YES, I SAW GANDHI

BY

ANNADA SANKAR RAY

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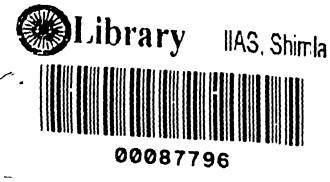

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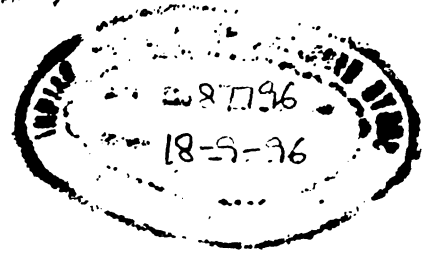

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To

LILA RAY

"I know, too, that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself."

—*Gandhi.*

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The author and translator wish to put on record their gratitude to Shri T. K. Mahadevan of the Gandhi Peace Foundation for the interest he has taken in this book and the efforts he has made to find an appropriate publisher for it. We deeply appreciate all he has done to make this book available in English to all students of Gandhiji's methods and thought who are unfamiliar with Bengali.

Lila Ray

Annada Sankar Ray

Calcutta

15th August 1976.

PREFACE

Shri Annada Sankar Ray kept a written record of his response to, and thoughts about, the events covered in this book. He looked at Gandhi and observed his methods with the eyes of an experienced administrator. He was actively engaged in the work of government throughout this period and, therefore, intimately concerned with what Gandhiji did, and the consequences. He also had the privilege of meeting Gandhiji several times. Shri Annada Sankar Ray is a man who not only believes in non-violence but is convinced through experience that it is the best and most efficacious way of handling men's problems on all levels, from the personal to the state and multi-national. The purpose for which the institution of the state was evolved was to control the application of violence and reduce its incidence to a minimum. A better system of curbing violence has not yet been devised. A democratic state operates according to rules framed by the people themselves and codified as laws.

What Shri Annada Sankar Ray has to say is based upon personal experience as magistrate, judge and creative writer, of three systems of government—monarchy, colonial and democratic. He was born of Bengali parentage in the princely state of Dhenkanal, Orissa, in 1904. He grew up under a monarchy modified only by the restraining presence of a Resident, representative of the British Crown. He was educated in Dhenkanal and in British India, studying at Cuttack in Orissa and Patna in Bihar. After passing the I.C.S. examination in India, he spent a year in England, travelling extensively on the continent during the vacation. Upon his return he was assigned to Bengal. For the next twenty-one years, he served in various magisterial and judicial capacities in all parts of the undivided province. To his other experience was added the unhappy fate of being a witness to the partition of a people that are ethnically indivisible and the problems that arose in consequence of this particular example of the time-honoured policy of 'Divide-and-Rule'. In 1951 he retired prematurely to devote his whole time

As a writer, Shri Annada Sankar Ray had established himself before he entered the Indian Civil Service. He continued to write throughout his official career and gave up his official position when it became difficult to do justice to his dual role because of the mounting pressure of work in both capacities. At the outset of his career as a writer he wrote in three languages, Bengali, Oriya and English. Recognition came to him as an Oriya writer first. His Oriya writings have earned him a permanent place in the history of modern Oriya literature; and he was one of the founders of the famous Sabuj group of young writers. Fame as a Bengali writer came with the publication of *Pathe Prabase*, the story of his personal discovery of Europe. He was welcomed into Bengali literary circles by both Tagore and Pramatha Choudhury. His friendship with these two great men was to last their lifetimes. Bengali was his own language and he used it for his creative work exclusively from that time on, dropping Oriya. His use of English was restricted to his official life.

Annada Sankar Ray's childhood, spent in several provinces among Indians speaking different languages, was one that discouraged parochial feeling and encouraged an over-riding sense of Indian nationhood. His contacts with and study of European tradition and culture deepened and broadened his sense of the world as a whole and India's place in it. He developed a cosmopolitan cast of mind.

It is against this unusual background that Shri Annada Sankar Ray sees Gandhiji and studies his methods. His con-'usions are not uncritical, nor are they lacking in appreciation. hat he has made in this book is an intelligent assessment of r value. All those who seek insights into the workings of dhiji's mind and the relevance of their application to Indian iditions will find it useful.

LILA RAY

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TWO HUNDRED YEARS AHEAD OF HIS TIME

A remark about Gandhi that I found intriguing was made to me by a person who was, by profession, his avowed enemy. It was, as far as I remember, in 1942, but I cannot recall whether it was before or after August of that year.

"All his ideas are right," the police officer said, "but he is two hundred years ahead of his time."

The speaker was an Irishman and a Catholic. He was much older than I was and vastly more experienced. Gandhi's activities were well-known to him for he held a high post in the Intelligence Branch of the Service.

Two hundred years ahead of his time! Was India to wait for her freedom another two hundred years? The police officer had not meant that. He was referring to Gandhi's ethical and spiritual ideas, his moral concepts, his social values.

What he was actually implying was that the India of which Gandhi dreamed could not be realised in the twentieth century. But Gandhi had a degree of prophetic vision that made him think he would be able to bring about what the policeman considered impossible in my lifetime. As a professed rationalist I did not and could not believe in miracles. More than once I criticised Gandhi on this ground. Yet I knew in my heart that Gandhi was a miracle worker, that one day he would realise his dream. And in my heart I believed in him.

"Can a Brahmin of Tamil Nadu and a Pathan of the North-west Frontier belong to a single indivisible nation? Can they sit down together and dine at the same table?" the police officer asked on another occasion. His tone was sarcastic.

"Certainly," I answered promptly and proudly, "Look at Rajaji and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan."

Why should he be so sceptical about the unity of India? Was he as prejudiced as any other British imperialist?

It was about this time that Gandhi, from his prison cell, began to say he wanted to live for one hundred and twenty years.

That meant, apparently, that independence was not to be expected in the near future. More trials of strength would have to take place before it materialised. The Hindu-Muslim question had passed the point at which an easy solution had been feasible. Satyagraha would have to be used to maintain the public peace and prevent civil disturbances if both parties to the dispute remained adamant. Their claims were irreconcilable. One represented all Indians without distinction of religion or caste or class while the other voiced the demands of the Muslims only. Civil war appeared to be the only solution. I could not think of any other. My faith in Gandhi and his miraculous powers was deep enough however to encourage me to hope civil war could be avoided by non-violent action by one of the parties.

One day I was informed Gandhi was to visit Santiniketan. If we reached the ashram before the hour of his prayer meeting we would be able to meet him, both of us. But my wife could not go. It was not possible for her to either take our newborn daughter along or leave her behind. So I set out alone, picking up the munsif on the way. On my arrival at Santiniketan I was told Gandhi had agreed to speak with me. Fifteen minutes had been set aside for our interview. That was something which Gandhi did not ordinarily do.

The foundation stone of the Andrews Memorial Hospital was laid by the Mahatma on that day. It was the 19th December, 1945. The site was a spacious plot of land near Binoy Bhavan, about a mile from the ashram. Our interview was to take place as Gandhi walked the distance. He promised to walk slowly. In the precincts of Uttarayan a few words of introduction were exchanged.

"He is our District Judge," said Rathindranath Tagore, "but . . . ."

"He is no judge," Gandhi took the words out of his mouth before he could mention that I was a writer as well. Gandhi laughed gaily and turned towards Shymali, the small house in which he was accommodated.

I reminded him that we had met before, at Malikanda. Then I added, in a low voice, what I had come to say. It was my considered opinion, I stated, that the greed of the rich city of

Calcutta and its insatiable hunger was directly responsible for the Great Bengal Famine of 1943.

"There's no time to talk about that today," he said as he entered Shymali. "Tell me what you think about it some other time. I have heard similar opinions from others too".

Pyarelal, who was standing close to us, arranged for us to meet again, in Calcutta. The day was settled but not the hour. Later I was informed the only time he could give me was during his early morning walk. He was staying at the Khadi Pratisthan at Sodepur. Sodepur is a long way from the place where I was putting up, in Park Circus. I was making a brief stop in the city enroute to my new station in Mymensingh. My wife and I wanted to meet Gandhi together, but once again it was not possible. The child was still too small to be taken so far on a winter morning. I still regret it. Who knew that this opportunity to meet Gandhi together was to be our last?

At Santiniketan that day the munsif and I saw Gandhi seated in serene meditation at the prayer meeting, in the manner of Buddha. His eyes were closed, his mien serious, his expression profound. Perhaps he was thinking of the woes of the world, suffering with the millions of human beings afflicted by the war and its concomitant ills. Who knew what was still ahead? Gandhi sat upon a raised platform. His followers were seated beneath it. He was as immobile as a figure carved of stone while hymns were sung. Underneath the shawl draped over his chest his hand seemed to be moving gently, almost imperceptibly, as he told his beads. At that moment he was a bhakta, not a karmin or yogi of action. He was the bhakta of whom it is written in the Gita:

adveṣṭā sarvabhutānām maitrah karuṇa eva cha

He spoke when the prayers came to an end, exhorting us to forego the practice of regarding any human being as untouchable. He pronounced the word, *asprushyta,* in the South Indian manner.

"The Mahatma," said the munsif on our way back to Suri, "appears to be in excellent health. He looks like a ripe mango."

Yes, he was full of youthful vigour. The long walk bareheaded in the hot sun had not tired him. He continued to move about the ashram on foot, refusing the offer of a car.

We had come by car and now set out on our return journey

in one. "There now," the munsif exclaimed, "a mistake. What a mistake!"

"Have you forgotten something?" I asked.

"Yes, I forgot to pick up some dust from the spot where Gandhi stood when he spoke to us."

That was worth hearing a Brahmin say! The Mahatma commanded the veneration of all alike, even as Buddha had, or Jesus. But I did not approve of cherishing a pinch of dust from the ground on which he had stood for a minute or two like a holy relic. To me such an act seemed to demean the human spirit.

When, not long after, I arrived in Mymensingh, the country was sinking deeper and deeper day by day into chaos and anarchy. Anybody who thought he could reverse the trend of events by non-violent methods was welcome to try them, but we who were responsible for the maintenance of law and order, could not sit back and allow things to go from bad to worse while we waited for a miracle. We were obliged to deal with the situation very firmly. The weak had to be protected. I did not regard anarchy as an expression of the autonomy of the individual although I was something of a philosophical anarchist myself by conviction.

I had no inkling of what the British were thinking about the situation. A policeman with whom I was acquainted told me big new jails were being constructed. The Sahebs were not prepared to run risks. People would be arrested and locked up in thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands.

Why? What were the British so afraid of? They had an army at their disposal.

If the people of India rose suddenly, all together, the British would be finished in the course of a single night. Ten or twenty thousand would be dead before the army arrived on the scene. The British were getting ready to strike first. The atmosphere was ominous.

While my acquaintance was explaining all this to me news of the naval mutiny arrived from Bombay. The Royal Indian Navy had rebelled.

What an amazing year 1946 was! Everything seemed possible: rebellion, insurrection, civil war, revolution. At one point it appeared that the Mutiny of 1857 was about to be repeated, at another that revolution was the only possible denouement.

But the explosion found another outlet. The British, so apprehensive in January, sighed with relief in August. The hand that had been raised to strike the Sahebs plunged its dagger into the breast of its brother instead. Overnight, brothers became mortal enemies and Jinnah described them as belonging to "two nations." Jinnah had never submitted to anybody. Was he going to give Gandhi precedence? Was not Gandhi just another Gujarati like himself? No. Rather than that, he would launch a campaign of Direct Action, another August Movement, one of his own making. Gandhi's slogan was "*Quit India*". Jinnah's slogan was *Larke lenge Pakistan, Fight and Win Pakistan.*

The country changed before our eyes. Within a year it had split into two national entities. One year. Not more nor less. Almost to the day. We were the puppets of Destiny, even the greatest among us, the Mahatma and Qaide Azam Jinnah himself. Even Lord Mountbatten. Nobody really wanted partition, not even Jinnah. But he had no alternative ready and the people were forced to agree to partition when he flung a match into a situation that was like gunpowder, precipitating civil war. They did not wait for Gandhi.

The framing of a Constitution acceptable to both the Hindus and the Muslims, the Congress and the League, became impossible. To reject the Constitution drafted by the British was easy enough, but neither Ram nor Rahim could replace it with another. Should Gandhi have imposed one non-violently? He would not do that, not even in the name of unity. Everybody agreed about only one thing: the discontinuation of British rule. All else was arguable. Even the Mahatma did not know the answers.

Possibly a dictator might have found a solution of a sort provided he had the backing of the armed might of both Hindus and Muslims. But at that time the Indian army itself split, refusing to obey a single command or follow a single flag. Nowhere was there any unity. If there was none among the common people there was also none among the police, the administrative services, the armed forces. A war would have been as unavoidable as the wars among the sons of Shah Jehan if the British had not chosen their successor while there was still time to do so.

Could the struggle for power unite those whom the struggle

for freedom had failed to hold together? No, no such miracle was forthcoming. Gandhi could not produce one. Fasting would have had no effect. Destiny took its preordained course. The withdrawal of the British could not have been prevented by any failure to agree on the transfer of power nor could conflict between Hindus and Muslims have been avoided.

Seven days before the 15th August, 1947, I left Mymensingh under orders of transfer. Gandhi was in Calcutta exerting himself to restore peace to the strife-torn city. I saw how successful he was with my own eyes. The night of the 14th passed in apprehension. It was feared that August the 15th would be ushered in with a terrible bloodbath. But the cries which awoke me long before the day broke were not the cries of people being slaughtered. The rejoicing was so vociferous that I could scarcely believe my own ears. Brothers embraced brothers with tears in their eyes. The cries we heard were cries of joy. And not only that. The Union Jack had been lowered. That flag had been an affliction for over two hundred years. Its disappearance was an undeniable fact.

What happened in Calcutta on the 15th of August, 1947, was uncanny. One man alone had the power to bring it about—Gandhi. The tragedy of the Punjab was on the point of being re-enacted. Floods of people fleeing for their lives would have poured into India in the wake of rivers of blood streaming from Dacca to Calcutta, swamping the whole of Bengal. That a tragedy of that magnitude was prevented by the influence of a single man is a fact to be recorded on the pages of history in letters of gold. Could he have done it if he had not been *advestā sarvā bhutānām maitrā karunāh*? Or if his non-violent technique had not been adequate? It was true. Yes, true. It happened.

Historical forces are not individuals. Their course can not be changed by any individual waving a non-violent magic wand. Three major historical forces were at work in India. The British were opposed by the Congress and the Congress was opposed by the Muslim League. For a year or so the three ruled together, sharing the summit. Their opinions changed constantly. The Congress and the Muslim League could never have reached an agreement if the British had not acted as an intermediary. Before the British came to India two powers, the Moguls and the Mah-

rattas ruled the country between them. When the British left two powers again took over, the Congress and the Muslim League. Each of the two had its own sphere of influence. It was a kind of historical determinism. In such circumstances an individual could be no more than a means, even though that individual was Mahatma Gandhi. The wishes of an individual cannot play a large part when historical forces are at work. That was proven by the 15th of August, 1947.

Yet the events of that day also proved that the presence of an extraordinary individual could and did prevent the enactment of a lamentable tragedy. If Gandhi had not waved his magic wand the holocaust of the Punjab would have been repeated in Bengal. There is little doubt about it. Determinism is not the whole of history. It must be admitted that an individual can also be a force. The extent to which an individual by the name of Gandhi influenced the struggle for Indian Independence and the part played in that struggle by a force named the Congress cannot be easily ascertained or separated. The leaders of the Congress found the solutions Gandhi put forward acceptable in most matters, but during the negotiations with Lord Mountbatten they rejected them. The basis of the discussions being held was changed without consulting the Mahatma or even informing him. The basis on which talks had been begun was the constitution of a single centre with authority over three subordinate zones. In this centre the Congress and the League were to have equal representation. A time came when it was plain that discussions on this basis would lead nowhere. When the British were no longer there the other two parties would be hopelessly divided on matters of policy at the highest level and anarchy would rage unchecked on the lower ones. Two centres were therefore decided upon. Two Punjabs. Two Bengals. Gandhi and the Congress differed.

I have personal experience of anarchy on the lower levels. What happened in Noakhali might have been repeated in Mymensingh if it had not been for the exertions of several government officials. Gandhi's non-violent fighters might never have known what was happening except for them and the measures they took. Though an anarchist by conviction I was forced to admit that police are needed, courts are indispensable, jails have to be main-

tained and, if all other means of control fail, the army has to be given charge of a situation. That is to say, a state is required. The framework on which a state is erected must be retained in all its organisational functions, complete. The question of who will control the state and the apparatus of the state is a question that arises only later. A framework must exist first and the framework must be of a modern type. An old-fashioned set-up is obsolete in the world of today. What the British bequeathed to us is of great value.

THE GOVERNOR'S VISIT

Towards the beginning of the year 1947 the Governor of Bengal paid a visit to Mymensingh in the course of an official tour. We were among those invited to dine with him. It was from him that we learned for the first time that the British were really going to leave.

"If the Hindus and Muslims want to fight each other, let them," he said, "why should British bayonets hold the ring?"

"Trade," he continued, "is what is profitable. Our trade with Ireland has more than doubled since Ireland became free. The same thing will happen in the case of India."

There had been a time when the British exchanged the merchant's weighing scales for the sceptre. Now they were on the point of doing the opposite. If only the parties concerned would wait!

Mahatma Gandhi was groping his way through the darkness of Noakhali. Not a glimpse of light was visible.

The British were withdrawing of their own accord. No blows were needed to speed them on their way. Rebellion, revolution, satyagraha were no longer a *sine qua non*. The need of the hour was to protect the weak and innocent among the people from the guilty, the violent, the strong. My heart was convulsed with emotion.

Gandhi had sown two seeds in my young mind, the seed of a belief in satyagraha and the seed of the belief that a man can be his own master i.e. philosophical anarchy. The first was the means, the second the end. No other leader had given me so much. Such dreams.

Gandhi was at that time concentrating on the means, satyagraha, bringing the full force of his powers to bear upon it. He believed that if correct means were adopted, correct ends would follow. One should not worry too much about the ends.

Was the anarchy that prevailed in the country the ideal anarchy of autonomous self-rule envisaged by the philosophers?

A will-o-the-wisp is not real light. No, it was not the same though the word used to describe it might have the same sound. This was something very different.

When a government that has held sway for two hundred years breaks down, the country over which it exercised authority is plunged into a chaotic condition that is called anarchy. Towards the close of the Mogul period a general disintegration of this kind set in and before midnight struck for the British the phenomenon was repeated. Similar situations have arisen in many countries of the world at various stages in their history. Such a collapse of authority cannot be equated with the anarchy which is the goal of satyagraha. It was not for this that the people of the country fought and suffered for twenty-eight years.

This was, then, something very different. Good. The question was how to deal with it. How could we come to an understanding with lawlessness? How could it be controlled? By satyagraha? By state authority? Reluctantly I was forced to the painful conclusion that satyagraha by itself could not cope effectively with such a situation. As we knew it satyagraha could be effective only when pitted against a firmly established authority that was fundamentally unjust and the oppressor of a subject people, even though that authority was equipped with unrivalled force of arms.

The question might be asked whether lawlessness is much worse than the oppressiveness of an authority based on violence. If satyagraha could be effective against the one why not against the other? The question is theoretical rather than practical. There was no time for argument. Shortly after the Governor's visit to Mymensingh the British Prime Minister announced that British rule would be terminated finally in June 1948. The question of who was to be the recipient of power was left to the Indians themselves to decide. If they reached an agreement, well and good. Otherwise power would be divided.

The place of an established government had to be taken by another government, one as strong as its predecessor. The new government would, like the old, have at its disposal the services of the armed forces, the police, the courts, the jails. If the framework of the state, the state organisation itself, was destroyed or its destruction permitted, could any power operate in an effective

manner? Would it not be like the removal of one's ladder after climbing on to a tree? A weak government cannot check lawlessness.

At one time or another in the life of every Gandhian this question brings about a crisis of conscience that is like an ordeal by fire. Do not Gandhians dream of seven hundred thousand village republics? Each of these republics, having been given authority by each individual in its area, would in turn authorise chosen representatives to form large republics at the provincial level. Provincial republics, in their turn, would delegate certain powers to the central republic. If the British left without handing over power to a single specific authority the people would be given a chance to organise their seven hundred thousand village republics. Otherwise the authority to which the British surrendered their sovereign powers would become rulers in their stead. This new sovereign power would be master. It might, of course, delegate some of its powers to the provinces and the provinces might distribute these to the districts and the districts to the villages. This process was the reverse of the process envisaged by the Gandhians. Instead of being built upwards on the base of the consent of the people it provided for the distribution of power downwards from a Central Authority which would be able, if so inclined, to impose its will.

The seven hundred thousand village republics could not come into existence unless a vacuum was created. Hundreds of small kingdoms sprang up in India during the eighteenth century for that reason. The Moguls left a vacuum. The number of these kingdoms was reduced to some six hundred by the British when they took over. If another vacuum of the same kind was created who could prophesy the extent to which India would be balkanised? Indian nationalists were naturally perturbed by the possibility. They came to fear the creation of a vacuum. It involved a risk they were not willing to take.

The historical moment for a decision had arrived. The British had made up their minds to leave. There was no longer any doubt about it. Indians knew it. If no agreement was reached by the leaders of the country power would pass into at least two hands, possibly several. It was not impossible that a vacuum would be created. Gandhi said, "Leave India to God or anarchy."

From the time of the Sepoy Mutiny the British had been organised according to a well-planned scheme. All the British residents of an area proceeded at once to the nearest Rallying Point at the first sign of trouble. Arrangements for their security were made there. Lord Wavell made use of this Rallying Point Scheme in 1947, extending it somewhat. All the Englishmen in India were to gather together in a single province in case of necessity. They would be given protection there. From all other areas the British administration would be withdrawn. The army was to protect the British. Attlee transferred Wavell when the scheme was submitted for his approval. He was most annoyed.

Lord Mountbatten was the new Viceroy. He quickly realised that the Indian leaders would never come to an agreement on the basis of the Cabinet Mission proposals. It was futile to attempt to bring one about. But instead of giving up like Wavell he inaugurated a fresh series of talks.

The coalition government in the Punjab had broken down in the meantime. Governor's rule was installed. There was no apparent hope of an alternative arrangement. The Hindus and Sikhs suddenly demanded the partition of the Punjab. This demand caught on and was taken up in Bengal also. It was made after a spate of riots had disturbed the peace. There was a round or riots in Bengal as well. The Muslim League was already demanding the partition of India as a whole. The Sikhs and Hindus took up the cry, each demanding the partition of its own province. Mountbatten conferred with the leaders. If an agreement satisfactory to both the Muslim League and the Congress was drawn up Nehru and Patel were willing to agree to partition. Mounbatten took upon himself the task of persuading Jinnah. Then he drafted the text of an agreement accordingly. Jinnah consented on being given an assurance that a referendum would be held in Sylhet and the Northwest Frontier Province to ascertain the wishes of the people. Gandhi was adamant. He refused absolutely.

The proposed Pakistan would, of its own free will, accept Dominion status. It was to be a member of the Commonwealth. What if the proposed Hindustan did not agree to that? Doubts arose. Mountbatten himself was reluctant to confer Dominion status on Pakistan alone, but his government felt no such hesita-

tion. The British government had formulated plans of its own which were, like Wavell's, secret. The British were not going to sit back and do nothing if the Indian leaders failed to reach an agreement. Before they left they would distribute power province-wise. If a Centre of any kind continued to exist they were prepared to delegate some of their powers to it. The provinces would be free to declare their own independence if they chose to do so. And they could combine to form one or more federations if they chose. The British agreed to recognise the holders of ultimate power.

In this secret document there was no suggestion that either the Punjab or Bengal might be divided. The British did not want to take the responsibility for any such act. The Punjabis and the Bengalis would have to decide their own fate. Civil war was possible.

The document was sent to London for approval. Certain alterations were made. Then it was approved and returned. The next step was to disclose its contents to the Indian leaders. Lord Mountbatten was at Simla. He invited Nehru to become his guest at the Vicergal Hunting Lodge on Summer Hill. One evening, after dinner, he showed the document to Nehru. The Viceroy was afraid that Jinnah might raise objections. He had not thought Nehru would have any.

But Nehru flushed as he read it. His face darkened. He declared that neither the country as a whole nor the Indian National Congress would accept it. It would not do. Subsequently he wrote a strongly phrased letter to the Viceroy informing him officially that the proposals would result in the balkanisation of India and civil war would be unavoidable. India's relations with Britain were bound to suffer.

Up to that time Mountbatten had been guided by the advice of his British advisers. Now his Indian Counsellor, V. P. Menon, came to his assistance. This gentleman had long before ascertained that Vallabhbhai Patel was agreeable to partition on the basis of Dominion status for both Pakistan and India if Bengal and the Punjab were divided and the granting of independence speeded up. Menon had even drawn up a plan on that basis, as a result of his talks with Patel. Under Mountbatten's instructions he revised it carefully and presented it at Simla. It

was shown to Nehru. Nehru gave his consent.

This was the plan that later became known as Mountbatten Plan or the Dominion Status Plan. The Viceroy boarded a plane for England and the British government scrapped the old plan and sanctioned the new one. The responsibility of bringing all the Indian leaders together and persuading them to agree to it devolved upon Mountbatten. Jinnah was his particular concern.

One thing was clear. It was in the interests of the British to play along with the Congress leaders until they were prepared to accept Dominion status. The moment they agreed, the British waived all their objections to the division of Bengal and the Punjab. The only obstacle that remained was the Muslim League. Mountbatten overcame it easily. Like that proverbial biscuit India was broken into two pieces. The British Parliament, reassured by the knowledge that the balance of power had been safeguarded, passed the bill granting independence to India overnight.

The policy that is known as Divide and Rule when applied to a subject country goes by the name of Balance of Power when the parties to it are two independent countries, newly created. The balance of power would not have been maintained if only one of the countries had become a Dominion. Jawaharlal Nehru tried to evade Dominion status as long as he could. That he did not oppose it to the end was because, according to Wavell's secret plan, the possibility arose of an undivided Punjab and an undivided Bengal breaking away from the rest of India.

The Mahatma was deeply opposed to the division of Bengal and he was rewarded with total misunderstanding.

"Where are all our young revolutionaries?" a sub-judge of my acquaintance remarked, "why doesn't somebody shoot Gandhi?"

I was thunderstruck. The sub-judge was a mild and gentle person. How could he be so wrongheaded?

"How can Bengalis survive unless Bengal is divided?" he went on, speaking in great agitation. He feared that the Muslim League would pursue its policy of extermination unhindered.

The Muslim League, by starting the Direct Action movement, unleashed forces of violence and hatred from the grip of which only Gandhi's non-violence could save us. Yet Bengali

Hindus, in their helplessness, eagerly sought salvation in the division of their homeland. No other alternative presented itself to them as sufficiently reliable in the great crisis that arose. The advocates of Gandhi's non-violence might have come forward and reassured the people if they had not themselves been powerless. Even their non-violence was ineffective. It is our great good fortune that they refrained from shedding blood.

On the 2nd of June, shortly before midnight, the drama came to an end. Hamlet appeared on the scene only after the curtain had gone down. Gandhi, the man who had been at the head of the struggle for independence for twenty-eight years, was left out of the play. It was heart-rending. Mountbatten was afraid that, if he chose, Gandhi could overturn what became an established fact that night, the partition of India. It was a cruel and ironic destiny. He was not a consenting party.

It would not have been difficult to do just that. He would not have had to resort to a fast. A small 'no' would have sufficed. But he would have been forced to face the dangers of the vacuum that would have been created when the British left without leaving a duly established government behind. How was he to deal with it? He had, it is true, created an unarmed, non-violent power which he could deploy in mass civil disobedience, but it had been directed against the armed force of a well organised state. Gandhi called it a matching force. In a vacuum what could he match it against? If the British left without delegating responsibility for the government of the country to a successor was a war of succession sure to follow? Where was a force trained to deal with such a contingency? Or capable of handling it?

Mass Civil Disobedience was not the way to either prevent or win a war of succession. Perhaps Gandhi thought that the Muslim League, if power was handed over to it, would come to an agreement with the British of its own motion. Civil disobedience against the Muslim League was possible if it adopted unfair or unwise measures. But none of his colleagues shared his confidence. They did not think it likely that its policy would be altered in any way after coming into power. Would satyagraha be effective against a government of thugs? Its use in Noakhali had not produced results that inspired any substantial hope.

Satyagraha, as the people had come to understand it, in-

volved the acceptance of suffering voluntarily in a righteous cause and acquiescence in imprisonment. Few were called upon to sacrifice their lives. Satyagrahis prepared to lay down their lives were few and far between in those days, not more than a couple of dozen. Those few were the salt of the earth, but they were too few to handle a civil war. Many thousands of satyagrahis prepared to lay down their lives would be required for any effective action in a civil war, action that would save the lives of the hundreds and thousands of people who would be threatened and be in jeopardy because of it.

At the Viceregal Lodge Gandhiji was silent. He had nothing to say. It was his practice to observe silence on one day of the week and the designated day was the day on which he arrived in Simla. In writing he stated that he considered himself a cipher. His self-effacement surprised Mountbatten.

Gandhi was convinced that the independence India was getting was genuine, the real thing. If he had not thought so he would surely have opposed it. He was a lapidary and knew the value of gems. But how could he endure seeing the country he loved so deeply being broken into two? Particularly Bengal? He could not accept the Mountbatten Plan in his heart.

Independence and Partition were two sides of a single coin. One could not be rejected without rejecting the other also. They were inseparable. Gandhi could not go against the wishes of the Indian National Congress.

CHAPTER THREE

A MOMENT OF TRUTH

When I met Gandhi at Malikanda at the beginning of 1940 it seemed to me that he, unarmed as he was, possessed unlimited power. This power he was stockpiling for use in times of conflict.

Had these reserves been exhausted by the 1942 movement? No. Gandhi had an inward source of revival that made his strength almost inexhaustible. Over and over fresh energy welled up from the depths of his spirit, filling him to the brim. When I met him again at the end of 1945 he was as vigorous as ever. He did not look at all like a battle-weary soldier. When the time came he was ready to jump into the fray once more. He was not in the least disspirited.

But where was the fray? He waited, carefully conserving his strength. The butchery of blind fanatics could not be called either a part of the national struggle for independence nor a Gandhian fight of any kind. Gandhi could accept no responsibility for conflict of that nature. The opponent worthy of his steel was the British Government, not the Muslim League. He could negotiate on an equal footing with the representatives of the British sovereign, not with Jinnah.

The time for him to descend once more onto the battlefield never came. His fighting power stayed where it was, in the arsenal of his heart, unused. If nobody came forward, with whom was he to engage in a trial of strength? The curtain had been dropped abruptly over the stage half way through the drama. The hero awaited the appearance of the villain on the scene but the villain had gone home. He escaped from the green room. Offstage he had struck a bargain with the hero's followers without his knowledge for they were as weary as he was.

That was a moment of terrible truth for India. The Muslim League became our opponent, replacing the British. Gandhi refused to lead the struggle against the League. Jinnah was not his equal. He could not be matched against him. Gandhi's his-

torical role lay in his opposition to the British government. His soldiers had been satyagrahis pledged only to go to prison. Satyagrahis pledged to sacrifice their lives would be required to fight the Muslim League, thousands of them. Where were they? Gandhi's followers, at this critical juncture, were either unwilling or powerless. Those who were willing to take part in a struggle felt that only violent measures were adequate to counter the violence of the League. Could they have prevented the division of the country, the partition of its provinces? No. It was for that reason they agreed to a compromise.

Gandhi's immense reserves of strength were wasted. Independence was born long before its time. India and Pakistan were Siamese twins.

Gandhi had no role to play if the Muslim League was recognised as the opponent of the National Congress. Mountbatten acted as the middle man in the negotiations that led to the division of the country and the partition of the provinces. Each party received a share of the army. They now had armed forces at their disposal which they could send anywhere they liked, whenever they liked.

Independence consists of the possession of the powers and apparatus of the State and the unhampered right to frame a constitution. If this was all it meant, the independence India won came in a form of which no part was lacking. The only thing omitted was the unity of the people, the unity of the country, the unity of the Punjab, the unity of Bengal.

We ceased to be a single nation. Our history, which had flowed in one mighty stream, was diverted into two separate channels. Our hearts were broken. Those among us who belonged to minority communities, the Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan and the Muslims in India, found themselves paralysed. Independence was insensible to them and their needs. Added to that was the prospect of becoming objects of suspicion, of being regarded as potential traitors in the event of a war between India and Pakistan at some future date. The estrangement between Hindus and Muslims remained and became a cause of recurrent civil discord.

As long as the British were present this estrangement could not be overcome. Was a rapprochement made any easier by

their withdrawal? People who were filled with terror at the prospect of either a Muslim or Hindu Raj, abandoned their homes, left their fields, gave up their occupations and fled. Hundreds and thousands were killed. Many killed also. The violence was without precedent in Indian history. The wars described in the Mahabharata are as close as we can get. Three hundred thousand died in the Punjab alone in the course of three short weeks. The uprooted numbered nearly a crore.

The possibility of a disaster of this magnitude occurring in the Punjab was brought home to me as early as 1940 when I was in Midnapore. One of my Punjabi Muslim colleagues, on his return from home leave, told us that iron was not available in the Punjab. Not the smallest piece was purchasable. The people were hoarding everything that might be of use to them in case of war. They were filled with apprehension. They believed that the British were about to withdraw, that they would lose the war with Japan. To whom would the Punjab belong then? The Sikhs claimed it. It was from the Sikhs that the British had taken it. They felt their old kingdom should be restored to them. It was only fair that it should be. The Hindus felt the same. The Muslims had, in the first instance, taken the Punjab away from them. All of them felt that what had been their own should be restored to them.

Recruitment to the armed forces practically came to a stop. The Punjabis were unwilling to fight anywhere but in their own province. Resort had to be made to trickery. The Sikhs were told, "Look. See how clever the Muslims are. They are joining the armed forces and, by doing so acquiring experience as well as arms. They'll be able to take the Punjab away from you later without any trouble." To the Muslims it was said: "Look. See how cunning the Sikhs are. They are signing up in order to get experience and arms. They'll kick you out of the Punjab and keep the country for themselves. You'll see." And to the Hindus—! It was the perennial policy of imperialist powers, the policy of divide and rule. Everybody knew it, everybody understood it, yet it worked. Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus joined the armed forces and participated in World War II. They came back confident that they were equipped to fight a civil war at home. The catastrophe that followed should not have been unexpected.

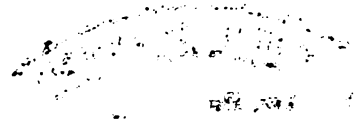
To me it was not, nor was the appalling ferocity or the havoc.

Gandhi once made the statement that the departure of the British would be followed by a period of anarchy but it would not last more than a fortnight. During the eighteen days the battle of Kurukshetra lasted, eighteen regiments consisting of two hundred and eighteen thousand seven hundred combatants each were destroyed. I recalled this fact and pointed it out in writing. In that war also brothers fought brothers.

"The fact," I continued in the same essay, written in 1942, "that the presence in our country of a third party, the British, has been disadvantageous does not mean that it will continue to be disadvantageous or that when this party withdraws we shall immediately throw our arms around each others' necks. On the contrary the problems they leave behind them may surface and become acute and our latent animosities erupt. This is a possibility to be feared even though there is no apparent reason to do so. It cannot be dismissed lightly."

The possibility became a terrible reality. The eruption was precipitated by the division of the Punjab. That is true. It is also true that it followed on the withdrawal of the British. The twilight period between the relinquishment of power by one authority and the establishment of complete command of the administration by its successor is a period during which anarchy has an opportunity to break out. If the Mahatma had been in the Punjab instead of Calcutta at that hour his great moral power might have altered the course of events. It did in Bengal.

Moral influence makes certain tacit assumptions. If Gandhi had not put himself on good terms with the then Government of Bengal and cooperated with it in the tasks it had undertaken, if he had been obstructive and irascible, the effect of his presence and the measures he took would have been different. Gandhi needed Suhrawardy's help and Suhrawardy needed his. Lahore did not regard Gandhi as indispensable. The politicians did not welcome him. The Lahore Government did not in fact pay much attention to him. Yet Lahore was the life centre of the Punjab. It was very urgent that somebody went to Lahore before the Partition took place and tried to exert some influence there, as in Calcutta. Anarchy was doubly terrible in the absence of both an

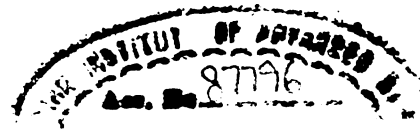


administration with a firm grip and a moral leader of the requisite status.

Calcutta was the life centre of Bengal. Lahore was the life centre of the Punjab. Delhi was the life centre of India. Gandhi was summoned to Delhi urgently. He was on the point of setting out once again for Noakhali. Changing his plans hurriedly he went westwards instead of to the east. In Delhi he found conditions that were strange in the extreme. In spite of the existence of a police force, armed forces, courts, jails and all the apparatus of government, in spite of the fact that the government was a national one, that there was nobody to claim a share in its authority, that there was no opposition, citizens belonging to the minority communities enjoyed no security, either of life, property, occupation, faith or happiness. They were without honour. Nothing was of any value. They turned to Gandhi in the hope that he would be able to work yet another miracle, repeat the miracle of Calcutta.

Delhi was in no way comparable to Calcutta. Calcutta had been the capital of the British. It had not existed before they came. No one had possessed it before them. Delhi had been the capital of the Moguls before the British came and the capital of the Turks before that. Earlier still it had been the capital of the Rajputs and, if the Mahabharata is true, the capital of the Kurus and Pandavas. The flag of free India floated over the city, but at its heart those who had possessed it before, in the remote past, had not forgotten their lost glory and were brooding over their claims. The Hindus were feeling relieved. They had at long last freed themselves of the humiliation of defeat at the hands of Muslim invaders. For seven hundred years they had smarted under it. The Mahrattas rejoiced because the insult of the third battle of Panipat was redressed. For them the two hundred years that had passed since that defeat had been agony. The Mahrattas had also ruled Delhi at one time. Mahratta rule could be restored in Hindusthan if Mogul rule was restored in Pakistan. How long would it take them to recover their lost supremacy in the capital?

A friend of mine who was a Minister remarked to me ruefully after a visit to Delhi that the power of the Congress was nominal, that real power was in the hands of a certain Mahratta



organisation. I was sceptical at that time. Later I came to realise the logic behind the move to give a part of the country to the Sikhs and Mahrattas. If a part was handed over to the Moguls why should they not claim a share too? It was these people who were restless. Some of them were making trouble as refugees from Pakistan. Others saw themselves in the role of avengers. Communally-minded organisations of various kinds joined them, even a section of the Congress. Yes, even certain members of the Cabinet were sympathetic.

Mahatma Gandhi's actions were based upon principles that were clear, unequivocal and generous. Every citizen of a secular state has equal rights and equal honour. They are equally entitled to protection. It was for the state to give them that protection. If Pakistan had been a secular instead of a theological state it also would have been duty-bound to protect the lives of its nationals. But Pakistan was not a secular state and was therefore able to discriminate between her nationals, treating some in one way and others in another. Gandhi did not look to Pakistan for anything. There was nothing to be expected from it. Why should members of an innocent minority here be punished for what was done to minorities there? If Pakistan was unjust there were other remedies. Is it just or fair that an innocent person be punished for the fault of a guilty one?

The assumption was that, since Pakistan was a theological state and not a secular one, the minorities there were sure to suffer. What remedy was there? The members of the minorities would be forced to flee the country sooner or later. Why should they hesitate? The only obvious solution was an exchange of population, mass migration. An eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth, a family for a family, a field for a field, a house for a house, a cow for a cow, necessities for necessities. Tit for tat. An exchange of population could take place in no other way.

In the process India would become an exclusively Hindu state and Pakistan an exclusively Muslim one. This was the same old argument. Only the circumstances were new. Congress was to be an exclusively Hindu organisation. Was not the Muslim League an exclusively Muslim one? Jinnah's unremitting insistence that this was so had been rejected outright by the National Congress. It nevertheless now became apparent that

some Congressmen had begun to think along those lines.

The country called itself India, Bharat, after it was freed in order to set the seal on the Congress stand. It did not call itself Hindusthan. The government established was secular. It was not coloured by Hindu theology. Pakistan took its name from the stand taken by the Muslim League. It was, frankly and unashamedly, an Islamic state. Life for the minority in Pakistan could not be anything but hard as long as the attitude of the Pakistan government remained unchanged. Gandhi intended to do whatever he could about it when he went back to Noakhali. He was resolved to resume his work there as soon as his Delhi mission was accomplished. If his Delhi mission failed he would not be able to go back.

The Mahatma's determination to return good for evil always, not to avenge wrongs, was misconstrued. To the coarse-minded it meant only that he was partial to Muslims. It was a sign of weakness to be soft with Muslims. They should be paid back in their own coin—violence for violence, hate for hate. The language of violence was the language the Pakistanis could understand. But the Muslims in India are Indian nationals. Some of them are members of the Indian National Congress. Who cared to listen to the voice of reason? All Muslims were regarded as Pakistanis, actual or potential. All Muslims were fifth columnists.

Mahatma Gandhi could not regard injustice perpetrated in India as a remedy for injustice perpetrated in Pakistan. Had his people forgotten all that he had taught them for so many years, even some of his colleagues? The state, in the hands of such people, would not be the protector of the people. It was in danger of becoming their exploiter. Private violence would be condoned. Hindu communalism would replace Indian nationalism in the seats of power. Was it for this that Gandhi had lived and fought? He felt a fast unto death was better than to go on living in the circumstances.

It was just at that time I was transferred to Berhampore in the district of Murshidabad. One of the first news items that came to me when I arrived there was that the Mahatma had broken his fast. But before two days passed a bomb was exploded at his prayer meeting. Ordeal followed ordeal in rapid succes-

sion. He was tested like Prahlad. From death by starvation he was spared only to become a target for bombs. He was inured to that. I was relieved. I hoped that, like Prahlad, Gandhiji would not only survive but triumph.

One afternoon a leader of the local Congress was waiting for me when I returned to the house after a game of tennis.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked in great perturbation. "There was an announcement on the radio—!"

"Announcement?" his anxiety communicated itself to me. "No. What was it?"

"The Mahatma has been shot. The Mahatma is—" he stammered.

"Impossible!" I cried, catching hold of his hands. "It cannot be true."

The voice of Jawaharlal Nehru came to our ears. He was speaking on the radio. His voice was heavy with grief, deep with dismay. "The light has gone out," he said.

O God!

An official radiogram was not long in arriving. It described the event tersely. The name of the assassin was not given. He was a Hindu, a Hindu from down country. No more was said. All night I tossed and tossed. He wasn't a Bengali, was he? Who could have done such a thing? Who could be so depraved? A Mahratta disguised as a Muslim, a Brahmin disguised as an untouchable, a foreign agent disguised as a Hindu, an advocate of violence in the garb of a non-violent disciple of Gandhi? The conclusion I reached in my agonised consideration of all these alternatives was confirmed by the newspapers the following morning.

Precautions that ought to have been taken much earlier were announced. The stable door was shut and locked but the horse was gone. Cipher messages poured in. A certain organisation was declared illegal. Action was taken in accordance with certain specified sections of the law. I happened to be the Superintendent of the Jail as well as the District Magistrate. Arrests were made and people sent to prison. But even putting the entire population of the country in prison would not restore the Mahatma to us.

Later, to my great distress, I came to know that, on the night of the assassination, the event was celebrated in certain homes in

the town of Berhampore and also in some of the villages in the countryside. Sweets were distributed. What was a catastrophe bringing the greatest grief to us was, to some, a matter for rejoicing. Had not an enemy of the Hindus been removed? Was I not a friend of the Muslims? The Hindus were relieved.

For the second time in the history of mankind a scene as profoundly moving and of as deep significance as the crucifixion of Christ was enacted. It was our fate to bear witness to the pity and the glory of it. A fury that was futile consumed me. I did not consider it either inevitable or unavoidable. If the will to prevent it had been strong enough it could have been prevented. That will had been divided, wavering, weak.

On the following day the last British soldiers boarded a ship at the port of Karachi. The epilogue of the 30th January was written. The country was at last free from the presence of the demon Rahu who had dominated it for two hundred years. The removal of the first and greatest of all satyagrahis and the withdrawal of the last foreign troops were two sides of the same coin. Gandhi's task was complete. What he had been born to bring about was accomplished and his life ended with its achievement.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MEEK INHERIT

Gandhi was still alive when, not long after Independence, I happened to be on my way back from a trip to Darjeeling. In my compartment was an English army officer. He boarded the train at the last minute, chatting as long as he could with another Englishman. They stood apart, in a corner of the station platform. His friend put him on the train. They embraced each other emotionally as they parted.

The train had begun to move when he jumped in, striking up a conversation with me almost immediately.

"Our behaviour may have surprised you," he said apologetically. "He is my brother, my elder brother. We met today after twenty years, probably for the last time. It's likely to be that. I'm leaving the country, pulling out with the British army. My brother owns a tea plantation. He's staying."

What the Britisher said next is deeply scored upon my heart.

"My brother can't understand why we're leaving. Such a country! It's gold! We spent our whole time together arguing. Who is forcing us to pull out? I tried to explain. Might is right. Might is always right. Are we as strong as we once were? How can we be?"

The army was the incarnation of British might. They had had might on their side but war had drained away their strength until only the dregs were left. What the army officer said was true. They had lost much of their mettlesomeness. They were pulling out while they could still do it gracefully.

Gandhiji, as a satyagrahi, could perhaps have made a parallel statement. Right is might. Right is always might. That was the antithesis of the Britisher's position, just the opposite of what he held to be true.

Right is not on the side of might. Might is on the side of right. Gandhiji's teaching flatly contradicted the traditional attitude of the British army officer.

For thirty years the struggle went on. It was an epic

struggle. Might versus right. Right versus might. Gandhiji called it a glorious struggle but the way it came to an end was not exactly glorious. He described it as decidedly inglorious.

His destiny gave him, on the 30th January, what the 15th August had withheld—a glorious end.

The epic character of India's struggle for freedom will no doubt become the subject of an epic poem some day, a poem that will describe it fittingly. Novels and dramas are also certain to take it either as their subject matter or be written against its background. Of all of them one man will be the hero—Gandhiji. He will appear as what he was, a modern Yudhishtira in a modern Mahabharata. Or perhaps as the charioteer, Krishna.

Kurukshetra was not the last word. I did not realise this when the idea of an epic came to me. Gandhi was still alive at the time. Now I know that its final message lies in Yudhishtira's final journey. For Krishna it lay in his terrible death. This ancient tragedy was re-enacted before my eyes. I saw it but my heart refused to believe it for a long time. The new Mahabharata, in its last denouement, required the removal of the hero. Both the hero and the villain, Gandhi and the British Government, left the stage at the same time. The presence of one depended on the presence of the other. They were, in a sense, inseparable. Neither had any significance without the other.

Shortly after Gandhiji's assassination Sri Ramani Mohan Sen, a prominent resident of Berhampore, told me a revealing anecdote about him. Gandhi had once been his guest. Requested to give his blessings to a babe newly born into the family he said, "May you live long."

"We wish you a long life also, Mahatmaji," Ramani Babu had said.

"Believe me, Ramani Babu," Gandhi answered, "I shall not live a day longer than necessary."

He did not. When he was no longer wanted, when he was no longer needed, he passed out. The need was ours, not his. This unfortunate country lacks so many things! The list is long. How could we ever regard him as unneeded? He himself had no great desire to live longer. Neither did history have much need for him. With whom was the first satyagrahi to engage in conflict if there were no British soldiers in India? The half-naked

fakir's opponent was the British Raj. With the removal of the one the presence of the other no longer had any meaning.

Deep in his being Gandhi realised that he was no longer wanted, at least by some. There were some who regarded him as an obstacle in their path.

The last words he was to hear before his departure were to the effect that his days were over. "Your ahimsa doesn't work," people said.

Yes. This was the basic point of difference which arose between him and his own followers. It was his considered opinion that ahimsa can provide a solution for every problem that arises. If such a solution is sought it will be found. It is certain to be found.

His followers felt that the methods of ahimsa had lost their effectiveness with the achievement of independence. They had been of use in its achievement but they could not be applied to other problems. Those who took this stand were politicians. They were not saints nor sadhus and had no pretensions to being men of religion. They were not men who would make sacrifices for the sake of ahimsa and devote themselves to the search for non-violent solutions for every new problem that cropped up. What were the armed forces for? Why had power been transferred to them?

Satyagraha vanished. Its disappearance was astounding. Had it not occupied the centre of the stage for thirty years? Was it real? Had it been an illusion? Gandhiji himself began to say that what he had clung to for so many years was, after all, an illusion, an illusion he had now lost. He was free.

Gandhi declared that what he had mistaken for ahimsa was nothing more than passive resistance. Passive resistance is a weapon of the weak. Once the weak become strong and other weapons are placed in their hands they turn violent and their hearts overflow with hatred.

The regrets to which Gandhiji gave expression in these terms found no echo in my heart. For thirty years a mighty moral force had been at work in this country, driving it forward like a powerful engine, carrying it far down the road of history. Was it no more than the passive resistance of weak and helpless people?

Gandhiji expected the most ordinary people to display a most

extraordinary degree of moral strength. He was disappointed for that reason. But when the final accounts are drawn up it will be found that what was accomplished by the united exertion of the common people was really extraordinary. If they had held together and fought on, even more extraordinary results could have been achieved. But they split into two factions, each assailing the other in a manner so cruel that they were alienated for a long time to come. It was an anti-climax.

A tragedy. About that there are no two opinions. But satyagraha did not, for that reason, become an illusory force or ahimsa a mask for passive resistance by the weak. Gandhiji's life work was not in any way diminished or rendered meaningless. The power of the common people of India grew greatly under his leadership; communal rioting reduced it. Any superficial survey will prove the truth of that. But though the low level to which communal rioting reduced us morally made us bow our heads in shame, thirty years of brave and fearless moral struggle were not falsified. Enough had been accomplished to provide adequate material for an epic of monumental proportions.

When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa he said India would not be freed in less than a hundred years. It could not be done sooner. He did not think it could be accomplished sooner.

Circumstances came to his aid. India was free within thirty or thirty-two years. The circumstances were two world wars and their consequences. During the first world war, revolution broke out in Russia and during the second Labour was voted into power in England. The depression that followed the first world war gave place to inflation. A crisis developed in capitalist countries. Communism spread.

After the battle of Stalingrad some of us sat down with maps of Europe and drew lines across them according to our whim and imagination. The whole of Germany could not be handed over to Russia. The British and Americans had a claim to part of it The partition of Germany was inevitable. In the event of a third world war breaking out the British and the Americans would be in an advantageous position. Would they, in such an eventuality, fight the Russians only or take on India as well? How many fronts could they open simultaneously? It would be wise to keep

the Indian front closed and if the friendship of India was of any value in the event of the third world war India would have to be given independence. India, of course, could not accept independence on the condition that it would be friendly in such an eventuality. It was not possible to give any categorical assurance to that effect. True independence is unconditional.

Independence for India was imminent. It would not be long in coming although it was not yet clear how long. It occurred to me that with the declaration of independence Gandhiji's fight would end. When a conflict terminates the C-in-C's job is done. Would he want to go on living? Would he live? A vague fear seized me. We could not afford to lose Gandhi. I was afraid he might not be long with us after the declaration of independence. To me, personally, Gandhiji's presence was of such great importance that I said that I did not mind if independence was slow in coming. When I said it I did not realise that I was placing greater value on his life than on the freedom of my country, but I was not keen on having independence declared overnight. Intuitively I knew Gandhiji would not stay with us after the British left.

The world situation was in our favour. Inflation in Russia had precipitated a revolution twice over. In India inflation was so uncontrolled that revolutionary activity was sure to grow and, if the war was prolonged, independence might come while it was still in progress, right in the middle of dangerous and turbulent circumstances. Revolution does not necessarily usher in independence or even freedom. The war, for various reasons, ended fairly quickly. No revolution took place. Gandhi was thinking the same thoughts I was.

World War II did bring India's independence much closer but at the time much damage was done to the principle of ahimsa. The prestige of violence rose. Logically the opposite should have been the case. The world as a whole, insane with hatred and violence, was worn to exhaustion. It ought to have wearily turned its thoughts to peace and the pursuit of peace. Instead it continued to counter violence with violence. Negotiations were conducted on that basis, the USSR and the USA, Britain and India, Muslims with Hindus. Ahimsa, driven out by the pressure applied upon it from every side, sought refuge in a corner of the Sevagram Ashram, and was confined to it.

It was the irony of fate. As India's independence steadily drew nearer and nearer, the faith of the people of India in ahimsa, the weapon with which they had won that independence, receded proportionately. In such a situation Gandhiji might remain calm but his colleagues found it impossible to do so. With every passing day it became more difficult for them to adhere to the principle of their leader. It was the Muslim League, not the British, which was shaking them by its terrible acts.

"The war is responsible," one of my Muslim friends said, noticing my grief over the events in Noakhali. "The humanity of men has been maimed by the hatred and violence unleashed by the war. Men are no longer themselves."

Humanity was maimed all over the world. India is a part of the world. India could not but be subject to the same forces that were at work everywhere. Everywhere people were saying: Might is Right. Might is always Right. Keep what you have by physical force. Take what you want by physical force. Justice is only obtainable by physical force. Physical force is justice.

How lucky we were to have in our midst one man who kept his head in the midst of the insane clamour, who was quiet and could say in a voice of dispassionate calmness, "Right is might. Right is always might." Was he going to change his principles? He could wait and wait patiently. And for that he wanted to live a hundred years. His turn would come. It would come after everybody else had had theirs. Ahimsa would triumph in the end. It could go further, win a complete victory than any amount of violence could. Violence and the advocates of violence might succeed for the moment but ultimately the field would be won by love, friendliness and ahimsa. For that a long life was required.

When we prayed that Gandhiji would be granted a long life, that he would live a hundred years, we were preparing ourselves for yet another ordeal, a greater ordeal than any we had yet faced, the ordeal that would establish ahimsa, even as independence had been established before it. One person and one person only might be the focus of that ordeal but it would be an event that would profoundly influence the whole of the country, of the world, of history. Man's spirit was sure to respond. Could it be possible that it would not? A response would come. It was

sure to. All that was needed was for Gandhiji to have a long life, for us to be patient and strong.

How did it all end? Independence could not wait. The British hastened their departure when they saw civil war starting. Two babes were born prematurely, blood-stained, wailing. Their cries were hushed and the blood wiped away by Mahatma Gandhi's greatness of soul. The task he took upon himself was left half-done, broken off halfway to completion.

There was no consolation. Hearts writhed in agony. None of us had ever dreamt such a thing could happen, that his life might be terminated in such a tragic way. "Why did it happen?" we cried. It was not on the cards.

The possibility had always been there. We knew it of course but we had not believed it would happen in India. Had not the Jews turned against Jesus and crucified him? Was not Gandhi as great as Jesus? He was in our eyes. But such men had never been martyred in India.

When Gandhi went to see Mrs. Besant on his return from South Africa, she exclaimed at the sight of him, "Why, his eyes are like the eyes of Christ! Will he die the same way?" She had intuitively sensed the possible denouement long before.

Gandhiji came among us, bringing two gifts, two great boons, freedom and ahimsa. We accepted the freedom. It was freedom we wanted. We did not want the ahimsa. Some ahimsa was necessary for the sake of freedom and we took only as much as we had to, reluctantly, paying only as much for it as we had to. Those who paid more did so out of devotion to Gandhi. His teachings did not, however, find a secure and permanent place in our hearts. Gandhi knew it. He waited, with a patience that was gentle and infinite.

The people of India as a whole did respond to the call of ahimsa, they responded again and again, over and over, building the broad highway to freedom with their own hands, at Gandhi's bidding. This highway will remain wide and sweeping. It is not and can never be reduced to a narrow track or twisting jungle trail such as furtive beasts of the jungle follow. The road that the common people of India must take is the road built by Gandhi and his followers. No other is wide enough to contain them, strong enough to bear the thunder of their marching feet. There

will be, of course, railway lines that cut across the country with violence for those who prefer fast and ruthless travel but the railroads can never accommodate more than a few. And though a train may have the speed of a hare it was the tortoise who won the race. Christ said: "The meek shall inherit the earth." The earth belongs by right to the common people. Meekness does not mean abjectness. Gandhiji has showed us the way by guiding us through one ordeal after another and undergoing ordeals himself in an exemplary manner.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRIPLE STREAM OF INDIAN TRADITION

Let us look once again at the past, when Gandhiji's influence was at its beginning, his star in the ascendant, before we turn to contemplate the decline of his leadership. Two famous lines written by Wordsworth come to mind:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven."

The non-cooperation movement meant to me much the same thing that the French Revolution meant to the English poet. Half a century has passed, yet just the thought of it fills me with excitement still. Such a moment comes once and once only in the life of a nation, setting its mark on its people for all time.

The French Revolution was also, ultimately, a failure. Yet no historical event has been more apparently successful. Men still dream of it all over the world.

The dreams awakened during the days of the Non-cooperation Movement will abide with us in a like manner.

Gandhi appeared from nowhere and created a situation that proved to be the only way by which the British Government could be brought to its senses. The people of India were disarmed by their order. They had to be made aware that they possessed a weapon of which they could not be deprived, a weapon that could not be taken from the hands of the people, a weapon forged out of the very absence of one, a weapon that was not a weapon. The people were *weaponless*. With that fact they armed themselves.

For the first time in history the common people of India appeared upon the stage of their country's destiny, summoned by the call of a leader of most extraordinary earnestness and mastery. He was not armed with any of the conventional weapons. His hands were empty. Out of the fact that he was unarmed, out of the fact that his hands were empty, out of the steel of his defencelessness, he forged a technique of resistance that armed his people far more effectively than all the panoply of power.

All that could be won by representations, by delegations, by petitioning, had been gained. There was nothing more to expect from those methods. Neither self-rule nor independence was to be obtained that way. People were looking for alternative ways of taking action. Was armed insurrection or revolution the only one? For a handful of people it might work but how could the common people as a whole benefit?

The common people have no use for rifles and revolvers. They will not take them even if they are given them free. They have not the training to make effective use of them and because they have not the training they lack the courage. Only a few young men from middle-class families, gentry in fact, inspired by romantic ideas of revolution and adventure, will find them useful. Not very many really believed that such people were capable of liberating the country if the task was entrusted to their dare-devil courage. And those who did, took care to keep at a safe distance like the proverbial uncle who also looked after himself first. They themselves took no part in the struggle and resisted all efforts to drag them on to the stage.

These efforts were not entirely wasted however. Another way of resistance had been discovered during the Swadeshi Movement, the rejection of everything foreign. Much progress had been made in this direction. But when the rejected commodity is something urgently needed how is the vacuum created by its disappearance to be filled? Can it be replaced by something manufactured in the country? If not, were people ready to do what was necessary to start its manufacture?

The boycott of foreign-made commodities was not successful because it was not accompanied by efforts to replace the rejected articles with country-made goods. People who only destroy, people who do not exert themselves to build or make, do not command a following among the common people for very long. The boycott movement subsided. Gandhi had watched its development and decline from South Africa. On his return to India his first concern was the production of essential commodities. The people of the country should be self-reliant, they must be able to provide for their own basic needs themselves. The search for ways and means of enabling them to do this led him to Khadi, to the spinning wheel. There is no other way the crores of destitute

and poverty-stricken people in India could begin to support themselves. Every other method led inevitably to dependence upon a handful of the better-off residents in every town, money-lenders, or mill owners, or landlords.

The freedom of a country is intimately bound up with the degree of self-reliance the people enjoy. That has always been so, throughout history everywhere. There was no novelty in the idea. The Swadeshi Movement grew out of the determination to make the country rely upon itself and what it could produce. Attention had however been diverted to the spectacular ways foreign-made goods were destroyed. Tagore was deeply disturbed by what he saw and his disapproval was well-founded. When Tagore was told that even Gandhi sanctioned the boycott of foreign-made goods he concluded that he also considered destruction more important than production. The word boycott, itself, had a harsh unpleasant sound to Tagore's ears ever after.

The truth was that Gandhi was attempting to steer the country slowly into productive activity, to bring it round to the point of adopting a constructive programme on a very extensive scale. Tagore wanted boycott to be stopped outright, the mention of the word banned. Gandhi, by going with the tide of the movement, was able to divert the current into constructive channels by degrees. Tagore and Gandhi wanted much the same thing. It was only that Tagore thought of constructive activity and rejected the boycott totally. Gandhi used the word boycott in order to come to grips with the foreign ruling power. Freedom could not be won without a struggle. Yet Gandhi knew and said that constructive activity alone was capable of winning independence for India. Is that not what Tagore also said?

Tagore also found the word *non-cooperation* distasteful. Behind it was a negative and hostile attitude, an attitude hostile to modernisation, to science, to industry, to all the beneficial developments that were taking place in the West, not only to the foreign exploiters and oppressors inside India. Tagore could not tolerate such a movement. He felt it ought not to have anybody's sanction. Foreign-made cloth can be replaced by cloth made in the country itself within not too long a span of time, but if the light of science is put out, if scientific research is made impossible, the darkness that will descend upon the mind of the people will be like

that of a moonless night. If anyone wished to engage the British rulers and British exploiters in a struggle for freedom they were of course welcome to do so but to eliminate all western contact from our education, to sever our ties with western intellectual developments, was to cripple Indian culture.

In Indian culture today three mighty streams of tradition converge : the ancient Hindu, the medieval Muslim and the modern European. They are inextricably intermingled, inseparable. If students are advised not to attend educational institutions founded and administered by the foreign government or its approved agents, they can be educated elsewhere, but wherever they may be sent for instruction they should be allowed to bathe their minds in the holy confluence of these three streams. The national schools which sprang up everywhere in response to the call for the boycott of foreign institutions were, for the most part, abbreviated editions of those institutions and neither ancient nor medieval. What was new was the replacement of English as the medium of instruction by an Indian language, Bengali, Hindi etc. Some books marked by the British to be of a seditious nature were added to the syllabus. The boycott of educational institutions had, in fact, no basic justification and bore no relationship to constructive or productive activity. So it was that nationalised education gradually faced towards the villages and focussed on khadi. The river of culture does not flow in that channel.

Courts of law were boycotted in the expectation that the establishment of *panchayat* Councils of Five in every village would be expedited. People were expected to seek and find justice there. Those who gave false evidence before a court would not be able to do so before a Council of Five. It would be easier for the people to detect falsehoods and to assert the truth. Their natural intelligence would find wider scope. People can be punished without sending them to prison, in a manner that is more humane than incarceration. British penal measures violated humanity. Corruption was the order of the day in the British courts. Was justice to be found there? If so, what degree of justice? Does civilisation consist of a horde of touts, vakils and maktars who prey upon their clients? Of what use to the common people were the hair-splitting judgements of judicial office and their finesse in elucidating fine points of the law?

Not all British officials appreciated the importation into India of British ideals of justice and fair play, of regulated legal procedure. The rough justice of the Kazis was good enough, they thought, for it was what the people were accustomed to. If this type of official had had his way no higher or lower courts would have been established at all. Nor would there have been any Councils of Five either. The only justice the people would have had would have been justice of the Mogul or Maratha kind. The British Raj, by establishing regular courts of law, introduced a modern element into the Indian state, an element the name of which was the Judiciary. A new judiciary would not automatically replace the British one if it was destroyed. What we would have would be, like the coarse clothes and the coarse food that was being prepared for us, a coarse kind of summary justice or no justice at all. Neither the educated nor the uneducated wanted that. It was to nobody's advantage. A justice that was fair, right and sensitive was what everybody needed.

The British ideal of justice, despite the corruption of the system founded upon it and despite the expense it involved, satisfied a need that was centuries old. It was something the people of the country had lacked. They had developed a certain degree of confidence in it. No appeal to the attractions of the indigenous over the foreign evoked any response in this connection. The people chose the system that was more advanced, more progressive and more efficient. This they did without any hesitation, quite simply. If those who boycotted foreign-made cloth had felt as strongly about foreign justice the Non-Cooperation Movement would have been stronger than it was. The boycott of the law courts inconvenienced the common people more than it did the Government. The *panchayat* Councils of Five did not provide an answer.

The Legislature was also introduced by the British. It was as modern as the Judiciary. There had not been anything like it in the country before. The legislative system was imported from England. The British were in no particular hurry to introduce it. They procrastinated as long as possible. The reason for their reluctance was that, in English history, the monarch had gradually lost his influence and powers as parliament grew stronger and stronger. They feared that history would repeat itself in

India. As the representatives of the Indian people grew stronger and more powerful the representatives of the British crown would find their influence and power waning. They would eventually be reduced to the position of helpless spectators. That is a position nobody reduces himself to voluntarily or willingly.

The Engilsh regard the parliamentary system as their very own invention, a characteristic feature of the English way of life. They were naturally reluctant to introduce it into any other conutry. It was widely thought that any such attempt wolud be fruitless. The British system maintains its momentum by the motion of the two wheels upon which it is superimposed; the opposition party is one wheel and the party which forms the government the other. The pair of them are aligned in their movements by the rules that govern their operation and by mutual agreement. The Government is formed by the party which wins a majority in the elections. The other takes over the duties of the opposition. This opposition is highly responsible in its conduct, for a party in opposition at one stage may be called upon to form the government subsequently. Parliament cannot function properly unless the parliamentary conventions are observed. These conventions are not codified by law. They are the gradual growth of long experience. Did any comparable conventions exist in India? Could Indians evolve any of their own motion? What did it matter how well qualified any individual Indian might be? No Legislature could work properly. It was futile to set up one.

The Indian National Congress was founded to claim the right to have a Legislature. The Congress demanded the introduction of the British parliamentary system in India. The question of refusing it on the ground that it was foreign in its origin never arose. The institutions which existed in India, which were indigenous to its soil, were in no way adequate and were not even considered as rivals. Is it anti-national for the people of a country to want something they do not have, something that is better than anything they have had before? No Indian considered it to be so before the Non-cooperation Movement. Indians wanted from the British the best they had to offer: Parliamentary Government.

A section of British public opinion was sympathetic to Indian aspirations. They pledged themselves to assist in their

realisation. They thought India and England should be held together by bonds of friendship and mutual esteem, not force. One such Englishman took the initiative in the formation of the Indian National Congress. For almost fifty years Hume was the general secretary of the organisation. There were many other Englishmen who also held out their hands to Indian nationalism. The Indian national leaders grasped those hands in firm and lasting friendship. Dadabhai, Surendranath, Firozshah, Gokhale, Malaviya and their contemporaries were not the men to rudely turn away. Would Gandhiji have done that? He was forced to. There was no other way.

Equals can co-operate. Men who are free can take the hands of other men who are free. But England, even after a war of the magnitude of World War I, was still unwilling to concede equal status to India and her people. Had India not expended a great deal of blood, money, armaments and strength for the sake of England during the War? Would the Turks have been defeated if Indian soldiers had not fought against them? Would the struggle against the Germans not have been more bitter, harder, without the loyal assistance of the Indian army? Yet the war was no soon over than the Indians were kicked out. They were no longer needed. The Rowlatt Act was clamped down upon the country. Protests went unheeded.

Gandhi still had faith in the bona fides of the British government at the time of the satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. Little by little he lost it. The first blow was the massacre at Jalianwalla Bagh. Indians were ordered to crawl along the ground with their chests touching the dirt. Revenge was inevitable. Some Englishmen lost their lives. English women were insulted. The British became alarmed. They feared another Mutiny was brewing. No Britisher, man or woman, would be safe if that happened. The reaction, when one of them was touched, was panicky. Retribution was bound to be terrible.

The second blow fell upon the Muslims. Gandhi was hurt also for he regarded himself as their friend and brother. The Sultan of Turkey was deprived of his lordship over the holy places of Islam and his powers were greatly curtailed at the peace conference held at the conclusion of the War. His Indian Muslim friends invited Gandhi to meet them and sought his advice as to the

course of action they should follow. Gandhi said that if their petitions and deputations failed they could non-cooperate. The word sprang to his lips in an unpremeditated manner. He forgot it at the time but when the representations and petitions of the Muslims did fail to yield any results he recalled it. Jalianwalla Bagh had raised a storm in the country meantime. The first person to make an effective protest was Tagore. He gave up the title with which the British had honoured him. The poet was therefore the first man in India to non-cooperate.

The humiliation inflicted upon the Punjabis was felt by every Indian as his own. So was the pain of the Muslims. The way sympathy flowed out spontaneously to our afflicted countrymen proved, if proof was needed, that we belonged to a single nation. The Khilafat was far away, very far away. To be pained by anything that happened to it was natural for everybody connected with it by close ties. The ordinary Indian was not concerned. Few other than Muslims came forward to non-cooperate over the issue, not even at Gandhi's entreaty. Neither would the agitation over the tragedy in the Punjab have swept over India, from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean, without the addition of another element. The additive was Swaraj, self-government for all.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms did not deserve outright rejection. Gandhi was not opposed to them in the beginning. Little by little however he came to feel that there was a risk involved, that advocates of violence might take advantage of the mood of the people who were smarting with the hardships and the humiliation that had come in the wake of the war. If they did, the imperialists would wreak a fearful vengeance. And if those who believed in ahimsa sat back and did nothing no chance would ever come their way. The Muslims were eager to non-cooperate and the Punjabis were more than ready. The rest of the country was sure to respond if the call for non-violent action was issued in the name of Swaraj. A longing to control its own destiny, to rule itself, had awakened in the country. It was of unprecedented strength. The people wanted Swaraj. Those whose blood was hot were unwilling to patiently go through the long and slow process of gradual reform, step by step, leading to Swaraj at some future, unspecified date. The impatient and violent, believing in terrorist methods, spread a net all over the

world and collected arms and ammunition. In Germany, Canada, Japan, Indonesia, everywhere their agents were at work and their organisation active.

At this juncture Gandhi stepped forward, taking up a position midway between the extremists on the one hand and the moderates on the other. At his back was the solid mass of Khilafat Muslims and with them stood people for whom nobody had ever before taken thought, the lowborn commoners of India, the non-gentry. Sudras were customarily regarded with pity and contempt because of their low social status. No consideration was ever shown to them. Yet was it not self-evident that, for India to win her freedom, it was most urgent for large numbers of her people to participate in the fight for it? Cobblers, scavengers, potters and tanners made as good soldiers as men of any other caste. They were certainly acceptable.

The urgencies of war have always had a beneficial effect on the status of the lowborn. And of women also. In the movements inaugurated and led by Gandhiji they gained not only status but respect. While the country was waiting with bated breath for Gandhiji to give the signal for the struggle to begin, an amazing thing happened. The Indian National Congress changed its position overnight and converted itself into his platform. In the intensity of the conflict which followed, the Congress was welded into a monolithic party.

The movement in the beginning adopted a policy of non-cooperation but its objective was full civil disobedience. Hundreds and thousands of people plunged into the fray, attracted by the power of Gandhi's personality, his charismatic magnetism.

CHAPTER SIX

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Gandhiji's personal faith in the supreme power of ahimsa was as unshakable as a mountain. His followers were less convinced. They wanted immediate results and when none were forthcoming they became discouraged.

Gandhi himself had set a time limit. He said Swaraj would be won within a year. The year was running out. Where was Swaraj? Civil disobedience on a mass scale would have to be launched, a satyagraha of the masses. Everybody expected that once a movement of this kind was launched it would spread like wild fire and no fire brigade would be able to extinguish the resulting conflagration. Swaraj! That would be the way Swaraj would come! All eyes were on Bardoli. This small tahsil in Gujarat was to ignite the fire by taking the lead. Bardoli!

Then the tragedy at Chaurichaura occurred, at this moment of all moments. The police station of Chaurichaura was set on fire by a mob that lost its self-control when the police fired upon it. Twenty-two constables were burned to death. To the Mahatma it was ominous portent. Who could guarantee that, in a country of the size of India, more incidents of the same kind would not take place during the movement he was on the point of launching? Would it take very long for non-violent non-cooperation to turn into the most violent demonstrations? What mercy could the Government be expected to show? All the force at its command would be mobilised to put the people down.

Gandhi did not need to be told that the British government could on occasion, take off the velvet glove and apply its naked iron fist. His friends nonetheless warned him that the British were prepared for a showdown and the army was being held in readiness. Every trace of disobedience would be rooted out, civil or otherwise.

Mohammed Ali Khojani was one of the friends who spoke to him. The anglicised form of this gentleman's name was Jinnah, Jhina Bhai. Very late one night he turned up at Bardoli and

suggested that civil disobedience should not be started at that time. If it began, he argued, shooting would immediately stop it. The British were in no mood to tolerate anything of the kind. It would be much better, said Jinnah, to talk with the Viceroy, Lord Reading. He, Jinnah, would arrange for Gandhi to meet him, with Malaviya's help.

Gandhi of course knew how badly the British had been shaken by the Mutiny. He knew that they kept themselves armed and alert. In return for every blow aimed at them they were prepared to strike ten. Afterwards they would initiate some reforms, make provision for a few more jobs, and do other things for the countrymen whom they had without mercy killed, wounded and maimed. It was better not to provoke them. Did that mean the movement should be called off? No, that was not what he intended. There is no provision in ahimsa for that kind of withdrawal. Ahimsa could not be launched however until the country was thoroughly prepared for it and this preparation had to take place in advance. What the tragedy of Chaurichaura showed was that the preparation was not thorough enough. It was a danger signal and to ignore the red light would be to invite a disaster of the magnitude of the Sepoy Mutiny, if not greater.

A single satyagrahi could remain unmoved by any circumstance, resolutely non-violent, but could crores of satyagrahis be expected to display the same degree of firmness? In a conflict involving life and death this was the first question that had to be answered, and the answer had to be given by the leader. It could not be left to chance or to trust, or to faith, or to God. The time for action was passing. Who knew when the opportunity to launch a movement would come again if the present moment was allowed to slip away? Time and tide wait for no man. Yet could Gandhi accept the leadership of a movement that had lost its non-violent character?

The programme of the mass civil disobedience movement as contemplated at that time was to set free small unimportant tahsils from government authority by methods that were to be demonstrated at Bardoli. Whenever an official visited the area in connection with his duties he would be boycotted. He would be made so uncomfortable that he would be obliged either to leave or to come over to the side of the people. This was the

way in which the country was to be set free, tahsil by tahsil, step by step. The British Government would be forced to seek to come to terms.

There was nothing wrong with this plan. Self-rule, Swaraj, could have been established in a few places like Bardoli and maintained for a time. To manage any such area in isolation however was not possible for very long. Officials did occasionally do things of benefit to the people. Their acts were not always detrimental nor was their attitude hostile. In times of trouble and difficulty they were ready to come forward with help of one kind or another. If officials non-cooperated, staying away from tahsils that had been liberated, would the residents of the area not go to them of their own accord and ask for assistance? One by one the liberated areas would abandon the effort to carry one alone, in isolation from the rest of the country. I have myself, in the course of my official duties, visited places government officials had not set foot for years, areas difficult of access, cut-off from centres of transport. Officials had to be compelled to visit these places in order to attend to the needs of the people who live there. Why should they go at all if the local residents are hostile? Neglect is unavoidable unless government officials inform themselves of the conditions in which the people live and do whatever they can to improve them.

No matter how elevated and noble the idea behind a theory may be, it is in danger of being lost if theory and practice do not tally. The programme as planned at that time, was destined to fail and would have collapsed completely if Gandhi had paid no heed to the warning signal of Chaurichaura and suspended the movement for the time being. He had to face ridicule. If the Government had not started a case against him and locked him up in prison he would have had to face worse. His incarceration was a blessing in disguise. By going to jail he escaped criticism.

Some of his followers demanded the withdrawal of the ban on attendance in the Councils after mass civil disobedience was suspended. The struggle could be carried on from inside the Councils. No confidence motions could be brought forward to defeat the pro-Government faction. That could no doubt be done but how was it to dislodge the British government from

the backs of the Indian people? The strength of the British government did not depend upon its success in the Legislative Assembly. Elected ministers gave advice in the administration of some portfolios under provincial governments however and these ministers could be easily toppled by no confidence motions. The Swarajists who were in favour of joining the Councils did not aspire to do more than that. Was Swaraj to be won by such methods? Congress opinion was divided over the issue. Later the Swarajists were permitted to stand for election to the Councils.

Students began to go back to the schools and colleges. The tide was turning against ahimsa. It had to fight against the ebbing of its influence. Lawyers returned to the law courts and resumed their legal practice. What happened to all those *panchayat* Councils of Five? To the national schools? Khadi and the spinning wheel were kept going with difficulty. Devoted constructive workers tended the lamp of their faith and kept it alight through the darkness of the night.

The advocates of violence, thinking that ahimsa had gone as far as it could go, that it had reached the limits of its possibilities, revived their interest in violent activities and received the support of a section of the Congress. The pendulum swung slowly away from non-violence. The violence that was being preached was not confined to politics. It took the form of communal hatred in many places. The divide and rule policy of the British was blamed for this communal dissension of course but the fundamental antagonism between the Hindu and Muslim communities was not dissipated by that assertion.

The Turkish Caliph was the centre of the Khilafat Movement. Kamal Pasha drove him into exile. Indian adherents of the Khilafat cause were dismayed. Those who had joined them out of sympathy with their cause dropped away. Soon alienation replaced any affinity that had existed. Erstwhile comrades came to blows. Hindus who had embraced Islam out of compulsion or necessity were welcomed back into the fold by the Arya Samaj. Why should the Moulvis and Mullas let go of their converts without a protest? A quarrel that originated in the problems of conversion ended in the most devastating communal rioting.

Congress candidates won many municipal elections and became the heads of mnuicipalities. If they had so chosen they could have given a larger number of jobs to Muslims. They were apprehensive of losing the votes of their Hindu supporters however. This gave rise to resentment. Many Muslims began to lose their respect for the Congress. What did they stand to gain from a Congress victory? Was this not a Hindu Raj? How could anybody be so stupid as to fight and die for somebody else's benefit?

Many Muslims adhered staunchly to the Congress in spite of this growing disillusionment. They recognised their obligation to participate in India's national struggle for freedom. They did not excuse themselves by blaming the Hindus. Their patriotism was strong enough and noble enough to keep them above petty issues and communal jealousy.

When Gandhiji came out of prison the temper of the country had changed to a degree that ruled out any possibility of a mass civil disobedience movement. Non-cooperation had virtually died out. Only khadi and the spinning wheel were still functioning. He concentrated on them, throwing all his strength into the development of handspun cloth and its ancillary industries, preparing himself against the time when the tide would turn in his favour again. Those who would fight by his side at that time should be trained and made ready, put into close and wide contact with the common people of the country through the development of cottage industries. To join the Councils was, from his point of view, a mistake, and to condone violence was to take a direction diametrically opposite to his own.

While I was in college I formed the habit of reading widely. Publications of all kinds, concerned with many different schools of thought, came to my notice. I studied and read. The thought of Gandhi was always in my mind. Gandhi was neither the first thinker in the history of mankind nor the last. The narrowness of the orthodox outlook of Gandhiji's followers became the target for my criticism, but it was the criticism of one of the family, not an outsider's. And did I only criticise? Did I not approve? My sympathies were plain for all to see. With the exception of Gandhi's pigtail or a Gandhi cap the clothes I wore were all of the coarsest khadi, dyed in strong colours. I did not adopt a pigtail

because I considered myself a child of the Indian Renaissance and the Indian Renaissance was deeply influenced by the European Renaissance. I differed from Gandhi in this regard. My hand itched at the mere sight of a pigtail, and a pair of scissors became my weapon. My feelings about pigtails are still violent. In Bengal no headgear of any kind is worn. Bengalis are always bareheaded. When one dons a hat he immediately turns into a saheb.

Gradually, over a long period of time, I became convinced that ahimsa is the best method of taking action in any circumstances just as honesty is the best policy in one's business dealings. In the conditions that existed in India at the time no other policy was feasible. The common people had no other means of self-defence. The common people were not on the side either of the Council-goers or those who differed from them. I was personally quite prepared to applaud the Council-goers if they could win independence and keep it without the help of the common people. But I could not, after the coming of Gandhi, ignore the common people. Gandhiji had awakened them from their aged-old passivity. They would never again lapse into inertia, although their responses might be slow initially. Where was a Council-goer or a violent revolutionary who was capable of parleying with them when they did rise? How would either of the two go about approaching them? Would they be given votes or given arms? Arms would inevitably lead to civil war. Voters waken only once every five years. The rest of the time they are passive. Gandhi, ahimsa and the common people were, to me, one and indivisible, a unit as indivisible as the Christian Trinity, the Hindu Trimurti and the Three Jewels of the Buddha.

The various schools of modern thought nearly all ensured a satisfactory degree of justice, but they were all based upon the idea that the end to be achieved was the determining factor, the main consideration. To achieve it any means were justified. The end excused the means if it was in itself sufficiently advantageous. The means were pardonable. Gandhiji's teaching, inspired by Tolstoy, was the exact opposite. It gave priority to the means. No end, however worthy, can be successfully achieved by means that are impure or morally reprehensible. Gandhi had neither a shield nor a buckler and wanted none. He could assert himself

without the aid of either. At this juncture however his voice was drowned in the clamour all around him. Yet he went on insisting quietly and firmly that it did not matter how noble and great an objective might be if the means adopted to achieve it were base. Nothing that could only be won by base means was worth winning. A road slippery with the blood of injustice and the muck of outrage cannot lead to a just world.

Gandhi was the only man able to refuse unequivocally to worship either Mammon or Mars. Nationalism in itself is a narrow and rather chauvinistic credo but in the light of the nobility of his character it took on a radiance that was glorious. Those who worship their nations are not necessarily concerned for the truth of humanity as a whole. Indian nationalism grew out of a sense of human truth; its source was in humanity at large and concern for the welfare of humanity. Yet it contained poisonous drugs of hatred also. This hatred was not compatible with the spirit of ahimsa. Ahimsa was ignored when hate set about its secret-most workings. The open violence of a brave man is much to be preferred to the underground machinations of hatred of this kind. There were some who sheltered under Gandhi's umbrella only because they lacked the courage to be violent openly. They did not add to his reputation although they swelled the numbers of his followers. Large numbers of followers are required when a movement is in progress and a conflict in full swing. When the doors of a movement or of an institution are kept open all are free to enter and those who do so are not subjected to very strict scrutiny.

Even Gandhi could not prevent them from muddying the waters of ahimsa with violent hatred and thoughts of vengeance nor could he keep them from confusing racial hatred with patriotism. He insisted upon regular spinning for he felt that those who were not sincere would quickly give it up. Only the honest would stick to the discipline. But those who came eagerly forward to break laws imposed by a foreign authority felt little hesitancy about breaking the rules Gandhi laid down.

I agreed entirely with Gandhiji's views regarding the means by which an end is achieved. It seemed to me evident that ahimsa was the best way to do things. But I had reservations about the end to be desired. I had no objection to the departure

of the British. Let them go. But should modern civilisation and its culture also be discarded only because they had been introduced into India by the British? Truth, ahimsa, and brotherhood were eternal values that deserved to be placed on a sound footing but was it necessary to displace the values of the Renaissance in order to do it? These values were: freedom from the bondage of superstition, reason, logic. Was it desirable for the common people to be ignorant even though they were devoted to ahimsa? Would it not be a good thing to make a passage-way for the waters of the Renaissance so that they might reach the fields of the common people and add to the wealth of the crops? Should they not be accessible to all?

One swallow does not make a summer. Gandhi alone could not bring about a total change in the Indian temperament. Little by little I realised that he himself had not been influenced very deeply if at all by the Renaissance. If the eighteenth century Enlightenment had touched him at all it had not left a permanent mark upon his mind or personality. The modern age meant only two things to him: militarism and industrialisation. Under his leadership India could win freedom, the common people could also develop the strength to resist oppression and injustice, friendly relations between religious communities could be established successfully, but could a Revolution on the French pattern take place? Where was the preparation for it? Where was our Voltaire? Where was our Rousseau? Where was a Diderot to compile the first Indian Encyclopaedia with a set of brilliant colleagues?

Was India about to revert to the Middle Ages? Would the conditions of pre-British India be restored upon their departure? The Middle Ages had at least belonged to Muslims and Hindus alike. There were some who dreamed of going even further back in history, to a time when there were no Muslims. These were the Hindu Revivalists. There was a similar group among the Muslims, the Muslim Revivalists. Were we to be forced to witness a clash between them? A man is as much a child of his age and time as of his country. To which age did we belong? What was our relation to the Modern Age? Were we bound to it by hatred or by love?

That militarism and industrialisation were slowly eroding our

age, eating out the core, was well-known. Gandhi did not care for a free India if it was to mean a duplication of either Japan or Italy. Nor did I. No age is acceptable in all of its aspects. If it were, the industrial slavery of the nineteenth century would have been on the approved list of developments that took place at that time. We have come a long way since then. Our age is different. Militarism and industrialisation will likewise become obsolete and be left behind. This is what I believed and because I believed it I could not envisage an India that was an imitation of either Italy or Japan.

Negative thinking of this kind only explains what I did not want; it does not define the things I thought desirable. I turned to Gandhi. It was not easy for me to accept the idea that if people who had lived in villages for thousands of years continued to live in them, a new society could be established or that if differences between the high and low in society were effaced, caste distinctions would become tolerable for another five thousand years or that the practice of celibacy would bring sweetness and light into the relationship between men and women and the sexes become equal. Nor did I find it easy to believe that equality of status was possible between the rich, the worker, the usurer, the debtor, the peasant and the landowner or that, if equality could be achieved without damaging the interest of any of them, minds set in traditional orthodox ways of thinking would not change, would never grow rebellious and develop the volatility of a twentieth century mind. In these matters I found myself forced to disagree with Gandhiji.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GANDHI, AHIMSA AND THE COMMON PEOPLE

Gandhi, ahimsa and the common people formed, as I have said, a trinity in which I had faith. But the shape of the things that might come in India as a consequence of their association worried me. I was fundamentally opposed to an India in which caste was important and powerful. The kind of life that appealed to me was a life capable of movement, open to change, responsive to the thought currents of the world. A static life, a life frozen into immobility, was not to my liking. The order I wanted was a new order, not the old one.

Every week I studied Gandhi's journal, *Young India,* following his mind closely. I had already read *Hind Swaraj.* Later I pored over his autobiography, *My Experiments With Truth.* Gandhi was a maker of history. In time he was sure to be acclaimed as one of the great teachers of mankind and given a place beside the Buddha and Christ. The moral and spiritual side of my nature drank his words thirstily. Did I not breathe the same air he did? Was that not rare good fortune? Future generations would envy me for having lived during the age of Gandhi. I wanted to be able to say, "Yes, I saw Gandhi."

The opportunity came about a year and a half after he was released from prison, at Patna. The All-India Spinners' Association was founded that year and the Congress handed over to the Swarajists. I was able to get admittance to the All-India Congress Committee meeting by hanging a camera around my neck and pretending to be a reporter. The place where I seated myself was quite close to Gandhi and though I did not take a photograph of him my eyes never left him. What was the man's secret? What was it that drew people to him like the sun of a new solar system, holding them firmly in their orbits? Why were so many learned and venerable people attending to him in such a devoted manner? Yes, India's greatest leaders were present that day. I saw them all. The ladies were there too.

How was I to discover his secret? He sat cross-legged on

the floor in front of a low desk, listening with close attention and unflagging patience to speech after speech as each leader rose to address the audience in turn. Now and then he made a modest remark in a low voice. I did not realise that he had just suffered a defeat, losing to the Swarajists. At this meeting he came to terms with them, confirming their triumph. He accepted the parliamentary programme they brought forward and they conceded their support to khadi. He was outwardly unperturbed, as serene as the Buddha, but inwardly he was not so calm. His heart was restless. He had not been able to accomplish what he had to do, what he had come to bring about, but he did not waver. He was as poised as a thunderbolt.

It was not for me to decide who was to go to parliament and who was to stick to the spinning wheel. Though I kept in close touch with Gandhi's thought trends I myself moved away, taking up a position at some distance from his. The Marxists had become active. M.N. Roy and some of my contemporaries were in the vanguard of the Communist movement. Still others became admirers of Mussolini and Hitler, finding Fascist doctrines to their liking. My Muslim friends had begun to have doubts. They were not prepared to fight the British over the issue of Swaraj, having joined the nationalists only for the sake of the Khilafat. They were finding it easier to become Communists than Swarajists. As members of a religion spread through many nations of the world, an international brotherhood, they were inhibited in their attitude to nationalism. The Caliph might be gone but the brotherhood remained. The holy places were no less holy. There was Mecca. To us, the Turks, Arabs and Iranians were aliens. They were not aliens to the Muslims.

At one point in the history of England the Catholics, loyal to the Pope, concerned for their holy places of pilgrimage which lay scattered through many countries, found themselves unable to keep step with the nationalism of the Protestants. A complete break occurred. Catholics were excluded from the state government, denied office and were not even allowed to perform their priestly functions in the Church of England. A stray Catholic official was to be found here and there but strictly on probation. Supreme authority lay in the hands of the monarch and his chosen advisers.

It is therefore a serious question. Who are aliens and who are not? The dispute between Hindus and Muslims was not due to theological differences only. It was complicated by the problem of loyalty to a sovereign state. Swaraj was an issue that was confined to India. The Khilafat was, by comparison, an outside issue. How many of those who agitated for the one were deeply concerned for the other as well? The attitude was often one of bargaining. What were the Hindus able to give in exchange for support? How much? What if the British offered more? Gandhiji was gradually forced to realise that it would serve no purpose whatsoever for nationalists to join hands with Muslims who were of a communal turn of mind. To Muslims whose loyalty was undivided, who were genuine Indian nationalists, hands could be extended. They would be more than welcome. They would not be expected to become Hindus. Nobody would interfere with their religious practices. But, being Indian nationals, like other Indian nationals, they would have a share in Indian national unity.

Some Muslims were as divided in their attitude to democracy as to nationalism. They showed a marked sense of separatism whenever the question of jobs came up, or the question of elections, of representation, of responsible ministerial posts. These Muslims considered themselves responsible only to Muslims. Others were responsible only to others. Even Gandhi gave his consent to this kind of representation without realising its implications at one time. How could he be expected to understand them? His heart was not that of a parliamentarian. What was involved became apparent only after the programme the Swarajists had forced him to swallow stuck in his throat and the Non-cooperation Movement was suspended.

Gandhi did not believe in pacts. Pacts are for parliamentarians. He had not entered upon the Indian historical scene to engage in activity of that kind. He had no faith in it. The Lucknow pact was never repeated. Even Jinnah gave up all hope of one. He put forward his fourteen demands. Congress refused to pay any attention to them. British policy ultimately succeeded. Many of the Muslims who had stood solidly behind Gandhi began to drop away and were gradually lost sight of. They did not feel that Swaraj was worth fighting for. They were

interested only in the Khilafat. They backed Gandhi as long as the two issues were linked together and because there would have been no struggle at all otherwise.

Gandhi had been blamed by his critics for linking the two issues in a manner that, they said, was unnatural. What was Gandhi to do? Had not the Khilafatists themselves approached him with the invitation to lead their struggle? The only condition he imposed was that the struggle should be non-violent. They agreed to that. Could he raise any other objection? And if the Muslims had not joined the Swaraj Movement in large numbers would it have been as strong and as effective as it was? A national struggle cannot be fought with the support of only a handful of Muslims. Any movement of the kind would necessarily have to be on a small scale.

Hindus and Muslims fought together during the Sepoy Mutiny. One of my Muslim friends recalled this years later. What had been the result? Muslims had lost both their lives and their lands. Hindus had been the beneficiaries. They had purchased the lands for a song and waxed rich. Muslims had felt a natural diffidence ever since about joining the Hindus in anything. They did not feel that they would reap any benefit from such collaboration. They were afraid of losing.

The Sepoy Mutiny left a deep scar on both the British and certain sections of the Muslims. If that is remembered many things will become clear which are otherwise enveloped in obscurity. The English were afraid that Hindus and Muslims might unite again and the nightmarish tragedies of Cawnpore, Lucknow, Delhi and other places repeated. A section of the Muslims feared British retaliation. Had they not been put down with the utmost violence, their property confiscated and handed over to the Hindus?

The atmosphere in the country became favourable for Gandhiji's leadership once more four or five years after he was released from prison. The people, having seen how far the Swarajists were able to progress, resorted to non-cooperation again. A satyagraha movement was launched on a small scale at Bardoli. Vallabhbhai Patel was the leader. The issue was a local one, a protest against a rise in land rent. Vallabhbhai Patel rose

in the estimation of the people. The opportunity to increase his stature was given him by Gandhiji.

The front ranks of the Congress had been monopolised by the pro-changers for a long time. Now the no-changers got their chance. Gandhi declined the presidentship of the Congress. He did not want a second term. It was given to Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru became and remained a top-ranking leader from that time on. He was a no-changer. Not long after, he introduced socialism. Other no-changers quit but the young turned to him for guidance. Some of them also turned to Subhas Bose. Everybody knew however that what Gandhi wanted would be done. Nobody demurred. Sanction was in his hands and in his hands alone.

Sanction meant civil disobedience. It depended upon Gandhi. Nobody else could do anything if Gandhi sat back and did nothing, no matter how much of a fuss was created. Gandhiji was far from idle. He devoted himself once more to constructive work. It was the only way to prepare the people of the country for satyagraha. Satyagraha can only be rightly understood and its full implications realised, the methods of its deployment correctly envisaged, by a person actively engaged in work that will build up the moral and economic strength of the common people. That person must be profoundly concerned for and involved in their welfare. Constructive work, as designed by Gandhi, is to satyagraha what drilling and marching and parading are to a regular army. Satyagraha cannot succed if those who participate in it are indifferent to constructive work and have not submitted themselves to its discipline.

Constructive work means physical labour. Constructive work means interested labour. Work is the power behind society. The majority of men live by their labour. In every country of the world, power is passing into the hands of those who labour. In order to identify oneself with them and understand their problems one must work as they work and like it. People adverse to physical labour shall remain outside the mainstream of the country's progress. But those who are willing and eager to participate in physical labour will be at one with it. The very least that can be asked of anyone is spinning for half an hour every day. How could anyone reluctant to perform that small service win the hearts of his countrymen? They might, through the vote,

become administrators of the country but where would they find the moral authority that would command the allegiance of the people and their eager obedience?

Sanction meant a moral force capable of defeating the physical force of a foreign occupying power and replacing it with representatives of the people of the country. This was the sanction Gandhi sought to create. While waiting for the tide to turn so that a movement could be launched on its waters as it swept up to the full, he occupied himself continually with constructive labour, giving it all his attention. He worked without capital and without patronage.

How close could Gandhi come to the common people? In person? Hundreds and thousands of workers were required to carry his message to them. It was for his workers to move out into India's seven hundred thousand villages and establish contacts with those who lived in them. If these workers served the people with sufficient devotion and skill the people would provide for their basic needs of their own accord and for their families if they had any, unless, of course, those needs exceeded their resources. Most of Gandhi's workers came from the middle class. In order to live in the villages and serve the people they had to give up the comfort to which they were accustomed. If they did not they only added to the burden of those they had come to help. The villagers would demur and disputes arise.

Workers made the sacrifice and many won the confidence of the people by their unremitting efforts to alleviate their situation. They laboured for the freedom of their country, for Swaraj, cheerfully accepting hardship and an austere way of life. It was love for their country that inspired and sustained them. The focus of their love and emotion was their country, India. The people themselves, as individuals, did not command as high a degree of passionate concern.

Gandhi loved the people, particularly the weak, the destitute, the desperate, the abandoned, the orphaned, the afflicted. His love was unconditional. He asked nothing in return, not even the independence of his country. The freedom of his country was a passionate obsession and he fought for it with unremitting vigour but, when it was won, his love for the people and his labours on their behalf would in no way diminish. He would

continue to work for the people with the same devotion as before. His concern for the common people, his relationship with them, was permanent. It would not come to an end with the winning of independence. Gandhi was a man of the people. He was inseparable from them. And he was dedicated to ahimsa in the same absolute way. He was inseparable from ahimsa.

A patriotic love of their country blazed in the hearts of all of his associates, but an equal love of the common people burned in only a few. These few were the salt of the earth. Gandhi's words may have reached the ears of the people without their help but those words would not have come alive in the way they did and become a powerful force. These men were completely sincere. They were not making use of the people in order to gain independence. On the contrary they fought to free the country for the good of the people. Their wants were few. Abstemious in their habits, ascetic in their tastes, temperate by nature, they were not only patriots, they were Gandhians. When India was freed they would still be Gandhians. Their taste for a simple austere way of life devoted to the welfare of the lowly would not vanish. It has been my good fortune to come into contact with men of this type, men of principle. I know of what metal they are made.

When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa he brought with him two gifts; satyagraha was one and the other was sarvodaya. Swaraj was not a word of his invention. If I am correct it was Tilak who first used it. Dadabhai Naoroji was the first to pronounce it on the Congress platform. Gandhiji took it up at a later date. *Hind Swaraj,* the book in which he described his idea of what Swaraj should be, was written in South Africa. The Swaraj of his dreams was not the Swaraj of other leaders. How could it be? The two ideas which inspired Gandhi, satyagraha and sarvodaya, meant little or nothing to them. Satyagraha was an indispensable part of Gandhi's Swaraj. Sarvodaya was no less indispensable.

Gandhiji was always prepared to engage in satyagraha over any suitable issue. The issue need not have been Swaraj. One follower was sufficient, he did not require the help of many people. Satyagraha and ahimsa were one and the same. Gandhi was born to bring the message of satyagraha to the world. His goal in life was the achievement of sarvodaya. Sarvodaya was

his Utopia. Of how many Utopias have men dreamed! His efforts to realise it would not stop with the coming of Swaraj. His followers would also continue to press forward with undiminished fervour. Sarvodaya was a part of Swaraj; therefore Swaraj also could not be realised overnight like the expulsion of the British. Sustained effort over a long period of time would be required.

Gandhi used the word Swaraj in a variety of senses, according to his context. The Swaraj he had thought attainable within a year was not the Swaraj he described in his book *Hind Swaraj*. What was possible within a year was a transfer of power. Power could pass from the hands of the representatives of the British crown into the hands of the representatives of the Indian people. If the best use of that power was not made India's independence would become what Italy's was, an affair of the rich and influential. *Hind Swaraj* was written to forestall a deviation of that kind. Gandhiji was as dissatisfied with the British parliamentary system as he was with the Italian set-up. He considered the whole of the so-called modern civilisation of the West as little more than a disease, a contagion that had been brought to India by the British. What he wanted, in fact, was a moral world just as the saints of old had wanted a religious one. Any progress devoid of morality he considered of little worth, trivial.

Gandhi was trying, by means of the techniques employed in satyagraha, to save India from the contagion of the West's immorality. He sought to make the common people masters of their own fate and the builders of their own special brand of civilisation, by means of sarvodaya. It was a long road. Swaraj was the name of one of the stations on the way—Tilak's Swaraj, Dadabhai's Swaraj, political Swaraj. Gandhi wanted the panchayat system of village Councils of Five to be established but he gradually overcame his dislike for the British parliamentary system.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhiji was forty-five years old when he left South Africa and came back to India. He had been outside the country for twenty-five years. No Indian leader before him had been out of the country for such a long period of time, either in Europe or in an European colony. South Africa was a colony.

Hind Swaraj was written around the experience he gained in those twenty-five years. It gives voice to the conclusions he reached, the principles he adopted as his own, the convictions he formed. At the time of writing the book he had no idea that satyagraha would be so successful in South Africa, that his fame would spread to India, that he would return to his country as a man already well-known and esteemed five years later or that four years after his return he would initiate a movement in protest against the Rowlatt Act, a satyagraha movement.

Hind Swaraj was in the nature of a manifesto, comparable in a way to the manifesto of Marx. In a letter he wrote to an Indian friend he gave the gist of the ideas behind it. The letter said:

1. There is no impassable barrier between East and West.
2. There is no such thing as western or European civilisation but there is a modern civilisation which is purely material.
3. The people of Europe, before they were touched by modern civilisation had much in common with the people of the East; anyhow the people of India, and even today Europeans who are not touched by modern civilisation, are far better able to mix with Indians than the offspring of that civilisation.
4. It is not the British people who are ruling India, but it is modern civilisation, through its railways, telegraphs, telephones and almost every other invention which has been claimed to be a triumph of civilisation.

5. Bombay, Calcutta and the other chief cities of India are the real plague spots.
6. If British rule were replaced tomorrow by Indian rule based on modern methods, India would be no better, except that she would be able to retain some of the money that is drained away to England; but then India would only become a second or fifth nation of Europe or America.
7. East and West can really meet when the West has thrown overboard modern civilisation, almost in its entirety. They can also seemingly meet when East has also adopted modern civilisation, but that meeting would be an armed truce, even as it is between, say, Germany and England, both of which nations are living in the Hall of Death in order to avoid being devoured, the one by the other.
8. It is simply impertinence for any man or any body of men to begin or to contemplate reform of the whole world. To attempt to do so by means of highly artificial and speedy locomotion, is to attempt the impossible.
9. Increase of material comforts, it may be generally laid down, does not in any way whatsoever conduce to moral growth.
10. Medical science is the concertrated essence of black magic. Quackery is infinitely preferable to what passes for high medical skill as such.
11. Hospitals are the instruments that the Devil has been using for his own purpose, in order to keep his hold on his kingdom. They perpetuate vice, misery and degradation and real slavery. I was entirely off the track when I considered that I should receive a medical training. It would be sinful for me in any way whatsoever to take part in the abominations that go in the hospitals. If there were no hospitals for venereal diseases, or even for consumptives, we should have less consumption and less sexual vice amongst us.
12. India's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past fifty years or so. The railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors, and such like have

all to go, and the so-called upper classes have to learn to live consciously and religiously and deliberately, the simple life of a peasant, knowing it to be a life giving true happiness.

13. India should wear no machine-made clothing whether it comes out of European mills or Indian mills.
14. England can help India to do this and then she will have justified her hold on India. There seems to be many in England today who think likewise.
15. There was true wisdom in the sages of old having so regulated society as to limit the material conditions of the people: the rude plough of perhaps five thousand years ago is the plough of the husbandman today. Therein lies salvation. People live long under such conditions, in comparative peace, much greater than Europe has enjoyed after having taken up modern activity, and I feel that every enlightened man, certainly every Englishman, may, if he chooses, learn this truth and act according to it.

A scratch on the surface of this way of thinking reveals that it is not Indian. Neither Ram Mohan Roy nor Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda or Rabindranath, Gokhale or Tilak ever dismissed a civilisation out of hand by placing the adjective 'modern' in front of it. They studied the civilisation of the East and of the West and regarded them as different, either opposed or complementary developments. Some advocated a synthesis of the two, others, for the sake of preserving their identity, favoured the elimination of western influences, their total rejection.

This way of thinking was, in fact, one aspect of the European thought of the time. There were many who did not favour modern civilisation, who sincerely and wholeheartedly opposed it. There were even some who seriously debated the usefulness of any civilisation at all. Does not a life blended harmoniously into natural surroundings, in tune with nature, make for happiness? The more closely a person associates himself with nature, the happier he becomes. This idea of a return to nature was widely propagated in eighteenth century Europe. The introduction of the machine and the industrial revolution which followed was consistently opposed by many of the best minds. Their efforts failed and they were pushed aside.

In Russia Tolstoy opposed it, carrying on the fight against industrialisation in that country, to which it came later and where it was therefore something of a novelty. By Tolstoy's time it was amply clear that capitalism was making use of science for its own ends, not the general good of the people as a whole. And capitalism had donned the mask of imperialism. Militarism stood at its side, giving it unqualified support. Tolstoy saw clearly that the unrest to which it gave rise, the class hatred that had begun to smoulder in more than one country would inevitably lead to both war and revolution. He exerted himself to find ways to avoid them while there was still time. He did not, however, launch any movement of protest. That was left to Gandhi. Gandhi had to shoulder the responsibility.

Tolstoy was not the only one who opposed war and revolution. There were many others. Some of them were opposed to civilisation itself also, not only to modern civilisation. But they did not know what action to take in support of their convictions. A few did but they lacked the ability to carry it out. Gandhi pushed to the front of the crowd. He was the one, the only one, who held in his hand a weapon designed for the task, one which insured a measure of success—satyagraha. A band of loyal soldiers stood at his back. They were few but they were strong.

Two years after satyagraha was launched in South Africa and five years before it came to an end, Tolstoy gave the movement his blessing. He had read *Hind Swaraj*. Gokhale was not appreciative of the book. Neither was the British Government. The book was banned in India. After Gandhi returned to India and became the recognised leader of the country's fight for freedom the ban was defied.

A set of values new to India was introduced when the English opened schools and colleges on the British pattern in the nineteenth century. These did not always tally with the old values. Friction was inevitable and before a workable adjustment could be made between them a third set of values arrived and added to the confusion. These were values we discovered for ourselves in the course of our studies. The Mahatma told us to unlearn everything we had been taught. Wipe the slate clean, he said, and start afresh.

At that time his movement was protesting against modern

civilisation. Modern civilisation was decried as materialistic. All that could be gained through it was the comfort and pleasure material artefacts can provide. It could add nothing to man's stature, either morally or spiritually. Man does not live by bread alone. He requires divine nourishment, ambrosia, as well. Of what use to him was anything that did not satisfy his essential need? Maitreyi's question was asked once more, after thousands of years.

It was a question that Christ also asked. What will it profit you, he asked, if you gain the whole world and yet lose your own soul?

Voices are asking the same question all around us today still. Varied voices. Gandhi humbly avowed that he had endeavoured to follow in the footsteps of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and the philosophers of India although the opinions he gave expression to in *Hind Swaraj* were his own. He regarded Tolstoy as one of the foremost of his gurus.

Gandhi's question, like Maitreyi's and Christ's, can be couched in the following words for contemporary readers: What good will all the comfort and wealth that science is capable of conferring on mankind do you if your heart grows callous, your conscience inactive, your soul comes to depend upon the physical needs of the flesh and your way of life grows as mechanical as a machine's?

Tolstoy was more familiar with the civilisation of modern Europe than Gandhi. Where, he wrote, is the individual freedom of which men boast so proudly when they are conscripted for the purpose of war, drafted to kill, forced to carry out orders in the framing of which they had no hand?

The first world war, World War I, broke out within five years of the publication of *Hind Swaraj*. Conscription was introduced in one country after another from the outset, France, Germany, England, Russia, the U.S.A. England avoided it as long as she could. Individual freedom had to bow out before the exigencies of war. There was one value the less. In the course of two Russian Revolutions subsequently several more were lost. Fascist Italy did away with some. So did Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany. Last of all came America, powerfully armed with the atom bomb.

Gandhi and Tolstoy came into my life about the same time. In my heart I became an anti-materialist, idealistic young anar-

chist. I looked to the common people for my own and my country's fulfilment. To know life profoundly, to enter deeply into its processes, one has to go not to the city but to the village. City life has variety and excitement but it has no depth. Can factories and workshops ever bring the satisfaction that is to be found in the creative work of the hands, in agriculture, in handicrafts? What is lacking in material comforts is compensated by inward contentment.

The essential cannot be separated from the inessential or even distinguished from it until the fascination of the city has been overcome. But is modern civilisation not something greater than urban civilisation? Was it identical with or inseparable from the city? Do trains and steamers, hospitals and courts, workshops and factories serve only towns and cities and are they inseparable from modern civilisation? If so does any place remain where literature, art, philosophy or science itself can flourish?

Does science occupy such a large part of our life only because it increases our physical comfort? Does it not discover one new law of the universe after another as it pursues its search for the truth of nature? Does it not wrest knowledge out of the inert, the inanimate? And do writers whose work is literature sleep over their pens? Are they not as alert, as wide awake as scientists? Do they not search the dim recesses of the human heart and mind for new and newer truths? Do they not strive to discover and create beauty? Is the search for beauty not also the search for truth? Is the entertainment of the wealthy the only function of art? Are the experiments that artists engage in continually, made only for the sake of the market value of female nakedness?

Commercial considerations do play a part in all these activities just as a certain amount of mumbo-jumbo is associated with the practice of religion. But if the assets and liabilities of the past five hundred years are scrutinised it will be found that man has not left the safe harbour of the Middle Ages and set sail on a sea the shores of which are beyond his ken solely for the sake of material gain or for the sake of trade. He also embarked upon dangerous voyages into the unknown out of the need to find new and strange and marvellous ports of truth and beauty. Modern civilisation is a civilisation that is mobile, sensitive to the evolutionary flux of thought, that in constant motion. It is neither

static nor unresponsive to change. It is alert, aware, conscious of what is taking place in and around it.

There may be more darkness than light in the history of the past five hundred years but is the light so dim? If we keep our faces turned towards the light we shall see more than the surrounding darkness, for a little light goes much farther than a great deal of darkness. Why then should the existence of the light be denied or played down and the importance of the darkness inflated?

After long and agonised thought I came to a position which enabled me to retain my favourable attitude to modern civilisation, to approve and applaud its mobility and sensitivity while at the same time remaining loyal to Gandhi, to his ahimsa, and the common people. Without continual new ideas, continual new discoveries, continually widening horizons, and continual new creation I could not live. I wanted the freedom to make mistakes. Modern civilisation gives us that kind of freedom. The civilisation of the Medieval Ages denied it. In the name of morality, in the name of religion, men were deprived of this freedom.

It was not possible for me or other young people like me to take up any other position, to be content with any other compromise. We of the present day are the heirs of all that happened as a result of the introduction of English education in the nineteenth century. The values it changed and made new are our values. We belong, in fact, to the fourth generation. This heritage and tradition would have remained with us even if we had abandoned the English schools entirely. It would have been introduced into the national schools founded so patriotically at that time.

It is not in our power to forego or abandon the values of East-West humanism that evolved at that time nor could we surrender the teachings of the Modern Age that came to us as part of our 19th century heritage. These were things we could not part with at anybody's request. The tradition nourished so assiduously from Ram Mohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore could neither be diverted from its channel so easily nor deprived of its deep flowing waters. It was one thing of which we could be absolutely sure. And because we are sure of it we are free to add to it, each according to his ability. The values introduced by Gandhi were acceptable; they enriched and expanded the humanitarian concepts we had already been given. Disputes that arise

between men can be resolved by non-violent means. The alternative is not a violent conflict but non-violent satyagraha. Ahimsa has the sanction of thousands of years of Indian and Christian culture. The adoption of non-violent means in our dealings with human beings is the logical extension of a reverence for life itself. Truth is a value of equal greatness and equal antiquity. Behind it lies thousands of years of universal approval by mankind as a whole. In the person of Mahatma Gandhi it reached its culmination. He would not have recourse to falsehood even for the good of the country. Everything that he did was open and straightforward. He had no secrets, not even from his opponent, the British government.

We all desire that the oppression and deprivations suffered by the common people should come to an end. People who have been ground under foot for centuries have to be taken by the hand and helped to their feet. A place must be made for them by our side. They must be given equal opportunities and, if necessary, they must have special care in order to enable them to make the best use of their opportunities. This may, in the beginning, make it imperative that they be given more than their share as equals. The erasure of the inequalities resulting from the maiming they have suffered from time immemorial, will require it. Not until they are equals can they be treated as equals. If, in order to make this possible, the more fortunate sections of the people have to make sacrifices for a time, those sacrifices must be willing and courageously borne. Nobody should cling to an unfair advantage. It is wisdom to ward off a revolution before it is even halfway to the point of eruption. This is what Gandhi perceived and made provision for. No revolution is at all necessary where the common people come forward of their own accord and receive the welcome accorded to them by Gandhian ethics. Gandhian leadership will win for them more benefits than any revolution or counter-revolution with all its butchery can give them.

We shall have no reason to grieve if a Gandhian state ever comes within approachable distance of an enlightened anarchy. I was, like Tolstoy, against the State as an institution. What good would independence be if the state remained as it was? My attraction for Gandhi was due more to my anarchic sympathies than to ahimsa.

CHAPTER NINE

TOLSTOY AND THE TRANSVAAL

I was a man who, under the influence of Gandhi and Tolstoy believed in ahimsa and also favoured anarchy; yet it was my fate to become personally involved with the state and its administration. Perhaps it was my destiny to learn from experience that Swaraj and Anarchy are not two sides of the same coin. Swaraj means a state of one's own. A state is a state even though it may be controlled and guided by a sarvodaya society. The state is present.

My period of training was spent in England. I was there for two full years and spent all my holidays on the continent. Regretfully I was forced to realise that history had paid no attention at all to the teachings of Ruskin and Tolstoy. These men were ignored much as the sea ignored Canute. The number of their followers had been negligible before World War I. Ten years after it they were fewer still. The War seemed to have branded all idealism as unrealistic and cast it aside. It did not reject Communism but of course Communism did not announce itself as an idealist credo. It emphasised realism, realism of a kind that was one day to seem pre-ordained.

The protest being made against the machine by humanists was, at a time, still confined to the pages of books. Man could not become the slave of a machine, the mechanical adjunct of a mechanism, an adjustable part. Yet men wanted to become mechanical, to have a machine's speed and efficiency. How many could! On the other hand the machine, like Alladin's lamp, produced instantly things far beyond the powers of the old-fashioned methods of production, the loom and the spinning wheel among them. And it was capable of performing many tasks that could not be otherwise attempted.

Steam, electricity and petrol are to modern life what the loom, spinning wheel, sickle and hammer were to the ancients. It may have been feasible to dream of doing without them at one time: it is unrealistic now. Everyone has become dependent upon ma-

chines in their day-to-day living although they may not like it. Even automation is widespread. The workers welcome the benefits they derive from it even though their livelihood is threatened. They like their cigarettes and chocolates. Gandhi was able to impress the evils of mechanisation upon the minds of the people of this country because the machine is comparatively new to India and because it was associated with foreign exploitation and an oppressive foreign administration. Neither Tolstoy nor Thoreau was able to impress to the same extent. Protests against the machine are still to be heard today although everyone—capitalist, communist or anarchist—accepts it in practice. These protestations are like the anti-marriage fulminations of couples who have lived for twenty years or more in conjugal harmony and become parents.

Man is not however at peace with himself. All his working hours are spent in tending machines in a factory and his leisure is passed listening to music relayed through a machine or to watching pictures projected on a screen by one. Any war that comes along brings with it a sense of release. For the average man it is the chance of a lifetime to get away, out of the rut. But he finds himself tending machines again on the battle-field, fighting mechanically. Man's way of life during the past two centuries had been moulded to a greater and greater extent by the machine and he has come to depend upon it almost wholly, usually to a greater extent in capitalist countries. In socialist countries it is becoming more and more the same. The sickle and the hammer do not define socialism.

The old, traditional moral values were, I found, not adequate any longer. The ranks of morality were in disarray. The ancient faiths were being doubted and questioned. Industrialisation is largely to blame for the break-up of European society. If the evolution from a society based upon agriculture and handicrafts to one based upon industry had been gradual and taken place in a natural manner the consequent dislocation might also have been less disastrous. Adjustments could have been made that would have mitigated the effects of the disorder created. But the pace of industrialisation, stimulated doubly by national rivalry and the greed for profit of financiers, was so fast that the old society had no time to examine what was taking place or make provision for

it. It was roughly and violently torn from its foundations. Disintegration followed swiftly. Developments which had taken two centuries in Britain were brought about in Germany within the short space of fifty years. The result was catastrophic. Has anything been learned from World War II? No. Nobody has learnt anything.

The entire responsibility cannot be laid on industrialisation alone. The idea of a social revolution existed both in Germany and France long before industrialisation started. For the fifty preceding years the intellectual world of Europe had echoed and reechoed with the debates that were in progress over the pros and cons. Fifty years earlier still, the French Revolution had given expression to the idea of a pure and unadulterated overthrowal of the state. The idea of a social revolution also developed out of it, step by step. Even though the French Revolution failed, a seed was planted that was to bear fruit in coming generations.

The roots of the events of the twentieth century lie in the eighteenth century. They go back to a time long before the French Revolution. England's contribution was far from negligible. The English were the first to behead their king. The French did not follow their example for a hundred and fifty years. The King was the social head of feudal society. To behead a monarch meant the decapitation of society. Could society survive? The aristocracy lost their influence and status. The bourgeoisie grew powerful. In Russia the bourgeoisie was also deprived of its status and power.

At the time I visited Europe there was, beneath an outward appearance of calm, a great inner restiveness. Men were impatient. A new order was being sought expectantly. The new order they hoped for was not a revival of the Christian medieval system. The new should not be just another version of the old. An order that was really new would combine the humanism of the Renaissance, the benefits of the Industrial Revolution, the social justice of the Russian Revolution, England's democracy and law, and the secularism of America.

But what would become of the new order if Mars and Mammon continued to be worshipped side by side with unabated zeal? Sooner or later men would lose their illusion all over again and ask the same old questions. The wealth and power science has

bestowed upon man are greater than any he has ever known but what will he do with it if his heart grows callous, his conscience insensitive and his spirit is pulled out of joint? If our way of life becomes mechanised? If we live like machines? For what do we come into the world, why do we have to suffer death, is there a life in the other world or does all end here? Does God exist at all? Is Satan by bestowing upon us the gift of great power, deceiving us as he sought to deceive Christ? Is what we call progress only unmeaning agitation, movement to no purpose? Is there really a goal? Is progress an end or a means?

When Tolstoy at last attained the peak of his fame it appeared to him devoid of substance, meaningless. He found the strength to go on living in the life of Jesus Christ. He might, otherwise, have committed suicide. The life of the Buddha was also a source of inspiration to him. The doctrines of love and ahimsa gave him peace. Life took on new meaning for him when he simplified his way of life. The last letter he wrote to Gandhi is almost a testament. It is to Gandhi that he hands down the things to the realisation of which he had pledged himself, his moral and spiritual riches. He wrote:

"The longer I live, and especially now, when I vividly feel the nearness of death, I want to tell others what I feel so particularly clearly and what to my mind is of great importance, namely, that which is called 'passive resistance,' but which is in reality nothing else than the teaching of love uncorrupted by false interpretations. That love, which is the striving for the union of human souls and the activity derived from it, is the highest and only law of human life, and in the depth of his soul every human being—as we most clearly see in children—feels and knows this; he knows this until he is entangled by the false teachings of the world. This law was proclaimed by all—by the Indian as by the Chinese, Hebrew, Greek and Roman sages of the world. I think this law was most clearly expressed by Christ who plainly said, 'In love alone is all the law and the prophets....'

"He knew, as every sensible man must know, that the use of force is incompatible with love as the fundamental law of life; that as soon as violence is permitted, in whichever case it may be, the insufficiency of the law of love is acknowledged, and by this the very law of love is denied. The whole Christian civilisation, so

brilliant outwardly, grew up on this self-evident and strange misunderstanding and contradiction, sometimes conscious but mostly unconscious."

The ultimate conclusion Tolstoy reached at the end of his eighty years of experience and thought is contained in this letter in the form of a prophecy:

"In acknowledging Christianity even in that corrupt form in which it is professed among the Christian nations, and at the same time in acknowledging the necessity of armies and armament for killing on the greatest scale in wars, there is such a clear clamouring contradiction that it must sooner or later, possibly very soon, inevitably reveal itself and annihilate either the professing of the Christian religion, which is indispensable in keeping up these forces, or the existence of armies and the violence kept up by them, which is not less necessary for power...."

Tolstoy's own country resolved this contradiction seven years after his death by rejecting the Christian faith entirely, all religious faith in fact, as the opium of the people. With it went belief in God. Soviet Russia became simply and straightforwardly, atheist. Belief in the law of love was replaced by an out-and-out advocacy of violence. Love was repulsed. The burden of conscience dropped away. No explanations had to be made to any deity any more, nor to any avatar of love. Men had no heart and no conscience. They gained a kind of freedom. There was no hypocrisy any more. Nobody could be accused of not practising what he preached. Mental health was no longer jeopardised by the strain of being forced to make continual choices. Man was healthy, physically and mentally.

This claim could not be made for the countries of Western Europe. People in these countries could neither forego their belief in God nor their faith in Christianity. They could worship neither Mars nor Mammon with wholehearted devotion. Many had however turned pagan in heart already and begun to think in pagan terms also. The Italian Fascists and the German Nazis were of this kind. They turned to the pre-Christian traditions of their Teuton and Roman forefathers. They did not consider themselves under any obligation to offer any explanation to either Jesus or God. They could kill without a twinge of conscience. They exulted in blood. Tolstoy probably never foresaw even in his

wildest dreams that such a solution of the contradiction was possible, or that it would be reaction to Communism, that if the Christians of one part of Europe became Communists, people of the same faith in other parts of Europe would turn to Fascism. All of them broke away from God in the process and lost their attachment for religion. The only bond that would hold them together would be the bond of violence.

People who did not move to either of the two extremes remained and still remain aloof. They do not approve of any solution of that kind. They want to keep their cake and eat it as well. Their lives are unhappy for that reason, they find no satisfaction in any philosophy of life, they are inwardly torn by self-contradictions and afflicted with poverty. Such a condition is described as malaise, an all-pervasive uneasiness. The mind is active, the faculties function but existence is without flavour.

There was another prophecy in Tolstoy's letter although it is less clearly expressed. Gandhi grasped the meaning. The Russian rishi wrote:

"Therefore, your activity in the Transvaal, as it seems to us, at this end of the world, is the most essential work, the most important of all the work now being done in the world, wherein not only the nations of the Christian, but of all the world, will unavoidably take part."

Satyagraha in South Africa had not progressed very far at that time. Its success was still far away and uncertain. Yet Tolstoy perceived its supreme importance, he saw that it was the most essential work in the world, in which not only the Christian nations but all nations would one day inevitably participate.

There was no sign of it that I could see in Europe at the time of my visit. From the talk I heard around me I of course realised that people were weary of violence and counter-violence, that there were many who longed for a permanent peace. Peace is not to be had for the asking. The whole of life has to be oriented towards peace in order to make it possible. If wealth becomes the object of worship war follows quickly, demanding an equal devotion. Can war be avoided if wealth is to be preserved undiminished, capital protected?

If, instead of using the phrase modern civilisation, Gandhi had said modern capitalism, his meaning would have been clearer.

Modern capitalism is a more appropriate term. Modern capitalism was the name of the infection that had attacked England and which was introduced into India through contact with the British. The disease has its ups and downs. There are times when it takes a turn for the worse. Bad periods are described as periods of economic depression. It is a condition as harmful as war, at times even more so. War is sometimes entered upon by economically depressed countries because they regard it as a lesser evil. They prefer it to the institution of any major change in the economic set-up. Ruskin and his book, *Unto This Last,* was ignored. *Sarvodaya* is the Gujarati translation of the phrase *Unto This Last.* Economic depressions are not severe as long as economic activity is maintained at a certain level by war preparations. War is one solution of crises in capitalism. When war is declared economic prosperity follows. Capitalism and militarism come to each other's assistance like right and left hands.

Who can break them apart, destroy their coordination? Marx prophesied that it would be done by the boy who was growing up in Gokul, the infant Krishna, whom he named social revolution. His prophecy was fulfilled in Russia, a country that had, at the time, vast military commitments. The assumption was made that the same thing would happen everywhere. Revolution was attempted in a number of other countries and failed. The idea was however firmly implanted and spread. It was for that reason that people in a number of European countries began to think of ways of countering revolution.

Revolutionary forces and counter-revolutionary forces found no way of engaging in a trial of strength outside parliament in countries where the parliamentary tradition is as deeply rooted as in England. They pitted their strength against each other in its halls, where they were invited to present their separate cases. I had the opportunity to witness an incident of this kind during the general election, about a month before I returned to India. The Labour Party won. I was astonished. The sporting way the bourgeoisie took its defeat surprised me even more. They could not be exactly pleased but the verdict of the polls was acknowledged and accepted. It was a part of a game, the game of government. The workers who became the new ministers wondered

at first whether the civil services would cooperate with them or not. They were quickly reassured.

I returned to India with a high regard for England and deep respect for its parliamentary traditions and its civil service. Could these things not be introduced in India in a peaceable manner? Was there no alternative to an open conflict? Had two hundred years of close association not prepared both parties for an amicable settlement? Did they not know each other well enough? Could they not come to an agreement satisfactory to both without staging a rebellion, a revolution or even a satyagraha movement?

The leaders of the country wished to put British intentions to the test. Until that had been done they would take no decisive step. They tried to find an honourable way of cooperating with the Simon Commission, failed and were forced to boycott it. Then they sat down together and made a draft plan for a parliamentary system suited to Indian needs themselves. Their eyes were still on England and they made room in their plan for Dominion Status. A time limit was set for its acceptance—one year. When I returned, the year was drawing to its close. The time limit would be up in three months. India would become a self-governing dominion if the British parliament approved Motilal Nehru's report before then. If the plan was not accepted a demand for complete independence was to be made on the basis of a nation-wide agitation during the succeeding year.

The indications were not very favourable. With the exception of an influential section of the Muslims all Indian parties agreed to combine and fight as a single unit, but these Muslims refused to forego their demand for a separate electorate. They were adamant. They favoured a federation to prevent too much power falling into the hands of a powerful Centre. They refused to consider the possibility of such a Centre ruling over provinces with a Muslim majority if the Hindus dominated it. To whom was the British Parliament to pay the most attention? Could a new constitution be imposed without the consent of the Muslims?

Lord Irwin acquainted himself with the attitude of the British Government in England, came out to India as the Viceroy and announced that Dominion Status was the ultimate goal of India's administrative development. A Round Table Conference

was to be held in London to discuss proposals for its realisation. Indian leaders were invited to participate. But the Viceroy could not set a date for the proclamation of Dominion Status. Who knew how long it would be delayed?

The Lahore Congress, at midnight on the last day of the expiring year, threw the proposal for Dominion Status into the waters of the river Ravi and passed a resolution demanding full independence, electing Gandhiji as their leader. The struggle was to take place in the year that had just begun.

CHAPTER TEN

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

On the conclusion of the Satyagraha Movement in South Africa, Professor Gilbert Murray wrote in the *Hibbert Journal* as follows. That was in 1914. He said:

"Persons in power should be very careful how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy, because his body which you can always conquer, gives you so little purchase upon his soul."

It was not for even the greatest commander-in-chief to engage an enemy so dangerous and uncomfortable in conflict. To put him in prison was to do what he wanted. The threat of imprisonment no longer intimidated the people. They had overcome their fear of punishment by the British government. Gandhi's authority waxed in proportion. The authority of the British waned.

Gandhi always used the same strategy but his tactics varied on occasion, being adapted to special issues. His purpose was to set the people entirely free of their fear of the foreign authority. They could fight it barehanded. They could say 'no' to its demands without a tremor. They could accept punishment without complaint, cheerfully, without returning blow for blow, injury for injury. The foreign authority could be defied and flouted without in any way being disobedient to Gandhiji's instructions. He asked them not to be violent, to keep true to ahimsa.

If they failed to do that it meant they did not accept Gandhi's authority. This was the most painful thing that could happen. Anarchy would be unavoidable if the people recognised no authority at all, his or the British government's. Swaraj would not be won that way. Gandhiji's leadership was not necessary to reduce the country to a state of anarchy. That could be done by any goonda easily enough.

Chaurichaura pained Gandhiji exceedingly. When he saw

that his instructions were not obeyed, that the most terrible violence had broken out, he was forced to withdraw and call the movement off. He did not have the requisite authority to keep it peaceful. Was he going to withdraw every time? Call off every movement? In a country of the size of India was it strange or unexpected that an incident or two like Chaurichaura should take place? It was also possible that such things could be staged by *agents provocateurs*.

The resolution demanding complete independence had been passed. The leadership had been given to Gandhiji. What was he going to do next? Was India to be set free tahsil by tahsil, starting with Bardoli? Gandhiji kept quiet. He did not disclose his plans to anybody. Did he himself know at that time exactly what he was going to do?

He appealed to the revolutionaries who believed in violence and were angrily impatient, to give him a chance, to hold their hands. Their violent tactics were a greater handicap to his ahimsa than his ahimsa was to them. Gandhi was more concerned for the violent revolutionaries than he was worried by Lord Irwin's displeasure.

The Armoury Raid at Chittagong was a hundred times more serious than Chaurichaura. But Gandhi was already on his way to Dandi when it took place. He had reached the sea coast, taken up a handful of salt and thereby broken the Salt Laws of the British government. The whole of India had been waiting for this signal. Everywhere people began to defy the Salt Laws and manufacture salt themselves. The Armoury Raid in Chittagong took place on the 17th April. By that time the Salt campaign had spread to every nook and corner of India. Nobody could stop it. And nobody wanted to.

Gandhi had not yet been arrested. Perhaps it was hoped he would call off the movement again. Did not a greater disaster threaten? But this time he had made up his mind at the outset that he would either return with salt in his hands or his dead body would be washed out to sea.

Not many of us knew that salt can be manufactured in places other than the seashore. Saline marshes existed in various parts of the country and so did briny deposits. The satyagrahis set about discovering them and salt was made in spots the possibilities of

which had never been suspected. Their product was often very crude, sometimes salt only because of its taste, but the satyagrahis were immediately arrested nevertheless. They deliberately sought arrest. No attempt was made to evade it. The jails overflowed with them. Women also came forward and courted arrest in large numbers. A tremendous problem was created for the British authorities.

The picketing of foreign liquor shops and the boycott of foreign-made cloth continued unabated side by side with the manufacture of salt. Shop owners in Bombay obeyed instructions issued to them by the Congress, ignoring the orders of the Government. The authority of the Congress grew greater and greater while the authority of the British diminished proportionately. This was exactly what Gandhi wanted. Even the Pathans of the Northwest Frontier caused general amazement by the fortitude and self-control they displayed in the sacrifices they took upon themselves cheerfully and voluntarily. The Garhwali Fouj, a crack regiment of the British army, refused to fire upon them. For some time Peshawar was entirely out of British control. Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan became affectionately known as the Frontier Gandhi. It was proven beyond doubt that the Muslims were with Gandhi. No lie or propaganda could deny the fact of their wholehearted participation in Gandhi's movement and their allegiance. It was also proven beyond doubt that the Hindus were in no sense the enemies of the Muslims or antagonistic to them.

The well-known American news reporter, Webb Miller, was present and saw in person the assault upon the peaceful salt demonstrators at the salt storage plants in Darsana. They faced the lathi charge with fearless heroism although the lathis were ringed with iron. In order to bypass the censorship imposed by the British government he went, as far as I remember, to Iran and released the terrible story from there. It was published all over the world, in thirteen hundred and fifty newspapers. Webb Miller stated that in his eighteen years of experience he had witnessed hundreds of riots and a great deal of street fighting in twenty countries and seen rebellions as well but he had never come across anything as moving as what took place at Darsana.

And we all know the story of Midnapore. Many peasants lost all they had in the no-tax campaign that was begun in Bar-

doli. They abandoned their homesteads and moved to Baroda. The no-tax campaign spread. The United Provinces became involved. The peasants shook off the lethargy of centuries and stood up, alert and awakened. The awakening of the workers progressed side by side. Over a hundred thousand satyagrahis in all went to prison. Women were among them in large numbers. Some of them had babes in arms.

The Salt Satyagraha lasted less than a year. The stature of every individual Indian was increased measurably. A critic as cool-headed as Ramananda Chatterjee took note of it. The transformation took place in a short space of time. I shared the general feeling. The people of the country might not have become free but they had become fearless. They voluntarily and cheerfully came forward in their thousands and millions to face hardships and sufferings. They had learned to march in step together at a single signal from their leader and they had marched from the Himalayas to the sea.

To the Europeans in the country the situation was intolerable. They demanded ruthless repression. In reply Lord Irwin said:

"However emphatically we may condemn the civil disobedience movement, we should, I am satisfied, make a profound mistake, if we underestimate the genuine and powerful meaning of nationalism that is today animating so much of Indian thought and for this no complete or permanent cure has ever been or ever will be found in strong action by the Government."

It was our good fortune that a man of such a genuine, Christian disposition was the representative of the King in India at that time. He was able to recognise Gandhi for what he was. But if the Mahatma was permitted to have his way the administration of the British would come to an end, for the rule of law could not be sustained. The advisers of the Viceroy recommended firmness. He suggested bilateral talks.

England was in the throes of an economic depression. The Indian boycott in India had adversely affected exports. Imports had fallen to a fourth or less than a fourth of what they had been. Of the mills owned by Europeans in Bombay sixteen had closed down. Indian mills which gave an assurance that they would not compete with khadi were working double shifts. The demand

for khadi had risen so high that production had increased by 70 per cent. Yet shops never had enough. The mills by themselves could not have met the demand for cloth without the help of khadi. The absence of foreign-made cloth from the market created a vacuum that had to be filled. Without production the boycott would not have been successful. That was why Gandhi placed so much stress on khadi.

The movement was almost totally spontaneous. The people took the responsibility of carrying it on into their own hands as their leaders were, one by one, arrested and jailed. The inevitable happened. In some places the people went too far and the police committed excesses. Nobody knew how to handle such a situation. Had any magistrates ever before been faced with such reckless law-breaking? On such a scale? The Non-cooperation Movement had been most restrained by comparison. Gandhi had been free to guide and control it. This time too Gandhi was allowed to remain free for quite a long time. So were Motilal Nehru and others. As the extent and strength of the movement became more and more plain the Government changed its policy. Would the leaders have spared the Government if they had not been imprisoned?

Mass satyagraha is a form of war because it involves a trial of strength between two opposing parties, the rulers and the ruled. It is also a kind of revolution for the common people. People from the lowest rungs of society, join freely, bringing with them their massive sanction. Can either party to it leave the other alone? It is a question of life and death for them, of winning or losing. Neither would fall back or surrender his position, not even if the struggle lasted for ever.

The Round Table Conference had started its session in London in the meantime. It did not wait for either Gandhi or the Congress. But before much progress had been made the unrealistic character of the discussions became evident. Unless the new constitution was to be forcibly imposed from outside, the consent of the Congress was necessary and it was necessary to have Gandhi's opinion of it. These two held supremacy among the nationalists. They should come to the Round Table, participate in the talks, come to an understanding with the other delegates. Negotiations could then begin with the British Government on

the basis of unanimity. The Round Table Conference suspended its proceedings until Gandhi and the Congress could come to London.

Lord Irwin's term as Viceroy was drawing to its close. He wanted to come to terms with Gandhi before he left India for good. A good and sincere man, he was reluctant to leave so much unrest in the country behind him. He accepted the suggestions made by Sapru and Jayakar for that reason. Negotiations began with their assistance. They exerted themselves to restore peace. Eventually Gandhi and his colleagues were released unconditionally.

For Gandhi to discontinue mass civil disobedience was a hard decision to take. His talks with the Viceroy dragged on and on. A wide range of subjects was covered. Neither of them adhered to his own position inflexibly. Both yielded on certain points. According to the agreement that was ultimately reached the freedom to manufacture salt for private consumption wherever it was possible was granted. It could also be sold within the village of its manufacture. The Salt Law itself was not revoked. Lands that had been expropriated during the movement were restored to their owners but otherwise no compensation for loss was given. Provincial governments were requested to take a generous attitude towards the re-instatement of employees who resigned their posts in response to Gandhi's appeal. The Viceroy refused to do anything about the police force. He was unwilling to touch it.

After carefully considering the question from every angle Gandhi at last agreed to call off mass civil disobedience. All satyagrahi prisoners were immediately set free. Only those involved in violent incidents were held back. Gandhi had to put up with a great deal of criticism because of this, especially after the hanging of Bhagat Singh.

If the goal of the movement was, as had been announced, complete independence, where was it? Had it not been for the sake of complete independence that so many people had undergone so much hardship, made so many sacrifices? Why should they be asked to desist before they reached the goal? Had the time come to call it off? What was the need to do so? There were many who declared that Gandhi was making a mistake. Con-

gressmen were among them. They believed that the movement would continue to grow until at last it attained a size and momentum beyond the power of the Government to either check or control. The Government would be forced to surrender in a manner comparable to the February Revolution in Russia. The British Government was, like the Russian, on the point of losing the war that was in progress. The situation was similar.

The background against which Gandhi had launched mass satyagraha was a world-wide economic depression. In the circumstances it could not go very far. The number of those who went to prison did not exceed a hundred thousand, a fraction of the total population of the country, only a three hundredth part. Another hundred thousand were involved with the movement in diverse ways. They constituted another three hundredth part. It was not enough for a revolution, not enough even for a war.

Gandhi's critics had not shared his South African experience. If they had kept in mind that Gandhi's strategy had been worked out in the first instance in South African conditions they would have compared his tactics at the moment with the tactics he had adopted there earlier and realised the extent to which his actions were influenced by that experience. The Indian Satyagraha movement was an advanced form of the satyagraha he had launched in South Africa. The Salt March to Dandi was a more fully developed version of the March to the Transvaal.

I do not say repetition. It was not a repetition. Gandhi did not duplicate any of his actions. He took up where he left off. The Salt March to Dandi was an enlarged, better planned and more effective application of the same idea that had led him to start the famous Transvaal trek.

Gandhi had seen for himself how the British changed. They changed in South Africa within a short time after winning the Boer War. They had won but their victory had resulted in an inner change of attitude in spite of it. They lost their hostility and held out the hand of friendship in an eager gesture of reconciliation. They wanted to compound the quarrel. The British Parliament did not hesitate to pass the constitution which the South Africans had drafted for themselves. Not a comma was altered. Gandhi thought of the Boer War as a kind of mass satyagraha. He felt that even if the British suppressed India's mass

satyagraha they would inevitably be moved by the unconquerable courage of the satyagrahis, their uncapitulating dignity. A change of heart was sure to follow. They would become as anxious for a settlement as they had been in South Africa after the Boer War, and the British Parliament would gladly pass the constitution the Indians would draw up for themselves. Not a comma would be altered. And India, freed from her subjection to British imperialists, would be free to associate herself with England as a sovereign country of equal status.

Gandhi therefore saw no reason why he should not be willing to take part in talks with the British government if he participated in them as an equal or why he should refuse any agreement that did not place independence in jeopardy or in any way curtail it. The door to complete independence was open. Mass satyagraha shut no doors. If complete independence was not forthcoming at the Round Table Conference, if he had to come back empty-handed, what prevented him from launching mass satyagraha again? Of course the momentum of a movement is checked by its being broken off for a time and not easily regained, but it can be done. Even then he was perhaps making a mistake from that point of view. Gandhi was a man of faith. He believed in God. Leaving future developments to the future he did what it was his duty to do at the moment. That was to take the hand of friendship held out to him by Lord Irwin and accept the invitation of the British Government.

He was still talking with the Viceroy when tea-time came. Lord Irwin offered him a cup, suggesting they toast each other with tea. Gandhi demurred. He politely expressed his preference for lemonade. With him was a small packet of illegally manufactured salt. He showed it to the Viceroy, put a pinch in his lemonade and remarked, "Your Excellency, this reminds me of the Boston Tea Party." Whether Lord Irwin was amused or not is not known but he did not refrain from making a joke of his own at the time of Gandhiji's departure. The Mahatma forgot his shawl. "Gandhi," said the Viceroy, picking it up. "You are not so well-dressed that you can afford to forget your shawl."

In England Winston Churchill was wrathfully protesting

against the admission of a half-naked fakir into the presence of the representative of the British crown.

Others besides Churchill were annoyed. Gandhi was received with the courtesy reserved for representatives of equal status deliberately. No other Indian had ever been shown as much respect or honoured in the same way.

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

That was a day very different from the South African season.

Mohandas K. Gandhi, a barrister, had just arrived in South Africa and was travelling from Durban to Pretoria in connection with a legal case. He was the first black ever to attempt to travel in the first class compartment of a South African train. At Maritzburg station a white man got in. Was it possible that he should have to sit in the same compartment as a black man? He sent for the railway guard immediately. The black man was ordered into the van in spite of the fact that he was carrying a first class ticket. Gandhi refused. He was forcibly removed, the train pulled out and he was left on the station platform with his luggage. Gandhi spent the night in deep thought. What should he do? The waiting room was unheated. It was cold. He shivered. Should he go back to India or fight? Should an end not be put to this kind of situation? The answer that came to him during the lonely watches of the night was not only the answer of an individual humiliated and inconvenienced by racial arrogance. It was the answer of an entire people, the answer of all Indians in South Africa and the answer of Indians in their own country as well.

The satyagraha movement started in India was a continuation of the African satyagraha movement, a further phase of the development of the technique of applying ahimsa to social and political problems. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact was a repetition of the Gandhi-Smuts Pact. Smuts was the head of a government; not, like Irwin, the head of a state. He was a prime minister; Irwin was the representative of his sovereign. Greater honour came to Gandhi because of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. How could a British Indian subject negotiate on equal terms with the King of England and set his signature beside that of his representative? Was it not insolence? Churchill tore his hair. What would happen to the prestige of the King? A section of the Tories, diehards and many Englishmen in India, hardened by years of im-

perialism, neither forgave nor forgot. An honour had been shown to Gandhi that had never been shown to any of them, not even to the highest ranking among them.

The British government in India consistently followed the policy of seeking to come to an understanding with an India in which Hindus and Muslims were united. No negotiations could take place until Hindus and Muslims had come to an amicable settlement among themselves. It was to facilitate such a settlement that the Round Table had been summoned in London. A new element was introduced there, the Indian Rajas. They also claimed the right to be parties to any agreement preliminary to negotiations with the British government. The first session of the Round Table was over. In the absence of the Congress no important resolution had been passed. Was the second session to fizzle out in the same indecisiveness? Lord Irwin was entrusted with the task of persuading the Congress to participate. He succeeded in obtaining Gandhi's signature to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. It was a thing which could have happened only against the background of the Round Table Conference. From the point of view of British policy it was a digression, a departure from the accepted line of procedure. It was made possible only by the goodness of Lord Irwin, in whose eyes prestige was not the highest consideration, and by the Labour Government. Had not the Labour Party risen from the ranks itself and did it not claim to be socialist?

The Labour Government resigned quite suddenly, before Gandhi arrived in London. The Labour party was in a majority but an economic depression had set in that made it necessary to take measures concerned with the banks. The Labour Government lacked the courage to do that, nor did they have the requisite sanctions. Vested interests cannot be prodded too far even though power has been won by a majority vote. Even elephants on occasion get so annoyed that they dispense with their mahouts. The Labour Government resigned in good time. Those who replaced them were bourgeois conservatives of high moral principles. The same Ramsay MacDonald was their leader.

In London, Gandhi was treated with the respect and courtesy reserved for great leaders. Lord Shankey, the Chairman of the Round Table Conference, addressed him as the Mahatma and

seated him in the place of honour on his left. MacDonald also addressed him as the Mahatma. Baldwin and Hoare went out of their way to make his acquaintance. All those who are present at a Conference of the Round Table type undergo an elevation of status. That is one of the major benefits it confers. That Britain should have agreed to hold such a Conference at all indicated that some progress had been made. At the outset everybody was optimistic. A solution to India's constitutional problems was sure to be found and a settlement reached.

Not many days passed, however, before it became plain that the delegates could not be dislodged from the positions which they had taken up. They were adamant. There was no lack of courtesy. What was lacking was understanding. Gandhi was pushed into a corner by the minorities. They were hand in glove with the British authorities. Gandhi was also isolated by his own policy. The British government, preoccupied with their domestic crisis, were unable to state clearly what they could or could not give to India. The parties concerned could not agree over the division of the spoils until it was known what Britain would concede.

The British government let it be known that it was willing to go beyond the recommendations of the Simon Commission in order to pacify Indian opinion, concede greater autonomy at the Centre and full autonomy in the provinces. At the Centre, Indians would be given ministerial posts but they would not be given the portfolios of foreign affairs or defence. Not all the members of the Legislative Assembly were to be elected nor were those elected always to be voted for by the mature. The electorate itself was not a single body of voters among whom no distinctions were made on the basis of caste or creed. No assurance was given that the Viceroy would not interfere with the decisions taken by the ministers. The Indian Civil Service was to remain.

Gandhiji said he was opposed to foreign mercantile interests and Indian mercantile interests also when these were contrary to the interests of the country as a whole and the poorer sections of the population in particular. And he was not in favour of the principle of nomination. The representatives of the Rajas, he pointed out, would all be nominated men. He asked that the right to vote be given to all on the attainment of a certain age in order

that the poor of the country would be able to make their wishes known. And he also asked that the portfolios of Foreign Affairs and Defence be given to Indians so that the Indian Government could function as the Government of an independent country. Gandhi was plain-spoken about many other things as well.

Whose opinions was he voicing? Were they his own or those of the people whose representative he was? And whose representative was he?

This created a problem. Gandhiji considered himself the representative of the Congress. The Congress considered itself the representative of the common people of India, all of them, rich and poor, without distinction of caste or creed, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Parsee. Congress was fighting on everybody's behalf. Congress was the only organisation that was. When the time came for a truce the parties to the truce would be the British Government and the Indian National Congress. The Congress was India. It stood for India both inside the country and outside it. Other organisations represented various sections of the people, not the people as a whole. The Congress acknowledged their existence and was willing to come to terms with them but the Congress alone represented the people and the country as a whole.

Nobody objected to Gandhi being the representative of the Congress. But the Rajas and British residents of India objected to the Congress's claim to be the sole representative of the people and the country as a whole. They objected to the Indian National Congress being equated with the country and the recognition of its right to negotiate a settlement with Britain on the country's behalf.

In the new Constitution that was being drafted provision had already been made for the formation of two blocks at the Centre to counter-balance the Congress. One block was to consist of the nominated representatives of the Indian princes in place of the former officials and the other was to consist of the representatives of the minorities. The importance of these had been greatly inflated by separate electorates and weightages. The two blocks together effectively precluded the possibility of the Indian National Congress ever winning a majority. It would always be forced to accept a coalition.

The minorities had been encouraged to make a pact among

themselves in order to make sure that the new government of India would be both a federal government and a coalition government. Foreign mercantile interests joined them. A similar pact was made by the Rajas. The Rajas wanted to make sure that the Indian princely states would be represented by their nominees only. They would have nothing to do with the common people.

Strangest of all was that a section of Hindu society also joined the minorities, a section that ought not to be separated. Both nationalism and democracy would be truncated if the demand of the minorities for separate electorates and weightages was conceded. An exception might be made in the case of the Muslims and the Sikhs for historical reasons but to give in to a section of Hindu society would not only damage the social structure of the country but place both democracy and nationalism in jeopardy. As for the practice of untouchability, it would cease to have social sanction when, under the new constitution, it was declared illegal. Could it be a good thing either for the country or for Indian society, to brand a part of the population as untouchables for all time by giving them the status of a minority?

Gandhi could not allow a separate electorate to be set up for the untouchables. He would oppose it with all his strength. Proposals had been made by a number of parties that, since differences had arisen over the question of creed between Hindus and Muslims, and the differences were of a serious nature, their solution should be left to the British Prime Minister. To leave the solution to the British Prime Minister meant that whatever decision he reached would have to be accepted blindly, without demur. Gandhi did not find that to his liking but he was prepared to consider any award the British Prime Minister might make and, together with the Congress, decide whether to accept or reject it. If the award established a separate electorate for the Harijans there could be no question of acceptance. He warned MacDonald.

Whenever reforms were introduced in India by the British government it was the practice to concede a little and withhold a little, keeping the reins in official hands. What was conceded was divided between the minorities and the nationalists. Indian opinion was consulted before the division was made. This had been done since the Minto-Morley Reforms. If the Indians failed to agree among themselves the Government shouldered the res-

ponsibility of making a decision. When this happened whatever they decreed had to be accepted. There was no alternative. To turn an award down was to reject all or any of the benefits accruing from the reforms. Some people were willing to do without it but others were not.

At the time of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms the Congress and the League had been able to come to an agreement. The name of it was the Lucknow Pact. Jinnah played a prominent part. It is said that Tilak also did. The Indo-British conflict was enough. He did not want to keep the Hindu-Muslim conflict going at the same time, side by side with it. If India's internal quarrels were amicably settled the whole of her strength could be concentrated on the struggle for freedom from foreign rule. The Lucknow Pact not only conceded separate electorates for the Muslims but agreed to give them weightage also in provinces where they were in a minority. The Muslims, for their part, agreed to give weightage to the minorities in provinces where Muslims were the majority. A separate electorate for the Muslims turned out to mean, in practice, that non-Muslims cast their votes separately also. Muslims could be elected only by Muslims. Likewise, non-Muslims could be elected only by non-Muslims. Muslims were not responsible to any community but their own and developed a communal mentality very rapidly. The non-Muslims developed a parallel attitude for the same reason. Rioting threatened to become endemic. Where was the unity or the concentration of strength that was needed for the success of the nationalist movement?

In the Constitution drawn up by Motilal Nehru's committee there had been no separate electorates for this reason. And no weightage had been provided for anybody. Seats for Muslims were reserved for them in provinces where they were in a minority but the number of seats did not exceed the number they could claim to be entitled to. This arrangement found favour with a section of Muslim opinion but the most influential Muslims demurred. They felt their communal identity could not be protected except by the double lock of a separate electorate and weightage as well. These Muslims were invited to the Round Table Conference. The voice of Sir Ali Imam, the only Muslim present who felt differently, was not heard. Separate electorates and weight-

ages was demanded not only for the Muslims but for all minorities, even the lower cadres of Hindu society itself, the untouchables. A document to this effect was drawn up and became known as the Minority Pact. The European mercantile community was included in it and given minority status.

There was no suggestion that the minorities reciprocate by acknowledging the claims of others. The Hindus—caste Hindus that is—would lose their majority at the Centre and be deprived of any weightage they might have hitherto enjoyed in provinces where they were in a minority. The Lucknow Pact was the result of hard bargaining. The gains and losses of each party to it were equal. Behind it was a friendly attitude of barter. The minorities present at the Round Table Conference considered nothing but their own selfish advantage. Losses, if any, were to be borne by the others. Their terms were as hard as that of a conqueror dictating to a defeated people. Full independence would not be brought any closer by the acceptance of their demands nor would the need for a trial of strength with the British government be eliminated. The communalists were not promising their support in return for the concession. No end would be put to communal rioting. The parties to the Minority Pact looked to the British government, not to Gandhi. If Gandhi approved, the Pact would be submitted to the Government for its sanction. If Gandhi did not approve, the British government would be asked to exercise their discretion and impose it upon India.

Gandhi did not let himself be trapped. The British government could, if it chose, impose the provisions of the pact but it would be done on their responsibility alone. He would have nothing to do with it. As for the Hindu untouchables, they would be given what was their due by their own society, the Hindus. They need not turn to the British or anyone else. Separate electorates were harmful for everybody but they were most harmful of all for the untouchables themselves. The Sikhs may be Sikhs for ever and ever and the Muslims may also remain Muslims for ever but no untouchable can be allowed to remain an untouchable any longer. It was perpetuating an injustice to allow the government to turn their stigma into a permanent institution. It would also sow the seeds of one more factional dispute, caste Hindus versus untouchables. Hindu reformers would find themselves frus-

trated. Society would be weakened and with it the state.

Jinnah was also present at the Round Table Conference. He had not yet taken a wholly communal stand. He was, in fact, closer to the Congress than to the others. He had hoped another agreement like the Lucknow Pact would emerge if Gandhi agreed to participate in the discussions. Gandhi had given the Lucknow Pact his approval at the outset although he later decried it. He did not believe in pacts of any kind. Jinnah's hopes dwindled. He did not return to India, staying on in England to practise as a lawyer there. By the time he did come back to India, four years later, he had moved very far from the Congress position and from Gandhi. He was no closer to the British government either. Reorganising the Muslim League he set up a third camp between the other two, making himself the League's one and only leader. The Muslim League declared that it was the one and only representative of all the Muslims in India.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MARTYR-SOPHIST

The Round Table Conference aroused high hopes. That such a Conference was held at all shows how much was expected of it. The British government would not otherwise have considered the presence of a representative of the Congress so indispensable or agreed to the establishment of a precedent like the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

Let us examine the results and leave history to decide who was to blame for its failure and the dashed hopes.

The Indian Rajas gradually backed out. There was not really any very urgent reason why they should join the proposed federation. They had consented to come at the request of the British government in order that a block could be constituted in the Legislative Assembly which, like the official block, would follow the British line and advocate their policies. The Rajas were alarmed. Democracy might find a way to slip through the opening thus created and penetrate to the Indian princely states. The Rajas feared that their authority might be diminished. Their apprehension was so great that they considered it better to withdraw.

The proposed Minority Block remained but the minorities would have to be given weightage to become equal to the majority. Without parity they could not become an effective balancing power. Unless they did, the Viceroy would still hold the balance. That was no independence. The Congress would never agree to it.

The minorities also needed to have the Harijans with them in order to attain parity. The untouchables had to have the status of a minority imposed on them. Gandhi was determined to resist any such attempt. He was not going to allow untouchability to be made a permanent condition by law nor Hindu society to be weakened. Yet the Minority Block could not be equated with the Congress otherwise.

How was a balance to be reached? Unless some force was found strong enough to be balanced against the Congress, to have parity with it, the proposed Federation would become a Congress

Raj. The idea of a Federation first came from the Muslims. The majority of the population of India are Hindus but the Muslims did not want Hindus to rule. They could be prevented from ruling if minorities were given parity, no matter how that parity was achieved. After the fast that Mahatmaji undertook over this issue it became clear that, without the untouchable Harijans, the minorities would be unable to acquire the degree of strength they required. Congress, with the support of the Harijans, was far too strong for them.

The Muslims abandoned the idea of a Federation and came forward with a proposal to partition the country. A Muslim India was demanded. It was considered the need of the hour. The name of it was to be Pakistan. India was undivided no longer.

The word, Pakistan, was coined after the Round Table Conference. A student named Rahamat Ali took the first letter of the names of the provinces with Muslim majorities and combined them. The Muslim leaders paid no attention to it at the time. Rahamat Ali was not connected with the Conference in any way. The leaders were still in favour of an undivided India. They had not yet begun to think of it as divisible. What they were apprehensive about was the role Congress would play as the successor to the British government. Congress rule could, they knew, become Hindu rule. They hoped to come to an agreement and make a pact that would be acceptable to the Muslims and not unacceptable to the Congress. If Gandhi could be persuaded to consent to a pact of this kind, they and other minorities would take upon themselves the task of persuading Britain to agree to it also. Britain's desire to further the political progress of India was sincere, but communal amity was a precondition.

This was the snag. Grave differences arose over the question as to which was to be given priority, a communal settlement or political reforms. Congress Swaraj was of supreme importance to Gandhi. A communal settlement was secondary. To the Muslim League and the British government a communal settlement was the most important. Swaraj was secondary. This divergence in priorities was a basic reality in Indian politics almost from the beginning, at least from the founding of the Cong-

res.. With the formation of the Muslim League it became acute. Jinnah tried to bridge the waters of dissent with the Lucknow Pact and Tilak supported him. But the span of the bridge was found to be too short. The water had risen higher. Neither Gandhi nor the Congress was willing to do what was necessary to lengthen the old structure. They realised that the water was rising so fast that longer and longer bridges were going to be needed. No solution reached in such circumstances could be final. And how much would any solution of the kind contribute to the termination of imperialism or colonialism? These were the objectives for which the struggle for freedom was being fought. Over and over again battles would have to be won. Where was the Muslim League when a battle was in progress?

When Gandhi first entered the political field the Muslims accompanied him. That had never happened before with any other leader. Gandhi became the leader of the Congress after he had become the leader of the Khilafat Movement. The Khilafat Movement lapsed, its adherents dispersed. The number of militant Muslims among the followers of Gandhi remained high. Gandhi thought only of unity, the fighting unity of Hindus and Muslims. That was necessary to win the country's struggle for freedom, to complete a victory that was still indeterminate. If he had had any real confidence in the Round Table Conference he would have taken the other leaders of the Congress to London with him. He had unlimited faith in human nature. The opportunity that had come to him should be used to the best advantage. All the participants in the Round Table Conference should make an honest and earnest effort to reach an honourable settlement. Frustrations are steps on the way to success.

The practitioner of ahimsa seizes every chance that comes his way of making the acquaintance of his adversary and never refuses to talk with him. He spares no effort to bring about a change of heart. The Round Table Conference gave Gandhi a rare opportunity to do this. The Chairman, Lord Shankey, later described Gandhi as follows:

"How Mr. Gandhi managed to stand the physical and mental strain of that Conference has always been a marvel to me. Without fail he was there at the beginning and he remained till the end of the day's work. A note made at the time tells me that on some

days as many as 80,000 words were spoken. But Mr. Gandhi's real task only began when the Conference adjourned. Hour after hour till late in the night, and early in the morning, he was engaged in conversations and interviews with the different parties, doing his best to get them into line and to bring them to his own way of thinking. Prime Ministers and Dictators have means and opportunities of imposing their views on their peoples, but it is doubtful whether there has ever been any man, other than Mr. Gandhi, who has in his lifetime won so many millions of men over to his side by his own efforts and example."

Ordinarily Gandhi worked twenty-one hours a day. For him the real work of the Conference was done outside its halls. He concerned himself not only with a few carefully selected representatives of the crown but with all classes of the British people. During his stay in England he lived at Kingsley Hall, a welfare institution in the East End, instead of residing in a fashionable West End Hotel. Kingsley Hall was half an ashram and half a club. It was called a Settlement. The director was Muriel Lester, the sister of a young man who had lost his life in the war—Kingsley Lester. As one of my friends knew her well I visited Kingsley Hall years before Gandhi decided to live there for the duration of his visit to England. On the top floor there were several small rooms that resembled the cells in a monastery. These were for initiated workers. Gandhi lived in one of them for three months. Mira Behn who was looking after him was instructed not to spend more than half a shilling a day on his food. He made no change in his costume and dressed exactly as he had in India, as a half-naked fakir.

A small office was rented for him at Knightsbridge. Innumerable well-known people came to see him there. Bernard Shaw was among them. Shaw, with his characteristic wit, remarked that Gandhi was a major Mahatma while he himself was only a minor one. Shaw also said, "You and I are members of a very small section of the earth's people."

Churchill turned down a request for an interview but his cousin, Clare Sheridan, was given permission nevertheless to sculpture a bust of Gandhi through the good offices of Sarojini Naidu. She made the request of her own accord. Gandhi refused to pose. To win his consent was not an easy matter.

Eleven years earlier Mrs. Sheridan had made a bust of Lenin. Lenin agreed on exactly the same conditions. The similarities she noticed between the two men are most interesting. She writes:

"The first time I found myself in his presence, the Mahatma said (just as Lenin had said) 'I cannot pose, you must let me go on with my work, and do the best you can.'

"Gandhi, squatting on the floor, proceeded with his weaving. Lenin, in his office chair, went on reading.

"I sensed—on both occasions—a silent resentment, but in each case it ended on terms of great mutual friendship. One day Gandhi, in almost the same words and with the same ironical smile as Lenin, observed:

"So you are a cousin of Mr. Winston Churchill!"

"It was the same old joke: Winston's relation fraternising (yes?) with his arch enemy! And Gandhi pursued:

"You know he refuses to see me? But you will tell him, won't you, from me how glad I am to see you."

"Lenin said in much the same way: 'You will tell your cousin...etc.' "

"And when their respective heads were finished and I asked one and the other the same question: 'What do you think of it?' they answered identically, 'I don't know—I cannot judge my own face, and I know nothing about Art—but you have worked well!"

Shortly after Lenin's death a book was published that later became famous based on the resemblances between the two men. The name was *Lenin and Gandhi*. The author was an Austrian, Rene F. Milar. Opinions differed about these two men but both their names were names to be remembered in connection with our time.

At Kingsley Hall Gandhi was invited to participate in recreationary activities as well as in the business of the Settlement. He was often present at folk dance performances. 'Mr. Gandhi, won't you dance with us?' asked working class men and women. Gandhi replied, 'Certainly. The cane in my hand will be my partner.'

For them dancing was an innocent entertainment. To be one of them he had to take part in their amusements as well as their working-day lives. 'We must understand the ways of people with whom we wish to become friendly', he said in reply to the inevi-

table question in this connection. 'We must learn to share their joys, to appreciate what they appreciate. Folk dancing is a very old English custom. Don't forget that.'

Gandhi found time to spend several days in the company of Lancashire mill workers, people who had been adversely affected by his boycott of foreign-made goods in India. Many had been thrown out of work. Gandhi expressed his sincere sympathy and at the same time gently explained that, though they were temporarily unemployed, they were not as badly off as the half-employed or permanently unemployed men and women of the Indian working class. Indians knew what it means to starve. Did they really want to wax fat by taking the food out of the mouths of India's spinners and weavers? They understood what he said and agreed with him. Photographs were taken of the Lancashire workers, standing hand in hand with Gandhi. Most of the workers were women. Gandhi was self-conscious and shy among them.

While Gandhi made the acquaintance of the poorer sections of the British people, winning friends among them, he gave much of time also to the devout, to the intellectuals, to the wise, to the gifted and to the politicians. He was not afraid of losing himself anywhere, not even in King George's Buckingham Palace. Everywhere he wore the same dress, that of the fakir he had been so derisively called. The King remarked that he had seen him in South Africa. Gandhi had been, he said, a good quiet man up to that time and, in fact, up to 1918. After that something had happened to him. Gandhi did not argue with the sovereign but later, when the King went on to say that the rule of the British crown would have to be maintained, that no rebellion would be tolerated, he politely and firmly protested.

Men of religion regarded Gandhi as one of themselves, as good as the best among christians as Maude Royden did. He was, they felt, as close and closer to Jesus Christ than any other living man. To Ernest Barker Gandhi was the St. Francis or St. Thomas Aquinas of the age. The teachings of these two great souls intermingled in Gandhi and found expression in his very practical nature. His success was, Barker felt, due to this peculiar blending.

The most esteemed Oxford dons, among them Gilbert Murray of Balliol, Michael Sadler, P. C. Lane, spoke with him for hours

on end. Edward Thomson describes the scene in the following words:

"The conviction came to me, that not since Socrates has the world seen his equal for absolute self-control and composure; and once or twice, putting myself in the place of men who had to confront that invincible calm and imperturbability, I thought I understood why the Athenians made the martyr-sophist drink the hemlock."

On the way back to India Gandhi stopped off in Switzerland to visit Romain Rolland at Villa Nuova. Rolland was unwell but he was at the station to receive him. Rolland's book, *Mahatma Gandhi,* written eight years earlier had been the first to acquaint the world at large with his activities. It had been Rolland who sent Mira Behn to Gandhi. The following day Rolland confessed his fear that he might never be able to meet Gandhi in person, that he would be summoned to the other world before the opportunity came.

They talked in Rolland's bedroom. Framed portraits of Beethoven, Goethe, Tolstoy, Gorky, Einstein, Tagore, Lenin and Gandhi hung on the walls. That day Gandhi was present. Lenin was no longer in the world of the living. Rolland regretted that Gandhi and Lenin had never met. Lenin, he said, was like Gandhi in that he never compromised with the truth.

Rolland, the spiritual son of the French Revolution, was at one time influenced by Tolstoy. During the war he kept aloof. It was at that time he moved to Switzerland. He had remained there. I met Rolland four years earlier than Gandhi, and found him strongly opposed to war. In the interval he had moved slowly away from pacifism until he had come to a position in which he was resolutely determined to keep the revolution that had taken place in Russia alive, speaking up for it in a voice of thunder. Yet he was not exactly a Leninist. That meant he accepted war if war was required.

The issue for Rolland was no longer one involving a choice between violence and non-violence, as it was for Ganlhi. It had been when he wrote his book, *Mahatma Gandhi.* The present choice was between revolution and counter-revolution. He had moved away from Gandhi in one sense but he was still close to him as a man who placed his trust in truth. Truth was the bond

between them. It was of truth they spoke. Rolland was suffering deeply because of the situation in Europe. He knew no effective remedy for it.

"If any nation has the strength to endure violence bravely instead of retaliating in kind it will give expression to the highest teaching. But for that an undivided faith is required," Gandhi said.

"Nothing should be done by halves, neither the good nor the bad," said Rolland. At Gandhi's request Rolland played Beethoven's Fifth Symphony for him on the piano. Five days passed very quickly in pleasant converse. Gandhi's visit came to an end. Rolland again came to the station, this time to see him off. They laid their hands on each other's shoulders and kissed each other on the cheek, embracing in farewell. Rolland said: "This is St. Dominique kissing St. Francis."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RETURN TO PRISON

Perhaps it was because Gandhi was closer to Christ than any other living man that the Pope did not grant him an audience. The galleries of the Vatican were thrown open in his honour however. Gandhi lost himself among the incomparable art treasures housed there.

Rolland warned him not to become the state guest of the Fascist while in Rome, and Gandhi did not, but he met Mussolini and suggested that the Il Duce face the fact that the house he had built was a house of cards.

Gandhi set sail for India from Brindisi, travelling as a deck passenger. The three months he had spent in the Western world, chiefly in England, dropped behind him. What he achieved in that short space of time has to be assessed from two viewpoints, i.e. what he achieved for India and what he achieved for ahimsa. He had worked tirelessly for both causes. He had introduced ahimsa to the West and expounded its message everywhere continuously.

Was there anyone in the Europe of that day and time prepared to receive the message? Were not Hindus and Muslims slaughtering each other without mercy in India itself? Did not periodic outbreaks of terrorist activities occur? The crisis in Europe was growing deeper and more intense at a rate that violence appeared to be the only possible way to deal with it, however barbarous the violence might be, however deplorable.

Gandhi left Europe to find what strength she could in her own spiritual traditions and returned to India. The country was impatiently awaiting his arrival. The terms of the truce had not been meticulously observed by the common people. They had not had their leader to guide them. The Government had not strictly observed the truce either. Breaches of the peace had occurred. The Government, aware that the truce had somehow lowered its prestige felt obliged to demonstrate its strength with an iron hand. The terrorists gave ample provocation to the autho-

rities for the exercise of their repressive powers. Ordinances had been passed in at least three provinces.

Everybody was spoiling for a fight. Hostilities broke out before Gandhi had been in India a week. He was arrested and imprisoned in the Yervada palace at Poona. Other Congress leaders were also sent to jail. The Congress was declared an illegal organisation. More ordinances followed, about ten in all. The authorities moved so swiftly and expeditiously it appeared likely that the Government had prepared everything it required during the three months' truce and kept it in readiness. Congress had been preparing to launch civil disobedience. Once a war gets going there is no time to stop and complain of the unfairness of this or the injustice of that.

Observers noted that neither party was strictly observing the letter of the law. Law-breaking was, in fact, the Congress programme. The only consideration that it abided by was the obligation to avoid violence. Rule by ordinance replaced the rule of law, a regime of which the British had been proud. Imprisonment and the imposition of fines were considered mild measures. Caning was common in jails. Houses, lands, bank balances and motor cars were confiscated at pleasure. Parents and elders were punished for the offences of minors.

Even Churchill was forced to admit that such harsh punitive measures had not been taken since the Mutiny. Sir Samuel Hoare declared roundly that this time the conflict would not be inconclusive.

But what Gandhi feared did not come to pass. He had warned the people that they should be prepared to face not only lathi charges but bullets this time. The Government found no occasion to use all the powers it had taken to itself by the promulgation of the ordinances. The Congress movement did not take such a serious turn.

'What's happening? Tell me,' one of my European colleagues exclaimed in surprise. 'We assumed the Congress movement was going to last for a long time. Why has it petered out? The Congress hasn't much staying power, has it? We didn't know that.'

Their regret was genuine. They were prepared for a long and a strong conflict. They savoured war. What taste they got

of it was provided by the terrorists. The terrorists refused to be cowed down.

Gandhi had entered upon the scene of Indian politics for the express purpose of preventing violence from being countered with violence. He knew that the only method that had a chance of success was to counter violence with ahimsa and techniques of action based on ahimsa.

In an ordinary war a clash occurs between two hostile groups of people. Both are violent, in their attitude and their acts. Satyagraha, the meeting of violence with non-violence, was a phenomenon new in history. Behind ordinary war there were thousands of years of experience. Satyagraha was only twenty-five years old. The rules of violent war are well-known. Everybody is familiar with them. The satyagrahis themselves did not know the rules they were expected to follow or what they would be called upon to do.

Neither party was to blame. Mistakes are made by anybody who engages in an activity without knowing the rules. It happens even in a parlour game. Excesses are committed. The movement was not destined to last long. No strong repressive measures were needed to deal with it. The Muslims stood aside, making one excuse after another. A handful of them joined the movement in Bengal and a few in two or three other provinces. It was a movement of the common people, of the masses, but the masses were absent because, by the masses was meant, in many places, the Muslims.

In the course of my duties I had to send both a Hindu and a Muslim to prison, with ample reasons, of course. The English magistrate released the Muslim at once with the remark, 'We have no quarrel with you.'

Divide and rule! The Hindu was released too, not very long after, with a warning. The situation had been brought under control. When I recall the ease with which it was brought under control I also personally regret the harshness of the measures taken.

MacDonald's award accomplished what thirteen ordinances had not been able to do. It indicated clearly that Bengal was destined to have a Muslim majority no matter how much shouting there was or how many Europeans were assassinated.

The few Muslims who had joined the Congress movement withdrew. Where was the dream Gandhiji cherished, the dream that people belonging to all religious communities would plunge into his movement and carry it to fulfilment? The reality was otherwise and it was unpleasant. The aim of the British authorities was to detach all Muslims from the Congress, the opposite of what Gandhi wanted. He was successful in the Northwest Frontier but he failed in Bengal. Through the cunning machinations of the British, Bengal was placed in the hands of a Muslim majority that was approved and supported by the Europeans.

This was one way of punishing the Hindus, the caste Hindus, for their failure to control and suppress the activities of the terrorists. The Europeans did not want to live with the threat of assassination constantly on their minds. They were not going to surrender a position they had occupied so long to advocates of irresponsible violence. Who was going to annoy them after this?

In 1916, when the Lucknow Pact was drawn up, there had been a Muslim majority in Bengal. But, in accordance with the provisions of the Pact, weightage was given to Muslims in Bihar, the United Provinces and elsewhere at the expense of the Bengali Muslims. Weightage was also given to Bengali Hindus at the expense of the Hindus in those provinces. The result would have been the same if MacDonald had rejected the Pact outright and reopened the whole question. What he did was to keep the Pact more or less intact while adjusting the scales in favour of the Muslims. Wherever Muslims were in a minority they were given weightage. No weightage was given to the Hindus. But the Sikhs retained their weightage in the Punjab. Non-Muslims and Muslims were equally strong there.

This aspect of the Award could be protested against but it did not justify a step as serious as a fast unto death. The fault lay in the Lucknow Pact itself for it accepted and sanctioned the system of separate electorates. They were not only accepted but established. The popular leaders of the Congress did what Minto Morley had not dared to do. If the untouchable castes demanded a separate electorate for themselves they could not be refused now. MacDonald could not turn them down. He did not consider that any serious harm would be done to Hindu society as

a whole. It made a difference of only a few seats. All the other seats were joint.

At the time of the Minto-Morley Reforms the Muslims had not had a large number of separate seats. All others had been joint. This new trouble was being started in the same way. It was very likely to end also in the same way. A needle point makes a small hole but the edge of it can turn into a knife blade. How could that possibility be countenanced when the consequences were known from experience? The Hindus and Muslims had developed a separatist mentality that was alarming enough. Would a separatist mentality as between caste Hindus and untouchables not be even more disconcerting? Society as well as the state would be weakened. Untouchability would be turned into an asset and develop into one more vested interest.

Gandhi made up his mind to undertake a fast unto death. He was motivated by moral and spiritual considerations more than political ones. The idea did not come to him only after the Award was made. It had been in his mind even at the Round Table Conference and he had addressed a letter to India's Chief Secretary warning him of the possibility later. Nobody realised then how deeply he was occupied with the thought. Was he really going to fast unto death over an issue like this, that was apparently very minor?

Many of his fellow-countrymen felt it was too minor to justify such a major step. Other aspects of the Award appeared more important to them. Gandhi's announcement of his fast exploded with the impact of a bomb. Nobody was quite prepared for it. The country was plunged into the deepest anxiety. MacDonald announced that, in the absence of an agreement among the parties concerned the British government found itself forced to impose its own solution. This solution was unalterable. No party by itself could change it. If any change was found to be necessary it would have to be made by the common consent of all concerned.

This meant that the communities concerned would have to draw up an alternative plan themselves, a plan that would be acceptable to all. It would then be accepted as Montagu and Chelmsford had accepted the Lucknow Pact.

An unofficial durbar gathered around the person of the fasting Mahatma. The Government permitted it. The life or death

of Gandhi was in their hands. Ambedkar played a central part. If the Government was stony-hearted the Mahatma would die. Pressure was put on Ambedkar. Ambedkar was moved but he did not allow his emotion to confuse his judgment. He agreed to part with a separate electorate for the Harijans but in exchange he extracted a larger number of seats. The method of election to those seats was to be in a manner that ensured that the Harijans would be the first choice of their own people. Joint Hindu voting would follow, as a secondary measure. The British government would amend the Award if Hindus in general agreed to accept this arrangement, which became known as the Poona Pact.

The Poona Pact differed from the Lucknow Pact. In the first, separate electorates were accepted in principle and an agreement reached on that basis by the minorities concerned. In the latter, separate electorates were rejected in principle and an agreement reached on that basis by caste Hindus and Harijans. A certain number of seats were reserved instead. Why had nobody thought of that in 1916? Why had nobody realised then that the acceptance of separate electorates in principle automatically deprived both the Muslims and non-Muslims of the right to represent the Indian people as a whole? Non-Muslims were debarred from representing Muslims. Muslims were debarred from representing non-Muslims. The common people were restricted in their choice of representatives. They could not vote freely.

MacDonald relieved us from the obligation of describing ourselves as non-Muslims. The word 'common' was put in the place of that awkward term. The Muslims themselves and the Sikhs were of course both exceptions. The word 'common' did not apply to them. The number of minorities was reduced to these two religious communities.

Mahatma Gandhi gave much of his time and thought to the people belonging to untouchable castes from this time on. They were given a new designation. Gandhi called them Harijans, the people of God. By the Government they were classified as scheduled tribes. The name Harijan was presented to Gandhi by an untouchable, in a letter he wrote to the leader. It had been used for the first time by the first poet-saint of Gujarat. Gandhi of course used it in a different context.

Ambedkar was invited to contribute a message to the new

journal Gandhi decided to publish under the title, *Harijan*. In reply he sent his opinion instead of a message. He wrote:

"The outcast is a byproduct of the caste system. There will be outcasts as long as there are castes. And nothing can emancipate the outcast except the destruction of the caste system."

Gandhi did not believe in untouchability but he still believed in caste distinctions. Later he advocated a casteless society himself for he changed as he grew older. At the time of which we are speaking he felt one step at a time was enough. The step he contemplated taking was to insure that no single person was deprived of any of his common rights because he was an untouchable by caste. He also insisted that no distinction between untouchables and other Hindus should be made in the matter of temple entry.

In order to bring these changes about, Gandhi set out to win over the caste Hindus, to induce an alteration in their attitude and in their feelings. No agitation by the untouchables was necessary. Nor was satyagraha required. It was for the caste Hindus themselves to do what had to be done. There were two schools of opinion among them. Some were in favour of the reform and some against it. Gandhi was careful to insure that no open clash occurred between them.

He had to undertake yet one more fast, this time in connection with the untouchables. The cause of the fast was not indignation or anger but hurt. Gandhi was hurt to the heart by the hardness of the no-changers. The Government released him from prison unconditionally and he terminated his fast outside jail. It lasted twenty-one days.

Gandhi then suspended mass satyagraha for a month. He was moved by a gentlemanly feeling of gratitude to the authorities. He sought to open discussions with the Government. Mass satyagraha would not be renewed if the talks were successful and the Congress leaders agreed. But the Government stipulated that mass satyagraha must be called off unconditionally before any talks could take place. For Gandhi that meant surrender. He was being asked to yield his sword to a conqueror as the general of a defeated army.

Gandhi did nothing of the kind. No. The Indian people had been disarmed by the British government years before. What

weapon would they have left to fight with if they gave up ahimsa also? He knew how deeply the people were suffering under the repressive measures authorised by the ordinances. The punishment they were taking was beyond their strength; they were beginning to break under the strain. An honourable settlement was required. But there would be no surrender. Never.

Gandhi conferred with those of his colleagues who were not in prison. After a great deal of discussion they decided to substitute individual satyagraha for mass civil disobedience. Gandhi went to Sabarmati, closed down the ashram there and set out on foot for the Ras festival, taking with him thirty-three companions. He was promptly arrested and sent back to Yervada prison. In Poona he was released again on the condition that he remain in the town. When Gandhi refused to give any such undertaking he was put on trial and sentenced to a year in jail.

Gandhi asked for permission to conduct the campaign for the recognition of the rights of the Harijans from prison and was refused. This time he was not a detenu. He was a convict serving a sentence. Gandhi fasted. The Government released him unconditionally. This was a cat and mouse game very much to Gandhi's distaste. He wished to devote himself heart and soul to the cause of the untouchables. Individual satyagraha was not in tune with the kind of activity involved. For himself he chose an alternative. He vowed to devote all his energy to the Harijan cause for one year. Others were free to continue individual satyagraha as they liked.

Gandhi set out on foot, carrying a staff like a pilgrim of old, visiting places where large numbers of untouchables lived. He travelled all over India, preaching to the people like the Buddha or like Christ, spreading his message of freedom, urging them to shake off the shackles of the stigma to which they were subjected. For them to do this was, he said, essential to the attainment of Swaraj.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SATYAGRAHA AS A HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

Individual satyagraha can be undertaken by any single person at any time but mass satyagraha is a force as powerful and impersonal as revolution. Lenin and Gandhi were no more than instruments. Their job was to detect the rising of the tide in the hearts and lives of the common people. If the tide was not coming in, if it had not turned, any call to the people would be futile. They would not respond. It was no less futile to give the call to the people after the tide had crested and begun to ebb. They would not respond then either.

In 1930 Gandhi's mass satyagraha was astonishingly successful because the tide was on the rise. In 1932 the tide had begun to ebb and the movement failed, unexpectedly. Time and tide wait for no man, not even the Mahatma. What is to be done has to be done at the right time.

From one point of view the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was a triumph. From another it was the cause of a breach in the struggle. Yet even if mass satyagraha had continued uninterrupted in the way it had begun, there was no certainty that it would have finally reached the harbour of complete independence. The British government had the power to crush it. And they were cunning enough. Divide and rule. A communal Award of some kind would have been announced sooner or later even if Gandhi had not agreed to take part in the Round Table Conference. The people would have been divided.

Lenin was not confronted with a problem of a similar kind in his country. In India the British government held the trump card. They would not leave India without setting Hindus and Muslims at each other's throats. After the fighting started they would come forward as benevolent arbitrators and their decision would have to be accepted by both parties. Neither could claim more than the British were prepared to give.

When Gandhi set out on his pilgrimage to the Harijans he had made up his mind that if anything untoward occurred during

the year he had given himself he would go back to prison. Individual satyagraha continued. It was not curtailed in any way.

When the great earthquake shook Bihar he was half way through his trek in South India. He hurried to the afflicted province and engaged in relief work. Dr. Ansari put in an appearance. He was followed by Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. They came direct from a Conference in Delhi. They explained to Gandhi that, in the opinion of a large number of Congressmen, a need had arisen to revive the Swaraj Party. Elections to the Centre were impending. The parliamentary programme could not be accepted until individual satyagraha was called off and an end put to civil disobedience. Unless that was done the British government would not recognise Congress as a legal institution. Unless it regained its legal status the strength that the Congress enjoyed among the common people could not be utilised during the elections. How could the Swaraj Party win? Would the Mahatma be so good as to comply with their request and withdraw civil disobedience in all forms?

Many more leaders came to see him at Ranchi. In his talks with them it became more and more clear that not only would civil disobedience have to be discontinued but individual satyagraha also. The British government was very likely to object even to Gandhi retaining the right to engage in individual satyagraha himself, either in the name of the Congress or on its behalf.

Gandhi realised that the Congress could not, at one and the same time, have legal status and engage in law-breaking activity, no matter how non-violent. If Gandhi, either in the name of the Congress or on its behalf, claimed the freedom to launch civil disobedience in any form and did so, the British government was certain to regard it as a de facto breach of the law. The Congress would be declared illegal. The institution as a whole would therefore be penalised for the fault of only one of its members. That was harmful for the Congress, endangering its very existence, particularly when the Congress had made up its mind to accept the parliamentary programme.

Gandhi felt about the parliamentary programme exactly as he had felt at the time of the non-cooperation movement about the Legislative Councils. But this time, once again, he came to terms with the Congress. The agreement resulted in his with-

drawal from membership altogether. He ceased to be even a four-anna member.

Congress without Gandhi! It was inconceivable. Yet Gandhi had had no alternative. The terms the British government were insisting on meant the surrender of his sword once more, this time to the Congress organisation. No disobedience to the law was to be permitted in any form, by any individual or organised group. Members of the Congress would not be permitted to stand for election to Parliament unless this was assured. A large section of the Congress had committed itself to the acceptance of the parliamentary programme. If it left the Congress in order to fulfil its ambitions the Congress would disintegrate. Continued existence as an illegal organisation would deprive the Congress of its usefulness.

Should Gandhi surrender because the Congress surrendered? Should he hand over his sword? He preferred to have his name struck off the Congress rolls. The Congress would not suffer unduly from the resignation of only one member. But if that member, for the sake of the Congress, surrendered his weapon and acknowledged defeat it would be harmful to the country as a whole, harmful for the world too. The usefulness of ahimsa as an alternative to violence could not be proven. If, on the other hand, Gandhi stepped aside and bided his time, a day would come when he could win the Congress to his side. And the right to engage in individual satyagraha remained his. He also retained the uncurtailed right to call for mass satyagraha by the common people as a whole at any time he thought proper. Leaving the Congress did not mean abandoning mass satyagraha. On the contrary he preserved it, holding it in readiness for another day.

There was a deeper reason also for Gandhi's action. The capture of power was not the purpose for which he had launched mass satyagraha. What he was trying to do was to bring about a change of heart in the foreign rulers on the one hand and in the terrorists on the other. There were no signs of any such change yet in either of them. Their hearts were still ruled by violence. Ahimsa as it had shown itself in mass satyagraha had not produced the desired effect. What Gandhi had made his own personal mission in life remained unfulfilled. Congress had helped him as much as it could. He now wanted to rely upon himself alone. He would go directly to the people instead of approaching them

through the Congress. His message had not reached them in an undistorted form. It had passed through the lenses of imperfectly educated minds. The common people had not understood it correctly for that reason. Alone, as an individual satyagrahi, Gandhi could go a long way. His message could reach a larger number of people. In working on his own, outside of the Congress, he could gain greatly himself. Both his own self-confidence and his reliance on his own judgement would grow. And, unimpeded by the necessity of winning Congress sanction, he would be freer to carry out measures he felt necessary. He wanted to be free from the burden of an institution, particularly an institution like the Congress which was not dedicated to constructive activity and therefore not really serious about ahimsa. For the Congress ahimsa was not a principle but a policy. Without constructive activity ahimsa could not be put in practice effectively. No satyagraha was possible without ahimsa and there would be no Swaraj without satyagraha. Did Congress understand the logic of that? The pertinence of it? The satyagrahi maintained contact with the common people through constructive activities. It was a link that could not be broken without debilitating consequences. A feeble form of satyagraha is incapable of changing anything or of touching anybody's heart. Neither the foreign rulers nor the terrorists would be moved.

All the members of the Congress were followers of Gandhi during the twenties, although a section did cling to the temptations of trying parliamentary methods in spite of his dissuasion. During the thirties Lenin's theories of class struggle came into prominence and many members of the Congress turned to Russian methods, considering them more expedite and effective than mass satyagraha. Their faith in Gandhi's leadership weakened. They wanted mass satyagraha to develop into full-scale class war. Gandhi could not agree to that under any circumstances. A movement of that kind was not in accordance with the principle of ahimsa. The Congress was a democratic organisation. People of many schools of thought were in it. So were the Leninists. It was possible that they might one day win a majority. Gandhi would possibly have had to take part in a ballot war with them if he remained in the Congress. A no-confidence resolution might be brought against him. If he was defeated he would be forced into the role of an opposition. Gandhi considered all these possibi-

lities and came to the conclusion that it was best for him to resign from the Congress altogether. This was another reason for his decision. By working from outside the Congress he felt he would have a better chance of influencing its policies.

Gandhi released his hold on the Congress but the Congress clung to him. Events proved the correctness of his reasoning. The esteem in which he was held increased enormously in the Congress itself. Eighty thousand delegates and spectators rose to their feet as one man, greeting him standing, when he appeared at the Bombay Congress session as an invitee. A resolution reaffirming confidence in his leadership was passed unanimously. Hundreds of thousands of people had gone to prison under the leadership of this man. They had been fined, beaten, caned, tortured. Their property had been confiscated, their lands forfeited. And what had they gained? Full Swaraj had not come, not even partial Swaraj. Yet no one had any complaint to make against Gandhi. One and all they were distressed by his resignation from the Congress.

What had he given them? Mass satyagraha was a historical phenomenon of such a magnitude that those who participated in it felt honoured to have the experience. The struggle for freedom was likewise a movement which was valued for the experience it brought and the honour it conferred on its fighters. Gratitude to the man who had given them the opportunity to participate was natural. Success or failure was an added consideration. Does success depend upon only one man? Did failure matter? So many thousands of men and women had become conscious of their moral and spiritual power! They knew what they could do. Could that have been brought about by any other method? Was this not a triumph, something to be proud of?

Defeat is not defeat if an army remains intact, if its morale is unimpaired, if the confidence of the soldiers in their commander is undiminished, if they are as ready as always to carry out his orders. Gandhi retained his control over his weapon, ahimsa. He did not let it go. Nobody else could handle it. He lived to fight another day. But first it was necessary to see that the Congress did not split into two opposing factions over the question of the parliamentary programme. Any policy that was adopted should be taken up and acted upon in a whole-hearted manner, unanimously, with the utmost discipline. Even though he was

personally opposed to the parliamentary programme he felt those who advocated it should be given the opportunity to implement it. No obstacles should be put in their way. The Congress must be kept intact. He had great regard for the Congress leaders.

There was another reason also for his indulgent attitude to the parliamentary programme. It became generally known only at a much later date. Nobody was aware of it at the time. Government repression was an asset to the Congress. It had been voted into power by the people who had suffered at the hands of the British government. Was Congress going to form ministries in the provinces where it was in a majority? If they did, would the Governors refrain from goading them? These two questions were interconnected. Gandhi advised the Congress to wait. For some six months the formation of the ministries was held up while discussions took place with the Government. In other provinces the ministries were formed by that time. The new modified rules prescribed that if a ministry was not formed within six months of an election, the Governor would have to take over. The sponsors of the modified rules were anxious to avoid such a contingency. A formula was found that was acceptable to both parties.

The Congress ministers were given an assurance that there would be no interference with their policies. In the event of any attempt to interfere they were free to resign. Such a situation would only arise in the case of a very grave difference of opinion with the Governors. The Congress agreed to form the ministries. The ministers were installed in office and, as a result of the assurance, they had real power. People still in prison were immediately set free. Those whose lands had been confiscated had their property restored to them. Those who had lost their jobs were reinstated. In short, all those who suffered in the mass satyagraha were compensated in one way or another. This was what Gandhi wanted. People who were the objects of official displeasure received Congress protection. Gandhi accomplished in this way what would have been done by the Gandhi-Willingdon Pact if that pact had materialised. Willingdon had been replaced by Lord Linlithgow in the interval. He witnessed how, by humbling himself, Gandhi carried the day. Gandhi was a difficult man to defeat. He could not be outwitted easily.

Out of the ashes of the fire in which he had been consumed Gandhi arose like the fabled phoenix.

The British government had not imagined that the Congress would win an absolute majority in six of India's provinces, set up one-party ministries and paralyse the Governor's power to interfere with their polices. The six Congress ministries were controlled by a triumvirate of three Congress leaders at the Centre—Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Abul Kalam Azad. They formed the High Command. This was something even Indians had not thought possible. These three men were like Gandhi's own arms; they were inseparable from him. The Congress maintained its fighting discipline in the Legislative Assembly. The only historical parallel is to be found in the discipline of the Russian Communist Party. There it masked Stalin's ruthless policy of extermination. Anybody who did not obey was liquidated without pity. In India, for the first time in history, moral force and moral force alone proved its ability to maintain fighting discipline.

There was no precedent for it in British parliamentary history. It bore no relation to the democratic tradition. Ministers are responsible to Parliament and Parliament may remove them at will. This is the accepted practice. In India it now became clear that no minister could be touched as long as he enjoyed the confidence of the High Command. And nobody could save them if the High Command was displeased. The power of the High Command was as absolute as the Viceroy's. The Viceroy had the authority of the King at his back. The Congress had the authority of Gandhi.

This arrangement was thoughtfully and carefully worked out by the High Command itself, the Working Committee of the Congress and the leaders of Parliament with the help of Gandhi because the threat of being dismissed or forced to resign at any time by the British government hung over their heads like the sword of Damocles. It was a sort of stop-gap arrangement. The Congress ministries were like a string of fortresses. Their responsibility was joint. To keep intact, outsiders had to be excluded. The possibility of forming a coalition with other parties was not ruled out but a condition imposed was an agreement with the Congress. Obedience to its dictates was obligatory. That meant that the instructions of other parties were to be superseded by the instructions of the Congress High Command.

There were minorities in some provinces which also wanted

a taste of power. That was only natural. The Governor had been given the right to appoint ministers from among members of minorities under the reformed rules. Congress however interpreted this to mean that such nominations were the internal concern and responsibility of the ministries. Joint responsibility was jeopardised if a person who held allegiance, not to the Congress but to some other political group, was nominated. Joint responsibility is the bond that binds the British Cabinet together. It is part of their system. The Congress interpreted the provision for the nomination of ministers from among the minorities to mean that they should be selected from among the elected members of the Congress in the Legislative Assembly. There were many Muslims from Bihar and the United Provinces among them, fewer from Madras and the Central Provinces and none at all from Orissa and Bombay. In Bombay a Muslim who was an independent representative was selected and made a minister. In Orissa there was nobody to be nominated.

The question was raised as to whom these nominated ministers represented. In the Legislative Assembly there were a large number of Muslims who did not belong to the Congress or owed it allegiance. The men nominated by the Congress certainly did not represent them, nor did they represent the voters who elected them. The same question was raised in connection with the Hindu ministers of Bengal. As individuals they all qualified for selection as ministers but individual fitness and representativeness are not one and the same thing. A coalition would have solved the problem but one section of the ministers owed allegiance to the Congress High Command and another to the president of the Muslim League, Jinnah. A third section followed the instructions of Fazlul Huq, the leader of the peasants and industrial workers. A crisis of great intensity was certain to develop in such a set-up.

The question of minority representation in the Ministries was not solved satisfactorily anywhere, although in the Punjab the Unionist Party counted Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims among its members. Sikandar Hayat Khan enjoyed everybody's confidence. very much about this. They had not come to stay. Congress ministries did not bother themselves very

The Congress ministries were formed in two more provinces later and, in order to

bring it about, non-Congressmen had been accepted, that is, after they signed a pledge of allegiance to the High Command. Eight provinces were now controlled by the Congress. Only three remained outside it. The British had maintained a careful if invisible balance in the provinces. The Hindus had six, the Muslims five. Assam was counted among the Muslim provinces for the sake of argument. Europeans were strong there, as strong as they were in Bengal. The strategic importance of the North-west Frontier Province was great. The balance so carefully sustained by the British government was upset when both the Northwest Frontier Province and Assam went to the Congress. The Muslim League also had a balance of its own, an obvious, not a secret one. That was upset likewise. Congress candidates stood for election and won in Muslim constituencies. The League was premanently alienated.

Chapter Fifteen

OLD AND NEW

Enraged at the upset of the balance of power in the provinces those injured by it determined to maintain it at all costs in the Centre. Men are not good-hearted enough by nature to forgive what had taken place. If the Congress wished to rule at the Centre as well as in the provinces it would have to fight two more battles, one against the imperialist-minded British and the other against the communally-minded Muslims.

The battles could have been waged in a non-violent manner. Our faith in ahimsa is not really very great and not many were adequately trained in its methods. Few are ever prepared to surrender their lives without a struggle. We were no longer unarmed. We had been non-violent as long as we were. Now we had weapons at our disposal.

Congress had come to power in eight of the Indian provinces by democratic methods. It could not come to power in the remaining three unless it defeated communally-minded Muslims at their own polls, on their own ground, according to the separate electorate system. That was not a wholly impossible feat, but it would have to be accomplished by self-denial and fortitude, not by jail-going or the payment of fines. Landowners would have to surrender their estates and money lenders turn to some other profession. Land rents and rates of interest would have to be foregone to a considerable extent. In the three provinces of the Punjab, Sindh and Bengal the majority of Muslims belonged to the exploited classes and the exploiters were, by and large, Hindus. All the measures to lighten the burdens of Bengal's peasantry and industrial workers that were introduced in the Bengal Assembly were brought forward by Muslims and opposed by Hindus. Yes, Congress Hindus. Obviously the Congress could not rule in Bengal. A coalition was of course possible but the High Command was not likely to agree to it. Should people leave the Congress organisation? How could people who had brought the Congress into existence give it up? Who could be enlisted

in the fighting forces when freedom was won if people abandoned the Congress?

The leaders of the Congress were aware of their inability to do much for Bengal. The provincial government was not in their hands. They did not want a coalition. By making Subhas Chandra Bose the President of the Congress they hoped to win the good-will of the Bengalis and give them a taste of power. Not many days passed however before Subhas Chandra realised that though he might be the president he was not the master. The High Command, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Abul Kalam Azad, gave all the orders. The Congress ministers acted on their instructions. The High Command was a kind of super-Cabinet, set over the eight provincial cabinets. The Congress President himself had no authority over this super-Cabinet; he was president only in name and was, in fact, powerless, as much of a figurehead as the American or Russian presidents. Vallabhbhai Patel was his Stalin.

Patel controlled parliamentary power and Mahatmaji controlled mass satyagraha. Together they controlled the party machine with the help of hand-picked men. What was left for the Congress President to do? Was he to be content with the prestige of a figurehead? Was not the Viceroy there to control the government organisation? Subhas Chandra Bose was rebellious by nature. He was not the person to acquiesce in an arrangement of this kind. He wanted to control at least the party machine, to build it up into a fighting organisation. Several years earlier, in Vienna, Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhas Chandra Bose had issued a joint statement to the effect:

"The latest act of Mahatma Gandhi in suspending civil disobedience is a confession of failure. We are of opinion that the Mahatma as a political leader has failed. The time has come for a radical reorganisation of the Congress on new principles with a new method for which a new leader is essential, as it is unfair to expect the Mahatma to work a programme not consistent with his lifelong principles."

A new leader, new principles, a new programme! The Congress required to be reorganised from the bottom up around these three basic things. If this was to be undertaken was there any place for the same old leader, the same old

principles and the same old programme? Were they to be accommodated inside the Congress or outside it? Gandhi had removed himself from the Congress and by so doing removed the obstacle his continued presence would have been to those who favoured reconstruction. When the question of a choice of leader arose there was no longer any need to even think of him. Had he not withdrawn of his own free will? The new programme required attention and the new principles had to be drawn up. A controversy sprang up around them, originating in a dispute between the old and the new.

Those unwilling to give up the old principles and the old programme were labelled Rightists by their opponents. The others called themselves Leftists. The reason was simple. All over the world at that time three great ideals were at work. Every country was agitated by them. They were: nationalism, democracy, social justice. Social justice was taking three forms: socialism, communism and anarchism. Its adversary was fascism. India is an integral part of the world; it has never been and cannot be outside it. It cannot shake its own destiny without taking events in other parts of the world into consideration. Nationalism and democracy had been cherished ideals from the inception of the struggle for freedom. The idea of social justice was comparatively new. Gandhi was the first to introduce it. He was a disciple of Tolstoy, neither a Fabian nor a follower of Marx. In the twenties Congressmen found Gandhi's idea of social justice sufficient and inspiring but a group of Congressmen in the thirties began to advocate a more direct and simple form of socialism. They were, in the French definition of the term, Leftists.

The Congress ministries were in the hands of the Rightists. The Leftists concluded that the Rightists were so addicted to power that they would go to any length to retain their position and that Gandhi would stick to them even to the extent of compromising with the British government in order to obtain higher positions for them. Once a Federation was achieved the ministries would relax their efforts to win freedom. Yet no country, at any time in history, has ever won freedom without a struggle. Federation, in the eyes of the Leftists, was a mirage, a will-o-the-wisp.

Subhas Chandra Bose was elected unopposed the first time, although his views were well-known but the Rightists did not disregard Gandhi in favour of Bose. When Bose stood for election the second time at the end of the year he had to face their opposition. How was it that the attitude to him changed so much? Nobody now failed to realise that if Bose became the president of the Congress a second time he would dismiss the Working Committee, abandon the principles on which the organisation was founded and scratch its programme. No negotiations with the British would be possible and the ministries would be forced to resign at a most awkward moment, before the World War was well under way and before a time favourable to the launching of mass satyagraha arrived. The ministers would all be in prison when it did. Subhas Chandra's ideas and wishes would have to be obeyed. The wishes of Gandhi would be ignored. In such circumstances the members of the Congress who remained loyal to Gandhi's leadership would be forced to leave it. The Congress would be split. The common people would also have been split into two incompatible camps.

Subhas Chandra Bose won, defeating his opponent, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. He then went out of his way to inform Gandhi that he too had been defeated. Gandhi was not dismayed. There was room for such a contingency in his plans. He was in fact, rather pleased. Subhas Chandra Bose was free to form a Working Committee of the kind he wanted with members of his own choice. He made this clear in a public statement.

Shortly after Subhas Chandra Bose's re-election I met a very particular friend of mine who is a Leftist and Bose's supporter. I inquired whether he was going to join the new Working Committee. He was the most suitable man in his province.

"A World War is on the point of breaking out. It will start this year," he answered. "Congress must draw itself together, unite, and consolidate all its strength. We have told Bose to go to Gandhi and compound his differences."

Subhas Chandra, realising the situation, wanted to do exactly that. At the Tripura Congress a resolution proposed by Govind Ballabh Pant was passed stipulating that Bose was to take Gandhi's advice in the formation of the new Working Committee. Subhas Chandra agreed to select members whom Gandhi approved.

But Gandhi released him from any obligation to do it. He told Bose to make his own choice. Gandhi decided not to intervene and refused to offer any suggestion.

Subhas Chandra discussed the matter with the Rightists. If they joined him they would come en bloc, they said, not individually. The old Working Committee had to be retained intact as it was or reconstituted entirely. A Working Committee composed of both Rightists and Leftists, a kind of hash of contradictory opinions, would not do.

If the old Working Committee was to be retained intact why had Subhas Chandra Bose contested the election at all? It could be reconstituted by Leftists but such a Committee would not adequately represent Congress opinion as a whole nor would it have Gandhiji's blessings. Of what use could it be if a difference of opinion with Gandhi arose during wartime? And even if war did not come differences were sure to arise over the vexed question of social justice. Why should Congress ministries obey a Leftist High Command? And if they resigned where was Bose to find enough able men among the Leftists to replace them? Or were there to be no ministries at all? Could not an ultimatum be given to the British government? Six month's time? When the ultimatum expired was the launching of a mass satyagraha movement not feasible? No, not everybody would consent. No mass satyagraha could be undertaken without the leadership of Gandhi and without the support of the Rightists. The Leftists could not handle it by themselves.

If mass satyagraha was launched without Gandhi's sanction would his closest followers participate in it or any of the Rightists either? Could the Leftists do it all alone?

Subhas Chandra Bose's Leftist comrades were like the Twelve proverbial Rajputs. None ate out of the other's rice pot. Together they could win elections but they would not agree among themselves to an extent that would make the formation of a Working Committee possible, or the setting up of a High Command, or the making of ministries in eight provinces. What was to be done? Mass Satyagraha? No, not all of them were prepared to consent to that. An insurrection could take place, a rebellion, a rising. But why drag the Congress into anything like that? No ultimatum was required. If six months' notice is given to

one's adversary of an intention of that kind he will have ample time to prepare himself against it.

Gandhi sent a telegram to Subhas Chandra Bose, requesting him not to stand for election as president of the Congress. There must have been a grave reason. The Leftists might win the elections but if they plunged into an untimely movement without Gandhi's sanction or leadership and without the support of the Rightists, they would ruin not only themselves but the country as well. And if they refrained from launching a movement what alternative form of action did they have? Would they not be obliged to accept the parliamentary programme? They would become de facto Rightists if they did.

Subhas Chandra Bose ultimately surrendered the post of president. It was a most painful chapter in the history of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi was uncompromising. So was the old Working Committee. The only persons prepared to yield in any matter were Subhas Chandra Bose himself and his Leftist comrades. How far could they bend? Up to a point, not beyond it. It was better to resign.

None of the things Bose wanted came about. There was no new programme, no new policy, no new leader. Neither was the Congress reconstituted. Yet the Congress really needed reconstruction. Gandhi wrote: "I would go to the length of giving the whole Congress organisation a decent burial, rather than put up with the corruption that is rampant."

How could a Congress be entrusted with supreme power and unlimited responsibility if it lost its head as soon as any power at all came into its hands? How could honesty be expected, or careful accounting of public money, or firmness of principle, from an organisation up to its neck in the slime of corruption? Were not the temptations very great? Power is not everything. There must be authority also. Without moral strength there is no authority. What authority the Congress had, derived from the Mahatma and his close colleagues. A country as vast as India cannot be ruled by so few without some mistakes being made. More men were needed. Gandhi wanted to drag the Congress out of the mud. The country would benefit in the long run. Lenin acted similarly. He did not attempt a revolution until his party was thoroughly prepared for it.

An awakened and alert public might have sufficed to win the independence of the country. A strong, unified party was perhaps not necessary. But as soon as independence came, power had to be taken over and exercised. The responsibility for it had to be shouldered. A party was a necessity. Gandhi could not administer the country all by himself. And could the public run all the Government Departments without help? The burden of the responsibility was great and, whatever Gandhi might say, he knew that the Indian National Congress was the only organisation equal to the task. The Congress had to be prepared for it. It was his duty to do it. The Congress had to be purged.

More power was not the answer. More power would only corrupt the Congress further. It was high time power politics should be given up. The perimeter of power must not be widened nor a government at the Centre formed. On the contrary, the Congress must withdraw even from the provinces. It would have to forego power and positions of power for a much longer period than six months. A year or more might be required. Gandhi was thinking of seven years in the wilderness, seven long years of humble and devoted constructive work among the people—incognito.

He had made up his mind never to accept power himself or take any responsibility upon his own shoulders, not as long as he lived. He was determined to turn down any position that might be offered him. He was a man of ahimsa. The state is an organisation based upon force. Gandhi's role would be that of an adviser only until a state based upon non-violence was established. The Congress leaders were in different circumstances. They were free to accept responsibility in the present set-up, to take up the burden of the state and if, in the process, they sometimes deviated from the path of strict ahimsa, it was pardonable. It was wise to avoid temptation in so far as possible however. The Muslim League could not be paid back in its own coin. The League was growing more and more violent. Congress must not do the same. The War gave a good excuse for total withdrawal.

The Muslim League was determined to free itself of the Congress the day the Congress freed itself from the British. It demanded Pakistan.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WARTIME WORRIES

The Rightist leaders of the Congress assumed that power at the Centre would come to them in the same way it had come to them in the provinces and the Governors, like the Viceroy, would be restrained from using their power to intervene. They did not think more would be required than the surrender of some seats and portfolios to the Muslim League. That did not necessarily mean the League would acquire the right of veto and the casting vote would certainly not be left in the Viceroy's hands, for equal weightage could not be given. It was not justified.

This pleasant dream was accompanied by a haunting nightmare. Would it be necessary to go through the sacrifice and suffering of another movement? The things of which they were dreaming might not be as easily obtained as they hoped. A movement would, of course, be of the Gandhian type, satyagraha, under Gandhi's leadership, conducted on his principles. Another war might have to come and go. If it did, India, though not yet a Dominion, would inevitably be on the side of Britain and the Dominions. India was bound to Britain by many ties. Cooperation was the rule in most things. The question of independence could be settled by negotiation. Gandhi was not bound by any consideration other than what he understood to be for the good of the country.

War came. India as well as Britain declared war. Which India? The India which was not representative of the country, which had no real connection with the people, the India which was subservient to the British Government and carried out its policies, the India ruled in the king's name by foreigner administrators as an alien land.

Gandhi knew very well that Britain would not agree to any change during wartime which might result in a change from a policy of war to a policy of peace, from a policy of force to a policy of ahimsa. A Cabinet could be set up on a war footing, manned by Indians instead of Englishmen. This could only be

done on one condition, active participation in the war. Men, money and materials would have to be supplied. What would the people of the country receive in exchange? Independence! But if Britain lost the war India would share her defeat and the question of independence would be submerged, under sixteen feet of water. And would Britain keep her promises if she won?

To express sympathy with England in her trial was one thing, to shoulder a rifle and go to the battle-field was quite another. Nobody knew for certain who would win or who would lose. If the Nazis lost, the victory would go to Imperialists. If the Imperialists lost, the Nazis would win. One evil would replace another. Was there any possibility of good replacing evil? Only that could justify the sacrifice of the lives of sons of India. The good is worth dying for even if it is defeated. So Gandhi contented himself with an expression of sympathy. He gave no assurance of cooperation or assistance. On the other hand, he felt hesitant about taking advantage of Britain's trouble to harass and embarrass the Government at this hour. He made no reference to satyagraha in any of his statements.

Both wings of the Congress, Rightists and Leftists, objected to a policy of pure and simple non-cooperation instead of either active opposition, satyagraha, or active cooperation. What was Gandhi going to do? Both wings were resolute in their desire to participate in the war, either to fight Hitler side by side with the British in a full-scale violent conflict or to fight against the British in a full-scale non-violent conflict. They wanted either to save the world from the hands of Hitler or to save India from the hands of the Imperialists. They did not want to live in peace themselves or let others live in peace while a war was in progress.

If they were to fight Hitler it was obvious the Central Government must be in their hands. The first task to be accomplished was therefore to defeat the Imperialists. But the Imperialists were certain to mistake them for allies of Hitler—Fifth columnists. Gandhi would not of course lead any movement of that kind. If an unsuccessful effort to drive the British out of India while the war was in progress was made, they were certain to take a very terrible revenge.

The leaders of the Congress did not want to embarrass the British in their time of peril. What they were looking for was some trick by means of which they could attain their object with-

out hurting anybody, to kill the snake without breaking the stick. After a lot of deliberation they asked the British to show their cards. They did not disclose their own. Would Britain forswear Imperialism? Would Britain introduce democracy? Would Britain promise to allow Indians to draw up a constitution for themselves when the war was over? Would the British grant to Indians some small token of independence now, while the war was still in progress? Would Britain explain why they were fighting, state their aims and objects clearly?

The Working Committee's statement was a creditable literary document of which any free nation could be proud. When it was shown to Gandhi he declared that the person who had drafted it was a consummate artist. The man was Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi had also drafted a statement to place before the Working Committee but he liked Nehru's so much better that he withheld his own. Defeat at the hands of a disciple is something of which Indian gurus are traditionally proud.

But the only effect this fine statement had was to evoke back-slapping congratulations. The Viceroy, in his reply, said one useful thing, that he would set up an advisory body while the war was in progress. The Indian leaders would be given a place in it. Their advice on the conduct of the war would be heeded. After the termination of the war, discussions would be held with all parties, particularly the minorities, and the Government of India Act would be amended. Yes, the objective was Dominion Status.

The Congress was deeply perturbed. The statement had been drafted with an eye to Muslim opinion. The League stipulated that no constitutional measure should be introduced without their consent. Did not Queen Kaikeyi object to Ram Raj?

It was clear that the question of independence could not be settled until the question of the minorities was settled. The Congress was powerless in the matter. It was for the Muslim League to make up its mind. Britain would not be friendly unless the League was. The war had nothing to do with this situation. It was in fact quite irrelevant. Hitler's aggression was irrelevant. Cooperation was irrelevant. The situation would not be altered in any way by dashing about the north of France or Africa with a gun over one's shoulder, no matter how much money, how many

lives, or what quantities of raw materials were poured at the British Government's feet.

The Congress leaders were disappointed. The Congress statement, so elegantly couched in flawless literary English, was completely wasted. The English were not in the least touched by it. The British saw only that the cooperation of the Congress was conditional. When the war was over it would have to be rewarded with a Constituent Assembly and while the war was in progress it demanded charge of the Central Government. The Punjabi Muslims were needed in the armed forces. They could not be antagonised. Would Sikhs volunteer if Muslims held back? Would Hindus volunteer if Sikhs held back? Recruits were wanted.

The British Government relied heavily on Sikander Hyat Khan's Unionist Party. They had his support and the support of his Government in the Punjab. He was extraordinarily successful in his efforts to supply them with recruits. But not a single man would come forward in response to an appeal in the name of Indian independence or the need to put a stop to Nazism. Somebody had to say, "Brother Sikhs, if you don't go to war, the Muslims will. They'll be given arms and taught to use them. They'll conquer the Punjab and establish Pakistan with them. You'd better join up too. Some day you'll be able to get the Punjab back if you do. The days of Ranjit Singh will come again."

To the Muslims somebody had to say, "Brother Muslims, the Sikhs are signing up. They'll be given arms and trained to use them. They'll conquer the Punjab some day. The days of Ranjit Singh will come again. You'd better join up too. If you do you can establish Pakistan some day. The days of the Moguls will come again."

The Hindu Rajputs and Dogras had to be approached in a similar diplomatic manner. They had been the first rulers of the Punjab. They should secure it before the Muslims or Sikhs got their hands on it. The problem was to get arms and learn how to use them. Join the armed forces. The solution was plain enough.

Recruitment was slow at the outset but it picked up momentum and men who had been reluctant in the beginning came forward in considerable numbers. On their lips were different slogans: "Allah ho Akbar", "Sat Sri Akal", "Durga Ma ki Jai."

If they survived the war they would fight for the possession of their homeland, the Punjab.

Nothing great is ever achieved by cleverness alone. It was considered a clever move to cooperate in the British war effort. There was no way of convincing the people of India that Hitler was their enemy as well as the enemy of the British. To tell the truth, there was a not inconsiderable section of the public who were in favour of Hitler. In their hearts they hoped Hitler would defeat England. Russia could then defeat Hitler. The Indians themselves could handle the rest. Why should it be necessary to cooperate with the war effort to bring this denouement about? Were the Congress ministries so indispensable? Were they worth such a high price?

That day British rule and Congress seemed equally devoid of inner substance, hollow. No new order would ever come from that direction. Other things might. The Leftists were looking for a way to get rid of both together, to precipitate a revolution, like Lenin. Many of them were convinced the country was ready, that the leaders were reluctant. The tide was in. The opportunity should be seized. England's difficulty was the chance. The chance would not come again. It should be taken now.

Lenin's description of the indications which point to revolution is memorable. He was the guru of the Leftists. He wrote:

"When a revolutionary party has not the support of a majority either among the vanguard of the revolutionary class, or among the rural population, there can be no question of a rising. A rising must not only have this majority, but must have: (1) the incoming revolutionary tide over the whole country ;(2) the complete moral and political bankruptcy of the old regime, for instance, the Coalition Government; and (3) a deep-seated sense of insecurity among all the irresolute elements."

Had any of these conditions appeared in any part of India at the outset of World War II? Some of the more devoted followers of the Leftist leaders may have felt about them the way Lenin did. They may have been discussed in meetings here and there. But they certainly were not widespread. If any of the signs existed anywhere they existed in the Congress provinces. The discontent in these provinces was not directed against the British Government at that time. The people were dissatisfied

with the Congress ministries. This discontent disappeared the moment the ministries resigned on instructions from the High Command. The Congress leaders realised that cooperation in the British war effort would not bring independence a single step nearer. The Leftists could not detect any sign that might indicate a readiness for revolution in any of those areas.

The Congress had asked the British Government to state its intentions. When these were communicated to it the ministries were withdrawn from all the eight provinces in which the Congress had held power. The move was carried out with military precision and exemplary discipline. Some of them could, if they wished, have disobeyed. They were strong enough to do so. But it would have been a betrayal. Public opinion would not have forgiven them. The ministers, by acting the way they did, instantly became the idols of the people.

The Working Committee chose Gandhi as their supreme leader and gave him full power and responsibility. What had to be done would be decided by the Mahatma. For anything not done he would be responsible. Gandhi became the sole leader of the Congress. Supreme power was placed in his hands. At last! He had waited a long time. He regained his voice.

Gandhi had, at one time, thought independence could be won by cooperation with the British authorities. Cooperation in the war effort was only one aspect of a general, friendly cooperation. During World War he had cooperated whole-heartedly, at first in England itself on English soil, and later in India. Indian public opinion had also been in favour of cooperation at that time, even though the extremists of the day had already begun to say that England's difficulty was India's opportunity. Some went abroad, going from country to country in an effort to procure the arms that would be needed for a violent rising. Gandhi's task had been to hold up before the eyes of the people the ideal of ahimsa, to show in practice the working of non-violent techniques of struggle and to hold in check those who advocated violence. An occasion presented itself when the war had barely concluded. Disillusioned with the paltry gains that cooperation had brought them, the common people turned to non-cooperation. Gandhi became their leader. He had been the pioneer of non-cooperation from that time on. And he was the prophet of ahimsa.

What had happened to make him revert to a policy of co-operation? Though he had given the people a respite now and then by suspending non-cooperation he had consistently advocated it down the years. Had World War II made the difference? No, war does not bring about a basic change in policy. Neither is such a policy altered for the sake of independence, if the independence is conditional, if its attainment is made to depend upon cooperation in the war effort. Swaraj of that kind was of no value. What he wanted was the Swaraj of the common people. It was in their interest to restore peace to an embattled world. India would not become free by shouldering a rifle and running to fight Hitler. Hitler's greed for an empire, his lust for power, would receive a powerful blow, Gandhi felt, from India when the Indian people won their independence. Would Germany be able to hold an empire when Britain lost hers?

If independence came to India while the war was in progress, the restoration of peace everywhere would be expedited. No harm would be done if it didn't. Progress towards independence could continue without a break and without embarrassing those actively engaged in the war. That progress could be of a non-violent nature. Gandhi decided, in a word, not to abandon non-cooperation or allow the Congress to do so. At the same time he refrained from placing obstacles in the way of Britain's war effort. He was saying in effect, "If you want to fight, fight. We want to non-cooperate and non-cooperate we will. We won't prevent you and you should not prevent us from doing what we feel right. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

Never before in history had such a thing been seen. While rulers fought, the common people non-cooperated. Usually the people sacrifice their lives until their rulers compound their quarrel. For the first time the common people were saying that if their rulers had to fight they could fight but they, the people, would not cooperate with them. How can rulers fight without the cooperation of the people? If the common people of other countries followed the example of India and refused to cooperate in the war effort also, how long could the fighting go on? Peace would follow automatically.

Gandhi's policy of non-cooperation in the war effort was in accord with the anti-war policy being adopted by pacifists every-

where. If Tolstoy had been living he would certainly have given Gandhi his blessings. "You are the hope of mankind," he might have said. "If the people of your country stay with you, peace will be restored to the earth through you."

Kingsley Martin, in *The New Statesman*, wrote that Gandhi's policy was the policy Lenin had followed during wartime also. He called it revolutionary defeatism. The article appeared about this time. I do not recall what else Mr. Martin wrote but the purport of it was that a revolution can succeed if the people stand aside and allow the Government to be defeated.

Bernard Shaw applauded Gandhi's policy. In his opinion it was correct. Gandhi had not allowed himself to be side-tracked from his aim and he would not be. To save the British Government from defeat was not his duty.

When Gandhi visited Malikanda to participate in the meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, I travelled from Comilla where I was living at the time to see him. The fall of France had perturbed me greatly. France had been the best equipped of all the Allies against the vicissitudes of war. Yet she was defeated in a few days. Deprived of her arms France, one of the greatest powers in the world and a symbol of freedom, was totally at the mercy of her conquerors. Violent methods of defence had failed utterly. Non-violent resistance seemed to me to be more reliable. I said as much to Gandhi. He was non-committal. He smiled.

At that time I observed the extreme gravity of his mood, the seriousness which emanated from him. The burden of the country's fate lay upon his shoulders. He had also to face denigration by interested foreign powers. It was alleged that, by non-cooperating during wartime, he was acting for the enemy, encouraging them. The Leftists had subsided after the resignation of the Congress Ministries but the Muslim League was behaving in an obstreperous manner. It preened and struck poses, declaring it would never allow the Congress ministries to come back into power. The ministries were eager to get back.

Congress, as a party, wanted to non-cooperate and to cooperate at one and the same time. It blew hot and cold, veering from the advocacy of violence to ahimsa and back again. Gandhi was as worried about the Congress as the Buddha had been about his Sangha.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A SERIOUS SITUATION

A few months after I communicated to Gandhi the question that the fall of France had given rise to in my mind, I found that he had placed it before the members of the Working Committee and requested them to consider it. If India found itself in a similar situation would Indians defend their country violently or non-violently?

There was no threat of invasion at that moment but there was no certainty that such a contingency would never arise. The country might be attacked at some time in the future. If the responsibility for the defence of India was in the hands of the Congress what would it do? Would they try Gandhi's methods or resort to the violent means used by everybody else? Would they fight with armed forces or with mass satyagraha?

The Working Committee pondered the question deeply. In the end all the members, with the exception of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, agreed that although the country might be set free from subjugation by non-violent methods, the policy of ahimsa should not be extended to the battlefield in the face of an unprincipled invader. The use of force would be better. The policy adopted at any particular time should be the one best suited to the situation. Ahimsa could be used on some occasions and force on others, whichever was more effective in the circumstances. They had learned nothing from the fate of France. Gandhi was disappointed.

The Ramgarh Congress had, in the meantime, proclaimed that India would be satisfied with nothing less than complete independence. An Assembly for the framing of a constitution must be summoned. The Congress refused to modify its demand out of consideration for war conditions and refused to call off the movement in progress. Once again Gandhi was given sole charge. The struggle would be led by Gandhi and Gandhi alone. He asked people to hold themselves in readiness, to be prepared. More than that he refrained from demanding at the moment.

The Viceroy was trying to think of a way to persuade the Congress to cooperate. Eight provinces were without ministries. The Legislative Assembly could not function in the absence of a majority of its members. The minorities were forced to remain idle. They were impatient and angry.

The Muslim League complicated the prospects of a political settlement further by passing a revolution in favour of the partition of the country. It was afraid that the exigencies of war would force the British to come to terms with the Congress and the League would lose out. It therefore demanded a state of its own, entirely separate. No other solution would be acceptable.

The Congress Working Committee, after coming to the conclusion that the country could not be defended by non-violent means, proposed the formation of a temporary national government at the Center in order to coordinate defence. If such a government was formed, the Congress agreed to cooperate fully in the war effort.

There would have been no need for satyagraha if the Viceroy had agreed to the Congress proposal but there would have been a break with Gandhi. He would of course have gone his way alone and, if his conscience so dictated, engaged in solitary satyagraha.

Gandhi, observing the climate of Congress opinion, stood aside once more but he did not have to remain aloof for long. The Viceroy announced that the Executive Council would be enlarged but in no way altered. The British members would therefore remain and so would the Indian members at present in it. Representatives of the Congress and the Muslim League would be added to their number. Indians would have the opportunity to frame a constitution for themselves on the conclusion of the war. There were two conditions: British interests should not be endangered and the consent of the minorities should be obtained.

The leaders of the Congress lost all desire to help the war effort when the Viceroy's message was communicated to them. They turned back to Gandhi. There was now no alternative to non-cooperation and satyagraha, at least not until the Viceroy sent for them again.

Two extreme positions were taken up: either full coopera-

tion with the war effort or complete non-cooperation. There was no middle way. The Mahatma favoured moderation, not extremism. The situation was critical. He stood on a razor's edge. The British believed in war and knew how to wage one. Why should Britain be disturbed? A large section of Indian public opinion backed England unconditionally. The waging of the war should be left to the war-mongers. The people of the country could be awakened and told that this particular war contributes in no way to the achievement of independence, they could be told that Gandhi did not believe in war. Both these things could go on at the same time. If anyone was arrested for freely expressing a free opinion he could welcome imprisonment and spend the war years safely in jail.

The issue was the right to speak out freely and say the truth during war time. Through individual satyagraha the devotion of the people to truth could be tested. Nowhere is anyone permitted to say the truth during the course of a war. The first casualty in a war is always the truth. Political workers in at least one country in the world should speak out, tell the truth and go to prison for it if need be. Their names would be inscribed in history. Give leadership of this kind to the common people and they would soon be ready for mass satyagraha.

Gandhi met the Viceroy. He was ready to consider the rights of conscientious objectors but he refused permission to speak in public. No government could permit that without jeopardising the war effort.

Unless a man is able to breathe he cannot live, and a civilised man cannot live unless he is able to express himself freely. The primary function of democracy is to preserve freedom of speech, to protect and cherish it. No democracy can exist without it. Civil liberty is its cornerstone. The entire structure of democracy rests upon it. People who forfeit their liberty during wartime cannot save democracy. If people who do not live in a democracy have any civil liberties at all they cling to them desperately.

Gandhi did not agree with the Viceroy. The Viceroy could not agree with Gandhi. The Viceroy feared anti-war propaganda might have an adverse effect on the morale of the armed forces.

The number of volunteers would dwindle. How could war be carried on without recruits?

It was an issue over which no compromise was possible either by the pacifists or the war-mongers. Gandhi would not have compromised even with the Congress if the Congress had decided to participate in the war effort. He would have spoken out against war and written against it single-handed in order to keep anti-war feeling awake and strong. He was prepared to go to prison if the basic right of freedom of speech was withheld from him. He was ready even to fast unto death for it.

Gandhi was careful to see that satyagraha over the issue of civil liberty should remain restricted during the war period. It was confined to individuals. The principle involved was a moral one although political considerations played a part in it. Vinoba Bhave was selected to be the first satyagrahi. He was a man of religion, not a politician. He was opposed to war for political reasons. He would have opposed it anyway, whatever position in regard to it the Congress might have taken up.

If the responsibility of the leadership of the Congress had not rested on his shoulders Gandhi might have confined his choice of satyagrahis to men like Vinobaji, persons of high moral principles. But Congress workers also had to be allowed to take part in the satyagraha although they were opposed only to imperialist war. Nehru became the second individual satyagrahi. Men of high moral principles and politicians were both selected. One by one nearly all the ex-ministers and their supporters in the Legislative Assembly went to prison. Those who remained outside were either unwell or reluctant to participate in anti-war activity. Some of them felt it was a mistake to oppose the war and that cooperation was the better policy. They were unwilling to dismiss the war with a single word, imperialist. They were not chosen as satyagrahis because they did not want to be.

Satyagraha by carefully selected individuals had been in Gandhi's mind for a long time. Such satyagraha depended for its effect upon the quality of persons engaged in it, not on numbers. It was more powerful for that reason. All fear of the British Government disappeared within a few months. People spoke openly against the war. Anti-war writings could not be published, for the press was stringently controlled but there was little

need to. Outside the Punjab the number of recruits was negligible and donations were not forthcoming. Yet men who wished to sign up or needed to do so were not hindered or interfered with in any way. Gandhi permitted only one kind of activity, propaganda. He did not want to paralyse the government. He wanted to remain outside prison in order to guide the individual satyagraha movement.

Did individual satyagraha bring freedom? No, that was not the purpose for which it was instituted. It was a kind of preliminary activity, undertaken to prepare the country for mass satyagraha to come. It operated upon the hearts of men. In no other way could their hearts have been moved as powerfully. Another thing that individual satyagraha accomplished was to inform the world at large that the common people of India were not in favour of the war. The war was being waged in India's name but those who were fighting it were the paid mercenaries of the British Raj. Were the Indian people on the side of Hitler? No, no such claim could be substantiated. The war effort of the British Government was not hampered in any way. Those who wished to take part were freely signing up. Nobody prevented them from doing so or even sought to dissuade them. Protests were made only when force was used.

But force was not being used. No complaints to that effect were received. Lord Linlithgow knew Gandhi would not tolerate anything of that kind. Force was certain to provoke a rebellion. Gandhi was vigilant. He was constantly on the watch to see that no force was applied. If any incident was brought to his notice he was not the man to sit back and do nothing about it. There was a tacit assumption between the Viceroy and Gandhi. Neither would transgress beyond certain well-defined limits. The Viceroy would not impose conscription and Gandhi would not start a large-scale movement. Both of them knew the moves in their game of chess very well. The police refrained from touching anybody who preached against the war and the campaign gradually faded out in consequence.

The Viceroy knew Gandhi's value. He kept the country quiet. Lord Linlithgow was careful not to antagonise him. Gandhi, for his part, did not ask for power either for himself or for the Congress. His relationship with the Viceroy was cordial. He

was prepared to keep them that way but not at the expense of the country. The country marched steadily forward towards the realisation of its goal, full independence. The altar of a new democracy was under construction. Satyagraha is not theatrical or melodramatic but it is none the less effective for that. The nationals of no other country in the world enjoyed as much freedom as the Indian people while the war was in progress. We were in the front rank of the free peoples of the world in matters concerning personal liberty, with the exception of the neutral nations of course.

Hitler's armies were trampling over the heart of Soviet Russia. Our sympathies were with the Russians. But the war was not our war, no matter how much we might be in sympathy with its victims. The common people of India would be confused and divided if any such statement was made. A section would refuse to engage in satyagraha against the British Government out of sympathy with the Russian people when and if a movement was launched. The war was being described as a 'people's war'.

The Communist party was a separate organisation. It had nothing to do with the Congress and Gandhi had no hand in the determination of its policies. Both Japan and America had plunged into the war by this time. In no time Japan was in Singapore. Nobody had imagined that the situation would take such a threatening turn. Japan overran the Malay Peninsula and entered Burma. Belgium is on Britain's doorstep and Burma is on India's. An attack on Belgium was considered equivalent to an attack on Britain and an attack on Burma was certainly equivalent to an attack on India. Alarm was general. There was no time left now for sympathy for others. An invasion of India had become imminent. We were confronted with the actual experience ourselves. What had been a remote possibility was about to take place.

From the reaction of the British it was plain that the fall of Singapore had dislocated their defence system. Until it could be repaired they would have to retreat in the face of the enemy. Many government departments were moved away from the coastal areas, inland. It was more or less assumed that the fall of Burma would be followed by that of Assam and Bengal. From my talks with several British military officers I realised they were prepar-

ing for a confrontation at Ranchi. The line was being drawn there. They would make a stand on the uplands of Bihar. No effort at all would be made to keep Bengal. A friend of mine worked for the Bihar government. He was warned to be prepared for the signal, "Bengal coming."

It was not a joking matter. Bengal was home to five crores of people. They could not migrate to Bihar *en masse*. The majority would have had to stay, to submit to the Japanese. But the legal entity known as Bengal would have been shifted to Bihar from Calcutta, just as the legal entity known as Burma migrated to Simla and Mussouri. When I read the circular issued by the government (one was sent to me) I had no difficulty in grasping the fact that the British were ready to abandon Bengal and move out. They would go to Bihar and other parts of Western India if they felt it was useless to try to fight on the plains or did not feel inclined to do so. The representatives of the British Government would formally hand over the administration of the country to the Japanese, not in accordance with any treaty or law but just in fact. India's representatives would have no say in the matter. Bengal would not be surrendered to the Bengalis. For the subjugated there was only a change of masters. No independence would be forthcoming.

What was meant by a British withdrawal was demonstrated in Burma. Before they left they destroyed their own factories and workshops in order that they might not fall into enemy hands and be of any use to them. When Napoleon invaded Russia the Russian people set fire to their capital city, Moscow, with their own hands, in a great surge of feeling, to prevent it from being of any use to the French. This act has come to be described since as the scorched earth policy. The Russians again resorted to the same tactics in World War II in order to defeat the Germans. For the Russians it was a useful and effective measure. But was it good for the Burmese? Would the Burmese have done it of their own accord if they had been left to themselves? As it was, they were given no choice. The British army took the decision without consulting their wishes. The Bengalis could, like the Russians, destroy their beloved city, Calcutta, themselves if to do so would be advantageous to them. They were capable of it. The decision did not need to be left to the British army. Why should

the British army or the Indian branch of it do or be permitted to do something that could and should be done by the common people themselves, of their own free will, on the day of invasion?

Indian soldiers were mercenaries, paid by the British Government. They had not joined the army either to fight for the country or to die for it. If the country was to be defended, a new army had to be organised. Who was to do it? How could it be done unless the British permitted it? And where was the time to do it in? Were the Japanese at all likely to wait while an army was scraped together for them to fight with? Were we fated to undergo a change of masters? Was the great steel factory at Jamshedpur, the Calcutta port or the Howrah Bridge to be blown up? A beginning had already been made. All boats in the districts of Chittagong and Barisal were commandeered and sunk. It was done to deprive the incoming Japanese of food supplies. Bengalis died of starvation.

An anti-war policy had been in the fitness of things as long as the war had been at a distance. Was it still relevant when the war was upon us? The battle-field was not in Belgium, it was not in Russia, it was in Burma, moving into Assam, on the point of engulfing Bengal. The people were given no choice in the selection of the battle-field. All the choices were in the hands of aliens, people to whom withdrawal was a matter of little consequence and likewise a scorched earth policy. While the people themselves lay helplessly enchained beneath the heels of a ruthless power they were to be overwhelmed by a great disaster. Was the country dead? A corpse?

Churchill, realising the gravity of the situation, consulted the British Cabinet and sent Cripps to India. The satyagrahis who were in prison were set free unconditionally. Only a handful of them were genuinely anti-war. Those who were only opposed to an imperialist war immediately found themselves in a terrible dilemma.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CONFUSION AND DISTRACTION : CRIPPS

Most Congress leaders believed that Japan was not India's friend, that Japan was the enemy of democracy. If this was the case Indians would suffer a hundred times more damage than the British if the Japanese gained entry into the country. An invasion or attack by Japan was a possibility that would do no good for either nationalism or democracy. India had to make a stand against Japan in her own interest. The logical thing to do was to join forces with the British when they too were fighting the Japanese. But, yes, the alliance should be on an equal footing, between friends, not a relationship of servant and master Why should the new proposals that Cripps was bringing not be accepted if they were proposals that one friend or ally might make to another?

A few however thought that Japan had no intention of subjugating India. What was the need of fighting the Japanese when they were not coming as India's enemies? Japan was fighting the British and India had no part in the quarrel. It would be foolish for Indians to ally themselves with Japan's real enemy. The British were fighting. Let them. It was their war, not India's. They could be allowed to withdraw like gentlemen. No obstacles need be put in their way. It would be enough to prevent them from carrying out a scorched earth policy.

Other workers, mostly men outside the Congress ranks, regarded the situation as a windfall for India. When the Japanese came, India would be freed. The British could be thrown out of the country with their help. A thorn, runs the Indian proverb, is best extracted by a thorn. The losers would be the British. India would lose nothing but her chains. Japan would never be able to subdue India the way the British had. It was sure to withdraw after the fighting was over. India would be left a free country.

The mind of India had never been so torn by conflicting trends of thought as it was at that time. A nation as powerful as Japan

had suddenly and most unexpectedly become a close neighbour. Some thought it a good thing, others regarded it as a threat, and a third section of opinion considered it neither a gain nor a loss. Some were neutral in their attitude to Japan, others antagonistic and yet others friendly. Some wished to fight, others refused to fight and some wished to take the help of Japan to drive out the British.

The Cripps Mission arrived when the confusion was at its height. The Mahatma was in Sevagram. He was reluctant to leave his ashram. Cripps was a personal friend and at last succeeded in persuading him to come to Delhi. It must not be forgotten that the Viceroy did not invite the Mahatma. His going to the capital was unofficial and he did not meet Cripps on an official footing. The Viceroy said nothing to Gandhi about what was in his mind.

"My advice," Gandhi said to Cripps, "is to take the next plane back to England if these proposals are all you have to offer."

The Cripps proposals were, briefly, as follows. A new state was to be established, a state that was to be known as the Indian Union. It would enjoy the status of a Dominion. It would have the right to leave the British Commonwealth if it so wished. A Constituent Assembly was to be summoned as soon as hostilities came to an end. The British Government agreed to accept the constitution drawn up by its members and take action accordingly on two conditions. The first condition was that if one or more provinces did not approve of the Constitution they would be free to make a separate one of their own which the British Government would recognise. They would be given equal status within the Indian Union. The Rajas were also given the right to draw up a constitution of their own separately, to be recognised by the British Government, and receive equal status within the Indian Union. The representatives of the Rajas were to be members of the Assembly.

The second condition governed the relationship between the Constituent Assembly and the British Government and dealt with all the problems that would arise in course of the transfer of total responsibility from British to Indian hands.

This was to take place after the war, assuming the war was won. During the course of the war the Viceroy would increase

the number of members in his Executive Council, adding representative Indians. Power and responsibility remained in the hands of the Commander-in-Chief for the duration of the hostilities. The Viceroy had the right to intervene.

The Congress leaders discussed the proposals with Cripps for fifteen days. They would not have given them so much of their time and thought if they had deserved to be rejected outright. God has not given us the power to see the future. If an inkling of what was to come had been in their minds even Gandhi might not have turned them down so flatly. Was there any hint in them of either a Pakistan or a Hindustan? Was it anywhere suggested that secession from the Indian Union would be permitted on grounds of religion? No mention was made of either a Hindu or a Muslim majority. If the Congress had accepted the Cripps proposal a joint Constituent Assembly would have been set up by the future Indian Union. Those who were not in favour of the Union would not have participated in it but the splitting of whole provinces would have been avoided. Where it was not possible to avoid a division of some kind, an arrangement could have been reached by mutual agreement, not through the intervention of a third party.

... It was by no means certain that the war was going to be won by the British. That was the snag. The responsibility of carrying out a scorched earth policy might have devolved upon the Congress if it had cooperated blindly with the British. The Viceroy and the C-in-C would both have withdrawn to a safer area leaving the leaders of the country to deal with the Japanese, as had been done in Burma. India required a war leader of Churchill's stature in order to make sure of something that was so uncertain. Nehru might have done it. He was willing to accept the role. The common people of India would have stood solidly at his back if he had been made the war leader. They would have stopped the Japanese like a wall. But who was going to let Nehru do it? Cripps stated unequivocally that the place of the C-in-C in the Viceroy's Council would remain unchanged.

The C-in-C was not under any obligation to explain his actions to anybody, not even to the Viceroy. Even though the Viceroy's special charge was India the responsibility for anything that happened in wartime belonged to the Allied Command in

London. Soldiers moved over the chequer-board of India when a button was pressed in England. The Indian army was no more than a subordinate branch of the British army. It was inconceivable that war secrets should be disclosed to an Indian Minister or Secretary of Defence. If any Indian could be even considered for a post of that kind it would have to be a man of proven loyalty to the British crown, a man like the Aga Khan or the Maharaja of Bikaner. Nehru was not such a man and neither was Jinnah. Indianisation could not go so far, not even out of fear of Japan. If the Japanese captured India or any part of it the British were confident that they would get it back some day, but India could not be given what belonged to her by right only because a war was in progress. No imperialist could tolerate it.

For Churchill and his party the Cripps proposals were an enormous concession. Yet they fell far short of the independence the Indian National Congress was fighting to win. India was being threatened, it was true, and so was Britain's imperialism, but if India came to its aid in face of the common danger its hold would only grow stronger. Nehru and Azad exerted themselves to the utmost in the effort to come to an understanding with Cripps. Churchill and his party in England and the Viceroy and his men in India were hard as stone. Civil powers are usually curtailed to some extent during a war but military power is kept unitary. India could not be saved without military power. The Cripps Mission failed largely because of divergent opinions in regard to the control of military power. There were, of course, other differences also. No agreement was reached over the proposed post-war measures.

The leaders of the Congress hoped that Roosevelt would use his influence with Churchill in India's favour. He did. Churchill's reaction was one of anger. Once again the leaders turned to the naked fakir for help. With Gandhi, Churchill had no sympathy. The two men were poles apart. Congressmen who had been prepared to fight the Japanese now joined the Gandhian camp and became anti-war satyagrahis. It is so easy to swing back and forth between policies of violence and non-violence!

The Congress and the British Government both expected that the fall of Assam and Bengal would follow the fall of Burma as the fall of Malaysia had followed the fall of Singapore, and

Burma had fallen after Malaysia. Military installations would be the first targets of Japanese bombing. A counterattack from India had to be forestalled. Calcutta was an army base, a big one. Danger was a reality. As it crept slowly closer we prepared ourselves to meet it. Hundreds and thousands of people fled the city, pouring down the roads, seeking shelter wherever they could find it. They hoped to save themselves by flight. It was not likely they could have done it. Food was growing scarcer as grain flowed into the Government bins to feed the troops and what remained was bought up and hoarded by unscrupulous merchants who sold it at increasingly high prices in the black market.

The shadows thickened. There was little or nothing the people could do. All the action was being taken by the British and the Japanese. We Indians felt as helpless as straws in the wind. Such passivity was appropriate to sheep but it was unbecoming of men. If there are ever times when a man's blood should grow hot, this was one of them. Was it possible for Gandhi, in a crisis of such magnitude, to close up like a tortoise, drawing back into a protective shell? Gandhi saw clearly that a section of the people, under the delusion that they were finding freedom, would welcome the Japanese. A section of the Congress, on the other hand, would cooperate with the British to protect their own personal and private interests, out of selfish motives. Some would clamour to go back to the ministries from which they had so recently resigned. All Gandhi's efforts would come to nothing, the work of his lifetime would be undone. Unless satyagraha was launched while there was still time, the opportunity might never come again. There could be no satyagraha in areas under Japanese occupation. Theoretically there was no reason for it not to be possible but in practice it was, for satyagraha cannot be conducted from outside or from a distance. Gandhi would have to enter Japanese territory and remain there in order to do it. Why should the Japanese allow him in? And if he went in, despite any ban on his entry they might impose, who was to take charge of the satyagraha movement in British-occupied territory? The Congress and its leaders would be divided also if the country was shared out.

The August movement was started against this background. If Gandhi had not done something at that moment he might never

have got the chance to do anything again. Yet it was risky to attempt to conduct a movement in such dangerous circumstances. It was possible the British would have him and his followers court-martialled and shot as rebels. Nobody but Gandhi was prepared for such a contingency. His decision and his unfaltering determination reflected the greatness of his moral courage and added to the glory of his name. If Gandhi had been court-martialled, a revolution of the most bloody kind would have taken place instantly. The British Government arrested him and all his followers before they could do anything, hoping to nip the August movement in the bud and avoid a general rising. Some of Gandhi's followers escaped, spreading out over the country and going underground.

"Quit India." "Leave India to God or to anarchy." These slogans worked like magic charms. The man who first pronounced them was a Rishi. They were mantras. Those who heard and understood what they heard would, if they had been allowed to, plunge between the two fires that threatened to engulf the country and set village after village aflame. The British would not have been permitted to stay nor the Japanese to enter. The programme this time did not prescribe imprisonment. A harsher measure was called for. The workers took the initiative into their own hands. Gandhi gave only one command, a blanket order, "Do or Die." They were not told to kill, only to die. This should not be forgotten.

But the mob in its fury destroyed vast properties. A few people were even killed. It took the Government more than a fortnight to bring the situation under control. At the outset it was entirely out of hand. Terrible punishments were inflicted. I was told villages were surrounded and entire populations wiped out. Men were hung from trees.

The national government itself was not so exemplarily non-violent. Substantial fines were realised from substantial people. If the fines were not paid the defaulters were jailed. Until I read a book written by one of the members of the national government at that time I was not aware that the national government also carried out a number of executions. That was several years ago. Is there any way of finding out who strung up the corpses that were seen swinging from trees long afterwards? At the time I

assumed, in simple faith, it was the work of the army.

The slogan "Leave India to God or to anarchy," implied that there would be no recourse to the established courts and that nothing was to be brought to the cognizance of judges. One party to the conflict was free to string up traitors to the country and the other to string up rebels against the king. Who was going to complain? To whom? The police were excluded. Wherever they tried to gain an entrance they only added to the general bashing. These conditions could not and did not last for long, except in one or two small areas. The Governor of Bengal was heard to remark that he held jurisdiction over the whole of Benga' except Ramnagar thana.

Non-violence did not have priority at that time. The most important thing was to do something, to show that the people of the country were not going to take the situation lying down, that they were more than straws in the wind. We wanted to prove that we were our own masters, able to decide our own destiny. Let there be anarchy. Anarchy was better than nothing; it was preferable to slavery. If our forefathers had realised that, they would not have submitted so tamely to British rule out of fear of anarchy. British rule was backed by bayonets. Anarchy could be prevented without them. There was a way.

Gandhi did not want to be spared from bayonets. He wished to do away with the need for the British Raj altogether. The common people themselves are capable of establishing and maintaining peace and order in days of disorder and anarchy. A Panchayat Council of Five could be formed in every village to take charge of the welfare of the people and a kind of village republic established. The villagers could protect themselves against thieves and dacoits and against external enemies as well, without weapons. They would not kill but they would, if necessary, die. They would not pay unfair taxes even if they were beaten for their refusal. They were prepared to spend a fortune but not to sacrifice their honour. What would a country in which there were seven hundred village republics of this strong moral fibre have to fear? What could bayonets do?

Gandhi had dreamt of seven hundred village republics from the very first, speaking of them when he launched satyagraha for the first time. Step by step he fought for them, starting from

Bardoli. He did not want satyagraha to be over in a short time. When and where it would end was God's affair. The same kind of mass satyagraha was not launched a second time. The movement took other forms. It was replaced by the Salt Campaign and the boycott of foreign-made goods. The dream of 1922! It was to be twenty years before it wakened again, in 1942. The programme of the August Movement was to establish Councils of Five in every village and build up a new administrational apparatus, from the bottom up, like a pyramid, wide at the base and deeply entrenched.

Gandhi had, by this time, overcome his fear of a violent revolution. No Chaurichaura could stop him now. He wrote: "That is the consideration that has weighed with me all these twenty-two years. I waited and waited, until the country should develop the non-violent strength necessary to throw off the foreign yoke. But my attitude has now undergone a change. I feel that I cannot afford to wait. If I have to wait, I might have to wait till doomsday. For the preparation that I have prayed for and worked for may never come, and in the meantime, I may be enveloped and overwhelmed by the flames that threaten all of us. That is why I have decided that even at certain risks, which are obviously involved, I must ask the people to resist the slavery."

Chapter Nineteen

THE AUGUST RISING : A PARADOX

The August rising was not a satyagraha movement. Gandhi was removed before he could make any declaration to that effect. The dream remained unrealised, history's unborn child.

What took place was a natural, spontaneous and furious outburst of feeling. It was like a flood or an earthquake. Congress workers were behind it of course. With a few orthodox Gandhians were a large number of Leftists. The Gandhians were people who devoted themselves to wholetime constructive work, makers of khadi, who lived pure lives of ascetic simplicity and kept out of the muddy waters of politics.

Calcutta was blacked out. It was within Japanese bombing range. It was not an easy matter to detect the presence of people who moved about stealthily in the near-total darkness. One evening three of us, myself, my wife and a Gandhian friend, walked slowly up and down a lonely Calcutta street while he talked to us. He was an underground worker. Fighters, he told us, came to him for instructions from places as far away as Assam. It was astonishing. They returned and carried out his orders. What kind of orders? I was prepared to hear that he had given instructions to cut telegraph wires, disrupt railway lines and other similar things for these were actually being done in Bihar as I was living in Bankura at the time I heard of them. But I was astounded when my friend told me he had issued instructions to blow up railway bridges. How terrible!

He explained that the best way to hamper troop movements is to destroy bridges. The Japanese could not advance and the British could not go to meet them. Between the two opposed armies an area was created which was a kind of no-man's land. The people would be their own masters in a place of peace for no fighting would take place in it. Communications had to be disrupted to prevent the country from being turned into a battlefield.

It appeared plain enough that it was the duty of a lover of

peace to step between two enraged combatants and prevent them from flying at each other's throats, turning the country into a battle-field in the process. My question was, "Are the means non-violent? Destroying railway bridges——?"

"They are our own property. These bridges do not belong to the British. Why can we not destroy what is ours if we wish to? We are not causing any loss of life. Our purpose is to save life, to protect the people of the country. We do not want them to suffer the horrors of war. Instructions have been given that not a single life is to be taken."

What he was saying meant that a scorched earth policy of a sort was being carried out, with the difference that it was directed against both the warring parties simultaneously. The British would describe it as sabotage but history would give another verdict. It was plain and simple self-defence.

The bridges would be blown up by either the British or the Japanese in any case. The telegraph wires would also be cut by one or the other of them. If the Japanese did it the act would be described as a military measure. Nobody would say a word. But if it was done by pacifists there was a hue and cry. "Is this non-violence?" people would demand.

Gandhi was shut away in the Aga Khan's palace. The Viceroy was laying all the blame for anti-war activity, anti-social acts and everything else associated with the August Movement at his door. Gandhi declined to accept the responsibility and suggested that the Viceroy go to the courts for justice. The letters exchanged grew into a voluminous correspondence. The Government published a booklet describing the August rising in great detail. It accused the Congress and Gandhi of having brought it about. This was done without the benefit of any judicial procedure. The world at large was informed that the Indian National Congress and Mahatma Gandhi were inimical to the British and friendly to Japan. Their actions, it was claimed, were dictated by fear. The specific charge against Gandhi was that he was encouraging the use of violence vis-a-vis non-violence.

Gandhi decided to fast. There was no other way to protest against these mendacious charges and no possibility of refuting them. He was informed that he would be released from prison for the duration of his fast. He said in reply that if he was re-

leased he might not fast at all. He would seek some other way of refuting the charges made against him instead. The Viceroy concluded that he was fasting to get himself released unconditionally. The Viceroy withdrew the release order.

Thus began what was for us a heart-rending experience. We could do nothing. We were entirely helpless. One by one the terrible twenty-one days passed. We suffered even more than Gandhi. Who knows how he survived it!

Nobody lifted a finger. Silently and philosophically they watched. Men who had brought about such a large-scale rising six months earlier were absolutely cold. Such is the consequence of violence. When force is put down by force it can never raise its head again. The same thing happened at the time of the Sepoy Mutiny.

The Government made elaborate preparations for Gandhi's funeral. Sandalwood was purchased for his pyre. Magistrates were warned to see that no breach of the peace occurred. A friend of mine who was a magistrate at that time told me about the order. No, there was not the slightest sign of an outbreak. Gandhi's passing would have been taken quietly but the British would never have been forgiven.

I do not know what the verdict of history will be but my own assessment is that the 1942 Movement was Gandhiji's finest hour, his most magnificent achievement. Never before had an anti-war movement on such a scale been launched during the course of a major conflict and the call for peace sent out so poignantly. A resistance movement took place in France when the country lay beneath the iron heel of Hitler. An armed rising took place in Yugoslavia after the Nazi invasion. But neither the Yugoslavia rising nor the resistance had the restoration of peace as their objectives nor did they take place between two adversaries, both armed to the teeth. Nor did the temporary rulers of these two countries, France and Yugoslavia, tamper too much with a regime that had been established for over two centuries. What Gandhi did was without a precedent in history although it may not have been mass satyagraha. He was deprived of his freedom and held in prison, but from behind the bars he was able to encourage and inspire his people by the power of moral force and moral force alone.

In this connection I remember him saying that a body is an obstacle, that it would be better not to have one. The spirit is better able to function without one, unfettered. If such a man does nothing but think, his thoughts embody themselves in acts. It was of no consequence whether he was behind bars or outside them. His thoughts would continue to work freely. A concept, a thought, is the most important of all things. How many have the courage to think? And the nature of the thinking must be such that it points to the way history is sure to take. A day-dream is of no use, whether it is dreamt by a single man or by many.

Gandhi showed us the way history was moving and was immediately placed under arrest for doing so. He would have been shot if the Japanese had triumphantly entered India at that time. Gandhi knew it and because he knew it he chose to rebel at an hour when invasion by Japan was imminent, when Assam and Bengal were on the point of being overrun. And he was careful to state plainly that if the Japanese sought to take advantage of his movement he would call it off immediately.

That is beside the point however. The fact was that the heart of Gandhi was full and overflowing with love for the British. His concern was sincere. They knew it. The Viceroy remarked to Louis Fischer shortly before the August rising: "Make no mistake about it.... The old man is the biggest thing in India.... He has been good to me.... If he had come from South Africa and been only a saint he might have taken India very far. But he was tempted by politics.... I have been here six years and I have learned restraint....but if I felt that Gandhi was obstructing the war effort I would have to bring him under control."

The best among the English leaders knew how to read the writing on the wall. The fall of Singapore, of Malaysia and of Burma had adversely affected their prestige. An empire of the size of the British could not be held by physical force alone. Prestige, influence and authority were imperative. The Viceroy himself told Louis Fischer that the British were not going to stay in India. He said the Congress did not believe it but the British were not going to stay. They were getting ready to leave.

"We'll be out of this country within two years after the end

of the war," the Home Minister, Maxwell, spoke even more explicitly to Fischer.

This was before August 1942. The British had already made up their minds to quit. The Viceroy did not disagree with Gandhi on many matters. It was a question of five years this way or that. Five years are a short time in the history of a nation. Yet to Gandhi it seemed an unendurable delay. He wanted India to take its place among the free countries of the world in a halo of glory and greatness that would command universal respect. At this historical moment that was possible. India's voice should be heard. Who could say that peace might not be restored to the world through India's good offices?

Many thought that Gandhi's efforts were directed towards securing an honourable settlement with Japan. It could not be brought about as long as the British were here. The British and Americans were insisting that Japan surrender and surrender unconditionally. Why should India involve herself in their quarrel? What harm had Japan done to India?

A question of foreign policy lay in the background. It was a question on which Gandhi and the Viceroy could never agree. Churchill and Gandhi were of course poles apart in their opinions. Roosevelt was India's friend but he was Japan's enemy. If India followed Roosevelt's foreign policy and later received independence through his good offices the Congress would do as he did and become Japan's enemy also. Japan would be alienated for no reason. Would Japan be willing to come to terms with India? Would the country not be turned into a battlefield? Gandhi did not want to do anything to precipitate a war. But if Japan invaded of her own accord he would, of course, resist.

Gandhi's foreign policy was that of a separate and independent sovereign state. The decisions he took were the decisions of a man who was free. India would not add to her independence or in any way strengthen it by marching in step with either Roosevelt or Churchill. Japan's advance had to be arrested but efforts for a settlement should go on at the same time. If the war could be terminated a little sooner by such a step the world would be relieved. An even better solution was for no party to the conflict to be forced to surrender unconditionally.

Where there was fundamental disagreement over foreign policy,

where opinions in connection with military authority were irreconcilable, no wartime government could be formed. Non-cooperation with the war effort was the only alternative. The August rising did not envisage a change of government even though the August Resolution of the Congress appears to have been intended to bring that about. Its purpose was to awaken the common people and show them how to take power into their own hands. Their awakening and self-realisation was to be brought about not through participation in war but through resistance to it.

The August Movement did not last long but it wrought a fundamental change in the temperament of the people. They had realised their strength. The taste of power is sweet. If the rising had been entirely non-violent there would have been no residue of bitterness. But there was. The country had pushed a long way forward towards independence but ahimsa had dropped behind. Progress in one direction was counterbalanced by regression in the other. Gandhi won and lost at the same time. The country grew more and more violent from day to day. Anarchy spread. But a period of depression and weakness preceded it.

The famine in Bengal occurred during the period of depression. The Government of Bengal displayed extreme incompetence. The amazing thing was that the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, was an agriculturist. He came to India the first time as Chairman of an Agricultural Mission. As the all-powerful head of the British Government in India Lord Linlithgow had to take a large part of the blame for this famine. The Governors of other afflicted provinces like Bihar and U.P. took strong measures to check it. But in Bengal millions died of starvation. I happened to be on leave at the time and was at Almora. Governor Hallet was successful in curbing the famine.

From what I saw in Bengal and the United Provinces at this time I learned that rich sections of the Indian population are not to be trusted. A whip has to be waved over their heads. The British Government could have done it if they wished. They were not indifferent.

That was something I wished to point out to Gandhiji but I could not. What good would it have done? It was not in his power to make an effective appeal to the conscience and common

sense of India's rich men, or to bring about a favourable change at the moment. The toughest problem ahimsa had to deal with was the problem of setting the common people of the country free from exploitation by the rich. But before it could give its attention to it ahimsa was confronted with another problem, the problem of religious fanaticism. For this it was no match.

As long as Gandhi was in prison it was not possible to apprise him of the manner in which fanatically-minded religious organisations, by opposing each other in every possible way, were growing in strength. Ostensible enemies, they were actually performing a friendly function. The most powerful of these organisations paraded under the banner of nationalism. The Muslims had become a nation; they no longer regarded themselves as a religious community. So were the Hindus. They regarded themselves as a nation also. Like the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha decided that the Hindus alone composed the nation. Muslims, Christians and others were aliens. This was, in some ways, comparable to the attitude towards the German Jews. Public opinion was so confused and distracted that many mistook this fanaticism which was masquerading as nationalism, for the real thing and encouraged it.

In the province where thirty crores of human beings, Hindus and Muslims, died side by side on the foot-paths and roads for want of a handful of rice or a cup of rice grue, the Muslim League won a by-election. I had expected the League to lose. The League had done nothing when the danger of invasion was at its peak and Barisal, Noakhali and Chittagong in grave peril. The Congress was the only organisation that had done anything. Men's minds move in strange ways. The Muslims stood aside during the August Movement. Very few took part. When I broached the subject to a friend he said, "The Muslims in my province are cursing the Congress."

This friend came from the United Provinces. People there still remembered the Sepoy Mutiny vividly. What good had it done for the Hindus and Muslims to stage a rising together? Muslims were caught and strung up. Their property was confiscated. Hindus bought it up cheaply, growing rich. Wasn't the August Movement the same kind of thing? The Muslims would regret participating in it.

Another Muslim friend was a Khaksar. I have never seen his equal in self-denying service of the poor and needy. Hundreds and thousands of lives would have been saved if the measures he advocated had been taken during the famine. He resigned from his official position because the Muslim ministers of the Bengal Government refused to consider them in their blind conceit. "We are all responsible for this famine to some extent," he said to me. "Nobody's conscience is clear. Not even yours."

"I am a member of the judiciary," I answered. "In what way am I responsible?"

"You are a Government official," he replied.

This friend was a Khaksar. He was the devoted follower of Gandhi, a devoted practitioner of khadi. Earlier he said to me one day, "You are hoping that a day will come when we shall be a single nation. That is not to be." Later he sent me a copy of the Khaksar Journal. From what I read in its pages I discovered that he favoured Pakistan.

The August rising was paradoxical. It brought Pakistan a few steps closer. How was Gandhi to know that separatist Muslims would opt for Pakistan out of fear of the Congress?

CHAPTER TWENTY

PRELUDE TO PARTITION

One of the things that precipitated the August rising was the fear that the British Government would abandon India and run away, leaving us to the mercy of the Japanese. We would suffer a change of masters. The thought caused something of a panic. Ahimsa was forgotten. If it had not been, the Indian people could have demonstrated the power and practicability of ahimsa.

Jinnah and his supporters were also afraid of a change of masters. They panicked at the thought that the British Government might abandon India and run away, leaving them to the mercy of the Congress and that the Congress, forgetting all its fine pretensions to non-violence, would take the help of the armed forces and the police to establish themselves firmly in power. Congress rule would be perpetuated. It was certain to last longer than the British Raj. The English were aliens. They could leave. There was no place for the Hindus to go. They could not leave. Therefore they would ensconce themselves solidly, riding on the backs of the Muslims like the proverbial old man of the sea.

These apprehensions had been aroused by the Congress leaders themselves, but not by Gandhi. Some of them said openly that the British Raj was to be replaced by a Congress Raj, that the Congress was its natural successor. The British Government was sure to hand over power to the Congress when it left, they said. If Muslims wanted a share in it they should join the Congress and participate in the fight for freedom. Why should there be a separate electorate for Muslims? Until it was scrapped the Congress would continue to set up Muslim candidates of its own. If they won, the Congress would make them ministers, members of the Congress ministries, appointed from the inside. Any Muslims from outside who wished to join would have to sign the pledge of obedience to the Congress dictates. Eight provinces were already in Congress hands. The next step was a Congress

Centre. If the Congress won an independent majority how could it ever be defeated?

Congress had not won an independent majority at the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly held under the provisions of the old system. Nominated members and official members, by combining, had stood in their way, blocking it. If that block was removed nobody could stop the Congress. And if the Congress reached an understanding with the British Government the nominated members and the official members would no longer oppose it. Congress would be able to do whatever it wished.

The very thought of that possibility drove Jinnah wild. He was the leader of a strong party in the Central Legislative Assembly. Parsis like Cowasji Jehangir, Hindus and Muslims were among its members. It was a neutral, non-sectarian organisation. At times it voted for the Congress, at others it voted for the Government. It asked favour from nobody. Jinnah was not the man to do that. He had an income of his own sufficient for his needs. His associates were all rich men. Jinnah had never, at any time in his life, sold his independence for a title or a high position.

Jinnah did not participate in the non-cooperation movement but he did not cooperate either. When Lord Willingdon was the Governor of Bombay Jinnah had annoyed him extremely. A hall was named after him for the construction of which the Congress workers of Bombay took the initiative and raised subscriptions. His wife was a Parsi. The majority of his friends were either Hindus or Parsis. Many of them never thought of Jinnah as a Muslim and objected to doing so. He was westernised and cosmopolitan in his dress, his manners, his habits and in his way of life in general. The name of his wife was Ratanpriya. His own surname was Jhina, a name that many Hindus also bear. When Gandhi met him for the first time he did not realise at once that he was not a Hindu. He was, in fact, an Ismailia Khoja. In law the term 'Hindu' includes the Ismailia Khojas.

Jinnah took good care of India's interest in the Central Legislative Assembly, as the leader of the Independent Party. He also looked after the interests of the Muslims as the leader of the Muslim League. In his dual capacity as the leader of the League and the leader of the Independent Party Jinnah found it easy

to bridge the differences that arose. One example of his skill was the Lucknow Pact. Sarojini Naidu hailed him as the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Jinnah started his political career as a Congressman. I have heard he was influenced by Dadabhai Naoroji. When elections to the Legislative Assembly were held for the first time he became a member and remained a member until the creation of Pakistan. He stood for election and won from an exclusively Muslim constituency. If he had not been popular among the Muslims that would not have been possible. Yet he was less concerned with Muslim religious practices than many others. He did not observe the annual fast, *roja*, nor did he perform the daily prayers, *namaj*. He did not wear Muslim dress. He did not know Urdu. He drank alcoholic beverages. At the age of forty he married a young girl, his daughter's age, Ratanpriya Petit, and the wedding was performed according to Muslim rites. This was the only occasion on which he was known to have taken part in Muslim religious observances. The lady was, from that day on, independent in her ways. She did not observe purda.

Muslim society was displeased. Official circles were not too happy about it either. When the young Mrs. Jinnah was introduced to Lord Chelmsford she greeted him in the Indian fashion with her hands pressed together in a namaskar. In those days that was unthinkable impertinence. The Viceroy, being her father's age, magnanimously overlooked her discourtesy.

"Mrs. Jinnah," he said, "when in Rome do as the Romans do."

"Your Excellency, that is exactly what I have done, isn't it?" she answered. "In India I have greeted you as Indians do."

Neither Jinnah nor his wife were people to humble themselves before their imperialist rulers. Neither did they put themselves out to conform with social usage. Jinnah had only two ambitions. One was to take part in the debates that were held in the Legislative Assembly and the other was to act as a bridge between the Muslim League and the Congress. The British Government's policy of divide and rule held no attractions for him at that time. He played no part in it, opposing it with all his strength.

Jinnah was no longer seen in the Congress after Gandhiji

launched his non-cooperation movement. Neither was he seen very often at the League. For some time he lived in seclusion. His family life was stormy. Ratanpriya died, leaving an infant daughter. The shadow of grief fell over him permanently. Was he able to keep his daughter? When she attained marriagable age she crossed the seas as the wife of the son of a wealthy Parsi Christian, against her father's wishes.

Shortly before her departure I saw them both, father and daughter in Calcutta. They had just come out of Firpo's and were awaiting their car. Behind them was a line of Bora and Khoja merchants. A luncheon party had apparently just concluded. I was on the point of entering a tailor's shop. The year was 1937. A provincial ministry had just been formed in Bengal but no ministry had yet been formed in provinces where the Congress had a majority.

Jinnah expected the old procedure would be followed and that the Governor would take the initiative, select ministers on his own responsibility and take two sets of people, one from the majority and another from the minorities, the way it was laid down in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Jinnah had never imagined that the ministers might be chosen by a person called the Chief Minister or that the leader of a majority would choose someone who did not enjoy the confidence of the minorities. Gandhi did forsee such a possibility. Until the Governor had given the Chief Ministers the power to do it he refused to permit the Congress to form any ministry at all. He took six months to think it over.

As a result of these tactics ministerial posts became the gifts of the Congress. The League would be appointed to such posts only if the Congress granted them. The posts could not be had by going to the Governor and asking for them. The Congress would have to be approached. Was a Muslim of Jinnah's distinction going to beg charity from a Hindu? Was it worthy of the British to turn him out on the street in such a manner? Were these methods going to be used in the Centre also? Would the Congress be the Donor and the League the Supplicator there as well? Was this to be the relationship between the two organisations? It was the same relationship that had obtained for so long between the British and the Indians.

Jinnah had, in the meantime, disbanded the Independent Party and replaced it in the Central Legislative Assembly by the League Parliamentary Party. He was the chairman. The Presidentship of the original Muslim League too was now within his grasp and he became the permanent President. Between the Muslim League of his youth and the Muslim League of his old age there was a difference. The early Muslim League had not envisaged a day when power would come into Indian hands and be taken over by the Congress. The Lucknow Pact might have made some provision for a development if it had. Jinnah was contemplating another Pact of a similar kind. But the Congress too had changed. It was now a fighting organisation and it was not likely to come to terms with any party that was not prepared to fight also.

The Congress had already announced that there were only two parties in the country, the British and the Congress. Muslims would have to join the Congress. They would receive whatever was their due from inside the Congress, as members of it and its representatives. Otherwise they would have to get it from the British, as their supporters. The Congress did not recognise any third party, a party consisting only of Muslims, dedicated to their interests alone. The British did. That was what irritated Jinnah.

When he had engineered the Lucknow Pact he had been a trusted leader both of the Congress and the League. He forgot that. At Lucknow he had been asked how he could be a member of the Congress. Was he not a Muslim? Was the Congress not Hindu? He had replied that he was in the Congress for the sake of the interests of the common people of India as a whole and that he was in the League for the sake of Muslims alone. At that time such a statement was not considered contradictory. There was no conflict between the special interests of the Muslim community and the interests of the common people as a whole. Other Muslim leaders also, like Jinnah, belonged to both organisations. Among them were Fazlul Huq, Majrul Huq, and Abul Kalam Azad. Congress had not yet become a political party nor had the League. The idea of a party came when the Swaraj Party was formed. Jinnah established his Independent Party at the same time. He remained a member of the Independent Party in the interests of the common

people of India. For him it was a substitute for Congress.

The politics of power had not yet appeared in India. Even the Swaraj Party did not aim at capturing power. During the thirties when the game of power politics started in earnest there was a general scramble and a lot of new parties put in an appearance. There was the Krishak Praja Party, the Unionist Party, both of which were organised at the time of the elections. Wherever they could, these parties formed ministries. Congress Muslims were not debarred from standing for election from Muslim polling centres. Therefore, in the Northwest Frontier Province, even though few Hindus lived there, Congressmen became the leaders. What took place in the Northwest Frontier Province proved that the Congress could not be equated with the Hindus.

The English have developed the habit of not seeing what they do not want to see. Nelson put the telescope to his blind eye in order that the British bombardment of Denmark could continue. He did not want to see Denmark's white flag. The British in India refused to see the plain fact that Congress represented the Muslims as well as the Hindus; yet they were surprised when Jinnah declared that the Muslim League was the one and only representative of all Indian Muslims. The Congress was thereby excluded. Jinnah denied its claim to act on behalf of any Muslim whatsoever. How could Jinnah remain a member of the Congress himself then? How could he act as a bridge between it and any other organisation? History cannot be dismissed with a word. The new policy of the Congress may not have been to his liking but did that mean it automatically became an exclusively Hindu party? Was the Congress preventing the League from joining any of the ministries? Was the Unionist Party not in power in the Punjab and the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal?

Jinnah did not, like Nelson, put a telescope to a blind eye. He used a monocle. With one unglassed organ of vision he saw that the Muslim League was the only organisation devoted solely to Muslim interests. There was a cunning political move behind this sudden change of attitude. Congress Muslim Ministers would be forced to resign if the Congress could be forced or tricked into recognising his claim. Congress Muslim ministers would also be forced out of office if the British Government acknow-

ledged the sole representative character of the League. Their places would then be taken by nominees of the League.

When League ministers joined Congress ministries these ministries would no longer belong only to the Congress. The Chief Minister would lose his power for he could exercise it only on behalf of the Hindus. Any ordinary minister would become his equal. The British system of obedience to a single minister, the Prime Minister, was new to India. It was a recent importation and was strangled at the outset. The custom of accepting all responsibility jointly by the ministers as a unit was nipped in the bud. No Cabinet system could evolve. The cooperation of Jinnah was considered so valuable that the most important pillar of the British Parliamentary system, a Prime Minister, and joint responsibility of the cabinet was sacrificed for his sake.

Jinnah began to say that parliamentary democracy would not work in India. That was exactly what the British were saying. Jinnah was an experienced and skilful parliamentarian. In making that assertion he falsified his own life. He had been elected to the Legislative Assembly at its inception and remained a member to the end. Even Malaviya did not have as long a record. If his assertion was true Nazimuddin had no place in Bengal. Jinnah owed his own position to parliamentary democracy. Yet he claimed that a minority had the right to veto a majority. If the veto was given to Muslims in Congress provinces it would have to be given to the Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab also. On top of this the question of Muslim weightage at the Centre was raised. A third of the seats was demanded. Who was going to agree to that? People were driven to exasperation by MacDonald's communal Award.

Jinnah hoped that coalitions would be established in the provincial ministries. He did not take an extreme step for that reason. But when these ministries resigned over the war issue he realised their withdrawal was intended to pressurise the British into forming a Central Government that would also be a Congress Government or at least dominated by the Congress. Majority rule would prevail there too. Representatives of minorities would not be allowed to participate in it unless they were members of the Congress. Muslims elected by the majority would be there. Jinnah, alarmed, took the plunge.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

END OF WAR : GENERAL ELECTIONS

No Muslim party except the Khaksars seconded the Muslim League's proposal to divide India. It was a proposal aimed at killing two birds with one stone, the mixed leadership of the Congress and Muslim leadership outside the League. Congress Muslims could be defeated at the polls over the issue of Pakistan. Other Muslim organisations like the Krishak Praja, the Unionist, the Ahrar, etc., could be wiped out of existence. Two parties and two parties only would be left, the Muslim League and the Congress. The League would be the sole representative of the Muslims and the Congress the sole representative of the Hindus. The supreme leader of one would be Jinnah. The other would be led by Gandhi. Both parties would have High Commands. Both would have parliamentary boards.

The Muslim League leaders did not foresee that the country would actually be partitioned. All they wanted to ensure was that the majority would not rule. A kind of balance had to be struck between the majority and the minority, a dyarchy of a sort created, in which each would have equal power and prestige. It was like setting two monarchs on a single throne, two heirs to the British kingdom. Neither was to be greater or lesser than the other. What one wanted could not be set aside just because the other had the majority of votes. Did it not have the power to veto? An overall parity would be maintained. Whenever a dispute arose it would be referred to a third authority, the British crown, for a settlement.

If this arrangement proved unworkable, if the British really and truly withdrew, the only other solution acceptable to the Muslim League was the partition of the country. Rejection by the Muslim League meant rejection by every Muslim in India. Why were the Muslims lumped together and labelled a community? Were the Muslims not a nation? Were they not entitled to a homeland of their own, a separate sovereign country? A state with its own armed forces, its own allies? The Hindus were also

a nation. They could have a homeland of their own, a separate sovereign state with its own armed forces, its own allies. What a splendid solution! Bicentralisation.

Jinnah reached this position after nearly ten years. He did not move from dyarchy to bicentralisation in a day any more than Rome was built in a day. When the provincial ministries were formed by the Congress he was in favour of dyarchy. When the ministries resigned and took up non-cooperation and satyagraha he turned to bicentralisation out of apprehension, fearing that the Centre would also fall into the hands of the Congress.

Jinnah had been mystified by Gandhi's pronouncements during the Round Table Conference. Gandhi had a large Muslim following at that time and it had participated in the struggle under his leadership. Before provision had been made for his followers no other Muslim organisation could be given anything when the time came to divide the spoils at the conclusion of the movement. It was for that reason Gandhi made no commitments of any kind. Jinnah was in the dark.

Jinnah decided to remain in Britain. Four years later Liaquat Ali Khan persuaded him to return. The Muslim League was reorganised. During those four years Jinnah did more than practise as a lawyer in the Privy Council. He studied fluctuating opinion in the English public, parliament and government, following its changing currents closely. His understanding of British policy was better even than Gandhi's. The rules of procedure and conventions of practice were at his finger tips. To Gandhi this appeared impossible for a man so opposed to parliamentary procedure.

Jinnah, for his part, did not suspect that Gandhi, in violation of all parliamentary conventions, would one day consent to the formation of ministries in the provinces by the Congress and convert a parliamentary programme into a struggle. It was in the nature of a war, the parties to which were the Congress and the British Government. The interests of the Muslim minority were trod underfoot by both in the excitement of the fray. The Muslims claimed representation in the ministries. They came forward to take their rightful share of power. They did not join the battle. They expected that the new ministers would be men in whom they

had confidence. Why should the ministers be men who enjoyed the confidence of the Hindus?

Jinnah had always felt that the special rights of the Muslims were as valid as the rights of the common people as a whole. He wanted an adjustment between them, an adjustment that would not involve sacrificing either to the other. At the Round Table Conference he found that Gandhi was not interested in anything but the welfare of the common people of India as a whole. Everything else could wait. Let the struggle for freedom be brought to a successful conclusion first. Jinnah's thoughts did not run in those channels. The minorities should first be assured that the majority would not be all-powerful after independence. Out-and-out democracy cannot work in a country with strong minorities. Pure majority rule is not acceptable. Self-rule, Swaraj, implies a number of checks and balances. Swaraj was desirable certainly and what checks and what balances would come with it should be decided in advance.

India is not England. The Congress and the League could not govern the country by turns like the Conservatives and the Labour party. The Indian electorate was split up in a way that the Muslim League could never win a majority either at the Centre or in six of the provinces. It could never disregard other parties in the formation of a government. The Congress on the contrary, had a permanent majority and therefore was able to form governments as it liked, without consulting others' wishes.

The hopes of the Muslim League focussed on the five remaining provincial legislatures and local ministries. One of them, Assam, was not exactly a Muslim majority state. European mercantile interests and the hill people, if they threw in their lot with the Muslims, made the difference. An alliance had to be formed with them. The Northwest Frontier was aligned with the Congress, but the hold of the Congress could be loosened by appealing to the people in the name of Islam. The Muslim League had no influence in the Punjab, but it would gain popularity quickly enough if the carrot of Pakistan was dangled in front of its Mohammedan population. In Bengal it woud be enough either to capture the Krishak Praja Party or smash it. The rest would be done by European businessmen.

Jinnah calculated that the Congress would lose the forthcoming

elections in the Northwest Frontier Province and in Assam, that the Unionists would lose in the Punjab. Sindh did not worry him. Sindh was certain to fall to his share. The trouble was with Bengal. Fazlul Huq was a powerful rival. An effort had to be made to bring him back into the League. If that could be done no problem remained.

The League would be very nearly the equal of the Congress if it could win the elections and form governments in five provinces. Congress would have six provinces, the League five. The score was almost even. The difference was not great. Could the League not claim that if six seats were allotted to the Congress at the Centre, five should go to the League? Six ministers could not over-rule five. If they tried to, the Viceroy would intervene. Or the League would insist upon the partition of the country.

This demand was a last resort, kept in reserve like a trump card. Jinnah knew that partition would entail the division of the League itself, the splitting of the Muslim community. Why should the Muslim community consent? Though some might gain, others were certain to lose. How was he going to claim that all Muslims favoured the formation of Pakistan or that Pakistan was the homeland of all Indian Muslims?

The hesitation was inner. The word Pakistan was not used in the 1940 resolution of the League. Muslim India was referred to in the plural. Several Muslim Indias were being thought of. At least that was what Bengali Muslims were given to understand. They were all afraid that the Center would be captured by Hindus. What they wanted was a kind of bicentralisation, two Centers instead of one.

Jinnah and Gandhi talked for eighteen days. Gandhi went to Jinnah's residence again and again. Jinnah did not return the courtesy once. The talks ultimately broke down.

The question of whether the Hindus and Muslims belonged to one nation or two was debated in endless correspondence to little purpose. Gandhi was evasive about the only thing that could have prevented partition, Hindu-Muslim League partnership. That would have entailed a coalition government not only in all the provinces but at the Centre as well. It was no secret that the partnership proposal would result in de facto partition. No, neither partnership nor partition was acceptable. The only

other alternative, if there was one, was rotation, ruling the country by turns, the Congress ruling for five years and the League for five, one after the other. The Central and Provincial Governments would change as the wheel turned, passing from the hands of the Congress to the hands of the League and back again.

Gandhi put forward a plan for decentralisation over and over again in the early years of the struggle. After the failure of the Cripps Mission he brought up the subject again. Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier and Sindh were Muslim provinces, forming a tight block in the West. Bengal, Assam and the Punjab were Muslim provinces too, less compactly situated. The Muslims in these provinces could be granted the right to determine their own fate. Let them make known through the vote whether they wished to remain in the Indian Union or secede from it. If their verdict was in favour of secession a separate state should be set up for them as soon as possible after independence. Foreign policy could be handled by a joint authority constituted by the two states concerned. With it would go defence, railways, telegraph, customs and other associated departments.

The Congress and the League would have ruled their own separate states while at the same time submitting to a higher authority that was joint and of their own making. But would the majority and minority question not arise there also? Would every appointment and every promotion not give rise to a dispute? Whose word would be final, acceptable to both parties—the Congress's or the League's? Did Gandhi think at the time that the Congress and the League would agree on foreign policy and defence? The League always imitated British policy closely. They had hidden bonds with Britain. Were they going to sever those bonds for the sake of the Congress? Jinnah was unwilling. He smelt Congress domination in everything. He was not going to accept any proposal that might lead to the overlordship of the Congress. He had differences with the Congress in other matters also. He differed from Gandhi in regard to the procedure that should be followed. Gandhi was prepared to talk such matters over after the British departed. Jinnah wanted them settled in advance. Gandhi regarded that as equivalent to secession. Jinnah regarded it as equivalent to partition. Jinnah also insisted that the areas to go to Pakistan would be chosen by the

Muslim vote alone and some of the proposed areas were at the moment in both Hindu and Muslim hands.

Gandhi knew many Muslims were on his side, but he did not realise how few had taken part in the August Movement. They either remained neutral or left Gandhi's camp to join Jinnah's. Those who had been neutral up to that time joined Jinnah. The Muslim League ministry in Bengal passed several laws that were of benefit to the peasants and workers. The peasants and workers were, for the most part, Muslims. The Muslim League won their support for their communal policies by appealing to their class interests. Class and denominational interests fused. The humble Muslims would very probably have voted for the Congress if the Congress ministries, instead of resigning, had passed measures of benefit to them. When we look at it from this angle the resignation of the Congress Ministries was harmful.

Once Jinnah had made up his mind what his goal was, he stuck to it. The failure of his talks with Gandhi in no way hampered him. He enjoyed both the trust of the Muslim section of the common people and the confidence of the British imperialists. He kept his hold on both with great skill. It is a mystery how he did it. Were the common people not Indians? British imperialists stood at one pole and the common people at the other. There was no meeting ground between them. What could the common people describe themselves as, if not Indian?

Jinnah had at one time acted as a bridge between Indian nationalism and Muslim separatism. He now resumed his bridge-building role, acting as a link between Muslim separatism and British imperialism. The inevitable result was a polarisation between separatists and nationalists. There was an unprecedented surge of ill-will between Muslims and Hindus. What had been inconceivable at the commencement of World War II became, by hook or crook, not only conceivable but feasible before it was over. Hindus and Muslims refused to share the same homeland. The two-nation theory came to their aid and reinforced the fanaticism. People gave their consent to a falsehood of such a magnitude. They did not hesitate to do it!

The Muslims had never lived under Hindu rule. That was true. They had, like the Hindus, been British subjects. Congress rule was identified in their minds with Hindu rule. "What?"

a distinguished Muslim of the Northwest Frontier Province cried scathingly, making a reference to the Congress years before, towards the close of the nineteenth century, "Shall we become slaves of our own slaves?" The Muslims were of the lineage of Badshahs. They belonged to a ruling race. The British also belonged to a ruling race. They had more in common with them than with India's humble millions.

Muslims leaders contented themselves with minority status within the Indian fold at the time of the Round Table Conference. Their attitude changed gradually. Such a status ceased to satisfy them. They aspired to a majority at the Center. Unless they got it they wanted a separate state. They did not claim the whole of India as their homeland but only those parts of it where Muslims were in a majority and, of course, Assam. This change of attitude developed during the thirties. Jinnah himself had not gone that far yet. The change in his thinking did not become noticeable until the forties. Minority status was also repugnant to him.

To Jinnah, Pakistan was a status symbol just as Congress was a status symbol for Gandhi. Both men were unshakeable about questions of status. The obstacle in the way of the Congress was the British Raj; the obstacle in the way of the League was Congress Raj. They were irreconcilable; the differences were fundamental. There was no way of getting around them. The British might have quit India and left the Hindus and Muslims to come to an agreement by themselves. If they failed, some provinces would have seceded and a separate state been established. The two new separate states could then have negotiated agreements of various kinds and dealt with matters concerning the interests of both jointly, by mutual agreement, in a kind of loose confederation. More than that was not possible.

To arrive at a point where such an agreement was feasible entailed a great deal of bartering; a price would have to be paid. To Jinnah that was repugnant. What did Gandhi have to give? Would Congress agree? Congress favoured a strong Center. It did not, as a matter of policy, favour bicentralisation.

World War II ended before the year was out. The British Raj, faithful to its promises, started renewed talks. All parties to the talks met at Simla. Lord Wavell, fresh from the battle-

field, was the Viceroy. He placed the new proposals before them. Certain changes in the Executive Council were suggested. The C-in-C was to be the only British member. The right to intervene would be retained by the Viceroy, but he would refrain from exercising it as far as possible. The Indian members would be their own masters in nearly every respect.

Wavell allotted an equal number of seats to Muslims and caste Hindus. Congress raised objections but it did not insist. Jinnah insisted that he and he alone would have the right to decide all matters in regard to Muslim representation. No Congress Muslim would be permitted to become a member nor could any Muslim belonging to the Unionist Party could become a member either. The Viceroy found this difficult. The family of Hayat Khan in the Punjab was the most loyal to the British Raj, of all the Muslims. Sikander was not there. His kinsman, Khijar, was the Chief Minister. Khijar could not be antagonised just to please Jinnah. It was better to abandon the Simla talks. Wavell called for a general election.

Chapter Twenty-Two

THE SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF MUSLIMS

The Muslims had ruled over India for five and a half centuries. They regarded the Battle of Plassey as a temporary set-back. Their overlordship had been unbroken up to that time and they wept while they counted the days, as months became years and years became a century. They did not learn English nor accept employment under the foreigners who had supplanted them. The nineteenth century was not real to them; they failed to grasp its significance.

Their hope of regaining power led them to take part in the Sepoy Mutiny. They aspired to overlordship for another five and a half centuries. The British smashed their dreams irrevocably in a most cruel manner. Many parts of the Red Fort crumbled under the British cannon. The last heirs to the throne of the Moghuls were executed. The Badshah himself was exiled to Burma. The policy of the new rulers was to ensure that the Muslims would never again raise their heads.

The Hindus, like the realists they were, did not hesitate to learn English, took jobs under the British, fell into step with the times and marched ahead. They quickly forged at least fifty years ahead of the Muslims. The Muslim leaders began to realise it after the Sepoy Mutiny. The Hindus had a headstart in every field of activity, both in the earning of a livelihood and in their way of life. The Muslims were no match for them in open competition. Some special arrangement had to be made quickly. It was only possible if friendly relations were established with the British and carefully cultivated. Sir Syed Ahmed fathered this policy in the interest of the Muslims towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Aligarh University is a permanent monument to his achievement.

Sir Syed regarded the Congress with mistrust. He was afraid the Congress would replace the British. The opposition party inherits the rulership of a country. What would the plight of the Muslims be then? Sir Syed and others like him had been

praying for the speedy end of the British Raj for a hundred years. Now they began to pray with equal fervour for the continuation of the Raj. People who had pulled in their belts to turn the British out of India now pulled them in a little tighter in the effort to keep them here. The next step, logically, was the setting up of the Muslim League. It was preceded by the first partition of Bengal.

Bengal, in those days, comprised an area that included Bihar and Orissa. Assam belonged to it for a time. It was unwieldy for many reasons and Lord Curzon proposed to divide it for administrative convenience. The new province was to consist of Bengal with a part of Orissa and a part of Chhota Nagpur. The name was to be Jharkhand or something similar. Curzon visited Mymensingh and reported, on his return, that the Padma River was the natural geographical boundary between the two new provinces. One would lie on either side of it. Assam and East Bengal would be the name of the area on the eastern bank. There were many advantages in such an arrangement.

Noakhali and its neighbouring districts were almost unmanagable from Calcutta. Not even minor officials ever went there, not to speak of the Governor. If Dacca became the capital of the new province of Assam, East Bengal officials would have to go and it would become easier for them to do so. The distance would be considerably reduced. In reply to Lord Curzon the Secretary of State wrote that he did not understand why the name Jharkhand should be abandoned now, after so much progress had been made towards its realisation. Curzon, in order to strengthen his case for an Eastern province consisting of Assam and East Bengal, let the cat out of the bag. It was to be a Muslim majority province. An excellent arrangement!

The Bengalis had, almost unnoticed, become conscious of their racial identity and developed the adhesive mentality of a nation in the meantime. A manifesto was drawn up in order to block the division of the provinces. The word 'nation' was used in it for the first time. The Swadeshi Movement was launched. Bombs exploded, guns barked. Englishmen and Englishwomen lost their lives. Bengal was reunited, but Orissa and Bihar were detached from it. The British reversed their policy. Provinces were no longer to be formed on a sectarian basis. It was

wise to make provision for religious differences through separate electorates. The Sikhs and other minority communities as well as the Muslims could be satisfied in this way. Nobody would be alienated.

The newly established Muslim League took up the demand for separate electorates. The highly esteemed Aga Khan himself petitioned Lord Minto, urging him to make a statement to the effect that Hindus should vote for Hindu representatives at Hindu polls and Muslims for Muslim representatives at Muslim polls. Lord Morley was Secretary of State at the time. He accepted the Viceroy's recommendation, or at least appeared to acquiesce in it. I have heard he did not approve of it personally and only carried out the wishes of his superiors.

Parliamentary democracy was maimed at the outset. An unnatural creature was born, a pair of Siamese twins. The struggle to turn it into a normal healthy thing was the object of the Indian fight for independence. The Raj decreed that Congress was for the Hindus, the League for the Muslims and that whatever favours they cared to bestow upon their subjects must be distributed equally between them. The halves would thereupon be joined together in a unity that was monstrous.

In spite of that, nearly all political parties in India aligned themselves with the Congress and members of all communities became its members. Many of them were supporters of the British Raj and others were extremists. The members of the Muslim League supported the British Raj without exception although there were one or two men of independent minds among them. Jinnah was one. He was given a place in the Congress, in the front rank. Although Jinnah, like Mrs. Besant, was not considered as extreme as Lal, Bal and Pal, his views were close to theirs. Jinnah ultimately joined hands with Tilak and framed the Lucknow Pact.

How his mind was working at that time is obvious from the following statement:

"The main principles on which the first All-India Muslim political organisation was based was the retention of the Muslim communal individuality strong and unimpaired in any constitutional readjustment that might be made in India in the course of its political evolution. The creed has grown and broadened with the

growth of political life and thought in the community. In its general outlook and ideal as regards the future the All-India Muslim League stands abreast of the Indian National Congress and is ready to participate in any patriotic efforts for the advancement of the country as a whole."

No Muslim politician of the time was more patriotic than Jinnah. He was the foremost of those who were described at that time as Nationalist Muslims. They differed from the group which centered around Aligarh.

There was yet another type of Muslim leader. Some adhered neither to the Muslim League nor to Aligarh. They did not believe in parliamentary politics; they did not want official patronage in the matter of jobs. They were dedicated to one thing, the glory of Islam. They concerned themselves with ways to increase its power in the world and add to its glory. By power they understood both political power and military power. They owed their place in India not so much to the fact that they were Indians but to the fact that they belonged to a ruling race. Had not Muslims ruled India for centuries? Was it not from them that the British had taken power? They would have ruled for many more centuries if the British had not appeared on the scene. They dreamt that the rise of Turkey, of Iran, of Afghanistan and other Islamic countries would have an effect on the British and eventually compel them to give up India.

Muslims of this type had very little connection with the Hindus. There was no common ground between the communities where they could meet. They looked upon the Hindus as their natural subjects. When their royal status was restored the Hindus would owe them allegiance again, just as they had in the past. They could not think of the Congress becoming the heir to the British Raj. It was inconceivable. If such a thing should happen the Congress would be only a mask for the British Raj. Had not the British taught the Congress all that it knew? These Muslims had a deep aversion to English education. They regarded even Aligarh as a bastion of the British Raj. And they had no respect for Muslim politicians. To their way of thinking Jinnah was not a proper Muslim at all. And what kind of a Muslim was the Aga Khan?

At the time of World War I Muslims loyal to the British Raj

became the enemies of Turkey. Some of them even fought in the British armed forces. Pan-Islam's cause was jeopardised. Some Muslims were sent into exile. Others were imprisoned for anti-British speeches. Others left the country of their own accord. Ordinary Muslims kept quiet. For the first time they realised how isolated they were. They were powerless to save their beloved Turkey from defeat. Were the holy places of Islam not to be protected? Were they to be taken away from the Caliphate? Who was to speak up? Do anything? How? Where were the arms that would be needed? Turkey itself, with all its panoply of power, horses, elephants and men, had been defeated. The adherents of the Caliph, the Khilafatists, were hesitant. What could they do?

Gandhi appeared out of the sky when they were plunged in despair. He had a weapon called satyagraha at his disposal and he knew how to use it. The Khilafatists made him their leader. Non-cooperation was designed for their use. The Congress only took it up later. Gandhi was the leader of the Khilafatists before he became the leader of the Congress.

Gandhi embarked upon leadership with satyagraha. The Congress did not launch it the first time. An organisation called the *satyagraha sabha* was in charge.

The Congress was transformed into a satyagraha sabha by slow degrees. One by one old leaders left, Jinnah, Mrs. Besant, Malaviya. Mass civil disobedience did not appeal to them, nor did they like the idea of non-cooperation. What good did it do to put the qualifying adjective 'non-violent' in front of these terms if the common people did not know what it implied and were in no way prepared for it? And why should ethics or religion be dragged into politics at all? It did not matter whether the religion was Hinduism or Islam. To mix religion with politics was not the practice in any other country in the modern world. It was not done. No doubt such a mixture had an attraction for the common people. It gave added importance to the party. But it added nothing to the glory of religion and in no way increased the people's knowledge of political practice.

It is a mistake to assume that they left the Congress out of a reluctance to go to prison, or because they could not forego the pleasures of attendance in the Legislative Assembly and the Courts.

They left because of the change in the temper of the Congress. They no longer felt comfortable in it. The Congress of Gandhi was so strong and so popular that their departure did not weaken it in any way. They had isolated themselves. No other political organisation could compare with it. Jinnah was trying to ride two boats at once, a foot in each. If he lost his footing in one could he keep it in the other?

Gandhi and Jinnah were good friends at one time. Jinnah hurried to Bardoli to warn Gandhi that the British were bringing in the armed forces in order to crush his movement. It was better for Gandhi, Jinnah said, to see Lord Reading, the Viceroy at the time. He was prepared to arrange a meeting.

Mass satyagraha terminated. Gandhi went to prison. The Khilafatist was disappointed. Gandhi gradually moved away from the leadership of the movement. The few Muslims left in the Congress lost any illusion they might have retained when they saw the fate of the Khilafat at the hands of Kamal Pasha. They abandoned Pan-Islam and devoted themselves to the cause of Indian nationalism: Indian nationalism vs. British imperialism. They made their choice. Abul Kalam Azad identified himself entirely with Gandhi. So did Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Dr. Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan.

How could Gandhi do what Jinnah suggested, disregarding loyal colleagues of this calibre? They were his own men, his comrades in adversity as well as in prosperity. To think of settling the Hindu-Muslim question without reference to them was inconceivable. Jinnah was disappointed. So were Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali. Gandhi maintained cordial relations with his former colleagues but he acted only on the advice of his closest Muslim friends, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Ansari, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Hakim Ajmal Khan.

Where, in all this was any trace of orthodox Hinduism? Were Gandhi's friends only Hindus? Were these men not good Muslims? Was the advice they gave contrary to the interests of Muslims, detrimental to Islam? The Muslim members of the Congress had always regarded British imperialism as their chief enemy. The Congress had always had such members. They all agreed that British imperialism had priority. It had to be eliminated first. Before that was done the question of who would in-

herit what did not arise. Nothing should be done to strengthen the position of the British. Domestic problems should not be discussed with them. The Mahatma was a man they respected and liked, not because he was a Hindu but because he was a sincere anti-imperialist.

They did not look upon the Hindus as enemies of the Muslims or vice versa. The Hindus had a fifty-year headstart. How could they be blamed for that? If the Muslims tried hard enough they could overtake them. Jobs are not the be-all and end-all of a man's life. Were not many young men participating in the non-cooperation movement? There are many more important questions in relation to which it is irrelevant whether men are Hindus or Muslims. One and all they were Indians, one and all they were subjects, one and all they were oppressed, one and all they were impoverished. Gandhi took up the work of building up the country economically. His workers went to parliament in the interests of the poor and oppressed people, and they left parliament for the same reason.

Gandhi welcomed all Muslims, inviting them very cordially to join the Congress. If all had joined, it would have been proven beyond a doubt that the common interests of the Indian people were the same for everyone. The Muslim minority had certain special needs. It was not equipped to compete with the Hindus in a straightforward fight. Muslims would not be able to enter the Cabinet, the Councils, the courts or offices unless special provision was made for them. Neither would Muslims in large enough numbers find places in schools and colleges if they were pitted against Hindus in their examinations. Muslim leaders who were aware of the factors involved therefore thought it advisable to form an association independent of the Congress that was devoted solely to the removal of the special handicaps from which their community suffered. The League developed out of this awareness of special problems. The Muslim leaders were also aware that there was no inherent conflict between the special needs of Muslims and the needs of the Indian people as a whole. What was in the interest of the common people of India was also in their interest. These interests were shared by all alike. It was for this reason that many joined the Congress as well as the League. There was no law against belonging to both organisations at the

same time, but dual membership gradually ceased to be the general practice. The reason was that the British Raj was more sympathetic to their special problems than the Congress. The Congress would not and could not make any commitments until Swaraj was an accomplished fact.

Congress had learned by experience that whenever it agreed to any concessions the British Government immediately came forward with a higher bid and offered advances. The Muslims pocketed what the British gave and held out their hands to Congress for more, asking for a share of what had been won by the competence and strength of the Hindus alone. This kind of thing could go on forever. No claim they made was announced as the last one. Another was brought forward as soon as one was satisfied. The British invariably went one better than the Congress or held out hopes of more in the future.

A game of this kind was played better outside the Congress. This was not realised all at once. It came to be understood little by little. Those most alert to their special requirements remained outside the Congress organisation, extending one hand permanently to the British and the other to the Congress. The Congress was intent upon the interests of the common people as a whole. The League was intent upon its special interest. Neither looked at the other. The time when they should have looked passed. The Congress gave precedence to the Muslims within its organisation. Others took second place. The League gave precedence to the British Raj. The Congress took second place. It became impossible to bridge the rift between the two organisations. The hand the League had held out to the Congress clenched its fist for a fight.

The turn Lord Curzon gave to the wheel of destiny came full circle forty years later. The first partition of Bengal was followed by separate electorates. Separate electorates were followed by the partition of India.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

INTERIM GOVERNMENT

If one party to a dispte remains non-violent the other cannot go on using violence all by itself for long. Hands cannot clap separately. There is no clap unless the other party is there to act as a sounding board. Violence is soon expended if there is no object to expend it on and no retaliation. It stops of itself.

This happens only if one party is non-violent and non-sectarian. After the August Movement the faith of the people in non-violence began to wane noticeably. Yet Gandhi's prestige was undiminished. It was paradoxical. What was more exciting was the news that Subhas Chandra Bose had raised a regular armed force and was marching towards India in the role of Netaji. Ladies in the families of Government officials were heard singing his marching song, *'kadam kadam baraiye ja'*. We had never imagined a time would come when violence would be so popular. The Mahatma's teaching had not gone very deep.

In addition religious fanaticism was raising its head everywhere, all over the country. Fanaticism was eager to combat fanaticism, to force a showdown. The year was 1944. I had taken leave and was living in Bihar. There I came to know that the RSS on the one hand and the Khaksars on the other were organising themselves and taking training in the use of weapons. The arms they had were not ones that would frighten the British, and the Government had not forbidden their use. But the common people who were either Hindus or Muslims were apprehensive, not without reason. My friend, a Government official, said definitely that a crisis was brewing which would reach a climax at the time of the departure of the British.

It was against this background that the talks between Gandhi and Jinnah took place. How could Jinnah believe that the Hindus would remain non-violent or that they were non-sectarian, that they would not make use of their brute majority inside and outside the parliament to keep the minorities down? Could he be blamed for worrying over the future of his fellow Muslims?

A free people frame the rules of the game they play and change them also, at will. Ahimsa and satyagraha were used as long as the British were in India. When the British were gone, when there were no more bayonets, the rules could be easily changed. Force and violence could be adopted. Parliamentary democracy was popular at the moment. After the British left, when their parliament no longer exercised any influence or imposed any restraint, dictatorship might be preferred and a war-like policy with it. Communal amity and nationalism were the current slogans, but when the country reverted to conditions that prevailed a few centuries ago, rejecting the modern age, might th policy adopted not become Hindu Raj and the repression of the Muslims?

How was the majority going to treat the minorities when the checks imposed by foreign rule were removed? Nobody could give any guarantee that they would be treated fairly. A written constitution was not considered an adequate safeguard. The majority could tear up the constitution at any time. The country could be ruled by the naked sword. Ths minority Muslims would have nowhere to go. Pakistan would provide them with a place of refuge in case of need. It was difficult to get there. No seas had to be crossed, no mountains scaled. A few steps over level ground and you were there. Pakistan was not farther away than that.

Similar arguments were once mooted in Ireland. Jinnah knew all the details of the Irish struggle. The Irish nationalists were forced to agree to the formation of Ulster. There was no alternative. The Indian National Congress would have to concede Pakistan too. Unless they did the British parliament would not pass the bill granting them freedom. Unless their freedom was legalised it would be difficult for them to accomplish much. It would not be easy to command the loyalty of the army. The Muslim regiments would certainly refuse to obey. Swaraj without the backing of the armed forces was a castle in the air.

Jinnah's duty now was to persuade the Muslim voters in the general election that was impending to give their sanction to the Pakistan proposed by the Muslim League. The fight for Pakistan would be half over if the Muslims voted for it in a solid block. The rest of the battle would have to be fought out on the roads,

in the towns and villages, in markets and fields. Jinnah hinted at what was to come, to Edward Thompson much earlier. Nobody took the hint seriously. But it was becoming more and more clear that unless an agreement between the Hindus and Muslims was reached before the British left India their departure would be the signal for a furious civil war.

A war of succession! Who was to inherit India from the British? Was India to belong to the common people of India as a whole or to only about seventy-five per cent of them, those who were Hindus by religion? Jinnah did not think that any organisation existed that represented the Indian people as a whole. The Congress, which claimed to, actually represented only a fraction of them. The common people of India did not vote together at any single polling booth. The Muslims voted separately and so did the Hindus. Muslims and Hindus had separate regiments in the armed forces. So did the Sikhs and the Rajputs. What good could be done by summoning a Constituent Assembly in such a country? Could a constitution be drawn up at all? Majority rule was unacceptable. In India a majority meant a sectarian majority, not a political one. The Congress majority in the Legislative Assembly was answerable only to the Hindu electorate, not to the Muslim voters, with the exception of course of Congress Muslims.

Quaide Azam Jinnah planned his moves with an eye to the general elections. He was rewarded. In most places his supporters were voted to power. But whom did he defeat? He defeated the other Muslim parties, not the Hindus nor the Sikhs. Other Muslim parties were not in favour of Pakistan. That was their only offence. The number of votes they got was large. The League won by a narrow margin. 51% of the votes was enough to bring the League into power but that did not necessarily mean that the other 49% was negligible or unrepresentative of a large section of Muslim opinion. Many Muslim voters cast votes blindly without any understanding of what it was they were voting for and many remained neutral. A large number of Muslims were not allowed to vote at all. The right to vote was not given to everybody on the attainment of a certain age. To assume that the League had the solid backing of all Indian Muslims is a mistake of a very grave nature. Very few had any inkling of the

implications. How could they know that once Pakistan was created they would automatically become aliens in the country they had always regarded as their own, in which they had lived for countless generations?

But Jinnah got what he wanted. He had proved that he had the backing of the majority of Muslim voters. The next step was to get the Hindus and Sikhs to agree. If they did not yield to persuasion there would have to be an open confrontation. To defeat them openly was a hard task. But Jinnah was prepared for it. He knew that even if he lost he could use the fact of his defeat as an argument in favour of Pakistan when presenting his case to the British parliament. The life and property of the Muslim minority would not be safe unless Pakistan was granted. It was a place where they could find refuge and security.

The British Cabinet sent three of its members to India after the general elections to make an assessment of the situation on the spot and decide what had to be done accordingly. Their mission was to try to effect an agreement between the League and the Congress. If they failed, the British Government would do what it felt necessary in the circumstances. The Congress and the League had stopped talking to each other, so the British ministers met them separately. They consulted Gandhi also but they did not exactly negotiate with him. The British were extremely annoyed with Gandhi at that time. They felt that he had prevented the Congress from accepting the Cripps Proposals. The Congress itself was on the point of agreeing and would have done so unprotestingly if it had not been for Gandhi. The British had followed a policy of excluding Gandhi from the Congress ever since, seeking by every means in their power to alienate the Congress members from their leader. They were polite to Gandhi, showing him all the respect due to a venerable elder but they were, all the time, tampering with the loyalty of the organisation which he had fathered. The stock of the Congress rose, that of the League declined.

The Cabinet Mission was not empowered to impose anything on anybody. All it could do was to make a proposal. The parties concerned were left free to accept or reject it. The Cabinet Mission had a most tempting offer in its bag. That offer would be made to the party that accepted their proposal in its entirety.

The Viceroy was on the point of reconstituting his Executive Council. All the posts were to be given to Indians. The C-in-C would not be a member. The Council would therefore be a genuine Indian Cabinet. The Viceroy agreed to forego even the portfolio of foreign affairs and abstain from exercising his right to intervene. He retained this right but promised to use it only in extraordinary circumstances. The Government thus formed was to be known as the Interim Government.

Once more the leaders of the country were faced with the question of 'to be or not to be,' like Hamlet. Congress wondered whether to accept or not to accept. So did the League. The proposal dangled before them by the Cabinet Mission was not a carrot but a rat. Would they or wouldn't they?

The Cabinet Mission also held out the assurance that the British Parliament would approve of the constitution Indians drew up for themselves, that the British would not reserve any powers. Indians should agree among themselves. No one party should try to impose its will upon the other and minorities should not be obstructive. The proposal submitted by the Cabinet Mission contemplated one centre, not two. The Center would control foreign affairs, defence, finance and transport. All other matters were to be dealt with by the provinces. These were to be joined together in three groups. Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, the Central Province, Bihar and Orissa were to belong to one group. Punjab, Sindh and the Northwest Frontier would belong to a second group. Bengal and Assam would form the third. Each of the three groups was to decide separately which portfolios were of general interest and which of special interest. Withdrawal from any group was permissible and no province would be forced to align itself unwillingly with any other. At the outset, however, it was suggested that the provinces join and give the proposals a chance to work. The same provisions were made for the princely states.

There was a snag but it was cleverly concealed. In the beginning it was not apparent. The Northwest Frontier Province and the Northeast frontier, Assam, would, inevitably, both pass under the control of the Muslim League. The League was being given five provinces. The two frontier areas were of great strategic importance. The position of the Muslims was a strong one

They acquired considerable bargaining power. The question of the balance of power arose.

This was not the decentralisation envisaged by Gandhi and Azad, nor was it the bicentralisation of Jinnah's conception. It was both and neither. There were to be two Pakistans, one on either side of India with a Hindustan in the middle and the Center on top. The princely states were to be represented but it was not clear whether the representatives would be elected or nominated. The fate of the Sikhs was also uncertain.

The Congress would have to surrender all claim to Assam and Bengal if it accepted the proposal. Also to the Northwest Frontier. This was something to which Gandhi could not agree. Was the Cabinet Mission to go home a failure? If so Britain would not come forward with any more suggestions. Negotiations would be broken off. Congress would have to go back to prison after its brief spell of freedom. The formation of local provincial governments would not suffice to maintain the prestige of the Congress any more. There had to be some change at the Centre. The Leftists would rebel otherwise. People would mock.

Did the Cabinet Mission proposals have to be swallowed? Yes. Gandhi was reluctant to resort to mass satyagraha. The times were not propitious. There was no indication that the tide had turned and begun to rise. The temper of the people was unruly, restless, wild. Anarchy was close. He did not want a repetition of the August rising. It was better, he concluded, for the Congress to return to the parliamentary programme. It was better that the proposed Constituent Assembly be called. At the same time he hinted that another interpretation might be put on the situation in Assam. The League was also prepared to accept the proposals in order to pave the way for its participation in the Interim Government.

The two parties however failed to reach an agreement about the Interim Government. The League demanded parity with the Congress or, in lieu of parity, the veto. The Congress wanted at least one more seat than the League. It was unwilling to give the League the veto. The Viceroy offered the League five out of fourteen seats and the Congress six. One of the six was reserved for the scheduled castes. The Congress said that a Muslim representative would be among the six allotted to it because

the Congress was an organisation that represented Hindus and Muslims equally. This was something the League could not tolerate. The League could take no part in a government in which there was any arrangement of that kind. The Viceroy's efforts at a rapprochement failed.

Attlee was the Prime Minister of Britain at that time. He sent instructions that the Interim Government must be formed whether the League joined or not. The Congress might resort to civil disobedience once more if it was not formed. Attlee wanted to avoid that. He had therefore to issue instructions even to the Viceroy. Nehru was invited to assist in the formation of a Cabinet. He was the president of the Congress. Nehru went to see Quaide Azam Jinnah and suggested a coalition.

Jinnah had already called a meeting of the Muslim League and a resolution had been passed rejecting the Cabinet Mission's proposals. He was no longer in a position that would permit him to join the Interim Government. The Cabinet Mission scheme was not the realisation of the bicentralisation he advocated. It brought about a certain degree of decentralisation but he did not want that. No matter how small a Centre might be, if there was only one, the question of the conflict between the majority and minority was certain to arise and hamper its working. If democratic procedure was to prevail the Congress would win every time. That was why he had demanded parity, at least in the Viceroy's Executive Council. And that was why he had asked for the veto, at least as long as the Viceroy was in India. In the Viceroy's absence he was likely to demand the casting vote. Without it a coalition was of no use. The question of who represented the Muslims was a question of life and death to him, the League or the Congress. The League was not interested in a coalition unless it was acknowledged to be the sole representative of all Indian Muslims. To sit at the same table with Congress Muslims was unthinkable.

The Interim Government would not concede his claim, nor could he obtain his objective in a Constituent Assembly. What was to stop him? All members of the Viceroy's Council were accorded equal status. That presented an even bigger problem. There would be no chief minister. Nehru assumed that he would be the de facto leader. He had been invited to assist in the for-

mation of a Government by Lord Wavell for that reason. Wavell made the same assumption. This was the procedure followed in England. But India was not England. No convention of the kind had yet been established in this country. A member of the Congress was about to become the de facto head of the Cabinet. In that position he would lord it over the League. The League would lose status. If the chief minister resigned the whole cabinet would have to resign. That was also totally unacceptable to the League.

Jinnah had made up his mind. He knew his moves and disclosed them one by one, at the proper time. To Nehru he of course said 'no.' The Viceroy hesitated. He was undecided what to do when he heard of it. It was not in accord with British policy to give power to the Congress alone, overlooking the League entirely. Gandhi went to see Wavell and reminded him that he was committed. Wavell was in an awkward position. He formed a Government with Nehru and the members Nehru chose. That was a day to remember for Gandhi. His heart rejoiced.

For Jinnah it was a black day. The League had already passed a resolution advocating direct action. The fight for Pakistan had begun. In four days five thousand people lost their lives in Calcutta alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"LARKE LENGE PAKISTAN" : THE FIGHT

Jinnah had made up his mind to create trouble if he was left out of any deal between the Congress and the British Government. What he meant by trouble had been the subject of speculation for two years or more. It was generally felt that whatever Jinnah did, he would not resort to violent breaches of the peace, or encourage criminal acts. He was by temperament civil and restrained in his manners and methods. But on August 16th, 1946, we discovered to our cost how wrong we had been. Jinnah declared that his unremitting efforts to gain something for his people by constitutional methods had come to nothing. He had tried for a long enough time. Now he intended to show us that he too held a weapon in his hands.

He showed us. Within seven months people who had lived side by side for seven hundred years or more, sharing each other's joys and griefs, people who were of the same blood, who spoke the same language, who had the same interests in common but who happened to belong to different religious denominations, recoiled in horror and mistrust from one another and decided, in grief and anger, that it would be better to separate. The Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab cried that the Punjab would have to be divided. The cry was taken up and echoed in India's North-eastern areas. Bengali Hindus demanded the partition of Bengal.

Jinnah had the consent of the Muslim electorate. He now obtained the acquiescence of the Sikhs and Hindus at revolver point. The British remained. They had to be persuaded. No revolver would be required for that. In a symbolic gesture of protest against the imposition of the Cabinet Mission's proposals he gave up the title the British had conferred upon him. If you think, he said in effect, that the Indians are docile little goody goodies you are mistaken. We know how to make trouble. Why are you forcing us to mutiny?

The British were neither equipped to deal with an outbreak of the kind that occurred nor were they very much interested in

putting a stop to it. The Hindus were there to do it. But it would not be done in the presence of the British; they were on their way out. The British did not accept the Congress claim to be the sole representative of the whole of India and it was not their policy to make a settlement with it only. The Hindus might belong to the Congress but that was no reason why those who were not Hindus should be left to its mercy.

If by independence was meant the grabbing of power without coming to any agreement with the British what was the need for negotiations? Power would go into the hands of those able to take it. The British were letting it go. Anybody who could take it was welcome to it. And if independence meant an arrangement with the British, power would be transferred by them to those with whom they came to an understanding peacefully. The minorities would be assured of a fair share. Whether that share took the shape of Pakistan or anything else was not Britain's headache. The Muslim League was recognised as the spokesman for the Muslim minority. It could not be left out of any settlement, no matter how badly it might behave. Who forced it to resort to direct action?

By independence Gandhi understood freedom from dependence upon the British. Jinnah understood it as freedom from dependence upon the Hindu majority. As long as the British were in India there could be no agreement between them. Could an agreement be reached after they left? Would not the Hindus still be in a majority? There was only one way to escape its domination, to partition the country. Jinnah became so desperate for that reason. He could not forego his pound of flesh. But he forgot that the Congress could also claim a pound of flesh, the partition of the provinces.

Yet Jinnah knew the Congress well, Power was important to the Congress, as important as moral principle was to Gandhi. If the Congress won an all-powerful Centre it might possibly agree to let go of certain Muslim majority areas. That is if the British insisted upon it as one of the terms of their award. Congress had not agreed to separate electorates of its own accord. It had been forced to accept them as part of a Communal Award. The idea of separate nations had evolved out of the separate electorates. It was part of the same process of change that was going on.

Could a part only be accepted, not the whole? If the Congress tried any tricks the British would leave without making any settlement. And if there was no legal transfer of power what authority would the Congress have? Would anybody obey it? Would Muslim soldiers take the oath of loyalty to a Congress Government? Would Muslim loyalty swear allegiance to it? Would Muslim subjects not rebel?

He was right. Nehru and Patel found that the Muslim section of the armed forces, that Muslim royalty and others were bound by ties of fealty to the Muslim members of the Viceroy's Council. They did not look upon members of the Congress as their own men. How could any Government be administered if so many of its officials were disloyal? After the British left? Would they change after the departure of the Viceroy? Would they be willing to cooperate then? Not for a single day. Would they carry out any order? Why should they be forced to remain against their will? Let them go to Pakistan. Let Pakistan be created.

The Viceroy had, in the meantime, persuaded the League to join his Council. Tripartite talks were not possible otherwise. Bilateral talks were of no use. The British would not make any arrangement with the Congress alone. By a settlement they understood a tripartite arrangement. Tripartite talks had been held on every occasion when reforms were introduced. Bilateral talks, as at the time of the Gandhi-Irwin pact, were an innovation, Gandhi's suggestion. The British agreed on only one occasion. They were not prepared to agree to it again. They preferred to leave without making an arrangement at all. If civil strife ensued it would not be their responsibility to deal with it. That a conflict of this kind would not be non-violent was amply shown by Jinnah's announced programme of direct action.

Gandhi undertook the arduous journey to Noakhali in order to deal with it in his own way. If he could restore amicable relations between the Muslims and Hindus there, the threat of civil war could be dissipated. Any decision arrived at would not be taken at pistol-point but with a cool head and calculated consideration, in a peaceful manner. But no sooner had he set foot in Noakhali than trouble broke out in Bihar, even more terrible, more widespread. Not long after, came trouble in the Punjab,

more fiendish, on a wide scale. In how many places could Gandhi be at one and the same time? In Bihar his co-workers took up his mission and became very active. Nehru, however, found himself forced to order bombing. If the state had to resort to violence in order to restore peace how could the people be expected to rely upon non-violence or retain any confidence in it? In Noakhali the common people felt secure only because of the presence of the army. They wanted it to remain. The army had been sent there against Gandhi's express wishes. It was sent because he was there. The people wanted him to stay because they felt that as long as he was there the army would stay. What wonderful logic!

That the presence of the army depended upon Gandhi's presence made the Muslims stubborn. They obstinately demanded that Gandhi leave. They thought the army would leave when he did. They refused to admit that the army was there because of their own misdeeds. They denied any guilt. Where was any sign of a change of heart? The state arrested people, put them on trial, and sentenced some. The Hindus were reassured somewhat. The Muslims were angrier than ever. They shouted for Pakistan more loudly than before.

Gandhi was forced to realise that the non-violence he had taught for so long was not the non-violence of strong men. It was the ineffective protest of the weak and helpless who had no other resource. In combating anarchy it failed. Gandhi groped in darkness. A faint hope lingered perhaps in his heart that the Congress leaders would lose their illusions about the good faith of the British and resign from the Interim Government. Congress would then no longer be a red flag to the League's bull. The bull would stop rampaging around. Hindus would be safe when the League called off its butchery. Mass satyagraha against John Bull would then again become a possibility.

The mentality of the Congress leaders resembled that of Charles II of England. They had wandered in the wilderness for a long time, and they were tired of it. Neither did the British want them to resign. The British did not want another mass satyagraha movement. Both the British and the Congress were weary of fighting, however non-violently. The British were ready and willing to quit as soon as the problems which remained were solved

There were not more than two or three. There was no apparent need for the Congress to resign and embark upon another movement.

The first problem to be solved was the question of the future of the army and civil service. It was decided that any member of the service who wished to retire would be allowed to do so. Indians would receive a pension and non-Indians a lump sum by way of compensation for the loss of their careers. Indians would not be entitled to compensation of this kind but all other terms and conditions were the same. Their salaries and emoluments would be the same as before if they continued in their jobs and when they retired their pensions were secure. Those who remained in service would have improved prospects. No Indian asked for compensation. To do so would have been unpatriotic.

The next problem was the question of the future of the minorities. If they demanded a separate state should it be given to them? No solution was reached in Wavell's time. Neither Wavell nor anybody else in the British military establishment was in favour of splitting up the armed forces. How could what had been built up with so much care, expense and dedication be destroyed at a word? Gandhi misunderstood Wavell. So did many others. Wavell opposed partition. He had a plan of his own which was odd in the extreme. According to it Hindus and Muslims would both have remained totally unprotected but Englishmen and Englishwomen would have been well cared for. Perhaps the mutual danger of the Hindus and Muslims might have forced them to come together and frame some sort of an agreement themselves, without taking the help of the third party. Who knows? Gandhi wanted a settlement in which the third party played no part.

Wavell was withdrawn by the British Prime Minister and Lord Mountbatten sent out in his place. At the same time he announced that the British were withdrawing from India and would leave entirely by June 1948. To whom power was transferred depended upon the leaders of the country. It was for them to decide. If more than one decision was taken, power would be transferred to more than one authority. If a single decision was reached power would be transferred to a single authority. That meant India would be divided unless the Congress and the League came

together at the last moment. The Congress leaders took heed of the warning and held out their hands to the League leaders. The leaders of the League did not respond. For them the warning was a green signal. What was there to be afraid of if the country split? They were pleased.

A cry for the division of the Punjab had been raised even before Mountbatten's arrival. It echoed across India and the partition of Bengal was also demanded. The Congress agreed to the division of these two provinces in the face of Gandhi's strong opposition. The Congress leaders asked for the division of these provinces when Mountbatten stated that he would not accept any settlement except one in agreement with Jinnah's demand for the partition of the country. The second problem was solved in this manner. Power was transferred to two separate authorities, not one. The official departments would be divided between them. India ceased to be a unit. An India divided into two, a Bengal divided into two, a Punjab divided into two, Syhlet detached from Assam and the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan! The wishes of the people concerned were to be consulted, it was said.

The solution was a simple one. Nobody stopped to think what the plight of the Congress Muslims in the Northwest Frontier might be. They were double losers. And what about the minorities in the two new states? Who was concerned over their fate? Gandhi alone. What could Gandhi do all by himself when his colleagues in the Congress had given their formal consent and the Muslim League had also agreed? He could have gone to the people and warned them that the agreement was a mistake. He could have asked them not to abide by its provisions. But what agreement was the right one? Where was an agreement that was not a mistaken one? He had attempted to correct the defects in the Cabinet Mission scheme himself and failed.

The Cabinet Mission scheme could not have been made acceptable without sacrificing Assam. And the Congress leaders had not approved of the decentralisation proposed in it. They preferred bicentralisation. But of course they agreed to it on the condition that both Punjab and Bengal would be divided.

Gandhi exerted himself to the full to prevent at least the partition of Bengal. Jinnah was equally anxious to prevent it. So was the British Governor Burrows. Burrows looked at the

problem from the standpoint of the Europeans. The only alternative was Balkanisation. By Balkanisation was meant that power would be transferred province by province. The provinces would be free to unite and form a single Union of India if they chose, or an India divided into two, or an India in which there were more than two authorities. Lord Mountbatten had brought a proposal of this kind with him. It was drawn up by his European colleagues partly in their own interest and partly in the interest of the Muslims. If this formula had been accepted Bengal would have remained intact but separate and Assam also, or both together. But when it was shown to Nehru he rejected it out of hand and compromised on Partition. He chose the lesser of two evils and public opinion was in his favour.

The second problem was solved. The future of the minorities was settled. The third problem came next. What was to be the future of the European residents of India? They had been living in this country for over two hundred years. They had, for the most part, engaged in trade. Were they to be forced to wind up their affairs and leave? Did winding up the empire imply an end to trade relations, the breaking off of commercial relations? The solution was found when both India and Pakistan agreed to remain members of the British Commonwealth of nations. Both would be given Dominion status. When this was done Lord Mountbatten decided to speed up the arrangements that were necessary for the departure of the British and quit the country by the 15th August. There was no reason for delay and he had no desire to do so.

The British gave up all hope of coming to a satisfactory agreement with Gandhi. He would never have compromised over the issue of the future of the minorities. In his opinion it was a problem that could not be solved as long as the British were present. It was India's domestic problem. Indians would settle it themselves like the two brothers they are. If necessary they would fight it out or divide the country. But nobody should stand between the two parties like an auctioneer, raising the price turn by turn. Let the British leave first. Let the country be handed over as a whole either to the Congress or to the League. Gandhi's proposal was not supported by anybody. It was not considered practical.

The British could not leave until the future of the minorities was assured. They were even prepared to restore their sovereignty to the Rajas. The Rajas could, of their own free will, merge with the Central Government. Paramountcy would cease to exist. Neither the British nor the Rajas would have paramount power. Britain was not worried about them. Britain was worried about the Muslims. The Muslims had kept aloof from the struggle for independence. They had, in fact, helped the British more than the Congress. That was one reason. Another was disclosed to me by a European friend. "We won't be able to stay in the Middle East," he explained, "if we antagonise the Indian Muslims. The policy we follow in this country is a part of our Middle Eastern policy. It cannot be regarded separately."

The alternative to the partition of the country was, as we have seen, Balkanisation. Gandhi did not object, but the Congress did. In politics the lesser of two evils is the one that is accepted. Gandhi knew it. He supported the Congress decision. The decision was theirs, the support his! Gandhi started back to Noakhali. Suhrawardy detained him in Calcutta on the way. The Muslims in Calcutta were frightened. Who knew what was going to happen on the 15th August! The Hindus might strike back at them, revengefully. Waves of violence and counter-violence would engulf the whole of Bengal. Gandhi stayed in Calcutta. The mysterious effect of his presence, his great spiritual and moral power, kept the situation peaceful. It was a miraculous sight.

Chapter Twenty-Five

THE ADVENT OF FREEDOM

At last the day came when we awoke to find ourselves free. What joy! The two hundred years we had spent in subjugation to alien rulers vanished like a bad dream. The British won the hearts of Indians by departing in the way they did. Lord Mountbatten was detained beyond the date set for his leave-taking by Indians themselves in order that the way to the accession of the princely states might be smooth and our relationship with newborn Pakistan also put on a peaceful footing.

When Gandhi raised the slogan *Quit India,* he could not have known that history would take it to mean that a part of India could be cut off from the country and made into a separate state, Pakistan. How could he have foreseen that all the Sikh and Hindu officials in the ceded territory would quit Pakistan and return to their truncated homeland? Half a crore of people, ordinary common people, also left Pakistan in the western half of India. If Gandhi had not been present in person in Calcutta the Hindus and non-Islam communities in East Pakistan would have done the same. That they did not at that time was due solely to the miracle of goodwill he brought about. Would the Muslims in West Bengal not have left also otherwise?

Most of the Muslim officials in the territory that remained in India quit. The few who stayed did so because independent India announced that it was a secular state in which all religious communities enjoyed equal rights and no discrimination would be made on the basis of religion. The number of ordinary people who stayed was great although about half a crore did migrate. India was as much their country as it was the country of the Hindus, Sikhs and others. It was their homeland.

Gandhi was in Calcutta exerting all his strength to control the situation in the East but there was nobody of comparable status to look after developments in the West. Mountbatten felt that if Gandhi had been in the Punjab a disaster of the magnitude of the one that took place there could have been averted. This bow to

ahimsa, made by a naval commander, and one of the most highly trusted officers of the British crown, should be recorded in letters of gold. Mountbatten called Gandhi a 'one-man boundary force.'

There are, however, basic differences between the Punjab and Bengal which if recalled in the context, explain the Punjab tragedy to some extent. Three ambitious organisations were competing with each other for power, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim. Each wanted to be undisputed master. They had been preparing for a show-down for seven years, arming themselves furiously. It was not the Muslims who raised the cry for the partition of the province. They did not want the Punjab split. They wanted to keep it intact, to have the whole for themselves. Those who demanded that the Punjab be broken up hoped that the division would be made the way they wanted it and that they would at least get Lahore. Shares were allotted as impartially as possible. Many places beloved of the Sikhs and Hindus went to Pakistan. Vast fortunes in land and property went to Muslims. Lahore, the Lahore of Ranjit Singh, was not restored to the Sikhs. They had dreamt of regaining possession of the cherished city after a century. But it was given to Pakistan. That was also as bad as it would have been if Calcutta had been handed over. Would Bengal not have turned red with blood?

The Pakistani leaders wanted both the Sikhs and the Hindus to remain in Pakistan, under their rule. White was one of the colours selected for their national flag for that reason. Jinnah, as the first Governor of Pakistan, gave a public assurance that all residents of the territory allotted to the new country would be Pakistanis by nationality and treated equally, no discrimination would be made between Pakistani and Pakistani. But it was the same Jinnah who, in making Pakistan an Islamic state, conferred on Muslims the status of first class nationals. All non-Muslims automatically became heretics, infidels. People who worship idols are not considered fit to be ranked even as heathens according to the shariat canon. The existence of idolators is not recognised in an Islamic state. They are not considered human. Many people in India do not know that. Christians and Jews are given grudging recognition but the question of equality in either status or treatment does not arise. Such people must either leave

the country or resign themselves to the life of slaves. There is no other alternative.

This doctrine can of course be implemented with some degree of generosity and tolerance. In India the number of idol-worshippers is so great and they are so well-armed that it is not possible to convert them all to Islam, nor is it feasible to treat them as infidels. Who will plough the land? Who will pay the taxes? Where will they go if they are forced to leave the country? The Muslim conquerors adapted themselves to the country little by little, incorporating the traditional ways of the Indian people in their own pattern of life. To each his own creed. Islam was the state religion nonetheless. What came into being on the soil of India was not a theological state but a state theology. Islam contented itself with its official status. The dream of setting up a theological state was not treated as urgent. Akbar did not even grant Islam the foremost place as the state religion. Later it reclaimed precedence.

Pakistan now avowedly aspired to realise the dream Islam dreamt fifteen hundred years earlier but which had been in abeyance for some seven centuries. It determined to reverse seven centuries of Indian history, to ignore the historical developments that had taken place during that time. Mosques and temples had stood side by side for hundreds of years. Hindu and Muslim kingdoms had been friendly neighbours. Hindus who lived in Muslim kingdoms were not forced to flee for their lives to the Hindu states on their borders, nor did the Muslims who lived in Hindu states turn to Islamic kingdoms for refuge. What had taken place that now, after seven hundred years, Muslims should run panting into Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs run away from it just as hard? Unless this movement was checked no Hindus would remain in Pakistan and no Muslims in India.

On the Indian side of the border a demand for the conversion of India into a Hindu state was raised by a certain section of opinion. The Hindu religion should be declared the state religion, its advocates declared. This confirmed Jinnah's two-nation theory, the total denial of India's advocacy of a single nation. Those who made the demand were doing exactly what the Muslims were doing, imitating them in all their theories. If the Muslims were going to drag the country back a thousand years there were

Hindus prepared to do the same. If the Muslims adopted an inherently suicidal policy there were Hindus prepared to do the same. Muslims had not lifted a finger during the struggle for independence. What did it matter to them if India was subjugated once again? All other Indians had suffered greatly during the struggle, sacrificing their lives and their property. They knew the value of the freedom they had won. They would never set foot in a blind alley of the kind the Muslims and their Hindu counterparts were advocating. Had it not led to subjugation in the past? Would it not do so again? The Hindus who advocated it did so only because it was a good way of putting pressure on Pakistan, of punishing those responsible for the breaking up of the country. They felt that the Muslims should be forced to leave and the Hindus to come. They wanted, in short, an exchange of population, unofficially and illegally.

It was most surprising to many of us to discover that Hindus could turn as communal as the Muslims overnight, that they could become as fanatic as they were. Each country has a distinctive cultural pattern of its own. a pattern the threads of which are woven during thousands of years of experience. The Indian pattern even before the British came was richly variegated by the separate contributions of different castes, ethnic groups, different creeds, different languages, different environments. Could these threads be unravelled, torn out of the texture of the tapestry, separated and ripped apart, by anybody into whose hands power may have come for the moment? Had not the colours become blended so deeply and so intricately in the course of the centuries that they were indistinguishable? One and the same individual person could be a Muslim by religion, a Bengali by language, a farmer by profession, and an Indian national at one and the same time. Was such a man to be forced out of the country that had given him so rich a personality? Was he not to be allowed to remain where he was, in his homeland? Who had the right to either force him to go or allow him to remain? In whose hands did power rest, those of the state, of unruly mobs or of private organisations?

"Congress rules only in name," a friend of mine commented after a visit to Delhi. "The real master is the R.S.S. If an election is held, the R.S.S., not the Congress, will win."

I was dumbfounded. The friend who made the remark was himself a Congress minister. He had never dreamt that, in free India, the Congress would become no more than a puppet. And that in Delhi!

The death of another friend made me realise even more sharply what the general situation had become. He lost his life at the hands of a man of his own religion, a Hindu sepoy, in the course of carrying out his magisterial duties. The sepoy was ordered to restrain certain rowdies who were attacking Muslims. He turned and shot the man who had issued the order.

Communal rioting went on. It was not to be stopped. The Muslims were trapped between the R.S.S. and the police who were, too often, hostile. Was the Government going to permit the slaughter of Hindus? Was it not itself a Hindu body? Muslims could go wherever they liked. The misdeeds of the Hindus would be overlooked.

Out of the churning of the mighty cosmic oceans, both poison and the immortalising ambrosia rose to the surface. The ambrosia was imbibed by the lords of the state. The poison was drained away by Gandhi. Having completed his Calcutta mission he prepared to return to Noakhali. The work he had undertaken there was unfinished. But an urgent summons called him to Delhi. Poison had come to the surface in the capital of the country itself. He was needed. Who else could drain it away? Gandhi turned his steps away from the East and faced westwards once again. Who knew that it was to be his last journey?

Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Pakistan were taking possession of houses belonging to Muslims in Delhi, turning the rightful owners out. They were also taking possession of mosques. They regarded themselves as Indians by right and the Muslims as intruders. Many Hindus believed that Muslims constituted a powerful fifth column, that their hearts lay across the borders of Pakistan and for that reason the only solution was an exchange of population, forcibly carried out.

The Mahatma fought the falsity of this notion day after day, all day. Over and over again he explained that ejection is not a remedy for ejection, that no problem is ever solved by revengefulness, that violence is not curbed by counter-violence, that injustice is not corrected by injustice. The country had been partitioned,

It was regrettable. But did that mean the people of the country had to be divided also? The common people of India, the ordinary, impoverished, long-suffering people, were indivisible. The physical partition of the geographical area called India would not be injurious if the people held together. If the people allowed themselves to be split up, if they were lumped willy-nilly into small hostile groups pitted violently against each other, the harm would be very great indeed. And the harm would be all the greater if the splitting up was accomplished by wreaking cruel vengeance on innocent and harmless and helpless minorities, by the taking of the law into the hands of private individual organisations, in a wholly illegal manner. No good could come of it.

While he admonished the people in this manner Gandhi advised the heads of the state to hold firmly to a secular policy, not to behave badly to Pakistan if Pakistan behaved badly, to hope and expect Pakistan to behave well. What has to be done in circumstances such as these must be done on one's own, unilaterally. His colleagues disagreed. They believed and had been taught that relationships between states are governed by reciprocity. What one party did was answered in kind by the other party. This, they claimed, was the general practice. Tit for tat. Good for good. Bad for bad. International relations, they said, are of this kind. Those who did not fall in line with the general practice would be thought weak. Initial injustice would be followed by greater injustice.

Gandhi's job was to break through the vicious circle. Evil must not lead to evil, nor violence justify and evoke violence. He was not the head of any state. He could only advise. Nehru made good and just use of the powers vested in a secular state. Madrassi soldiers were deployed to keep the peace in the northern areas of the country. They put a stop to the communal rioting with their guns. The state took the side of the threatened minorities, strongly and unequivocally coming to their defence.

The last few years of Gandhi's life passed debating the question of whether India was for Indians or Hindustan for Hindus. The glow of the conflagration that rose around them lent a tragic glory to his end. A section of the Congress itself turned against Nehru when they saw guns aimed at Hindus in what they regarded as a Hindu country. They turned against Gandhi also because he

supported Nehru. Even some of his most devoted followers began to think it was high time for him to retire to the Himalayas. He should not interfere with their freedom. It did not take them long to forget that independence had been won mainly by virtue of his moral strength and firmness of principle. Gandhi vowed not to abandon the minorities. He planned to return to Noakhali as soon as the minority in Delhi was honourably and securely reinstated and its protection guaranteed. In Noakhali he wanted to do the same. His critics however felt that his object could be achieved by putting pressure on Pakistan in other ways. And did it matter so very much if it wasn't? The people could migrate to India. The members of minorities here could migrate to Pakistan. India was the homeland of the Hindus, was it not? Pakistan declared very loudly that it was the homeland of the Muslims. Yet was not India the home of Muslims and Pakistan the home of Hindus too?

Enemies were legion. They were certain to strike sooner or later. Gandhi did not lack friends but they did not link their hands in a protective chain around him. He had no bodyguard. Gandhi remained as unshakable as ever in his convictions but he was forsaken by his own people in his last days. His friends could have arranged for his wishes to be carried out before he started his last fast or at least shortly after it began. But their ageing leader had to go without food for six days before their consciences responded and their hearts were moved. His official colleagues were lacking in sympathy and understanding. So were his followers among the common people. Somehow or other the idea had got around that he favoured Pakistan and was partial to Muslims.

In the meantime the princely states were making their choices. Some acceded to India, others to Pakistan. Only the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Maharaja of Kashmir had difficulty in making up their minds. Taking the opportunity offered by the Maharaja's indecision certain tribal peoples raided Kashmir. The Maharaja opted for India immediately for he discovered that the raiders had Pakistani backing. Indian soldiers marched into Kashmir and drove out the invaders. In Hyderabad the opportunity was taken by a violent fanatic group known as the Razakars. If they could not be brought under control by ordinary methods

soldiers might have to be sent in there too. If they were, would Gandhi approve? In official circles it was widely felt that as long as Gandhi remained influential, force could not be freely employed. Neither Gandhi nor his ahimsa had any further historical role to play. He was no longer needed. To Gandhi it seemed that the Congress had no historical role to play any longer.

With what is anything to be salted if salt loseth its savour? Congress had lost its character. By giving up Gandhi's ideals it had become a different organisation. Now it cast Gandhi himself aside. The Congress had been brought into existence for one purpose, to fight imperialism. The fight had ended. There was no imperialism any more. It should have been transformed into a welfare institution, devoted to the uplift of the common people. Gandhi did not approve of power being concentrated in the hands of a few leaders at the Centre. Neither did he want wealth to be concentrated in the hands of a few families. He wanted the decentralisation of power and had planned for it. Power should, Gandhi felt, be in the hands of the common people.

Margaret Bourke-White interviewed Gandhi on the day before his death. In reply to her question Gandhi said he had lost all hope and all desire to live to be a hundred and twenty-five years old. The American journalist and photographer wanted to know why. She writes: "He said, 'Because of the terrible happenings in the world. I do not want to live in darkness and madness. I cannot continue....' He paused and I waited. Thoughtfully he picked up a strand of cotton, gave it a twist, and ran it into the spinning wheel. 'But if my services are needed' he went on, 'rather I should say, if I am commanded, then I shall live to be one hundred and twenty-five years old'."

"A few more questions followed. Then came the question of the use of supreme violence, the atom bomb. How could he come to terms with that?

"'Ah, ah!' he said, 'How shall I answer that!' The charkha turned busily in his agile hands for a moment and then he replied, 'I would meet it by prayerful action.' He emphasised the word "action" and I asked what form it would take.

"'I will not go underground. I will not go into shelters. I will come out in the open and let the pilot see I have not the face of evil against him.'

"He turned back to his spinning for a moment before continuing....

"'The pilot will not see our faces from his great height, I know. But that longing in our hearts that he will not come to harm would reach up to him and his eyes would be opened'...."

His ordeal by fire took place the following day. Prayerfully he faced death with his hands raised in reverent greeting. He was fully prepared. The name of God rose spontaneously to his lips: "Heh Ram! Heh Ram!" His features were not distorted by either pain or anger. His sadhana was fulfilled, his object achieved. This was his crucifixion.