

MAHATMA GANDHI

VOLUME VII

Preparing For Swaraj

SUSHILA NAYAR



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Volume VII

PREPARING FOR SWARAJ

By

SUSHILA NAYAR

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The book is aptly captioned "Preparing for Swaraj". It was indeed a trying period but also a period when great things like rejection of separate electorate for Depressed Classes, founding of Harijan Sevak Sangh, establishment of Gram Udyog and the Talimi Sangh were achieved. These served to prepare the people for their democratic rights and responsibilities.

Dr. Sushila Nayar has spared no pains to make this volume informative and educative. She has made us feel as if we were living in those days. She richly deserves the thanks of the nation for giving such wealth of information to us and to the posterity.



By Pyarelal

The Epic Fast

Status of Indian Princes

A Pilgrimage for Peace

A Nation-Builder at Work

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Mahatma Gandhi -The Last Phase (Vol. I & II)

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Mahatma Gandhi -The Discovery of Satyagraha

Mahatma Gandhi -The Birth of Satyagraha

By Sushila Nayar

Mahatma Gandhi —Satyagraha at Work

Mahatma Gandhi —India Awakened

Mahatma Gandhi —Salt Satyagraha: The Watershed



FOREWORD

Pyarelalji's devotion to Gandhiji is comparable only to that of the Saints of the Bhakti cult who are reputed to have merged with the Lord. At his very first meeting with Gandhiji in 1919, Pyarelalji was drawn to the Mahatma as an iron to a magnet. Joining Gandhiji in 1920, he remained inseparable from Gandhiji until his martyrdom in 1948. No one was more qualified to write the biography of the great leader who attracted the attention of the entire world during his own *lifetime*. Pyarelalji was an outstanding intellectual endowed with keen sense of perception, objectivity and commitment to Truth. Out of the multi-volume biography of the Mahatma, Pyarelalji was able to complete five volumes dealing with the *Early Phase, Discovery of Satyagraha, Birth of Satyagraha and The Last Phase* in two volumes dealing with the years 1944-48.

Owing to his demise in 1982, the work would have faced disruption had the country not had another ardent devotee of Gandhiji and Kasturbaiji in Pyarelalji's sister Dr. Sushila Nayar to carry on the stupendous task. If Pyarelalji was a Bhakta (devotee) of Gandhiji Dr. Sushila Nayar was a daughter of the House. With the help of all the materials collected by Pyarelalji and her own personal knowledge of events Dr. Sushila Nayar has provided the country with an authentic account of the life and events of the time.

I have the privilege of knowing Sushilaji for over forty years. She is one of those rare personalities on whom God had showered his choicest blessings. She combines in herself qualities like knowledge, wisdom, experience and competence on the one hand and virtues like integrity, dauntless courage, devotion to duty and utter selflessness on the other.

Sushilaji has already published Volumes IV, V and VI dealing with *Satyagraha at Work, India Awakened and Salt Satyagraha*. Volume VII, *Preparing For Swaraj*,



which is now before the public, comprises of the years 1932-1939. Epoch making events changing the destiny of India occurred during this period. Since public memory is short, this Volume ensures to the posterity the drama of the events of this period.

The first and foremost among them is Gandhiji's single-handed valiant fight against separate electorate for the depressed classes formulated by the British Government in 1932. Gandhiji was quick to perceive that separate electorate for Depressed Classes would perpetuate untouchability, divide the Hindu Society and weaken the national struggle for freedom and liberation. Gandhiji who was then imprisoned in Yeravda Jail in Pune undertook a fast unto death against separate electorate for the depressed classes. The fast stirred the conscience of the nation. People who had taken rigid stand on this issue began to relent. Public resentment was roused to a high pitch and the "Poona Pact" modifying the communal award and providing for a joint electorate was hammered out by the enlightened leaders of the Depressed Classes and caste Hindus. Pyarelalji who was a witness to the agony has described those fateful days in his book *The Epic Fast*.

While ordinary mortals would have basked in the success, Gandhiji took immediately follow up action to launch a titanic anti-untouchability movement. He established the Harijan Sevak Sangh with the renowned philanthropist G. D. Birla as President and Thakkar Bapa as Secretary. This brought large masses of Scheduled Caste people into the national movement where complete equality among Satyagrahis prevailed.

The second major development during this period was the establishment of the All India Village Industries Association (Gram Udyog Sangh) for the revival of the dead or dying village industries. Gandhiji firmly believed in rural self-sufficiency and in rural employment for the economic advancement of the



villages. The measure of importance he attached to the programme is evident from the fact that he himself became its Chairman.

Gandhiji had always been critical of the system of education introduced by the British. There was too much emphasis on literary pursuits and English language and too little on developing creative skills and use of physical body. Gandhiji felt that education should be self-sustaining and that the pupils should earn while they learn. For this purpose he set up The Talimi Sangh under the leadership of Dr. Zakir Husain. This concept received warm response in several provinces at that time.

Gandhiji was a realist. He knew the pulse of the people and would accommodate their wishes. After the passing of the Government of India Act, 1935, there was a growing feeling amongst Congressmen that the fight for freedom should be carried not from outside but by capturing the citadels of power and that the Congress should enter legislatures and capture office. The Government of India Act, 1935 did not transfer real power to the people and the discretionary authority of the Governor was too large. Left to himself Gandhiji would not have accepted these reforms. None the less Gandhiji allowed the Congress organisation freedom to do so.

In 1939, the War came and the British without consulting the Central Legislative Assembly or the Provincial Governments, declared that India was at a war with Germany. The Congress leaders could not get an assurance about the country's future and on Gandhiji's advice resigned their offices.

The book is aptly captioned "Preparing for Swaraj". It was indeed a trying period but also a period when great things like rejection of separate electorate for Depressed Classes, founding of Harijan Sevak Sangh, establishment of Gram



Udyog and the Talimi Sangh were achieved. These served to prepare the people for their democratic rights and responsibilities.

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R. VENKATARAMAN



INTRODUCTION

1

This volume, Volume VII, of Bapu's multi-volume biography, covers one of the most important periods of India's freedom struggle. It narrates the momentous events from December 28, 1931, when Gandhiji returned from London after attending the Round Table Conference, to October 1939, when the Congress ministries in the Provinces resigned because the British Government had, without consulting either the Indian political parties or the Indian legislature, declared India a belligerent country in the war against Germany.

During this period Gandhiji staked his life to oppose separate electorates for the untouchables. He did so because he feared that separate electorates would brand the untouchables as untouchables for ever and vested interest would be created in the perpetuation of untouchability, resulting in a severe set-back to the movement for the abolition of untouchability. As a result of the fast he undertook in the Yeravda Jail, which took him almost to death's door, Gandhiji succeeded in getting the Communal Award modified. The scheme of separate electorate for untouchables was given up. Later Gandhiji undertook two more fasts to make the anti-touchability movement strong and effective. The first one was for self-purification from 8 May to 28 May so as to make the workers more dedicated. The second one was from 16 August to 23 August for the restoration of facilities for carrying on anti-untouchability work from jail, which had been withdrawn. This took him again to death's door and the Government decided to release him. He threw himself whole-heartedly into anti-untouchability work.

In order to carry on work for the removal of the disabilities of the untouchables, the Harijan Sevak Sangh was set up, with Shri G. D. Birla as its first Chairman and Thakkar Bapa as the first Secretary. Gandhiji then undertook an



extensive tour all over India to campaign for the abolition of untouchability. Though the Congress was then engaged in a programme of civil disobedience, Gandhiji confined himself strictly to constructive work, especially anti-untouchability work, and refrained from any talk about civil disobedience. He said he had been prematurely released from jail but his sentence of imprisonment had not technically ended. It extended up to 3 August 1934. Removal of untouchability, propagation of khadi and prohibition formed the only themes of his talks and discourses during the tour. He strictly avoided taking interest in or expressing any opinion on political matters. He later set up, under the auspices of the Congress, the All India Village Industries Association (A.I.V.I.A.) to supplement the work of the All India Spinners Association (A.I.S.A.) and create for the rural poor, especially untouchables, opportunities for self-employment and income generation. This, he said, would promote swaraj for the millions. Gandhiji himself became Chairman of the new body. The A.I.V.I.A. was to work for the processing of village produce in the village itself. Gandhiji's call for the revival of village industries drew from Srinivasa Sastri the remark that Gandhiji was starting "a quixotic war against modern civilization".

When his jail sentence expired, he started looking at the political situation. He saw that though the civil disobedience movement continued, the heart of most of the Congressmen was in parliamentary work. He thought over the matter and decided to withdraw civil disobedience and confine it to his own person.

He attended the All-India Congress Committee held in Bombay in October 1934, where he announced his retirement from the Congress because he did not wish Congressmen to feel constrained by consideration for his insistence and emphasis on truth and non-violence and constructive work. He first proposed amendments to the Congress constitution, including the one substituting in the



creed the words "peaceful and legitimate" by "truthful and non-violent", and then withdrew them. The Congress was now free to pursue parliamentary work.

The Congress contested the elections held in the Provinces in 1937 under the Government of India Act of 1935 and was returned to power in eight of the eleven Provinces of India. The Congress ministries looked to Gandhiji for advice and guidance in all matters and one of the most pressing issues on which they wished Gandhiji to show them the way was concerning education, especially at the primary school stage. They had limited resources and did not want liquor revenue mobilization for promoting education. And still they wanted all children to have the opportunity of getting education without delay.

Gandhiji proceeded by summoning a conference of India's noted educationists in Wardha in September 1938. The conference under Gandhiji's guidance prepared the scheme of education called the Wardha Scheme. In order to implement this scheme the Hindustani Talimi Sangh was set up with Dr. Zakir Husain as its Chairman and Shri Aryanayakam as its Secretary. Aryanayakam was a Ceylonese and had married Ashadevi, a highly educated and cultured Bengali lady. He had worked with Gurudev Tagore. He and Ashadevi were then working in Marwadi Vidyalaya of Jamnalal Bajaj at Wardha. They resigned and both of them threw themselves heart and soul into the work of the Talimi Sangh to promote the new scheme of education. The purpose of the education promoted by the Talimi Sangh was to take education to every village. It was to be imparted through productive work. Development of intellect of the village youth was to be promoted through development of skill of their hands by learning handicrafts. As a corollary thereof, said Gandhiji, self-sufficiency, partial or full, would be the result and enable rapid spread of education all over the country.



Thus, while the attention of the leadership of the Congress was riveted in the main on the constitutional changes being brought in by a series of exercises in London, culminating in the Government of India Act of 1935, Gandhiji devoted the whole of his immense energy in transforming the villages to lay the ground work of swaraj for the seven lakh villages where lived 80 per cent of India's men, women and children at that time.

His instruments for bringing about the change were the constructive work organizations: the Goseva Sangh, the Charkha Sangh, the Gram Udyog Sangh and the Talimi Sangh. Along with the Harijan Sevak Sangh these organizations became the vanguard of a mighty campaign to emancipate the villages of India from the evils of inequality, ignorance, superstition, sloth and exploitation by the cities.

Gandhiji was certain that for secure foundations of swaraj to be laid in the villages it was imperative that the village population should be self-sufficient in the matter of food and clothing. This economic swaraj could be ensured on the one hand by popularising the charkha and on the other by developing cottage industries, such as paddy-husking, oil-pressing, paper-making, bee-keeping, sericulture, tanning of hide of naturally dead cattle for making shoes and using the other parts of carcasses for fertilizers, etc. To expect the villagers to offer battle for swaraj and to face lathis and bullets would only be proper if their hunger could be first allayed. Swaraj must mean bread for the poor.

2

Gandhiji had returned from the Round Table Conference empty-handed, but the visit to England had not been without gains. He had conquered many hearts among all sections of the British people. Even the textile workers of Lancashire, many of whom had lost their jobs as a consequence of the boycott of foreign cloth in India under Gandhiji's inspiration and guidance, came to look upon



Gandhiji as a friend of the poor, and so their friend. The poorer sections of the people everywhere felt a spontaneous closeness and affinity with him. As a result of his visit, there was in England a better understanding of India's case for independence than there had been. The only people who remained unmoved were those in power.

In between sessions of the Round Table Conference Gandhiji was able to meet as many people in the various walks of life as possible. These included many peace groups, religious groups, scholars, scientists, artists, writers and intellectuals. He also met M.P.s and ex-M.P.s and personages associated with the Government in the past. He explained to all the urgent desire of the people of India to be free and to have the right to shape their own destiny without foreign interference. He reminded them that it was their own Prime Minister who had declared that good government was no substitute for self-government.

In the meantime the officialdom in India under Willingdon, who had taken over the Viceroyalty from Irwin shortly before the Round Table Conference met in London, had hardened its attitude towards the Congress and Gandhiji. The terms of the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement were impudently violated. A reign of terror and repression was let loose all over the country. Ordinances arming the Government with extraordinary powers were promulgated in U.P., Bengal and the N.W.F.P. In the N.W.F.P. Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan was arrested for having asserted the right of India to complete freedom. Crowds protesting against the action were fired upon, leading to many deaths.

Then Jawaharlal Nehru and Sherwani, while on their way to Bombay to receive Gandhiji on his return and to attend a meeting of the Working Committee, were pounced upon and lodged in prison. Gandhiji was distressed. He sought an interview with the Viceroy. This was refused. He must, he was told,



first repudiate his colleagues and dissociate himself from their actions, and then he could meet the Viceroy. There would be no discussion on the Ordinances in the various Provinces and the repressive actions of the Government. They could discuss constitutional matters.

The consequence of this attitude on the part of the British Government was that Gandhiji had to give a call for the resumption of mass civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes wherever this was found feasible, and civil defiance of the Ordinances. Gandhiji was immediately arrested on the night of 3 January 1932 and sent to Yeravda Jail. Vallabhbhai Patel, whose arrest had preceded that of Gandhiji, was also lodged there and was his companion. A little later Mahadev Desai was brought there from Sabarmati Jail.

In prison Gandhiji devoted himself to reading and to spinning, which was his way of identifying himself with the poverty-stricken masses. Vallabhbhai Patel read the newspapers to keep himself informed of what was happening outside and shared the information with Bapu. Mahadevbhai cooked, served Bapu and Vallabhbhai in various other ways and did such other work as Bapu entrusted to him. He read a lot, took down letters that Bapu dictated, wrote his diary and gave the rest of the time to spinning. The three of them prayed together and had lively discussions on socio-economic, political and spiritual matters. Mahadevbhai's diaries give an insight into their life in prison. We learn that Mahadevbhai took up the study of French and Urdu, while Vallabhbhai took lessons in Sanskrit from Mahadevbhai. Their time in jail was thus full. But in Bapu's heart a storm was brewing.

They had been in prison only a few months when the shadow of the Communal Award began to loom large. Bapu feared that the Award when



announced would concede separate electorates for the untouchables, a principle he was determined to resist even at the cost of his life. He disapproved of separate electorates for any community, but while he could put up with separate electorates for Muslims and others he could not tolerate separate electorates for the untouchables. He said: "The Muslims will remain Muslims for ever. The Christians will remain Christians for ever and the Europeans will be always Europeans. But are the untouchables to remain untouchables for ever?" In anticipation of the Award he wrote to Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, on 11 March 1932 reiterating what he had said in London — that he would oppose separate electorates for the untouchables even if he was the only one to do so, and even if it cost him his life.

The Award was announced on 17 August 1932. As had been feared, it provided for separate electorates for the untouchables. On 18 August Gandhiji wrote to British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, giving notice that he intended to resist the measure by undertaking, from 20 September, a fast unto death, which would continue even if the Government in order to save themselves embarrassment, released him from prison. The fast would be terminated only if during its progress the British Government, of its own motion or under pressure of public opinion, should revise the Award, withdrawing separate electorates for the Depressed Classes.

Gandhiji duly began the fast on 20 September. The fast stirred the conscience of the country. Leaders representing the Hindu sentiment and leaders of the untouchables had hectic consultations to evolve an agreed formula on the question of representation for the untouchables. The result was the Poona Pact, signed on 25 September 1932, and Gandhiji terminated his fast on 26 September 1932, but not before an assurance had been received from the Government that



the provision in the Communal Award bearing on separate electorates for the Depressed Classes would be modified according to the terms of the Pact. Tagore came all the way to Poona to be present at the breaking of the fast by Gandhiji. Gandhiji's life had been saved. The country rejoiced.

An added consequence of the fast was the freedom that Gandhiji was able to secure for carrying on the anti-untouchability campaign from prison. He could receive visitors in connection with the movement and correspond with workers engaged in anti-untouchability work. The publication of *Young India* and *Navajivan* having been discontinued after 14 January 1932, in consequence of Gandhiji's arrest, need was felt for a journal which would serve as a vehicle for the transmission of Gandhiji's views and be a mouthpiece of the anti-untouchability movement. The weekly journal *Harijan* therefore came into being, with its first issue coming out from Poona on 11 February 1933. By and by the journal was also brought out in Hindi and Gujarati. What with meetings with people, carrying on a voluminous correspondence and regular writing for *Harijan*, Gandhiji had his hands full.

It was in this period that the Harijan Sevak Sangh (originally called the Servants of Untouchables Society) was established. In pursuance of the resolution passed by the Hindu leaders in Bombay, the organization was set up on 26 October 1932 with G. D. Birla as President and Thakkar Bapa as Secretary. The function of the Sangh was to serve the untouchables in various ways and to improve their general condition by removing their disabilities and giving them education and self-employment opportunities.

Reports of anti-untouchability work as it was progressing and the general conduct of the workers, brought home to him the distressing fact that the initial enthusiasm created by his fast was ebbing away, and that the tempo was slowing



down. He moreover noticed insincerity and moral lapses on the part of some of the workers. Attributing their weakness to imperfections in himself, he undertook a self-purificatory fast of 21 days from 8 May to 28 May 1933. Gandhiji was released on the very first day of the fast, which he then completed at Lady Thackersey's house in Poona.

On being released from jail Gandhiji first had the mass civil disobedience movement suspended for six weeks and then withdrawn from the middle of July. Mass civil disobedience, he said, would be replaced by individual civil disobedience, which he planned to inaugurate on 1 August by a march from his Ashram to Ras, after having disbanded the Ashram as an act of sacrifice.

He did not have the opportunity to start the individual civil disobedience. Immediately after the morning prayers on 1 August he was arrested along with Kasturba and Mahadev Desai, and taken to Yeravda prison. On 4 August he was released and served with an order to remain in Poona and not to visit Yeravda village. On defying the order he was rearrested, tried and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. So was Mahadev Desai.

Gandhiji was not given the facilities to work for the removal of untouchability from jail this time. He asked for permission to carry on anti-untouchability work from jail as before. This was refused. Gandhiji therefore again started a fast on 16 August, because, he said, he had no interest in life if he could not do Harijan service without let or hindrance. On the fifth day of the fast, 21 August, his condition suddenly deteriorated and he had to be removed to hospital. While he continued the fast in the hospital, he became a prey to gloomy thoughts and was overcome by a feeling that his death was near. He distributed all his personal belongings among the hospital staff attending on him. C.F. Andrews in the meanwhile had been making hectic efforts to have Gandhiji



released. His efforts bore fruit and Gandhiji was unconditionally released from confinement on 23 August. He broke his fast the same day at Parnakuti, the residence of Lady Thackersey at Poona.

The release brought no happiness to Gandhiji. What was he to do with the freedom he had so unexpectedly gained? He could not forget that his term of imprisonment was to expire only on 3 August 1934. After much internal debate he came to the conclusion that for the remaining period of his unexpired jail term, while he must continue to do Harijan work, which was the breath of his life, he would not offer "aggressive civil disobedience" that might lead to his re-arrest.

4

Gandhiji decided to devote the period of his unexpired sentence to the cause of eradication of untouchability root and branch from the face of India along with constructive work such as prohibition and promotion of khadi. To this end he embarked on a whirlwind tour of the country, beginning on 7 November 1933 and ending on 2 August 1934. By mid- January 1934, in a matter of a little over two months, he had covered Andhra Pradesh, the Central Provinces, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Coorg and Malabar and was well set on the next lap of the campaign in Cochin when news reached him of the devastating earthquake that shook Bihar on 15 January 1934. Whole towns had been flattened and thousands of people killed. Rajendra Prasad, who had been hurriedly released from jail, had taken up relief work. He summoned Gandhiji for help. Gandhiji went, but not before covering some places in Madras which he had not visited earlier for untouchability meetings.

From 12 March to 9 April and again from 22 April to 5 May Gandhiji remained in Bihar, guiding the work of the Relief Committee formed by the Bihar Congress under Rajendra Prasad. He then resumed his interrupted Harijan tour.



He proceeded to Orissa. Here he saw incidents of violence on the part of the opponents of the movement and unruly and noisy behaviour on the part of crowds and decided to complete the tour on foot. The walking tour, which he called a pilgrimage, began on 9 May and was completed on 8 June when he again took up travelling by rail, visiting places as far apart as Karachi and Calcutta. Everywhere he had to face stiff opposition from the Sanatanists and on 25 June, at Poona, a bomb was hurled at the car in which he was thought to be travelling. At Ajmer, sometime later, a Sanatanist leader who doggedly opposed the movement, was manhandled by the crowd. Gandhiji was so distressed by this that he promptly announced a seven days' fast, which he went through from 7 to 14 August at Sevagram, where he returned on 5 August after completing the Harijan tour.

In the course of his extensive travels all over the country Gandhiji came into close contact with Congressmen at all levels and of all hues. He noticed that by and large the enthusiasm for civil disobedience was on the wane. On the other hand the urge to go in for parliamentary work was on the rise, especially in view of the fact that the elections for the Central Legislative Assembly were round the corner. The British Parliament was in the process of hammering a new reformed constitution, and it was perceived that whatever the shortcomings of the promised constitution might be, it was bound to provide for a larger popular franchise and considerably enlarged powers to popular representatives than available under the Government of India Act of 1919. Gandhiji accurately sensed the mood of the country and in April 1934 announced the decision that from then on he and he alone must offer civil disobedience and no other person should do so. At the same time he gave his blessing to those who wanted to pursue the parliamentary programme.



The Congress contested the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly under the 1919 Act and was returned in substantially enlarged strength.

The Government of India Act of 1935 ushered in Provincial autonomy. In the elections held for the Provincial Assemblies under the Act the Congress secured majorities in most of the major Provinces and after much internal debate and after assurances from the British Government that the Governors would not misuse the special powers with which the Constitution had armed them, formed ministries in all the Provinces except the Punjab, Bengal and Sind. The Muslim League for the most part was rejected by the electorate everywhere.

5

In 1936 Gandhiji had moved to Sevagram to make it his permanent home. Segacon, as it was then called, was a small village with a population of 600 steeped in abysmal poverty and ignorance. Gandhiji said he would show the villagers how to live by personal example and service rather than by preaching and he would not desert the village in the hour of danger to life or limb. He was true to his word and Sevagram became his headquarters.

In December 1936 came the Travancore Temple-entry Proclamation, which opened all the temples in Travancore to the entry of Harijans. Gandhiji was overjoyed. He congratulated the Maharaja and the Dewan and undertook a tour of the State in January 1937.

The year 1938 brought Gandhiji much mental distress. With the Congress ministries in power in the Provinces, conflicts between the peasantry and the zemindars came to the fore, generating violence in many parts of rural India. There were factional feuds within the Congress. In the C.P. there was a ministerial crisis, leading to severe disciplinary action being taken against the Premier, Dr.



Khare, by the Working Committee. Disciplinary action became necessary also against Nariman, the aspirant for Premiership in Bombay.

In 1938 also came the Munich Pact in Europe. Gandhiji described it as peace without honour and the triumph of violence. His advice to the Czechs, menaced by Nazi Germany, was to disarm unilaterally and offer complete non-violent resistance to the Nazis. This was the very first time that Gandhiji enunciated the position, which he maintained and advocated throughout the Allied war against the Axis powers, that the best way, and the only way, to meet foreign aggression was through unarmed non-violent resistance. He gave similar advice to the Jews then being persecuted and liquidated in Nazi Germany.

When, following Hitler's attack on Poland, the British Government declared war against Germany, Gandhiji declared that his sympathies were with England and that he considered Hitler responsible for the war. What shape the sympathy should take, he left to the Congress to decide. The Congress took a serious view of the fact that the British Government had declared India a participant in the war without consulting Indian opinion and invited the Government to declare its war aims. If the war was being fought for gaining imperialist ends the Congress would have nothing to do with it. If, however, it was being carried on to defend democracy, India would participate in it. As an earnest of its democratic intentions the Congress Working Committee asked Britain to establish full democracy in India, with the Indian people having the right to frame their own Constitution. Gandhiji's position of unconditional moral support to Britain was not accepted.

The British Government's response was disappointing. The Viceroy in a declaration merely said the Act of 1935 would be open to modification after the war through consultations with Indian communities and interests. For the



duration of the war a consultative group would be formed with representatives of Indian parties on it to advise the Viceroy.

The Congress rejected the declaration and the Working Committee decided by a resolution passed on 22 October that the Congress ministries would resign.

The movement for freedom was on the threshold of total confrontation with British Imperialism.

The story of the revival of civil disobedience as Quit India movement, followed by mass arrests, the victory of the Allies in the war, and the release of Gandhiji and other leaders and the events that followed will be covered in the next volume, *The Final Battle For Freedom*, which will linkup with Pyarelal's "Last Phase" in two volumes, Volumes IX and X of the multi-volume Biography.

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20-9-1994

SUSHILA NAYAR



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Shri Jitendra Desai, the Managing Trustee of the Navajivan Trust and his staff at the Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad, must be thanked for undertaking the publication of this book, which I hope will serve to introduce the most poignant period of our freedom struggle to the younger generation.

19-1-1996

Sevagram

SUSHILA NAYAR



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Gandhi, October 1934 (Frontispiece)

1. Gandhi during the 21-day fast at Parnakuti, Poona, May 1933
2. Gandhi in stricken Bihar, Hajipur railwaystation, March 1934
3. Gandhi at Bhadrak, May 1934
4. With Harijan children at Bhavnagar, July 1934
5. Gandhi and Thakkar Bapa in conference with Harijan workers, Delhi, January 1935
6. At Wardha, August 1935
7. Gandhi presiding over Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, Ahmedabad, November 1936
8. On the way to the exhibition, Faizpur
9. On the ashram precincts, Segaon, January 1938
10. Gandhi declaring open A.I.V.I.A. exhibition at Haripura, February 10, 1938
11. Gandhi and President Bose at the commencement of the Haripura Congress session, February 19, 1938
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13. Gandhi with Ghaffar Khan, October 1938
14. Gandhi's last meal before the fast, Rajkot, March 3, 1939
15. On the way to the Viceregal Lodge, Delhi, April 4, 1939
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PART I
THE COMMUNAL AWARD



CHAPTER I: WILLINGDON DECLARES WAR ON THE CONGRESS

1

The success of the Salt Satyagraha (6 April 1930 - 5 March 1931), resulting in the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement, led to the realization on the part of the British that they would have to think in terms of transferring power to the people of India. Of course there were many among the Tories who thought that they could and should stem the tide of the national movement for independence in India. The Tory victory in the Parliamentary elections in the autumn of 1931 strengthened their hands.

Gandhiji returned to India from the Round Table Conference empty-handed. He felt disappointed but not defeated. He had the satisfaction of having won a moral victory in England. He had been able to remove many misconceptions and misunderstandings about India's freedom struggle. He however saw that India would have to go through a great deal more suffering before the goal of independence was reached. He was prepared for it.

Viceroy Willingdon and Secretary of State Samuel Hoare were determined to crush the Congress. The year 1932 dawned with the British Government declaring an all-out war against the Congress. Gandhiji's overtures to the Viceroy for a meeting to discuss ways and means to restore normalcy in the relations between the Government and the Congress were summarily rejected and measures were set in motion ruthlessly to suppress the rising tide of mass civil disobedience contemplated in the resolution drafted by Gandhiji and passed by the Congress Working Committee on 1 January 1932, on the Viceroy's refusal to discuss with Gandhiji the Bengal, the U.P. and the N.W.F.P. ordinances promulgated before Gandhiji's return to India on 28 December 1931. Among these repressive measures were no less than four Ordinances issued on a single



day, 4 January 1932. These were (1) the Emergency Powers Ordinance, (2) The Unlawful Instigation Ordinance, (3) the Unlawful Association Ordinance, and (4) the Prevention of Molestation and Boycott Ordinance. These Ordinances placed in the hands of official's extraordinary powers of arrest and detention, restricting the movements of individuals, commandeering of any building, appointment of special police, forcing certain classes of citizens to assist in the maintenance of law and order, etc. Special courts, special procedures, new offences and new punishments were provided. [N. N. Mitra, ed. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 65-94; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (C.W.M.G.), Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, Vol. XLVIII, pp. 469-72]

The objects sought to be achieved through these Ordinances were: (1) to secure the arrest of Congressmen and confiscation of their funds and movable property, (2) to make all kinds of picketing unlawful so that High Courts would not be able to hold the arrest of peaceful picketers unlawful, (3) to control or suppress the Press so that it did publicity only to the extent and in the manner acceptable to the rulers, and (4) to make the definition of molestation and boycott all-comprehensive so as to ensure that this aspect of anti-British activity was not given any quarter. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, p. 54]

It may be mentioned that these Ordinances were in addition to the several Ordinances already in force in Bengal, the United Provinces and the N.W.F.P., under which thousands had been arrested and beaten up and a large number shot down. Among those arrested before Gandhiji returned home, were Jawaharlal Nehru, T.A.K. Sherwani, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother Dr. Khan Saheb. In fact, the four new Ordinances now issued were to suppress a movement provoked by the Ordinances already in force.



In the early hours of 4 January 1932, Gandhiji and Sardar Patel were taken into custody. Arrests of other important leaders of the Congress followed.

From this date onwards the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement of 5 March 1931 ceased to be operative. It had lasted a bare ten months.

Indeed so far as the Government were concerned the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement had become a dead letter much earlier. As early as on 26 December 1931, the day Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested, Willingdon had written to Secretary of State Samuel Hoare:

The Delhi Pact at all events is dead and gone, murdered by Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdul Ghaffar. Edward Irwin certainly made a great and gallant effort, but it has proved unsuccessful and has further proved that as long as it lasted it was a great handicap to Government in its administration and an enormous advantage to Congress in promoting their activities. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1972, Vol. IV, p. 176]

2

Even while the Delhi Pact had been in operation, the authorities treated it with supreme disdain. At every level and at every turn the terms of the truce had been violated with impunity. Peaceful picketing was interfered with and large numbers of civil disobedience workers continued to be kept in detention. In many areas, punitive police continued to oppress peasants. Lands and properties confiscated and sold were not returned and Government servants who had resigned or been dismissed were not reinstated in several places right up to Gandhiji's departure for London at the end of August 1931. Violations by the Government of the terms of the Settlement had been on such a large scale and involved so much oppression of the people that, as we have seen in the last



volume, matters had almost reached a breaking-point, and it had at one time become altogether uncertain whether the Congress would participate in the Round Table Conference which it had agreed to do as part of the Settlement. [C.W.M.G., XLVI, pp. 163-64, 204-5, 208, 276; XLVII, 166-67, 197, 198-200, 281, 358-59, 366-67, 368, 369, 449-50; Sushila Nayar, *Mahatma Gandhi: Salt Satyagraha - The Watershed*, Chapter- XX]. However, a second Settlement had been reached between Gandhiji and Willingdon on 27 August 1931 and Gandhiji had sailed for London on 29 August to attend the R.T.C.

Willingdon's Government had thus been carrying on an undeclared war against the Congress even while they were ostensibly seeking the cooperation of the Congress in the deliberations over the constitutional question. The aggressive outlook had become even more pronounced after the collapse of the Labour Government in August 1931 and coming into power of the so-called National Government, which was in effect a Tory Government with a Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. Wedgwood Benn, who had, as Secretary of State, been the architect with Lord Irwin of the policy of reconciliation with the Congress, had been replaced by Samuel Hoare, a dyed-in-the-wool Tory.

Thus within a few months of the Delhi Settlement Samuel Hoare in London and Willingdon in Delhi (who had taken over the Viceroyalty from Irwin in April 1931) set about undoing the damage they thought had been done by the policy of conciliation followed by Wedgwood Benn and Irwin. Irwin, even in the thick of the Civil Disobedience Movement, had given expression to his admiration for Gandhiji in his speech in the Central Assembly on 17 January 1931, declaring that no one could "fail to recognize the spiritual force which impels Mr. Gandhi to count no sacrifice too great in the cause, as he believes, of the India he loves."



Willingdon did not share this assessment of Gandhiji. His attitude to Gandhiji is expressed in a letter he wrote to Samuel Hoare on 10 January 1932:

Gandhi is a set of Jekyll and Hyde, and while he may have his saintly side, on the other hand, he is the most Machiavellian bargaining little political humbug I have ever come across. [*History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 173]

On 28 August 1931, soon after Hoare took charge at India Office, Willingdon wrote to him:

I and my Government are getting rather alarmed at the fact that your predecessor [Wedgwood Benn] seemed rather anxious for us to give almost every position away, in a supreme effort to get Mr. Gandhi over to London. [*Ibid*, p. 164]

Consequently Willingdon had set about retrieving the positions given away by Irwin through legislative measures and administrative and police action unparalleled in severity and barbarity. In the last three months of 1931 alone no less than eight Ordinances - No. VIII to No. XV - were promulgated. These were: (1) the Ordinance to try cases in the absence of the accused, (2) Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance, (3) the Ordinance to prevent assemblies of men from proceeding to Kashmir, (4) the Bengal Special Powers Ordinance, (5) the U.P. Ordinance to provide against instigation to illegal refusal of payment of certain liabilities, (6) the N.W.F.P. Special Powers Ordinance, (7) the N.W.F.P. Ordinance to provide against instigation to illegal refusal to pay certain liabilities, and (8) the N.W.F.P. Dangerous Associations Ordinance. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1931, Vol. II. pp. 661-83]. Altogether fifteen Ordinances were issued during the year 1931.



The action initiated by Willingdon's administration on 4 January 1932 did not thus mark a shift in policy necessitated by the Congress resolution to resume mass civil disobedience. It was not pre-emptive action, as British propaganda made it out to be. The British administration had been preparing for it ever since the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement on 5 March 1931, and the preparations had been stepped up after Willingdon took office as Viceroy in April.

The Bombay Government, presided over by Governor Frederick Sykes, had designed a "Civil Disobedience Manual", which had contained a review of the lessons of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-31 and recommended guide lines on policy to be pursued in future. It had been said that the care taken during the movement not to do anything that would alienate public opinion in the hope that the more sober elements in the population could be united in opposition to the movement had not borne fruit. It might be assumed that in any future agitation "a large section of public opinion will be antipathetic to the Government and primary attention should be given to crushing the movement before it gets fully underway".

One of the guide lines recommended in the Manual was that Civil Disobedience offenders might as a rule be awarded rigorous imprisonment rather than simple imprisonment. Fines were recommended in addition to imprisonment in all cases except where the realization of fines might be doubtful. Civil Disobedience offenders who were minors were to be proceeded against under the Whipping Act or Reformatory School Act. [B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi*, Allen & Unwin, London, p. 333]

Madan Mohan Malaviya put it succinctly in an open letter to the Viceroy, published in *The Bombay Chronicle* of 31 January 1932:



The strength of the Congress had grown and was likely to grow further. It was not likely to be satisfied by the reforms proposed. . . . It seems Your Excellency and the Secretary of State decided that the time was opportune for a change of policy and for launching a strong, well-planned, comprehensive attack on the Congress all over India. . . . Thus, even before the return home of Mahatma Gandhi the Government had decided on war. [*Romain Rolland and Gandhi: Correspondence*, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1976, p. 566]

The plan thus was to crush the Congress by a lightning action and lay the blame for it on the Congress.

Justifying the British policy Secretary of State Samuel Hoare said in the House of Commons on 29 January 1932:

Whatever might have been Mr. Gandhi's personal inclinations, the fact remained indisputable that in the second half of December the leaders of the Congress organizations were determined to renew the war with the Government of India. If the members studied the blue book they would see that instance after instance showed indisputably that the war mentality had possessed the leaders of the Congress in India. The blue book showed in detail how the Red Shirt movement had been stimulated by the Congress in the North-West Frontier Province and how in that very inflammable area, a critical situation had arisen that threatened the very basis of the Government.

The blue book had again showed how in the United Provinces the Congress had stimulated a revolutionary movement that looked like leading to agrarian revolution. . . in the province of Bengal the leaders of



the Congress, particularly the Left leaders, were in close contact with the Terrorist movement. . .

The Government was faced with this direct threat to its existence not by a comprehensive movement covering the whole of India, but by a sectional organization which admittedly represented only a very small portion of the great population of India. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 391-92]

Similarly a telegram from the Viceroy to Gandhiji before Gandhiji was arrested said:

They [the Government] must hold you and the Congress responsible for all the consequences which may ensue from action which the Congress have announced their intention of taking and to meet which the Government will take all necessary measures. [C.W.M.G., XLVIII, p. 503]

This pose of outraged innocence, as we have seen, was a sham. The "necessary measures" were being taken not to prevent a threat from the Congress from materializing but to destroy the Congress as an organization in pursuance of a policy devised beforehand. Nevertheless the policy marked a new phase in the conflict.

4

Arrests and prosecutions, searches and seizures, lathi-charges and firings took place all over the country. Jails began to fill with Civil Disobedience prisoners.

On 4 January, shortly after Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai Patel had been taken to Yeravda Central Jail, Rajendra Prasad, who had been nominated by Patel to



succeed him as President of the Congress, was picked up from Sadaqat Ashram in Patna.

In Calcutta, on 5 January, no less than forty-five organizations were declared unlawful associations and sixty different places were searched. The police seized properties and arrested about twenty leading Congressmen.

In Lucknow, on the same day, C. B. Gupta, H. P. Saxena, Gopinath Srivastava and many others were arrested and convicted to varying terms of imprisonment and fines. In Benares the police opened fire on a meeting held to protest against the arrest of Gandhiji.

In Delhi, the Chief Commissioner declared the Provincial and District Congress Committees unlawful organizations. Residences of Congress leaders, including that of Dr. Ansari, were searched. So were the premises of some Indian languages dailies, such as *Tej* and *Arjun*.

On 6 January in Bombay the police swooped upon leading Congressmen and simultaneously arrested a large number, including Vithalbhai Patel, former President of the Central Assembly, Nagindas Master and K.F. Nariman. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was arrested while leading women picketers of foreign cloth shops. The police also took possession of the Congress House and hoisted the Union Jack on it. The premises of the Youth League, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Hindustani Seva Dal were also raided and their books and records seized.

In Karachi Jairamdas Doulatram, Nagindas Bechar, Parasram Tahilramani, Secretary of the District Congress Committee, Tarachand Lalwani, Swami Krishnanand and a host of other leaders and workers were arrested on 7 January.



In Ahmedabad on the same day all the leading Congressmen were similarly picked up, prominent among them being Mahadev Desai, Manilal Kothari, J.C. Kumarappa, Kaka Kalelkar and Raja Rao. All of them were lodged in Sabarmati Jail.

In Karnataka Gangadharrao Deshpande was arrested under one of the Ordinances issued on 4 January. At Kakinada in Andhra Balusa Sambamurthi and Satyanarayana were arrested for defying Section 144 and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Krishna Rao and Nageswara Rao were also arrested and sentenced to two years in prison and fines of Rs. 1,000 each. T. Prakasam, D. Narayana Raju, A. Govindachari and several others were sentenced to seven months' rigorous imprisonment each.

In Delhi Dr. M. A. Ansari, who had been listed as President of the Congress to fill the place of Rajendra Prasad, was arrested on 8 January and sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200. Mrs. Rajpati Kaul, mother of Kamala Nehru, Mrs. Durgadevi, Mrs. Rampyari and several local workers were arrested while attending a mass meeting.

In Bombay, on the same day, no less than 80 Congress organizations were declared unlawful associations.

On the 9th C. Rajagopalachari and Satyamurti were arrested while distributing propaganda leaflets. They were tried under the Molestation and Boycott Ordinance. Both were sentenced to terms of six months' imprisonment. Elsewhere in Madras Congress volunteers picketing foreign cloth shops were severely lathi-charged.

At Periyakulam on the following day another batch of volunteers picketing liquor shops was similarly lathi-charged.



On the 11th there were lathi-charges in Tirpur in the South and in Karachi in the North-West.

On 13 January the Swaraj Bhawan in Allahabad was occupied by the police, who pulled down the Congress flag and hoisted the Union Jack in its place. The Congress House at Royapettah, Madras, was similarly occupied, after a notification declaring that it was being used for illegal purposes. All the papers, accounts and cheque books were taken away.

On the 11th, police arrested Mohanlal Bhatt, editor, printer and publisher of *Navajivan* and sealed the press.

In Bengal yet another 272 associations comprising Congress committees and allied organizations were declared unlawful. Several arrests also took place in the course of a demonstration.

In Bombay police made several lathi charges to disperse processions. The casualties numbered thirty. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 1-5]

Thus throughout the country the police were engaged in ruthless and indiscriminate repression.

5

By the middle of January the entire leadership of the Congress was in prison. The Congress Working Committee had been declared illegal, as also most organizations in any way associated with the Congress, such as youth leagues, students' associations, national schools and institutions, Congress hospitals, swadeshi concerns and the like.

Thorough and all-encompassing as the repression was, it was also most brutal. For realizing taxes and fines properties were attached and sold for trifles, not only of defaulters and convicts but also of joint families and



sometimes of relatives. Besides legal action there was the illegal harassment and plunder of property. Pattabhi Sitaramayya writes:

Not only were movables like furniture, household utensils, jewellery and even cattle and standing crops attached and sold and sometimes destroyed, but the very lands and homesteads were not spared. . . . There were many places where extra police were posted as a punitive measure and their cost realized from the inhabitants. . . . The terror and havoc created by the posting of additional force was so great in parts of the district of Midnapore in Bengal that the bulk of the Hindu population of two thanas in the district actually evacuated their homes and shifted to the neighbouring areas in the midst of indescribable suffering resulting in the death of women. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Padma Publications, Bombay, 1946, Vol. I, pp. 529-30]

Lathi charges and beatings had been, in the earlier phase of the movement in 1930-31, a late development, says the Congress historian. But in 1932 the lathi ruled right from the beginning. The number of those assaulted and belaboured was according to his estimate four times as high as the number of those arrested and convicted. Prisoners too were beaten. They were asked to divulge office secrets. They were asked to produce papers, books, subscription lists of volunteers. Unutterable things were said and unspeakable tortures inflicted. Respectable citizens such as advocates of High Courts, were subjected to the inhuman torture of their pubic hair being pulled out one by one. [*Ibid*, p. 521]

The grim tale of humiliations and tortures inflicted on innocent people is corroborated by the account furnished by Abdul Ghaffar Khan of the doings of the Frontier administration during the movement. He said:



The Britishers stripped the Pathans of their trousers and made them naked. When picketing was in full swing in Charsadda, they undressed the volunteers, twisted their testicles with a tight loop of rope, and beat them till they lost consciousness. Then they threw the dazed volunteers into a pit filled with urine and faeces. In freezing weather the volunteers were thrown in water and many were shot. . . . Many prominent leaders were whipped and were made to grind corn on *chakkis* and to turn *ghanis* (oil presses). They were confined to solitary cells. There was no cruelty and insult to which the political prisoners were not subjected. [D. G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1967, p.161]

It may be mentioned that in early part of January, while police were on the rampage all over India, in the N.W.F.P. columns of troops were operating in aid of civil authorities to put down the popular upsurge in Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. The repression was particularly ruthless in the Mardan and Charsadda sub-divisions of Peshawar district. [Diwan Chand Obhrai, *The Evolution of North-West Frontier Province*, The London Book Co., Peshawar, 1938, p. 253]

When reports of the doings of the police gone berserk reached Gandhiji in jail he was anguished. On 23 January he wrote to the Bombay Governor drawing his attention to the excesses being committed under the Ordinances:

The breaking up of a peaceful meeting in Ahmedabad by severe lathi charges and running horses through the meeting appears to have been a barbarous procedure. Several young men were severely and some women were slightly hurt. One young woman had her hair pulled. . . . In Nadiad the treatment is said to have been still more brutal and it is reported to have been the worst in Surat. Boys in two boarding houses are said to have been hurriedly dragged out of them and the houses taken over by the



authorities. Such procedure brutalizes those who are engaged in carrying it out. . . .

One of the most respectable Indians . . . Mr. Abbas Tyabji, who is 78-year-old and who is an ex-Chief Judge of the Baroda High Court, is said to have been locked up in Nadiad along with other prisoners in what can only be described as a cage. . . .

I have picked out but a few of what have appeared to me to be glaring instances of high-handedness. If past experience is any guide, probably the worst cases have not even been allowed to appear in the newspapers.

Gandhiji further told the Governor that he was anxious that on both sides every avoidable cause of bitterness should be avoided and that the fight should be conducted honourably on either side. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, pp. 19-20]

Non-Congress political opinion in India was equally outraged both by the promulgation of the Ordinances and the way they were being worked. In the Central Assembly on 1 February 1932, Sir Hari Singh Gaur, who had always kept himself at an arm's length from the Congress and civil disobedience, moved a resolution protesting "against the manner in which the Ordinances promulgated by the Government of India have been worked in various parts of the country by the agents of the Government", and disapproving of the way the various Ordinances had been issued "immediately after the conclusion of the last sitting of the Legislative Assembly".

Speaking on the resolution he expressed regret that under the Ordinances "without any charge or evidence, persons could be detained, their properties and funds confiscated and parents punished for the crimes of their children".



K. C. Neogy, supporting the resolution, said the Ordinances were part of a repressive policy thought out beforehand. He pointed out that Churchill, in his speech in the House of Commons on 3 December 1931, had indicated that there would be laws amounting to martial law in the provinces and had wondered how the various committees of the Round Table Conference would work in those conditions.

Abdur Rahim, the Bengal Muslim leader, also condemned the Ordinances in the most categorical terms. The European group, however, was most vociferous in supporting the Ordinance raj. The motion was lost by 44 against 62 votes. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 126-34]

6

In his speech in the Central Legislative Assembly on 25 January Willingdon explained the policy thus:

There must be no room left for misunderstanding either on the part of the public or of those who choose to disobey the law. There can be no compromise in this matter. I and my Government are determined to use, to the full, the resources of the State in fighting and defeating a movement which would otherwise remain a perpetual menace to orderly government and individual liberty. While the Government will take all the requisite steps to guard against any abuse of the special powers it has been necessary to take, there can be no relaxation of the measures now in force against Civil Disobedience so long as circumstances exist which make them necessary. [*Ibid*, p. 119]

In England Sir Samuel Hoare addressed the House of Commons on the subject of India on 28 January. He roundly blamed the Congress for the unrest in the N.W.F.P., the U.P., Bengal and Bombay and declared that the "restrictions",



meaning the penal provisions under the Ordinances, were necessary and that with their help the situation in the N.W.F.P., the U.P., Bengal, Bombay and Ahmedabad, had been brought under control. Attacking the leadership of the Congress, the Secretary of State said:

While Mr. Gandhi was in England these men had already started the war. From the north to the south they had already begun a relentless attack upon the very foundations of law and order. No self-respecting Government could have failed to accept this challenge to its authority, least of all when it was made by a single section of the Indian population. Congress has too long arrogated to itself the claim to represent all India.

Hoare referred to the way the representative character of the Congress had been brought in question by the Aga Khan, who represented "the great Muslim community": and Dr. Ambedkar, "the champion of the untouchables" and how untouchables had started a riot in Bombay "against an arrogant Congress" on the day Gandhiji had landed in Bombay. Scores of millions of Indians, he declared, repudiated altogether the claim of the Congress to represent them. Continuing he said:

These years of trial have made us know our friends. We shall stand by them, whether they be the Indians who are determined to keep India an integral part of the British Empire or whether they be that splendid band of British officials who are facing the dastardly attack of the terrorists. . . .

He concluded his speech with the words:

Though the dogs bark, the caravan passes on. [*Ibid*, pp. 412-14]

In the Commons, where there were debates on the Indian Question on 29 February, 24 March, 19 April and 27 June during the first half of 1932, the British



Government continued to justify its policy of repression. In his speech on 29 February, Secretary of State Hoare defended the emergency powers as a "bulwark against anarchy, disorder and revolution". The policy came in for severe condemnation from the Labour benches, with Morgan Jones, Grenfell and Lansbury leading the attack.

Morgan Jones criticised the "extraordinary celerity" shown by the Government in arresting Gandhiji, who had never been given a chance to exercise a moderating influence. Even people who had for long been cordial supporters of the Government had resented Gandhiji's arrest. Instances had been reported of police harassment of the people. In an incident in Kheda men had been seized and made to stand stripped and on all fours for two hours in a village pond. The Ordinance had not left a vestige of liberty to the people.

Clement Attlee joined in raising a voice of protest against the repression in India and said that in trying to placate the minorities the British risked estranging the majority.

Lansbury severely condemned the "despicable methods of holding the people down". He declared that it was "a piece of impertinence" to say that Indians needed to be taught how to govern themselves. No material benefits that the conqueror might confer on the conquered could take the place of self-government and the right of conquered people to choose for themselves. He declared that if the Government was unable to maintain the position except by such powers as had been taken, the British had no right to remain rulers of the country. He went on:

Let us have an end to this nonsense about the Congress not representing this, and the people of India not wanting that! At the Round Table all the delegates without exception demanded autonomy. I do not



think that it is for us to decide whether India is or is not capable of self-government. . . . And let us say nothing more of the 'Depressed Classes'! I never heard any talk about taking care of these people until the question of self-government reached its present stage. [*Romain Rolland and Gandhi: Correspondence*, p. 581]

Grenfell said the situation in India had slid further back than it had been for years. The machinery of conciliation appeared to have broken down and the moderate opinion in India was growing anxious. The Ordinances, he said, could not be justified on any ground. The Government was building up a tradition of injustice. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I. pp. 398-410]

But in a House dominated by Tories the voice of the critics of the British Government's Indian policy could make little impression. On the other hand the Tories and most of the British Press praised Sir Samuel Hoare for his efficient handling of the Indian situation.

7

While wholesale repression was sweeping across the country, Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai Patel remained confined in Yeravda prison, where they had been taken on 4 January after their arrest under Regulation XXV of 1827, classified as State prisoners.

Gandhiji started by treating the incarceration as heaven-sent opportunity to rest, relax and overtake arrears of sleep. He had had an exceedingly busy time ever since his release eleven months earlier on 26 January 1931 with practically no rest. There had been first the nerve-racking parleys with Irwin, then the continued tussle with the officialdom over breaches of the Settlement and finally the incessant toil associated with the Round Table Conference.



This is how Gandhiji described his and Vallabhbhai's jail routine in a letter to Narandas Gandhi:

Both of us get up at 3.40. After brushing [the teeth] we pray. After that we take warm water with honey and lemon-juice and then read till the stroke of five. From five to six we walk. At six, if I feel the call of nature I answer it, and then sleep for about twenty minutes. I get up at 6.45, when the bell for opening the cells is given, and read up to seven. The Sardar, after answering the call of nature, walks about and sits down to breakfast, he reads from the newspaper, which has arrived by then. During the day I read, write and spin. In between I take a nap twice. . . . I have two meals a day. . . . At present I eat dates and tomatoes and, in the morning, take half a pound of milk, and in the evening the same quantity of curds. . . . My health is good, of course. Do you know that my weight has increased? I see that now I do not need very nourishing food, especially when I enjoy solitude and peace of mind. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, pp. 75-76]

Gandhiji got through a fair amount of reading in Yeravda jail. By the first week of February - that is, in just one month after he arrived in Yeravda - he had finished reading several books. These included: Will Durant, *The Case for India*, Crozier, *A Word to Gandhi*, Brailsford, *Rebel India*, Al Haj Salmin, *Imam Hussain and Khalifa Ali*, Samuel Hoare, *Fourth Seal*, Ramsay MacDonald's *Travelogue*, J. C. Kumarappa, *Survey of Matar Taluka*, Ramanathan, *Speech on Khadi*, Will Hayes, *Essence of Hinduism* and *The Book of the Cow*, John Ruskin, *St. George's Guild*, K. T. Shah, *Federal Finance*, Rothenstein, *Ruin of Egypt*, *Candle of Vision*, Kinley, *Money* and *Shankh ane Kodi* (Gujarati). He then started on a biography of Munshi Zaka Ullah written by Andrews and another work of K. T. Shah, *Economic Administration of India*. [*Ibid*, pp. 76-77]



The authorities had permitted Gandhiji to write letters to persons not prominent in political field and Gandhiji availed himself of the permission to write to members of the Ashram circle individually and collectively. The letters contain advice and guidance, and those to Narandas Gandhi suggestions on the conduct of the Ashram affairs, for the Ashram problems and squabbles pursued Gandhiji to the jail. But the letters he wrote, Gandhiji told Narandas, were not to be published in newspapers or used as propaganda in any form. He wrote:

My actions are governed by mutual trust. I do nothing without the knowledge of the authorities. . . . There seems nothing wrong to me in writing a letter of condolence. But it would be wrong if such a letter were published. That would be propaganda.

The letter of condolence in question was one on the death of Chanchalbehn's son Visu. Extracts from letters containing moral discussions or news about Gandhiji's health could however be published in the handwritten sheet *Ashram Samachar*. [*Ibid*, p. 56]

In a sense all the letters Gandhiji wrote contained "moral discussions", some perhaps more than others, and reflections on matters spiritual. In a candid letter written on 13 February Gandhiji tried to answer the question how deeply he felt the awareness of God. He wrote:

During waking hours there is no time when I am not aware that God dwells within and observes everything. This awareness is intellectual and has been achieved through long practice. I do not say that my heart has such awareness, since I do not think that I am free from all fear. . . . It seems that I love life and also that I would be ready to die. These two feelings together are strange, and because of this weakness I do not think I can say that my awareness of God is a matter of the heart also . . . and yet so complete and



firm is the intellectual acceptance of this idea that I also feel it is slowly sinking into the heart. [*Ibid*, p. 91]

Premabehn Katak, one of the most persistent correspondents during this period, wrote to Gandhiji that as a writer in *Young India* he appeared to be on a much higher plane than Gandhiji the man, who had human limitations. Gandhiji answered:

The distinction you have made is correct. The writer of articles in *Young India* is one person, and the man whom the inmates of the Ashram know intimately is another. In *Young India* I might present myself as one of the Pandavas, but in the Ashram how can I help showing myself as I am? I am, moreover, a votary of truth and can make no attempt consciously to hide my weaknesses. Hence the Kauravas dwelling in me make their presence felt in one way or another. [*Ibid*, p. 94]

8

The privileges of writing and receiving letters and interviews with visitors remained hemmed in with problems, but this time they were not of an intractable nature or of the kind requiring any drastic step on the part of Gandhiji.

Writing and receiving letters was governed by the Bombay Home Department's instructions conveyed on 16 January, soon after Gandhiji came to jail. Both Gandhiji and Sardar Patel could write letters once a week, or oftener with the previous permission of the Superintendent of the Prison. All correspondence to or from the prisoners was subject to censorship by the Superintendent. Letters written in an Indian language were required to be sent to the Oriental Translator to Government for translation. All objectionable correspondence was to be withheld. [*Ibid*, pp. 533-34]



The procedure, as was only natural, resulted in inordinate delays both in the receipt and in the delivery of letters. In several cases outgoing letters did not reach the addressees at all. Gandhiji protested. He told the authorities that he knew that all correspondence was subject to strict censorship, and he had nothing to say against it. But the correspondence sent from the prison, duly franked by the prison authorities, should be free from further censorship and consequent delay or danger of being withheld altogether. [*Ibid*, pp. 402-3]

Soon after coming to Yeravda Gandhiji came to know that there were over two hundred civil disobedience prisoners in the extension barracks of the jail. Many of them were his close co-workers. Gandhiji told the authorities that an occasional meeting with the prisoners was a human want he could not resist, and asked for permission to see the prisoners in small batches of two and three at a time.

The jail authorities forwarded the request to the Home Department of the Bombay Government. The Home Department conveyed the necessary permission for interviews "with not more than three prisoners at one time, and not oftener than once in two weeks". In order to keep Vallabhbhai and Mahadev Desai out of the interviews, Gandhiji was informed that his interviews must take place in the office of the Superintendent, and for twenty minutes only. [*Ibid*, p. 536; *Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. I, p. 23]

Gandhiji asked for interview with Haridas Gandhi, Narsinhbhai Ishwarbhai Patel and Chhaganlal Joshi, all lodged in Yeravda Prison. He later amended the list by including Gangabehn Vaidya in place of Chhaganlal Joshi. But Bhandari, the Jail Superintendent, said he would write to the Inspector General of Prisons again. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, p. 210; *Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), pp. 23, 25]



Gandhiji was afflicted by pain and stiffness in the elbow joint of the left arm almost throughout his jail term. Doctors said he was suffering from a "tennis elbow" as a result of spinning continuously for years. They suggested rest, which meant abstaining from spinning. This Gandhiji would not do and put up with the pain. He did try giving rest to the left arm. He first tried drawing the thread with the right hand, using the left only to turn the wheel. Then he tried operating the wheel with the foot. Finally the doctors put the left arm in splints. The pain however persisted through the months. Gandhiji continued to spin. [C.W.M.G., Vol. I, pp. 17, 18, 47, 82, 146, 277, 373]

An interest Gandhiji assiduously pursued in the Yeravda Jail was astronomy. He had taken to the study of the heavens during his previous jail term – for he had been permitted to sleep under the sky – and also read some books on astronomy. Now that he was back in jail, he took up the study again.

At night, lying in his bed, he let his gaze roam across the star-studded firmament, trying to identify constellations. During the day he studied, among other things, books on astronomy sent by friends. Among them were three books by James Jeans: *The Stars in Their Courses*, *The Universe Around Us* and *The Mysterious Universe*. Then there were such works as *Stellar Maps*, *Khagolchitram*, *Hindu Astronomy*, *Ball's Story of the Sky*, *Jyotirvilas*, Dikshit's *Bharatiya Jyotishshastra* and Patwa's *Akash Darshan*.

Other enthusiasts with whom Gandhiji exchanged ideas on the subject were Hiralal and Kaka Kalelkar. Indeed Gandhiji wanted something written for the lay reader in Gujarati and thought that perhaps Kaka Kalelkar could do it.

In a letter to Kaka Kalelkar Gandhiji explained his interest in the subject:

Looking at the sky the impression we get of infinity, of purity, of order and of grandeur is one that purifies us. It may perhaps be that on being able



to reach the planets and the stars one will get the same experience of good and evil that one gets here on earth. But truly divine is the peaceful influence of their beauty and coolness at this great distance. Also when once we are able to establish communion with the heavens it does not matter where we may happen to be. It then becomes like receiving the Ganga in one's own home. [*Ibid*, pp. 11, 276 and 427]

9

Gandhiji's pursuit of learning in jail was many-dimensional. He was impatient, in the first place, to add to his knowledge of languages. Here is what he wrote to Kishorelal Mashruwala on 1 July 1932:

Currently I am studying Urdu. Then, as my acquaintance with currency and fiscal matters is unpardonably inadequate I am trying to get a grip of that subject a little. In both cases it is the desire to serve that impels me. Being possessed by this desire I am tempted to improve my imperfect knowledge of Tamil, even at this stage when I may be considered to be nearing death. The same is the case with Bengali and Marathi, for I had taken up the study of these languages and then discontinued. If I have to stay on here for a sufficiently long time it would not be surprising if I find myself engaged in these studies. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati) Vol. I, p. 267]

Gandhiji also did a great deal of reading and pondering on spiritual matters. For a man of religion the necessary guidance in matters of spiritual belief could be provided by the scriptures, viz., the Vedas, the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, but understanding the scriptures required an adequate knowledge of Sanskrit. A further difficulty was the matter of interpretation, for no two interpretations of the same texts seemed to agree in all respects. Gandhiji was



acutely conscious of these problems and sought to overcome them. In a letter to S. D. Satavlekar, a renowned Vedic scholar, he wrote on 19 July 1932:

You are acquainted with my knowledge of Sanskrit, it is of the most elementary order. . . I know this much, that Vedic hymns have been interpreted in several ways by different scholars – by Sanatanis in one way, by Arya Samajis in another and by Western scholars in yet another. . . . Is there any work available from which I may learn the rudiments of Vedic grammar and does a collection exist containing different annotations by various scholars? In short, what should a man like myself do when confronted with interpreting correctly the Vedic *mantras*? I have not faith enough in any sect to accept their interpretation as gospel truth. [C.W.M.G., L, p. 263]

Gandhiji was of course an ardent Vaishnava. He at the same time had a close affinity with *Advaita* (non-dualism) as propounded by Shankara. In the same letter to Satavlekar he explained his position thus:

The man who sees the whole world as a manifestation of Vasudeva is bound to have a vision of the Cosmic Form [as described in Ch. XI of the *Bhagavad Gita*] but the Form will be that of his own imagining. A Christian who considers the creation as a divine manifestation will visualize an image to suit his notions. Our way of worship determines the form of God in our mind. . . . We may call the divine force as Brahman, *Atman* or Vasudeva, yet it remains formless. Only for the devotee it acquires dimensions; that is its expression and therein lies its poetic appeal. [*Ibid*, p. 262]

A number of people wrote to Gandhiji, seeking guidance on spiritual matters or clarification of metaphysical propositions. Gandhiji took the opportunity, while



answering them to clarify or enlarge upon ideas earlier expressed by him. Writing to P. G. Mathew on 9 July Gandhiji says:

In 'God is Truth', 'is' certainly does not mean 'equal to' nor does it merely mean 'is truthful'. Truth is not a mere attribute of God but He is That. He is nothing if He is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means Sat. *Sat* means 'Is'. Therefore Truth is implied in 'Is'. God is, nothing else is. [*Ibid*, p. 175]

But if God and Truth are identical, then saying 'God is Truth' is equivalent to saying 'Truth is God'— a proposition that Gandhiji expounded in his talk at Lausanne in December 1931. Writing to the Ashram boys and girls on 21 March 1932 Gandhiji said:

Instead of saying 'God is Truth:' I now say 'Truth is God' There was a time when I doubted the existence of God. Even at that time I did not doubt the existence of Truth. This Truth is not a material quality; it is pure consciousness. Since it orders the whole universe it is God. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, p. 223]

Pure consciousness, *chit*, it may be remembered, is defined by Shankara as consciousness without a subject (*ashraya*) and without an object (*vishaya*). It is neither individualized – *my* consciousness – nor concretized – consciousness of blue. What is more, it is the only reality, Sat is *chit*.

On the subject of Maya, too, Gandhiji's position is very similar to that of Shankara. Writing to Balkrishna Bhawe on 20 August 1932, he said:

I do not know with certainty what Shankaracharya meant by *Maya*. This is what I believe. The world which we see and believe in is mere appearance; it is a product of our imagination. But in its true essence it does exist. We do not know what that essence is. We say it is *Brahman*, but we characterize all



descriptions of the latter as inadequate- *neti, neti* (not that, not that). The world also is *Brahman* and not different from it. The difference which we see is mere appearance. [C.W.M.G., L, p. 392]

Writing to Mirabehn earlier on the same theme Gandhiji had said:

The idea is that the universe is not real in the sense of being permanent; it is neither a thing to be hankered after nor feared because it is supposed to be God's creation. As a matter of fact it is a creation of our imagination even as the snake in the rope is. The real universe like the real rope is there. We perceive neither when the veil is lifted and darkness is gone. [C.W.M.G., XLV, p. 52]

Shankara too asserts that *Maya* is a positive principle that is neither existent (*sat*) nor non-existent (*asat*). The world and finite selves are *Maya* inasmuch as their reality is not deducible from *Brahman*. They are not creations of *Brahman*, for *Brahman* does not create. They are, rather, appearance superimposed upon *Brahman*, concealing its nature. Shankara called this superimposition *adhyasa* or *avidya* — the golden lid that hides Truth. But it may not be dismissed as *asat*.

And Gandhiji wrote:

In [the] cycle of time this universe is *Maya*, but during the moment of time it exists, it is real enough. [C.W.M.G., L, p. 40]

While Gandhiji read, wrote, reflected and span in the confines of Yeravda Prison, repression continued to sweep across the country in ever increasing fury.

On 15 January in Calcutta students took out a procession and were forcibly dispersed by the police. Thirty students were taken into custody.



On 16 January Seth Jamanlal Bajaj, Dr. Hardikar and Sofia Somji were arrested in Bombay under Ordinance No. 2 of 1932, Mohanlal Bhatt, editor, printer and publisher of *Navajivan* was also arrested.

On 18 January, S. A. Brelvi of *Bombay Chronicle*, who had been released from jail only on 15 January, was rearrested under the Special Powers Ordinance for having disobeyed police orders. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In Lahore Dr. Satyapal, Dr. Gopichand Bhargava and Harimohan Chatterjee were arrested under Section 7 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

In Allahabad on the same day Mrs. Uma Nehru and a few others were tried under the Emergency Powers Ordinance in the jail where they were lodged. Uma Nehru was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment. In Madras Ambujammal, daughter of Srinivasa Iyengar, Janammal, daughter of Bhashyam Iyengar and Kamalabai were arrested while picketing foreign cloth shops and sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment each.

On 19 January in Calcutta demonstrators were dispersed and sixteen persons were arrested. Six women volunteers, who had participated in a procession in defiance of orders, were tried and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment.

On 20 January J. M. Sen Gupta, returning from Europe, where he had gone on medical advice, was arrested as soon as he landed and sent to Yeravda prison. The cause of arrest, as given out by officials, was that he had earlier been arrested for sedition and was a known agitator. On the following day there were arrests and convictions in Calcutta, many of the arrested being women, for holding meetings and picketing. On 22 January the number of those arrested was 27. They were charged with distributing unauthorized leaflets. Fifteen persons,



including three women, were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

On 23 January in Comilla the police resorted to lathi-charge to disperse a procession. Many were injured. On 25 January there was lathi-charge also in Peddapuram in Andhra on a group advocating swadeshi and boycott of foreign cloth. A dozen persons were badly beaten up by the police for being in possession of objectionable leaflets.

On 26 January, observed as Independence Day, police arrested 103 persons in Delhi, including Farid-ul-Haq Ansari and Chamanlal, a news reporter. In Bombay 75 arrests were made in connection with the Independence Day processions. Mass arrests similarly took place in Ahmedabad, Karachi, Lucknow, Calcutta and other places. In Calcutta 200 persons were arrested, including women.

In Bombay on 29 January police resorted to lathi-charge in which some 200 persons sustained injuries and then fired on demonstrators observing the Frontier Day, killing one person and wounding 21. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 1-9]

By the end of January, according to Government's own admission, 14,800 persons had been convicted under various Ordinances. [*Ibid*, p. 26]

But arrests and convictions were not the only way the Government dealt with the Civil Disobedience movement. By far the most widely used method adopted to deal with protesting crowds was resort to lathi-charges. Pattabhi Sitaramayya writes:

The police had taken to the device of dispersing crowds and processions by lathi-charges. There was hardly an important place in any



province where the movement showed signs of life which did not experience these lathi-charges. In many places the injuries caused were serious and the number of those injured large. . . . When the lathi-charges were made, no discrimination was made between those who had assembled as sight-seers and those who had gone with the set purpose of disobeying the law. [*The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, p. 529]

11

It is not to be supposed that the initiative rested wholly with the Government and Congressmen supinely submitted to the punitive fury unleashed by the gendarmerie. In all the provinces and at all levels Congress Committees zealously and whole-heartedly endeavoured to further activities connected with Civil Disobedience though it was not always easy. As Pattabhi Sitaramayya puts it:

One of the difficulties which faced the organizers . . . related to the laws which could be selected for disobedience. It is evident that any law and every law may not be disobeyed. The Ordinances with their wide ramifications solved the difficulty for the Congress. In the different provinces different items were selected, while there were certain items prescribed from time to time by the Acting President of the Congress. Thus picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops and of British goods was an item common to all the provinces. In the United Provinces, on a pretty large scale, and in a portion of Bengal, non-payment of rent was an important item. In places like Bihar and Bengal, payment of Chowkidari Tax was withheld. In the Central provinces and the Berars, Karnataka and some places in U.P., Madras Presidency and Bihar Forest Laws were disobeyed. Salt Laws were defied in many places by manufacture, collection or sale of



illicit salt. Meetings and processions were of course prohibited and were held in spite of such prohibition. At an early stage in the struggle, a favourite item of the programme was the observance of what came to be known as special days. These were in connection with special events or individuals, or for special purposes, e.g., Gandhi Day, Motilal Day, Frontier Day, Martyrs Day, Flag Day and a number of other days. [*Ibid*, pp. 526-27]

Nevertheless as a whole the campaign remained desultory and largely symbolic. There was no dearth of zeal and enthusiasm in the rank and file, but some of the most important elements necessary to carry on a successful campaign were missing: there were no financial resources, most of the funds of the Congress organizations having been confiscated, there was no organization left and the effective leadership was in jail.

Even so, in many parts of the country, especially in the rural areas, the spirit of defiance shown by the people was not easily crushed. According to the Report of the India League Delegation, of which mention has been made earlier, in one single tehsil in U.P. 209 summonses had been issued, 298 attachments made and 44 auctions effected. In Ras village in Gujarat, 16 encampments of armed police pickets encircled the whole cultivable area and out of a total of 2,600 acres, 500 acres had been confiscated and sold and another 900 acres had been seized. Seizure and sale at nominal prices of goods and chattels to recover taxes had become a normal procedure. [B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 535]

In the cities, even with picketing having been rendered difficult by Government action, boycott of foreign cloth and of British goods generally made a significant impact, so much so that the British Press was filled with forebodings. *Times* of 29 January admitted that “the situation has much worsened since the end of 1931”. Romain Rolland in his "Letter from India", published in *Europe* of



15 March, noted that England had been touched not so much in the heart as in the stomach, by the boycott which had been 95 per cent effective. He cited several British dailies, such as the *Express*, the *Telegraph* and the *Manchester Guardian*, lamenting the consequences of the boycott. *Manchester Guardian* of 12 February 1932 counselled:

We must hasten to make peace by withdrawing the Ordinances (in return for a promise to suspend Civil Disobedience), by frank recognition of Indian right to the fullest propaganda on behalf of indigenous industries. . . Above all a clear statement that self-government is being swiftly and wholeheartedly pushed forward is essential. . . . The attempt to kill Congress is the surest way to disaster. [*Romain Rolland and Gandhi: Correspondence*, pp. 79-94]

In his third "Letter from India" Romain Rolland referred to reports he had received which gave an idea of the damage suffered by British trade. He wrote:

British firms in Bombay have been harshly affected; orders for textile machinery to the value of 37 lakhs of rupees (£ 300,000) had been made, but either have been cancelled or are in process of being cancelled. Foreign firms, under the influence of Congress, have decided not to sell foreign merchandise; a Greek firm which did sell some has apologized and paid a fine to the Congress. British cotton-producing firms have been paralysed by the withdrawal of their employees' labour and by the hartal, which follow hard on each other's heels almost "without interruption. . . The secret threat of public opinion strikes fear into those who would like to trade with England. The story is told of a trader who, on the very day of Gandhi's arrest, had exported some gold; next morning he saw his name chalked up as a



traitor on the walls of the bullion exchange, and he dropped dead out of shame and fear. [*Ibid*, pp. 574-75]

12

The all-out war against the Congress, started by the British rulers continued throughout the months that followed. It was waged on all fronts: legislative, judicial, administrative and police.

Ordinances continued being issued from Delhi and various provincial capitals to supplement those already in force or to give more powers to the police. On 6 February came the Ordinance to amend the Emergency Powers Ordinance promulgated on 4 January. On 29 March came the Ordinance to supplement the Bengal Emergency Powers Ordinance (No. IX of 1932). This facilitated taking over of civil administration by the army in Bengal and appointment of special courts to try certain offences. This was in addition to the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1932 passed by the Bengal Legislative Council on 24 February. On 30 June came the Special Ordinance (No. X of 1932). This empowered district authorities to prohibit traffic "over any road, pathway, bridge, waterway or ferry", commandeer private vehicles, tools; machinery or other material "of any kind", intercept postal, telephonic or telegraphic messages, stop trains, issue and execute search and seize warrants, impose collective fines and so on. The District Magistrate could fine one person and pay the amount realized to another person as a reward for services. For offences committed by children under sixteen parents could be fined or imprisoned. The Ordinance also provided for summary courts and special magistrates and special judges. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 79-94]

Lathi-charges on meetings and processions and arrests and convictions went on as before.



On 1 February premises of Congress Committees and affiliated organizations were raided in Punjab and everything contained in them, including utensils and provisions, seized.

On 2 February Devadas Gandhi, while on his way to the N.W.F.P., was arrested at the New Delhi railway station. J. C. Kumarappa and Hariprasad Mehta were arrested for breach of parole and sentenced to one year's R.I. and fines of Rs. 2,000 each.

On 3 February in Lahore eight women workers were arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment for having led a Congress procession.

On 4 February Sarat Bose was arrested and his house searched. Mahadev Desai was rearrested after release on parole and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. Arrests of large numbers of people were made in Benares, Allahabad and Ahmedabad.

On 13 February at Hussainabad in Noakhali district of Bengal, processionists came in conflict with the police when they defied prohibitory orders, resulting in firing by the police in which two persons were killed and thirty injured. When the matter came up in the Bengal Council later, the Government said the police had fired in self-defence. [*Ibid*, pp. 9-11, 213-14]

Two days later, on 15 February processionists were again fired upon. The firing continued for two minutes, resulting in the killing of 8 persons and injuries to many more.

On 20 February Mathuradas Tricumji was rearrested for breach of parole and sentenced to one year's R.I. and a fine of Rs. 100. In Lahore Baldev Miter Kaviraj, 19th dictator of the Punjab Congress Committee and a woman worker were sentenced to one year's R.I. each.



In March prominent leaders arrested and sent to prison included Lilavati Munshi, Abid Ali, Amrit Kaur, Yusuf Meherally, Dr. Jivraj Mehta and his wife Hansa Mehta, Manilal Kothari, Durbar Gopaldas Desai, K. F. Nariman, K. M. Munshi, Perin Captain, K. P. Damodara Menon, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, Jairamdas Doulatram, Gopichand Bhargava, Sardar Mangal Singh, and Dr. Satyapal. In a large number of cases the convictions were for breach of parole and sentences ran to one year's R.I. Kasturba Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to 6 months' R.I.

The number of convictions all over the country was 17,800 in February and 6,900 in March.

13

By the end of March 1932 virtually all the top-ranking Congress leaders were in jail. Those who had for some reason escaped the dragnet decided to hold the annual session of the Congress in April. Rajendra Prasad, the President-elect of the Congress, was in jail and in his absence Sarojini Naidu officiated as the Acting President or "Dictator" of the Congress. She decided that the forty-seventh session of the Congress, which was intended to be held at Puri, should be held in Delhi. In the first week of April an announcement accordingly appeared in the Press that the session would be held in Delhi on the 23rd and 24th of April. At her instance Madan Mohan Malaviya accepted the Presidentship of the session.

The local authorities were approached for the site for the session. It may be remembered that the Congress as such had continued to be a lawful organization, for it was only the Working Committee, which had passed the Civil Disobedience resolution, which had been declared illegal and in any case the entire membership of the Working Committee were in jail. On 6 April the District Magistrate communicated to the Congress the decision that permission for holding the session could not be granted since the deliberations of the session



were likely to give an impetus to unconstitutional and subversive activity going on in the country. But Congressmen were not to be deterred. Permission or no permission they would hold the session. Delegates in large numbers made their way to Delhi. Many were arrested on the way but a good many managed to sneak in. Though both Sarojini Naidu and Madan Mohan Malaviya had been put behind the bars, the Congress did meet under the Clock Tower at Chandni Chowk in Delhi – for the Subject Committee meeting on the 23rd and for the open session on the 24th. The meetings were of only fleeting durations. Nevertheless three resolutions were passed.

Sarojini Naidu had been arrested on 22 April and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. Pandit Malaviya, the President-elect, entered Delhi on the 23rd in defiance of prohibitory orders and was arrested, along with Govind Malaviya, R. S. Pandit and a few others. Earlier, on 21 April, the Reception Committee had been declared an unlawful body and its members arrested.

The "session" was held in the morning, at about 9 a.m. with Ranchhoddas Amritlal presiding. About 150 persons attended, who were all soon afterwards rounded up and lodged in Central Jail. Pandit Malaviya, his son Govind Malaviya and his grandson and a few others arrested with them were released after a week in detention. [*Ibid*, pp. 20-21, 57-60]

R. S. Pandit, who had also been held for defying the ban against entering Delhi, was tried and sentenced to one year's imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200. [*Ibid*, pp. 22-23]

Repression relentlessly went on. In rural areas especially police brutalities crossed all bounds. In his "Letter from India" Romain Rolland wrote:



People are stripped naked, forced to walk on all fours, tethered to carts, beaten and left for dead, given electric shocks; children are whipped, women harassed and forced (in the Ahmedabad region, they have now hung long knives on their belts, to kill themselves if their honour is threatened). A whole village is punished for the refusal of a few; cattle, utensils, women's ornaments and agricultural implements are seized . . . for a few annas of tax . . . Hospitals are closed, patients are turned out, the wounded are refused admission to governmental hospitals. . . . The aim is to break and demoralize the population by every base means available. [Romain Rolland and Gandhi: Correspondence, pp. 578-79]

This kind of treatment was being meted out to wholly non-violent protesters who merely raised slogans, assembled at public meetings and took out processions chiefly for the sake of breaking the law. In their thousands and tens of thousands the satyagrahis offered themselves for arrest. Even though, gradually, the movement lost its initial fire and enthusiasm it had brought out the best in man and woman throughout the country.

The one black spot on an otherwise white background was represented by the communal riots that broke out in Bombay in May and continued through June. On the very first day of rioting, which broke out on 14 May about 30 lay dead and 500 were wounded; 16 more were killed on the following day. By the end of June more than 200 persons had lost their lives and thousands were injured. [The Indian Annual Register, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 25-28]

In Calcutta on 6 February, the Bengal Governor Sir Stanley Jackson, while delivering the convocation address at the Calcutta University, was shot at by a student Bina Das. Bina Das fired five shots at the Governor without making a hit.



The act gave the Bengal Government added excuse for bringing in further repressive legislation. Moving the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Bill in the Assembly on 23 February, the Home Member said that it was necessary to bring under the sweep of the law not only terrorists but also individuals who were not actually terrorists.

On 15 February Bina Das was convicted and sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. [*Ibid*, pp. 10-11]

Just how many suffered imprisonment during this phase of the Civil Disobedience movement? No one could say precisely, but the number from all accounts was immense. The official statement issued on 31 May gave the number of convictions till then. The figure was 48,602, with the following month-wise break-up: January 14,800, February 17,800, March 6,900, April 5,200, May 3,800. But these figures referred only to those who were arrested and convicted after trials.

By the end of February 1933, when the movement had all but spent itself, the number of convictions recorded was 71,453, of which 3,642 were of women. Never before had women been roused to such an extent to leave their hearths and homes to offer themselves as sacrifice for the sake of the motherland. [*History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 198]

The figures say nothing of the vast numbers who were rounded up and detained in jails without trial. Numerous camp jails and temporary jails were crowded to overflowing and proved quite inadequate to house the ever increasing numbers offering themselves for arrest. Arrests therefore were generally made on a selective basis.



The treatment of Civil Disobedience prisoners in jails was horrible. According to Pattabhi Sitaramayya, more than 95 per cent of them were placed in 'C' class. He writes:

Graduates, professors, lawyers, editors, well-to-do traders and businessmen, rich zamindars, high grade agriculturists, philanthropic workers –men whom the Government themselves recognized as well-to-do by imposing heavy fines running often into four figures – were all thrown pell-mell into the last class, with the food and clothing of ordinary convicts. [*History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, p. 528]



CHAPTER II: THE "CARAVAN" MOVES ON

1

Enunciating the new, so-called Dual Policy of the British Government in regard to India, Secretary of State Samuel Hoare had declared in the House of Commons on 28 January 1932: "Though the dogs bark, the caravan passes on."

The first part of this dual policy, which consisted in taking care of the barking dogs, was being effectively handled by the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, who had, as we saw in the preceding chapter, turned India into a vast prison house. There were lathi-charges, firings and other outrages by the police. Ordinance rule was instituted in all departments of Government, threatening the freedoms of person and property and stifling all protest.

The second part of the policy, that of getting the caravan of their so-called "constitutional proposals" on the road, was not proving as smooth as they had hoped it would.

From the British side the offer that held the field was the statement of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, made at the closing of the Round Table Conference on 1 December 1931, and later circulated as a White Paper. The statement laid down the view of His Majesty's Government that

responsibility for the Government of India should be placed upon the legislatures, central and provincial, *with such provisions as may be necessary to guarantee, during a period of transition, the observance of certain obligations and to meet other special circumstances and also with such guarantees as are required by the minorities to protect their political liberties and rights.* [Emphasis added.]



At the Centre, which was envisaged as a Federation of British Indian provinces and princely States,

the principle of responsibility was to be subject to the qualification that in the existing circumstances *the defence and the external affairs must be reserved to the Governor-General and that in regard to finance such conditions must apply as would ensure the fulfilment of the obligations incurred under the authority of the Secretary of State*. . . [Emphasis added.]

Thus in any scheme of responsibility defence, external affairs and finance were to remain in the hands of the British. Further, the federal government could not examine, let alone repudiate, any of the liabilities even where they had been incurred solely in furtherance of British interests. This was not all. The Governor-General, that is to say, the British Government, must also retain the responsibility for securing the observance of the constitutional rights of the minorities and for ultimately maintaining the tranquillity of the State.

This did not mean that even when all these conditions had been ensured, work with regard to the truncated responsibility at the Centre could be proceeded with unhindered. For, the White Paper said, there must first be "the settlement of the key question of how to safeguard the minorities under a responsible central government", checks and balances must be devised to protect the minorities "from an unrestricted and tyrannical use of the democratic principle expressing itself solely through the majority power". The Prime Minister warned that to secure the "natural rights" of the minorities it would not be enough to provide for their representation in the legislatures. The constitution must contain provisions to ensure that the principle of majority government was not employed to their moral and material disadvantage in the body politic. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1931, Vol. II, pp. 444-48]



Such ardent advocacy of the rights of minorities, of which the Muslims were, in practical terms, the most important constituent, represented a shift in tactics on the part of the British Government. From now on they intended to use the plea of protecting Muslim rights to block India's progress towards freedom.

The Prime Minister's statement quoted above assured the Muslims that the North-West Frontier Province would be constituted a Governor's province. On 25 January 1932, Lord Willingdon, in his address to the Legislative Assembly, confirmed this decision of the British Government, stating that consultations were in progress to prepare a constitution "which will forthwith place the Frontier Province on the basis of a Governor's Province under the present Act [Government of India Act, 1919]". [Diwan Chand Obhrai, *The Evolution of North-West Frontier Province*, p. 257]

Throughout the twenties, it may be remembered, the British authorities had consistently resisted the demand for the Frontier districts to be brought under the Reforms Act, notwithstanding the fact that the Congress had supported this demand of the Muslim leadership in order to further the prospect of a communal settlement. The Simon Commission too had opposed the setting up of responsible government in the N.W.F.P. It had declared:

It is not possible to change the plain facts of the situation. The inherent right of a man to smoke a cigarette must necessarily be curtailed if he lives in a powder magazine.

Referring to the clamour raised in this regard the Commission had stated that the demand for the introduction of reforms in the N.W.F. Province is largely due to a desire by the Mohammedans of India to add to



their strength by advancing the constitutional status of a province which contains a majority of their co-religionists. [*Ibid*, pp. 137-38]

The Hindus and Sikhs of the province, miniscule minorities as they were, numbering respectively 149, 881 and 28,040 out of a total population of 2,251,340 at the 1921 census, viewed the prospect of popular rule being extended to the N.W.F.P. with a certain amount of apprehension. They did not oppose the demand, but they would have liked the five districts constituting the province, namely, Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan to be reamalgamated into the Punjab, from which they had been separated in 1901. [*Ibid*, pp. 124-28]

On 20 April 1932, the Viceroy inaugurated the Frontier Legislative Council. The Council had 40 members, 28 of whom were elected and 12 nominated. Hindus and Sikhs had respectively five and one representatives in the Council. The operation of the Frontier Crime Regulation was suspended for year. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 261-65]

Whatever the political or administrative justification for making the N.W.F.P. into a Governor's province might have been, it certainly had the consequence of setting the Muslims against the Hindus. The position of the minorities under the so-called popular regime gradually went from bad to worse. The Hindus were by and by edged out from all public services and less qualified Muslims were appointed in their places. Hindu educational institutions were starved of funds while munificent grants were given to Muslim educational institutions. In course of time there came the infamous "Anti-Hindi-Gurmukhi circular" which aimed at eliminating Hindi and Gurmukhi languages from all recognized girls' schools. The circular laid down that the medium of instruction in all schools should be either Urdu or English. Any kind of aid was to be withheld from any school which failed



to implement the circular. The Hindus and Sikhs held, rightly, that it represented an attack on their language and culture, and offered stiff resistance to it. [*The Evolution of North-West Frontier Province*, pp. 262-69]

3

In Muslim politics separatism was now becoming a dominant refrain. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, father of the immortal poem –

सारे जहाँ से अच्छा हिन्दोस्तां हमारा,
हम बुलबुले हैं इसकी, यह गुलिस्तां हमारा |
मजहब नहीं सिखाता, आपस में बैर रखना,
हिन्दी हैं हम वतन है हिन्दोस्तां हमारा |

delivering the presidential address at the All-India Muslim Conference, held at Lahore on 21 March 1932, declared that he was opposed to nationalism, for it contained the germs of atheistic materialism. While patriotism was a natural virtue in a man, what mattered was a man's faith, his culture and historical tradition. Islam, he said, was not a matter of private opinion, it was a civic church. As for national unity, Iqbal observed:

The problem of ancient Indian thought was how the One became many without sacrificing its oneness. Today this problem has come down . . . to the grosser plane of our political life, and we have to solve it in its reversed form, i.e., how the many can become One without sacrificing its plural character.

Coming down from abstruse thought to the nitty-gritty of practical politics, Iqbal expressed satisfaction that separate electorates for Muslims had been retained (he was obviously anticipating the Prime Minister's Communal Award)



and the N.W.F.P. had been granted the status of a Governor's province. But this could not satisfy the Muslims. He declared:

As for the promised provisional settlement, it is obvious that no communal settlement, provisional or permanent, can satisfy the Muslim community, which does not recognize as its basic principle the right of the community to enjoy majority rights in provinces where it happens to be in actual majority.

Enjoying majority rights in the Punjab and Bengal of course meant statutory reservation of majority seats for Muslims in these provinces. Iqbal also reiterated the demands for "unconditional separation of Sind and one-third share in the centre".

Iqbal expressed the view that the Congress had launched the Civil Disobedience movement in the fear that the British might impose on the Indian parties a provisional communal settlement, conceding to the various minorities what they demanded. The movement was aimed at forcing the British to "settle the matter of minorities with the Congress alone".

There was therefore no question of Muslims supporting the movement. The problem of India was not a problem between England and India. The parties in the dispute were the majority community, which wanted democracy of the Western type, and the minorities, which could not accept Western democracy unless safeguards were provided. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 301-06]

In the first week of June 1932, some influential Muslim leaders, including the Aga Khan, issued for publication in India and England what they called a manifesto. They reminded the Government of the Muslim services during the war. The number of Muslim soldiers serving in the army, they said, exceeded the



proportion of Muslim population in India. They pointed out that Muslims had taken no part in the Congress movement of 1930; the Muslims had been "openly hostile to the seditionists on more than one occasion". All terrorist murders in the Punjab and Bengal were committed by Hindus. The leaders' "manifesto" continued:

We believe that if the alternative to British rule were the ubiquitous supremacy of Hindu rule, the mass of our Muslim brethren would prefer the former not only because of the safeguard offered by its impartiality, but also because under the alternative system there would be heinous strife between the virile and martial Muslim races and those many Hindus in whom the Congress left-wing has sown the seed of insidious conspiracy and rebellion, blood-lust and lewdness.

The leaders pleaded that in working out the communal settlement between the Hindus and the Muslims His Majesty's Government should consider the two communities' "relative merits of loyalty and stability".

There was also a barely concealed threat. If the British did not concede to Muslims "a position a trifle stronger than that to which they may seem to be entitled by political logic", the consequence would be "enduring communal bitterness and strife". [*Ibid*, pp. 315-17]

4

Another "minority", numerically only slightly smaller than the Muslims, were the so-called Depressed Classes. The preceding volume has narrated how Ambedkar had made common cause with Muslim leaders at the Second Round Table Conference in October-November 1931 and, aided and abetted by a few other sectional leaders, had effectively stone-walled attempts at a communal settlement. It was a ganging up against Gandhiji and the Congress, aimed at



calling into question the representative character of the Congress. The result was the 'Minorities Pact' or the 'Minorities Petition of Rights', signed by the representatives of the Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Muslims, Roman Catholics and Depressed Classes, claiming to represent 46 per cent of India's population. Ambedkar had simply allowed himself to be led by the nose by such champions of Minority rights as Hubert Carr and Edgar Wood, European delegates to the Conference. [*Ibid*, p. 340]

On 7 May 1932, when the entire leadership of the Congress was in jail and the Congress organization was in a state of disarray, a Depressed Classes Congress met at Kamptee under the presidentship of Rao Saheb Muniswami Pillai. The session was successfully hijacked by Ambedkar's followers, who threw out those opposed to Ambedkar's policy and even beat up some delegates.

Rao Saheb Pillai in his presidential address inveighed against Gandhiji and the Congress for resisting the demand for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes and called upon his following to "join hands with other communities like the Muslims, Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians and lodge our protest against a joint electorate which, while it smoothes the dreams of a national unity where no unity exists, is sure to be used by the communally minded . . . Hindu majority for securing political power with which they could oppress the weak and backward minorities".

The gathering passed resolutions, supporting the Minorities Pact and condemning the Civil Disobedience movement and the Terrorist movement. [*Ibid*, p. 328-32]

Of course Ambedkar, Srinivasan and Muniswami were not the sole leaders of the Depressed Classes. The All-India Depressed Classes Association, established in 1925, which claimed to be the only authentic representative



organization of the Depressed Classes, stood uncompromisingly for joint electorates.

In March 1932 B. S. Moonje, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, invited M. C. Rajah, President of the Depressed Classes Association, for consultation on the quantum of Depressed Classes representation in the Central and Provincial legislatures. The result was the so-called Rajah-Moonje Pact, the text of which was sent to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.

M. C. Rajah condemned the demand for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes voiced by Ambedkar and Srinivasan, which, if enforced, he said, would lead to permanent division and prevent the growth of any feeling of political as well as social oneness and solidarity in the Hindu society of which the Depressed Classes formed part. He declared that even his proposal for reservation of seats was a temporary expedient.

Rajah also condemned the Minorities Pact, describing it as an injustice to the Depressed Classes. He showed how that Pact had favoured Muslims at the cost of the Depressed classes. While in population the Depressed Classes were nearly equal to the Muslims, with the Depressed Classes forming 19 per cent and the Muslims 21.5 per cent of the population of India, in the provincial legislatures the Muslims had been provided 338 seats, which was in excess of their fair share, and the Depressed Classes were given only 180 seats. Similarly at the Centre, in an Upper House of 200 members, the Muslims had been allotted 67 seats, where rightfully they should have got 38. In the Lower House of 300 members, the Muslims on the basis of population should have been given 65 seats; the Pact gave them 100, while the Depressed Classes got only 45 seats instead of 57.



The Rajah-Moonje Pact gave the Depressed Classes the exact number of seats at the Centre justified by the population figures, viz., 45 in the Upper House and 57 in the Lower House. In the provinces there was only a marginal increase compared to the number provided in the Minorities Pact: from 180 to 194.

What was of importance was that a representative Depressed Classes organization had squarely stood up for joint electorates and dissociated itself from the demand for separate electorates for those classes. [*Ibid*, pp. 333-37]

5

The rulers of princely States met twice in March-April and May to define their attitude towards the proposed Federation and formulate conditions for their cooperation.

The first conclave, an annual session of the Chamber of Princes, met from 28 March to 4 April in New Delhi.

The Nawab of Bhopal, who was the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, gave a report on the work of his delegation at the Round Table Conference. He explained how it had been proposed that in the Upper House of 200 the share of the States, which accounted for 24 per cent of the population of India, should be 80 seats, and how he had argued with the Lord Chancellor that if a larger number of States were to be drawn to the idea of Federation it was essential that the Princes' share in the Upper House should be 125 seats. As for the Lower House the Federal Structure Committee had proposed that the States' representation should be one- third of the total number of seats.

As for the Federal Court, it should be a joint court of the Crown and the States and its judgments should not be subject to appeal to the Privy Council, for that would constitute an infringement of the State's sovereignty.



The Chamber passed a resolution that the States would join the Federation on the following conditions:

- (a) That the necessary safeguards will be embodied in the constitution;
- (b) That under the constitution their rights arising from the treaties or sanads or engagements remain inviolate and inviolable;
- (c) That the sovereignty and internal independence of the States remain intact and are preserved and fully respected and that the obligations of the Crown to the States remain unaltered.

But though the Princes had spelt out the size and cut of the pound of flesh they wanted in return for their cooperation, a number of questions still remained to be sorted out. Should the States join the Federation individually or as a confederation? If they joined individually, how should the seats be divided amongst them? The Chamber had put forward the idea that no member State should have less than half and more than one vote, but even after a certain amount of grouping of the smallest States was allowed for, there would still not be enough seats to go round. A large number of States were also resentful of the way distinctions were made between States by classifying them as important, medium, smaller and smallest States.

Such misgivings found expression at a conference of States held in Bombay from 6 May to 12 May. Though the Conference approved the demands formulated earlier at Delhi, it was unable to resolve the many issues that were thrown up.

The distribution of seats was of course the most ticklish issue. In an Upper House of 200 – should there be an Upper House – the States could never hope to have 125 seats as demanded. There was the further apprehension that if they



accepted the 80 seats offered they would not be able to settle the matter of distribution amongst themselves, it would have to be sorted out by a tribunal appointed by the British Government. [*Ibid*, pp. 386-90]

The States, clearly, were far from committed to joining the Federation and without the States, the idea of a Federation could not be realized.

The British themselves were none too keen for the States to join the Federation. Benthall, who represented the Anglo-Indians at the Round Table Conference, in his circular issued on his return and dealt with more fully in the preceding volume had said:

It is by no means certain that the Princes will be quite that stabilizing element which they were hoped to be. The Princes who will run into Federation are the Congress-minded Princes and they will come increasingly under Congress influence once they come in. The Conservative Princes may stay out and may indeed be the real source of strength. [*Ibid*, p. 343]

6

The Round Table Conference had ended leaving many questions of substance to be decided by the Prime Minister. A question of supreme importance related to communal representation, on which Ramsay MacDonald had to give an award.

There were, besides, the Franchise Committee, headed by Lord Lothian, the Federal Finance Committee, headed by Lord Eustace Percy, and the Indian States Enquiry Committee, headed by J. C. C. Davidson – all nominated by the Prime Minister and none appointed by the Round Table Conference itself – whose reports were anxiously awaited by the "minorities", particularly the Muslims and the Depressed Classes.



The Franchise Committee: The terms of reference of this Committee were conveyed to Lord Lothian by the Prime Minister in a letter dated 29 December 1931. The Committee was asked to formulate "complete and detailed proposals on which to base the revision of the franchise and the arrangement of constituencies for the new legislatures, central and provincial" which were to form part of the constitution that was envisaged.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the fact that the existing franchise covered no more than 3 per cent of the population of the areas returning members to the Provincial Councils and the need to widen the franchise so that the Councils were made more representative of the general mass of the population.

The Committee was directed to proceed on the assumption that "separate communal electorates will continue to form a feature of the new constitution". [*Ibid*, pp. 437-39]

The Franchise Committee started its investigations in India in March and its report was officially published on 3 June 1932.

Its chief recommendation was to increase the electorate of British India from 7,000,000 to 36,000,000 persons, that is to say, from 5.4 to 27.6 per cent of the total adult population.

The arguments for adult franchise were examined and rejected. The adult population of British India comprised some 130 million. There were not enough qualified officials to manage polling on such a large scale and there would be well-grounded suspicions that the election results were falsified by inefficiency or corruption. The police force available — about 1,91,000 would also be inadequate to handle the elections, which always generated excitement. A



further problem would be posed by women voters, for special arrangements would be required for them and there was paucity of female staff.

The Committee examined and rejected modified forms of adult franchise, such as primary groups of 20 or 25 persons electing one person to vote for them; confining adult suffrage to specific age groups, say, persons between 30 and 50; allotting one vote to one household, etc.

The Committee came to the conclusion that in order to give the vote to a wider spectrum of the population it was necessary to lower the property and educational qualifications for voters. Different standards would have to apply to different sections of people; women, industrial labour, tenants-at-will, etc.

The Committee noted that in different provinces different percentages of the population were entitled to vote. In Bihar, Orissa and the Central Provinces the existing electorate was only about one per cent of the total population, whereas in certain other provinces it was between 3 and 4 per cent. No uniform standard of increase could be applied. The electorate suggested by the Committee for different provinces was as follows:

Madras: Electorate recommended – 7,400,000, or about 16 per cent of the population, of whom about 20 per cent would be women. The franchise for the provincial legislature would be practically identical with that in force for local bodies.

Bombay: Recommended electorate — 3,700,000, about 17 per cent of the population, of whom about 20 per cent would be women.

Bengal: The Committee could not formulate any recommendation for Bengal. Universal indirect adult suffrage had been suggested, which the Committee did not favour, for it felt that withdrawal of direct franchise



would cause widespread discontent. The Bengal Government's suggestion that direct franchise should be supplemented by indirect franchise was also similarly rejected. The Committee asked the Bengal Government to prepare a detailed scheme based on payment of rates to local bodies with the addition of the upper primary educational qualification for men.

U.P.: For U.P. the Franchise Committee accepted an electorate of 7,600,000, recommended by the U.P. Government on the basis of detailed enquiries in 1,800 villages. This represented nearly 16 per cent of the population of the province, the women's share being 1,600,000 (about 21 per cent).

Punjab: Recommended electorate — 2,800,000, or about 12 per cent of the population.

Bihar and Orissa: Recommended electorate — 3,500,000 or about 10 per cent of the population, as against the existing one per cent.

C.P.: Recommended electorate — a minimum of 1,500,000, representing about 10 per cent of the population.

Assam: Recommended electorate — slightly over 1,000,000, or about 13 per cent of the population, about 100,000 being women.

N.W.F.P.: No recommendation made, the issue being left for the Parliament to decide, existing franchise covering about 4 per cent of the total population and 12 per cent of the urban population.

In the existing arrangement women were hopelessly behind men in the matter of franchise — while in Madras the ratio of men and women to be given the vote was 10:1, in Assam it was 114:1. In other provinces it ranged between these two extremes. The Franchise Committee recommended that roughly one-



fifth of the total electorates for the Provincial Councils should comprise women. The Committee also recommended women being represented in the Councils.

For labour — industrial and agricultural — the Committee recommended reservation of 38 seats in the Provincial Councils, to be filled by election through registered trade unions or through special labour constituencies.

Then there were the Depressed Classes. The Committee agreed that untouchables should be treated as the Depressed Classes. From various calculations the Committee arrived at the figure of 35,000,000 as the total population of the Depressed Classes. Since most of the Depressed Classes would not have the necessary property or educational qualifications which would entitle them to vote, the Committee felt they would not be enrolled in the register in proportion to their population. The Committee therefore suggested "some form of differential franchise", including the lowering of property and educational qualifications.

The Federal Legislature: The Committee recommended that so far as the Upper House, or the Senate, was concerned, the British Indian members thereof should be elected from the Provincial legislatures by single transferable vote. As regards the Federal Assembly, the Committee recommended 300 members for British India and a separate voters' register, that is to say, not everyone entitled to vote for the Provincial Council would be a voter for the Federal Assembly. The Committee proposed "the same franchise for the Federal Assembly as that now in force for the Provincial Councils, supplemented by certain differential educational qualifications for men, women and members of the Depressed Classes calculated to raise the total from 7,100,000 to 8,500,000". [*Ibid*, pp. 452-60]



The States Enquiry Committee (Financial), headed by J. C. C. Davidson, was appointed to explore more fully the specific financial problems arising in connection with certain individual States. It was required to ascertain existing rights of certain States and certain contributions of a specific character which many States had been making or had made in the past to the Indian Government. [*Ibid*, p. 440]

The report of this Committee was published on 28 July 1932. The report gave a historical survey of the circumstances in which the Indian States came into relation with the British Government and gave a brief account of the origin of contributions and immunities. The report said when the treaties had been entered into, anarchy, lawlessness and ruthless oppression had been the order of the day and in many cases military intervention of the British Power had been necessary. After the responsibility for governing India had been taken over by the Crown from the East India Company, the States became more and more closely integrated with the rest of India economically. To a great extent Railways, Currency, Posts and Telegraphs and Salt were already for all practical purposes federal subjects. The States lacked the means to influence policy in these matters. When transferring further responsibility to Indian hands provision should be made for the due participation of States.

The report dwelt on the intricate nature of the cash contributions, generally known as tributes, realized from certain States as well as territories ceded by certain other States and of the immunities (salt and sea customs) and observed that eventually it would be necessary to frame separate terms for each individual State at the time of the States joining the Federation. In a general way, the report



recommended remission of contributions above five per cent of the total revenue of the States. In cash terms it came to Rs. 11 lakhs annually.

Then there was the claim of States which had ceded territories in lieu of cash contributions. Territories had been ceded by States to the East India Company to provide it with funds for the maintenance of a special force to protect the rulers. There were only four such States: Hyderabad, Baroda, Gwalior and Indore. The Committee recommended cash credits to the States for the ceded territories except in the case of Hyderabad which wanted continuance of the special military arrangements which the cession was designed to secure.

The Committee refused to entertain the claim of States for cash credits in lieu of the armed forces they maintained and the assistance they offered to the British armed forces in times of emergency. It recommended however that the States had the right to levy taxes on railway employees residing in the State territories and on profits the railways earned inside their territories.

Then there was the question of salt. Salt was the most important source of revenue to the Central Government, accounting for as much as 16½ per cent of the total revenue. The Centre had a monopoly on the production of salt throughout India except in Kathiawar and Cutch where the production served only local requirements. The Committee recommended that salt tax be extended to Kathiawar and Cutch to reduce the extent of immunities which then amounted to over Rs. 46 lakhs. The Committee examined the concessions and immunities enjoyed by the States in the matter of sea customs, posts and telegraphs, coinage and currency and transit duties and in most cases recommended their being continued with minor modifications.



The recommendations made by it, the Committee said, would apply only in the event of the States joining the Federation, which was a matter each individual State must decide for itself. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, p. 479-84]

8

The Federal Finance Committee, headed by Lord Eustace Percy, had been charged by the Prime Minister in a letter dated 22 December 1931, with the task of pronouncing on the classification of revenue and estimating the probable financial position of the Federal and Provincial Governments. It was also asked to examine and advise as to the treatment of the pre-Federation debt, and the division of pension charges.

The Committee came to certain tentative conclusions with regard to the budgetary position of the Federation and the Provinces in the early days of the Federation. It estimated that the Federal revenue under various heads, viz., customs, salt, opium, railways, currency and mint, States' contribution and taxes on incomes, would total 8460 lakhs, whereas the expenditure under the various heads, viz., debt services, posts and telegraphs, military, frontier watch and ward, civil administration, pensions, N.W.F.P. sub-division, civil works, chief commissioner's provinces and Central areas would total Rs. 8010 lakhs, thus leaving a surplus of Rs. 450 lakhs.

The financial position of the provinces however would not be so happy. Except for the U.P. and the Punjab, which were estimated to show surpluses of Rs. 25 lakhs and Rs. 30 lakhs respectively, other provinces would have deficit budgets.

The Committee thought the Provinces were themselves responsible in various ways for the reduced revenues. Thus, for instance, policies pursued by certain provinces in the matter of country liquor tended to reduce or even



extinguish the excise without correspondingly restricting consumption. The decrease in excise appeared to have been accompanied everywhere by an increase in illicit distillation.

The Committee suggested new sources of revenue at the Federal as well as Provincial level.

On the Federal level it suggested a system of vend licences and fees on tobacco instead of excise, since the manufacture was carried on in small establishments. Matches were another item suggested for excise. The Committee also suggested monopolies on the manufacture and sale of certain kinds of goods, such as arms and explosives and public utilities. Stamp duties could be another source of revenue, which under the existing arrangement were to a large extent a subject of provincial legislation.

On the provincial level the Committee suggested tax on tobacco other than excise on manufacture and sale, succession duties and terminal taxes. Provinces should also have the right, if they would choose, to levy a tax on agricultural incomes.

As regards public debt, on 31 March 1931, this stood at a whopping Rs. 7,67,63,17 lakhs. Adding to it interest-earning debts from provinces the total came to Rs. 9,38,90,88 lakhs.

The Committee suggested that the Federal Government should retain the power of legislation in regard to certain sources of revenue levied for the benefit of the Units, even though actual collection might be carried out by provincial officers. Such was the case in regard to duty on petroleum. The Federal Government should have the power to levy surcharges on any duties levied for the benefit of the Units. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 441-51]



On 1 December 1931, when the Second Round Table Conference adjourned without registering any agreement, the Prime Minister had appointed a Consultative Committee to carry on its work in India. He had envisaged it as "a small representative committee, a working committee of this conference, which will remain in being in India".

The Committee held two sessions in Delhi in the early days of its formation under the chairmanship of the Viceroy and never met again.

On 27 June 1932 the Secretary of State made a statement in the House of Commons in London unfolding the procedure the British Government intended to follow in regard to consultations on the constitutional question. The statement was also issued in the name of the Viceroy from Simla on the same date. Elaborating on how the British intended to proceed, the statement inter alia said:

After carefully considering the present position they [the British Government] are convinced that matters have now reached a stage, at which the settlement of urgent and important questions that still remain to be decided will only be delayed by the formal sessions of large bodies such as the Round Table Conference or Committees such as the Federal Structure Committee. . . .

His Majesty's Government consider that the final stage of consultation with Indian opinion can usefully take place only on definite proposals. They, therefore, propose to invite both Houses of Parliament to set up a Joint Select Committee to consider their definite proposals for revision of the constitution . . . before introduction of a Bill.



Of course if it should turn out that the discussion in the Consultative Committee failed to formulate any proposals for the consideration of the Joint Select Committee, the statement assured that

His Majesty's Government will make arrangements accordingly, but they would regard it as essential . . . that the size and personnel of the body to be summoned for such further discussions in London should be strictly determined with reference to the number and character of the subjects found to require further discussion. [*ibid*, pp. 407-12]

Thus the British Government decided to do away with the procedure of consultation through sessions of the Round Table Conference adopted in 1930. In his statement of 9 July 1930, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, had declared:

His Majesty's Government has reached the conclusion that it would not be right to prescribe for the Conference any terms more limited than in my statement of November last, and that the Conference should enjoy the full freedom that these words connote. . . . It is the belief of His Majesty's Government that by way of Conference it could be possible to reach solutions that both countries and all parties and interests in them can honourably accept.

The essence of the method thus was that the proposals to be placed before British Parliament would be made by the Government on the basis of agreements reached at the Conference.

Now, after two years and two sessions of the Round Table Conference, the Government had come to the conclusion that the Round Table Conference method was not a satisfactory one. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 377-79]



In his statement of 27 June 1932, the Viceroy also declared Government's intention to prepare a single Bill for the constitutions of the Federation and the Provinces.

This was decided upon, the statement said, to avoid undue delay any further because it was the view of the Government that

the units concerned must be prepared actually to federate, and that proposals to be laid before Parliament must be complete in all essentials. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, p. 411]

But there was a catch here, as Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar were quick to point out. In a statement issued on 29 June, they said:

Again when it is said that before an All India Federation materializes, the units concerned must be prepared actually to federate, we must strongly dissent from this proposal if it means that it will be left to the Provinces to decide whether they will or will not join the Federation, for it is clear that one single Province may, by adopting a perverse and obstinate attitude, hold up the Federation indefinitely.

It was recognized that the association of States with the Federation could only be on a voluntary basis, but the principle could not be extended to the Provinces. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 379-80]

On 8 July 1932 Sapru, Jayakar and N. M. Joshi resigned their membership of the Consultative Committee in protest.

Actually the principle of consultations through a series of Round Table Conferences had been worked out by Wedgwood Benn and Lord Irwin when a Labour Government had been in power and Samuel Hoare never reconciled



himself to the idea. When in the election of October 1931 the Labour Party was almost routed (it had 52 members in Parliament to the Conservative Party's 471), the Tories saw their chance of undoing much that had been done. Ramsay MacDonald functioned more or less as a rubber-stamp Prime Minister, doing the bidding of the Tories.

On 10 July 1932, the British Indian delegates to the Round Table Conference met in Bombay and issued a statement that they found the new procedure "entirely different in substance and spirit from the conference method as expounded by Lord Irwin in October 1929 and July 1930 and by the Premier in December 1931". They said the continuation of the conference method was essential for their continued cooperation and support. [*Ibid*, p. 392]

But the British Government did not relent. Samuel Hoare, explaining the matter in the House of Commons on 13 July, said it was too bad Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and some others had taken the stand they did, particularly in view of the fact that the Government intended to introduce a single Bill dealing with the constitutions of the Centre and the Provinces. He said:

If we adopted the alternative . . . that we should proceed in two stages, that we should have Provincial Autonomy Bill first and Federal Bill subsequently, we might then have introduced Provincial Autonomy and might then have had a whole series of formal discussions going on at the Centre. Then therefore there would not have been anything like the same objection against the number of big formal ceremonial meetings going on in London. [*Ibid*, pp. 397-98]

Thus the British unilaterally bade adieu to the conference method for evolving the principles of a constitution for India. The new procedure adopted



meant that the Indians' role would now be confined to considering proposals that the British officials placed before them.

C. Rajagopalachari, then acting as Congress President, commented:

The Secretary of State has now declared that not what we desire, but what a British Parliamentary Committee shall deliberate and lay down, shall be the constitution. More than one clear voice representing British policy has with unabated frankness spoken out that the form of the constitution shall be such as, while seeming in India like self-government, must in Westminster show adequate provisions to guarantee continuance of British control and British exploitation. [*Ibid*, p. 33]

On 9 August the Servants of India Society in a manifesto said:

We consider the new procedure announced by the Secretary of State for India on June 27 so grave a departure from the Round Table Conference method as to be unacceptable. . . . We are clearly of opinion that the best interests of the country require that those of our countrymen who may be invited to assist in further stages of constitution making, should withhold cooperation unless and until the former method is restored. [*Ibid*, p. 34]

A deadlock had thus been created. With the Congress leaders in jail, the Liberals had withdrawn cooperation and the Muslims awaited the Award of the Prime Minister on the communal question before they would commit themselves. So there was practically no one with whom the Government could negotiate. There was pressure from the Labour Party in Parliament for modifying the position adopted. The Welfare of India League also intervened. Even the Europeans in India were concerned. The Madras branch of the European Association in a telegram urged the Home Government to modify its stand so that the cooperation of the constitutionalists could be assured. [*Ibid*, p. 34]



Lord Willingdon, in his opening address to the Legislative Assembly in Simla on 5 September 1932, announced that since the Consultative Committee, over which he himself presided, had failed to make the contribution expected from it because "we found our discussions of the major issues continually impeded by the communal difficulty",

in order to place His Majesty's Government in possession of the material they will require for framing of their proposals, I am authorized to inform Hon'ble Members that His Majesty's Government have decided that it will be necessary to hold further discussions in London. . . . His Majesty's Government propose therefore to invite a small body of the representatives of the States and British India to meet them in London about the middle of November. [*Ibid*, pp. 103-05]

So the Round Table Conference was on, and the Liberals were satisfied, even though it was going to be a very small body and even less representative of the people of India than the First and Second sessions had been.

11

It may be remembered that the Round Table Conference having failed to evolve any agreed formula for the representation of the Minorities in the Provincial Councils, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald had put forward the suggestion that if the leaders of the various sections participating in the Round Table Conference would request him to arbitrate in the matter he would be willing to do so. Most of the delegates concerned had thereupon signed letters requesting him to arbitrate. Gandhiji had refused to do so; first because Ramsay MacDonald would be acting not in his individual capacity but as the Prime Minister, and Gandhiji did not wish that the British Government should decide the issue. Secondly, so far as the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were concerned, the



Congress would accept any arrangement they accepted but if the British Government's award dealt with other communities, the Congress, and Gandhiji, would be "bound to resist every attempt to vivisect India converting the nation's legislature into a communal cockpit". On 14 November 1931 Gandhiji wrote to the Prime Minister regretting his inability to join the other delegates in sending him letters of request for arbitration, but assuring him that the Congress would not oppose his award in so far as the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were concerned. As regards other communities, Gandhiji reiterated his opinion that they "should be satisfied with complete protection of their civic and religious rights and of all their legitimate interests".

Gandhiji warned the Premier that the Congress would in any case never be reconciled to "any further extension of the principle of separate electorate or special statutory reservation". [C.W.M.G., XLVIII, p. 302]

The British Prime Minister having preferred to intercede in the dispute, Muslim leadership began to pressurize the Government to announce its decision without delay. The All India Muslim Conference at Lahore passed a resolution on 22 March 1932 demanding that the Communal Award be announced before the end of June, failing which the Conference would launch a programme of direct action. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, p. 307]

The All India Muslim League Council, meeting in Delhi on 29 June, also demanded an immediate decision in the matter, and warned that delay might entail "very grave consequence". [*Ibid*, p. 313]

While the Award was some time in coming, it was already anticipated that separate electorates would be retained in the case of the Muslims and would be introduced in the case of the Depressed Classes and various other minorities. So much was this the case that Gandhiji, as early as on 11 March 1932, considered



it necessary to warn the British Government against creating separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. He said:

I . . . respectfully inform His Majesty's Government that, in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, I must fast unto death . . . for me the contemplated step is not a method, it is a part of my being. It is the call of conscience which I dare not disobey even though it may cost whatever reputation for sanity I may possess.

Samuel Hoare answered that he fully realized the strength of Gandhiji's feelings on the question of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes and that the Government would give a decision on the question only on merit after the report of the Franchise Committee had been received and considered. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, pp. 190-93, 534-35]

12

The British Government's Communal Award came on 17 August 1932, with a personal explanation by the Prime Minister. Ramsay MacDonald said he had acted not only as the Prime Minister but as a friend of India who had concerned himself with the communal question for over two years, that in the first place he had never wanted to arbitrate, he had wanted the Indian communities themselves to come to an agreement over the question, which they could still do, in which case the Award would be modified.

Separate electorates had been given to the minorities in the Award. Ramsay MacDonald's statement said: "However much Government may have preferred a uniform system of joint electorates, they found it impossible to abolish the safeguards to which minorities still attach vital importance."

The salient points of the Award were:



- (3) His Majesty's Government have . . . decided that they will include provisions to give effect to the scheme set out below in the proposals relating to the Indian Constitution to be laid in due course before Parliament. The scope of this scheme is purposely confined to the arrangements to be made for the representation of the British Indian communities in the provincial legislatures. . . .
- (6) Election to seats allotted to Mohammedan, European and Sikh constituencies will be by voters voting in separate communal electorates covering between them the whole area of the province (apart from any portions which may in special cases be excluded from the electorate area as "backward")

Provision will be made in the constitution itself to empower revision of this electoral arrangement . . . after ten years with the assent of the communities affected. . . .

- (7) All qualified electors who are not voters either in a Mohammedan, Sikh, Indian Christian, Anglo-Indian or European constituency, will be entitled to vote in a general constituency. . . .
- (9) Members of the "Depressed Classes" qualified to vote will vote in a general constituency. In view of the fact that, for a considerable period, these classes will be unlikely, by this means alone, to secure any adequate representation in the Legislature, a number of special seats will be assigned to them. . . . These seats will be filled by election from the special constituencies in which only the members of the "Depressed Classes". . . will be entitled to vote in a general constituency. . .



His Majesty's Government do not consider that these special Depressed Classes constituencies will be required for more than a limited time. They intend that the constitution shall provide that they shall come to an end after twenty years if they have not previously been abolished. . . .

(10) Election to seats allowed to Indian Christians will be by voters voting in separate communal electorates. . . .

(11) Election to the seats allotted to Anglo-Indians will be by voters voting in separate communal electorates. . . .

(20) His Majesty's Government do not propose at present to enter into the question of the size and composition of the Legislature at the Centre, since this involves, among other questions, that of representation of the Indian States which still needs further discussion. . . .

(24) The following will be the allocation of seats in Provincial Legislatures (Lower House only):

MADRAS: General Seats: 134 (including 6 women); Depressed Classes 18; Backward Areas: 1; Muslims: 29 (including one woman); Indian Christians: 9 (including one woman); Anglo-Indians: 2; Europeans: 3; Commerce & Industry, Mining & Planting: 6; Landholders: 6; University: 1; Labour 6. Total: 215

BOMBAY (including SIND): General seats: 97 (including five women); Backward Areas: 1; Muslims: 63 (including one woman); Indian Christians: 3; Anglo-Indians: 2; Europeans: 4; Commerce etc.: 8; Landholders: 3; University: 1; Labour: 8; Depressed Classes: 10. Total: 200



BENGAL: General seats: 80 (including two women); Muslims: 119 (including two women); Indian Christians: 2; Anglo-Indians: 4 (including one woman); Europeans: 11; Commerce, etc.: 19; Landholders: 5; University: 2; Labour: 8. Total: 250

UNITED PROVINCES: General Seats: 132 (including 4 women); Depressed Classes: 12; Muslims: 66 (including 2 women); Indian Christians: 2; Anglo-Indians: 1; Europeans: 2; Commerce, etc.: 3; Landholders: 6; University: 1; Labour: 3. Total: 228

PUNJAB: General seats: 43 (including one woman); Sikhs: 32 (including one woman); Muslims: 86 (including one woman); Indian Christians: 2; Anglo-Indians: 1; Europeans: 1; Commerce, etc.: 1; Landholders: 5; University: 1; Labour: 3. Total: 173

BIHAR & ORISSA: General seats: 99 (including 3 women); Depressed Classes: 7; Backward Areas: 8; Muslims: 42 (including one woman); Indian Christians: 2; Anglo Indians: 1; Europeans: 2; Commerce, etc.: 4; Landholders: 6; University: 1; Labour: 4. Total: 175

CENTRAL PROVINCES (including BERAR): General seats: 77 (including 3 women); Depressed Classes: 10; Backward Areas : 1; Muslims: 14; Anglo-Indians: 1; Europeans: 1; Commerce, etc.: 2; Landholders: 3; University: 1; Labour: 2. Total: 112

ASSAM: General seats: 44 (including one woman); Depressed Classes: 4; Backward Area: 9; Muslims: 34; Indian Christians: 1; Europeans: 1; Commerce, etc.: 11; Labour: 4. Total : 108

NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE: General seats: 9; Sikhs: 3; Muslims: 86; Landholders: 2. Total : 100

In the event of Sind being separated from Bombay, seats were also allotted for Bombay without Sind and for Sind.



As regards seats for commerce and industry, mining and planting, it was not specified how many of them would be filled by Europeans and how many by Indians. But according to a rough distribution provided, there would be many more Europeans than Indians representing these interests.

In Bombay out of the 97 general seats, 7 would go to the Mahrattas. In Bengal the number of general seats, 80, included seats to be allotted to the Depressed Classes, which had been left undecided. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 229-37; *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, pp. 656-64]

It will be seen that the British Government through this Award gave statutory recognition not only to such minorities as Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans, but also created new minorities, such as the Backward Areas, commercial and industrial classes, landholders, labour, universities and Mahrattas. Further, it gave tacit recognition to the demand of that section of the leadership of the Depressed Classes which was working for separate representation for the Depressed Classes and, thereby, for a division within Hindu Society. The sequence of events to which this decision led is treated in the following chapter.

Dr. Tara Chand commented:

The plan obviously took for granted that the programmes and parties in India at the Centre and in the provinces, would be determined not by economic, political and social considerations but on the basis of religious and communal interests. Therefore, from the foundations upwards, the entire structure – constituencies, elections, ministries – was organized on communal lines. [*History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 182]



CHAPTER III: LEAD KINDLY LIGHT

1

Gandhiji had returned from Europe on 28 December 1931 by *s.s. Pilsna*. The Working Committee meeting had been called for 31 December. Jawaharlal Nehru and Sherwani, while proceeding to receive Gandhiji in Bombay and to attend the Working Committee meeting, were arrested. Gandhiji himself was arrested during the night between 3 and 4 January 1932 and put behind the bars along with Vallabhbhai Patel. He concentrated on his daily routine, including the sacrificial spinning, which was for him a means of identifying himself with the poorest Indian. He practised drawing the thread with his right hand when the left refused to work because of pain. He read a great deal and wrote many letters. His weekly epistles to the Sabarmati Ashram children were a means of teaching them how to realize the ideals of Truth and Non-violence in their day-to-day life. But within his heart there was unrest.

Gandhiji could not get over the feeling that the British Government had trapped him by setting up a Committee on Communal Affairs in which the so-called representatives of different groups had all been selected by the Government and were known to hold reactionary views. Gandhiji had gone to the Second Round Table Conference as the sole representative of the Congress and he had to function within his mandate. The rest of them were free to hold their own views. They had met and set down proposals which Gandhiji could not accept. Separate electorates for the untouchables he considered harmful for the removal of untouchability. He feared that separate electorates would set the clock back so far as abolition of untouchability was concerned.

Gandhiji had seen the trap when the Prime Minister in his speech on 13 November 1931 had officially blessed the Minorities Pact and the untouchables



demand for separate electorates as embodied in it. Gandhiji's speech that day was memorable. In a voice charged with emotion he had said:

I can understand the claim advanced by other minorities, but the claim advanced on behalf of the 'untouchables' is to me the unkindest cut of all. It means perpetual bar sinister. I would not sell the vital interests of the 'untouchables' even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the 'untouchables'. I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the 'untouchables', their vote, and that I would top the poll.

He had then gone on to expose the fallacy underlying the analogy between the Depressed Classes and the other minorities with regard to special representation:

Let the Committee and the whole world know that today there is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove this blot of untouchability. We do not want on our register and on our census 'untouchables' classified as a separate class. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Mohammedans, so may Europeans. I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived.

Gandhiji disputed Dr. Ambedkar's claim to speak for all Depressed Classes, saying the bitter experiences the latter had undergone had for the moment warped his judgment. He said it hurt him to say that but, he proceeded:

I would be untrue to the cause of the 'untouchables' which is dear to me as life itself, if I did not say it. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. . . . Those who speak of the political rights of 'untouchables' do not know India and do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore, I want to say with all the emphasis I can



command that if I was the only person to resist this thing [separate electorates for 'untouchables'], I will resist it with my life. [C.W.M.G., XLVIII, pp. 297-98]

2

Gandhiji did not object to the representation of the Depressed Classes in the Legislatures. He was even prepared for their overrepresentation with the consent of other members of the Committee. What he objected to was the creation of a vested interest in untouchability and the stigma of untouchability being attached to some people in perpetuity. He felt the Hindus should have a chance of doing the right thing by the 'untouchables' of their own free will rather than under compulsion of statutory reservation of seats.

Gandhiji had hoped that after his return to India from the Round Table Conference he would be able to concentrate on mobilizing public opinion so as to find a solution for the communal question, especially the problems of the Depressed Classes, as outlined by him in London. But that was not to be. The first news on landing that he received was of Jawaharlal's arrest. Then before the end of the first week of January 1932 he himself and most of his trusted colleagues and Congress leaders were put in prison.

Gandhiji was worried in jail. He had pledged his life to resist separate electorates for the untouchables in their own interest. What could he do from behind the prison bars? Verrier Elwin had sent him a message, as to many others all over the world, that every Friday after the evening prayers, at a fixed time, they should sing "Lead Kindly Light". This was done religiously by Gandhiji and his companions in Yeravda prison. From the depth of his heart came the anguished cry:

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still



Will lead me on,

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent till

The night is gone." [C.W.M.G., XLIX, pp. 485-86]

Gandhiji believed in the omnipotence of soul force, and its capacity to transcend all material barriers and obstacles. He had been preaching the efficacy of soul force all his life. Was he going to be a helpless witness of his life's mission of removal of untouchability being destroyed?

3

The demand for reservation of seats and separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was raised by Dr. Ambedkar for the first time at the Second Round Table Conference. Gandhiji, to begin with, did not quite comprehend what Dr. Ambedkar had in mind. He had not even been aware till then that Dr. Ambedkar himself was an "untouchable". He had assumed that the learned Doctor was a Brahmin who felt for the untouchables and was carried away by his zeal for reform. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. I, p. 68]. In his speech at the Federal Structure Committee on 17 September 1931, he had said:

I have not yet quite grasped what Dr. Ambedkar has to say; but of course the Congress will share the honour with Dr. Ambedkar of representing the interests of the untouchables. They are as dear to the Congress as the interests of any other body or any other individual throughout the length and breadth of India. Therefore I would most strongly resist any further special representation.

Gandhiji made it clear that so far as the Congress was concerned, it had reconciled itself to special treatment of the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh tangle, but it would not extend that doctrine in any shape or form. [C.W.M.G., XLVIII, p. 34]



In a talk with Evelyn Wrench of *The Spectator* a month later Gandhiji was even more categorical. He said:

In the interests of the untouchables themselves I think it would be fatal for them to have a special electorate, or to have reservation of seats. If this were attempted, it would create opposition to them. I think their interests would be best safeguarded by their coming "through the open door", to let them have the same voting rights as the ordinary Hindu. [*Ibid*, p. 179]

Gandhiji was equally categorical in opposing schemes for special representation for other special interests, such as labour, landlords, Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, etc. [*Ibid*, pp. 34-35, 258-59 and passim]

In the first week of October 1931, having sought a week's adjournment for the Minorities Committee, Gandhiji had tried his best to secure an agreed solution to the communal problem through consultations with Muslims, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Depressed Classes representatives. Gandhiji told the Committee on 8 October, when it reassembled, that his failure to bring about a commonly agreed settlement was due largely to the fact that the leaders of the delegations had no representative capacity; they were nominees of the Government. He denied that the Congress was opposed to representation of the Depressed Classes in the Legislatures. What the Congress was opposed to was their special representation, for special representation could only harm their cause. [*Ibid*, pp. 115-19]

Having stonewalled all Gandhiji's efforts to find a solution to the communal problem, the representatives of the Minorities, the Aga Khan, Sir Henry Gidney, Dr. Ambedkar, and others got together and signed a memorandum called the



Minorities Pact, or the Minorities Petition of Rights, which demanded, *inter alia*, that the communities which were parties to the Pact "shall have representation in all legislatures through separate electorates . . . provided that, after a lapse of ten years, it will be open to Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal and any minority communities in any other provinces to accept joint electorates. . . . With regard to the Depressed Classes, no change to joint electorates . . . shall be made until after 20 years. . . ."

Speaking at the Minorities Committee on 13 November when the Minorities Pact was discussed, Gandhiji said the Minorities delegates had come up with the Pact because they were encouraged by the British assertion that there could be no progress in constitution-making without a communal settlement. He proceeded:

It would have been against human nature if they had done otherwise. All of them thought that this was the time to press forward their claims for all they were worth. . . . Having received that encouragement, we have failed to arrive at an agreement.

Coming to the Pact Gandhiji said:

I will not deprive Sir Hubert Carr and his associates of the feeling of satisfaction that evidently actuates them, but, in my opinion, what they have done is to sit by the carcass, and they have performed the laudable feat of dissecting that carcass. [*Ibid*, pp. 293-94]

According to the Minorities Pact, the distribution of seats in different Provinces was to be as follows:

ASSAM: Total seats 100. Caste Hindus 38; Depressed Classes 13; Muslims 35; Christians 3; Anglo-Indians 1; Europeans 10.



BENGAL: Total seats 200. Caste Hindus 38; Depressed Classes 35; Muslims 102; Christians 2; Anglo-Indians 3; Europeans 20.

BIHAR & ORISSA: Total seats 100. Caste Hindus 51; Depressed Classes 14; Muslims 25; Christians 1; Anglo-Indians 1; Europeans 5; Tribals (Backward Areas) 3.

BOMBAY: Total seats 200. Caste Hindus 88; Depressed Classes 28; Muslims 66; Christians 2; Anglo-Indians 3; Europeans 13.

MADRAS PRESIDENCY: Total seats 200. Caste Hindus 102; Depressed Classes 40; Muslims 30; Christians 14; Anglo-Indians 4; Europeans 8; Tribals (Backward Areas) 2.

PUNJAB: Total seats 100. Caste Hindus 14; Depressed Classes 10; Muslims 51; Christians 1.5; Anglo-Indians 1.5; Europeans 2; Sikhs 20.

UNITED PROVINCES: Total seats 100. Caste Hindus 44; Depressed Classes 20; Muslims 30; Christians 1; Anglo-Indians 2; Europeans 3.

CENTRAL PROVINCES: Total seats 100. Caste Hindus 58; Depressed Classes 20; Muslims 15; Christians 1; Anglo-Indians 2; Europeans 2; Tribals (Backward Areas) 2. [Extracted from table in Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, p. 665]

As the figures indicate, the Minorities Pact conceded to the Depressed Classes much fewer seats than their population, as estimated by them, would have entitled them to. Of the projected total of 1100 seats in the Provincial Councils, the Depressed Classes were to have, under the dispensation proposed, only 180 seats, whereas being 19 per cent of the population of British India according to the claim advanced by them, they should have been allotted 209 seats. On the other hand, Muslims, forming 21.5 per cent of the population, were



given 338 seats (about 30.7 per cent of the total), whereas on the basis of population they should have got 237 seats.

Why then did Dr. Ambedkar and Srinivasan accept so reduced a level of Depressed Classes representation in Provincial Legislatures? They did so because those claiming to represent the Muslims, Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, etc. jointly underscored Ambedkar's demand for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. The demand had behind it also the implicit and later on explicit backing of the British Government whose representatives did everything in their power to encourage Ambedkar.

5

So much for the Minorities Pact. As for the Communal Award of the British Government, it proceeded by and large along the lines laid down in the Minorities Pact, raising separate electorates and special constituencies into a paramount principle on which any future constitution should be based. However in the matter of distribution of seats it went even further to satisfy the Muslims, raising their share to nearly 31 per cent (453 seats out of a total of 1463 seats fixed for the Provincial Councils). The number of seats allotted to the Depressed Classes was drastically reduced to 71, or less than 5 per cent. The explanation for this was contained in para 9 of the Communal Award, dealing with the Depressed Classes, which said that the members of the Depressed Classes would vote in a general constituency and that the special seats allotted to them would be from selected areas where the Depressed Classes were most numerous.

But if that was the intention, then the number of general seats should have been proportionately increased. But that did not happen. As against 613 seats allotted to Caste Hindus and Depressed Classes together out of a projected total of 1100 seats under the Minorities Pact, the British Government's Award gave



them a total of 757 seats (inclusive of 71 special seats for the Depressed Classes) out of the total of 1463 seats in the Provincial chambers. That is to say, the Minorities Pact allotted to them slightly less than 56 per cent seats; the Communal Award brought it down to less than 52 per cent, whereas they formed over 68 per cent of the country's population according to the latest census.

A group that stood to gain from the Award were the Europeans. The Minorities Pact had of course assigned to them 63 seats in all the provinces out of 1100 — or nearly 6 per cent. That was because the Minorities Pact was in the first place the handiwork of the European delegation, the other Minority delegations having merely fallen in line. In the Communal Award this figure was cut down to 31 out of 1463, but other ways were found to fill the chambers with Europeans, for it was expected that out of the 63 seats assigned for Commerce and Industry, Mining and Planting, no less than 41 might go to Europeans, so that the European representation in the Provincial Councils was expected to be in the region of five per cent. [For figures analysed here, see Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the India National Congress*, Vol. I, p. 665]

6

The Lothian Committee came to India on 17 January 1932 and went about its work in a systematic business-like manner. In two months' time, the Committee had made sufficient progress to warrant the Government's decision being announced any time. When Gandhiji learnt this from the newspapers he was permitted to read in jail, he prayed hard for light as to his next step. He felt that he should warn the Government. But how and in what form?

The light came to him in a flash as it were. On 11 March after a night's vigil which, Pyarelal says, was characterized by the memory of endless entreaties, prayers and arguments to reconsider his decision on one side and a cool, resigned



firmness rooted in some secret strength and mystic ecstasy of the soul on the other, that strongly recalled the scene of passion that was enacted on the Mount of Olives two thousand years earlier, he conveyed in a letter addressed to Sir Samuel Hoare his resolve to undertake a fast unto death in the event of the Government taking the decision in favour of creating separate electorates for the untouchables. In the letter he said:

I therefore respectfully inform His Majesty's Government that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, I must fast unto death. . . .

It is a call of conscience which I dare not disobey, even though it may cost whatever reputation for sanity I may possess.

So far as I can see now, my discharge from imprisonment would not make the duty of fasting any the less imperative.

I am hoping, however, that all my fears are wholly unjustified and that the British Government have no intention whatever of creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, pp. 190-91; Pyarelal, *The Epic Fast*, pp. 10-11]

Gandhiji also mentioned in his letter how shocked he was at the naked repression let loose by the Viceroy, which also might lead him to a fast, but that was not the point at issue at the moment.

Vallabhbhai Patel was with Gandhiji and he understood his position and refrained from arguments. Mahadev Desai arrived in Yeravda on the day the letter was to be sent. He was upset by it, but following the line of Sardar he too felt that arguments would be of no use. They feared that for Gandhiji to take his opposition to separate electorates for untouchables to the point of fasting to



death would be misunderstood and certainly misinterpreted by the British. Even among Englishmen sympathetic to Gandhiji, many honest persons would not understand the step.

Vallabhbhai said he did not approve of the letter being sent, but it was for Gandhiji to decide. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. I, pp. 6-7] Gandhiji decided to send it.

Sir Samuel Hoare replied on 13 April in a stiff bureaucratic tone saying that he had noted how strong were Gandhiji's feelings regarding the question. He however regretted that it was not possible for His Majesty's Government to anticipate the recommendations of the Lothian Committee. He promised that Gandhiji's views would be "fully taken into account" before the final decision was taken.

As for the repression, Sir Samuel Hoare wrote that he was convinced it was absolutely necessary for the maintenance of law and order and that the force used was not in excess of the minimum necessary. [C.W.M.G., XLIX, pp. 534-35]

7

The Report of the Lothian Committee – The Indian Franchise Committee – was published on 3 June 1932. The Report made no specific recommendation and provided no guidance on the question of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, except to mention these as one of several alternatives to ensure adequate representation to that segment of the population in the Legislatures.

The official summary of the Report in this connection said:

As regards enfranchisement the Committee say that until the new electoral roll is prepared it will be impossible to calculate the voting strength



of the Depressed Classes, but since most of them will not have the requisite property or educational qualifications they will certainly not be enrolled in proportion to their population. Since it is essential that under responsible government these people should be able to express their opinions in the Councils the Committee recommend a levelling up of the Depressed Class vote by some form of differential franchise. They suggest six possible methods. The first is to enfranchise Depressed Class village servants. The second to enfranchise on bare literacy. The third to grant a vote to each Depressed Class household. The fourth to grant two votes to each Depressed Class voter, one in a special constituency and the other in a general. The fifth to enfranchise wives of Depressed Class voters, and the sixth to reduce property qualification in respect of the Depressed Class.

Which of the six methods to use was left by the Committee to the discretion of the local Governments, but it thought that in Bombay, Madras and the Central Provinces extensive use might be made of the bare literacy qualification. In any case, the Committee urged, the voting strength of the community be raised in all but one province to approximately 10 per cent of their population. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 458-59]

Gandhiji read the summary in jail. He announced:

It will be wicked if they give separate electorates to the untouchables. One can understand a person becoming selfish. But here there is an attempt to turn a whole people selfish. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. I, p. 199]

As Gandhiji waited with unease, even with a certain degree of premonition, for the Prime Minister's Award, saner elements among the Depressed Classes



themselves tried to avert the statutory separation of untouchables from the Hindu Society that they could feel was impending. In March 1932 M. C. Rajah, President of the All India Depressed Classes Association and Member of the Central Assembly representing the Depressed Classes, got together with Dr. B. S. Moonje, President of the Hindu Mahasabha and worked out an arrangement for reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes in all the Provinces on the basis of joint electorates. In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister on 21 March, 1932, M. C. Rajah said:

The two Associations . . . having come to understanding on the basis of Joint Electorates with reserved seats according to their proportion of population, there ought to be no question now of granting separate Electorates for the Depressed Classes. The Depressed Classes have now come to know that under the so-called Minorities Pact that was made in London, they cannot get their full share of seats in the Legislatures in proportion to their number in the population; while under the system of Joint Electorates they not only get their full reservation, but obtain also the right of contesting additional seats. . . .

In a statement issued in April 1932 M. C. Rajah gave figures to show how the interests of the Depressed Classes had been sacrificed by Ambedkar and Srinivasan in all the provinces except Bombay and Madras, native provinces of the two gentlemen. The following is a comparative statement of the allotment of seats to Depressed Classes under the Minority Pact and under the Rajah-Moonje Pact: [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 333-37]



Legislature	Strength of Chamber	Seats for Depressed Classes under Minorities Pact	Seats for Depressed Classes under Rajah-Moonje Pact
Centre			
Upper House	200	20	38
Lower House	300	45	57
Assam	100	13	13
Bengal	200	35	49
Bihar & Orissa	100	14	14
Bombay	200	28	16
C.P.	100	20	24
Madras	200	40	39
Punjab	100	10	13
United Provinces	100	20	26

Dr. Ambedkar and his followers dismissed the Rajah-Moonje Pact as something "not worth wasting any time over". They said Rajah did not have the sanction for entering into any Pact with Moonje. They also questioned the representative character of the All-India Depressed Classes Association that he headed. [*Ibid*, p. 331]



The Prime Minister's Award on the communal question came at last on 17 August and it confirmed Gandhiji's worst fears. Notwithstanding Gandhiji's letter to Samuel Hoare of 11 March giving notice of a fast unto death in the event of the British Government introducing separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, notwithstanding the Hindu Mahasabha being willing to concede even a large number of seats to the Depressed Classes under the Rajah-Moonje Pact if joint electorates were retained, the Communal Award decreed separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. It created a number of special constituencies for them and gave them the right to contest the general seats besides the reserved ones, thus giving each voter two votes. It provided that special electorates and reservation of seats would cease automatically after twenty years, if not earlier.

On 17 August, when the Award was published and when Gandhiji saw it, he went about his routine activities as usual, as though nothing had happened. He told Mahadev to make millet chapatis, which he ate with relish.

In the course of the morning walk Mahadev expressed the view that the Award was much worse than the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

"But of course," Gandhiji said, "they had made the Congress-League Pact of Lucknow the basis of those Reforms. But this time they have created such divisions, conspired to disrupt the country to such a degree, that it may never recover from it."

In the evening, before the prayer, he told his two companions: "Now, if you have anything to say, say it. What I said in my letter to Samuel Hoare must apply now. I must now give them notice."



At night Gandhiji sat down to draft a letter to Ramsay MacDonald, which he completed in the morning of the following day. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. I, pp. 366-67] The letter said:

There can be no doubt that Sir Samuel Hoare has shown you and the Cabinet my letter to him of 11th March on the question of the representation of "depressed" classes. That letter should be treated as part of this letter and be read together with this.

I have read the British Government's decision on the representation of minorities and have slept over it. In pursuance of my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare and my declaration at the meeting of the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference on 13 November 1931 at St. James' Palace, I have to resist your decision with my life.

The only way I can do so is by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water with or without salt and soda. This fast will cease if during its progress the British Government, of its own motion or under pressure of public opinion, revise their decision and withdraw their scheme of communal electorates for the "depressed" classes, whose representatives should be elected by the general electorate under the common franchise no matter how wide it is.

The proposed fast will come into operation in the ordinary course from the noon of 20 September next, unless the said decision is meanwhile revised in the manner suggested above.

I am asking the authorities here to cable the text of this letter to you so as to give you ample notice. But in any case, I am leaving sufficient time for this letter to reach you in time by the slowest route.



I also ask that this letter and my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, already referred to, be published at the earliest possible moment. . . . I want, if you make it possible, public opinion affected by my letter. . . .

I regret the decision I have taken. But as a man of religion that I hold myself to be, I have no other course left open to me. As I have said in my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, even if His Majesty's Government decided to release me in order to save themselves the embarrassment my fast will have to continue. . . .

He closed the letter on a note of introspection:

It may be that my judgment is warped and that I am wholly in error in regarding separate electorates for Depressed Classes as harmful to them or to Hinduism. If so, I am not likely to be in the right with reference to other parts of my philosophy of life. In that case my death by fasting will be at once a penance for my error and a lifting of a weight from off those numberless men and women who have childlike faith in my wisdom. Whereas if my judgment is right, as I have little doubt it is, the contemplated step is but the fulfilment of the scheme of life which I have tried for more than a quarter of a century, apparently not without considerable success. [C.W.M.G., L, pp. 383-84]

Discussing the implications of the step contemplated with Mahadev Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhiji agreed that it could be misinterpreted and misconstrued. It was quite possible they would say in America that he proposed to fast to secure his release. Many would say it indicated his spiritual bankruptcy. Others would thoughtlessly copy him, which would have terrible consequences. Jawaharlal Nehru would certainly not approve. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), p. 368]



The Prime Minister's reply to Gandhiji's letter of 18 August was received on 9 September, some three weeks later. Gandhiji wondered over such long delay on such an urgent matter. Could it be due to Government of India having sent the letter by surface mail instead of by cablegram as requested or had it been pigeonholed in the Prime Minister's Secretariat?

The Prime Minister's reply stated that he had received Gandhiji's letter with much surprise and sincere regret. He tried to explain Government's decision which he claimed had taken care of Gandhiji's objection not to divide the Hindu Community. He said further that in the Government's view separate electorates for a limited period were necessary to safeguard the rights of the depressed classes "to a fair proportion in the legislatures" in view of the many representations from the depressed class organizations and the "generally admitted" special disabilities under which they laboured. He argued:

Under the Government's scheme the Depressed Classes will remain part of a Hindu Community and vote with the Hindu electorate on an equal footing, but for the first twenty years, while still remaining electorally part of the Hindu Community, they will receive through a limited number of special constituencies, means of safeguarding their rights and interests that, we are convinced, is necessary under present conditions.

Gandhiji, he said, had himself expressed concern over the disabilities of the 'untouchables' and stood for their fair representation in the legislatures. The Government had given two votes to them so that they would vote for the Hindu candidates and Hindus would have to solicit their votes. They could also contest from the general seats besides the reserved ones when they would have to solicit



Hindu votes. They would thus remain a part of the Hindu Community. Moreover, this arrangement was temporary and would end after 20 years.

The Prime Minister was unable to understand Gandhiji's objection to the Government Scheme regarding depressed classes. He said:

As I understand your attitude, you propose to adopt the extreme course of starving yourself to death, not in order to secure that the Depressed Classes should have joint electorates with other Hindus, because that is already provided, not to maintain the unity of Hindus, which is also provided, but solely to prevent the Depressed Classes, who admittedly suffer from terrible disabilities today, from being able to secure a limited number of representatives of their own choosing to speak on their behalf in the legislatures which will have a dominating influence over their future.
[*The Epic Fast*, p. 109]

The Government, he said, had reluctantly agreed to give an award at the request of the parties concerned when they could not come to an agreement among themselves and he was unable to change it.

I am afraid, therefore, that my answer to you must be that the communities themselves can substitute other electoral arrangements for those that Government have devised in a sincere endeavour to weigh the conflicting claims on their just merits.

He agreed to the release of the correspondence as requested by Gandhiji.

A careful study of the Premier's reply would lead one to the conclusion that the device of double vote for the Depressed Classes was a clever move to put Gandhiji in the wrong while still retaining separate electorate for the



untouchables to which the Government had committed themselves. It may be argued that the Premier had only "registered a state of affairs which he found at the moment and that he took as neutral a view of the sectional cleavages in existence as a man in his position could take. Pyarelal writes:

But that is precisely where his failure lay. As a well-known Calcutta Christian journal has observed, if he had been more sympathetic to Indian nationhood (and we may add, the Hindu spiritual aspiration to do voluntary expiation for its sinful past) he would have used his opportunity to discountenance firmly all divisive tendencies. Since he overlooked that in the interests of political exigencies, it was the duty of the Indian leader to make a counter-attack upon and check the sedulously fostered disruption of the country into multifarious sections. He, therefore, appeared with the sternest conceivable resolve to put an end to the mischievous tendencies that had enjoyed freedom all too long, to the chagrin and dismay of all sincere patriots. [*Ibid*, pp. 13-14]

Gandhiji's brief reply to the Prime Minister reiterated his resolve to fast. "I am sorry," he wrote reproachfully

that you put upon the contemplated step an interpretation that never crossed my mind. . . . I had hoped that the extreme step itself would effectively prevent any such selfish interpretation. Without arguing I affirm that for me this matter is one of pure religion In establishment of a separate electorate at all for "Depressed" Classes I sense the injection of a poison that is calculated to destroy Hinduism and do no good whatsoever to "Depressed" Classes. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 31]



The correspondence was released from Simla on 12 September. It appeared in the Press on the 13th morning and sent shock waves all over the country. Many all over the world were stunned and worried over the prospects of the tragic consequences of Gandhiji's self-imposed ordeal.

In India the week from 13 to 20 September was marked by anxiety and fervent prayers for the success of Gandhiji's mission. There was a countrywide demand for the withdrawal of the Premier's Award on the one hand and a firm resolve to remove the religious and social disabilities of the untouchables on the other. Temples were thrown open to untouchables in many places all over the country.

On 18 September a dozen temples in Allahabad and all temples in Ayodhya were opened for untouchables. There were reports of similar events from various other parts of the country and there were scenes of fraternization between caste Hindus and untouchables. It seemed the wall of caste barriers was at last crumbling.

The Depressed Classes, as a general rule, looked upon Gandhiji's contemplated sacrifice as a gesture to ratify his claim that the cause of the untouchable was dearer to him than life. In the face of this contemplated supreme sacrifice, all differences were forgotten for the time being. The chief consideration in everyone's mind was that Gandhiji's life must be saved at any cost.

Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah, a respected leader of the untouchables, was among the first to come out with a public statement on the 13th, condemning the British policy of political segregation of Depressed Classes as laid down in the Prime Minister's scheme of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. He



made a fervent appeal to all sections to save the life of Gandhiji, "the greatest benefactor of the poor and down-trodden classes, who by focussing world attention on the Depressed Class issue had earned the gratitude of all the members of that community". He struck the same note in the speech he delivered on the same day on an adjournment motion on the subject moved in the Central Legislative Assembly by C. S. Ranga Aiyar.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru in a public statement demanded immediate release of Gandhiji. No wise Government, he said, would take any risk with the life of one "who alone could make any contribution to the solution of the communal problem by mutual agreement".

Yakub Hussain, a Muslim leader from Madras, appealed to the untouchables to give up separate electorates to save Gandhiji's life. He warned Muslims against any disrespectful belittling of the noble sacrifice of one who was held in the same regard and devotion by a large section of the Muslims with which he used to be "when he was placed at the head of the Khilafat movement by the common consent of the whole community a decade ago".

Babu Rajendra Prasad stated:

The Hindu Society is on its trial, and if it has life in it, it must respond with a great and magnificent act. Political issues can then be more easily settled in an atmosphere of goodwill at a conference of the leaders of the parties concerned.

He exhorted the Hindus to throw open temples to the untouchables, accept their right to draw water from the wells, admit their children to schools, and to allow them the use of all public roads.



Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya proposed a conference of leaders at Delhi on 17 and 18 September. The venue was changed to Bombay at the suggestion of Jayakar, in view of the likely need for frequent consultations with Gandhiji. The date was changed to September 19 and 20.

C. Rajagopalachari gave a call to observe 20 September as a day of prayer and fasting. Malaviya gave whole-hearted support to this proposal. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 17-19; C. B. Dalal, *Gandhi-1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, p. 98]

13

In England C.F. Andrews with Polak and many workers active in the Indian cause set about educating the English public about the implications of the fast and the gravity of the crisis.

At Kingsley Hall, where Gandhiji had stayed during the Second Round Table Conference, there was an all-night vigil and prayer for Gandhiji's life.

Lansbury, a prominent Labour M.P., declared in a public speech at Poplar that Mahatma Gandhi, "self-martyred for faith, will become a still mightier force". He strongly urged the Government not to impose a settlement that could lead only to "strife and conflict".

The India Reconciliation Group decided to remain in continuous session while Gandhiji's fast lasted. They issued an appeal to members of all branches of Christian churches to offer special prayers for India. The appeal was signed, among others, by Dr. Maud Royden, Rev. Dr. Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, Dr. J. Scott Lidgett, the leader of the Methodists, and Rev. Dr. Paton, member of the International Missionary Council.



Mustapha Nahas Pasha, ex-Premier and President of the Wafd party of Egypt and Madame Safia Zaghlul sent message in appreciation of Gandhiji's penance and said they were praying for the success of his mission.

The Friends of India decided on a 24 hours fast on 2 October all over the world, as a gesture of sympathy and penance and resolved to send the money thus saved from food to Gandhiji.

Millions in India prayed and fasted on 20 September.

Andrews cabled from London on 13 September appealing to Gandhiji to postpone fasting till he came, adding that he was starting immediately. Gandhiji told him that he would be much more useful in England. So Andrews had to deny himself the satisfaction to be by his friend's side during the fast. He and Polak did much to educate public opinion in England. [*Ibid*, pp. 19-20; C.W.M.G., LI, p. 50]

As news of Gandhiji's impending self-immolation through fasting spread, a wave of anxiety swept across the country, and friends and well-wishers of India abroad were distressed and worried. Anxious letters and telegrams started arriving in an avalanche at the jail. But Gandhiji himself was now perfectly at peace. He wrote reassuringly to everyone, telling all that the fast was God's will and could not be postponed unless separate electorates for untouchables were done away with. Between 13 and 20 September he wrote or dictated no less than 80 communications. In addition to the members of his family and inmates of the Ashram, he wrote to G. D. Birla, C. Rajagopalachari, T. B. Saprú, M. A. Ansari, Verrier Elwin, Romain Rolland, Sarojini Naidu, Vinoba Bhave, Rabindranath Tagore, Srinivasa Sastri and others. [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 50-102]



Gandhiji's one object now was to endeavour to make the meaning of his fast crystal clear to everyone.

On 16 September a statement sent by Gandhiji to the Bombay Government for being released to the Press was pigeonholed. The Government sat upon it and released it to the Press only on 21 September when they were forced to do so by importunate Pressmen who had come to know about it.

In the statement Gandhiji said that he had resolved upon the fast in the name of God, for His work and at His call. Friends had urged him, he said, to postpone the date for the sake of giving the public a chance to organize itself, but he was sorry it was not open to him to change even the hour. The fast was not against the English official world or against those who were opposed to him. It was against those who had faith in him and believed that he represented a just cause. Above all, he said, it was intended to sting the Hindu conscience into right religious action.

Gandhiji said though he could understand the distrust of caste Hindus on the part of the untouchables, they were committing an error in opposing joint electorates. Separating the Depressed Classes entirely from Hindu society would not serve their interests. In fact in practice it was impossible to separate them from Hindu society. He therefore felt impelled to "resist the contemplated separation even though the effort should cost life itself".

Gandhiji called for "fullest freedom for the Depressed Classes inside the Hindu fold", which alone could be an adequate substitute for the contemplated separation. A patchwork agreement could only postpone the day of immolation. It was, Gandhiji said, either a hallucination of his or an illumination. If it was the former, he wished to be allowed to do his penance in



peace. That, he said, would be the lifting of a dead weight on Hinduism. If, on the other hand, it was illumination, he prayed that his agony might purify Hinduism and even melt the hearts of those who were then disposed to distrust him.

In order to remove any misunderstanding as to the implication of the fast, Gandhiji reiterated that

it is aimed at a statutory separate electorate in any shape or form, for the Depressed Classes. Immediately that threat is removed once for all, my fast will end.

Gandhiji said he would abide by an agreement on the basis of joint electorates that might be arrived at between the leaders of caste Hindus and Depressed Classes. He also warned friends and sympathizers against copying him blindly or out of false or hysterical sympathy.

The fast was an expression of non-violence and there ought not to be any malice or anger against a single soul. No violence was to be permitted against those inimical to the cause. [*Ibid*, pp. 62-64; *The Epic Fast*, p. 13]

In a letter dated 13 September to Narandas Gandhi Gandhiji had written:

A total fast is the ultimate and the highest ideal of the Ashram. . . . Only a rare person on a rare occasion is entitled to undertake it; I believe that I am on this occasion . . . I claim nearly half a century of ceaseless effort to purify my mind completely so that I may be able to hear the voice within. . . . I have taken the present step in obedience to that voice. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 35]

Many wondered if fasting was not coercion. Gandhiji's reply was emphatic: Love compels; it does not coerce. In the same way, truth too compels, and so does right if once we acknowledge that right is might as it indisputably is. But



surely one cannot describe the overwhelming effect of love, of truth or of right by the term coercion as it is commonly understood. The method of redemption from error by vicarious suffering of the pure in heart is not a new one. It is as old as religion itself. What satyagraha in these cases does is not to suppress reason but to free it from inertia and to establish its sovereignty over prejudice, hatred, anger and other baser passions. It dissolves the mists of mutual distrust and suspicion that obscure it and lends weight and perspective to it by setting the final seal on the sincerity and earnestness of its appeal. [*The Epic Fast*, p. 14]

In his interview to the Press on 20 September Gandhiji said that he wanted to throw his fast in the scales of justice. He continued:

This may look childish to the onlookers, but not so to me. If I had anything more to give, I would throw in that also to remove this curse, but I have nothing more than my life. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 118]



CHAPTER IV: THE FAST AND THE YERAVDA PACT

1

On 20 September, when the week's time ended, Gandhiji got up earlier than usual — at 2.30 a.m. At the morning prayer he and his two companions sang his favourite hymn *Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye* (He alone may be called a Vaishnava who can feel another's pain). Before the fast commenced the Government had decided to remove Gandhiji to a private residence under certain conditions, but Gandhiji had told the Government not to disturb him.

Gandhiji had an early breakfast of fruit and milk. From 6.30 a.m. to 8 a.m. one of his companions recited verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*, which he heard with rapt attention. At 11.30 he had his last nourishment before the fast — hot water with lemon juice and honey.

The fast was started at noon with the singing of a hymn sent to him by Rehana Tyabji, eldest daughter of the Grand Old Man of Gujarat Abbas Tyabji:

O traveller, arise, it is dawn.

The night is past and thou still sleepest.

The first day passed without much happening, except that in the afternoon, for the first time in nine months, Gandhiji was permitted to receive Press representatives. They gathered round him at 5.30 p.m., five hours after the commencement of the fast. Writing about the interview, the *Times of India* reporter commented that it was "one of the most easily delivered and seriously thoughtful interviews to which it has ever been my fortune to listen". Explaining his position on the fast Gandhiji told the reporters that the fast was "only against separate electorates, and not against statutory reservation of seats". He was of



course opposed to the reservation of seats, too, for it was his view that it would do the untouchables more harm than good. He continued:

I am a 'touchable' by birth but an untouchable by choice; and I have endeavoured to qualify myself to represent, not the upper ten even among the untouchables . . . but my ambition is to represent and identify myself with, as far as possible, the lowest strata of untouchables, namely, the 'invisibles' and the 'unapproachables' whom I have always before my mind's eye wherever I go; for they have indeed drunk deep of the poisoned cup. I have met them in Malabar and in Orissa, and am convinced that if they are ever to rise, it will not be by reservation of seats but will be by the strenuous work of Hindu reformers in their midst, and it is because I feel that this separation would have killed all prospect of reform that my whole soul has rebelled against it; and let me make it plain that the withdrawal of separate electorates will satisfy the letter of my vow but will never satisfy the spirit behind it, and in my capacity of being a self-chosen untouchable, I am not going to rest content with a patched-up pact between the 'touchables' and the untouchables.

What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch. . . .

My life I count of no consequence. One hundred lives given for this noble cause would, in my opinion, be poor penance done by Hindus for the atrocious wrongs they have heaped upon helpless men and women of their own faith. . . . My fast I want to throw in the scales of justice, and if it wakes up caste Hindus from their slumber, and if they are roused to a sense of their duty, it will have served its purpose. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 118-21]



Rabindranath Tagore, whose blessing Gandhiji had sought before starting the fast, in a telegraphic message said:

It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. . . . I fervently hope that we will not callously allow such national tragedy to reach its extreme length. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love.

After the fast had been commenced Tagore spoke to the students of Visva Bharati at Santiniketan. He said:

A shadow is darkening today over India like a shadow cast by an eclipsed sun. The people of a whole country is suffering from a poignant pain of anxiety. . . . Mahatmaji . . . has commenced his vow of extreme self-sacrifice. . . . The penance which Mahatmaji has taken upon himself is not a ritual but a message to all India and to the world. If we must make that message our own, we should accept it in the right manner through a proper process of realization. The gift of sacrifice has to be received in the spirit of sacrifice.

Though the cleavage between classes, Tagore continued, had existed from the beginning, of human history, no civilized society could "thrive upon victims whose humiliation has been permanently multiplied, whose minds have been compelled to dwell in the dark". Gandhiji had pronounced his ultimatum against that deep moral weakness in Hindu society and though it might be the nation's misfortune to lose him in the battlefield, the fight would be carried on. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 109; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 246-47]



The manner in which the authorities handled the fast, especially in the initial stages, was deplorable. The jail administration, and the jail doctors, paid no attention to the need for the fasting leader to conserve his energy. Every time a visitor came, Gandhiji had to walk to the jailor's office. When the fast started, all they did was to move him to a special yard, where he lay on a jail cot with a jail mattress and a jail bed-sheet spread over it. On a table near the bed were piled various odds and ends – books and papers, a bottle of water and bottles containing salt, soda, etc. A few chairs had been provided for visitors, but no visitors were allowed in till Gandhiji had made a representation in the matter to the Inspector-General of Prisons. Even on 21 September when Hindu leaders from Bombay came to meet him, the meeting took place in the jailor's office.

The fast gave rise to acute anxiety all over the country. Gandhiji had pulled through a 21-day fast for communal unity in 1924, but he had then been eight years younger. He was now nearing sixty-three. Again, while in 1924, he had been careful to conserve his energy, knowing that there was a definite time period at the end of which he would be terminating the fast, this time he appeared indifferent. He walked to the bathroom every time he felt the need, refusing any kind of assistance until his strength failed him on the third day of the fast. In 1924 Gandhiji had taken water with salt and soda every hour with strict regularity. This time he was indifferent in this regard also and the intake of water was erratic and inadequate. The strain of talking, which the ensuing hectic negotiations involved, brought on nausea. On two occasions he had to be administered soda bicarb and water through the rectum to overcome dehydration and acidity.

When the fast began Sarojini Naidu was brought over from the Women's section of the prison to look after Gandhiji. She installed herself as his "jailor" and



was strict with visitors. But she was only partly successful in protecting Gandhiji, for she had to reconcile herself to the fact that Gandhiji had to hold extensive conversations with the leaders of caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes if a solution to the problem created by the Communal Award was to be found.

The jail authorities were most solicitous but the jail doctors were without experience of treating people on a fast. They did not know their requirements. In 1924, Gandhiji's own doctors had looked after him. On 22 September Government offered to call Gandhiji's own doctors, but Gandhiji declined the offer, saying he had full faith in the Government doctors. He was convinced that if he pulled through the fast this time, it would only be because God wanted him to live and not because of medical care or nursing.

3

Gandhiji continued to walk to the bathroom till the evening of 22 September, the third day of the fast, though he was already too weak by then to walk by himself and had to be supported. As the fast proceeded and the body tissues burnt away, he suffered from severe aches and pains. He had had aches and pains during the Delhi fast too, but regular massage by an expert had brought relief. This time he showed no interest in massage. It was only when Kasturba Gandhi arrived that he permitted any massage being given him, if only to please her. A friend later sent an expert masseur and the massage he gave soothed Gandhiji.

On 24 September, the fifth day of the fast, Dr. M. D. D. Gilder and Dr. Nathubhai Patel came from Bombay. Together with the jail doctors they examined Gandhiji and pronounced that the threshold of safety would soon be crossed if unnecessary interviews and the strain of negotiations being conducted were not stopped. But of course the interviews had to go on.



An anxious consultation took place. It was at last decided that two of his close associates should be allowed to stay with him at night also, as he would soon be in need of help even to turn in bed. This arrangement continued till 29 September, when following the end of the fast, all restrictions were reimposed.

On 26 September Rabindranath Tagore came from Calcutta and sang to Gandhiji one of his compositions. Gandhiji was much moved, as he always was, to hear the Poet sing. Music soothed Gandhiji. Parties of musicians from outside were also allowed to come in and sing hymns to him in between the negotiations, both on 27 and 28 September.

Throughout the fast Gandhiji sat up for the prayers both in the morning and in the evening. He also continued his sacrificial spinning every day, notwithstanding his fast-declining strength and the warnings of the doctors.

Kasturba Gandhi was brought over from the Sabarmati prison on 22 September. Her sentence was soon to expire. She was calm and collected and showed supreme courage. On seeing Gandhiji she remarked: "Again the same old story!" Immediately she took charge of Gandhiji's nursing set-up. She had always joined Gandhiji in his fasts by taking one meal a day of fruit and milk. She did so this time too.

Every day from the morning, when the gates of the Yeravda prison opened, visitors came in a stream, except when visits had to be cut short for Gandhiji's meetings with the leaders engaged in the negotiations, or for a short break at midday when he had his bath and a little rest.

Swarup Rani, mother of Jawaharlal Nehru, and Kamala, his wife, came to see Gandhiji on 25 September. Kamala Nehru complained that the newspapers had insulted her by reporting that on hearing the news of Gandhiji's fast she had fallen ill and taken to bed. "How could I afford to fall ill," she exclaimed, "when I knew



that the need of the hour was action and more action?" Swarup Rani, a strictly orthodox lady who had kept her own kitchen for years, told Gandhiji that before leaving Allahabad she had accepted *prasad* from untouchables. On 26 September Basanti Devi and Urmila Devi, wife and sister respectively of C. R. Das, also came from Calcutta. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 42-48]

On 25 September Gandhiji cabled a message to Lawrence Housman to be read at a special meeting of the Friends of India scheduled for 27 September. The message said:

My fast is appeal not merely to Hindus or India in general but to British conscience, indeed to the whole world. . . . Since my deepest faith forbids resort to physical force, I am praying God discover to me such final way of corporate self-suffering extreme kind and give strength undergo it. When, if required, such time comes, I know it will penetrate every British home. I had hoped that appeal from this fiery bed would somewhat somehow wake up British public as it seems to have marvellously aroused India. But God's will was perhaps otherwise. Wanting as I do British sympathy and help, I will value anything your meeting may do. I know I have silent sympathy and prayer of thousands of British men and women. [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 138-39]

4

The fast in the meantime pricked Hindu conscience and activated Hindu leaders. On the initiative of Madan Mohan Malaviya attempts were set on foot for a dialogue between representative Hindu leaders and Ambedkar and others claiming to represent the Depressed Classes, to seek a solution of the Depressed Classes question outside the Communal Award of the British Government. To this end Hindu leaders from various provinces and spokesmen of the Depressed Classes met at a conference in Bombay on 19 September, the evening before



Gandhiji was to start his fast. The conference, held "in a spirit of accommodation and optimism", was attended, among others, by Madan Mohan Malaviya, C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, M.C. Rajah, B.S. Moonje, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, M. R. Baloo, T. Prakasam, B. R. Ambedkar, Dr. Solanki, G. E. Natarajan, M.S. Aney, G. K. Devadhar, Amritlal Thakkar, Sir Govind Madgavkar, Choithram Gidwani, Swami Satyanand, D. P. Khaitan, Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Mrs. Anasuyabai Gokhale, Walchand Hirachand, B. J. Devrukhkar, Raja Rao, Kamala Nehru and H. N. Kunzru.

The feeling in the minds of one and all at the conference was that Gandhiji's life had to be saved. While Ambedkar insisted that Gandhiji's proposals must be obtained before the matter could be further discussed, M. C. Rajah asked the caste Hindu leaders for an assurance that the disabilities of the Depressed Classes, particularly those relating to temple-entry, roads, wells and schools, would be removed.

On the vexatious question of joint versus separate electorates the conference could not evolve any concrete formulation.

On 20 September more people joined in the deliberations. Among them were Tej Bahadur Sapru, M.R. Jayakar, N.C. Kelkar, Chunilal Mehta, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Mathuradas Vasanji and G. D. Birla. It soon became clear that Dr. Ambedkar was not willing to consider giving up separate electorates for the Depressed Classes as provided in the Communal Award. He and his colleague Dr. Solanki were distrustful of joint electorates, which, they felt, would deprive the Depressed Classes of the opportunity to elect representatives of their choice. Sapru had a brain wave and came up with a formula that seemed to combine the advantages of both joint electorates and separate electorates. He suggested a system of primary and secondary elections. The primary election



would determine the choice of candidates of the Depressed Classes and they alone would vote to elect them. The final election on the basis of joint electorates would elect one of the panel of candidates elected by the Depressed Classes. This, Sapru said, while maintaining the principle of joint electorates, would allay the legitimate fears of the Depressed Classes.

Dr. Ambedkar welcomed the proposal. He however added that he would, in return for the concession, want a much larger representation for the Depressed Classes than the 71 seats conceded in the British Prime Minister's Award. The Hindu leaders, Ambedkar found, were willing to consider this, and by the evening of 20 September, Dr. Ambedkar had drafted a proposal for the consideration of the Hindu leaders and Gandhiji. The proposal was as follows:

PART I

- (1) The Depressed Classes shall have the following number of seats in the Provincial Legislatures:

Madras: 30 out of 215. Bombay: 16 out of 200. Bengal: 50 out of 250. Punjab: 10 out of 125. United Provinces: 40 out of 228. Bihar & Orissa: 20 out of 175. Central Provinces & Berar: 20 out of 112. Assam 11 out of 108.

- (2) The method of election to these seats shall be joint electorates with reserved seats, provided that for the first ten years in 18 single constituencies in Madras, 10 single constituencies in Bombay, the Central Provinces and in Bengal, 4 single constituencies in Assam, 7 in Bihar & Orissa, 5 in the Punjab and 12 in U.P. (all in single constituencies) there shall be held before the general election a primary election of voters of the Depressed Classes for electing two



persons to constitute a panel, who, thereafter, shall contest on behalf of the Depressed Classes in the joint electorates.

- (3) After the first ten years the system of primary election shall cease and the seats continue to be filled by direct election in the system of joint electorates with reserved seats.
- (4) The right of the Depressed Classes to special representation through joint electorates and reserved seats shall continue for a further period of 15 years. After that the matter will be settled on the basis of a referendum of the Depressed Classes.
- (5) The right of the Depressed Classes to special representation in both Houses of the Central Legislature shall be recognized on a population ratio on the same terms and in the same manner as provided in the case of Provincial Legislatures.
- (6) There shall be adult suffrage at least for the Depressed Classes. The franchise of the Depressed Classes shall be the same for the Provincial and Central Legislatures.

PART II

- (1) The Depressed Classes shall be allowed representation in all Provincial Municipalities, Local Boards, Village Unions, School Boards and Panchayats and any other local bodies now existing or to be constituted in future on a population basis.
- (2) In all public services, Central and local, the Depressed Classes shall be guaranteed appointments according to the population ratio as a minimum, subject to such qualifications as may be laid down for the



same. Provision shall be made for relaxing statutory rules that may be in existence in matters other than educational qualifications.

- (3) In every province out of the educational grant a sum equal to the population ratio of the Depressed Classes shall be earmarked as a minimum for providing educational facilities for the Depressed Classes.
- (4) There shall be provision in the constitution for allowing the Depressed Classes the right to appeal to the Governor or the Viceroy for any neglect of their interest in matters of education, recruitment to public services, sanitation, etc., on the same terms and in the same manner as provided for in the Constitution of Canada.

Most of the Hindu leaders felt relieved that Ambedkar had accepted the formula. But they were not sure of Gandhiji's reaction. It did not entirely do away with separate electorates but was the next best thing possible under the circumstances. Rajagopalachari, G. D. Birla, Rajendra Prasad and Devadas Gandhi volunteered to plead with Gandhiji and persuade him to accept the formula. Madan Mohan Malaviya, M. R. Jayakar and N. C. Kelkar expressed themselves in favour of it. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 219-20; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 248-49]

5

Accordingly a party comprising Sapru, Jayakar, G. D. Birla, Rajendra Prasad, Rajaji and Devadas Gandhi boarded the late night train to Poona, arriving there in the early hours of 21 September. At 7 a.m. they met Gandhiji in a room in the jailor's office. Gandhiji greeted the party with a hearty laugh but they could see that he had grown weaker. Sarojini Naidu, who escorted Gandhiji, looked worried, but her face lit up on seeing so many old friends. She joined in the



deliberations. Gandhiji placed himself at the centre of the table, saying: "I preside."

Sapru opened the discussion, explaining his proposal. He had hardly spoken for half an hour when Gandhiji said that he was willing to give a favourable consideration to the proposal. "But," he added, "I should like to see the whole picture in writing." He would like to meet Dr. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah before making up his mind, he said. Everyone felt immensely relieved.

An hour later Gandhiji was shifted to a yard close to the office. Here the first group of people to call on him were the Depressed Classes leaders P. N. Rajbhoj, A. M. Mate and Limaye. The talk centred round the need for legislation for temple-entry. Gandhiji told the group that temple-entry was not an issue in his fast, which could not be used for coercing the orthodox. Legislation in a free State always represented the will of the majority. All legislation in advance of general opinion argued bankruptcy of missionary effort. His reliance, therefore, was on missionary enterprise, not on legislation so far as temple-entry was concerned.

He said:

My opinion is quite clear. I would accept any pact that has not a tinge of separate electorate about it. I would, with the utmost reluctance, tolerate reservation of seats under a joint electorate scheme. But I should insist upon what is to me the vital part of the pact, the social and religious reform.

Rajbhoj was suspicious of the *bona fides* of the British Government. He felt that if Dr. Ambedkar accepted a reasonable compromise, Government might call another leader into being who would declare his opposition, thus making sure that the fast ended in Gandhiji's death. Gandhiji said even if that should be so, he could not give up the fast undertaken with God as witness. [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 125-27]



Sapru sent word to Ambedkar to come to Poona and he complied. But his attitude was disappointing. He had added more demands to his original ones. Jayakar had given a copy of his demands to Gandhiji and Gandhiji had also seen the press release given by Ambedkar. He was upset.

On the morning of 22 September Gandhiji told Rajaji and Rajendra Prasad that there was a serious flaw in the scheme. The scheme provided that while for some of the seats reserved for the Depressed Classes there would first be a primary election to elect a panel of candidates, for other seats there would be no such panel. Gandhiji expressed the view that those elected through the panel would consider themselves superior to those directly elected. This would divide the representatives of the Depressed Classes. He could not be a party to this happening. If the panel was good for some, why not concede it for all the seats?

As for Part II of Dr. Ambedkar's proposal, Gandhiji said he could not swallow it. All the claims advanced in it must of course be met, but it could not go into the constitution. [*The Epic Fast*, p. 56]

Later in the day Sapru and Jayakar again saw Gandhiji, to whom also Gandhiji expressed his view that the principle of primary elections should apply to all the seats reserved for the Depressed Classes and not only to some seats. They were agreeably surprised.

In the afternoon Dr. Ambedkar and his associates Dr. Solanki and P. Baloo called on Gandhiji. The conversation was protracted. Gandhiji lay in his bed, weak and tired, and Dr. Ambedkar did most of the talking. One sentence which occurred again and again in his discourse was: "I want my compensation." He said:

The decision of the Government gives me seventy-one seats, and I feel that is a just, reasonable and definite allocation. . . . Over and above that I



get the right to vote and contest elections in the general constituencies. I also have a franchise in the labourers' constituencies.

He told Gandhiji that his quarrel with him was that Gandhiji worked for the so-called national welfare and not for the Depressed Classes' interest alone. If Gandhiji were to devote himself entirely to the welfare of the Depressed Classes he would become their hero.

Gandhiji said he understood the position of Dr. Ambedkar and why he felt that the Depressed Classes could not accept joint electorates without primary elections. But why had he not said so before? Acceptance of primary election, Gandhiji said, did not violate the letter of his vow. He therefore accepted the clause pertaining to it. But, Gandhiji went on, he suspected something when Ambedkar insisted that the panel of candidates elected through the primary election should consist only of three candidates. Moreover, Gandhiji said, he did not like it that the community should be divided into two groups. If the panel system was good for the Depressed Classes it should be good for the entire electorate.

Gandhiji went on:

I do not want to let you have the panel for only a few seats. I want to make a present of it to you for all the seats. I confess I do not like the scheme as it stands. It will again divide your community, and I would give my life to prevent the disruption of the whole Hindu community.

Dr. Ambedkar said: "I have made my concession, Mahatmaji, by accepting joint electorates. Your offer to accept primary elections for all the seats is very kind."



Gandhiji said that was his offer. But he proposed that the panel should consist not of two but of five candidates. He also said that before he finally accepted the scheme he would like to see it drafted in very clear language. As drafted it required many changes. Gandhiji enumerated some of them:

- (1) The system of primary elections and reserved seats should terminate automatically after ten years.
- (2) The number of voters should be ascertained from the Lothian Committee Report. . . . About other issues you should put the Hindu community on its honour. . . . [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 458-61; *The Epic Fast*, p. 59]

6

Gandhiji's physical condition meanwhile had been fast deteriorating, causing widespread anxiety. To achieve some sort of settlement before the deterioration became irreversible, the Hindu leaders' conference met at Bombay in an emergency session on 22 September. After a heated discussion the conference decided that Sir Chunilal Mehta should go to Poona and join Madan Mohan Malaviya and other leaders already camping in Poona. Chunilal Mehta arrived in Poona early in the morning on 23 September.

Very early on 23 September the Hindu leaders sat down with Dr. Ambedkar and other leaders of the Depressed Classes for a conference. The conference had the following agenda:

- (1) Number of seats to be reserved for the Depressed Classes and the basis on which it was to be fixed;
- (2) Number of candidates to be elected to the panel;
- (3) Representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature;



(4) Duration of the system of primary election; and

(5) Duration of reserved seats.

The discussion went on for nine hours. Ambedkar was the chief spokesman on the Depressed Classes side, and he was a hard bargainer. On the caste Hindu side Tej Bahadur Sapru, Ghanshyamdas Birla, C. Rajagopalachari and M. R. Jayakar did most of the talking. The number of persons participating in the discussion was over twenty-five.

Gandhiji's suggestion that the panel system should be extended to all the reserved seats was unanimously accepted.

As regards the number of reserved seats to be allotted to the Depressed Classes, Dr. Ambedkar had demanded a total of 197 seats as against 71 provided in the Communal Award. Dr. Ambedkar's demand was considered too high. It was contended that the number of seats to be reserved should be based upon the proportion of the Depressed Classes population to the total Hindu population. This was something that had to be determined. Amritlal Thakkar and Bakhle of the Servants of India Society undertook to work out the figures with Dr. Ambedkar. The three worked together and after a couple of hours' calculations the figure was brought down to a little over 160.

As for the panel, Ambedkar had restricted the number to two, while Gandhiji had proposed five. After a prolonged discussion the number was fixed at four.

In the Central Legislature it was agreed that 18 per cent of the seats assigned to British India should be allotted to the Depressed Classes.

The most difficult question to be tackled concerned the length of time for which the special arrangements were to last. In Dr. Ambedkar's scheme, while the system of primary elections would come to an end after ten years, on the



reservation of seats there would be referendum after ten years and if the referendum went against the abolition of reservations, there would be another referendum at the end of fifteen years. The Hindu leaders found this unacceptable.

Dr. Ambedkar fought every inch of the way. He and his colleagues were of the view that untouchability was not going to disappear even after 20 years and they wanted the provision for a referendum to serve as a means of pressure on the caste Hindus to induce them to do justice by the untouchables. Devadas Gandhi and others pleaded with Ambedkar that Gandhiji's insistence on the abolition of untouchability and the threat of fast on his part if this was not done was a better guarantee than the fear of a referendum. Continuation of reservations would come in the way of removal of untouchability and growth of a spirit of nationalism and self-confidence among the untouchables. There were, besides, practical difficulties in holding a referendum. It was thus not in the interest of the Depressed Classes. But Dr. Ambedkar remained unmoved.

As the discussions proceeded reports came from the Yeravda prison that Gandhiji's physical condition had further deteriorated. His voice was weaker, he had difficulty in keeping his eyes open and he had nausea. Ambedkar suggested that the question of referendum might be referred to Gandhiji. He recalled that Gandhiji had expressed himself in favour of a referendum and he was sure Gandhiji would concede his claim.

Accordingly a dozen leaders including Tej Bahadur Sapru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Jayakar, Rajagopalachari, Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Solanki rushed to the Yeravda prison for a meeting with Gandhiji. Emerging from the meeting after twenty minutes, Sapru told press reporters: "As we could not agree on one point we wanted to consult Mahatma Gandhi. We placed the point of dispute before



him and he gave his opinion in the matter. We are going back to resume our discussions and hope to see Mahatma Gandhi tomorrow morning."

Gandhiji told them that he was in favour of a referendum. But why after ten years? He would rather have it at the end of one year, or at the most, say, five years. The effort exhausted him. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 63-69; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, p. 250]

7

Early on Saturday morning negotiations were resumed. As regards the number of seats to be reserved for the Depressed Classes in Provincial Legislatures, as against 71 seats in the Prime Minister's award and 197 claimed by Ambedkar, the figure 148 was agreed upon.

The following is a comparative statement:

SEATS FOR DEPRESSED CLASSES

	British Government's Award	Ambedkar's Demand	Agreement	Total Number of Seats
Madras	18	30	30	215
Bombay (Sind)	10	16	15	200
Bengal	10 (estimated)	50	30	250
U.P.	12	40	20	228
Punjab	-	10	8	175
Bihar-Orissa	7	20	18	176
C.P. & Berar	10	20	20	112
Assam	4	11	7	108
Total	71	197	148	1464



Ambedkar's Demand:

Reservation of seats in the Central Legislature was to be on the basis of population. There would be adult suffrage for Central and Provincial elections for the Depressed Classes.

The Poona Agreement stated that 18 per cent of the seats allotted to British India were to be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

As for the method of election, members of the Depressed Classes in a constituency were to form an electoral college which would elect a panel of four candidates for each reserved seat. These candidates would be eligible for election by a joint electorate. This arrangement was to continue for ten years. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 219-20]

On the question of the referendum, Ambedkar argued that Gandhiji had accepted his claim and the caste Hindu leaders should now agree to it. As agreement could not be reached, Ambedkar decided that he would see Gandhiji again.

It was midday when Ambedkar and Rajaji went to see Gandhiji. Ambedkar wanted Gandhiji to agree to the referendum regarding reservations at the end of 10 years. Gandhiji was a little better. He spoke slowly and poured out his heart.

He said:

Your logic is irrefutable. But let the referendum be at the end of five years. Surely, five years is a sufficient period to prove the *bona fides* of the caste Hindus. But if you insist on postponing the referendum further, I would begin to suspect that what you want is not to test the *bona fides* of the caste Hindus but time to organize the Depressed Classes for an adverse referendum.



Pyarelal, who was present, gives a graphic account of how Gandhiji made an impassioned appeal for mutual trust, confidence and goodwill and laid bare the anguish that had burnt in his soul for over half a century. He described how from the age of twelve, his whole being had rebelled against the very idea of regarding any fellow human being as untouchable, how since then he had led a ceaseless crusade against the evil, in the course of which he had severed family ties and himself voluntarily become an outcaste, and how finally when it came to choosing between his life's mission and his life, he had unhesitatingly decided to choose the former. He said the Depressed Classes naturally felt suspicious of the caste Hindus.

You have a perfect right to demand cent per cent security by statutory safeguards, but, from my fiery bed I beg of you not to insist upon that right. I am here today to ask for a reprieve for my caste Hindu brethren. Thank God, their conscience has been roused. If you proceed to wrest from them cent per cent security by statutory means, it will interrupt the process of heart-cleansing and self-purification that is fast taking place among them. The particular injustice, for the time being, to the 'untouchables' might be checked, but the taint in Hinduism would remain. After all untouchability is but a symptom of that deep-seated taint. If Hinduism is not completely purged of it, it will assert itself again and again in a variety of ways and continue to poison our entire social and political fabric. I entreat you, therefore, not to deprive Hinduism of a last chance to make a voluntary expiation for its sinful past. Give me the chance of working among the caste Hindus. That is but fair. But if you ask for ten or fifteen years, then it is no chance at all. The Hindus must give a good account of themselves within five years or not at all. For me, therefore, the five-year limit for referendum is



an absolute matter of conscience. There should be a referendum, but not at the end of any period longer than five years. Tell your friends that I am adamant on this point. I may be a despicable person, but when Truth speaks through me I am invincible.

Then with a tone of finality, not unfamiliar to so many, he said, "There you are. Five years or my life." [*Ibid*, pp. 70-71]

By the time Gandhiji finished speaking, he was utterly exhausted. His voice had become almost a whisper. For three days and nights he had burnt his tissues and was sustained only by the power of will. Ambedkar tried to say something in favour of 10 years, but in the same breath he admitted that his argument was feeble. It hardly satisfied even Ambedkar himself. It seemed that the rock had melted, and the last obstacle in the way of an agreement was removed.

Returning from Yeravda Ambedkar retired into a separate room with his colleagues. This was the procedure they followed every time a decision was to be made. After an hour's deliberations they came out and announced that they were unable to agree to anything less than 10 years. In the meantime Gandhiji's announcement "five years or my life", had become known. There was consternation, but there was nothing to be said after the considered decision of the Depressed Classes leaders.

In the mango yard at Yeravda Gandhiji lay motionless with Vallabhbhai Patel, Mahadev Desai and Sarojini Naidu around him. Kasturba was giving him a gentle massage. At 3 p.m. Rajagopalachari came. He briefly reported the agreement to Gandhiji. He said: "I have done it on my own responsibility, thinking that you cannot but agree. We have agreed to leave the whole question to be decided by mutual agreement in the future. Dr. Ambedkar and his friends have accepted this



solution. It bars nothing, while making it possible to do without a referendum entirely. It would depend on the future course of events."

Gandhiji asked Rajaji to repeat what he had said. Rajaji repeated and elaborated his proposal. Gandhiji listened carefully and then said just one word "Excellent". It lifted a big burden off half a dozen of his devoted companions sitting or standing near his bed. [*Ibid* pp. 70-72]

8

Rajaji went back to Malaviya's place at Ramkrishna Bhandarkar Road in Poona, and they all quickly drafted the agreement. It was signed while they had tea. The signatories were Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Solanki, Rao Bahadur Srinivasan, T. B. Sapro, M. R. Jayakar, Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah, P. Baloo, Rajbhoj and Sivraj.

On Sunday morning, September 25, the sixth day of the fast, most of the leaders were back to Bombay where a full conference met at 2 p.m. and ratified the agreement, which was as follows:

1. There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of general electorates. Seats in Provincial Legislatures shall be as follows:

MADRAS	30
BOMBAY WITH SIND	15
PUNJAB	8
BIHAR & ORISSA	18
CENTRAL PROVINCES	20
ASSAM	7



BENGAL	30
UNITED PROVINCES	20
TOTAL	<u>148</u>

These figures are based on the total strength of the Provincial Councils announced in the Prime Minister's decision.

2. Elections to these seats shall be by joint electorates subject, however, to the following procedure:

All members of the Depressed Classes registered in the general electoral roll of a constituency will form an electoral college which will elect a panel of four candidates belonging to the Depressed Classes for each of such reserved seats, by the method of single vote and the four persons getting the highest number of votes in such primary election shall be the candidates for election by the general electorates.

3. Representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature shall likewise be on the principle of joint electorates and reservation of seats by the method of primary election in the manner provided for in Provincial Legislatures.
4. In the Central Legislatures 18 per cent of the seats allotted to the general electorate for British India in the said legislature shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes.
5. The system of primary election to the panel of candidates for election to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, as hereinbefore mentioned,



shall come to an end after the first ten years unless terminated sooner by mutual agreement under the provision of Clause 6 below.

6. The system of representation of the Depressed Classes by reservation of seats in the Provincial and Central Legislatures as provided for in Clauses 1 and 4 shall continue until determined by mutual agreement between the communities concerned in this settlement.
7. The franchise for the Central and Provincial Legislatures for the Depressed Classes shall be as indicated in the Lothian Committee Report.
8. There shall be no disabilities attaching to anyone on the ground of his being a member of the Depressed Classes in regard to any election to local bodies or appointment to public service. Every endeavour shall be made to secure fair representation of the Depressed Classes in these respects, subject to such educational qualifications as may be laid down for appointment to the Public Services.
9. In every province out of the educational grant an adequate sum shall be earmarked for providing educational facilities to members of the Depressed Classes. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 252-53; C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 463-64]

On 25 September 1932, the Hindu Leaders Conference assembled in Bombay to ratify the Poona agreement. Speaking at the Conference Dr. Ambedkar gave expression to his feeling of relief at the agreement that had been arrived at. It had saved the life "of the greatest man in India" and it had safeguarded the interests of the Depressed Classes. A large part of the credit for



the success of the negotiation, Ambedkar said, must go to Mahatma Gandhi himself. He went on:

I must confess I was surprised — very immensely surprised — when I met him, to find that there was so much in common between the Mahatma and myself. In fact my disputes whenever they were carried to him — and Sir Tej Bahadur has told you the disputes that were carried to him were of a crucial character — I was surprised to see that the man who held such divergent views from me at the Round Table Conference came immediately to my rescue and not to rescue the other side. I am very grateful to the Mahatma for having extricated me from a very difficult situation. My only regret is, why did not the Mahatma take up this attitude at the Round Table Conference?

The Conference passed two resolutions. The first read:

This Conference confirms the Poona Agreement arrived at between the leaders of caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes on September 24 and trusts the British Government will withdraw its decision creating separate electorates within the Hindu community and accept the agreement in full. The Conference urges that immediate action be taken by the Government so as to enable Mahatma Gandhi to break his fast within the terms of his vow and before it becomes too late. The Conference appeals to all leaders of the communities concerned to realize the implication of the agreement and of this resolution and make the earliest endeavour to fulfil them. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 253-54]

The second resolution, drafted by Gandhiji, read:

The Conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and those who



have been so regarded hitherto will have the same rights as the other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public roads and other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest acts of the Swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time.

It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes including the bar in respect of admission to temples. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 139]

On the same day, 25 September, Gandhiji sent a cable to C. F. Andrews that no conditional acceptance of the settlement would warrant his breaking the fast. Sapru, Ambedkar, M. C. Rajah, Malaviya and others fervently appealed to the British Prime Minister not to lose any time in taking necessary action so as to enable Gandhiji to break his fast.

There were prophets of doom who put a sinister interpretation on every hour that went by without a reply being received from the British Prime Minister. Ellen Wilkinson of the India League who visited Gandhiji in jail on Sunday morning shared their pessimism and said some harsh things about the British ruling class. But Rajaji advised everyone to have patience. There had been no more than sixteen hours since the agreement was communicated to London, he said. The atmosphere of pessimism that prevailed was not justified.

Interested newspapers from Simla added to the general anxiety by reporting that the Cabinet would meet only on Wednesday and the Prime Minister would take a decision after the Cabinet meeting. They also said that he would have to consult the Government of India and the State Governments to ensure that the



agreement did not have any adverse effect on other communities. All this would take four or five days.

10

Anxiety became more intense when a medical board including Dr. M. D. D. Gilder and Dr. Deshmukh of Bombay along with the jail doctors examined Gandhiji on the 26th morning and issued the following bulletin:

The feeling of nausea which troubled him previously and caused vomiting yesterday appears to be less than before. Blood-pressure is systolic 185 m.m., diastolic 110 m.m. The disturbing features are that both the acetone and urea content in his urine have increased, the latter to 1.5 per cent. We are definitely of opinion that this portends entry into the danger zone.

Explaining what was meant by 'danger zone', Dr. Gilder said: "Mahatmaji has no reserve of fat and he is living on his muscle. This is the stage when an attack of paralysis may intervene at any time. We are of opinion that he had entered into the stage that is bringing him nearer his end. There is now danger even if the fast is broken. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 75-76]

In the midst of a general feeling of dismay Rajagopalachari issued a statement advising everyone not to put any sinister interpretation on the reports. The statement said:

I do not put any sinister construction on the reported suggestion that the opinion of the caste Hindu leaders and the Provincial Governments on the Agreement may be sought.

I put the best construction, namely, that the Premier wished to lose no time to follow the necessary procedure if Gandhiji insists on total



acceptance by the Government before he breaks his fast. I do not think the Premier is not meanwhile taking the minimum steps needed for saving Gandhiji's life.

Rajaji was right. Andrews had cabled on the 25th saying everything possible was being done. The Prime Minister had gone to attend the funeral of an aunt at Ardingley in Sussex. On receiving the cable about the Yeravda Pact, he had hurried back to London and, assisted by Sir Samuel Hoare, had drafted the statement to be issued both in London and in Delhi.

The whole of the 26th morning was passed in anxiety at Yeravda.

Rabindranath Tagore made a hurried dash from Calcutta and approaching Gandhiji's bed, buried his face in Gandhiji's clothes on his breast and, overcome by emotion, remained in that position for several minutes. He had heard the news that the Cabinet had accepted the Poona Agreement. He said as he recovered his voice: "I have come floating on the tide of good news. I am so glad that I have come and that I have come in time." He then talked of other things and said that so far as the social aspect of untouchability was concerned he would always be ready to do his bit to relieve Gandhiji's burden. [*Ibid*, p. 76]

11

The Government statement which was read in the Central Legislative Assembly by Home Member Haig on the 26th was received with cheers. The main features of the Government's decision were:

1. The Government accepted for recommendation to Parliament the scheme of representation for the Depressed Classes in the Provincial Legislatures, and certain other matters affecting their welfare adopted under the Yeravda



Agreement, in place of the scheme of separate electorates in that behalf that had been adumbrated in the Communal Award of 4 August.

2. It accepted the number of seats in the Provincial Legislatures assigned to the Depressed Classes under the Yeravda Agreement.

3. As regards the clauses in the Yeravda Agreement, referring to guarantees for the welfare of the Depressed Classes, it recognized them as a definite pledge of the intentions of the caste Hindus towards the Depressed Classes.

4. As regards the method of electing Depressed Class representatives to the Central Legislature and the level of franchise, it stated that whilst the Government could not definitely commit itself to the terms of the Agreement as the whole question of representation in the Central Legislature and the franchise was under consideration, the Government was not against it.

5. It recognized the figure of 18 per cent of the percentage of the general seats at the Centre to be reserved for the Depressed Classes as a matter for arrangement between them and the other Hindus. [*Ibid*, pp. 77-78]

The breaking of the fast was postponed because Gandhiji wanted to study the statement to make sure that it fulfilled the letter and spirit of his vow. At 4.15 p.m. Col. Doyle, the Inspector General of Prisons, came with the document and gave it to Gandhiji. He then retired to enable Gandhiji "to study and discuss it in quiet". After studying it, Gandhiji said that it should go to the Depressed Classes leaders. It was a question of honour for him. They must not get the impression that he cared only for that part of the agreement that affected the letter of his vow and was not as anxious about the implementation of other parts that affected the interests of the Depressed Classes.



Everyone was now upset. "This means another Conference" they exclaimed. Gandhiji replied: "Then a Conference it must be."

The Depressed Classes leaders had gone back to Bombay. At last Hridaynath Kunzru assured Gandhiji that he had studied the document closely. It contained as complete an acceptance of the Yeravda Pact as could be expected from any Government. It fully endorsed all those clauses that had a bearing on the Premier's decision, while the other clauses that fell outside that decision were not repudiated but were expressly recognized. "In other words," he said, "it completely replaces the Premier's decision by corresponding provisions of the Yeravda Pact." Besides, it was clearly understood at the conference that the Depressed Classes' leaders themselves did not expect the part relating to the guarantees about their special interests to form a part of the constitution. The form of the communique must have been determined by the exigencies of constitutional procedure. He said Sir Tej Bahadur agreed with him that had they been in the Government's position, they could not have issued a different communique. Rajaji supported Kunzru.

In the face of this unanimous opinion, Gandhiji gave in. He told Col. Doyle:

I have decided to break my fast. I had my misgivings, but in the face of the unanimous opinion of these friends, I do not want to take upon me the responsibility of prolonging it. But before I break my fast I want to make one thing clear. If after I break my fast all the old restrictions are reimposed on me, it will interrupt the work of reform that has been begun. I would, therefore, expect all facilities necessary for the carrying on of my untouchability work to continue, if I am to remain here.

Col. Doyle told Gandhiji that he was not competent to decide these matters. They were to be decided by the Government. He would, he said, convey his



feelings and views to the Government the same night and added, "I would now like you to break your fast." He warmly shook Gandhiji's hand and said, "One thing more, the fruit juice must be handed to you by Mrs. Gandhi". [*Ibid*, p. 79]

12

At 5.15 there was an impressive ceremony the like of which Yeravda prison had never seen before. The yard was freshly sprinkled with water. Gandhiji lay on his cot. Around him sat Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Basanti Devi Das, Swarup Rani Nehru, Urmila Devi, Ambalal Sarabhai and his family and Gandhiji's two companions, Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahadev Desai as also Kasturba. A number of inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram and others who had come, added up to about 200 persons in all. The Poet led the prayer by singing a song from his *Gitanjali*. Some Sanskrit verses were next recited by Parachure Shastri, a fellow prisoner from the leper yard at Yeravda. Then they all sang together Gandhiji's favourite hymn: "*Vaishnava Jana to tene kahiye je peer paraee jane re* (He alone is a Vaishnava who understands and feels the pain of another).

When the prayer was over, Kasturba handed him the glass of orange juice and Gandhiji broke his fast. Fruit and sweets were distributed to all present. Big baskets of fruit were sent by known and unknown friends in anticipation of the breaking of the fast. These were all empty before Gandhiji had finished sipping his orange juice. "It was a day of jubilation and union of hearts in common thanksgiving to Almighty God in that little world in the Yeravda Prison," records Pyarelal. The milk of human kindness flowed and for once the woodenness of jail discipline was forgotten. [*Ibid*, p. 80]

At night Gandhiji dictated a statement for the press in which he reminded the people that the breaking of his fast had cast a responsibility on them to work hard for the abolition of untouchability and removal of the disabilities of the so-



called untouchables. Any laxity in this might bring on another fast on his part. He had thought of putting a time limit for the completion of this work of reform, "but I feel that I may not do so without a definite call from within". The message of freedom must penetrate every untouchable home and that could happen if reformers would cover every village, he added.

Gandhiji also expressed the hope that the almost ideal solution that had been reached regarding the question of the Depressed Classes' representation would pave the way for the larger unity between the various communities and mark the dawn of a new era of mutual trust, mutual give-and-take, and recognition of the fundamental unity of all communities. Referring to the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh question, he said,

I am the same to the Mussalman today that I was in 1920-22. I should be just as prepared to lay down my life as I was in Delhi to achieve organic unity and permanent peace between them [and the Hindus] and I hope and pray that there will be, as a result of this upheaval, a spontaneous move in this direction, and then, surely, the other communities can no longer stand out.

Gandhiji thanked the Government and the jail staff and the medical men who had looked after him during the fast and reiterated his assurance to the Harijans that he was wedded to the pact as a whole. He concluded:

The terms of the decision sent to me I have not approached without misgivings. It accepts, I suppose very naturally, only that part of the agreement that refers to the British Cabinet's Communal decision. I expect that they had a constitutional difficulty in now announcing its acceptance of the whole Agreement, but I would like to assure my Harijan friends, as I would like henceforth to name them, that so far as I am concerned, I am



wedded to the whole of that agreement and that they may hold my life as a hostage for its due fulfilment unless we ourselves arrive at any other better settlement of our own free will. [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 143-45]

13

The next day, 27 September, happened to be Gandhiji's birthday according to the Hindu calendar. The whole country celebrated the week from 27 September to 2 October as Untouchability Abolition Week. Rajaji and Rajen Babu placed before the nation a programme of intensive work for the removal of untouchability. There were numerous expressions of enthusiasm during the week in the form of throwing open of wells and temples to, and fraternization with, Harijans.

Rabindranath Tagore presided over a public meeting held at Poona. In the course of his address the Poet said:

Today, in our determined effort to join Mahatmaji in his noble task of removing the burden of ages, the burden of disrespect upon the bent back of those who have been stigmatized for the accident of their birth, a sin of wilful denial to a large body of our countrymen of sympathy which is the birth right of all human beings – we are not only casting off the chain of India's moral enslavement, but indicating a path for all humanity. We are challenging victimization wherever and in whatever form it may exist to stand the test of relentless questioning of conscience which Mahatmaji has brought to bear upon our day.

When Mahatmaji began his penance there were cynics in our own country and abroad who mocked and jeered at him, and yet before our very eyes the wonder has happened. Hard rocks of tradition have been blasted.



Irrational prohibitions cramping our national life are already showing signs of tottering.

Great has been the achievement due to his penance, but it will be greater glory to him and to us if we can fulfil his vow by fighting to a finish the evils of untouchability, of intolerance, of all that hinders the comradeship of man and man and obstructs our path of freedom, of righteousness.

There was rejoicing and buoyant cheer in Yeravda on the 27th morning in place of the tension and gloom of the previous day. People of all grades and shades of opinion representing all classes and sections of society, women with infants in their arms came to Yeravda from morning to the closing of the jail for a glimpse of the Mahatma and to get his blessings. This continued on the 28th also. But on the 29th orders came from Simla withdrawing all special facilities. The masseur, when he came, was told that his services were no longer required. Jayakar had an appointment with Gandhiji. But when he came, he was told that he was too late. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 82-85]

Kasturba was collecting her few belongings to return to the women's section of the jail. She could hardly keep her tears back. Bapu remarked, "Ba is finding it hard to leave." But she had to go. It led to harsh remarks being passed about the Government's attitude. But the following day she was released – five days in advance of the expiry of her sentence — and told that she could stay with her husband during the day.

Gandhiji's mind was in the meantime preoccupied with plans for a campaign for the removal of untouchability, root and branch.



PART II
UNTOUCHABILITY ABOLITION CAMPAIGN



CHAPTER V: THE 21-DAY SELF-PURIFICATORY FAST

1

The importance of the Poona Pact, rather of the fast Gandhiji undertook to make it possible, lay in the fact that it led to an unleashing throughout the country of such a mighty torrent of anti-untouchability sentiment that for a time it seemed to sweep aside all other questions from the public mind. The fight against untouchability had for long been a part of the Congress programme, but the inception of an autonomous and enduring anti-untouchability movement dates from Gandhiji's fast against the Communal Award.

Gandhiji in his statement after breaking the fast had insisted that "the sacrificial fire", having once been lit, must continue to burn and the caste Hindus must carry on with redoubled vigour the work of reform in order to bring about "complete removal of social and religious disabilities" under which the untouchables had been groaning. He had warned

that the breaking of the fast carried with it a sure promise of a resumption of it if this reform is not relentlessly pursued and achieved within a measurable period.

He had called upon reformers to cover every village and carry the message of freedom to every untouchable home. [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 143-44]

Hindu conscience was stirred.

On 30 September 1932, a large public meeting of Hindus was held at the Cowasji Jehangir Hall in Bombay under the presidentship of Madan Mohan Malaviya. The meeting, by a resolution, decided that an All-India Anti-Untouchability League, with its headquarters at Delhi and branches in different provincial centres, be established for the purpose of carrying on propaganda



against the observance of untouchability, and that for this purpose the following steps should be immediately taken:

- (a) All public wells, *dharmashalas*, roads, schools, crematoriums, burning-ghats, etc., be declared open to the Depressed Classes.
- (b) All public temples be opened to members of the Depressed Classes.

The meeting appointed G. D. Birla as President and Amritlal Thakkar as General Secretary of the League and authorized them to take all the necessary steps to organize the League and bring about the fulfilment of the objects of the League and to organize collection of funds for its work. [*The Epic Fast*, pp. 194-95]

It was later discovered that an organization under the nomenclature of All-India Anti-Untouchability League, founded by V. R. Shinde, was already in existence. Therefore from December 1932, the name of the League, of which G. D. Birla was president, was changed to the Servants of Untouchables Society, or Harijan Sevak Sangh. [C.W.M.G., LII, p. 151]

Although the Servants of Untouchables Society had been formed by caste Hindus in response to Gandhiji's call to intensify work for the eradication of untouchability and in pursuance of the commitment made to him, the organization had to function, at least during the first month of its existence, without Gandhiji's counsel and guidance. That was because all of a sudden in the afternoon on 29 September Major M. G. Bhandari, the Jail Superintendent, conveyed to Gandhiji Government's orders withdrawing forthwith permission for interviews. The new regime was drastic. Gandhiji would not be permitted to receive anyone except G. D. Birla and Mathuradas VasANJI in connection with the work of untouchability. None of Gandhiji's kith and kin, none of his closest colleagues who had nursed him and cared for him during the five agonized days



of his fast would be allowed in. In the morning Rangaswami Aiyanger, Kelkar and Malaviya had been able to visit him, but later Jayakar, who had an appointment, could not meet him. In the afternoon Swarup Rani Nehru was turned away from the jail gate. C. R. Das's sister Urmila Devi had sought a brief visit of ten minutes. She too was refused permission.

Gandhiji was flabbergasted and immediately dictated a letter to Major Bhandari protesting against the withdrawal of the facility. He said:

The Government cannot be unaware of the phenomenal awakening that has taken place in the country, nor of repercussions of the fast. . . . I therefore hold it absolutely necessary that I should be left entirely free to see whomsoever I consider necessary regarding untouchability. . . . I should not have the slightest objection to Government officials and interpreters attending any interviews I might have with visitors. . . . [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 151-52; *Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati) Vol. II, p. 88]

On 6 October Gandhiji wrote to E.E. Doyle, Inspector General of Prisons, requesting him "to secure early decision from Government in this matter". [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 198]

2

The Government conveyed their decision on 24 October. They were prepared to allow Gandhiji a reasonable number of interviews and to carry on correspondence "provided it is clearly understood that it is not reproduced in the Press".

Gandhiji wrote to Doyle immediately that work of reform could not be carried on without publicity and submitted that "all restrictions on the choice of visitors and publication of correspondence should be removed". Of course the interviews and correspondence would have no reference to civil disobedience.



Gandhiji warned:

Unless, therefore, these restrictions . . . are removed before the 1st November next, I shall be reluctantly obliged to withdraw . . . such cooperation as is possible for me to do. And as a preliminary, I shall deny myself all the feeding facilities permitted to me and restrict myself to such 'C' class diet as I can within my vow consistently take and so long as my body can accommodate itself to such food. . . . I can have no interest in life if I cannot prosecute, without let or hindrance, work for which the fast was undertaken and suspended. . . .

Gandhiji added that since he could not guarantee non-publication of correspondence, he had to suspend what correspondence on untouchability he had been carrying on.

He asked that a reply be sent before 31 October.

The Home Department, Government of India, to whom Gandhiji's letters were forwarded, wrote to Bombay Government on 1 November, the day on which Gandhiji was to go on restricted diet:

Your letter of 28th October forwarding important letters of Gandhi, dated 18th and 24th October, reached us only yesterday. We are after full consideration recommending to His Majesty's Government that Gandhi should be allowed complete freedom in regard to visitors and correspondence on matters strictly confined to removal of untouchability and that there should be no restriction on publicity. Conditions suggested by Gandhi himself about right to have an official present at interviews and inspection of correspondence would be accepted, though it might not be necessary to enforce them. Meantime we regard it as of utmost importance that in these conditions Gandhi should not start restriction of his diet. . . .



Meantime suggest that it might complicate situation if he started restriction of diet before we have had opportunity of fully considering his requests. [*Ibid*, pp. 288-91]

Gandhiji, of course, not having heard from Government by 31 October, proceeded to take steps to restrict his diet. He wrote to Major Bhandari to have the supply of goat's milk stopped from the following day. Also limes and vegetables. He told the Superintendent that from 'C' class rations he would be taking the morning and afternoon *bhakris* and the morning *kanji* but not vegetables and *dal*, which contained more than five ingredients. [*Ibid*, pp. 320-21]

From 2 November onwards, having received the communication from the Government of India, Gandhiji reverted to his normal diet.

On 3 November the Superintendent of the Prison received telegraphically the Government of India's decision in the matter. It was to the following effect:

Government of India recognize in view of considerations stated in Mr. Gandhi's letters of 18th and 24th October that if he is to carry out the programme that he has set before himself in regard to removal of untouchability, which they had not before fully appreciated, it is necessary that he should have freedom in regard to visitors and correspondence on matters strictly limited to removal of untouchability. They also recognize that if Mr. Gandhi's activities in this matter are to be fully effective, there can be no restriction on publicity. As they do not wish to interpose obstacles to Mr. Gandhi's efforts in connection with the problem of untouchability, they are removing all restrictions on visitors, correspondence and publicity in regard to matters which in Mr. Gandhi's own words have no reference to civil disobedience and are strictly limited to the removal of untouchability.



Gandhiji gratefully acknowledged the decision, which gave him all the facilities he had hoped for and could possibly have expected and said he recognized the gracefulness of the manner in which the Government had decided to trust him. [*Ibid*, pp. 336-37]

3

The stiffness in Gandhiji's left elbow, which had developed soon after he first arrived in jail in January 1932, had, with the passing of time become even more pronounced and painful. Towards the end of the year it became so acute that it was with great difficulty that he could go on with his daily spinning. On 3 November he noted in his diary: "The hand pains so much that I want to reduce the spinning still further."

It was not really reduced however. From the 4th to the 13th of the month his daily output of yarn according to the diary was 90, 109, 102, 116, 113, 111, 103, 104, 100 and 113 rounds. On 14 November he was forced to switch from the charkha to the *takli*. From 22 November the spinning had to be stopped altogether on the doctor's orders, first for a week and then indefinitely.

"Tennis elbow," the doctor said.

"*Takli* elbow." said Gandhiji. [*Ibid*, pp. 451-52 and LII, p. 127]

But tennis elbow or no tennis elbow, the Government's decision to lift all restrictions on Gandhiji's correspondence and visitors so long as these were concerned with his anti-untouchability work brought on, starting from 4 November, such an avalanche of communications and visitors to Yeravda every day that it required all of Gandhiji's energy to deal with it. Every day he had to answer scores of letters. He has listed the letters he wrote in his diary. Regrettably only a fraction of them have been reproduced in the *Collected Works*.



Under 4 November, for instance, he has listed no less than 25 addressees, whereas in the *CWMG* only two letters are reproduced under that date. Going through the daily lists in Gandhiji's diary and comparing them with the contents of *CWMG* one finds that 4 November is not by any means an exception.

In addition there were the Statements on Untouchability. He drafted 13 of these for publication between 4 November and 30 December. Then there were visitors – crowds of whom came every day. They were of all descriptions: workers of the newly formed Anti-Untouchability League seeking guidance, enthusiasts seeking temple-entry for the untouchables, Sanatanists opposing temple-entry and those supporting it. On 14 November Gandhiji was writing to the Home Secretary, Bombay Government:

Untouchability work is proving beyond my ability to cope with. . . . The correspondence is daily growing in volume. The number of visitors is increasing daily and more and more time has to be given to these visits as the movement progresses. My difficulty is enhanced by the fact that my elbows are giving more trouble than before and I am not able to use my hands for writing [it may be noted Gandhiji says 'hands' not 'hand', for he used both for writing] as much as I should. . . . As it is, we all begin work at 4 o'clock in the morning and it continues with necessary intervals up to 9 p.m.

Gandhiji requested the Home Secretary to send a prisoner associate of his to stay with him and assist him with the correspondence. He gave a list of six names to choose from.

The Government obliged by transferring Chhaganlal Joshi to Yeravda to stay with Gandhiji. [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 50, 319]



A word occurring again and again in relation to Gandhiji during the last two months of 1932 is 'fast'. The whole of this period remained permeated with the possibility that Gandhiji might suddenly go on a fast – if not for one reason, then for another. Once or twice in fact he came very near to it.

It was as though he had already made up his mind to undertake a fast and was looking for a cause worthy enough to fast for. We have seen how he had already started a limited fast on 1 November before the Government relented and gave him the necessary freedom to carry on anti-untouchability work from jail.

In his very first Statement on Untouchability on 4 November he warned that if the caste Hindus did not carry out the terms of the Yeravda Pact in full he would have to resume his fast, which was only suspended. Dwelling on the merit of fasting, he wrote:

In my opinion fasting for purification of self and others is an age-long institution and it will subsist so long as man believes in God. It is the prayer to the Almighty from an anguished heart. But whether my argument is wise or foolish, I cannot be dislodged from my position so long as I do not see the folly or the error of it. It will be resumed only in obedience to the inner voice, and only if there is a manifest breakdown of the Yeravda Pact. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 343]

But even if all had gone well with the Yeravda Pact another cause came up which brought Gandhiji to the verge of a prolonged fast. This was that of entry of untouchables into the Guruvayur temple in Malabar. The genesis of the issue was as follows:



A group of young volunteers had been carrying on a struggle for the opening of the Guruvayur temple to Harijans and their leader, K. Kelappan, started a fast from 20 September to achieve the object. When Gandhiji learnt of it on 27 September he at once sent telegrams to the Maharaja of Travancore and M. Krishnan Nair, the Law Member of Madras, appealing to them to use their influence to have the temple opened to Harijans, so that the life of a great servant of Kerala could be saved. Nair expressed his inability to help in the matter and the Dewan of Travancore said the Travancore Government were unaware of any authority or privilege over Guruvayur. [*Ibid*, pp. 145, 147]

On 29 September Malaviya and Rangaswami Iyengar met Gandhiji and pressed him to persuade Kelappan to give up the fast. The Zamorin of Calicut, the trustee of the temple, also made a similar appeal to Gandhiji, expressing the view that opening the temple to the untouchables would wound orthodox conscience. Accordingly Gandhiji telegraphed to Kelappan pointing out that inasmuch as he had not given sufficient notice for the fast and had also failed to consult Gandhiji before undertaking the fast, he should suspend the fast and give three clear months' notice. [*Ibid*, pp.150-51]

Kelappan obeyed and broke his fast on 2 October. Gandhiji informed the Zamorin of the step taken and gave notice that if during the three months' period of suspension the temple was not opened to Harijans, he would have to share the fast with Kelappan.

In his first Statement on Untouchability issued on 4 November Gandhiji gave public notice of the possibility of his going on a fast on this issue: He said:

It was at my urgent request that Sjt. Kelappan suspended his fast for three months. . . . I would be in honour bound to fast with him if on or before the first January next that temple is not opened to the 'untouchables', and



if it becomes necessary for Sjt. Kelappan to resume his fast. [*Ibid*, pp.177, 343; *Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati) Vol. II, p. 100]

5

With this announcement by Gandhiji Guruvayur, which had till then been a local issue in a far corner of India, immediately became transformed into an issue of all India importance. It became a test case. Gandhiji said that in announcing the possibility of his fast, he was proceeding on the assumption that an overwhelming majority of Hindus were in favour of the temple being opened to Harijans. But for this assumption, a fast on his part and that of Kelappan would be untimely. [*Ibid*, p. 467]

As the issue was taken up in the Press and at public meetings, three questions emerged: (1) Was entry of Harijans into temples permissible according to the Hindu Shastras? (2) Would it or would it not offend the sentiments of the temple-going public and caste Hindus in general? (3) Even if the Shastras permitted it and the temple-going Hindus favoured it, would it be permitted by the law as it stood and as it had been interpreted in various court judgments?

Gandhiji held that though the Shastras were authoritative, there was nothing rigid about them. They had evolved with time. He wrote:

Though it [Hinduism] has retained unimpaired the claim to divine inspiration for the scriptures as a body, it did not hesitate to introduce new reforms and make changes. . . . But a time came when this healthy growth or evolution was arrested, and instead of the written word being used as an aid to the search for light from within, it was held to be all-sufficing, whether it accorded with longings and strivings of the spirit within or not. [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 305-6]



The corpus of religious literature, which was accepted as authority by Sanatanist Hindus comprised material written at different times in answer to the needs of those times. Gandhiji wrote:

Thus, there are many Smritis, some of which are unknown outside the little areas in which, by a few hundred men, they are held in veneration. No one can give their origin or the dates of composition. . . . There are numerous *Agamas* which, when examined, contradict one another and which have no binding effect outside the little areas where they find acceptance. [*Ibid*, p. 9]

Gandhiji's own definition of what constituted Shastra was simple and clear. He wrote:

Shastra does not mean the pronouncements of men of spiritual experience in the past. It means the words of living men today who have had first-hand spiritual experience, that is, who have realized the Brahman. . . . What exists only in books and is not followed in life may be philosophy . . . or mere hypocrisy. Shastra must be immediately capable of realization in experience, it must spring from the living experience of the person who utters it. It is only in this sense that the Veda is eternal. [C.W.M.G., LIII, pp. 348-49]

Gandhiji further held that there was no sanction in the Shastras for untouchability "as it is practised today". [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 348, 351]

No-change Shastris, spearheading the resistance against reform, challenged Gandhiji's position. Singly and in groups they trooped to Yeravda from Poona, Pandharpur, Jalgaon and other places for discussions. The Secretary of an orthodox Sanatanist body calling itself the All India Varnashram Swarajya Sangh, persuaded Gandhiji to invite to Yeravda representatives of the two opposing



groups of the Shastris "to investigate and find out the truth whether untouchability is enjoined by Shastras and whether there are restrictions in Shastras on untouchables' temple-entry". [*Ibid*, pp.440-41]

The letter was in English which was doubtless a concession. Some Shastris from Poona, who visited Gandhiji on 7 December, expected him to converse with them in Sanskrit. [*Ibid*, p. 426]

Gandhiji agreed and fixed 23 December as the date of confrontation between the pro-change and no-change Shastris. He formulated a set of questions for the Shastris to decide upon. These were:

- (1) Define untouchability according to Shastras.
- (2) Can the definition of untouchability given in the Shastras be applied to the so-called untouchables of the present day?
- (3) What are the restrictions imposed by Shastras on the untouchables?
- (4) Can an individual be free from untouchability in his own lifetime?
- (5) What are the injunctions of the Shastras regarding behaviour of the touchables with the untouchables?
- (6) Under what circumstances will the Shastras permit temple-entry by the untouchables?
- (7) What are Shastras?
- (8) How is authoritativeness of the Shastras proved?
- (9) How will the differences arising over the definitions or interpretations of Sastras be decided?
- (10) What are your conclusions? [*Ibid*, p. 265]



The Sanatanists' position on the question was aptly summed up by someone whom Gandhiji respected. He had written:

In this part of the country these classes [untouchables] have come to be excluded from temples from the very time the people started worshipping in temples. Scholars will find it difficult to ascertain the time when the untouchables were permitted to enter temples. I am afraid . . . our religion as it is practised today enjoins exclusion of the untouchables. The people who cling to the practice as a religious principle have the law, the Shastras and tradition on their side. They are the Sanatanists.

Gandhiji on his part was certain that whatever else might be on the side of the Sanatanists, the Shastras were not. He asked Anandshankar Dhruva, a Sanskrit scholar well versed in the Shastras, to prepare, in Sanskrit, Hindi and English, a reply to the Sanatanist argument and obtain on it signatures of as many pundits as possible. [*Ibid*, pp. 22-23]

Anandshankar Dhruva, in cooperation with Dr. Bhagwandas, prepared a statement in regard to untouchability in the Shastras. According to this there were three classes of untouchables mentioned: (1) Progeny of the union of a Shudra with a Brahmin woman, (2) persons guilty of any of the five heinous sins, (3) persons whilst in a polluted state.

There was nothing to show, the statement went on, that any of the communities classed as untouchables came under the first category. The second kind of untouchability could not apply to any class or community as a whole. It could only apply to individuals. As for untouchability through pollution, it attached to Bhangis and others by reason of their occupation, which was an external cause. The pollution could be got over by a bath and a change of clothes.



The statement was signed by six eminent Shastris and pundits besides Dhruva and Bhagawandas. [*Ibid*, pp. 348-49]

Gandhiji had at one time considered requesting Madan Mohan Malaviya to go to Travancore to have the temple opened to Harijans and had consulted various people in the matter. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 150]

Rajaji persuaded Gandhiji that it might not be the wisest thing to do. After all Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Benares had not been opened to Harijans and the Sanatanists of the South might very well ask Malaviya what he had done about it.

Gradually it became clear that Malaviya did not quite see eye to eye with Gandhiji on the question. In January he summoned a special session of the Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha and put forward the proposal that untouchables might be allowed to enter temples for *darshan* and *stuti* after going through a series of purificatory rituals, such as *samskar* and *upadesh*, consisting of *tyag*, *diksha*, *achar grahan* and *vrata*. [C.W.M.G., LIII, pp. 489-91]

Gandhiji would have none of it. He did not want conditions laid down which would be applicable to Harijans alone. Naturally Harijans would be expected to conform to conditions that had to be observed by everybody entering a temple.

6

The second important question was that of ascertaining the wishes of temple-going Hindus on the issue. The contemplated fast, said Gandhiji, would only be justified if it could be proved "to the hilt" that the vast majority of the temple-going *savarnas* favoured temple-entry. In order to demonstrate this, Gandhiji wrote to Kelappan on 23 November, "there should be a methodical taking of a referendum of temple-goers, say within a ten-mile radius". Should



such a referendum prove that the temple-going Hindus in the neighbourhood of Guruvayur were opposed to Harijans entering the temple his contemplated fast from 2 January 1933 would have to be postponed. [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 43-44, 68, 78, 147]

Gandhiji further insisted that not all the Hindus in the area but only the temple-going Hindus should be asked to vote on the question. When he heard in the first week of December that workers had been taking votes from all Hindus whether they were temple-going or not, he warned them through a telegram addressed to U. Gopala Menon on 9 December, that such a referendum would be totally valueless. [*Ibid*, p. 155]

Towards the end of December the results of the referendum were placed before Gandhiji. He shared them with the public in his Statement on Untouchability on 30 December.

Never, he said, had a referendum been taken with such scrupulous care. 73 per cent of the eligible voters had voted. The voting was confined to the actual temple-goers, that is to say, those who believed in temple-going and had faith in temple-worship. Of the adult population of some 30,000 in the area answering the requirement, 27,465 were visited for votes. 55 per cent favoured temple-entry, nine per cent were against, eight per cent were neutral, 27 per cent abstained. "The unchallengeable conclusion," Gandhiji declared, "is that a decisive majority of eligible voters are in favour of the entry by the Harijans." [*Ibid*, pp. 304-5]

Although the result of the referendum appeared conclusive, the view was widespread that the result was to an important degree influenced by the fact that Gandhiji's life hung by it and that large numbers of people who were perhaps opponents of temple-entry had voted for temple-entry because they believed



that it was far more important to save Gandhiji's life than to prevent a religious practice from being violated. Ranchhoddas Patwari gave strong expression to this view in his letter to Gandhiji. [C.W.M.G., LIII, p. 14]

Gandhiji was aware of the fact that securing a positive vote of the temple-going Hindus for opening the temple to Harijans was not the end of the matter. The Zamorin, who was the trustee of the temple, could still argue that under the law as it stood he had no power to allow the entry of Harijans into the temple. In that case steps would have to be taken to have the law amended. This could also be time consuming. Soon after he had declared his intention to fast from 2 January 1933 if Guruvayur had not been opened to Harijans before then, he was asked what he would do in case the Legislature could not get the amending Bill through before 2 January.

Gandhiji said:

Supposing it is physically impossible to secure an amendment of the Act before 1st January, that would be sufficient justification for the postponement of the fast. That presupposes that all the steps that could be taken have been taken, and that, humanly speaking, there is every chance of the legislation going through. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 410]

In the first week of December 1932, Dr. P. Subbaroyan gave notice of a Bill to be introduced in the Madras Legislative Council seeking to amend the Religious Endowments Act of Madras so as to empower the Hindu residents in any locality to secure an alteration by a majority vote in the established practice regarding the admission of untouchables to local temples. Gandhiji was satisfied with the Bill as published and said his contemplated fast from 2 January would be suspended if the Bill could not go through the Legislature before the date. This in all likelihood would be the case because, Gandhiji was informed, before a Bill of



a religious character received Viceregal sanction for introduction he must have a clear two months. [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 125, 198, 249]

The sanction of the Viceroy was required for the introduction of the Bill in the Madras Council. The Madras Government therefore forwarded the Bill to the Viceroy's office. On 30 December Gandhiji sent a telegraphic appeal to the Viceroy, expressing the hope that Viceregal sanction for the introduction of the Bill would be soon forthcoming.

Gandhiji argued that the Bill was no innovation, it sought only to restore the status quo as it existed before the British courts enforced what was held by some to be ancient practice. The Madras Religious Endowments Act, he said, was in itself interference with the prevailing practice. Gandhiji said he had indefinitely postponed his contemplated fast from 2 January 1933, which, if the sanction was withheld, might have to be resumed, resulting in embarrassment to the Government. [*Ibid*, pp. 309-10]

Gandhiji also appealed to the Sanatanists to desist from raising a hue and cry over the Bill saying that their religion was in danger. He said:

If the British courts had not intervened at the instance of a sanatanist, if the mixed legislatures such as we now have had not passed a measure of a religious character at the instance of Hindu legislators, this Bill would be unnecessary. . . . It is the British law, as it exists today, that makes it possible for a single individual to thwart the will of a whole host. . . . It may suit you today, but . . . it is a most dangerous thing both for you and for me. It is calculated to deaden religious life. [*Ibid*, p. 360]

In January 1933 Ranga Iyer gave notice for the introduction of an Untouchability Abolition Bill in the Central Assembly. This proposed that no



custom or usage based on untouchability should be recognized by any court of law.

7

On 23 January the Viceroy's decision on the two Bills was announced. Sanction was given to the introduction in the Central Assembly of Ranga Iyer's Abolition of Untouchability Bill, but sanction to Subbaroyan's Bill to be moved in the Madras Council was refused on the ground that it was too far-reaching in implication for enactment by a provincial legislature. [*India in 1932-33*, pp. 9-10]

There is little doubt that if Dr. Subbaroyan's Bill had not been blocked it would have had an easy passage in the Council. Earlier, on 1 November 1932, the Council had without dissentients carried a resolution moved by Dr. Subbaroyan asking Government "to recognize the strong and growing feeling in the Hindu community" against disabilities of the untouchables and recommending legislation for removing legal difficulties in the way of temple-entry. [*Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, p. 190]

Gandhiji, in a statement issued on 24 January, regretted "on general grounds that the Government could not see their way to allow both the Bills to be discussed by the respective Legislatures and the country". [C.W.M.G., LIII, pp. 128-29]

Having an enabling legislation passed did not mean forcing people to do anything against their will, especially in religious matters. In a letter to S. Krishna Aiyar on 27 January Gandhiji wrote:

What is wanted is that there should be no State recognition of untouchability. At the present moment there is this anomaly that the State not only recognizes untouchability, but helps believers in it to enforce



their views against others, thus making what they believe to be a religious precept a matter of legal obligation. Seeking assistance of law therefore becomes obligatory for reformers in order to have the anomaly removed. . . . [*Ibid*, p. 165]

Ranga Iyer then prepared another Bill, on the lines of the Madras Bill of Dr. Subbaroyan, and the Viceroy accorded his sanction to its introduction in the Assembly. Gandhiji expressed his satisfaction with the Bill and hoped that the two Bills would receive "immediate consideration" of the Assembly.

On 1 February 1933 he wrote to the Viceroy seeking "such assistance as may be necessary for the speedy consideration of the measures" and facilitate the progress and passage thereof. [C.W.M.G., LIII, pp. 203-4]

The Government of India expressed their inability to accede to the request. In answer to Gandhiji's letter they said that

in their opinion it is essential that the consideration of a measure which so closely affects the religious customs and usages of the Hindu community, should not proceed unless the proposals are subjected to the fullest examination in all their aspects, not merely in the Legislature, but also outside it, by all who will be affected by them. This purpose can only be satisfied if the Bill is circulated in the widest manner for the purpose of eliciting public opinion. . . . [*Ibid*, p. 497]

But apart from the dilatory tactics to which the Government appeared to be taking recourse to prevent the passage of the Bills, there was a strong Sanatanists lobby both inside the Assembly and outside it which was opposed to the measures. Madan Mohan Malaviya in a telegram to Gandhiji of 15 February expressed his opposition to the Bills, saying legislation to promote temple-entry



for Harijans was not part of the Hindu pledge taken at Bombay on 25 September. [*Ibid*, pp. 501-2]

Sapru, whose advice Gandhiji sought in the matter, was not too sanguine about the Bills being pushed through the Assembly. He feared that the motion to circulate the Bills might be carried. The forces of orthodoxy inside the Assembly, he said, were too strong. [*Ibid*, p. 394]

As it turned out, the Bills did not even get to the stage of being circulated. The Abolition of Untouchability Bill was expected to come up for introduction in the Central Legislative Assembly on 27 February, but, as *India in 1932-33* put it, "owing to protracted discussions on other non-official Bills by members who were hostile or indifferent to the Anti-Untouchability movement, the opportunity was lost". [*India in 1932-33*, p. 11]

The Temple-Entry Bill, slated to be introduced on 24 March, met with a similar fate.

Gandhiji was distressed but not disheartened. The march of reform, he said, could not be stayed. Now that the opening of temples on a large scale had been brought to a standstill by the failure of the Legislature to amend the law, other ways would have to be found. Gandhiji suggested the following:

- (a) Where public opinion and trustees are quite demonstrably in favour of opening temples, trustees may open the temples under their charge and may take the risk of an injunction being issued against them.
- (b) Private temples should be opened where the owners are willing to open them.
- (c) Wealthy and spiritually-minded people may open new temples. . . . These temples will be purposely designed for the Harijans as well as for the other Hindus. [C.W.M.G., LIII, p. 452]



He reiterated the plea in a statement to the Press on 27 March 1933. He said:

There is no custom in connection with the private temples which can be pleaded by the third party in order to prevent the entry of Harijans to them. They should be thrown open to them and those who have none may even build new temples for the Hindus in general. [C.W.M.G., LIV, pp. 223-24]

Gandhiji also put forward a compromise proposal for the consideration alike of the Sanatanists and Reformers. He suggested that during certain hours of the day, the Guruvayur temple should be thrown open to Harijans and to other Hindus who had no objection to the presence of Harijans, and during certain other hours it should be reserved for those who had scruples against the entry of Harijans. [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 343-44]

The reformers, as also Harijans, were not too happy with the proposal. Gandhiji said while the dissatisfaction voiced by Harijans was natural, it was not only workable but also one which while respecting the Sanatanist prejudices, surrendered nothing of the principle that Harijans should be admitted to the temples on terms of absolute equality. He wrote:

Since there can be no compulsion in religion, prejudices which amount to belief for those who hold them, must be respected, in so far as that respect is consistent with the main thing. There is then needed a formula whereby such objectors will not be deprived of the religious consolation to which they are entitled. That can only be done if there is some period fixed during which they can have their darshan in isolation.

Gandhiji admitted that



the sentiment undoubtedly exists that the efficacy of the idol is diminished, if not altogether destroyed, by the presence of certain people in the temple in which it is installed. It is not possible to make the people who harbour that sentiment give it up by force of law or arms. That can only disappear either through an appeal to reason or through experience. . . . [C.W.M.G., LIII, p. 1]

Gandhiji, it appears, made the proposal without having taken his colleagues into confidence over it. This occasioned a protest from Vallabhbhai Patel, who expressed the view that Gandhiji had no right to publish the proposal without first consulting Rajaji. [*Ibid*, pp. 42-43]

Gandhiji said if he was not to do violence to the feelings of Sanatanist devotees the compromise proposal suggested by him was the only way under the circumstances. For, he wrote:

It is an undoubted fact that . . . thousands of people attribute particular sanctity to their favourite temples. That sanctity is for them an untransferable thing. Sanctity handed down from ancient times cannot be imparted to a new image and a new temple by the mere will of a man.

One of the reformers, T. A. V. Nathan, angrily asked if Gandhiji would be willing to satisfy the conscience of conservative seekers in England who wanted that political reforms in India should be postponed to some later period.

Gandhiji wrote back that he would not insult the correspondent's intelligence by showing that there was no analogy between the two cases. [*Ibid*, pp. 7-9]



But those in charge of the temple, and those whom they represented, would not deign to consider the proposal. The portals of Guruvayur remained shut in the face of Harijans. And thus the first ever organized assault mounted on the citadel of orthodoxy ended for the time being in a stalemate.

8

Guruvayur claimed concentrated attention of Gandhiji and the anti-untouchability workers during this period, making it into a kind of test case in the anti-untouchability movement. It was however by no means the only item on the agenda. The aim of the movement was to end the disabilities of untouchables in all areas of life, in terms of the resolution passed at the mass meeting of Hindus in Bombay on 30 September 1932. Letters and reports with which Gandhiji was flooded in jail showed that disability in regard to temple-entry was by no means the only one from which the so-called untouchables suffered. In one of his statements on untouchability Gandhiji cited a report about the condition of Bhangis in Vile Parle, a suburb of Bombay. Wrote Gandhiji:

The scavengers are accommodated in quarters where there are no roads, no arrangement for water supply and no sanitary convenience. The land itself is low-lying, the huts are hovels constructed from dilapidated tins which were once used for conservancy work. There is no lighting and nearby is the dumping ground for all the suburban rubbish which gives an eternal stench. Next to it is a structure for housing conservancy; attached to this is a water pipe for washing dirty tins, and if the overseer is well disposed he would allow the scavengers to help themselves to water from the pipe; on the other side is a row of carts that receive the buckets collected from the privies of households. . . . Thirty-one families live in this condition, they are composed of 35 men, 25 women, 34 boys and 15 girls.



Gandhiji called upon the Hindu inhabitants of the area to make decent collection overnight and provide suitable quarters and other conveniences for the scavengers.

But, said Gandhiji, Vile Parle was by means an exception. Amritlal Thakkar, Secretary of the Servants of Untouchables Society (Harijan Sevak Sangh), had given harrowing descriptions of the living conditions of the untouchables in Danapur and other places in Bihar. [C.W.M.G., LII, pp. 11-12]

The condition of Harijans in Gujarat was no better. Summarizing a report Gandhiji said:

Harijans suffer great hardships from the so-called higher classes. In some villages they are not allowed to build verandahs for their houses. They may not wear decent clothing, nor ride horses. . . . The high-class people will not even tolerate any discussions about reform.

The report spoke of high infant mortality, child marriage and perpetual indebtedness among the untouchables. [C.W.M.G., LIII, pp. 330-31]

All over the country the position of the untouchables continued to be deplorable socially, culturally and economically. In a statement Gandhiji neatly summed it up. He wrote:

It is well to remind ourselves what wrongs we have heaped upon the devoted heads of the Harijans. Socially they are lepers. Economically they are worse than slaves. Religiously they are denied entrance to places we miscall 'houses of God'. They are denied the use, on the same terms as the caste men, of public roads, public schools, public hospitals, public wells, public taps, public parks and the like, and in some cases their approach within a measured distance is a social crime, and in some other rare enough



cases their very sight is an offence. They are relegated for their residence to the worst quarters of cities or villages where they practically get no social services. Caste Hindu lawyers and doctors will not serve them. . . . Brahmins will not officiate at their religious functions. . . . They are too downtrodden to rise in revolt against their oppressors. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 347]

Gandhiji held that untouchability was a blot on Hinduism, an excrescence, for which caste Hindus alone were responsible. He said this repeatedly, persistently and unequivocally. The caste Hindus, he said, must do penance for the sin of untouchability. This they could do by removing the load of untouchability from off the backs of the untouchables.

The work of the reformers, the anti-untouchability workers, was thus cut out for them. They must on the one hand awaken the caste Hindu conscience by going to the Sanatanists, by carrying on propaganda, and on the other, serve Harijans socially and economically and try to improve their general condition.

Writing about the importance of propaganda work in this matter Gandhiji wrote:

This is work for a century. Propaganda means a country-wide effort to create among the people a feeling against untouchability through speeches, pamphlets, and social dinners, parties, etc. . . .

Really speaking, the most effective propaganda lies in pure constructive work. But since pure constructive work is a near impossibility, propaganda is essential to supplement constructive work.

But propaganda work, Gandhiji held, should be self-supporting. Pamphlets ought not to be distributed free of charge. A body such as the Harijan Sevak Sangh could not afford this.



Further, such work must be carried on by caste Hindu workers. And such workers should not expect any remuneration beyond travelling expenses, which should be met not by the institution employing them but by the people. [C.W.M.G., LIV, pp. 206-9]

9

In December 1932, G. D. Birla, President of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, consulted Gandhiji on the desirability of bringing out a journal devoted to anti-untouchability propaganda in English and Hindi. Gandhiji warned him against issuing the English edition, "unless it is properly got up and contains readable English and translations are all accurate". He suggested that it would be much better to be satisfied with the Hindi edition only. [C.W.M.G., LII, p. 296]

There were delays in bringing out the Hindi edition and the Chairman of the Central Board of the Servants of Untouchables Society authorized the publication of the English edition without waiting for the Hindi edition. It was decided that it should be brought out from Poona under Gandhiji's supervision. Gandhiji persuaded Amritlal Thakkar to lend him the services of R. V. Shastri, who had earlier given up a lucrative job in Calcutta and thrown in his lot with Thakkar Bapa in the service of the untouchables, to work as editor. [C.W.M.G., LIII, pp. 91, 226]

The first issue of the English *Harijan* accordingly came out from Poona on 11 February 1933, under the editorship of R. V. Shastri. The very first issue carried no less than seven articles by Gandhiji.

The Hindi edition of the journal, *Harijan Sevak*, followed from Delhi under the editorship of Viyogi Hari, the first issue being published on 23 February 1933.

The last to come was the Gujarati *Harijanbandhu*, the first issue of which came out on 12 March 1933 from Poona under the editorship of Chandrashankar Shukla, This journal was later shifted to Ahmedabad.



Addressing the readers of *Harijanbandhu*, Gandhiji wrote:

I am not eager to die. I am eager to live and commit untouchability to the flames. And if I have to die in order to see that glorious hour, I am ready to die. . . . To live while untouchability lives is like a cup of poison to me.

It was to further this cause, Gandhiji said, that he had exchanged his sleep for wakefulness. *Harijanbandhu* would every week call upon every Gujarati Hindu to immolate himself in the *yajna* to purify the Hindu religion. [C.W.M.G., LIV, p. 64]

The three *Harijan* weeklies together became a powerful vehicle of communication in Gandhiji's hands. They became a means of educating the public and guiding the workers in the cause of Harijan uplift and eradication of untouchability. The three weeklies replaced *Young India* and Hindi and Gujarati *Navajivan* weeklies.

Gandhiji again and again reminded the workers in the cause not to force the pace. There could be no compulsion in religious matters. They must not he had said in the statement issued on 7 November 1932, even to save his life, resort to questionable methods. "It would be living death for me," he wrote, "to witness the degeneration of the movement on behalf of which, as I believe, God had prompted that little fast. The cause of the Harijans and Hinduism will not be served by methods of rabble. This is perhaps the biggest religious reform movement in India, if not in the world, involving as it does the well-being of nearly sixty million human beings living in serfdom."

Gandhiji continued:

The orthodox section that disapproves of this is entitled to every courtesy and consideration. We have to win them by love, by self-sacrifice,



by perfect self-restraint, and by letting purity of our lives produce its own silent effect upon their hearts. We must have faith in our truth and love for converting our opponents to our way. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 367]

But the Sanatanists did not see it in that light at all. The extremist sections among the orthodox were so roused that in exchange for love and persuasion, they let loose a campaign of hatred and slander against the anti-untouchability workers. Even Gandhiji was not spared. Early in January 1933 Gandhiji wrote in a letter:

So much untruth, almost bordering on the libellous, is being broadcast at the present moment about me that I should warn you not to believe anything against me unless you have it verified. . . . [C.W.M.G., LIII, p. 185]

Again:

Bulletins are being issued against me. I have been subjected to abuse. My writings are being torn from their context and used against me." [*Ibid*, p. 193]

Matters were coming to such a pass that workers found themselves in perpetual danger. Even Harijans were scared to receive them in their localities for fear of caste Hindu ire. How were they to be served?

Gandhiji wrote:

They have no will to be served. They curse those who go to their quarters. Some even stone workers out of their streets. Still they must be served. . . .

Referring to the resistance being mounted by the Sanatanists he continued:



The Sanatanists think that the Hinduism of their belief is in danger. They have money which they are using freely. New organs are daily coming into being. They impute motives, make the wildest statements about the reformers and distort the whole movement. . . . Sanatanists are reported to be resorting to goondaism and not to hesitate to resort to force to break up meetings.

Gandhiji called upon workers not to be deterred by the calumny and violence they had to face in their mission of service. They must have love for Harijans, they must have patience and courage to face injury and insults, they must be prepared to live on the barest minimum and they must be pure of character. [C.W.M.G., LIV, pp. 47-48]

10

The movement was proving an uphill and at times a frustrating undertaking. Gandhiji realized that the first flush of popular enthusiasm following the fast of September 1932 was waning. While the aggressiveness of the Sanatanists was increasing, Harijans were showing impatience with the tardy progress of reform. Gandhiji felt himself in the midst of "a raging fire".

Voices also began to be raised against the Yeravda Pact. In April 1933 Gandhiji was writing:

Hindus had become delirious and done acts which, when they became sober, they undid. They opened temples and wells to Harijans freely during the fast. Some of these were closed soon after the end of the fast. A very large number of educated caste Hindus in Bengal do sincerely feel that . . . a grave injustice was done to Bengal in the allotment of seats to Harijans. I know, too, that in some other Provinces the Yeravda Pact was assented to



under the pressure of the fast I certainly had not anticipated it all when I embarked on the fast. [*Ibid*, p. 414]

The opposition to the Pact in Bengal was real enough. A meeting held under the auspices of the British Indian Association of Bengal on 11 January 1933 passed a resolution protesting against the Pact which had been arrived at without any consultation with the Bengal Hindus and requesting the British Prime Minister to cancel his acceptance of the Pact as far as Bengal was concerned. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. I, p. 3]

On 14 March 1933 the Bengal Legislative Council by a large majority passed a resolution against the Pact. Ramanand Chatterjee, editor of *The Modern Review* wrote a scathing editorial in the journal denouncing the Pact as being as bad as the Communal Award if not worse. Even Satis Chandra Das Gupta thought that there was not much difference between the Government definition of untouchables and that of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and also that in Bengal the feeling was that the position in the Communal Award should be restored. [C.W.M.G., LIV, pp. 116-17, 307, 309]

Rabindranath Tagore wrote in a note to Gandhiji:

I am fully convinced that if it [the Poona Pact] is accepted without modification it will be a source of perpetual communal jealousy leading to constant disturbance of peace and a fatal break in the spirit of mutual cooperation in our province. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 349 *fn.*]

B. R. Ambedkar, the other party to the Pact, also began to have misgivings about the Pact and expressed a desire to modify it. He met Gandhiji and said he had been under pressure from others to propose that the panel system should be altered. The substitute suggested was that only those Harijan candidates



should be declared elected who succeeded in getting a fixed minimum of votes of Harijans from among the joint electorates.

Gandhiji of course explicitly declared himself as opposed to any change in the Pact. He declared that while the change proposed would bring no benefit to Harijans, for unscrupulous political parties would not hesitate to exploit the situation by putting up their own candidates and create dissensions among the Harijans, it would deprive the caste Hindus "of any say whatsoever in the election of Harijan candidates and thus create an effectual bar between caste Hindus and Harijan Hindus." [*Ibid*, pp. 17, 37-38]

Though the Poona Pact survived the assaults, the opposition from so many diverse quarters clearly showed which way the wind was blowing. Gandhiji's unhappiness increased.

11

In the midst of his agonizing preoccupation with the problems that the anti-untouchability campaign threw up and the stiff resistance from the orthodoxy that it provoked, there was another vital area which made claims on Gandhiji's energies. This was the Sabarmati Ashram and its affairs. A large part of Gandhiji's long working hours was taken up by the problems of the Ashram.

The Ashram housed all kinds of people – people with different backgrounds, different educational attainments or lack of them, different tastes, temperaments and idiosyncrasies and Narandas Gandhi, the Manager of the Ashram, was much harassed by the conflicts, squabbles and mutual suspicions that were generated every so often and that posed a constant threat to the smooth working of the establishment.



A large number of inmates wrote to Gandhiji periodically, often dwelling not so much on the work assigned to them or accomplished by them, but on the personal problems they had to face, the suspicions, the envy and the ill feeling harboured against them by some others. There were complaints and complaints of so many varieties. Gandhiji gave thought to them and tried to answer each complaint, now with admonition, now with soothing words, now with sage counsel.

Narandas Gandhi of course wrote with regular frequency, reporting to Gandhiji on the work being done, the work planned, the finances and so on. He also reported on the bickerings and misunderstandings among the inmates as he saw them. Gandhiji wrote to him detailed letters of guidance in all matters. As the year 1933 dawned, the problems of the Ashram became more pressing, largely because of human errors. Between 1 January 1933 and 30 April 1933, when Gandhiji announced his 21-Day fast, he wrote as many as 74 letters to Narandas Gandhi. Some of them were pretty long, and they make anguished reading. If it was not Premabehn Kantak, full of anger, obstinacy and sharpness of tongue, it was Parashuram Mehrotra, impetuous and temperamental, whose talk made no sense, and who appeared to have joined the Ashram to test Narandas's "capacity for endurance". Then there was sickness - such as that of Kusum Gandhi, over which Gandhiji constantly worried and which later turned out to be tuberculosis or of Dhuru Joshi who appeared not to be gaining weight.

As if this were not enough, an incident was uncovered in March which shattered Gandhiji. An inmate of the Ashram had for a long time been carrying on a clandestine affair with a young woman. A bunch of letters written to the girl by him fell into someone's hands and the matter was reported to Gandhiji.

In great pain Gandhiji wrote to Narandas Gandhi:



I have work before me which I must do, and it helps me to forget all my pain. But, unknown even to me, a fire is raging inside. I do not know what atonement I would do if I were outside. Nor do I know what my duty is while I am here. [C.W.M.G., LIV, p. 139]

The man met Gandhiji and tried to justify himself. He said he had only been "testing" the girl. Gandhiji was sickened.

But if there was sin abroad, Gandhiji felt it was because of a weakness in himself. He wrote to Narandas Gandhi in another letter:

I should have discovered the true character of . . . and. . . . My failure to do so is a sure sign of the imperfection of my spiritual attainment. . . . Unknown to me, falsehood, violence and passion are lurking in me. [*Ibid*, p. 159]

The last drop to make Gandhiji's cup of pain and sorrow overflow was provided by the case of Nilla Cram Cook.

Nilla Nagjni, as she was known in the Ashram circles, first drew Gandhiji's attention to herself soon after his September 1932 fast. She represented herself as a young American lady of 24 years who had for several years been in Greece, then had come to Kashmir and embraced Hinduism. She had been married and had a child. She wrote to Gandhiji that should he stick to his resolve to fast from 2 January in connection with temple-entry, she would fast with him. Gandhiji dissuaded her, but asked her to let him know more fully about herself.

She had then gone to Bangalore to take up work in connection with the anti-untouchability campaign. Reports came to Gandhiji of her unconventional morals. Gandhiji called her and asked her to explain. She prevaricated. But in the end made revelations that showed that her life had been "one of lewdness, untruth and extravagance".



She promised Gandhiji that she would mend her ways, break with the past, run the risk of being prosecuted by her creditors and engage herself in the service of Harijans. She went back to Bangalore, but did not give up her dissolute ways. Scandalous stories of which she was the centre continued to spread. She could not get along with the people with whom she was supposed to work. Gandhiji then sent her to the Ashram to be under the vigilant eye of Narandas Gandhi.

What compounded the failing of this high-strung and emotionally unstable lady was the fact that she had been doing work in connection with the anti-touchability campaign. Gandhiji warned the young men engaged in the campaign:

The work . . . demands the highest purity and the greatest simplicity on the part of the workers. Let the young men and women who are working for the cause take heed from the example of N. [C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 122-24]

12

On 30 April 1933 Gandhiji announced a 21-day fast. He wired to the Home Secretary, Government of India:

For reasons wholly unconnected with Government and solely connected with Harijan movement . . . I have to take twenty-one days' unconditional irrevocable fast with water, soda and salt beginning from noon eighth May next ending noon twenty-ninth May. Fast might have commenced at once but for . . . my anxiety to enable local authority receive necessary instructions for arrangements during fast and avoid all possible embarrassment to Government. [*Ibid*, p. 77]

The announcement shocked and surprised everybody. There had been no previous intimation of this fast, no inkling of it. Mahadev Desai in his diary reports Gandhiji as saying in the morning that he had not slept the whole night. Thoughts



kept coming – of Nilla, of Margarete Spiegel, a German lady, who meant well but tended to be ill-tempered, impetuous and spiteful. Of course Gandhiji could wash his hands of them, get rid of them. But a voice kept saying: Go on a fast, go on a fast. Should he fast for forty days or twenty-one days? – that was the question. The answer came that it should be for twenty-one days. Of course it could be said that Nilla was the immediate cause. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. III, p. 255]

In his statement to the Press Gandhiji said:

A tempest has been raging within me for some days. I have been struggling against it. . . .

As I look back upon the immediate past, many are the causes too sacred to mention that must have precipitated the fast. But they are all connected with the great Harijan cause. The fast is against nobody in particular and against everybody who wants to participate in the joy of it. . . . But it is particularly against myself. It is a heart prayer for the purification of self and associates, for greater vigilance and watchfulness. . . .

During all these months since September last, I have been studying the correspondence and literature and holding prolonged discussions with men and women, learned and ignorant, Harijans and non-Harijans. The evil is far greater than even I had thought it to be. It will not be eradicated by money, external organization or even political power for Harijans . . . to be effective, they must follow or at least accompany inward wealth, inward organization and inward power, in other words self-purification. This can only come by fasting and prayer. We may not approach the God of Truth in the arrogance of strength, but in the meekness of the weak and the helpless.



. . . Shocking cases of impurity have come under my notice. I would like my fast to be an urgent appeal to such people to leave the cause alone.

Gandhiji appealed to co-workers not to be agitated over the fast but to feel strengthened by it and to stick to their post of duty. Friends, he said, should not ask him to postpone, abandon or vary the approaching fast. [C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 74-75]

The announcement of the sudden decision by Gandhiji to fast came upon the country like a bolt from the blue. The co-workers were stunned, the people at large were stunned, even angry. But why? they asked, why such a precipitate and impulsive decision? All the previous fasts Gandhiji had undertaken had definite, tangible objectives. This appeared to have none.

Devadas Gandhi was shattered and wept in frustration. "So now it is Nilla and the Ashram Affairs." "Well, in a way," said Gandhiji. Both Nilla and the Ashram were intended to be instruments to be used in the service of Harijans. But this required purity of character. No, Devadas said, he was not convinced. Gandhiji was trying to defend the indefensible.

Kaka Kalelkar came the following day. He said to Gandhiji: "If you say that the fast is in obedience to a Divine command, there is of course nothing left to say. But it certainly betrays impatience. It is ill-timed and uncalled for."

Gandhiji said the need for such fasts would remain so long as untouchability had not been wholly eradicated. Many more people would have to undertake many more fasts to achieve that purpose.

Kaka Saheb suggested that perhaps Ambedkar was one of the causes of the fast. Gandhiji agreed that it might well be the case.

Gandhiji told Nilla: "Leprosy of the body is a lesser evil than the leprosy of the heart. You are a broken reed. I want to make you whole."



Khurshed Naoroji, Mathuradas Tricumji, Ramdas Gandhi and others argued vehemently against the decision to fast. Gandhiji remained unbending. He said:

I am a votary of Truth, which is beyond form. Maybe for a while I may be able to see it but imperfectly. Its face is hidden by the golden lid. The lid has to be removed.

Vallabhbhai Patel expressed his opposition to the move by remaining uncommunicative. Gandhiji thought it was anger. Mahadev Desai assured him that the Sardar was only distressed.

Rajagopalachari, who came on 4 May, told Gandhiji that in his view Gandhiji would be committing suicide by undertaking the fast. Hinduism, he argued, did not sanction suicide. He further told Gandhiji that if there was an eighty per cent chance of Gandhiji's fast ending in death it would be a form of gambling. Gandhiji asked him how he could admit his mistake unless the result showed it.

Shankarlal Banker, Jamnalal Bajaj and Sarojini Naidu also strove with Gandhiji but without making any impression. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. III, pp. 263-90]

Gandhiji had informed Jawaharlal Nehru, Srinivasa Sastri and Tagore of the move and sought their understanding. None of them was enthused Jawaharlal Nehru wrote:

I feel utterly at a loss. . . . Religion is not familiar ground for me, and as I have grown older I have definitely drifted away from it. . . .

The Harijan question is bad, very bad, but it seems to me incorrect to say that there is nothing so bad in all the world. I think I could point out to much that was equally bad or even worse. But . . . I do not want to argue in this letter as the stage for argument seems to be past. [C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 438-39]



Srinivasa Sastri was even more forthright. He wrote:

I believe that too much self-communion and internal debate have undermined your judgement. The state of ecstasy when values are reversed, when day becomes night and night day, when pleasure becomes pain and pain pleasure, is rare even in the experience of mystics. The attempt to make it habitual and to adopt the language appropriate to that state as the language of everyday speech is, if I may use the expression, to walk on moral stilts. . . . You have enough philosophy to understand that to claim divine sanction for a course of conduct is to withdraw it from the field of discussion and deprive it of direct validity to other minds. . . . [*Ibid*, p. 437]

Tagore wrote:

It is not unlikely that you are mistaken . . . and when we realize that there is a grave risk of its fatal termination, we shudder at the possibility of the tremendous mistake never having the opportunity of being rectified. I cannot help beseeching you not to offer such an ultimatum of mortification to God for his scheme of things and almost refuse the gift of life with all its opportunities. . . . [*Ibid*, p. 92]

From South Africa General Smuts, learning about Gandhiji's contemplated fast, sent him a cable through Maharaj Singh, Agent of the Government of India in South Africa, appealing to him to delay his fast. He said:

India stands on the threshold of a new period which makes your wise guidance in future more essential than ever before. Endangering your life might lead to a dreadful calamity and an irreparable setback at the most critical moment. I appeal for old friendship's sake and for the great causes which you have championed so successfully. [*Ibid*, p. 122]



In separate articles for *Harijan Sevak* and *Harijanbandhu* Gandhiji explained the significance of the contemplated fast. He wrote in *Harijanbandhu*:

Those who tremble at this fast should give up their attachment to the body. . . . The body perishes but the *atman* does not. It is the *atman* which acts or does not act. It lives for ever; it is immortal. . . . At the moment I have only one burning desire, viz., that we should all realize that this task of abolishing untouchability . . . cannot be achieved except through religious means. . . . The best way to make this clear is to take up the *yajna* of fasting in thought, word and deed. [*Ibid*, p. 135]

13

On 8 May 1933, exactly at 12 noon Gandhiji started his 21-day fast for self-purification.

In the evening at a quarter past seven Gandhiji was informed by Col. Doyle, Inspector-General of Prisons, that the Government had decided that "in view of the nature and objects of the fast and the attitude of mind it discloses" Gandhiji should be set at liberty. [*India in 1932-33*, p. 24; C.W.M.G., LV, p. 157]

Out of a number of possible places Gandhiji chose to spend the 21 days of the fast at Lady Thackersey's bungalow – "Parnakuti" – in Poona. Having arrived there late in the night, Gandhiji gave to the Press a statement suspending the civil disobedience movement for six weeks. He said:

This release . . . puts upon me . . . a tremendous burden and strain. . . . I had hoped, and still hope, not to excite myself over anything and not to take part in discussions of any nature whatsoever. . . .

There can be no doubt that fear has seized the common mass. The Ordinances have cowed them down, and I am inclined to think that secret



methods are largely responsible for the demoralization. The movement of Civil Disobedience does not depend so much upon the quantity as upon the quality of men and women taking part in it, and if I were leading the movement, I should sacrifice quantity and insist on quality . . . –

. . . Whether I like it or not, during these three weeks all civil resisters will be in a state of terrible suspense. It would be better if the President of the Congress, Bapuji Madhavrao Aney, were to officially declare suspension for one full month or even six weeks.

Gandhiji appealed to the Government to take advantage of the suspension of Civil Disobedience and unconditionally discharge all the civil resisters. Gandhiji assured the Government that after the fast was concluded, he would try for an understanding between the Government and the Congress. Should he fail and Civil Disobedience again become necessary the Government could go back to the Ordinance rule. If there was a will on the part of the Government, Gandhiji had no doubt that a *modus vivendi* could be found. No settlement, he said, could be arrived at so long as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Khan Saheb Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and others were buried alive. The members of the Working Committee therefore should be released. [C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 157-60]

M. S. Aney, accordingly issued a statement the following day suspending the Civil Disobedience movement for the period suggested by Gandhiji. His statement read:

In response to his suggestion, which also strikes me as a proper thing to do as at this time, I declare officially that Civil Disobedience shall be suspended for six weeks beginning with Tuesday the 9th of May.

In conclusion I repeat my appeal to every man and woman to utilize this period to the best of his or her ability and energy in the service of such



work for the uplift of Harijans as may be most commending itself to him or her. [*Ibid*, pp. 443-44]

The Government, however, remained unmoved by the appeal. An official communique issued on 9 May, reiterated what the Home Member had earlier said in the Central Assembly:

If in fact the Congress do not mean to revive the struggle, why should that not be made plain? . . . There can be no cooperation under the menace of renewal of Civil Disobedience. We have no wish to keep these prisoners longer than circumstances require, but equally we are determined not to let them out when their release might lead to renewal of Civil Disobedience. . .

A mere temporary suspension of Civil Disobedience movement . . . in no way fulfils the conditions which would satisfy the Government of India that in fact the Civil Disobedience movement has been abandoned. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. I, pp. 69-70]

Extremist sections among nationalists were shocked by Gandhiji's advice to suspend mass Civil Disobedience. Vithalbhai Patel and Subhas Bose, who were then living in Europe for reasons of health, issued a strongly-worded statement from Vienna on 9 May denouncing the move. They said:

The latest action of Mahatma Gandhi in suspending Civil Disobedience is a confession of failure. We are clearly of opinion that Mahatma Gandhi as a political leader has failed. The time has, therefore, come for a radical reorganization of the Congress on new principles with a new method, for which a new leader is essential.

The following day, addressing a meeting of Indians in London, Bose made the same point. He told the gathering that:



If the Delhi Pact of 1931 was a blunder, the surrender of 1933 was a calamity of the first magnitude. [*Ibid*, pp. 22-23, 27]

14

Meanwhile at "Parnakuti" Gandhiji's fast continued. Since Mahadev Desai's services were no longer available to him, Desai being still in prison, Mathuradas Tricumji took over the secretarial duties. Doctors Phatak and Gharpure attended on him round the clock by turns. Devadas, Brijkrishna Chandiwalla, Harihar Sharma and Dinshaw Mehta nursed him assiduously. Services of Dr. Deshmukh, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and above all of Dr. Ansari were also available whenever asked for. Gandhiji had immense faith in Dr. Ansari. Gandhiji had said he wanted to die in Dr. Ansari's lap and Dr. Ansari had answered that he would not permit Gandhiji to die in his lap, he would not permit Gandhiji to die at all, he would be with him. He had dashed to Poona shortly afterwards to be with Gandhiji. [C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 167, 169, 173, 176, 202, 464]

Gandhiji stood the fast quite well. For the first three or four days he continued to go through the letters that came and answered some of them. On the fifth day of the fast, on 13 May, the team of doctors examining him said that his condition on the whole was satisfactory, except that Dr. Deshmukh suggested that Gandhiji should be given Vichy water in lieu of ordinary water. A few days later Gandhiji said he would rather have water from Sinhgad, which was equally good.

Mahadev Desai, on being released from prison on 19 May, came to "Parnakuti" to be with Gandhiji but Gandhiji sent him off to the Sabarmati Ashram the following day. "Your place," Gandhiji told him, "is in the Ashram."

Devadas Gandhi kept Mahadevbhai informed of Gandhiji's condition from one day to the next. He told him in one of his letters that Gandhiji could not be



persuaded to shave. He was becoming more and more introspective. [Mahadevbhaini Diary, (Gujarati), Vol. III, Appendix iii, p. 445]

This seemed to be true enough. During the fast Gandhiji clearly had ceased taking any interest in external things. His whole being had become transformed into a supplication. As he wrote later about the fast:

The fast was an uninterrupted twenty-one days' prayer. . . . I know now more fully than ever that there is no prayer without fasting, be the latter ever so little. And this fasting relates not merely to the palate, but to all the senses and organs. Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being and we rise superior to, and are completely detached from, all physical functions. That state can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. Thus all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, . . . is a yearning of the soul to merge in the divine essence. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 257]

Gandhiji successfully terminated the fast at 12 noon on 29 May, by accepting a glass of orange juice prepared by Lady Premlila Thackersey, whose guest he was. Parties of Harijans had come from Ahmedabad, Poona and elsewhere. Dr. Ansari read verses from the Koran, Kaka Saheb sang a Sanskrit hymn, Mahadev Desai, who had returned from the Ashram on 26 May, sang a song composed by Rabindranath Tagore. Then Gandhiji wrote out a few words thanking "the doctors and other friends who have poured their affection on me during these days of privilege and grace. . . . God alone can give them a fitting reward". Mahadev Desai read out the little speech. Gandhiji then broke the fast. [*Ibid*, pp. 177, 444-45]

An important domestic event, coming soon after the successful termination of his long fast by Gandhiji, was the marriage of Devadas Gandhi to Lakshmi,



daughter of C. Rajagopalachari. The wedding took place at Parnakuti on 16 June, with Lakshman Shastri performing the office of priest. Premila Thackersey herself made all the arrangements for the wedding. Gandhiji in a short speech blessed the couple. He told Devadas that he was fortunate in having so many friends and elders to bless him on the occasion. He had, Gandhiji added, robbed Rajagopalachari of a cherished gem. "Guard her, protect her as you would Lakshmi, the goddess of the good and beautiful. May you both live long and tread the path of *dharma*."

Since it was a *pratiloma* marriage, one in which the bridegroom belongs to a lower station in the caste hierarchy (as contrasted with *anuloma*, in which it is reverse), the religious marriage rites are held to be invalid. Indeed when Gandhiji asked Madan Mohan Malaviya for his blessings for the wedding, the latter said he did not approve of the *sambandh*, though he wished Devadas and his spouse all happiness. Rajagopalachari therefore suggested that to avoid any adverse social and civil consequence of such non-recognition it would be desirable to have the marriage registered under the Civil Marriages Act. Devadas and Lakshmi accordingly gave declarations of their intention to marry before the Registrar of Marriages at Poona on 10 June and their marriage was registered on 21 June under Act III of 1872. The wedding was thus a spread-out affair. [*Ibid*, pp. 195, 200-201, 203, 212, 465]

It might be mentioned here that Gandhiji had sent Devadas to South India for Hindi Prachar (popularization of Hindi) and it was during that period that he had lived with Rajaji for some time and met Lakshmi. The two had been attracted to each other. Both fathers however had withheld their approval and a three years test period when they were neither to meet, nor write to one another, was prescribed by Gandhiji to see if their mutual attraction was genuine love and not



mere infatuation. They had proved the genuineness of their sentiments by remaining steadfast in their resolve to marry but only with the blessings of their fathers. That wish was now fulfilled.



CHAPTER VI: DECLINE OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

1

In advising temporary suspension of the mass Civil Disobedience movement Gandhiji was not interrupting anything very big. It certainly was not like in February 1922 when he had called a halt in mid-step to a movement that in the words of an English Governor had come "within an inch of succeeding", when the entire nation had been united as one man behind Gandhiji, with the 32 crores of India's people at his "back and call".

The Civil Disobedience Movement started in 1932 also differed qualitatively from the Salt Satyagraha which preceded it. For the Salt Satyagraha had continued with undiminished vigour till it was "discontinued" on 5 March 1931 as a consequence of the Delhi Settlement between Irwin and Gandhiji. The Salt Satyagraha had witnessed an upsurge of Indian people never seen before, with the masses all across the country rising in defiance of the Empire and the jails of the country proving hopelessly inadequate to house the ever-growing numbers of civil resisters arrested and convicted. Many had to be kept in makeshift camps.

This time the movement had been, almost from the very beginning, a lackadaisical affair. The initial impulse, generated following the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders on 4 January 1932, and immediately thereafter, had spent itself by the first half of the year, with the peak having been reached in February, when the number of Civil Disobedience convictions stood at 17,800. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, p. 26]

2

Thereafter the current steadily weakened. By the end of the year the minds of the rank-and-file Congress workers came wholly to be filled by the events



brought in the wake of the Communal Award of the British Government, Gandhiji's fast against it and the Anti-Untouchability campaign that issued from the fast. Civil Disobedience was pushed to the background.

This is not to say that there were not spurts of Civil Disobedience activity witnessed here and there. On 4 January 1933 the anniversary of Gandhiji's imprisonment was observed with hartals in many towns and cities all over the country. On 26 January there were mass demonstrations, especially in the United Provinces and Bombay in celebration of the Independence Day. In the rural areas of the U.P. in many places the peasantry continued to pursue the no-rent campaign. In Bombay picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops was also kept going. Picketing also went on, although with reduced enthusiasm, in parts of Madras presidency, Bihar and Orissa and in several other places.

An even more audacious undertaking in 1933 was the holding of the 47th session of the Congress in Calcutta on 31 March and 1 April.

The Government were determined at all costs to foil the attempt, even though the Congress as a whole had not been banned. A notification issued by the Police Commissioner, Calcutta, warned the public that anyone harbouring any delegate to the Congress would be liable to prosecution under the Indian Penal Code. The Reception Committee of the Congress was declared an unlawful association.

Nevertheless; according to a statement later issued by Madan Mohan Malaviya, President-elect of the session, over 2,500 delegates from all over India made their way to Calcutta to attend the Congress. Nearly a thousand of them were arrested and detained before their arrival in Calcutta: Among them were M. S. Aney, Madan Mohan Malaviya, his son Govind Malaviya, his grandson



Sreedhar Malaviya, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Keshavdev Malaviya, C. B. Gupta, Jawaharlal Nehru's mother Swarup Rani Nehru and Devadas Gandhi.

Malaviya thus having been prevented from presiding at the session, it was decided that Nellie Sen Gupta should take his place. Accordingly, at about 3 p.m. on 1 April, some 250 delegates converged on Esplanade, in the centre of the city, for the open session. Before Mrs. Sen Gupta could proceed with her presidential address police swooped upon her and took her into custody. The gendarmerie then rushed upon the delegates with lathis and bayonets and mercilessly belaboured them. Undaunted by the shower of lathi-blows, however, the "session" went on, passing all the seven resolutions finalized the previous evening by the Subjects Committee.

Madan Mohan Malaviya, who had been released on 3 April, along with the others arrested with him, in a statement issued on 9 April, charged the police with ill-treating the peaceful assembly. He said the sergeants had been careful to aim the lathis not at the heads of people but on their bodies, causing serious injuries to many. He said even before the Congress session, on 30 March 89 delegates from the U.P. and 180 others arrested in Calcutta had been severely assaulted by the police without any provocation. Many had been severely injured and some had fainted under the beating.

The Government of Bengal denied the accusations. So did Samuel Hoare in the House of Commons, where the matter was raised on 22 May. Samuel Hoare regretted that Malaviya should have lent his name "to these very vicious and false charges". Malaviya refused to accept the denial and challenged the Government to institute an enquiry. The enquiry was entrusted by the Government of India to the Bengal Government, which entrusted it to the Police Commissioner. That



official, as was only to be expected, denied all charges. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. I, pp. 16, 445-46]

Such activities in pursuance of Civil Disobedience were however sporadic and desultory and made little or no impact either on the Government or on the people. The movement as a whole continued its downward slide. According to the figures put out by the Government the number of civil resisters in jails went down from 14,919 in December 1932 to 13,793 in January 1933, 13,674 in February and 12,639 in March. The number of prisoners continued to diminish thereafter. [*India in 1932-33*, pp. 18-20]

There were of course reasons for this state of affairs. Unlike in the 1930-31 phase of the movement, the Government this time had wrested the initiative and were determined to crush the Congress before pushing the constitutional devices they were finalizing in London down the throat of a disunited India. They had armed themselves with a series of Ordinances and administrative measures to pre-empt any attempt on the part of the Congress to raise its voice in protest. Ever new draconian laws were framed; they were more stringently administered and the police were given a much freer hand to tyrannize over the people in the towns and villages. The lathi and the gun ruled the day.

The leadership of the Congress at all levels – national, provincial, district and taluka – having been put behind the bars within the first few months of 1932 and the Congress committees at all levels effectively banned, the workers left at large did not know what to do and how to do it. In many places the vacuum thus created was filled by undesirable elements. As Jawaharlal Nehru observed in a letter to Gandhiji “unreliable persons have come to the helm of affairs in some local areas with the intention of obstructing and even stopping the very activities they were supposed to further”. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 459]



When the Anti-Untouchability campaign gathered strength as a result of Gandhiji having been given permission to carry on anti-untouchability work from jail, further confusion was created among workers who were not in prison. Should they continue to pursue Civil Disobedience activities or take to anti-untouchability work? Gandhiji took note of this. In a statement issued to the Press from jail on 7 January 1933 he declared that so far as he was concerned he had "abated nothing" from his existing obligation. The service of the Harijans had only been added to it. But of course the workers who were outside the prison walls were differently placed and had to decide "whether to continue Civil Disobedience or to take up anti-untouchability work". Being in prison and bound by prison rules, he said, he could give them no guidance in the matter. They must decide for themselves "without reference" to him. He went on:

But a civil resister may feel a special call for doing untouchability work, or e or she may think that there is no disciplined resistance left in him or her, or that the spirit of resistance is played out, or even that there is no such thing as civil resistance and that all resistance is necessarily uncivil or in civil. [C.W.M.G., LI, pp. 379-80]

Even earlier, on 9 December 1932, writing to C. F. Andrews, Gandhiji had given expression to the same ambiguity of attitude on the question. He said while it was "a self-evident proposition" that he would be able to carry on the anti-untouchability work more effectively as a free man than as a prisoner, he could not, to secure his release, give an assurance to the Government "without a full knowledge of the circumstances outside as to his future course of action. He could not say beforehand what would occupy his attention exclusively or for the most part at a given moment. [*Ibid*, p. 158]



Congressmen, or at least a section of them, interpreted Gandhiji's statements to mean that he no longer favoured carrying on Civil Disobedience. Gandhiji did not admit this. Writing to a correspondent he tried to clarify his position:

I have considered myself to be incapable of coming to a judgment one way or the other, if only because I have not all the data for coming to a judgment. I have therefore stated in unequivocal language that every Congressman has to decide for himself or herself, taking stock of the circumstances over which they alone have control and I have none....
[C.W.M.G., LIII, 132]

This attitude of Gandhiji led to divided counsels among Congressmen. Some expressed themselves tired of Civil Disobedience. Asaf Ali wrote an open letter to Gandhiji demanding suspension of the movement and fundamental change in the Congress policy. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 221]

3

Meanwhile resentment was steadily growing in the country at the continued incarceration of Congressmen, at a time when the country's constitutional future hung in the balance and the cooperation of the Congress in the task of constitution-making was of crucial importance. Even sections of political opinion not sympathetic towards the Civil Disobedience movement were raising their voice for the release of civil resisters. In a manifesto issued on 29 January some prominent Bombay Liberals, *inter alia*, demanded that in order to secure cooperation of the Congress the Government should free civil resisters in jails. [*India in 1932-33*, pp. 7, 17]

The National Liberal Federation, meeting in Calcutta, on 17 April 1933, passed a resolution emphatically protesting



against the methods of repression employed by the Government which have led to an increase of discontent by reason of needless and unjustifiable harshness and to growing alienation of public opinion.

The Federation urged release without delay of Mahatma Gandhi and other Congressmen equally on wounds of expediency and justice. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol I, p. 440]

The matter came up before the Central Assembly, too, where on 15 February Maswood Ahmed moved a resolution "for the release of Mahatma Gandhi, Mufti Kifayatulla and other political prisoners". Discussion on the motion was resumed on 1 March. Speaker after speaker took the Government to task for continuing to keep Gandhiji in prison. Ranga Iyer said repression was overtaking the reforms. N. M. Joshi also condemned the continued incarceration of Gandhiji. Several others joined their voice to the demand for release of the prisoners. Some contended that Civil Disobedience was in fact dead and no risk would be involved in releasing the leaders of the movement, that what the Government was aiming at was abject and humiliating surrender on the part of the Congress. It was asserted that Congressmen when released, would find the situation so hostile to Civil Disobedience that they would turn away from it and engage themselves in constructive activities.

The Government, represented by Harry Haig, the Home Member, vehemently opposed the motion. Haig argued that all that the Congress wanted was a breathing space in which to gain strength to revive the struggle in more favourable circumstances. There could be no peace under such conditions.

The discussion on the motion was resumed on 1 April. But the issue was not pressed to the vote. [*India in 1932-33*, pp. 7, 17; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. I, pp. 113, 131, 168]



On 15 June 1933 Gandhiji admitted in a letter to C. F. Andrews that the situation was as bad as it could be. He wrote:

This Ordinance rule has struck the people dumb. The ignorant masses have become terror-struck.... The well-to-do are trembling in their shoes simply through a vague fear of their being overtaken by some Governmental Act. They feel that their only safety lies in an abject surrender to the will of what to them is a power which seems to override Providence itself. ... And so there is a kind of dead calm which even in my bed ... I can't help sensing. It is the peace of the cemetery. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 197]

4

Gandhiji had hardly emerged from his 21-day fast when he was faced by colleagues and workers, anxious for guidance in the situation. They were assailed by doubts and were searching for light.

Talking to Rajagopalachari on the 1st and 2nd June Gandhiji made the point that the peasantry and the masses in the cities would have to be kept away from the struggle, which should be restricted only to the educated. Also, those who participated in the struggle must not expect any remuneration from the Congress. Those that needed financial support must seek it from friends and neighbours. There must be no mass demonstrations. Spectacles such as holding Congress sessions and the like should be discontinued.

Gandhiji also felt that all secrecy must be avoided.

As for the no-tax programme, Gandhiji held that it was not a practical proposition so far as the demand for swaraj was concerned. They could have no-tax campaigns for specific goals, and the Congress had carried on such campaigns. But for the larger political goal of independence the Congress had



never made preparations for conducting a no-tax campaign on a countrywide scale. It was not a light matter.

Rajaji raised the question of the return of confiscated properties. He said he was tempted by the thought of capturing power if only to secure the return of the confiscated lands to the peasants. Gandhiji agreed, but said he could not think of capturing power at that juncture. The need of the hour was to carry the struggle forward and to intensify it.

Rajaji asked if Gandhiji contemplated initiating any further action beyond the statement he issued when undertaking the fast. Gandhiji said he felt that it would be desirable to renew his appeal to the Viceroy for an interview, so as to take up the thread of discussion from where it had been left off. He would seek concession on salt and the right of peaceful picketing of liquor and foreign-cloth shops.

But, Rajaji pointed out, the Viceroy had already turned down his request for an interview. The Government wanted complete withdrawal of Civil Disobedience as a condition for any sort of talks.

This they could ask in the course of the talks, Gandhiji said. Where was there the authority to take a decision about withdrawal of Civil Disobedience? The Working Committee were in jail. The Civil Disobedience prisoners would have to be set free before withdrawal of Civil Disobedience. Gandhiji also felt that the Viceroy was not likely to take that view. Things were being run more by Samuel Hoare in London than by the Viceroy.

Did not Gandhiji now feel that the no-tax campaign announced in January 1932 was a mistake? Rajaji asked.

"Yes, it was," Gandhiji said. In fact he had told people in 1931 that he did not think it a very good idea to start a no-tax campaign for swaraj.



In that case, Rajaji said, the mistake should be admitted.

"Yes," said Gandhiji, "but it does not mean that we should withdraw the struggle." [*Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol III, pp. 297-301]

5

Andrews from London was beseeching Gandhiji to abstain from any precipitate action, saying he was doing his best to have the prisoners released. Obviously he was finding the going difficult. There was much resistance to the idea in British official circles. The case of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and incitement to violence in the N.W.F.P. was cited. Gandhiji assured Andrews that he would scrupulously avoid precipitate action, but said Abdul Ghaffar Khan could not be sacrificed. He said both Khurshedbehn Naoroji and Devadas Gandhi, who had stayed with Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the N.W.F.P., had always said that Abdul Ghaffar meant what he said. Gandhiji continued:

My own firm opinion is that he is much misrepresented in official circles and that what they do not want is his influence among his people. This he undoubtedly has, because he is self-sacrificing, simple and brave. It is once more a repetition of the old policy of cutting off tall poppies.

If the charges against Ghaffar Khan were true, Gandhiji wrote, they must be proved before an impartial tribunal. [C.W.M.G., LV pp. 182, 196-98]

On 17 June 1933 acting Congress President M. S. Aney announced that Civil Disobedience would be suspended for a further six weeks, i.e., till 31 July, "in view of the present state of health of Mahatma Gandhi and the doctors' opinion". [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. I, p. 27]

In the middle of July Gandhiji summoned in Poona an informal conference of the members of the A.I.C.C. who then happened to be out of prison and some



other prominent Congressmen, along with a few who were not members of the Congress, such as Srinivasa Sastri, to whom Gandhiji sent a personal invitation. The conference, which was attended by about 150 invitees, met from 12 to 14 July. The deliberations were not open to the Press.

At the very outset objection was taken by some to the presence of Kelkar and Sastri at the conference. Gandhiji pointed out that Kelkar was a member of the Congress and Sastri had been invited by him personally. In any case, he said, it was not good to be so full of hatred.

Gandhiji said he had summoned them not as office-bearers of the Congress but in their individual capacities, to know their views as regards future course of action. From the letters he had been receiving he gathered that some Congressmen wanted Civil Disobedience to be discontinued.

If Civil Disobedience had to be discontinued they had to be clear whether it was to be done to gain time or at the bidding of the Government. Those who stood for giving up the fight to propitiate the Government should openly say so. They should also say what the Congress should do after withdrawing the movement. There could be no talk about going into the Councils. The reforms were still in the air.

Except for one or two, the participants at the conference were unanimously of the view that Civil Disobedience should be called off, regardless of what the Government might or might not do about the release of Civil Disobedience prisoners. It was argued that the workers were tired. They needed a respite.

Gandhiji disagreed. Those who said that the workers were tired were perhaps themselves tired, he said. And if some were tired that only meant that the others who were not should act with greater vigour. History was full of instances when a handful of soldiers who were not tired carried the battle



forward and won the field. Tod had dwelt at length on the heroism of the Rajputs. India was not a country of cowardly people. History of every country abounded with tales of heroism. There was no cause for defeatism.

It was being suggested that the struggle should be stopped unconditionally. Gandhiji did not agree. Even if the struggle had to be stopped it must not be done unconditionally. In fact the struggle could not be discontinued. It had been going on since 1920. It could only be done as part of an honourable settlement. Doing otherwise would amount to a betrayal of the people.

A few had suggested that the movement should be allowed to proceed as it had been proceeding. That too, Gandhiji said, was not possible. It needed to be reviewed and the programme needed to be revised. He suggested that the mass Civil Disobedience should be discontinued and individual Civil Disobedience taken up in its stead. In individual Civil Disobedience each person was his own leader and acted on his own responsibility. He had to burn his bridges regardless of what others did or did not do. This was the kind of action in which peasants too could participate, though not collectively. Even two or three such satyagrahis could act as the spark to light the fire.

Gandhiji then dwelt on the question of secrecy. Some held that the fight could not be carried on without resorting to secret methods. Gandhiji felt that secrecy had done immense harm to the movement. It had been a mistake on his part to have allowed *Navajivan* to be brought out secretly in 1931.

Asaf Ali, Abid Ali Jaffarbhoy and others pleaded with Gandhiji to reconsider his position. The heroism of the Rajputs, Asaf Ali said, had availed them nothing.

Gandhiji was unmoved. In any case, he asked, who was there to take the decision to discontinue the movement? The conference they were attending was an informal one, convened merely for consultations. Could the acting President



of the Congress take the decision? No, for this the A.I.C.C. would have to be summoned.

He asked that he should be authorized to write to the Viceroy. He would act merely as an intermediary between the Government and the Congress; he would get the Working Committee to approve whatever proposals he placed before the Viceroy.

Gandhiji had said that the peasants would be kept out of the movement. He was asked what would be his attitude if some peasant refused to pay land revenue. Gandhiji said it would be a commendable act. The Congress could not ask anyone to pay the tax.

The Conference approved of Gandhiji's proposal that mass Civil Disobedience should be discontinued in favour of individual Civil Disobedience. It also authorized Gandhiji to seek an interview with the Viceroy. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. III, pp. 303-17; C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 262, 264-66]

In accordance with the consensus arrived at the Conference, Gandhiji on 14 July telegraphed to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy asking if His Excellency would grant him an interview "with a view to exploring possibilities of peace".

The reply, stiffly rejecting the request, came on 17 July. The telegram of the P.S.V. referred to the reports of the proceedings of the informal and secret conference of Congressmen, where it had been decided not to withdraw the Civil Disobedience movement. Reiterating the Government view that the Civil Disobedience movement was wholly unconstitutional and the Government could not enter into any negotiations for its withdrawal, P.S.V. said that if the Congress desired to resume its position as a constitutional party and restore peace, it was within its power to do so by withdrawing the Civil Disobedience movement.



Unless this was done the interview with His Excellency could serve no purpose.
[*Ibid*, LV, p. 264]

In the House of Commons Sir Samuel Hoare on the same day, 17 July, spoke along the same lines. He said:

Mr. Gandhi again wishes to put himself in the position of a negotiator with the Government of India and carries in reserve the unconstitutional weapon of Civil Disobedience. I repeat that there can be no question of making a bargain with the Congress as a condition for their accepting the ordinary obligation of law-abiding citizens. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, p. 2]

On receiving the unfavourable reply, Gandhiji telegraphed again on 17 July. It had come upon him as a painful surprise, he said, that Government had taken official notice of "unauthorized publication of confidential proceedings of an informal conference". The proceedings, taken as a whole, were calculated to bring about an honourable peace. Gandhiji repeated his request for an interview.

The Viceroy again turned it down.

6

On 18 July Gandhiji finally left Lady Thackersey's hospitable "Parnakuti" in Poona for Ahmedabad, where he intended to discuss with the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram their role in the coming individual Civil Disobedience campaign. On the way, in Bombay, in an interview to a Press correspondent, he indicated that the President of the Congress would be stopping mass Civil Disobedience, tabooing secret methods and, since Congress committees were no longer able to function except through secret organization, he would be scrapping for the time being all Congress committees. C.D. from then on would be confined to individuals. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 276]



In another Press interview in Ahmedabad on 19 July he clarified the concept of individual Civil Disobedience. He said:

In mass Civil Disobedience a large number of people act like sheep, therefore act under leadership and sink or swim together. In individual Civil Disobedience everyone is his own leader and the weakening of one cannot affect any other person. One million individuals may offer individual Civil Disobedience but that would mean that each one of them has acted independently of others and on his own responsibility. [*Ibid*, p. 281]

M. S. Aney, President of the Congress, issued a statement on 22 July listing the steps being taken in pursuance of the decisions taken at the informal conference at Poona under the advice of Gandhiji. These were:

- (1) No unconditional withdrawal of Civil Disobedience.
- (2) Discontinuation for the time being of mass Civil Disobedience, including no-tax and no-rent campaign, with individuals reserving the right to offer Civil Disobedience on their own responsibility.
- (3) Those offering individual Civil Disobedience to do so without expecting any help from the Congress.
- (4) Secret methods to be abandoned.
- (5) All Congress organizations, including the All-India Congress Committee, to cease to exist for the time being.
- (6) Congressmen unable to offer individual Civil Disobedience to carry on, individually or collectively, such constructive activities of the Congress as they were fitted for. [*Ibid*, pp. 450-51]

Gandhiji followed this up with a statement of his own, issued on 26 July, explaining the implications of the new programme and the circumstances that



had led up to it. Referring to secret methods that had had to be resorted to in pursuance of Civil Disobedience, he said:

I fully admit the purity of purpose and the great cleverness of the workers in conducting the campaign by secret methods, devised to meet the situation created by repressive measures of the Government. But secrecy is repugnant to satyagraha and hampers its progress. It has undoubtedly contributed in a great measure to the present demoralization of the people.

As regards stoppage of the mass movement, Gandhiji said:

The masses have acted bravely and suffered much.... But ample evidence is forthcoming to show that they are not able any longer to suffer the prolonged torture of the Ordinance rule.... The Congress as an organization finds it increasingly difficult day by day to render them effective aid. The stoppage of secrecy would prevent even the little relief that it was possible to give them. The masses ... need more training and experience through the example of individuals.

Civil Disobedience is, therefore, to be confined to individuals on their own responsibility although they would be acting on behalf of and in the name of the Congress. Those who will so act may expect no financial or other assistance from the Congress. They should be prepared for indefinite incarceration whether well or ill.... On termination of their sentences they should seek re-imprisonment on the first opportunity. They should be prepared to brave all the risks ... including uttermost penury and the loss of all their possessions, movable or immovable, or physical torture such as lathi-blows.



Naturally, Gandhiji said, such action could only be expected from a small number in the beginning. But their example would be emulated, resulting in a mass awakening which could not be crushed by any repression.

British policy, Gandhiji said, could not be changed through a constitution that registered no more than British will, ignoring the welfare of the nation. It could only be changed through adequate action on the part of the people in the face of British repression. Independence should mean not registration of British will but that of India. Individual action must, in the long run, affect the masses.

Referring to the need for strict non-violence in the conduct of the movement Gandhiji said:

I would have India abjure violence even if it had the power to wield it. I would have it appreciate the fact that if the masses are to work out their own independence, they are so numerous that if they achieved anything through violent means, it would not be independence but a fiendish thing that would devour them and perhaps bring ruination to the whole world. The one lesson that the Western nations teach the world in flaming letters is that violence is not the way to peace and happiness.

Gandhiji expressed the belief that though to begin with civil resisters would only be a few, if they were true men and women, they would multiply into millions. [*Ibid*, pp. 295-301]

Many in the Congress, both of the right and the left, did not see eye-to-eye with the new policy. In particular they deplored the gratuitous self-annihilation on the part of the country's dominant political organization. [*India in 1932-33*, p. 29]



Gandhiji, replying to such critics, said they presupposed that there were lawfully working Congress organizations all over the country, which the Acting President had dissolved. The fact was that all such organizations had been declared illegal. What were working were secret organizations and shadow cabinets, and this was calculated to lead to chaos. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 324]

7

Gandhiji expected the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram to be in the forefront in the coming individual Civil Disobedience campaign. In such an eventuality he foresaw problems for the Ashram: searches and seizures and confiscations, including that of land. He discussed these matters with the members of the Ashram. On 21 July he was writing to Jamnalal Bajaj:

I am discussing with co-workers a proposal for sacrificing the Ashram in this *yajna*. It is almost certain now. [*Ibid*, p. 283]

Again writing to Bajaj the following day he said:

The reason for handing over control of the Ashram is that it is better to hand over ourselves what the Government is sure to take by force in due course. Instead of carrying away our belongings one after another against land revenue, let them take the entire land. Moreover, when thousands of people have been ruined forcibly, it seems desirable and even necessary . . . that an Ashram which bears the name of Satyagraha Ashram should voluntarily sacrifice itself. [*Ibid*, p. 288]

On 26 July, Gandhiji addressed a letter to the Home Secretary, Bombay, asking that the Government take possession of the land, buildings and crops of the Ashram.



He said the Ashram, for which the land in Sabarmati had been bought in 1916, was a wholly non-political institution given to the pursuit of constructive activities. It had then living on the premises 107 inmates in all (men 42, women 31, boys 12 and girls 22).

Time had arrived, Gandhiji said, for the Ashram to sacrifice itself in the face of growing terrorism being resorted to by Government as evidenced in the following:

1. Methods of torture have been adopted by the police in various parts of India in order to cow down individual civil resisters.
2. Women have been insulted.
3. Free movement of people has become almost impossible.
4. In many parts of India village work by Congressmen has become all but impossible.
5. Civil resistance prisoners have been subjected to humiliations and bodily injury in many lock-ups and prisons.
6. Unconscionably heavy fines have been imposed and gross irregularities committed for their recovery.
7. Peasants withholding revenue or rent have been punished in a manner out of all proportion to their offence, obviously with a view to terrifying them and their neighbours into subjection.
8. The public Press has been gagged.
9. In short, freedom with self-respect has become impossible throughout the length and breadth of the land.



Gandhiji said he could see quite clearly that the constructive programme of the Ashram could not be carried out in safety any longer. The struggle was bound to be prolonged, in view of the rejection by the Viceroy of the honest advances of the Congress.

Gandhiji pointed out that the Ashram had not been paying land revenue for the past two years in consequence of which goods worth considerable value had been seized and sold. The institution could not be carried on under such precarious circumstances. He had therefore decided to sacrifice the Ashram.

The Ashram had immovable property worth about Rs. 300,000 and movable property including books, worth about Rs. 200,000. The movable property he intended to hand over to friends, who would make use of it in public interest. So far as the immovable property was concerned, Gandhiji suggested that the Government take possession of it. If the Government declined to take possession of the land, the Ashram would still be vacated on 31 July, when the period of suspension of Civil Disobedience ended. [*Ibid*, pp. 301-04]

On 30 July, Gandhiji gave notice to the Home Secretary, Bombay Government, that he intended to vacate the Ashram on 1 August morning and if he was left free, to march in easy stages to Ras with 32 companions, half of them women. The party would march "priceless", depending on the villagers to feed them. He would not invite people to offer mass Civil Disobedience, but would tell them that those who felt like it, could offer individual Civil Disobedience in terms of the Congress resolution. [*Ibid*, p. 327]

He repeated the same message in an appeal addressed to the people of Gujarat the same day, telling them further that though he would not want them to offer mass Civil Disobedience, he would certainly ask those who were given to drinking to refrain from doing so, the liquor dealer to give up his trade, the



foreign-cloth dealer to deal exclusively in khaddar. He would also appeal to the Hindus to "wash themselves clean" of the taint of untouchability and to the Harijans to observe the rules of hygiene and sanitation. Then he said:

We will not have a copper on us, we shall cheerfully and thankfully accept what humble fare the villagers will offer us. The coarsest fare lovingly served will mean to us the choicest treat. As this is the rainy season, we shall be thankful to be put in a cottage having a roof. . . .[*Ibid*, pp. 327-28]

On 31 July Gandhiji spoke to the inmates of the Ashram, now about to be scattered. He told them not to lose heart. "It is the sheep that go in flocks," he said, "lions roam around alone." They had to represent in their persons the 33 crores of India's people. They must act as their representatives.

Nine of the Ashram children then were placed in the care of Anasuya Sarabhai.

8

Gandhiji with a few companions, including Mahadev Desai, then went to Ranchhodlal's bungalow to spend the night. He was not destined to start his march on the following morning, as he had planned. The police came at night – at twenty minutes past one, according to Mahadev Desai – and took him away, along with Kasturba Gandhi, Mahadev Desai and his son Narayan Desai. They were taken to Sabarmati Jail, where they spent the remaining few hours of the night. Kasturba, Gandhiji was informed by the jail authorities, had been kept with Mira behn. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. III, pp. 323-4]

The Government publication *India in 1932-33* observed:

This programme was obviously intended to revive memories of his famous march to the sea in March 1930; and as the region he had selected



for his activities was one where Civil Disobedience had gained a great hold in the past, Government was forced to take prompt action against him. [*India in 1932-33*, p. 29]

The same night the police also raided the Ashram and took into custody those who had been expected to join Gandhiji on his march to Ras.

On the evening of 1 August Gandhiji was put in a train and taken to the Yeravda prison in Poona. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. III, p. 325]

On 3 August, Gandhiji learnt from newspapers that the Government contemplated releasing him and then serving on him a restraint order. He at once wrote to the Home Secretary, Bombay Government, that if newspaper reports be true and he were served with a restraint order, he would be "unable to conform to the order". If the object was to secure his conviction the Government had enough powers to do so "without going through the vexatious procedures". [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 339]

What then followed was a farce. On the morning of 4 August, the jail authorities showed Gandhiji the orders for his release as well as that of Mahadev Desai. The orders were signed not by a Magistrate but by Home Member Maxwell. They were taken out of the jail, put in a private taxi and told to drive along a side road. F. W. O. Gorman, District Superintendent of Police followed in another car. By prearrangement, they stopped after a while and Gorman handed them the order to leave Yeravda village but to remain within the Poona city limits. When after some time they were still found to be within the limits of Yeravda, they were arrested. [*Mahadevbhaini Diary* (Gujarati), Vol. III, pp. 327-28]

Gandhiji was tried the same day before the Additional District Magistrate at Yeravda. Gandhiji pleaded guilty of violating the order served on him. In a brief statement before the court he said:



This Law or Act under which I have been tried is a glaring instance in proof of my contention that the system under which India is being governed today is not merely unjust, but is dragging her down economically and morally.

I have had recently a spell of freedom and was in the midst of people and had an opportunity of coming into contact with a very large number of men and women. I made what was to me a most painful discovery, that men high and low, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, were demoralized, and were living in a perpetual fear of loss of liberty and their possessions.

I am offering all resistance to this system of Government – a resistance that is within my capacity and resistance that a peaceful man like me could offer.

The Magistrate found him guilty under Section 14 of the Bombay Special Powers Act of 1932 and sentenced him to one year's simple imprisonment. He was placed in 'A' class. Mahadev Desai was next tried and similarly sentenced to one year's simple imprisonment. He was placed in 'B' Class. [C.W.M.G., LV, pp. 341-43]

Gandhiji's expectation that once individual Civil Disobedience movement was inaugurated people in large numbers throughout the country would come forward to offer themselves for imprisonment was only partially fulfilled. Pattabhi Sitaramayya writes:

From all over the country Congress workers followed the lead given by Gandhiji, and from August 1933 to March 1934 a regular stream of civil resisters maintained the campaign.



The Congress historian was not able to give figures for different provinces, because, he said, reports from provincial centres had not been received. [*The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, p. 568]

Pattabhi Sitaramayya would have been less enthusiastic had provincial centres sent full reports. The fact was that little zest was noticeable in the country at large in the movement. Workers everywhere did however offer Civil Disobedience and they were duly arrested and convicted.

On 6 August in Delhi Krishna Nair and three others courted imprisonment. Krishna Nair was sent to jail for six months and the others for three months each.

On 7 August Kasturba Gandhi, Durga Desai and Premabehn Kantak were tried and sentenced to six months' imprisonment each. On the same day C. Rajagopalachari, having given notice of his intention to march from Tiruchengode along with 16 others, was arrested along with his companions before they could set out on the march. They were sentenced to six months' imprisonment each.

On 10 August Jairamdas Doulatram offered Civil Disobedience. On 13 August in Akola, M.S. Aney, having given notice of his intention to commit breach of Forest Laws, was arrested with 13 others. Two women were acquitted. M. S. Aney and 11 of his companions were sentenced to six months' imprisonment and fines of Rs. 250 each.

In Lahore, on 22 August, Sardul Singh Caveesar, the acting President of the Congress, courted imprisonment. He was awarded a jail term of six months and a fine of Rs. 500.

In Lucknow, on 24 August, Mohanlal Saxena and 21 others were arrested and sentenced to jail terms of six months each. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, pp. 4-8]



After August the stream of volunteers courting imprisonment, if it could be called a stream, was considerably weakened. It first became a trickle, then a drip and by and by dried up altogether. The procedure followed by satyagrahis was the same everywhere. They would give advance notice to the authorities of their intention to commit breach of some law or the other, specifying the time and the place. They would be picked up, tried and convicted. To Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been released after almost two years of incarceration on 30 August, this appeared "ridiculous". He wrote to Gandhiji:

It was right and proper, if I may say so, for you to court imprisonment by giving previous intimation of your intention to do so to the authorities. But it seems to me to be perfectly absurd for others, and even Congress volunteers, to send such notices or communications to the authorities. Any person desiring to offer Civil Disobedience should openly carry on activities which further our cause and thus court arrest. [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 460]

Gandhiji agreed. He wrote in reply:

I quite agree with you that it is ludicrous for individuals to send notices to the local authorities of their intention to offer a particular form of civil disobedience. We do not want to make a great movement ridiculous. Therefore when civil resistance is offered it should be offered seriously and in an effective manner. [*Ibid*, p. 429]

It was clear, however, that the movement had not taken off. It made very little impact in the country and no impact on the Government. It did not swell the jails where the number of political prisoners kept steadily decreasing. From 10,950 in April the figure declined to 9,144 in May, to 6,915 in June, to 4,683 in July. At the end of August, when the movement had been going on for a month, the figure stood at 4,528. [*India in 1932-33*, p. 30]



After his arrest in Ahmedabad on 1 August Gandhiji had been taken to Sabarmati Central Prison. He had immediately written to Advani, the Jail Superintendent, asking for permission to be obtained from Government, if necessary by wire, for him to carry on Harijan work from jail as before. He had pointed out that he had to send matter every week to *Harijan* and give instructions to the editor.

Before the matter could be pursued, there had followed the drama of his being taken to Poona, his release, rearrest, trial and conviction.

Then, when on 4 August he found himself again within the walls of Yeravda Prison, the very first thing he did was to renew the request. He wrote to the Home Secretary, Bombay, drawing his attention to his letter to Advani for permission to resume anti-untouchability work as before, and requesting a reply by Monday, 7 August. "This work," he wrote, "may not be interrupted except at the peril of my life."

The Home Secretary replied that the request was under consideration of the Government, but that a decision was not possible by 7 August. In the interim Gandhiji was allowed to send matter to *Harijan* and see the concerned persons in connection with the work of that journal. He was also permitted to deal with one or two letters he considered important, one of them being from Rabindranath Tagore.

But the matter continued to hang fire and Gandhiji was getting impatient. On 14 August he wrote to the Home Secretary:

The strain of deprivation of this work is becoming unbearable. If therefore I cannot have the permission by noon next Wednesday [16



August], I must deny myself all nourishment from that time, save water and salt. . . . I do not want the proposed suspension of nourishment to act as a pressure on the Government. Life ceases to interest me if I may not do Harijan service without let or hindrance. As . . . the Government of India have admitted, permission to render that service is implied in the Yeravda Pact to which the British Government is a consenting party. . . . [C.W.M.G., LV, p. 353]

The Government in reply said that they were willing to permit Gandhiji to pass on the *Harijan* manuscript to the acting editor. This, Gandhiji told them, was not enough. To get matter ready for *Harijan*, he would want to see the correspondence touching on the subject of untouchability. The least he would require, he wrote to Jail Superintendent R. V. Martin on 15 August, was:

- (a) the delivery of all the correspondence in your possession with permission to reply to so much of it as may have any connection with untouchability;
- (b) access to, and disposal of, all correspondence received at the *Harijan* office;
- (c) access to newspapers received by you or the *Harijan* office so as to enable me to deal with points on untouchability that may have been discussed in those papers.

If permission was given on the above three matters, Gandhiji said, pending final orders on his request, he would not start the fast from the noon of 16 August. [*Ibid*, pp. 354-55]

The Government's reply came on the evening of 16 August, after Gandhiji had started the fast. He was informed that he would be granted the following



special facilities for carrying on work strictly confined to anti-untouchability: (1) to receive newspapers and periodicals, but not to be allowed interviews for publication in the Press, whether with Press correspondents or others; (2) to see not more than two visitors a day; (3) to send instructions or contributions to the editor of *Harijan* three times a week, and a limited number of letters to other correspondents and (4) to have at his disposal a convict typist, books and newspapers, needed for Harijan work.

The concession offered did not satisfy Gandhiji. He wrote to Martin that they were so far short of the original orders of the Government of India and his requirements that he must not be "precipitate" in breaking the fast. How could he commit himself to non-publication of interviews in the Press? Gandhiji asked. It was a physical impossibility, for those interviewing him would not be under his discipline. And if he was to see only two visitors a day, how could he conduct the movement? And what did the Government mean by saying that he would be permitted to write a "limited" number of letters? During his earlier imprisonment he used to send, he said, something like 30 letters a day on an average. [*Ibid*, pp. 354-58]

But the Government were adamant in not allowing Gandhiji the earlier freedom. Willingdon, in a cable dated 18 August to the Secretary of State, admitted that immediately after the Yeravda Pact, they did permit Gandhiji "as a State prisoner" to inaugurate the movement to which he appeared to be devoting his whole attention, even though there had been protests from orthodox Hindus. But Gandhiji had now courted imprisonment on a political issue and could not expect facilities not given to other 'A' class prisoners. Even so facilities had been provided which would enable him to make "an important and effective contribution" to the anti-untouchability movement. The Viceroy pointed out that



when Gandhiji was at liberty his main energies were employed in politics and on the continuation of Civil Disobedience. His demand now for permission to do Harijan work without let or hindrance amounted to "a refusal to accept for himself the normal concomitants of imprisonment, and in effect was a claim to dictate the terms of his imprisonment". If Gandhiji was willing to abandon Civil Disobedience, the Viceroy said, the Government were prepared to set him at liberty at once, so that he could devote himself solely to the movement against untouchability. [*Ibid*, pp. 453-54]

Gandhiji was informed accordingly by the Home Secretary, Bombay. Gandhiji was distressed, especially by the allusion to his activities in furtherance of Civil Disobedience. He wrote to the Home Secretary on 19 August:

I have stated to Government more than once that civil disobedience under circumstances like the present is a part of my creed. But I recognize that what I consider as a perfectly lawful and moral activity, Government consider as unlawful and probably even immoral. I must therefore be content to be their prisoner not merely for the natural term of the present confinement, but for such time as India comes to her own if I live long enough to see that day. [*Ibid*, pp. 361-62]

Gandhiji continued the fast. But this time it was not easy. Barely two and a half months earlier he had emerged from a 21-day fast, effects of which had not been fully overcome. Nevertheless for the first two or three days Gandhiji carried on work for *Harijan* and saw visitors. Kaka Kalelkar came once and C. F. Andrews visited him every day with the permission or at the behest of Home Secretary Maxwell, and discussed with Gandhiji various possibilities that might enable him to give up the fast. On 20 August Kasturba was allowed to see him.



Soon after Kasturba had left an ambulance arrived and took Gandhiji away to the Sassoon Hospital. Mahadev Desai, who had been left behind, was transferred to Belgaum Jail.

As the fast progressed Gandhiji's condition deteriorated. On 23 August he vomited and became quite depressed. On the 24th, thinking that his last hour had arrived, he gave away his things to the nurses and attendants and expressed the desire that no one should speak to him, and no one should even give him water. He closed his eyes and began reciting *Ramanama*.

Then C. F. Andrews rushed with orders of the Government releasing Gandhiji. The Government declared in the Central Legislative Assembly at Simla on 24 August that the decision to release Gandhiji had been taken because "Mr. Gandhi was apparently determined to commit suicide. Government was not prepared to allow him to die in jail nor to order forcible feeding to save his life." [Mahadevbhaini Diary (Gujarati), Vol. III, p. 365; C.W.M.G., LV, p. 373, 393]

11

Gandhiji had not been mentally prepared for this sudden release. It had come to him much too unexpectedly and he could not decide right away how best to shape his course. On 25 August he unburdened himself of his dilemma in an interview to the Press. He said:

This discharge is a matter of no joy for me; possibly it is a matter of shame that I took my comrades to prison and came out of it by fasting. . . .

He refuted the Government's allegation that when free, he had given more attention to political work than Harijan work. It was a gross misrepresentation of facts, he said. During his fast of 21 days he had not been able to do any writing or talking; he could only pray and think. Later, the first thing he had done was to



address a meeting of Harijan workers. In Ahmedabad, too, he had been more taken up with meeting Harijan workers than with the winding up of the Ashram.

Gandhiji said he did not know what course he would now be pursuing. It lay in the lap of the future. For the moment it was "impenetrable darkness". But if the Government showed a will for peace, there would be peace. He did not rule out a possible fresh approach to the Viceroy for an interview. [*Ibid*, pp. 373-76]

Moderates, both inside the Congress and outside, were keen only about one thing: that Civil Disobedience should be called off. They had pinned their hopes on the constitutional exercises being carried on in London and Delhi, and were afraid that continuation of Civil Disobedience might act as a spoke in the wheel. Srinivasa Sastri gave strong expression to this attitude in his letter to Gandhiji on 27 August. Criticising first Gandhiji's contention that the Government having once given him permission to carry on Harijan work from prison without let or hindrance, were bound as a matter of principle to do so again, he wrote:

What they conceded to you at one time and in one set of conditions they are not bound to concede to you at another time and in another set of conditions. . . . You indulge in special pleading of a bad type when you charge them with a breach of promise. . . .

It might be said by an observer who wasn't prejudiced against Government that, while Harijan uplift was dear to you, putting blame on Government was dearer.

Then Sastri came to the point of his letter:

Behind and beyond your present tussle with Government lies the future of the country. How can Congress best secure that future? Your answer is clear. But another answer is taking shape in people's minds. It is



that Civil Disobedience, both mass and individual, must be given up. A new policy, aiming at constructive national good in legislation, finance and administration . . . must be tried. . . . In this sore strait, the country looks to you to play a greater part than you have ever played. . . . Save your individual conscience, pursue civil disobedience, seek the jail and embarrass Government as you like; but leave Congress free to evolve a new programme. . . . The moment is come . . . for you to say, 'I set Congress free to try other methods. . . .' [*Ibid*, pp. 455-56]

Gandhiji answered Sastri on 30 August. He wrote:

I quite agree with you that I am wholly unfit for the constitution-building at the present stage. In my opinion that time is not yet. It will come only when the nation has developed a sanction for itself. I would therefore gladly retire from the Congress and devote myself to the development of Civil Disobedience outside the Congress and to Harijan work. The difficulty is, how to do it?

Even during the earlier informal conference at Poona, Gandhiji said, he had debated the question. His impression was that Congress mentality had not changed. Even though a large majority were tired, there were few takers for the constitutional proposals set out in the White Paper issued in London. Congressmen still wanted a radical change. [*Ibid*, pp. 381-82]

Gandhiji was right in his assessment of the position of Congressmen. It is true there were people in the leadership who were tired of the struggle and, like the Liberals and others of the right wing, were eager to grab whatever crumbs of constitutional reforms the British were prepared to throw to them, but the core of the Congress rank and file had retained its fighting spirit and did indeed stand for a radical change. An important section among them was eager to go even



beyond the aims then sought to be pursued through Civil Disobedience. The chief spokesman of this section of Congressmen was Jawaharlal Nehru.

12

Nehru had been discharged from prison on 30 August. After spending a week or so in Allahabad with his ailing mother, he had hastened to Poona on 10 September and spent four days at "Parnakuti" in long and detailed discussions with Gandhiji. In a letter to Gandhiji dated 13 September he summed up his position in the discussions.

He made the point that while complete independence that the Congress stood for must include control of the army, foreign relations and finance, in economic matters emphasis must be laid on the resolution of the Karachi Congress adopted in March 1931. To give the masses economic freedom, it would be necessary for the vested interests to be divested of the privileges they had been enjoying. The problem of achieving freedom thus became one of "revising vested interests in favour of the masses". The divesting should be done gently, but it "must be as speedy as possible".

The Round Table Conference, Nehru continued, had been "an effort to consolidate the vested interests of India behind the British Government". It was a Fascist grouping and Fascist methods were employed in India to suppress the national movement. Preservation of vested interests could not solve India's problems. Democracy and autocracy could ill go together.

Nehru then went on to express the view that India's struggle for freedom was part of the international conflict between the forces of progress and the forces of reaction. Both on the ground of national self-interest and the wider ground of welfare of humanity, India must range herself with the progressive forces of the world.



Only a true appreciation of the issues involved, Nehru concluded, "will vitalize and give new meaning to our struggle for freedom which we must continue till the full objective is achieved." [*Ibid*, pp. 457-58]

Gandhiji, answering Nehru on 14 September, said he was in agreement with much of what Nehru had written: he adhered to the economic resolution of the Karachi Congress; he agreed that without material revision of the vested interests the condition of the masses could not be improved. The princes, for instance, would have to part with much of their power and become representatives of their subjects. He agreed also that India should range herself on the side of the progressive forces of the world.

But though they agreed in the enunciation of the ideals, Gandhiji further said, there were "temperamental differences" between them. He continued:

The clearest definition of the goal and its appreciation would fail to take us there if we do not know and utilize the means of achieving it. I have, therefore, concerned myself principally with the conservation of the means and their progressive use. I know that if we can take care of the means, attainment of the goal is assured. I feel too that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means. . . . We know that the princes, the zemindars and those who depend for their existence upon the exploitation of the masses, would cease to fear and distrust us if we could but ensure the innocence of our methods. We do not seek to coerce any. We seek to convert them. This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced that it is the shortest. [*Ibid*, pp. 427-28]

On the same day, 14 September, Gandhiji announced his decision not to initiate any political action till 3 August 1934, the day on which his prison term



would have ended but for his premature discharge by the Government. In a statement to the Press he said:

After hard praying and thinking, I have come to the conclusion that up to the termination of the period of my sentence, that is, up to August 3 next, I must not court imprisonment by offering aggressive Civil Disobedience

The self-imposed restraint, Gandhiji said, was a bitter cup, for the agony of witnessing the devastating effect of the Ordinance rule still persisted. But while he had decided to refrain from Civil Disobedience himself, he would continue to guide civil resisters who sought his advice. Should the Government leave him free, Gandhiji declared, he proposed to devote this time to Harijan service. He would also, so long as he was free, make all endeavours in his power to explore every possible avenue of an honourable peace. [*Ibid*, pp. 425-26]

On 15 September Gandhiji finally left Poona for Bombay, where he spent a week before leaving for Wardha on 23 September. Here he stayed for a month and a half, till 7 November and then he set out on his Harijan tour.

13

Terrorism in Bengal continued to be active all this while, the worst affected being Chittagong, Midnapur and Mymensingh. On 2 September, the English District Magistrate of Midnapur, B. E. G. Burge, was shot dead on a football ground just before the start of a match in which he was one of the players. Of the three youths who shot him, one was shot dead on the spot, another died of gun injuries in the hospital, while the third was arrested.

Gandhiji condemned the assassination, but at the same time regretted "that the rulers will not only not redress the wrongs which lead to such assassinations



but insist on ruling by counter-terrorism, which the Ordinances undoubtedly mean". [*Ibid*, p. 399]

In the wake of the assassination, counter-terrorism by the Government was intensified in the area. On 22 September armed police in Midnapur was increased by a hundred men, intelligence staff was also increased and the Suppression of Terrorism Act, so far in force in Chittagong, was extended to Midnapur. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol II, p. 15]

Gandhiji's condemnation of State terrorism was misunderstood by English sympathizers in England, and Agatha Harrison wrote to him about it. Gandhiji refused to apologize for what he had said in connection with the Midnapur assassination. He wrote to her:

The counter-terrorism is much more mischievous in its effect, because it is organized and corrupts a whole people. Instead of rooting out terrorism it creates an atmosphere for the approval of terrorist methods and thus gives them an artificial stimulus. . . . Hence it is necessary to bring out this point forcibly when any eruption takes place as that of Midnapur. [C.W.M.G., LVI, pp. 34-35]

He made the same point in answering a letter of H. K. Hales, M.P, then in Calcutta, who had appealed to Gandhiji to go to Calcutta and use his influence to make the terrorists give up violence. Gandhiji told the correspondent that nothing would be gained by addressing only one party of violence. He went on:

I regard both the Government and the terrorists as representing violence; that of the terrorists is unorganized, insane and wholly ineffective from my standpoint, and that of the Government is organized, deliberate and blasting. . . . [*Ibid*, pp. 84-85]



On 22 October 1933, Vithalbhai Patel died in a sanatorium near Geneva after prolonged illness. Subhas Bose had been with him and looked after him in his last moments.

The body was brought to India on 9 November. Gandhiji refrained from attending the funeral, causing resentment among some members of the Patel family. But Gandhiji said he was helpless. He considered himself still in jail and could not therefore take part in any outside activity. "My difference with Vithalbhai," he wrote in a letter, "had absolutely nothing to do with my not going there. I am out of jail solely for Harijan work." [*Ibid*, pp. 161, 257]

Even Vallabhbhai Patel did not attend the funeral of his brother, for he refused to seek release on parole. The last rites were performed by Dahyabhai Patel, son of Vallabhbhai Patel. [*Ibid*, p. 168 *fn* 3]



CHAPTER VII: THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS

1

From August 1932 onwards the activities and attitudes of almost all non-Congress political parties and groups, representatives of large and small minorities and special interests and of the rulers of States, big and small, were merely responses to the decisions announced in England by the British Government.

The first to disturb the still waters was the Communal Award of His Majesty's Government, published on 17 August. Gandhiji responded to it in so far as it had a bearing on the question of the Depressed Classes representation. As a prisoner, he had withheld comment on the other parts of the Award.

In patriotic circles, irrespective of the community they represented, the Award as a whole was widely seen as an attempt on the part of the British to enlarge dissensions and disunity among Indians rather than to bring parties and interests closer to one another. With the Congress leadership in jail and the rank and file scattered under the Government onslaught, there was no one who could effectively give voice to the discontent and resentment to which the Award gave rise. It was seen as a *fait accompli*, as something you had to swallow whether you liked it or not.

Nevertheless an attempt was made by those who then happened to be out of prison, both Muslim and Hindu, to salvage what they could from the ruins of national unity. What struck at the root of national unity was not so much the quantum of reservation conceded by the Award to Muslims and other communities, for in this matter the Congress, as Gandhiji had repeatedly asserted, was willing to accommodate the Muslims. It was conceding to the Muslims and to others, separate electorates which struck at the roots of unity.



Throughout the preceding three years, accordingly, the energies of the Congress leadership had been directed towards persuading the Muslim leadership to accept joint electorates in the larger national interest.

Following Gandhiji's fast, the amendment of the Communal Award in so far as it concerned Depressed Classes representation, and the general mood of conciliation and goodwill created in the country as a consequence of the fast, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Maulana Azad and Syed Mahmud got in touch with Shaukat Ali to explore possibilities of consultations aimed at a communal settlement outside the Communal Award. Shaukat Ali saw the wisdom of the course proposed. He also saw that the absence of Gandhiji from the scene would be a serious hindrance in working out a settlement. He therefore appealed to the Viceroy to release Gandhiji. The appeal was of course rejected. He then sent a telegram to Gandhiji, saying he had postponed his planned visit to the U.S.A. on 6 October in order to pursue efforts towards Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhiji answered conveying his good wishes. The Government withheld Gandhiji's telegram. [C.W.M.G., LI, p. 201]

2

In pursuance of these efforts, an All-Parties Muslim Conference was organized in Lucknow on 15-16 October 1933. On 19 October Maulana Azad telegraphically informed Gandhiji:

Muslim Leaders Conference unanimous not to press separate electorate if other demands accepted. In present situation no better solution possible. Bless us by message.

Gandhiji blessed the effort, by telegram, saying that for him, personally, any solution that was acceptable to the parties concerned, would be acceptable.



This telegram, too, was withheld by the authorities. [*Ibid*, p. 265]

The Unity Conference, held at Allahabad from 3 November to 17 November, was attended by delegates from all the four major communities, viz., Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Indian Christians. Altogether there were 121 delegates: 63 Hindus, 39 Muslims, 11 Sikhs and 8 Indian Christians. There were in all 23 sittings, running to 136 hours. The issues that came up were too complex to be decided by such a large body of men and accordingly a Committee was set up to go into things. The Committee included the Maharaja of Darbhanga, J. N. Basu, Ramanand Chatterjee, Abul Kalam Azad, Shaukat Ali, Zafar Ali, the Raja of Salempur, Sardar Sardul Singh, Sardar Ujjal Singh, C. Rajagopalachari, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Govind Ballabh Pant, Rajendra Prasad and Devadas Gandhi.

The Committee's recommendations were considered at the second and third sessions of the Conference held on 16 December and 23-24 December, when they were finally approved. The terms of the agreement arrived at were as follows:

In the Central Legislature with a projected membership of 300, the representation of the communities would be: Muslims 96 (32 per cent of total elected seats), Sikhs 14 (4 2/3 per cent), Indian Christians 4, Anglo-Indians 1.

The election would be through joint electorates, except that for the first ten years the arrangement would be that out of candidates who had secured at least 30 per cent votes of their own community the one getting the highest number of votes through joint electorate would be considered elected.

In the provinces the community-wise distribution of seats would be as follows:

Bengal: Muslims 51 per cent, general 44.7 per cent; Punjab: Muslims 51 per cent, Hindus 27 per cent, Sikhs 20 per cent, Christians 3 seats, Europeans and



Anglo-Indians 1 seat. It was further agreed that in the Punjab at least one Sikh and one Hindu would be included in the cabinet. In Sind, which would be organized as a separate province, for the first ten years the Hindus would be given 37 per cent seats in the Legislature; thereafter their representation would be on the basis of population, with the right to contest other seats. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. II, pp. 280-318]

But the separatist elements among Muslims were much too strong and it was they who in effect controlled Muslim politics.

Fazli Hussain called a meeting at Delhi on 20 November 1932, which was attended by the members of the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim Conference, the Council of the Muslim League and the Jamiat-ul- Ulema (Kanpur). The meeting passed the following resolution:

In order to remove all possible misrepresentations or misapprehensions this meeting wishes to make it quite clear that no communal settlement by whomsoever arrived at or agreed to shall be acceptable to the Muslim community at large, unless and until all the demands embodied in the Muslim Conference resolution of the 1st January 1929, amplified by the resolution of April 1931, are fully conceded. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 195]

Mohammed Iqbal of the All-India Muslim Conference, Mohammed Yaqub of the Muslim League, A. H. Ghuznavi and A. Suhrawardy roundly condemned the unity efforts, looking upon them "with resentment, anxiety and alarm". All the labour expended on the deliberations of the Unity Conference was simply wasted.



The Third Round Table Conference, summoned by the British Government in the middle of November 1932, was, unlike the First and the Second sessions, a very small gathering and rushed through the agenda set beforehand in a short time. Altogether the deliberations lasted from 15 November to 24 December. The gathering functioned not so much as a conference as a committee of experts and consultants.

The British representation on the Conference was made up entirely of officials directly connected with the framing of the Government's India policy. No representatives of British political parties as such were invited. The team included the following: Ramsay MacDonald (Chairman of the Conference), Lord Sankay, Sir Samuel Hoare, Lord Hailsham, Sir John Simon, Lord Irwin, Davidson, Butler, Peel, Winterton, Reading and Lothian.

The rulers of Indian States were represented by their ministers: Oudh Narayan Bisaria, Krishnamachari, Liaquat Hyat Khan, Wajahat Husain, Akbar Hydari, Mirza Ismail and Manubhai Mehta. The small States were represented by the Raja of Sarila.

The British Indian delegation was made up of known loyalists with a few Liberals thrown in. The contingent comprised: the Aga Khan, B. R. Ambedkar, Hubert Carr, Nanak Chand, A. H. Ghuznavi, Henry Gidney, Hafiz Hidayat Husain, Mohammed Iqbal, M. R. Jayakar, Cowasji Jehangir, N.M. Joshi, N.C. Kelkar, Ramaswami Mudaliar, Begum Shah Nawaz, A.P. Patro, T. B. Saprú, Shafaat Ahmed Khan, Master Tara Singh, Nripendranath Sarkar, Purushottamdas Thakurdas and Zafarulla Khan.

The Conference confined itself to considering the reports of the committees appointed in the early months of the year following the Second Round Table



Conference, especially the report of the Indian Franchise Committee, which claimed the largest share of the Conference's time.

It dealt with such questions as the method of election for the Provincial and Federal legislatures, the basis of the franchise, share of the States' representatives therein, etc. The Lothian Committee, as earlier mentioned, had considered various options as regards the methods to be adopted in the election of members: (a) adult suffrage, (b) adult suffrage with indirect voting, (c) a modified form of adult suffrage, (d) a combination of direct and indirect voting, and (e) extension of direct voting as then existing. The Conference approved the last option.

The Conference, with a few dissensions, agreed that property qualifications, if need be with certain modification, should continue to be the basis of franchise. The suggestion that educational qualifications should also be considered in granting the right to vote was rejected. No decision was taken as regards the categories of women who could vote, but it was generally agreed that men and women votes should be in the ratio 4 1/2: 1. As regards the Depressed Classes, it was generally recognized that some modification of the basis of franchise in their case would be necessary, as in the existing conditions no more than 3 per cent of them would be entitled to vote. It was felt that the franchise for the Depressed Classes should cover approximately 10 per cent of the adult Depressed Classes population in each province.

As regards the Federal Legislature the Conference expressed the view that for the Lower House the representatives of British India should be directly elected on the basis of provincial franchise then existing, except in the case of the C.P., where the franchise would have to be doubled.



The representatives of the Indian States, who would make up 33 1/3 per cent of the strength of the House, would be appointed by the rulers of States.

In the Upper House the British Indian component which would be 60 per cent of the membership of the House, would be elected by members of provincial legislatures by single transferable vote. The Indian States' representatives, who would form 40 per cent of the strength of the House, would be appointed by the rulers.

The States' delegates were not satisfied with the quantum of representation being conceded to them. They demanded that in the Upper House they should have at least 125 members, while in a joint session of both houses their strength should be no less than 36 per cent. The demand was not accepted.

The Conference left undecided the question of the size of the Federal Legislature. The Lothian Committee had suggested that the Lower House might have a total membership of 450. This figure was considered too large and a figure of 300 was mentioned, but the discussion remained inconclusive.

The other matters the Conference took up included the legislative, administrative and financial relations between the Federation and the Provinces, setting up of a Federal Court and a Supreme Court, the area of responsibility at the Federal and Provincial levels, the powers and functions of the Governor-General and the Governors and so on. However, since the decisions of the Conference on these matters were incorporated in the White Paper issued by the British Government later, it would be redundant to touch upon them here.

The White Paper containing its proposals for the future constitution of India was issued by the British Government on 15 March 1933. It was a disappointing



document and justified the worst apprehensions of the Congress and Indian political opinion in general. However it did not occasion any surprise, since there had been enough indications in the shape of the Communal Award, the deliberations of the Round Table Conference, the views being aired off and on by British politicians and the hostility consistently being pursued by the Government towards the Congress notwithstanding the universal demand for change in this policy.

The document opened with a declaration of the British Government's intention to convert the existing system of government in India "into a responsibly governed Federation of States and Provinces". The responsibility however would be hedged in by "safeguards", not in the interests of India alone as demanded by Indians out "in the common interests of India and the United Kingdom".

The conception, it was stated, involved a "complete reconstruction of the existing Indian constitution", its repeal in *toto*. British India had so far been a unitary system, with the control vested in the Secretary of State, and such powers as the Provinces exercised were delegated powers. The States, on the other hand, were not part of British dominions and in a Federation of British India and the States, the range of powers exercised over the States by the Federation would be determined by what the States chose to surrender to the Federation.

The powers of the Federation would be exercised by the Governor-General, the Federal Legislature, the Federal Court and other such organs created by the Constitution Act.

The coming into being of the Federation was however conditional. It would be created by the issue of a proclamation by the King and the proclamation would be issued by the King only when he had been assured that rulers of States



representing "not less than half the aggregate population" and entitled to half the States' seats in the Upper Chamber had signified their desire to accede to the Federation and further when both Houses of Parliament had presented an address to the King that such a proclamation be issued.

The executive authority of the Federation, including the command of the armed forces, would be exercisable on the King's behalf by the Governor-General.

The Governor-General would himself control the administration of the departments of Defence, External Affairs and Ecclesiastical Affairs.

In addition to the responsibility for these reserved departments, the Governor-General would also have a "special responsibility" in respect of (a) prevention of any grave menace to the peace and tranquillity of India, (b) safeguarding of the financial stability of the Federation, (c) safeguarding of the interests of the minorities, (d) safeguarding of the interests of the Public Services, (e) prevention of commercial discrimination, (f) protection of the rights of Indian States, (g) any matter affecting the administration of any department under the Governor-General.

It would rest with the Governor-General in his discretion to determine which matter was likely to affect things falling within his "special responsibility".

To advise him in these matters the Governor-General would appoint a Financial Adviser, whose salary would not be votable by the Legislature.

For the administration of departments other than "reserved departments" and matters not covered by the clause about the "special responsibility", there would be a Council of Ministers chosen by the Governor-General and holding office at his pleasure. The persons appointed as ministers must be, or must



become within a specified period, members of either house of the Federal Legislature. The ministers would be chosen in consultation with the person who, in the judgment of the Governor-General, was likely to command the largest following in the Legislature. The ministers as chosen would include as far as possible representatives of minorities and of the States.

The Federal Legislature would consist of the King, represented by the Governor-General, and two Chambers, to be styled the Council of State and the House of Assembly. The Governor-General at his discretion would have the power to summon, prorogue or dissolve both or either Chamber simultaneously or separately. Each Council of State would continue for seven years and each Assembly for five years, if not dissolved by the Governor-General earlier.

The Council of State would have 260 members, 150 elected from British India, 100 appointed by the rulers of States and 10 nominated by the Governor-General.

The Assembly would consist of 375 members, of whom 250 would be elected from British India and 125 would be appointed by the rulers of States.

Each member of either Chamber would be required to swear an oath of allegiance to the King and his heirs and successors.

The White Paper then dealt with the legislative procedure, procedure with regard to financial proposals, emergency powers of the Governor-General, and provisions in the event of the breakdown of the constitution. The Governor-General, in all cases, was entrusted with overriding powers. He could promulgate Ordinances and by proclamation assume to himself all powers vested in any Federal authority.



It may be remembered that the Governor-General in his discretionary capacity was responsible only to the Secretary of State, who in turn was responsible to the British Parliament.

5

In the Governors' Provinces, which would include Bengal, Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, the Punjab, Bihar, the Central Provinces, Assam, the N.W.F.P., Sind and Orissa (about to be formed into a separate province), executive power would vest in the Governor, who would exercise it on behalf of the King and during his pleasure.

The Governor would be advised, except in matters left to his discretion, by a Council of Ministers, chosen in the same way as Ministers in the Federal Executive.

As in the case of the Governor-General, the Governor too would have "special responsibility" covering more or less the same area within the provincial jurisdiction.

Provincial Legislatures would consist of the King, represented by the Governor and one Chamber, to be known as the Legislative Assembly, except that in Bengal, the U.P. and Bihar, there would also be upper Chambers to be known as the Legislative Councils.

The Provincial Legislatures would be enlarged, the total membership of each being broadly as laid down in the Communal Award.

The basis of the Provincial Franchise would be property qualification, supplemented by an educational qualification common to men and women alike. There would further be a provision aimed at securing an electorate of at least 10 per cent of the Scheduled Caste population in each province.



It was envisaged that electoral rolls, when finally prepared, would enfranchise some 16 per cent of the population in Bengal, an even higher percentage of the population in Bombay, almost the same percentage in Madras and the U.P., while in the other provinces the percentage would be substantially lower, the lowest being in Bihar and Orissa, where the electorate might form about 9 per cent of the total population. The total provincial electorate would be about 14 per cent of the total population, or about 27 per cent of the adult population.

Legislative procedure, the rules regarding legislative business and procedure as regards the Bills would be identical to those at the Federal level, the Governor at the Provincial level having the same powers to make or unmake things as the Governor-General at the Federal level.

Then there were areas styled as Chief Commissioners' Provinces, viz., British Baluchistan, Delhi, Ajmer-Merwara, Coorg and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These remained outside the jurisdiction of the Federal Assembly and were to be governed either directly by the Governor-General, as in the case of British Baluchistan, or by a Chief Commissioner appointed by him at his discretion. In the Provinces there would be excluded areas or partially excluded areas where the writ of Provincial Assemblies or even of the Federal Legislature would not run except as the Governor thought fit.

The legislative fields of the Federal and Provincial Legislatures would be defined in terms of subjects to be scheduled to the Constitution Act. There would be a Federal List of subjects, a Provincial List and also a Concurrent List. In regard to certain subjects the Federal Legislature was debarred from making laws, for instance subjects concerned with the Army, Navy or Air Force and laws pertaining



to British nationals. Any discussion of the Constitution Act itself would be outside the purview of the Federal Legislature.

As regards judicature, it was proposed to set up a Federal Court, with a Chief Justice and a specified number of judges, to be appointed by the King and holding office during his pleasure.

The Federal Court would have jurisdiction in matters involving interpretation of the Constitution Act where the parties in the dispute were the Federation and a Province or a State, or two Provinces, or a Province and a State. The Court would also have an exclusive appellate jurisdiction over any decision given by any High Court or any State Court so far as it involved an interpretation of the Constitution Act. The King in Council would as before continue to be the final Court of Appeal.

There would be provision also for setting up a Supreme Court for British India which would hear appeals from decisions of High Courts in British India. But it would be for the Federal Legislature to take a decision in the matter. Any Bill introduced towards setting up such a Court would require the previous sanction of the Governor-General which he might give or withhold at his discretion.

In the Provinces the existing High Courts, known as Chartered High Courts, would continue as before.

The bureaucracy, "the steel frame" of British rule in India, would be given fool-proof protection under the proposed dispensation. All officials would be indemnified against civil and criminal proceedings in respect of acts committed before the commencement of the Constitution Act. There would be provisions made to safeguard the rights of personnel belonging to public services, a large category of them recruited by the Secretary of State. Recruitment for the Civil



Services would continue to be made by the Secretary of State, so also the recruitment for the superior Medical and Railways services.

There would be a Federal Public Service Commission and Provincial Public Service Commissions. Members of the Federal Public Service Commission would be appointed by the Secretary of State and those of the Provincial Public Service Commissions by Governors. The emoluments of the members of Public Service Commissions would not be subject to the vote of the Legislatures.

It was further intended, though the matter was not covered by the proposals, to set up a Statutory Railway Board so that the administration of railways could be placed beyond "political interference".

It had been suggested at the Round Table Conference that the Constitution Act should contain a statement of Fundamental Rights. This suggestion was not found acceptable. His Majesty's Government saw "serious objections to giving statutory expression to any large range of declarations of this character".

Finally there was the ominous paragraph:

The Constitution Act, though treating the Federation as a whole, will contain provisions enabling the Provincial Constitutions for which it provides, to be brought into being if necessary before the Constitution as a whole comes into being. Transitory provisions, also to be included in the Constitution Act, will enable in that event temporary modifications to be made in the provisions of the Constitution Act for the purpose of continuing the existence of the present Indian Legislature. . . .

The implication was that the so-called Federation was only a possibility, not a certainty and that in all likelihood the Central Government would continue to function under the Government of India Act, 1919. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. I, pp. 295-342]



The British Government's constitutional proposals, as contained in the White Paper were found to be so unsatisfactory, so retrograde in every way that far from satisfying the aspirations of Indians, they came under severe attack from the Labour Party in Britain, under whose administration the whole exercise of constitutional reform had been initiated in the late twenties.

Well before the publication of the White Paper, on 27 February 1933, Sir Henry Page Croft, a Tory back-bencher, had tabled a motion in the House of Commons declaring that Central Responsibility was inexpedient in India and that extension of self-government should be started with the Provinces. He had referred to the grave anxiety felt in Lancashire at the prospect of India being given Responsible Government.

Sir Samuel Hoare tried to allay the anxiety. He assured the House that the Government had not the least intention of abandoning their Indian obligations and losing India to the Empire. He asked the members to suspend judgment till the White Paper was published. [*Ibid*, pp. 343-45]

The debate on the White Paper began in the Commons on 27 March, when the House considered a motion of Sir Samuel Hoare for the appointment of a Joint Committee of Peers and Commons to consider the Government's proposals for constitutional reforms in India.

To a section of the Tories, represented by Churchill, any talk of self-government for India was anathema. One of them, Reginald Craddock, deprecated any suggestion of democracy for a country "with so many warring races and hostile interests". Churchill saw in the White Paper "a definite decline, even the disappearance, of our authority in India". The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, he declared, had had the effect of arousing agitation and increasing



disloyalty. He warned that transfer of responsibility to Indian hands, after 180 years of British rule, would be a disaster and there would be heard "the dull roar and scream of carnage and confusion coming back tous". Warfare in the Provinces would proceed simultaneously with graver disturbances at the summit. Nobody in India or England liked the scheme. The opposition would only use it as a starting point for further departures and it was easy to remove the safeguards.

Churchill found it an uncomfortable thought that over the preceding 50 years the population of India had increased by a hundred million "by reason of the prevention of wars and famine and the control of infanticide". He declared that it would have been far better if British rule had resulted "not in the mere multiplication of teeming humanity on the lowest levels of subsistence, but in the substantial raising of the standard of life and labour and in smaller number".

Samuel Hoare reassured Churchill and others sharing his views. He said under the scheme the Governor-General, the Provincial Governors and other high officials would continue to be appointed by the Crown. The security services and executive officers of the Federal and Provincial Governments would still be recruited and protected by Parliament and the Army would remain under the undivided control of the British. The safeguards were no paper safeguards. There were no less than 47 Central subjects for which the Governor-General was responsible.

The apprehensions of an "extremist" majority – that is to say Congress majority – at the Centre, he said, were ill founded. An analysis of the proposals would show that it was impossible for the extremists to control the Federal Centre. And in Provinces, such as Bengal, it would be extremely difficult for them to secure majorities.



On behalf of the Labour opposition Clement Attlee read a statement sharply attacking the White Paper for the shift in policy it represented. The Round Table Conference, which was a procedure started by the Labour Government, had been dismissed, the structure of conciliation had been shattered. An era of repression against the Congress had been started, which was a mistake, because it was impossible to smash the Congress by force and reach a satisfactory settlement with a few Indians. There was no mention of Dominion Status in the White Paper and no suggestion that the powers of the Governor-General and the Governors would lapse at any time. He deplored the establishment of second chambers in the landlord-ridden provinces of Bengal, Bihar and the U.P. Every vested interest was protected, so that the banker would reign in Delhi as in London and the landlord would rule the Council of State as in the Lords.

Col. Wedgwood denounced the White Paper as a cowardly abdication by Parliament which would be unable in future to ask questions on such matters as the Meerut sentences, the hours of labour, work in the mines and the use of troops in dealing with peasants in Indian States. The proposals envisaged giving power to a narrow class of Princes who represented absolutism and to elected members who would be millionaires or nominees of millionaires. It would be like the Venetian oligarchy.

Maxton of the Independent Labour Party was even more scathing. He said the discussion had been only about how much England was to interfere in the affairs of India, and nobody – by which he meant the British Labour Party – had suggested that she should not interfere at all. He expressed the view that England had no right to be in India. The only decent thing she could do was to withdraw and let Indians live their own lives and conduct their own affairs. He wished to see India free and independent and wipe out the rule of the Princes,



money-lenders and millionaires. The fight must be a fight of the common people of India for the removal of poverty and exploitation.

Lansbury of the Labour Party reminded the House that from the very inception of the Imperial relationship with India the assumption had been that sooner or later India would govern herself. He said he could not accept Sir Samuel Hoare's assertion that by suppressing the Congress the British had brought peace to reign in India. Surely when they suppressed people, wiped out free speech and right of public meetings and denied contacts between very large sections of people, it could not be called peace. They would find that it was impossible to administer any laws in India unless they had the consent of the great mass of organized opinion in India. Wedgwood Benn and Irwin, although they had suppressed the Congress and imprisoned thousands, had all the same steadily kept it in mind that they must convince the Congress leaders that they were in earnest about giving India Dominion Status.

Concluding, Lansbury said that he believed that Imperialism had had its day, that it had failed. He believed that the white races would have to change their attitude of mind towards those they called the subject races.

The Government's motion to establish a Joint Select Committee was passed by a majority of 448 to 43 votes. [*Ibid*, pp. 345-64]

In the House of Lords, which debated India from 4th to 6th April, Lord Sankey, on behalf of the Government, took pains to assure the members that nothing of substance was being parted with. Indeed, he said, Indian politicians had been saying that they would not work the reforms proposed because the British were giving them the husk and keeping the kernel. What was most important about the proposed constitution were the safeguards, which would be



secure because of the powers to be exercised by the Governor-General, the Governors, the Army and the Services. The Governor-General would not only have the right but the power in the last resort to put the Army in motion and take over the Government, while in less formidable situations he could disallow Acts passed by the Legislature and make Ordinances and pass Governors' Acts.

Whatever course was pursued, he said, would be fraught with risk. "To grant complete independence is a risk; to do little or nothing is a risk," he told the Peers. The scheme proposed would give them breathing space for many years, but if they rejected it, they might have to go even farther.

Lord Snell, speaking for the Labour Party, tried to raise his voice of protest. Lord Sankey, he said, appeared to emphasize not what should be given to India but what should be withheld. The safeguards had been designed mainly in the interests of Britain. It was mere adroitness to say that self-government was being withheld. The safeguards proposal would leave the soul of India affronted. The solemn pledges about Dominion Status had not been honoured.

But the voice of Labour was feeble and their protestations sounded half-hearted. While the Party denounced the provisions of the White Paper, in the same breath it promised its cooperation in the work of the Joint Select Committee.

Linlithgow referred to the fears of the effects of self-government on the rural population – meaning the zamindars – and said that if the principle of representative government was applied too hastily, it might give rise to assault on the rights of property.

Lord Lamington lamented the tendency among Indian leaders to assert Indians' right to secede from the Empire, when they needed the British to protect them from people across the Frontier, who were awaiting Britain's disappearance



for an opportunity to loot. There would then ensue devastation on a scale unseen for centuries.

Lord Brabourne, a former secretary to Samuel Hoare, welcomed the proposals if only because they would provide an opportunity to the conservative forces in India, which were then dormant, to assert themselves. The Congress then would be weakened because there would be nothing to hold the Congressmen together.

Lord Middleton was apprehensive. He did not know a single white man knowing India who was optimistic. All feared terrible chaos because the elements of democracy were lacking. He thought instead of saddling India with the kind of constitution proposed, it would have been better to expand the existing States and create new ones, so as to evolve a United States of India under the Viceroy with a powerful army. He opposed the idea of transferring the responsibility for law and order to responsible ministries in the Provinces. Governors, he said, should be in charge of the police. [*Ibid*, pp. 364-76]

8

The reaction in India to the White Paper was universal indignation. This found voice in the debate on the White Paper in the Central Legislative Assembly on 29, 30 and 31 March 1933. When the Government moved for consideration of the White Paper, Sir Abdur Rahim, leader of the opposition, moved an amendment saying that unless the proposals for constitutional reforms were substantially amended in the direction of conceding greater responsibility and freedom of action to people's representatives in the Central and Provincial spheres of Government, it would not be possible to ensure peace, contentment or progress of the country.



Speaking on his amendment Abdur Rahim condemned the safeguards and the reserved powers, on which no limitation had been set. The powers proposed to be conferred on the Governor-General and Governors were similar to those under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. He was further opposed to federation with the States, thus blending medievalism with progressivism.

B. Das asserted that the White Paper did not give a constitution, it gave safeguards.

Bhai Parmanand of the Hindu Mahasabha vehemently denounced the Communal Award, on which the proposals of the White Paper were based. It was vindictive, he said, mainly devised to keep the Hindus, who formed 75 per cent of India's population, out of power. Under the proposals they would be reduced to a minority in the Federal Legislature.

Sir Cowasji Jehangir criticised the wide powers sought to be given to the Viceroy under Special Responsibility. What was there, he asked, to prevent him from interfering with the legitimate responsibilities of Ministers?

Ranga Iyer said safeguards *per se* could not be objected to so long as they were demonstrably in the interests of India. But the safeguards being proposed were not in the interests of India, especially the financial safeguards. The Financial Adviser to the Governor-General, who would not be responsible to the Legislature, would be an autocrat. Unless his position was rigidly defined, fiscal autonomy would be reduced to nullity, because no Minister would be able to maintain independence in the midst of fear, panic and constant trepidation. The Financial Adviser must not be a representative of British vested interests.

Ramaswami Mudaliar criticized the provision under which personnel for the Services would continue to be recruited by the Secretary of State instead of by the Government of India, as was decided by the Round Table Conference. This



would be so not only as regards the I.C.S. and the Police Service, but also as regards superior services in the Railways. A Minister would not be able to post an officer in an All-India service without the concurrence of the Governor.

Referring to the proposal for the setting up of a statutory Railway Board, Mudaliar asked why the Railway companies should go to the Secretary of State for arbitration and not to the Government of India or the Federal Court. He referred to the provision in the White Paper that the Federation would come into being after the Reserve Bank had been established and was working. It might take years, he said.

H. P. Mody said to ensure good government the control of the Secretary of State in day-to-day administration would have to be eliminated. He also asked that the control of the Reserve Bank should be placed in Indian hands.

Moulvi Shafi Daudi said the White Paper contained more safeguards than the powers proposed to be given to Indians. But he would not want even a letter of the safeguards dropped till the Hindus changed their mentality and were willing to treat the minorities with justice and fair play.

The official side did not take part in the debate and Sir Abdur Rahim's amendment was passed unanimously. [*Ibid*, pp. 160-67]

Of the political parties, among the first to comment on the White Paper were the All India Muslim Conference and the Hindu Mahasabha.

The Muslim Conference executive board, which met in New Delhi on 26 March under the presidentship of Mohammed Iqbal, expressed its "profound disappointment" with the scheme of reforms outlined in the White Paper, since it failed to meet "the demand of the Muslim community".



It demanded the largest measure of provincial autonomy in fiscal, administrative and legislative matters and curtailment of the powers of the Governors; fundamental safeguards for the protection of the personal law, education and culture of the Muslims; provision for effective representation of Muslims in public services and the army; "a slightly increased proportion over one-third of the British Indian share" in the Upper House and separate electorate for election to the Upper House. It further demanded that the electoral qualifications of the landholders' constituency in Bihar and Bengal should be reduced, so that Muslim vote in these Provinces was increased. [*Ibid*, pp. 413-14]

The Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee also met in New Delhi on 26 and 27 March to consider the White Paper. In the resolution passed on the subject the Sabha expressed the view that the constitution foreshadowed in the White Paper was "most disappointing and inadequate and even retrogressive". The whole conception of the constitution, the resolution said, was based on the assumption that India was a conquered territory belonging to the Crown. Contrary to past assurances, the safeguards proposed were not in the interests of India and no time had been fixed during which they would be operative.

The resolution condemned the extraordinary powers given to the Governor-General, whereby he could make Acts even without a reference to the Legislature and appropriate funds at will; he could appoint counsellors for the administration of the reserved department. Defence and Foreign Affairs, and the choice of counsellors would not be restricted to the members of the Legislature. No provision had been made for the complete Indianization of the Army, fundamental rights had not been defined nor any provision made for their inclusion in the constitution. The Communal Award, which had been made the basis of the constitution, the resolution said, was predominantly pro-Muslim and



highly unjust to the Hindus. It was unacceptable to the Hindus inasmuch as it provided for separate electorates and undue weightage to the Muslims. [*Ibid*, pp. 419-20]

The National Liberal Federation met in Calcutta on 15 April to consider the constitutional proposals of the British Government. Srinivasa Sastri, proposing Ramachandra Rao for presiding at the session, sounded quite dispirited. He said:

I believe our political fortune is now at such a low ebb that if I could I would really withdraw national demands for a while. I would beg our leaders not to press them forward on this occasion, for they seem to be coming up against a dead wall.

He said it was too late to try and stop the political machine which had been set in motion and gathered a great deal of momentum, and it had been got hold of by minorities and special interests, who were controlling it.

Ramachandra Rao in his presidential address reviewed the events since the Viceroyalty of Irwin, how with the fall of the Labour Government under the impact of a fast worsening economic situation, and coming into being of a National Government in England, "Irwinism" had come to be replaced by "Willingdonism". A marked change had thus come about in the British attitude towards India. Repression had been let loose, ordinary laws had been suspended and all kinds of excesses had been perpetrated.

Could the proposals contained in the White Paper raise India to the status of a self-governing Dominion? The answer was no. One disturbing feature of the proposals was that one really did not know whether or when the Federation would come into being. First there was the condition of the establishment of the Reserve Bank, which was not possible until "the Indian budgetary position is assured and until the existing short-term debt is substantially reduced and



adequate reserves have been accumulated and also until India's normal export surplus has been restored". Then, it was not certain whether the States would agree to join the Federation in sufficient numbers. There was a further difficulty. The Royal Proclamation for bringing the Federation into being could only come after the presentation of an address to the King by both Houses of Parliament to that effect. There was nothing to prevent either House from refusing to vote such an address.

Ramachandra Rao severely criticized the States' insistence on the precondition that their sovereignty should be fully protected and respected, their rights under treaties, sanads or engagements should remain inviolate and inviolable and that the rights and obligations of the Crown to the States should remain wholly unaltered after the establishment of the Federation. There was nothing in the White Paper about how the relationship between the Crown and the States would be modified on the States joining the Federation.

Ramachandra Rao also asked for gradual withdrawal of British troops and for the creation of a National Army.

The resolution passed by the Federation recorded its profound disappointment with the White Paper. No scheme of reforms, it said, could meet India's requirements which did not confer full status and powers of a Dominion on India. The Liberal Federation could not accept the conditions laid down precedent to the coming into being of the Federation. It asked for the curtailment of the powers of the Governor-General, abolition of the India Office and India Council, drawing up of a scheme for the Indianization of the Army, throwing open recruitment to the army to all communities and increasing the strength of the Federal Assembly to 450, as recommended by the Simon Commission. The resolution asked that all the members of the Assembly should be directly



representatives of the federating units, with some form of indirect election being allowed in the case of States for a transitory period, and that the Council of States should have no right to consider demands for grants or Money Bills. The resolution condemned the financial safeguards as being unnecessary and objectionable and also safeguards against commercial discrimination, which were calculated to hamper Indian trade and industrial development.

The communal electorates, the resolution said, must not be perpetuated, the minorities representation to be secured through reservation of seats. As regards the proposals concerning the Services, they were the most reactionary and objectionable; they were contrary to the recommendations of the Service Sub-Committee of the first Round Table Conference and would reduce Responsible Government and Provincial autonomy to a mockery. [*Ibid*, pp. 430-44]

10

So far as the question of the States joining the Federation was concerned, the picture was far from clear. Even though the White Paper laid down that the States, which together contained 24 per cent of India's population, would have one-third of the total seats in the Federal Assembly and two-fifths of seats in the Council of State, all to be filled by nomination by the Rulers of States, the Chamber of Princes, which assembled in Delhi from 20 to 25 March, gave no assurance that the Princes would come into the Federation. The resolution passed by the Chamber on 24 March said:

This Chamber places on record its strong opinion that the entry of the Princes into the Federation depends upon the inclusion in the constitution and the treaties of accession, of the essential safeguards for which the States have consistently pressed.



The safeguards sought were contained in an 18-Point memorandum submitted to the British Cabinet earlier on behalf of the Princes, which laid down the conditions precedent to the States coming in. Some of these conditions were:

- (1) Any amendment to the constitution shall for the purpose of its introduction require in the first instance a two-thirds majority of the House in which it is being introduced, and will only become law after separate ratification and acceptance by three-fourths of the Indian States represented in the Federal Legislature. . . .
- (2) The Federal Government will have no concern with the form of government in the States, and the method of selecting representatives of the Indian States to the Federal Legislature.
- (6) There shall be absolute guarantee for the connection of India with the British Crown.
- (8) The States shall enter the Federation by means of treaties made with the Crown and the provisions of these treaties shall be outside the operation of Parliamentary or Federal legislation. These treaties may provide special safeguards for the particular interests of individual States and will admit of reservations being made by any State that may so desire.
- (9) The appellate jurisdiction of the Federal Court shall not extend over the courts of Indian States. . . .
- (11) Reference to the administration of individual States in regard to non-Federal matters or against individual rulers or Governments of States shall not come within the purview of the Federal Legislature.



- (13) Federal laws should not apply *proprio vigore* to Indian States, but the States should accept and pass Federal laws as State laws and such laws should operate as State laws within the territories of States. . . .
- (15) The Crown shall be required to incorporate provisions in the constitution retaining power and sanction for itself to secure respect for treaties which have been declared by the King Emperor as inviolate and inviolable and to see that the obligations and agreements contracted by both the parties, namely, the States and the Crown, are not encroached upon by the Federal Executive or Legislature and are not varied or abrogated without the free consent of both the parties.
- (16) The Constitution shall provide . . . that no unfriendly act shall be permitted by one federating unit against another and that there shall be no interference, direct or indirect, in the internal affairs of any State.

The rulers were informed by the spokesmen of the British Government that they need entertain absolutely no apprehensions on the score of the safeguards demanded.

At the meeting of the Chamber some of the rulers expressed their fear of the influence of democracy coming into their States. But they were told the risk would have to be faced. In any case democracy and autocracy, if brought together, had equal chances of diluting each other.

A ticklish issue faced by the Chamber, as well as by the British Government, was the allocation of seats to different States. The White Paper had left the issue undecided. An arrangement of alternate representation in the Upper House was mooted, by which the occupants of seats would change every year. In any case it was recognized that equal representation could not be given to the chamber States. Grouping of States was another alternative. It was decided that a



determined effort should be made for an agreed allocation of the seats, which His Majesty's Government would approve. [*Ibid*, pp. 475-86]

11

The subjects of Indian States, forming no less than 24 per cent of India's population, were of course not taken into consideration in formulating the constitution scheme. They had not been represented at any of the three sessions of the Round Table Conference. They had been given no representation on the Indian delegation that had been appointed in April 1933 for consultation with the Joint Select Committee of Parliament. This delegation had 21 members chosen from British India and seven appointed by the Rulers of Indian States.

The views of the States' people were succinctly summarized at the Punjab States' People's Conference held in Delhi on 5 April, by its President A. V. Patwardhan. He called upon the leaders of British India to reject the White Paper *in toto*, for no possible improvements in it could make it acceptable to the States' people. What the States' people wanted was (1) popular election of States' representatives in the Federal Legislature, (2) declaration of the rights of the States' people, enforceable through the Federal Court, (3) federalization of civil and criminal law in the States, (4) residual powers to be vested in the Federal Government. [*Ibid*, p. 486]

The executive committee of the Indian States' People's Conference met in Bombay on 30 April under the presidentship of Govindlal Shivilal Pitty and passed the following resolution:

This meeting enters its emphatic protest against the exclusion of the representatives of the States' people from all Round Table Conferences and the Indian Committee sitting with the Joint Select Committee and registers its opinion that the White Paper . . . cannot be acceptable to them since



their position has been deliberately ignored throughout, and all the rights and privileges that are proposed for the States are reserved for and are vested in the Princes and their nominees.

The resolution further asked for election of States' representatives in the Federal Legislature, guaranteeing of fundamental rights and Federal citizenship to the people of the States, extension of Federal laws to the States without their having to be ratified by the States and vesting of paramountcy, after a transitional period, in the Federal Government. [*Ibid*, p. 486]

The British were as keenly aware as the Princes themselves of the danger that lay ahead in the experiment of mixing democracy with autocracy in the Federal scheme. They were quick to realize that the Princes would need to be protected from agitations developing in the States under the influence of popular movements in British India. Accordingly they brought forward a bill in the Central Assembly on 28 August 1933, styled the Indian States (Protection) Bill. The statement of objects and reasons appended to the Bill said:

Experience of recent years has shown that ordinary law is not adequate to afford the States in India protection . . . against activities which may be carried on in British India with the object of subverting or exciting disaffection towards . . . the administration of such States. The forthcoming constitutional changes, moreover, were making it desirable that the authorities in British India should have the power to protect units of the Federation from agitation directed against them from British India. . . .

The Bill sought to protect the rulers of States, especially against attacks in the Press and organization and movement of *jathas*.

There was considerable opposition from Indian members. N.M. Joshi said the Bill aimed at supporting maladministration in the States. The people of Indian



States did not even enjoy elementary rights; they could not even hold meetings to ventilate their grievances.

Neogy, dealing with the provisions in the Bill regarding bringing the States' administration into contempt, said that there were States in India in whose case a mere statement of true facts would bring them into contempt. The best way for the States to fight scurrilous writings, as Lord Irwin had advised, was for them to issue regular administration reports.

Cowasji Jehangir also criticized the attempt to gag the press. The administration of certain States was very bad and the Government knew it.

Others who opposed the Bill were M. P. Mody, Sir Abdur Rahim and Ramaswamy Mudaliar. Having passed the committee stage, the Bill was put to vote on 11 April 1934 and carried by 57 to 28 votes. The rulers certainly had a large number of friends in the Central Assembly. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, pp. 87, 107, 115; 1934, Vol. I, pp. 141-48]

The inadequate representation provided for women in the White Paper was another issue that roused feelings in political circles.

Franchise for the Federal Assembly was to be the existing franchise for the Provincial Councils, with the property qualifications, on which it was based, supplemented by an educational qualification common to men and women. This would result in the ratio of men and women voters remaining unchanged. The plea for a differential franchise based on education for women was rejected on grounds of administrative difficulties.

The All-India Women's Conference, held in Calcutta from 27 to 30 December 1933, expressed its disappointment at this neglect of women. The president, Lady Abdul Qadir of Lahore, regretted that the claims of women had not been



recognized and the franchise proposed was even less than that recommended by the Simon Commission and the Indian Franchise Committee. But she asked the assembly not to be disheartened. They must remember that even in advanced countries of the West the task of women seeking to secure their rights had been uphill.

The Conference passed a resolution, moved by Sarojini Naidu, reiterating the demand for increased franchise for women. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, pp. 276-80]

Similar resolutions were passed by various other women's conferences.

12

Although political parties and groups of all hues were outdoing each other all the time breathing fire and fulminating against the constitutional proposals contained in the White Paper, the far-seeing among them were not slow to see which way their bread would be buttered. Those calling themselves nationalists began edging away from the Congress in an attempt to grab the carrot being dangled before them.

On 30 August 1933 some politicians from Bombay met to chalk out their strategy in the changed situation and decided to form a Maharashtra Democratic Swaraj Party. This they did at the Maharashtra Political Conference held in Bombay on 28 October. Speaker after speaker at the Conference inveighed against the Congress and its policies, Gandhiji being the special target of attack.

Jamnadas Mehta described the policy of the Congress as a conspiracy of silence and inaction and declared that the first task before the country was to break the spell of Mahatma Gandhi.

N. C. Kelkar, who opened the proceedings, said he was glad that the masses had been released from the onerous obligation of Civil Disobedience. For Civil



Disobedience only meant a sullen static aloofness from the political machine. The machine must be grasped and controlled if the problems of the country were to be solved. It was admitted, even by the Congress, that an adequate measure of political reforms could be secured only through a Parliamentary Statute. Such reform must necessarily be less than full independence.

Kelkar expressed the hope that the Congress, when it came to power, would not become a partisan of this or that interest, that it would not take extreme measures of social legislation.

Brahminvadi Ramrao Deshmukh, who presided, denounced the policy of boycott of the Councils pursued by the Congress, calling it a serious blunder. [*Ibid*, pp. 253-60]

Jawaharlal Nehru did not take kindly to the formation of this new party. In a statement he said sarcastically that the leaders of the party appeared to believe in the principle of "safety first". [*India in 1932-33*, p. 42]



CHAPTER VIII: THE HARIJAN TOUR - I

1

Gandhiji had declared that it was his intention to consider himself a prisoner till 3 August 1934, when his one-year sentence would have expired. He therefore scrupulously avoided any public comment on political matters during this period and concentrated all his energies on Harijan work. Gandhiji's unflinching adherence to the programme of Civil Disobedience was well known and well understood. The self-imposed restraint in this regard, therefore, came as a godsend to those who had been endeavouring to steer the Congress away from Civil Disobedience and commit it to the Council-entry programme, especially in view of the constitutional pot-pourri promised by the British Government in the White Paper.

Madan Mohan Malaviya wrote to Nehru, seeking a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee. He also issued a statement welcoming Gandhiji's decision to stay away from politics for a year and asking that the A.I.C.C. be convened to consider what programme of work it should recommend to the country.

Jawaharlal Nehru was reluctant to convene the A.I.C.C. There were difficulties in the way, he said in a statement. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, pp. 360-61]

Gandhiji agreed that it would "do no good to have the A.I.C.C. meeting". Writing to Malaviya on 15 October, he reiterated his impression that if the A.I.C.C. should meet it would by an overwhelming majority pass a resolution endorsing the continuance of the civil resistance movement. But of course if Malaviya wanted a meeting he should requisition it, and have a programme ready to be placed before the meeting. Gandhiji further said that he would gladly attend such



a meeting and say his say. He would equally gladly refrain from attending it if a body of responsible members desired his absence. [C.W.M.G., LVI, pp. 95-96]

Gandhiji arrived in Wardha on 23 September and wanted soon after to start out on the Harijan tour, but seeing that his recovery, following his recent fast, was somewhat slow, Dr. Khare and others prevailed upon him to have at least six weeks' rest before undertaking a prolonged tour.

Apart from writing for *Harijan*, attending to correspondence and addressing meetings concerning the Harijan movement, Gandhiji during this period of enforced rest, devoted his attention to sorting out the matter of the land and buildings of the Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, which had been dissolved on 31 July 1933. The Government having declined to take over the property, Gandhiji consulted such of the Trustees of the Ashram as were outside jail and decided that it should be handed over to the Harijan Sevak Sangh for the furtherance of the work of Harijan welfare.

He suggested that the Sangh should form a committee comprising G. D. Birla, Thakkar Bapa and three Ahmedabad citizens to take over the Satyagraha Ashram, which would now have the following objects:

- (i) to settle on the Ashram ground approved Harijan families subject to regulations to be framed;
- (ii) to open a hostel for Harijan boys and girls with liberty to take non-Harijans;
- (iii) to conduct a technological department for teaching the art of skinning carcasses, tanning the hide so obtained, curing it and manufacturing from leather so prepared shoes, sandals and other articles of daily use; and lastly



- (iv) to use the premises as offices for the Central Board or the Gujarat provincial organization or both, and such other allied uses as the committee . . . may think proper. [*Ibid*, pp. 41-42]

Gandhiji was unwilling to be involved in the running of the institution or in any responsibility in regard to admissions into it. He clearly told Thakkar Bapa that "running the Harijan Ashram or Mandir or Nivas, whatever you call it" was to be his responsibility and that he should follow his own plan in the matter, treating Gandhiji only as an adviser. [*Ibid*, pp. 148-49]

2

Gandhiji had left the matter of arranging his tour programme to the Harijan Sevak Sangh and accordingly on 7 November, when the tour officially began, Thakkar Bapa, the General Secretary of the Sangh, issued a meticulously worked out, though only tentative, tour programme. The tour was to last nine months, from November 1933 to the end of July 1934. It was to cover the Central Provinces (31 days), Delhi (5 days), Andhra (14 days), Madras City (5 days), Mysore-Malabar (10 days), Cochin- Travancore (7 days), Tamil Nadu (20 days), Orissa (7 days), Bengal (28 days), Assam (7 days), Bihar (14 days), the United Provinces (35 days), the Punjab (14 days), Sind (7 days), Rajputana (7 days), Gujarat-Kathiawar (14 days), Bombay City (7 days), Maharashtra-Hyderabad Deccan (17 days), and Karnataka (7 days).

The days indicated in brackets against each province were to be the total number of days, including days of rest and those spent on journey. Of the total of 266 days from 7 November to 31 July, 173 days were specified as days of public engagements, leaving 93 days for rest, train travel and for attending to correspondence. Mondays and Tuesdays would be kept free – 24 hours for



silence and another 24 hours for correspondence and other work. [*Ibid*, pp. 502-4]

Gandhiji tried strictly to keep to the programme as worked out, but in 1934 events forced him to alter the schedule considerably, and he ended the tour not on 31 July, as per the programme but on 3 August.

On the tour Gandhiji's party included Thakkar Bapa, Mirabehn, Chandrashankar Shukla, Ramnarayan Chowdhary, Uma Bajaj, Ramnath 'Suman' of the Sasta Sahitya Mandal, Vishwanath, Nayar (presumably Krishna Nayar of Delhi) and one or two other co-workers. [*Ibid*, pp. 81-82, 189, 200, 222]

Gandhiji formally started the tour on 7 November by a visit to a near-by village Selu, where he opened a temple to Harijans and then addressed a meeting, telling his audience that there was no place for untouchability in Hinduism, and that if untouchability was not eradicated Hinduism must perish. Returning to Wardha, he addressed another public meeting. Describing Wardha as the geographical centre of India, he hoped that, with Jamnalal Bajaj and Vinoba Bhave associated with the place, it would also become the centre of the anti-untouchability movement.

On 8 November Gandhiji left Wardha for Nagpur, where he remained till the 10th, visiting many institutions and speaking at many places.

At a sweepers' meeting, asking for donations for the cause, Gandhiji said he rejoiced at the thought that he had been instrumental in making many lawyers, doctors and merchants give their all for the cause and embrace voluntary poverty. A lady divested herself of her gold bangles. Referring to the gift, Gandhiji said that in a country like India where people had to walk miles to earn one pice a day, it did not behove anyone to wear jewellery.



Speaking at the public meeting later, Gandhiji appealed to the Sanatanists to show tolerance towards the reformers, even as they showed tolerance towards followers of other faiths. The reformers on their part, he added, must persevere gently and patiently to convert the Sanatanists to their view. There was no place for violence or coercion in the movement.

Speaking at a students' meeting on 9 November Gandhiji asked them to devote a part of their spare time every day to Harijan work. Their worth would be measured not by whether they could speak faultless English but by their service of the poor. They must go to the Harijan quarters, sweep their roads, wash their children and educate them.

The popular response that Gandhiji received was most enthusiastic. Wherever he went crowds assembled, as he told Vallabhbhai in a letter from Nagpur. Money and jewellery came pouring in. The programme was so packed that, Gandhiji informed Nehru in a letter on 11 November, the four hours allowed each day for rest, bath and dinner had dwindled to two. Altogether, during his three days at Nagpur, Gandhiji visited Ramtek, Saoner, Tumser, Bhandara and Gondia and attended some fifteen public engagements. [*Ibid*, pp. 194-214, 501-02]

On the morning of 11 November Gandhiji returned to Wardha. He was to open a temple to Harijans at Deoli, but the Sanatanists blocked the way and requested Gandhiji to stop the anti-untouchability movement. The police arrested some persons. Gandhiji asked the reformers not to force the pace and not to retaliate. The aim of the movement was not to score a victory over the Sanatanists. He hoped that those arrested would be released. [*Ibid*, pp. 215-17]



After a two days' stay at Wardha, Gandhiji was on the road again on the 13th. His first stop was Hinganghat, where he visited the Harijan quarters and addressed a public meeting. In the evening he was at Chanda. Here Gandhiji tried to catch up with his correspondence and wrote several letters. In a letter to Nehru he clarified certain issues the latter had raised in connection with the Harijan campaign. Gandhiji advised that only those Congressmen should participate in the campaign who did not wish to court arrest. Also, Civil Disobedience and the Harijan movement must be kept apart. Harijan work must not be used to strengthen the C.D. movement, for that would damage both the Congress and the Harijan cause. [*Ibid*, p. 221]

On the 14th there were several public engagements at Chanda and in the vicinity, including a public meeting in the evening. On the 15th Gandhiji addressed public meetings at Warora and Wun in the morning, visited Brany and Umani and in the evening addressed a meeting of workers at Yeotmal and visited a Harijan boarding school.

The party halted for the night at Yeotmal and early in the morning the next day left for Amraoti, visiting on the way Dhamangaon and Chandur. There were no less than four public engagements to attend to: a children's meeting, a women's meeting and a public meeting, besides a visit to Hanuman Vyayamshala, a gymnasium primarily for Harijan youth. At the largely attended public meeting Gandhiji exhorted the audience to take part in the Harijan work, which he described as a *yajna*. Those who had money could give it for the cause. Those who had leisure and intelligence to spare could teach Harijan children and give them lessons in personal hygiene and cleanliness. It was a work in which Congressmen as well as non-Congressmen could participate. So far as



Congressmen were concerned those among them who believed in civil disobedience, were not expected to give up civil disobedience. Only, they must not hold any office in Harijan service organizations.

Writing to Agatha Harrison on the same day about the public response he was receiving, Gandhiji said:

The same demonstrations and enthusiasm continue unabated. I do feel that untouchability is going much more swiftly than many may imagine. No less than 1,50,000 people must have taken part in the numerous meetings and demonstrations . . . they attend, and, in spite of the very hard times we are going through, they give their pice and their rupees. [*Ibid*, p. 233]

One of the topics which elicited a fair measure of public interest, and which Gandhiji touched upon at his meetings, was that concerning the Temple-entry Bill. Earlier in March 1933 the attempt made by Ranga Iyer to have the Bill introduced had been foiled by the Sanatanist lobby in the Central Assembly. But the debate on the Bill was resumed again on 24 August, when an amendment for the circulation of the Bill was taken up. Although there was considerable opposition voiced by representatives of Hindu orthodoxy, in particular by Pandit Satyendranath Sen, who argued that the Bill was calculated to infringe on the law of the Hindus relating to temple worship, the motion for circulation of the Bill by the end of June 1934, was duly passed. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, pp. 85-86]

During the tour Gandhiji frequently came up against the demand that the move to have the law about temple-entry enacted should be given up, that legal interference in religious matters was undesirable. Gandhiji argued that the Temple-entry Bill did not have any element of coercion in it, that all that it sought to do was to remove the element of coercion that existed in the law. As matters



stood, even if the vast majority of trustees were agreeable, a temple could not be thrown open to the Harijans if even one person amongst the trustees opposed the move. This was coercion, negation of free choice. The Temple-entry Bill only sought to remove the coercion. [C.W.M.G., LVI, pp. 246-47]

4

On 17 November Gandhiji visited Kamargaon, Loni, Karanjia, Murtazapur, Balapur, Wadegaon, and Khamgaon. A private Shiva temple at Lasoor was thrown open to Harijans, but there were no Harijans present to enter the temple. Making a reference to this in his speech at the public meeting at Khamgaon, Gandhiji said the Hindus must do their duty of opening the temples to Harijans whether Harijans responded or not. [*Ibid*, p. 245]

On the morning of 18 November Gandhiji's party left Khamgaon for Akola. When they were about to set out, a group of Sanatanists opposed to the movement, who had come all the way from Benares, lay down before Gandhiji's car in a bid to block his way. They were led by a Swami called Lalnath. They said they would not let Gandhiji proceed with the tour. They would offer satyagraha against him. If Gandhiji must proceed, he would have to have them beaten up by his volunteers or summon the police. Gandhiji said he would do neither. He tried to reason with them and to convince them that what they were doing was not civilized behaviour and would not bring glory to Sanatan Dharma, which stood for tolerance. Gandhiji told Lalnath that if his group refused to let the car move he would have to get down and walk. Lalnath said that in that case they would attach themselves to Gandhiji's feet and not let him proceed. In the end they removed themselves but only after Gandhiji had agreed to take a different route to save the face of the group.

On the way Gandhiji was also shown black flags and later an attempt was made to burn his effigy, an outrage that the police prevented. Leaflets were



distributed charging that the volunteers accompanying Gandhiji had beaten up the Sanatanists.

Speaking at the meeting at Akola later Gandhiji hoped the charge was not true. There was no place in Hinduism for hatred or contempt, for it was a faith of non-violence and tolerance. Untouchability was a sin and must be removed from the face of Hinduism even if some Hindu law books supported it.

The caste Hindus, Gandhiji said, must get off the shoulders of the untouchables and must stop oppressing them. The Harijans lived in the dirtiest hovels, in the most unhygienic conditions. Their hardships must be removed. He appealed for money and jewellery for the cause. A lady gave away her gold bangles and some silverware. [*Ibid*, pp. 250-56]

In the two days following Gandhiji visited numerous villages and townships: Ugwa, Keliveli, Akot, Anjangaon, Pathrot, Chikalda, Ellichpur, Morsi and Badnera. On the 22nd he addressed a public meeting at Durg before entraining for Raipur. Here he had a crowded schedule, which kept him in the town for four days.

As was frequently Gandhiji's practice, he began the day at 3 a.m., when he attended to correspondence. In one of the letters – the one to Prabhavati – he wrote:

I have already written to you about Jayaprakash. . . . The present fight is not for people who have debts to pay and wish to discharge their responsibilities towards their brothers and sisters. The fight requires one to sacrifice one's all. . . . Jayaprakash can remain in the present fight only if he is thus prepared to embrace poverty. This is a soldier's dharma. The other dharma is towards one's family. . . . When it becomes absolute dharma, it is in conflict with the good of society as a whole. [*Ibid*, p. 266]



Gandhiji's public engagements on the 23rd included giving interviews to groups of Harijans and Sanatanists, visits to Harijan quarters, Khadi Bhandar, Hindu Anathalaya and Sanatani Ashram. In the evening he opened a swadeshi exhibition, where he made a strong plea for the adoption of khadi. He pointed out that 95 per cent of the country's population lived on land and even if all the agricultural processes were to be mechanized, there would still be need for a supplementary cottage industry. The spinning-wheel alone could supply the want. It had been a means of providing employment to many Harijan families and saving them from destitution.

In an article published in *Harijan* on 24 November Gandhiji reiterated that Congressmen must not use the Harijan movement for furthering civil resistance. The two should not be mixed. The Harijan movement must be taken up for its own sake, in a religious spirit. "A movement so grand and so pure, so religious and so humanitarian, must not be exploited by anybody for his own end. Certainly not for its political consequences." Political approach could only end in accentuating strife.

At the public meeting at Raipur held on 24 November Gandhiji told the audience:

It would no doubt pain me to know that the Hindu masses are not with me. But it would pain me all the more if they attend the meetings to deceive me and themselves. I have got to follow my dharma even if everybody deserts me. The scriptures say that you need not have anyone on your side for following dharma, that you need God alone. Following dharma is a matter for each individual himself. [*Ibid*, p. 278]



On the 25th Gandhiji declared a private temple at Baloda Bazar open to Harijans. Speaking to the Harijans present on the occasion, Gandhiji called upon them to give up their evil habits. They must give up carrion-eating and beef-eating and observe rules of cleanliness, which were the common requirements for all Hindus visiting temples. They must also give up drinking, which was one of the most degrading vices, vitiating both body and soul.

On the same day Gandhiji addressed a meeting of railway workers at Bilaspur. He told the audience that he had made himself a labourer by choice while they had been forced to become labourers by circumstances. He said:

I early gave up the ambition of becoming the master, for I would then have belonged to an inconsiderate class and could not have identified myself, as I do today to the best of my ability, with the penniless pauper, the half-starved and the naked, the lowliest and the lost. I want labourers not to deplore, much less despise, their lot and to realize the dignity of labour.

Gandhiji told the labourers that the lot of Harijans among them must arouse their sympathy. They suffered from terrible hardships and privations. They were born outcastes and remained outcastes till death. They had to live in segregated areas and were denied the amenities of life that the others enjoyed. Even water, that free gift of God, was denied to them. He asked the Labour Federation to abolish all distinctions between Harijans and non-Harijans. [*Ibid*, pp. 281-82]

On 27 November Gandhiji was invited to speak to the alumni of the Rajkumar College, Raipur. This was, as the name implied, an institution meant for the sons of the chiefs of the various small states in the region. They expressed the wish that Gandhiji should address them in English, as they did not possess an adequate knowledge of Hindi. Gandhiji did so, but exhorted them to learn Hindi



or Hindustani. They must remember that they would be expected not merely to confine themselves to their comparatively very small territories but to extend their horizon. They must learn Hindustani, for then alone would they be able to know the India of the people. They must remember, further, that there was no difference between them and the common people, except that they enjoyed opportunities which the common people were denied. They must learn to identify themselves with the poorest in the land. The idea of hereditary superiority and inferiority was repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism which taught oneness of all life in unequivocal terms. [*Ibid*, pp. 289-90]

Between 28 November and 2 December Gandhiji covered Amgaon, Risama, Lanji, Kirnapur, Belaghat, Waraseoni, Chhindwara, Kherwani, Multapi, Betul, Khedi, Saveligarh, Baraling, Itarsi, Kareli, Deori, Anantpur, Garhakota, Damoh and Sagar. He visited numerous Harijan quarters, opened temples, addressed public meetings and women's meetings and spoke to khadi workers.

An instance of the way Gandhiji studied the problems of each place that he visited and the work being done or not being done there as also the difficulties faced by the workers is provided in an article he wrote for Harijan on his visit to Anantpur.

First the statistics: 177 houses, roughly 885 population, nearest railway station 35 miles away, weekly postal service from a post office 12 miles away.

Gandhiji visited six or seven dwellings, including one of a Harijan. They were bare of any metal pots or boxes. The inmates were in rags. Their bedding was straw covered with rags. They ate *jawar* (millet) chapatis and a pulse. Children went stark naked. The sun by day and fire by night kept them warm.

But there was hope. A worker, Jethalal Govindji, whose faith in khadi rivalled, if it did not surpass, that of Gandhiji himself, had come to settle in the



village in 1929 and in just three years had shown remarkable results. Assisted by three companions, he had gone around with single-minded devotion teaching villagers the skills of ginning, carding, spinning, weaving and dyeing. He had collected and stored data about the condition of every household. Many villagers were now clad in khadi produced by their own labour.

The team served no less than 17 villages containing 1100 huts with a population of about 5000. 80 percent of the population had, through the efforts of these devoted workers, learnt spinning and over 100 persons had learnt weaving. On an average an individual villager devoted around 500 hours to khadi activity. The workers aimed at increasing this to 1,600 hours. The expenditure on the experiment came to Rs. 325 per month, which was met by the Charkha Sangh.

It was a great experiment for the service of the underfed and underclothed, Gandhiji wrote. He concluded:

I have known nothing simpler, cheaper and yet more effective than this experiment of village uplift through khaddar. The progress seems to be undoubtedly slow just now, but I expect that it will be found to be the quickest in the end. [*Ibid*, pp. 333-36]

7

On 3 December Gandhiji was at Jabalpur, where on the evening of that day he addressed a public meeting.

He said:

If this effort to abolish root and branch the distinctions of high and low succeeds, it will have a healthy reaction on all spheres of life. . . . The untouchability as practised today in Hinduism is the worst of all the phases.



Masquerading under the name of religion, it has contributed the most to the degradation of man by man.

Gandhiji admitted that there were enormous difficulties in the way of the reformers. But if they girded up their loins to fight "this age-old sin against God and man" and sought Divine aid in the undertaking, he had no doubt that they would in the end win the grace of God. [*Ibid*, pp. 300-301]

On 5 December a few members of the Congress Working Committee, viz., Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Dr. Ansari, Syed Mahmud, K. F. Nariman and Jamnalal Bajaj, came down to Jabalpur by prearrangement to confer with Gandhiji and seek his advice as regards the policy and programme that the Congress was to put before the country. The Congress was rent by sharp differences as regards the course to be adopted. A sizeable section, including Dr. Ansari, Maulana Azad, Syed Mahmud and K. F. Nariman, not to speak of Madan Mohan Malaviya and those of his way of thinking, had been pressing for giving up Civil Disobedience and taking up the parliamentary programme. They were seeking to this end a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, in the hope that that body would give its endorsement to this policy.

Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, was totally opposed to any course the adoption of which would suggest a whittling down of the demand for complete independence in terms of the Lahore resolution and radical economic reforms as spelt out in the Karachi Congress resolution. This had been the burden of his talks with Gandhiji in September. In October he had come out with a series of articles, later brought out in the form of a booklet under the title *Whither India?*, in which he spelt out his views with greater emphasis. He wrote:

Right action cannot come out of nothing, it must be preceded by thought . . . action which is not based on thought is chaos and confusion.



The barb was understood to have been aimed at Gandhiji, whose action seemed to proceed from intuition, or impulse or feeling, rather than analytical thought. Nehru reasoned that the failure of nationalists lay in their excessive concern with trivia and personalities and their refusal to think deeply about basic principles. Freedom to be meaningful had to be conceived as a means of amelioration of the condition of the masses, eradication of poverty, disease and suffering and creation of conditions that would make for a good life. The political goal for India must remain complete independence, including severance of the British connection, while the economic goal must be the ending of all special class privileges and vested interests.

While the constitutionalists and moderates in the Congress and outside were alarmed by the views Nehru expounded, the radical sections among nationalists were distressed that he had been quite unable to give any lead in action. Subhas Bose later wrote:

With a popularity only second to that of the Mahatma, with unbounded prestige among his countrymen, with a clear brain possessing the finest ideas, with an up-to-date knowledge of modern world movements – that he [Nehru] should be found wanting in the essential quality of leadership, namely the capacity to make decisions and face unpopularity if need be," was a great disappointment. [Michael Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 194-95]

K. F. Nariman argued vehemently against continuing Civil Disobedience. He too had issued a pamphlet, under the title *Whither Congress?*, in which he had made a strong case for recasting the Congress policy along the lines of Council-entry.

The Jabalpur discussions were inconclusive. In a letter to Vallabhbhai Patel Gandhiji reported on 7 December:



Maulana Saheb and the Doctor tried to persuade me not to be uncompromising. . . . The matter was discussed in minute detail. I felt that Nariman had no sense. I told them: "If somebody writes '*Whither India?*' and another writes '*Whither Congress?*', I hope it wouldn't seem too much if I write '*Whither Nariman?*' Jawahar is indeed a *jawahar*. [C.W.M.G., LVI, pp. 307-8]

At Jabalpur, where he spent four days from the 3rd to the 7th December, Gandhiji had a packed schedule. On the 6th he spoke at public meetings at Mandla, Narayanganj and Barela. He also spoke at a Harijan meeting and inspected a night school for Harijans. On the 7th he conferred with Harijan workers, visited Harijan quarters and a swadeshi museum, sold khadi at a khadi bhandar, opened a temple to Harijans and addressed various meetings.

On 8 December Gandhiji ended his tour of the Central Provinces with speeches at Khandwa and Burhanpur. Then he left for Jhansi on his way to Delhi, with a short halt on the morning of 9 December at Bhopal, where he addressed a public meeting and also visited neighbouring Bhilsa and Basoda.

8

Arriving in Delhi on the 10th, Gandhiji went straight to a meeting of workers of the Birla Mills, where he was presented a purse of Rs. 2000, half of it contributed by Birla himself, and an address inscribed on a banana leaf. Gandhiji appealed to the workers to eschew smoking and drinking and lead a pure life. He also addressed a meeting at the Jamia Millia and visited a khadi bhandar. Later a group of Harijans came to see him. They were critical of the movement. They wanted to know why Gandhiji laid stress on temple-entry when what was wanted was economic uplift of the Harijans. They also thought by describing the untouchables as Harijans, Gandhiji had added only one more name which set



them apart from the rest of the Hindu community. They thought, lastly, that the Harijan fund being collected by him might be misused by the workers.

Gandhiji said he laid emphasis on temple-entry irrespective of whether Harijans cared to enter the temples or not. It was a matter of penance for the caste Hindus. It was a question of justice. As for the term 'Harijan', he said:

The name 'Harijan' was suggested by one of your class. Thousands have welcomed the name as a good substitute for the offensive names 'untouchable' and '*avarna*'. So long as untouchability is not completely removed, a name to distinguish you from others will be required, and an inoffensive name is any day better than one that stinks in the nostrils.

As regards their mistrust of workers who would be handling the funds, Gandhiji assured them that by far the greater part of the funds would go directly into the pockets of Harijans. Many of the workers handling the funds were persons of unimpeachable character and would do credit to any movement. Harijans could not be made party in the disbursement of the funds because the movement had been conceived in terms of penance and reparation on the part of caste Hindus, although Harijans could advise. [*Ibid*, pp. 317-18]

Gandhiji emphasized this point in his talk with the workers of Harijan Sevak Sangh on the 13th. He told them that no part of the collections should be spent on propaganda or office administration. Every single pie must be spent on constructive work alone. He was not touring India, he said, to finance their office administration.

A group of Sanatanists called on him and expressed resentment at his leading a movement for temple-entry. They said the attempt to open temples to Harijans was bound to lead to bloodshed. They further objected to Gandhiji describing himself as a Sanatani Hindu, since no one who did not believe in



untouchability, *shraddha* (offerings to the ancestors) and idol-worship could be called a Sanatani Hindu.

Gandhiji told them that he did not agree with them. Truth alone was the test of Sanatan Dharma. According to his reading of the Shastras untouchability was repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism. As for bloodshed, he said that was not probable because the movement was wholly peaceful and no compulsion in the matter was contemplated. No temple would be opened to Harijans where an overwhelming majority of temple-goers was not in favour of such opening.

9

Jawaharlal Nehru had in the meanwhile been hitting out not only against those who would compromise with British Imperialism but also against communalists both among the Hindus and the Muslims. In a statement published on 2 December he questioned the representative character of the two chief political organizations of Muslims, viz., the Muslim All-Parties Conference and the Muslim League, and described their leaders as anti-national and political reactionaries of the worst kind. Most of the leaders of these organizations, he pointed out, were Government officials, ex-officials, ministers, title-holders and big landlords.

Severely criticizing the role of the Aga Khan, Mohammed Iqbal and Shafaat Ahmed Khan at the Round Table Conference, Nehru said that even though Gandhiji had been willing to concede every single one of their demands, however illogical and exaggerated, on condition that they assured him of their full support in the political struggle for independence, they had rejected the offer.

Nehru in the same breath also denounced Hindu communalism and its leaders and asserted that both the Hindu Mahasabha as well as the communal Muslim organizations represented the rich upper class groups. They had no



programme for the workers, peasants and the lower middle classes, which formed the great bulk of the nation.

Mohammed Iqbal countered by saying that if the offer the Aga Khan made to Gandhiji in London was acceptable to the Hindus and to Jawaharlal Nehru, that is, if the safeguards the Muslims thought necessary for their protection as an all-India minority were accepted, the Muslim community would still be willing to serve as camp-followers of the majority community. Iqbal also gratuitously observed that Gandhiji had wanted the Muslim leaders at the Round Table Conference not to support the untouchables' claim. He asked for redistribution of India on the basis of religious, historical and cultural affinities. [*Ibid*, pp. 504-8]

Gandhiji said he could not leave unchallenged the statements made by Iqbal about him. In a statement issued on 13 December Gandhiji clarified the position:

I told Muslim friends that Dr. Ansari held my conscience in Muslim matters in his pocket and that therefore they should cooperate with me in securing his presence at the Conference. To this they would not agree, unless I would first accept their demands. My effort having failed, I tried every other recourse at my disposal to achieve real unity and hopelessly failed.

The offer to act as camp-followers to the Congress seemed then, as it has proved since, to be a mockery. . . . Muslim friends in London were playing other minorities against the vital national interest. . . . It was therefore necessary to fight the spirit of separateness, no matter from what source it arose.

As regards separate electorates, one of the safeguards demanded, Gandhiji said, no Muslim had defended separate electorates as a good thing in itself. Even in their case Muslim leaders had admitted that it was a necessary evil to be



tolerated for a temporary period. The doctrine therefore did not admit of indefinite extension. To demand it for the untouchables was clearly against the national interest as well as against the interests of the untouchables themselves.

Gandhiji reiterated that he would accept any solution that might commend itself to the Muslims as a whole and that was not in conflict with any other national interest. [*Ibid*, pp. 328-30]

On the 14th Gandhiji's engagements included discussions with Congress leaders and speaking at two meetings, one of Harijans and the other of women. Speaking at the Harijans' meeting, Gandhiji said:

It is not to keep you segregated that schools are being opened and wells are being dug for you. All this is being done because I cannot bear to see you get no water at all. How can I tolerate that Harijans get water from the same trough from which dogs and cattle drink water? . . . Wells are being dug for Harijans not to keep them as untouchables, but in order that they may at least get clean water. . . The same is true about schools. [*Ibid*, p. 331]

December 14 completed the first stage of the tour, and it went strictly according to schedule. It was also an eye-opener. The crowds that congregated to see and hear Gandhiji were so immense that they took one's breath away. This was in spite of the fact that the cause Gandhiji was promoting, namely, the abolition of untouchability, was not a particularly popular one. The political core of the Congress rank and file as well as the leadership, whether votaries of Civil Disobedience or of Council-entry, maintained a taciturn silence if they did not frown upon it; the Sanatanists had organized a stiff resistance against the movement and the followers of Dr. Ambedkar too were hostile to it, inasmuch as it represented an attempt to prevent the untouchables from going out of the Hindu fold.



Dealing with the tour, the Government of India publication *India in 1932-33*, felt obliged to remark:

There was some obstruction by orthodox or 'Sanatanist' caste Hindus at the outset, but during the rest of the year he [Gandhiji] seems to have encountered little direct opposition. . . . Mr. Gandhi's meetings were generally crowded, and the tour clearly proved that the feeling of personal respect for him among the masses was still strong. [*India in 1932-33*, p. 44]

'Crowded' was of course an inadequate word to describe the surging sea of humanity that turned up at the meetings. Every time it gave an anxious time to the organizers and put great strain on Gandhiji. In an article containing instructions to the volunteers and the public Gandhiji wrote:

I cannot recall occasions when people near me have not trodden on my naked toes or scratched my legs. God has saved me from serious injury hitherto. But the crowds can take no credit for the immunity. Their affection is mad. And madness can do nobody any good.

Among other things Gandhiji asked the crowds gathering at stations to await his arrival to "stand in rows upon rows without causing inconvenience to the passengers and without moving from their places", not to raise cries, especially at night between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., and not to attempt to present him addresses. [C.W.M.G., LVI, pp. 336-37]

On 14 December in the afternoon Gandhiji and party took the train to Bezwada to begin the Andhra tour.

Gandhiji arrived in Bezwada on the morning of the 16th to a packed schedule. He addressed several meetings and collected a sizeable sum. As usual



there were also numerous addresses presented to him. Speaking at the Harijan workers' meeting Gandhiji told them that their contribution to the cause must be unalloyed. There could be no room for selfishness, hypocrisy, untruth and violence in such a movement. They must show tolerance towards their opponents and not give way to anger in word or deed. They must try to convert their opponents and seek their cooperation. [*Ibid*, p. 342]

On the way to Masulipatam on the 17th he addressed several meetings at several places, such as Gudivada, Siddhantam, Angaluru, Gudlavalleru, Kavutaram and Pedanna. At Siddhantam he was asked by a Press representative what he thought of the statement of M. K. Acharya of Madras that 95 per cent of the Harijans did not want the Gandhian creed. Gandhiji replied:

I do not know what the 'Gandhian creed' is . . . I only know this. I am engaged in giving Harijans clean water. I am engaged in giving them facilities for education. I am engaged in finding accommodation for them in public caravanserais where they cannot get it. I am engaged in weaning them from drink and carrion. Do they not like all these? . . . I am engaged in . . . having public temples thrown open to them. . . . I do not care whether they want to go to the temples or not. I simply feel that *savarnas* should do their duty.

Gandhiji said he believed in *varnashrama*, but for him it was not a graded system of untouchability. It did not imply a vertical division of society. It was a horizontal division where all the *varnas* stood on the same plane and were equal.

Gandhiji denied the charge levelled against him in some quarters that he was using the Harijan movement for civil resistance propaganda. He was obeying, he said, a peremptory religious call and those who gathered at his meetings did not so much as hear the words 'civil resistance' from his lips.



Gandhiji expressed satisfaction at the results of the tour. If the public response he had been receiving was anything to go by, he had no hesitation in saying that untouchability was fast dying out. On no other basis could he account for the tens of thousands of people who flocked to his meetings and gave their coppers, well knowing what the money was to be used for. [*Ibid*, pp. 345-46]

After various engagements in and around Masulipatam on the 19th, Gandhiji returned to Bezwada and the same evening took the train to Madras, where he arrived the following morning. This visit to Madras marked a change in the schedule worked out beforehand, which had set down five days for Madras from 30 December to 3 January. As the tour worked out, those dates found Gandhiji in the Nellore-Cuddapah region.

Gandhiji's three day stay in Madras had been packed by the organizers with more than a dozen meetings, not to speak of several interviews, including Press interviews. On the very first day, 20 December, he addressed a function organized by the Madras Corporation, where he was presented with a civic address, spoke at a students' meeting and two women's meetings and finally at a mass meeting held at Tilak Ghat on the Triplicane Beach.

At the women's meetings Gandhiji asked the ladies to shed their jewellery for the cause, which they did in a generous measure.

At the students' meeting he asked the youth not to give heed to what the orthodox people had to say. The masses, he said, responded only to those who worked among them. They did not argue. They only asked themselves who were the people approaching them. If they felt that those approaching them had acceptable credentials, they would listen to them, but not otherwise.

"Take a broom and a bucket in your hands," Gandhiji told the young men, "not by way of *tamasha*, not by way of a spectacle, but sincerely, and work with



the broom and the bucket and clean out all those dirty places of Madras." They must work in the midst of Harijans, wean them from drink and teach them the elementary principles of sanitation. Gandhiji said he did not want them to steal time from their studies for this work. They must use for it only their idle hours or a part of them.

The public meeting at Tilak Ghat in the evening was perhaps the largest recorded. Over one lakh people attended. It took Gandhiji half an hour to make his way through the milling humanity to the dais and forty-five minutes to get to his car after the meeting ended. In an interview later he said:

I must confess that I was unprepared for the demonstration at the Beach and the demonstrations I witnessed during the visits to several labour areas. The numbers that attended these demonstrations everywhere exceeded past records.

Gandhiji interpreted this overwhelming public turn-out as a sign that untouchability was on the way out. For if the religious sense of the people had revolted against the drive against untouchability, he said, their exhibition of affection for him "would have been tempered with moderation and restraint". He was used to reading the mass mind by taking at a sweep the expression in the people's eyes and their general demeanour, he said, and he could find there no disapproval of what he had been doing. [*Ibid*, pp. 365-66]

On the 21st Gandhiji spoke to a meeting of Harijans held at Robinson Park. He reiterated to them the advice he had been offering throughout the tour: they must give up carrion and beef-eating, they must give up drink, observe the rules of hygiene and sanitation and they must educate their children.



On the 22nd a strong deputation of Harijan leaders and others concerned with the Harijan question called on Gandhiji. The deputation included R. Srinivasan, V. Dharamalingam Pillai, Swami Sahajanand, P. V. Rajagopala Pillai and Pushparaj. Others present were V. Bhashyam Iyengar, president of the Provincial Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, K. Nageswara Rao Pantulu, V. Venkatasubbiah, K. Bhashyam and R. V Sastri, editor of *Harijan*.

The Harijan leaders argued that the Poona Pact was not being worked in the manner it was intended to be worked by the caste Hindus and attempts were being made through unfair methods to keep out Harijans from elected bodies. Gandhiji agreed that if the *savarna* Hindus did not do their part, the Pact could be rendered nugatory and of no benefit to the Harijans. He however assured the deputation, citing instances, that the Harijan Sevak Sangh had been trying to intervene in the situations described to set matters right. The Sangh necessarily had its limitations, for it must keep itself apart and aloof from politics if it was to be an effective instrument of service.

R. Srinivasan also raised the question of Harijans getting financial and other assistance from the Government and asked how the Harijan Sevak Sangh viewed it. Gandhiji said he held strong views against the existing system of Government. It was a mischievous system, taking the interests of India as a whole. But he could assure them that he would never interfere with the policy of the Government in so far as the Harijans were concerned. Let the Harijans take all the advantage they could from the Government, let them take all the advantage they could from the *savarna* Hindus. He would never want to take advantage of the Harijan movement to further the aims of the Civil Disobedience movement, for doing so would make the movement not civil but criminal.



The deputationists complained that the policy of admitting Harijan boys to common schools had not been working well. They asked for help by way of scholarships and stipends and for starting hostels for Harijan students.

Gandhiji pointed out that in that matter the Central Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh had a good record. Hundreds of Harijan children had been receiving scholarships from the Board which they could not have got from the Government or any other agency. The Board did not say to anyone: 'Do not go to the Government.' It encouraged Harijan boys to seek assistance from the Government department and where the assistance was not enough, the Board supplemented it.

So far as temple-entry was concerned, it was a wholly one-sided affair. It was a matter of repentance on the part of the caste Hindus. The Harijans were entitled to enter the places considered as Hindu sanctuaries. When that right was recognized it was for the Harijans to decide whether to exercise it or not. [*Ibid*, pp. 375-81]

Later in the day Gandhiji gave an interview to a correspondent of the *Madras Mail*. The correspondent drew Gandhiji's attention to the remark made by him that in political matters he had given Jawaharlal Nehru the power of attorney, and asked whether in view of Nehru's "well-known communist leanings" Congress policy would not be given a communist bias.

Gandhiji said he did not think so, and added:

I do not think that Jawaharlal's own views are yet sufficiently crystallized to make any fundamental departure from Congress policy likely. He is a firm believer in socialism, but his ideas on how best the socialist principle can be applied to Indian conditions are still in the melting pot. His communist views need not, therefore, frighten anyone.



The correspondent referred to the matter of zemindari abolition and Jawaharlal Nehru's views in the matter. Gandhiji said it would be a loss if the influence of the big hereditary landholder was wholly destroyed, but emphasized that the actual cultivator should have a title in the soil and a larger share of the produce. In many places the cultivator was getting far too little. The tremendous awakening among the peasantry, Gandhiji said, was not going to die out. What had impressed him most was that it had been accompanied with so little violence. It was an unconscious manifestation of the effectiveness of non-violence. [*Ibid*, pp. 382-85]

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On the evening of the 22nd Gandhiji left Madras for Guntur, to resume his Andhra tour. He arrived there on the morning of the 23rd and by the evening had covered the entire district by car. He addressed a meeting at Guntur and paid visits to Chebrole, Munipalle, Manchalla, Vellapur, Ponur, Nidubrole, Thalapalem, Kavur, Ithananagarampadu, Bhattiprolu and Repalli. He opened several temples to Harijans and laid foundation-stones of several institutions of public welfare. Everywhere there were crowds. Everywhere Gandhiji was presented with addresses and purses.

On the 24th Gandhiji covered Samalkot, Peddapuram, Cocanada, Gollapalem, Ramachandrapuram and Rajahmundry, spending the night in a launch. At Rajahmundry he was met by a deputation of Harijans from the East Godavari district, who proposed that the Harijan Sevak Sangh should be manned principally by Harijans.

Gandhiji told the deputation that Harijan Sevak Sangh was not an organization of Harijans. It was an organization of caste Hindus for the service of Harijans. It was an organization of debtors, not of creditors. What the Harijans



had to do was to see that the debtors discharged their responsibility properly. Replying to the suggestion that the Sangh should at least appoint advisory committees comprising Harijans, Gandhiji said it was not for the Sangh to appoint any such committees, it was for them, the Harijans, to elect such committees from among themselves and then ask the Sangh to deal with them. The only difficulty would be the existence of factions among Harijans and setting up of different committees by different factions. If they could put up a united front and set up committees of business-like men, they could easily dominate the Sangh without being on it. [*Ibid*, p. 395]

Gandhiji continued, throughout the tour, the practice of starting the day at 3 a.m. From 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. he was able uninterruptedly to deal with the correspondence. From 6 a.m. onwards till it was time to start out on the onward journey, he continued to write but with interruptions, so that frequently letters were written in instalments. Vallabhbhai Patel, who was informed of Gandhiji's schedule by Chandrashankar Shukla, protested. Gandhiji said getting up at that hour suited him and in fact he felt uneasy when he got up later. The ideal should be rather to go to bed early, which rule was not being observed. Nevertheless he was able to put up with the strain without his health being affected.

The popular response in Andhra to the tour was as enthusiastic as it had been in the Central Provinces and Madras city. The crowds were larger than ever. Gandhiji called it a wonderful experience. But he had his reservations about what it signified. On 25 December he wrote in a letter to Chhaganlal Joshi:

But these numbers may easily deceive us, for we have to reach crores of people. Nor is it that all the people who come immediately change their way of living. The only consolation is the thought that this propaganda does not seem to displease all these hundreds of thousands. We can therefore



hope that sooner or later the practice of untouchability will disappear completely. [*Ibid*, pp. 399-401]

On the 26th he went round the countryside, visiting Vangalpadu, Tallapaudi, Malakapalli, Dharamvaram, Nidadavole and Tanku, where he spent the night. The journey from one village to another in this area frequently had to be done by boat.

On the 27th his first engagement was a public meeting at Tanuku. Then he paid visits to Eletipadu, Kavitam, Poduru, Vedangi, Jinnunur, Palakollu, Ballipedu, Bhimavaram and Tadepalligudem, ending the day at Ellore, where he addressed a largely attended public meeting.

In his speech Gandhiji mentioned the great enthusiasm shown by the people for the anti-untouchability drive, their readiness to part with their possessions, their coppers, their silver and their gold, the readiness on the part of the women to part with their bangles and their rings or whatever they held dear, and expressed the hope that finally untouchability would be ended: It was sad to think that a religion which drew its inspiration from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the *Ramayana*, a religion which preached oneness of all life, might perish because of the sin of untouchability that had crept into it. [*Ibid*, pp. 407-8]

At Vizagapatam, which Gandhiji passed through on the 28th, he was driven past a row of Harijans being fed through the charity of some townsmen. Gandhiji was distressed. At the public meeting he addressed, he gave expression to his feeling of shame at the spectacle of people feeding while cars were driven past and crowds of people followed those cars, raising dust which must contaminate the food. He knew there was no evil intention behind the show put up. But it showed thoughtlessness. [*Ibid*, pp. 410-11]

In the six days from 29 December to 3 January 1934, on which date Gandhiji completed his tour of Andhra, he visited scores of places. On the 29th he covered



Vizianagaram, Anakapale and Bitrangunta; on the 30th he addressed public meetings at Kavali, Allur, Gandavaram and Nellore and also visited Yellayapalem and Bhuchireddipalem, ending the day at Venkatagiri; on the 31st he was at Tirupati, where he spoke at a public meeting before visiting Renigunta and Cuddapah. At Cuddapah he halted for two nights. The 1st of January 1934, being a day of silence, Gandhiji took up his public engagements at Cuddapah on 2 January, starting with an interview to Harijan workers.

The Harijan workers asked Gandhiji about his views on the caste system. Did he want the castes to remain? Gandhiji said if untouchability, which was the extreme form of the evil that the caste system represented, was removed, the caste system itself could not long remain in its existing form.

Gandhiji made a distinction between *varna* and caste. *Varnashrama* was an economic law, which must continue to operate whether anyone liked it or not. It was not based upon distinctions of high and low. It did not represent the doctrine of 'might is right'. The distinguishing feature of the *varna* system was occupation. The *varna* law did not confer privileges; it defined duties. Evil lay not in the *varna* system but in considering one *varna* higher than another. [*Ibid*, pp. 428-29]

Gandhiji later spoke at a public meeting where he was presented addresses and purses as usual. Gandhiji expressed his happiness at the way the Municipality had housed its Harijan employees. They had been provided beautiful houses, the kind of which he had not seen anywhere else on his tour.

On 3 January Gandhiji covered Peddavadugur, where he arrived at 4.30 a.m. on that day, Gooty, Guntakkal, Konakondla, Vajrakarpur, Uravakonda and Uravaskonda, before finally arriving at Hindupur, which ended his tour of Andhra. At all these places Gandhiji spoke at meetings and visited Harijan quarters.



On 4 January Gandhiji set out on the next lap of the tour which was to cover the Mysore-Malabar region and to last ten days. On the very first day Gandhiji visited Goribidnur, Doddaballapur, Tumkur, Tyamagondlu, Nelamangala and Bangalore before arriving at Mysore for the night.

At Doddaballapur Gandhiji was informed that among the 800 Harijans living there, no less than 50 per cent of the children had been attending school. Gandhiji was glad to hear this but said that Harijan children attending Harijan schools should not satisfy the people. They must themselves teach Harijan boys and girls and for this it was necessary for them to root out untouchability from their hearts. At Tumkur and at Bangalore, Gandhiji was welcomed with wild enthusiasm by the people and presented addresses. He called upon them to root out untouchability from their hearts and give up the notions of high and low. [*Ibid*, pp. 434-37]

Gandhiji found it most embarrassing that people expressed their affection for him by lavishing on him and his party sweets, varieties of delicacies and a multiplicity of dishes. He deprecated this. In an appeal to the organizers, published both in *Harijan* and *Harijanbandhu*, he asked them not to "pamper" him and his party and to be rigorously simple and economical in catering to them and limit themselves to satisfying only their barest wants in the way of food. No more than one boiled vegetable should be served and expensive fruit should always be avoided. [*Ibid*, pp. 438-39]

At a Harijan meeting in Mysore on 5 January Gandhiji was informed that the Harijans there had given up beef-eating. Gandhiji expressed his satisfaction at this and advised them to give up the evil of drink also.



At the public meeting held later Gandhiji said the Reception Committee had earlier taken him round the *cheries* and shown him the improvements made by the Municipality in Harijans' living conditions since his visit to the city six years earlier. He congratulated the Municipality and the Maharaja on the neatness and cleanliness he noticed everywhere he went. But merely improving the economic condition of the Harijans was not enough. What was needed was for them to be absorbed in the Hindu community on equal footing. They must have the same amenities and religious privileges as other Hindus. This was only possible if *savarna* Hindus washed themselves of the taint of untouchability. This was not a thing that any Municipality or any Maharaja could do. This could only be accomplished by a change of heart on the part of caste Hindus. [*Ibid*, pp. 444-45]

Later the same day Gandhiji paid visits to Mandya, Sakoor, Maddur, Besagrahalli, Shivapuram, Somanhalli, Chennapatna, Closepet, Kankanhalli, Bidali, and Kengeri before going back again to Bangalore. Arriving there he addressed a students' meeting before turning in for the night. Gandhiji told the students:

A servant of Harijans must be above suspicion like Caesar's wife. He must have a character above reproach. His eyes must be clean so that they may not offend. His hands also must be clean and his touch must be pure and gentle. His heart will not harbour a single impure thought. His ears must be tuned to listen to the music of the spheres, his feet will take him to the purest work, never to dens of evil. [*Ibid*, p. 447]

At the civic reception the next day Gandhiji was presented an address, which mentioned the good work the Municipality had done for the Harijans as well as the liberality with which the Maharaja had been dealing with the problem. Nevertheless much remained to be done. Gandhiji told them that during his



morning walk he had seen some Harijan dwellings, which he would not even call huts. They were more like holes, which gave no protection whatsoever against wind, rain and sun. He said he expected the Municipality to set before itself a minimum standard for the poorest of its citizens.

Addressing the Temperance Association, Gandhiji said he was not a temperance man, he was a prohibition man. In India the tragedy was that the Government was trading in liquor, which distressed him, especially because the Harijans had become victims of the drink evil. They lived in wretched holes, they had no money to spend for creature comforts. Yet, what little they got went to the canteens. India was a country where prohibition could certainly succeed.

Later Gandhiji addressed a public meeting where he exhorted the audience to root out untouchability from their hearts and let the Harijans enjoy the same rights and privileges in every walk of life as the other Hindus. [*Ibid*, pp. 448-52]

While in Bangalore Gandhiji also visited the Deena Seva Sangh, Adi-Karnataka Girls' Home and Harijan quarters, and addressed a meeting of women at Malleswaram and also a Harijan meeting.

The 8th of January was a silence day, which Gandhiji spent dealing with his correspondence. On the 9th he left Bangalore and Mysore State to continue the tour in Malabar.

His first stop was Olavakkote, where he visited the Shabari Ashram. He then went on to Palghat, where he addressed a public meeting and a women's meeting.

He began his speech at the public meeting at Palghat by describing Malabar as the land of inequalities. It was the land where untouchability, unapproachability and invisibility were practised. Earlier, while Gandhiji was on



his way to the meeting he had been shown black flags by a group of demonstrators. Those carrying the black flags, Gandhiji said, had smeared themselves with the external marks of Brahmins. Could they be called Brahmins? A Brahmin was one who knew the *Brahman*, one who had humility, piety, self-effacement. Malabar was a land of scenic beauty and it had the freest women in the whole country. Malabar must wipe out the shame of untouchability, which was the vilest thing on earth. If untouchability was not eradicated, Hinduism must perish.

At Kuzhalmannam on the same day Gandhiji also addressed a meeting of Nayadis, who were not only untouchables but also unapproachables. They presented an address to Gandhiji. The address was in English and Gandhiji told them that he was certain they themselves did not know what was said in the address. Had it been in Malayalam he would have known that it represented their feelings. He asked them to give up drinking and to observe the rules of sanitation. They should also educate their children. [*Ibid*, pp. 460-62]

Gandhiji then paid visits to Karimpuzha, Cherpulasseri, Ananganadi and Ottapalam and proceeded to Guruvayur, where he arrived at 10 p.m.

But even at that late hour there was a meeting of women to address, which Gandhiji did. The women had prepared an address which they presented to Gandhiji. Gandhiji complimented them on the spotless white attire they all sported and said he flattered himself with the belief that it represented their internal purity. He called upon them to lead the fight against untouchability in Malabar.

At the public meeting at Guruvayur the following day, there was a little trouble before the proceedings started. Two *pehalwans* hired by the Varnashrama Swarajya Sangh raised slogans against Gandhiji, waved black flags



and got on to the dais. The volunteers grappled with them to remove them, which resulted in slight injuries to both. They were taken to a near-by dispensary for first-aid, but in the meanwhile forty precious minutes had been lost.

Gandhiji said he recognized the right of the two demonstrators to stage a hostile demonstration if they were so minded. He regretted the injuries caused to them and if the injuries had been caused by volunteers he asked them publicly to own up the deed and purge themselves of the sin of violence perpetrated against their brothers. Untouchability could not be removed by force. Religion could only be defended through *tapascharya*. He said he was most anxious to avoid goondaism on the part of either party. Let them argue their case, for which they would be provided every facility. Both parties must have equal opportunities to put their case before the public.

Gandhiji recalled how he had been instrumental in persuading Kelappan to give up his fast for the entry of Harijans to the Guruvayur temple. He had done so because he had smelt coercion in the act. Gandhiji said he wanted the temple to be opened to Harijans only after ascertaining that the majority of temple-going public supported such action and then only after the legal hurdles in doing so had been removed.

Gandhiji refuted the imputation that there was any "nefarious design" behind the temple-entry movement, or any desire to undermine Brahminism, for Brahmins were the corner-stone of Hinduism. But who was a Brahmin? A Brahmin was one who had realized the *Brahman*. A Brahmin was not one who was dedicated to selfish pursuits, who thought only of himself and rarely of others, even if he correctly recited the Vedas.



The All-India Varnashrama Swarajya Sangh, which acted as the spearhead of the Sanatanists' resistance against reform, had continued to dog Gandhiji's footsteps throughout the tour. When Gandhiji set foot in South India, its attacks became more violent and vituperative. While in Madras Gandhiji had come upon a printed leaflet challenging him to *shastrartha* on the question of untouchability. "Don't say 'no time, no time', " the leaflet said, "when your very existence is questioned."

The leaflet charged Gandhiji with having destroyed the Congress, which had brought him into the limelight of Indian politics, which had made him "its virtual dictator and blindly entrusted its destiny into his hands", and with carrying on the anti-untouchability movement "under the banner of Sanatana dharma, sociology, abstract justice and so on".

Then while he travelled in Nellore district, he received a telegram challenging him to a debate and asserting that he had been leading the Hindus astray from the path of true moral and religious life.

Gandhiji had answered that he was prepared to talk to anyone and was willing to be converted if convinced of his error, but that he had limited time and that the decision with regard to the time and venue of the debate would have to be his. [*Ibid*, pp. 472-74]

Gandhiji told the Guruvayur meeting that he had received requests from Pandits at Palghat and then at Guruvayur to meet them and discuss the Shastra with them. He told them that it had not been possible at Palghat and it would not be possible at Guruvayur, for he could not interrupt his programme, but he would be happy to meet them at 10.00 a.m. on the 16th. The Pandits refused the offer. They wrote to Gandhiji that they would see him if he was prepared to discuss the



Shastras with them not for an hour but for days together and that too in Sanskrit. [*Ibid*, pp. 465-71]

Gandhiji later in the day addressed a public meeting at Pattambi. He told the audience that untouchability, unapproachability and invisibility could have no Divine sanction. These degraded human beings. To say that they had been degraded because of their actions in a past birth was a caricature of the law of *karma*. The law of *karma* could never be applied as they had been applying it to Nayadis and other Harijans. He appealed to them to exorcize the ghost of untouchability before it destroyed Hinduism. [*Ibid*, pp. 472-73]

On 12 January Gandhiji was at Payyanur, where he visited a Harijan Ashram and spoke at a public meeting. He then went on to Cannanore, where again there was a public meeting and Harijan workers' meeting. In the evening Gandhiji reached Tellichery.

Early the next morning Gandhiji addressed a public meeting held at the Tellicherry maidan. More than 6,000 people turned up to hear him, though it was only 7.30 a.m., hardly a time for attending meetings. Gandhiji was duly presented a purse and an address in which the hope was expressed that untouchability would soon be abolished. Gandhiji said that untouchability was a matter of change of heart and its abolition depended on each man and each woman rooting out the evil from their own hearts, each person must cease to think that any person was lower than himself or herself. Untouchability existed not only between caste Hindus and Harijans but between caste and caste and between one section of Harijans and another. They must organize public opinion to have temples opened to Harijans. [*Ibid*, pp. 477-78]

Gandhiji then proceeded to Mahe, which was part of French India. At the public meeting held there Gandhiji said that he made no distinction between



French India and British India, for both were India. He thanked them for having presented him a purse and an address. He was happy to be told that in Mahe a temple had been thrown open to Harijans. He asked the *savarna* Hindus in Mahe to cleanse their hearts of the taint of untouchability.

Another place Gandhiji visited was Badagara. When he appealed to the assembled women for jewellery, a young lady of 20 or 21 years divested herself first of her bangles, then of her necklace and finally of her earrings. Gandhiji was deeply moved by this renunciation. For a Malabar girl, he said, it was not of course an amazing performance because Malabar girls were the simplest in the world. Gandhiji later made a special mention of the young lady in *Harijan* in a column headed "Kaumudi's Renunciation". [*Ibid*, pp. 480-81 and C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 18-19]

At Calicut, the next place visited, Gandhiji addressed two public meetings on the 13th and 14th. The meeting on the 13th was held at the Town Hall. Addresses were presented to Gandhiji on behalf of the Municipal Council and a number of other organizations. All the addresses expressed sympathy for the cause and Gandhiji was happy to note that there was consensus of opinion on the question on the part of the intelligentsia. He noted further that the masses too were sympathetic to the cause. And yet, said Gandhiji, if an untouchability map of India was drawn, Malabar would be shown as the blackest spot. It was regrettable but it was a fact. He appealed to the audience to gird up their loins and make a Herculean effort to fight untouchability, so that it might be said that Malabar was in the vanguard of the struggle against that curse.

Gandhiji then spoke to the students of the Malabar Christian College, where, Gandhiji was told, there was no distinction between Harijan students and other students. But, Gandhiji said, they ought not to be satisfied with that. They must



do something much more vital. They must regard untouchability not as something descended from God but as something devised by the devil for their undoing. They must make the announcement that they were all children of the same God and equal in His eyes. They must spend a part of their pocket money for the service of Harijans and part of their spare time to serve Harijan boys and girls. [C.W.M.G., Vol. LVI, pp. 482-87]

At the Calicut public meeting held on the 14th, which was attended by a crowd of more than 15,000, Gandhiji announced that in Calicut he had received monetary contributions amounting to Rs. 4,388-5-9. He protested that this was too small an amount. Bangalore had given much more, he said. If they were convinced of the sin of Malabar, they must contribute more. Malabar was a beautiful place where scented breezes blew. But through untouchability man had become vile. He had seen in Malabar wild specimens of humanity with a stinking odour. They could be made as respectable as any other human being. All that was needed was a little soap, some hot water and some white khaddar. Gandhiji warned that if *savarna* Hindus did not bestir themselves in time and root out the evil of untouchability, it would bring about the end of Hinduism. Many a civilization had perished because of the inherent weakness of their representatives. Hinduism would not be an exception. [*Ibid*, pp. 489-91]

The Calicut programme completed Gandhiji's tour of the Mysore-Malabar region and he was ready to undertake the next part of the journey – the tour of Travancore-Cochin.



CHAPTER IX: THE HARIJAN TOUR - II

1

On 16 January, after a brief meeting with the Zamorin at Calicut in the evening, Gandhiji proceeded to Trichur to start his tour of the Cochin-Travancore region.

On the morning of the 17th the first thing Gandhiji did was to pay a visit to the Harijan quarter of the town. Later, speaking at a public meeting, Gandhiji said:

It was perhaps whilst I was driving through the streets of Trichur this morning to speak a few words to you, that I saw a Nayadi in flesh and blood. He was shivering with fear. It was a sign of humiliation for you, for me and for all Hindus. It is also a shame for us that there should be even at this stage men . . . defending untouchability, unapproachability and invisibility in the name of religion.

They must realize, he said, that untouchability was not a thing that could be removed with the stroke of the pen. No one could change their hearts for them. They must do it themselves. If untouchability was not wiped out Hinduism would become a religion of intolerance

Emphasizing the need for them to learn Hindi, Gandhiji expressed his pain that in the course of his tour of Malabar he had not found anyone willing to translate if he spoke in Hindi. They all wanted him to speak in English. This disinclination to learn Hindi, which was a language understood by twenty crores of people, presented a handicap in the campaign against untouchability. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 3-4]

Later at Kurukkancheri Gandhiji spoke to a meeting of Thiyya Harijans. In their address of welcome the Thiyyas had dealt with the question of abolition of caste. Gandhiji agreed with them that in so far as caste was based on



untouchability the system must be abolished. But the caste system, to the extent it was based on *varnashrama*, was an economic law, and promoted concord, never discord. When Narayana Guru Swami, the Harijan saint of Kerala enunciated his formula of one caste, one religion and one God, all he meant was that there should be no assumption of superiority on the part of any one caste over another. [*Ibid*, pp. 5-6]

Gandhiji then went on to Alwaye, where he had an invitation from the Union Christian College. He told the students that his message was just this, that the *savarna* Hindus who considered themselves superior to those whom they called untouchable, unapproachable and invisible, should realize that their assumption of superiority had no sanction in the Shastras. Gandhiji further said that if he were to find that his reading of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita* was wrong and that indeed these scriptures sanctioned untouchability, he would have no use for them and for Hinduism. It offended his reason that God, who had created both *savarna* Hindus and *avarna* Hindus should impose the bar sinister between His children.

He said that when he argued against untouchability in Hinduism he also meant by it that there should be no untouchability as between Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and the rest. [*Ibid*, pp. 7-8]

Afterwards Gandhiji paid visits to Perruvanam, Irinjalakuda and Chalakudi before proceeding to Ernakulam in the evening.

He stopped at Thuravur to accept an address and a purse of Rs. 225. It was explained that the total collection had amounted to Rs. 420, but that Rs. 159 had been spent on the reception and another Rs. 80 on the *pandal*. Gandhiji deprecated the expense incurred on entertaining him and his party. At that rate, he said, he would have to tour with his food in his pocket. [*Ibid*, pp. 13-14]



At Alleppey on 18 January there was a large public meeting at which Gandhiji was presented several addresses. The authorities of the local temple, which was controlled by Thiyyas, had placed the temple premises at the disposal of the Reception Committee, for which Gandhiji thanked them.

Gandhiji began his speech in Hindi but was made to switch over to English. He regretted this. He said perhaps the audience wanted to see how well or ill he spoke in English. He added that he had not been able to master the language, for he had learned it only enough to be able to express his thoughts. He appealed to the audience to learn Hindi, a language understood and spoken by the largest number of people in India.

Gandhiji referred to several letters, printed or typed, that he had been receiving. The burden of these letters was that religion was the greatest hurdle in the way of national unity and eradication of untouchability. The feeling against religion as such, he observed, appeared to be growing in a section of the youth. For this *savarna* Hindus were primarily responsible who had dignified irreligion by the name of religion. He refuted the charge that he was carrying on the anti-untouchability campaign in order to strengthen Hinduism. He said:

I ask you to take me at my word when I say that I am wholly indifferent whether Hindu religion is strengthened or weakened or perishes; that is to say, I have so much faith in the correctness of the position I have taken up that, if my taking up that position results in weakening Hinduism, I cannot help it and I must not care.

His purpose, Gandhiji said, was to purify Hinduism, not to consolidate it. If nevertheless Hinduism should cling to untouchability he would lose faith in Hinduism but he would not lose faith in God. The anti-untouchability movement was intended to bring all faiths together and if the movement should succeed, it must result in the strengthening of national unity. [*Ibid*, pp. 15-18]



On 18 January Gandhiji also paid visits to Tripunittura, Chalavennur and Nedumudi before proceeding to Kottayam.

At Kottayam on 19 January he spoke to a "public" meeting attended by an audience numbering about 2500. Gandhiji was presented with an address which said that the Harijans in the area were doing quite well. He also received a purse of Rs. 30. Gandhiji later visited Changanacherry, Odur and Panamanna, where he spent the night.

On the 20th, after addressing a public meeting at Panamanna and a stopover at Quilon, Gandhiji was in Trivandrum.

2

At the public meeting at Trivandrum, attended by about 10,000 people, Gandhiji referred to his statement that Malabar was the blackest spot in the untouchability map of India and expressed his distress that it should be so. Malabar was after all the place where Shankara was born, who taught the *advaita* doctrine. How could they reconcile the teaching of Shankara with untouchability?

Gandhiji said that while visiting a Harijan school that morning he had met two boys belonging to the Veta community, who were, like the Nayadis, unapproachable and unseeable. He was told that the Vetas had the greatest difficulty in finding clean drinking water. Gandhiji said he would love to identify himself with the Vetas and feel with them what it was like to be deprived of drinking water when there was fresh water all around. He appealed to the audience to root out the very feeling of untouchability from their hearts. It was not enough for them to treat Pulayas, Nayadis and other Harijans as blood brothers. They must wholly purge themselves of the virus that had contaminated not only Hindus but also other communities – Muslims, Christians and others.



Gandhiji had been presented a purse of Rs. 1001. He complained that it was too little. Even Bangalore and Calicut had given much more and Trivandrum was better off. He had also noticed, he said, that while people paid like misers, the organizers were quite lavish in spending what was collected. It pained him that the feeding charges of his party, which certainly descended like locusts on a field, were deducted from the collections made. In many cases more than 50 per cent of the purse had been spent in that way. If he did not protest against such squandering, he said, his claim to represent the Harijans would be summarily rejected by God. The collections were meant for the well-being of the poorest and most despised in the land. [*Ibid*, pp. 22-27]

Coinciding with Gandhiji's visit to Travancore, the Maharaja's Government had issued a communique on certain questions bearing on untouchability. On 20 January in the morning Gandhiji was handed a copy of the communique. It contained the decision of the Government on the recommendations of the Temple-entry Enquiry Committee on distance-pollution and use of public tanks and public wells (where they were not adjuncts of temples). The communique said:

Government share the view of the Committee that distance-pollution or *theendal* must cease and are of opinion that no general public funds should be spent by Government in the maintenance of public tanks, public wells, *satrams*, etc., admission to which is denied to any person by reason of his belonging to a *theendal* caste. They have resolved, therefore, that all public roads, public tanks, public wells, *satrams*, etc., maintained by them out of their general public funds shall be thrown open to all classes of people irrespective of the caste to which they belong. Measures to carry out these objects soon are being considered. [*Ibid*, pp. 22-27]



Gandhiji congratulated the Maharaja and his advisers on the reform, but said he was not satisfied. In his speech at the Trivandrum meeting and later in a talk with newspaper correspondents he declared that for him there could be neither satisfaction nor rest until the States refused to recognize untouchability in any shape or form taking care at the same time to see that there was no interference with anybody's personal or religious freedom. [*Ibid*, pp. 23-24, 27-28]

3

Though Gandhiji was under a self-imposed vow to keep away from political matters and to limit his activities to the service of the Harijans till 3 August 1934, he nevertheless kept himself informed of what was going on in the country. He was ever on watch to see that Governmental repression, which had shown no slackening even though Civil Disobedience had been put down, did not get out of hand. In certain areas of Bengal, such as Midnapore and Chittagong, exactly this seemed to be happening.

Following the assassination of the Midnapore District Magistrate B.E.G. Burge on 2 September 1933, and various other terrorist acts, such as the train dacoities near Kurigram on 24 October, and at Naldanga and Hill, Mymensingh, Midnapore and Chittagong appeared to have been completely given over to the army and the police. Armed police and military pickets were posted along the streets, pedestrians and passengers travelling in or getting off trams and steamers were searched and interrogated. People were indiscriminately arrested on the slightest pretext. The average daily strength of prisoners in the jails of the province in the year 1933, according to the Bengal Jail Administration Report, was 21,405.39, which was 50 per cent in excess of the normal figure. Of these only



374 were Civil Disobedience prisoners while those convicted for terrorist offences were 438. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 499-500]

It was a common sight in Midnapore for troops to surround the houses of people, drag them out, mercilessly belabour them, make them salute the Union Jack and then to march them off to police lock-ups.

Parades and route marches of army battalions were held for which people were forced to erect gates on public roads at their own expense and decorate their houses and shops. Leading citizens were "invited" to be present on such occasions and action was taken against them if they failed to come. Many lawyers and teachers were issued externment orders. Collective fines were imposed - the amounts being Rs. 78,631-9 in Chittagong and Rs. 6,658-15 in Midnapore. [*Ibid*, pp. 502-8]

Gandhiji was much troubled. On 21 January he wrote to Rabindranath Tagore:

The news about the Government measures in Midnapore has dazed me. They appear to me to be worse than the Martial Law measures of the Punjab in 1919. . . . Are you doing anything?

Our cowardice chokes me. [C.W.M.G, LVII, p. 29]

He also wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on the same day, repeating the same words, and added: "I have never felt so helpless as I do at the present moment." [*Ibid*, p. 30]

Later in a letter to Agatha Harrison he gave fuller expression to the agony he was going through.

He wrote:

The measures the Government have adopted to crush the spirit of the people defy description. The gagging of the Press has made it well-nigh



impossible to know the news accurately and to publish what little oozes out in spite of the strict censorship. Copies I am sending you of original documents will give you an inkling of what is happening. . . . I am trying my best to find a way to honourable peace. But there can be none so long as the Government persist in repression. [*Ibid*, p. 77]

Gandhiji stayed on in Trivandrum the whole day on the 21st, visiting Neyyattinkara, Pappanamcode, Amaravilai, Kuzhuthorai and Takkalai. He also attended to correspondence. On 22 January he made his way to Kanya Kumari.

What did Gandhiji do with all the ornaments of gold and silver he had been receiving from women in donation? Sri Prakasa in a letter asked him, suggesting at the same time that it would perhaps be desirable to sell them to those among women who were fond of wearing ornaments. Gandhiji answered that though he discouraged wearing of ornaments, he did not put them in the same category as foreign cloth. He wrote:

I do not mind selling ornaments to those who would wear them. It is enough for me if I get one woman to discard ornaments. You may not know that one-hundredth part of them are sold as ornaments, ninety-nine parts are melted and turned into gold and sold as currency. [*Ibid*, p. 33]

4

It was at Kanya Kumari on 22 January that Gandhiji first came to know about the earthquake that had devastated Bihar a week earlier, from a telegram sent by Rajendra Prasad, who had been released from prison only on the 17th.

The earthquake, which hit Bihar on 15 January 1934, was one of the biggest seismic disturbances in history. The main shock came at 2.13 p.m., preceded a few seconds before by a rumbling sound. The shock lasted for a period varying



from two and a half minutes to five minutes in different areas. The quake was felt over a very large area – some 1,90,000 square miles in extent – in North India and Tibet, but it was most intense in North Bihar, covering an area of 4,700 square miles stretching 160 miles from West Motihari to Purnea and from the Nepal border to the South of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga. But the area of maximum intensity lay in the region from Motihari through Sitamarhi to Madhubani where the devastation was almost total. In an area covering 6,000 square miles not a single building was left undamaged. Twelve towns with populations ranging from 10,000 to 60,000 were almost entirely decimated. In Patna over 4,000 houses were either totally destroyed or severely damaged. In Monghyr town the ruin was total. The main bazar crumbled into a heap of debris. In Muzaffarpur only three houses were left standing.

In the most affected areas the shaking was so intense that people were unable to stand up. Fissures of great depth and several hundred yards in length opened up, ejecting floods of water and sand which inundated the fields and rendered it difficult for those fields to be ploughed. In many places geysers appeared, spouting jets of water often to a height of six feet. Wells became choked with sand.

Road and rail transport was interrupted over large areas. Hundreds of miles of tracks and hundreds of bridges and culverts were damaged dislocating traffic. Telegraph lines were similarly damaged, rendering communications difficult.

In the beginning it was feared that the loss of life might reach 25,000. But gradually, as volunteers and the police force and village watchmen and staff employed to clear the ruins of houses, dragged out bodies buried under the debris, a more accurate estimate of the casualties became possible. On 14 February the Legislative Council of Bihar and Orissa was informed by the Finance Minister:



The total number of deaths reported up to date was 7,057 [*India in 1933-34*, a Government of India publication, gave the figure 7,253]. The greatest loss of life occurred as might be expected in Tirhut Division, where the number of deaths was 5,295. In Muzaffarpur district alone 2,844 lives were lost. In Muzaffarpur town there were 956 deaths reported. In Sitamarhi Sub-Division, where perhaps the shock was most intense and havoc most complete, 942 lives were lost mostly in Sitamarhi itself and in Belsand and Pupri police stations in Hajipur Sub-Division. In the South of the district the total loss of life was 227. In Darbhanga the loss of life was 2,128, over half of it in Madhubani Sub-Division. In Champaran the total loss of life was 499, mostly in Sadar Sub-Division. In Monghyr the loss of life . . . was 1,200.

The death toll in other districts was as follows: Patna 138, Gaya 34, Shahabad 22, Saran 184, Bhagalpur 174, Purnea 2. These figures were, except in the case of Monghyr town, the result of counting every case. . . . [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 18-19, 218-29; *India in 1933-34*, pp. 52-56; Kali Kinkar Datta, *Gandhiji in Bihar*, Patna, 1969, p. 135]

5

Gandhiji from now on spoke not only on untouchability, eradication of which had been the single purpose of his mission, but also on the Bihar earthquake and the need for relief for the victims. Indeed he combined the two themes, joining them in a cause-and-effect relationship. In his speech at the public meeting in Tinnevely on 24 January he said:

All these communications [about the earthquake] show what puny mortals we are. We who have faith in God must cherish the belief that behind even this indescribable calamity there is a Divine purpose that works



for the good of humanity. You may call me superstitious if you like; but a man like me cannot but believe that this earthquake is a Divine chastisement sent by God for our sins.

At the meeting in Tuticorin the same day he was more specific about the nature of the sin. He said:

I want you to be "superstitious" enough with me to believe that the earthquake is a Divine chastisement for the great sin we have committed and are still committing against those whom we describe as untouchables, *Panchamas*, and whom I describe as Harijans.

Relief on a massive scale was needed for those who were without shelter, without food and without clothing, said Gandhiji. He appealed to the people to forget their differences – political and social – and generously donate to the cause of the afflicted in Bihar. Whether Sanatanists or reformers, Congressmen or non-Congressmen, Hindus or non-Hindus, officials or non-officials – all should contribute to the extent they could.

As for himself, Gandhiji said, he would for the present continue on his mission of fighting untouchability. He could not cut short his tour plan. He could not also think of diverting the Harijan purse funds for earthquake relief in Bihar. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 44-47]

At Rajapalayam, where Gandhiji addressed a public meeting on 25 January, he thanked the audience for the purse presented to him for the Harijan cause and then referring to Bihar said:

I would like you, even as you have paid to the Harijan cause, to contribute your mite to the earthquake-stricken citizens of Bihar. Do not think that you can give no more because you have given for the Harijan



cause. If your neighbours go without food and without clothes, you have got to protect them. [*Ibid*, pp. 48-49]

At Madura, on 26 January, Gandhiji had several engagements. He spoke at no less than six meetings in that one day. There was first the reception given in his honour by the merchants, then a meeting arranged by the Municipality, then a women's meeting, then a public meeting, then a meeting of the Hindi Prachar Sabha and finally a meeting of labourers.

The merchants' reception was arranged by the Madura Ramnad Chamber of Commerce and the Bombay Hindu Merchants of Madura. Addresses and purses as usual were presented to Gandhiji, for which he thanked his "brother Banias".

Gandhiji confined his speech largely to the Bihar earthquake. He described the havoc caused by the earthquake, with thousands dead and the survivors living in open space, shivering in bitter cold. His conviction, he said, was growing that the calamity was a punishment for the sin of untouchability. The least *prayaschitta* (atonement) they could do was to send help to the victims.

In the Municipality's address presented to Gandhiji it had been mentioned that the Harijans in the town were provided equal opportunities with others in the matter of education and other civic amenities. Gandhiji said it certainly was not so in the matter of housing. He had visited Harijan *cheries* and found that their condition was very unsatisfactory. He welcomed the plan of the Municipality to build model *cheries* for Harijans and said this should be done within rigidly set time limits. [*Ibid*, pp. 50-57]

On 27 January Gandhiji moved on to Karaikudi where he addressed a Municipal Council meeting and a public meeting. The Municipal Council meeting was notable for the fact that at it a gentleman announced a personal donation of Rs. 10,000 for the Harijan cause, for which Gandhiji thanked him. Commenting



on the Municipality's plans for the betterment of Harijans, Gandhiji said that they were not enough, and that they were vague. He impressed upon them the urgency of improving the lot of the Harijans, saying it could not wait for better times to come. Better times would follow better treatment being assured to Harijans.

At the public meeting that he addressed later in the day Gandhiji drew the attention of the audience to the appeal issued by Rajendra Prasad and Madan Mohan Malaviya for funds for the relief of the Bihar earthquake victims and appealed to the public to show tangible sympathy to the sufferers by donating to the relief fund. He again repeated his conviction that such visitations were due to the great sin of untouchability. [*Ibid*, pp. 58-60]

Afterwards Gandhiji visited Devakottah, Therukutheru, Kilaour, Chittanoor, Tiruppattur, Paganeri, Sivaganga and Manamadurai, and exhorted people everywhere to contribute liberally to the Harijan fund and to the Bihar earthquake relief fund. [*Ibid*, pp. 61-64]

On the following day, 28 January, a group of Nattars called on Gandhiji at Devakottah. The deputation consisted of over one hundred persons. Earlier during a visit to a Harijan *cheri* he had been informed of the oppression and humiliation the Harijans had to suffer at the hands of the Nattars. It appeared that the Nattars would not let the Harijans even dress as they liked. "What right have you to dictate what dress the Harijans must wear?" Gandhiji asked. They said it was the custom handed down by their forefathers. Gandhiji said there were certain laws common to all human society and one of them was that no body of men could force on another body of men particular modes of dress and ornaments, etc. If on this account the Nattars molested the Harijans and the matter went to a court of law, the Nattars' case would be rejected at once. Both



religion and the established law forbade such interference. The Nattars remained unconvinced. "I accepted my defeat," Gandhiji wrote later. [*Ibid*, pp. 65-66, 134-35]

The next eight days from 29 January to 5 February Gandhiji spent at Coonoor, a hill station, and tried to catch up with his correspondence. In a letter to Vallabhbhai Patel on 30th January he wrote:

These days Bihar takes plenty of my time. You know now the extent of the destruction there. I get wires from Rajendrababu almost every day. I do whatever he wants me to do. There is no need for me to go to Bihar just now. He has asked for those inmates of the Ashram who have been released. I have sent a wire to the Ashram accordingly. As many of them as can go will go. [*Ibid*, p. 73]

To Agatha Harrison he wrote on the same day:

The male members of the Ashram who have just come out of prison have suspended their civil resistance and gone to Bihar. The calamity is of such magnitude that all the help that the whole world may give will be a drop in the ocean. [*Ibid*, p. 77]

The Ashram inmates who rushed to Bihar immediately were Narayan Moreshwar Khare, Y. M. Parnerkar, Balkrishna Kalelkar, Soman, Maganbhai and Raojibhai Patel. Swami Anand and Dhotre went from Bombay. [*Ibid*, pp. 114, 137]

J. C. Kumarappa was also sent to Bihar to help Rajendra Prasad with the accounts, at the urgent request from the latter.

Gandhiji's reiteration at every public meeting that the Bihar earthquake was a punishment for the sin of untouchability did not find favour in rationalist



quarters. Rabindranath Tagore, in a statement sent for publication to *Harijan*, said:

It has caused me painful surprise to find Mahatma Gandhi accusing those who blindly follow their own social custom of untouchability of having brought down God's vengeance upon certain parts of Bihar. . . .

If we associate ethical principles with cosmic phenomena, we shall have to admit that human nature is morally superior to Providence that preaches its lessons in good behaviour in orgies of the worst behaviour possible. . . . Though we cannot point out any period of human history that is free from inequities of the darkest kind, we still find citadels of malevolence yet remain unshaken What is truly tragic about it is the fact that the kind of argument that Mahatmaji used by exploiting an event of cosmic disturbance far better suits the psychology of his opponents than his own, and it would not have surprised me at all if they had taken this opportunity of holding him and his followers responsible for the visitation of Divine anger. As for us, we feel perfectly secure in the faith that our own sins and errors, however enormous, have not enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins.

Tagore expressed his sense of hurt that any words of Gandhiji, who had inspired "freedom from fear and feebleness in the minds of his countrymen", should emphasize the elements of unreason in people's minds. [*Ibid*, pp. 503-4]

Coming from the Poet, whom Gandhiji loved so dearly, it was bound to hurt him. When he received the statement he wrote to Tagore on 2 February:

There is a campaign of vilification of me going on. My remarks on the Bihar calamity were a good handle to beat me with. . . . I see from your



statement that we have come upon perhaps a fundamental difference. But I cannot help myself. I do believe that super-physical consequences flow from physical events. How they do I do not know. [*Ibid*, p. 95]

Tagore's statement was nevertheless published in *Harijan*. In the same issue of the journal, of 16 February, Gandhiji also published his reply. Gandhiji wrote:

We do not know all the laws of God nor their working. . . . If God is not a personal being for me like my earthly father, He is infinitely more. He rules me in the tiniest detail of my life. I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His will.

Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are, for me somehow connected with men's morals. Therefore I instinctively felt that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Of course, Sanatanists have a perfect right to say that it was due to my crime of preaching against untouchability. My belief is a call to repentance and self-purification I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me. If my belief turns out to be ill-founded, it will still have done good to me and those who believe with me. . . . I have not the faith which Gurudev has that "our sins and errors, however enormous, have not got enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins". On the contrary I have the faith that our own sins have more force to ruin that structure than any mere physical phenomenon. There is an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit. [*Ibid*, pp. 164-66]



While at Coonoor Gandhiji had an opportunity to acquaint himself with the problems of the Harijans living in the hills in the vicinity of Coonoor, for every day groups of them came to meet Gandhiji. One such group that met him on 4 February represented the 'Adi Hindus of Tamil Districts'. The memorandum they presented to Gandhiji was a catalogue of woes that afflicted their life. It was a long document, containing 18 paragraphs and Gandhiji reproduced its contents in an article under the title "Our Shame" carried in the *Harijan* of 9 March 1934. The following is a brief summary of their grievances:

They had, they said, no access to eating-houses, laundries, shaving saloons, coffee and tea clubs, schools, water tanks, wells, post offices; in some areas they were not allowed to hold umbrellas, wear sandals and wear dhotis below the knees; they were not allowed to carry their dead along the highway but had to carry them through paddy fields in knee-deep water; they could not ride on horseback; in certain bazars they were not permitted to touch bleached cloth; for their work on the fields they were paid in unwholesome grain in short measures; even their riding on bicycles was frowned upon; they were prevented from using public latrines; if some Adi Hindus should be elected to local bodies or panchayats the *savarna* Hindus resigned from them; if a caste Hindu should pass by while an Adi Hindu was resting in front of his dwelling, the latter must get up and worship the former with due veneration; in rural elementary schools maintained out of public funds Harijan children were discriminated against in every way; in post offices they were not allowed to buy stamps or do any other business, they must seek the help of some caste Hindu to have any postal business transacted.

Gandhiji, commenting on the grievances as presented to him, wrote that it was a matter of shame for caste Hindus that such things were sustained in the name of religion. [*Ibid*, pp. 111-12, 259-61]



On 6 February Gandhiji moved into the Tamil territory, addressing meetings at Erode, Chokkampalayam, Tirupur, Coimbatore and Podanur. At the meetings, which were invariably more crowded than ever before – at the Coimbatore meeting more than forty thousand people had assembled – Gandhiji called upon the audience to root out untouchability from their hearts and create a climate for the opening of public temples to Harijans in their areas. He also appealed for donations for the victims of the Bihar earthquake. [*Ibid*, pp. 122-26]

On 7 February Gandhiji addressed meetings at Pollachi, Palni and Dindigul, besides visiting Pondar, Udamalpet and Vannivalasi. At all the meetings the message remained the same. Untouchability persisted between caste and caste, Gandhiji said, and between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews. These defects should be removed. He also appealed for funds for Bihar. [*Ibid*, pp. 127-29]

8

The Government had been sending circulars to its employees not to associate with Gandhiji's movement in any way and to keep away from his meetings. Local authorities discouraged citizens from helping Gandhiji, as a consequence of which moneyed men too were frightened to be seen associating with the movement. Yet people attended Gandhiji's meetings in very large numbers and gave enthusiastically. But the way these collections were drawn upon by Reception Committees for defraying expenses on feeding Gandhiji and his party and on organizing meetings evoked strong censure from Gandhiji. He insisted on accounts – audited accounts – being placed before him of the collections made. In an article in *Harijan* he laid down guidelines to be followed by reception committees in this regard. He insisted that:

- (1) The fewest number of volunteers should be employed.
- (2) Motor hire for local purposes should be minimized.



- (3) Motor hire for the party should be separately shown, so as to enable one to collect from those who are travelling at their own expense.
- (4) Printing charges should be incurred only when absolutely necessary.
- (5) No decoration charges can be allowed to be debited against the purse.
- (6) On no account can address expenses be paid out of the purse fund. I have repeatedly said that addresses need not be presented at all.... The burden . . . rests upon reception committees of permitting only those addresses that are spontaneous and have a value in terms of the Harijan cause.
- (7) Accounts for feeding the party should be separately rendered when they are meant to be a charge against the purse. I must say in fairness to the committees that . . . seeing that my party is very big, consisting of 15 persons, even providing one meal is no light task in a poor country like India.

No spectacular displays, Gandhiji said, were needed for collecting money. It was done by hard work, patient and gentle arguments and unshaken faith in the cause. The Harijan cause was undoubtedly the noblest because it affected the most suppressed part of humanity on the face of the globe. [*Ibid*, pp. 131-33]

On 8 February Gandhiji halted at Kumbam, situated "between the Eastern and the Western Ghats", Gandhiji explained in a letter to Chhaganlal Joshi. He visited Batlagundu and Badugapatti on the 8th and on the 9th spoke at a public meeting at Thevaram. Gandhiji said it did his heart good to see the enthusiasm his tour had inspired among the people and mentioned the unbroken line of volunteers all the way from Combai to Thevaram on either side of the track. It



was beautiful country but insufficient attention had been paid to sanitation. The condition of the streets was insanitary and unhygienic. They must keep the drains always dry. But all that could be done only when they had rooted out the curse of untouchability from their midst. [*Ibid*, pp. 139-40]

Later Gandhiji visited Bodinayakanur and Theni and then took the train for Trichinopoly.

At Srirangam there was a mammoth public meeting on the 10th. The Sanatanists had organized a black flag demonstration but, as Gandhiji noted with surprise, it was wholly peaceful, with no vociferous shouts and the urchins holding the black flags smiling and even joining in the shouts of joy.

Gandhiji said he had had occasion to study the scriptures to see if they had any bearing on the question of untouchability as it was practised. He was satisfied that there was nothing in them that prohibited the entry of Harijans into temples. It was the duty of the caste Hindus, he said, to admit the Harijans to the same rights and privileges as they themselves possessed. The temple-entry movement was not a movement of Harijans claiming temple-entry. Harijans might or might not enter temples when they were opened to them. But it was the duty of caste Hindus to see that they were not deprived of the right. But this could only be when there was a consensus of opinion among the Hindus.

From the response he had received during his tour of the Central Provinces, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Malabar, Gandhiji said he had been left in no doubt that "unsophisticated caste Hindu mind is today ready to recognize the right of Harijans to enter temples and to enjoy all the other privileges that caste Hindus enjoy."

He said he was willing to enter into a discussion on the question with "the hottest Sanatanist". [*Ibid*, pp. 141-43]



At the public meeting at Trichinopoly the same day, attended by an audience of 30,000, which beat all previous records, Gandhiji was also presented an address by the local Muslims. The Muslims appealed to Gandhiji to take up the work of uplifting not only the Hindus and the Christians but also the Muslims.

Gandhiji assured them that the anti-untouchability movement was not a sectional movement and did not advocate a sectional cause. It had been taken up in pursuit of a universal goal, for the good of humanity as a whole. Untouchability had taken in its snaky coil not merely caste Hindus but all other communities, Muslims, Christians and others. The movement was aimed at bringing about the brotherhood not of Hindus alone, but the brotherhood of man.

Gandhiji then appealed for funds for the relief of Bihar earthquake sufferers. [*Ibid*, pp. 146-48]

Gandhiji also visited on the same day Manachanalloor, Samayapuram and Chintamani.

On the 11th he spoke at public meetings at Karur, Erode and Tiruchengodu. At all these places the meetings were largely attended. He made the point in his speeches that the temple-entry for Harijans was claimed on the basis of consensus among the temple-going caste Hindus. The attempt would be to convert, never to coerce. [*Ibid*, pp. 149-51]

On the 12th Gandhiji spoke at Pudupalayam, in the environs of Tiruchengod, where C. Rajagopalachari had been running an Ashram since 1926 for constructive work and Harijan service. The villagers around the Ashram made collections on the spot and presented to Gandhiji a handsome purse for the



Harijan fund. Gandhiji told the audience that Pudupalayam ought to serve as a test of the degree to which caste Hindus had cleansed themselves of the taint of untouchability, since it had a body of workers who were themselves wholly free of that taint and who served all alike. He was of course referring to the workers of Rajaji's Ashram. There were about 50 of them and, Gandhiji wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel on 13 February, Rajaji was able to manage them well. Gandhiji and party spent the night of the 12th at the Ashram. [*Ibid*, pp. 152-55]

On the morning of the 14th Gandhiji proceeded to Namakkal and thence to Salem. At both places there were huge crowds. Though the meeting at Namakkal was held at 7.50 a.m. 15,000 people had gathered to see and hear Gandhiji. The Taluqa Board presented to Gandhiji an address in which the steps taken to ameliorate the condition of Harijans were enumerated. Several other addresses were presented too, all of which Gandhiji auctioned at the end of the meeting, a practice he followed throughout the tour.

The Salem meeting was even more impressive, with an attendance of 50,000. No less than 12 addresses of welcome were presented to Gandhiji and as many purses, including those from the Municipality, District Board and various other organizations. Various articles of silver and gold were also donated. Gandhiji did not have the time to make a long speech, being in a hurry to catch the train to Tanjore. Caste Hindus, he said, if they wanted to earn God's favour, must work to elevate the condition of Harijans. They must be given the same rights and privileges as the caste Hindus themselves enjoyed. [*Ibid*, pp. 157-58]

In his speech at the public meeting in Tanjore, held at dawn on 15 February, Gandhiji emphasized the voluntary nature of temple-entry. He said it was a matter to be decided wholly by the caste Hindus. Referring to the opposition of the Sanatanists in this matter Gandhiji said:



I have been told not once but repeatedly that our Sanatanist friends would associate with all other reforms with reference to untouchability, if only I would surrender the claim of temple-entry on behalf of the Harijans. They little know that the advice is tantamount to asking me to surrender the force which sustains me. . . .

Not one of these temples can be opened without the free consent of those who are in the habit of going to these temples or who believe in these temples. Why should therefore the Sanatanists or any other person worry about my conviction about temple-entry when the matter was a purely voluntary thing?

What grieved him, Gandhiji said, was that under the excuse of the temple-entry question, the Sanatanists were opposing other reforms to improve the condition of the Harijans.

Gandhiji repeated these sentiments at the two meetings he addressed later in the day at Kumbakonam – one arranged by the Municipal Council and the other a public meeting. His only difference with the Sanatanists, he said, was on the question of temple-entry and, as he had repeatedly said, neither the Harijan Sevak Sangh nor he himself would do anything to force the issue. As for the demand that he should not whisper a word on the subject, he could not do that. He must continue to cultivate public opinion in favour of temple-entry.

He could not also agree that even if one person in ten thousand opposed temple-entry, the temples should not be opened. This would be coercion with a vengeance – one person imposing his will on the rest of 9,999.

Gandhiji said that though he was a staunch Congressman, so far as the Harijan question was concerned, he made no distinction between Congressmen and non-Congressmen. If there was a non-Congressman who loved Harijans and



served them, he would work under him and obey his directions. The movement had no political motive.

In the evening Gandhiji spoke at Nagapatam, where he was presented addresses of welcome and purses by the Municipality, the Charkha Sangh, the Harijan Seva Sangam and Nagapatam Taluq Board. There was also a collection for Bihar Earthquake Relief Fund. [*Ibid*, pp. 160-64]

10

Early at 8.45 a.m. on 16 February Gandhiji crossed into Karaikal, which was part of the French territory, where a huge crowd had gathered to welcome him. Besides addresses by the public and the Harijan Sevak Sangam a purse was presented to him by the Vice-President of the Consulate General.

Addressing the meeting Gandhiji invoked the idea of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which had been given to the world by France. It was a pity that the Hindus had denied all the three things to the Harijans in the name of religion. It was a mockery of religion. The *Rigveda*, which represented the dawn of human wisdom, taught the unity of God. Untouchability was a negation of that magnificent truth.

At Shiyali, the place next visited, Gandhiji was shown black flags at the meeting. This time the protesters were not the Sanatanists but a group of people who described themselves as "Self-Respecters". They did not believe in God or religion. They believed in justice and humanity. Their moto was love and sympathy. They opposed Gandhiji because they thought he was a tool in the hands of capitalists and rich men. They told Gandhiji that they wanted equal distribution of the riches of the world.

Gandhiji said if they wanted to describe their God as humanity, he would call God by that name. He had also no quarrel with their ideal of economic equality. But while they only talked about it, he pointed out, he was actually



taking from the rich to give to the poor, whether they be Harijans or the sufferers of Bihar.

At the Annamalai University at Chidambaram on the same day Gandhiji told the students and teachers that according to his reading of the scriptures, there was no religious sanction for untouchability at all, which was a blight and a curse. Some *Smritis* did have passages which could be interpreted to mean that they countenanced untouchability in some form. But even those passages did not identify the untouchables. Gandhiji said he had asked the Shastris to show him passages which identified the Harijans as untouchables. The Shastris had told him that they relied on the census reports. But the census reports were not the word of God. One census report would classify a certain group of people as untouchable while another census report would take them out of that classification and put another group in the category of untouchables who had till then not been untouchables.

Books, Gandhiji pointed out to the students, could not carry them very far. What better book could there be than the book of humanity, what better education could there be than to go, day in and day out, to Harijan quarters to serve Harijans?

Late in the night on 16 February Gandhiji spoke at a public meeting at Cuddalore. Gandhiji apologized for being there at such a late hour, but he had a packed schedule and if he was to accommodate the Pondicherry friends, who had sent an invitation at the eleventh hour, there was no other way. He asked the audience to donate for the Harijan cause and for the cause of the Bihar sufferers. [*Ibid*, pp. 167-72]

The idea of visiting Pondicherry had earlier been dropped by Gandhiji after Aurobindo had declined to see him. But friends in Pondicherry persisted and in



the end Gandhiji managed to squeeze in a short visit on 17 February. The meeting held in the Odianchalai ground, was fairly large, with an audience of nearly ten thousand. Gandhiji again invoked the French revolutionaries' proclamation of liberty, equality and fraternity, and declared that an ideal for which so many heroic souls had fought and bled was an ideal worth striving for. He hoped that they would remove the blot of untouchability from their midst. Purses were presented for the Harijan cause at the meeting. Gandhiji appealed for donations for Bihar, which brought in a sum of Rs. 57! [*Ibid*, p. 173]

Gujaratis in Pondicherry had been urging Gandhiji to make use of the opportunity provided by his Harijan tour to visit the Aurobindo Ashram and see the sage. Gandhiji himself was keen to meet Aurobindo. As early as on 25 December 1933 he wrote to Govindbhai Patel, an inmate of the Ashram, saying it would be a great disappointment to him if on his visit to Pondicherry he did not see Sri Aurobindo, and requesting him to arrange a meeting. Govindbhai conveyed the message to Aurobindo, who directed Govindbhai to write to Gandhiji that for a long time he had made it a rule not to see anyone and that time had not come when he could depart from it.

In the first week of January 1934, when Gandhiji was in Bangalore, he wrote "a long letter" to Aurobindo himself, asking for an interview. Gandhiji had to wait a long time for Aurobindo's reply, which reached him finally on 20 January. Aurobindo, in his letter, regretted that he could not break the rule of not seeing anyone. Gandhiji then decided to try and see Mother. He wrote to her, but she did not even answer.

Gandhiji, therefore, could not visit the Aurobindo Ashram. Later, on 19 February, Gandhiji referred to the matter in a letter to Vallabhbhai Patel. He wrote:



Govindbhai came and saw me when I was at another place. He told me the whole story. The Ashram is being watched, and so there was some risk even in letting me visit the place. [C.W.M.G., LVI, pp. 499-500; LVII, pp. 113, 184-85, 501]

Gandhiji spent the night of the 17th at Vellore and the following morning spoke at a public meeting organized at the Gandhi Maidan. The meeting was largely attended and numerous addresses and even more numerous purses, some of them from individuals, were presented to Gandhiji. Gandhiji appealed to the Municipal Councils and District Boards to save his time and present their addresses and purses on the common platforms instead of having him visit their offices for the purpose. He recognized that it was their right to do so, but they must waive the right in the case, for he was conducting a hurricane tour and both his time and his energies needed to be conserved. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 175-76]

11

Gandhiji was later taken to the Christkula Ashram, a Christian institution as the name implied, at Tirupattur. He said that he had been wanting to visit the Ashram for several years and when the tour programme for the Madras Presidency was being drawn up he had especially asked for the Christkula Ashram to be included.

He and his party, Gandhiji said, were tired out, and he would give them the gist of his message in only a few words. The message was that untouchability was the greatest sin that caste Hindus had committed against God and man, and if untouchability was not abolished, Hindus and Muslims were bound to perish. The anti-untouchability movement was a movement for the realization of the brotherhood of man. Removal of untouchability was merely a stepping-stone to the achievement of that grand design.



Gandhiji appealed to the Harijans to play their part in that movement of purification. They must rid themselves of their vices; they must give up carrion and, since eating beef was not permitted by Hinduism, they must give up beef. They must observe the laws of hygiene and personal cleanliness and they must give up drink. [*Ibid*, pp. 176-78]

Gandhiji had conceived the Harijan tour as a tour for preaching and bringing about an all-round improvement in the social condition of Harijans and for the removal of untouchability in all respects including entry into temples. The emphasis throughout in his speeches had been on the general uplift of the condition of Harijans. The temple-entry, though desirable, he was careful to leave entirely to the wishes of the caste Hindus. But the Sanatanists saw the movement essentially as a temple-entry movement and proceeding from that perception offered severe opposition at every step during the tour.

At Madras, where Gandhiji spent two days on the 19th and 20th, he told a *Hindu* correspondent:

While I have purposely kept the temple-entry question in the background, the Sanatanists have always been keeping it before the public. . . . I have no desire whatsoever to force the issue. For me the acid test is of a change of heart on the part of the caste Hindus; and temple-entry unaccompanied by that change of heart is to me of no consequence. [*Ibid*, p. 189]

The Sanatanists continued throughout the tour to harp on the theme: we shall support you in every effort to improve the condition of the Harijans. But please give up the demand for temple-entry. They said this again and again in different ways.



There was, for instance, a letter from Bengal, which Gandhiji reproduced in *Harijan* of 23 February 1934. Assuming an attitude of sweet reasonableness, the letter-writer made a plea to the squabbling Sanatanists and reformers for tolerance. The reformers must understand that, however, undesirable it might be, the Sanatanists did believe that they could not worship in the temples properly if the Harijans were admitted into them. Would it not be better to build new temples where the reformers and Harijans could worship together? And if, as Gandhiji asserted, the majority of temple-going Hindus were in favour of temple-entry, the newly-built temples would draw to them most of the devout and the orthodox temples would be left without devotees.

The writer offered ingenious arguments for opposing the Temple-entry Bill and the Anti-Untouchability Bill, then before the Central Assembly. Supposing an orthodox Hindu built or endowed a temple and allowed all *savarna* Hindus to worship in it but excluded Harijans from this facility, he would not be able to enforce this right because, if the Bill were passed the law would not recognize anyone as untouchable. If a majority of caste Hindus in the area favoured the Harijans' entry into the temple they would be able to override the desire of the donor, which would be unfair.

The other letter, handed to Gandhiji at Trichy, similarly pleaded that temple-entry may be dropped for the present and the resources of all Hindus including the Sanatanists may be pooled together for promoting the material, moral, educational and spiritual welfare of Harijans in consonance with the tradition of Hindu religion. . . . The reform must proceed gradually step by step. . . . It is likely that, in the course of fifty years, our Harijans will be admitted into the temples.



Gandhiji commented that both letters made the same plea. They wanted the temple-entry issue to be dropped. The first made an "appeal to both parties to show mutual tolerance". In fact it was an appeal made only to the reformers. Nothing was expected of the Sanatanists. And it argued that even one Sanatanist must have the right to exclude the Harijans from temples. "In naked terms," Gandhiji wrote, "this is coercion of the worst type – a minority of one bending the will of the majority to its will."

The reformers' position, wrote Gandhiji, was plain. They did not wish to see a single temple opened to Harijans until there was an overwhelming majority of temple-goers in favour of such entry. But the minority, which in Gandhiji's view the Sanatanists represented, insisted on the existing position being maintained. This would make for stagnation and death. As for mutual bitterness, the reformers did not have any. They gave the Sanatanists credit for the same honesty of purpose which they claimed for themselves. They considered their task confined to seeking conversion of popular opinion to their side. There need, therefore, be no friction whatever.

Gandhiji again emphasized that the Bills before the Assembly were merely enabling Bills, seeking only to remove legal obstacles in the way of reform. And in no case did he desire that the Bills should be passed in the teeth of opposition of a majority of Hindu members of the Assembly. In such an event he must wait till the legislature or legislatures were ready for the overdue reform. [*Ibid*, pp. 201-4]

On 21 February, which was the last day of Gandhiji's tour in Tamil Nadu, he spoke at Conjeevaram, Arni and finally Arkonam.

At Conjeevaram Gandhiji said the town was a centre of Sanskrit learning and it also boasted of a great temple. It was regrettable that Sanskrit learning was



being used by some for the defence of untouchability and the gates of the temple were barred to the Harijans. He appealed to the audience to persevere in the effort to create public opinion for opening the temple to the Harijans. Very little work had been done for improving Harijan services in the towns. Gandhiji called upon the students to spare some time every day for that work. Everyone must purify himself by eradicating untouchability from his heart and doing away with all distinctions of high and low. Before disposing of the addresses presented to him Gandhiji made an appeal for funds for Bihar.

At Arni, which Gandhiji passed on his way to Arkonam to catch the train, there was a crowd of 15,000 waiting to receive him. Three addresses of welcome and a purse of Rs. 801 were presented to him. Gandhiji exhorted the audience to do away with all distinctions of high and low and treat the Harijans as their brothers, for they were all, caste Hindus and Harijans alike, children of the same God. Harijans must have access to public wells, tanks and other places of utility and the doors of temples should be flung open for them.

At Arkonam, where Gandhiji arrived on the evening of the 21st, his address was in the nature of a farewell speech. He thanked the people of Tamil Nadu, he thanked the police and the railway administration in the South for the help rendered to him on all occasions throughout the province. The police, he said, had behaved throughout as if they were servants of the people, which of course they were.

He thanked the volunteers who had done duty in all parts of the South during his tour. They must remember, he said, that they were engaged in a magnificent task, the removal of untouchability, which meant the realization of the brotherhood of man.

He said:



You cannot – millions of caste Hindus cannot – do reparation to several million Harijans, whom they have suppressed for centuries, without setting free a power, a force, that will develop the whole of the human family and knit all its members together as one. And it is because I have never lost sight of this goal that I have called this movement a deeply spiritual and exclusively religious movement.

All that was needed to bring about this happy result, Gandhiji said, was for people to change their hearts. [*Ibid*, pp. 191-95]

12

On 22 February Gandhiji made his way to Coorg for a two-days' visit. On that first day in Coorg he spoke at meetings at Hudekeri and Panampet. At Hudekeri Gandhiji expressed his joy at the beautiful scenery of the place and hoped that their hearts were as beautiful as the scenery, for he observed that the untouchability in that area was not poisonous as it was in the plains. But even here, he said, he was told that the temples were not open to the Harijans. Their hearts would not be purified, he said, till they had opened the doors of the temples to Harijans.

At Panampet Gandhiji explained how the question of eradicating untouchability could not but be a religious question. Shastras had been quoted to the effect that untouchability was a divine institution. When it was thus presented he could not but fight it on the religious plane. Then there was the temple-entry question, which by its very nature was a question concerned with religion. But aside from all that, so far as he was concerned, Gandhiji said, all his activities flowed from his religion, including his politics. He went even further and said that every activity of a man of religion should be derived from his religion, because religion meant being bound to God.



As a man of religion, Gandhiji said, he could tell them that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion. It was a sin against God and man. And to deny Harijans entry into temples was equally a sin. [*Ibid*, pp. 198-99]

At the meeting at Virajpet on the 23rd, one of the addresses presented to Gandhiji was in very choice and correct Hindustani and Gandhiji was agreeably surprised. The address appealed to him to do whatever it was possible to do to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity throughout India. Gandhiji said Hindu-Muslim unity was as dear to him as life itself, which he staked several years earlier in Delhi to further that object. But Hindu-Muslim unity was just one step in the pursuit of oneness of all life. The Harijan movement was also a part of that pursuit and it was for that reason, said Gandhiji, that he had thrown himself heart and soul into the campaign against untouchability.

Gandhiji next spoke at the public meeting at Mercara. Here he got the impression that untouchability sat lightly on the hearts and minds of the people of Coorg and it was much less harsh in its consequences than it was in the plains. But he found that the Harijans in Coorg were daily becoming more landless and that whatever little land they possessed was lying fallow. The Harijan Sevak Sangh, he said, must look into the question.

What grieved him, Gandhiji said, was that even here the temples remained barred to the Harijans. It was monstrous that public opinion should not have been able to get the temples opened to Harijans.

Gandhiji at the end made a fervent plea for donations for Bihar, the land of Sita and Gautama Buddha. If they had not hardened their hearts they must help their suffering brethren in the North to the extent they could. While Gandhiji auctioned the various articles and addresses presented to him, volunteers



spread themselves among the audience to make collections for the Bihar Earthquake Relief Fund. [*Ibid*, pp. 204-6]

Afterwards Gandhiji paid visits to Bellur, Somwarpet and Gundukutti.

13

During the period from 24 February to 8 March Gandhiji took in Karnataka. This represented the last lap of his touring in the South, before he proceeded to Bihar in answer to persistent requests from Rajendra Prasad.

On 24 February, when he entered Karnataka territory, Gandhiji addressed public meetings at Puttur and Bantwal and no less than three different meetings in Mangalore.

At Puttur, a small place afflicted by malaria and "general depression", about 4,000 people had assembled to hear Gandhiji. He was presented several addresses, purses and ornaments. One of the addresses said that though the people of Puttur were unable to make an adequate monetary contribution to the cause, they would lay their hearts at Gandhiji's feet. Gandhiji said he would be more than satisfied if he could make use of their hearts. He had visited the local Harijan *cheri* before coming to address them, he said, and what did he see? The *cheri* was cut off from the main habitation, the children there were unkempt, their hair unwashed. He appealed to the young men who were eager to do Harijan service to visit the *cheri* and to transform it. He then asked for donations for Bihar.

At Bantwail Gandhiji was presented, in addition to the usual purses and addresses, a length of cloth woven from the yarn spun by a local khadi enthusiast. Asked for a message Gandhiji said he expected them to wash themselves of the sin of untouchability and forget all distinctions of high and low.



At Mangalore the first meeting Gandhiji addressed was one of Jnanodaya Samaj, a body engaged in temperance work among the fishermen community. He told the workers of the Samaj that making people give up drink was a difficult task, as he knew from experience. It was not enough to ask people not to drink. Many people drank because they had nothing better to do. Occupation must therefore be found for their minds, their hands and their feet.

At the public meeting, attended by about 10,000 people, Gandhiji was presented several addresses and a purse of Rs. 1,001. Gandhiji commented on the leanness of the purse, but said he realized too that they had also made donations for Bihar relief and that it was a period of depression. In any case abolition of untouchability was not a cause that could be advanced merely through funds. Not even a crore of rupees subscribed by a few millionaires could abolish untouchability. He was glad to be informed that there was in Mangalore a noticeable change of heart among the people in regard to untouchability, but, as one of their addresses mentioned, unless temples were opened to the Harijans it could not be said that untouchability had been abolished. No amount of economic betterment could possibly bring the Harijans on the same platform as caste Hindus without their having the same rights and privileges in the matter of temple-entry as caste Hindus. But temple-entry could not be forced. It could be done only by educating caste Hindu opinion. Gandhiji then appealed to the audience to donate for the Bihar Earthquake Relief Fund. [*Ibid*, pp: 207-12]

Next morning Gandhiji visited the Harijan *cheries* in Mangalore. He was very happy to see that they were beautifully kept. He also laid the foundation-stone of a common temple being built by the Old Boys' Association and then spoke at a meeting of students in the Kanara High School compound. He was told that there was no discrimination against Harijan boys on the rolls of the school.



Gandhiji said that the number was not enough. The caste Hindu students must not remain satisfied till they had gone to the Harijan *cheries* to look for boys and girls who could be given education at the school. If the students really desired to do so they could transform the condition of Harijans without undue strain upon their time or upon their mind. [*Ibid*, pp. 217-28]

On 25 February Gandhiji also spoke at Mulki, Udipi and Kundapur. The address presented to him at Mulki contained at the end a prayer to God that by the power of Harijans Hindu society might be strengthened. Gandhiji said that if they meant by that prayer that, untouchability having been abolished, Hindu society would be purified and would thus acquire moral height, he would join in the prayer. But if by that prayer they meant that Hindus, who had been pampered and degraded and become infirm in bodies as a consequence, would gain access to physical strength from the able-bodied Harijans, he could not join them in the prayer. For, said Gandhiji, he would never allow himself to associate with a movement based upon physical strength. Those who lived by the sword perished by the sword. The Harijan movement was essentially a movement of self-purification on the part of caste Hindus.

At all meetings in Mangalore there was a good sprinkling of fishermen among the audience. Conditions of general depression had accentuated their economic hardships and in most areas they found it extremely difficult to procure salt, an essential item in the fish trade. Gandhiji said the supply of salt depended on various circumstances but he was not without hope and some day it would be possible to tackle the problem.

At Udipi, where Gandhiji spoke next, he made mention of the Krishna temple in the town where, according to legend, the deity had turned its face round to give *darshan* to the Harijans. He, therefore, expected those present to create



such public opinion that the temple, which was not open to the Harijans, would presently be opened to them. Such public opinion, he said, could be created only by the gentlest of means. The message of anti-untouchability was a message of realization of the brotherhood of man. [*Ibid*, pp. 218-19]

At Kundapur, as everywhere else, a good many purses and addresses were presented to Gandhiji. Gandhiji told the audience that untouchability was a hydra-headed monster which affected every branch of society and as a consequence every community had become untouchable to every other community and there was no caste and no section which did not consider itself superior to some other castes, some other sections. It was impossible to realize the essential brotherhood of man and bring about communal amity so long as the belief persisted that untouchability had divine sanction. [*Ibid*, pp. 216-21]

On 27 February Gandhiji left Kundapur by boat for Karwar, visiting on the way small coastal villages such as Bhatkal, Honavar and Tadri. There was no train service in the area. As Gandhiji wrote to Kasturba in a letter of that date, there were so many streams and rivulets that building a railway had been found too expensive. Travelling therefore was a slow business, the journey from Kundapur to Karwar taking a whole day – some 12 hours. [*Ibid*, p. 225]

On the 28th Gandhiji addressed a meeting at Sirsi and visited Binaga, Chandia, Ankola, Hiregutti, Madangeri, Kumata, Aminpalli and Hegde. At Sirsi, where the local temple had been opened to the Harijans, Gandhiji congratulated the population on this achievement. But he was distressed to find that animal sacrifice was conducted at the temple. Gandhiji said he could not consider any place holy where animals were slaughtered for sacrifice. People in other countries killed animals for food, but at least they did not pretend that they did



so to propitiate God. God was to be propitiated only through self-sacrifice and self-denial. He appealed to them to stop the evil practice. [*Ibid*, pp. 233-34]

The eight days from the 1st to 8th March were the most strenuous time in the Karnataka tour. In this brief span of time Gandhiji visited nearly seventy different places and spoke to large and small gatherings on the need to abolish untouchability, to let Harijans enjoy the same rights and privileges as caste Hindus in every field and to create public opinion in favour of having temples opened to Harijans.

On 8 March Gandhiji left by train for Hyderabad on his way to Bihar. [*Ibid*, p. 516]

How much money had Gandhiji been able to collect for the Harijan cause during the four months of touring in the Central Provinces and the South? And what had been done or was being done with the money collected? These questions were frequently asked in the Press and elsewhere, often by people unsympathetic to the movement, who suspected that the money collected might be misused by the workers. Gandhiji took note of the questions, and pointed out that those who asked such questions probably did not read *Harijan* where periodically accounts were published of every pice collected. He wrote:

Three account-keepers travel with the party and work day and night under the direct control of Thakkar Bapa, the ever vigilant secretary of the Central Board. More often than not, they have to burn midnight oil in order to cope with thousands of copper and silver pieces and to tally cash from day to day. These moneys are all sent to the Central Board at Delhi and there safely banked. . . . All the transactions of the Board are public and duly recorded.



For the information of the interested public Gandhiji stated that total collections made during the tour up to 2 March 1934 – a period of a little less than four months – amounted to Rs. 3,52,130-9-7. This of course represented the cash collections as well as the money realized from the sale of jewellery and other articles of silver and gold received by way of donations. [*Ibid*, pp. 286-87]

As for the disbursement of the funds, the policy was that this should be largely regulated by the province which produced the funds, of course with the approval of the Central Board.

The Central Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh published guidelines in this regard for the benefit of the workers. These stated that:

- (1) the fund would be called THE GANDHI HARIJAN PURSE FUND;
- (2) the provinces would receive for their Harijan welfare schemes 75 per cent of the moneys collected in those provinces, and the principal cities 50 per cent of the moneys collected therein;
- (3) similarly 75 per cent of the collection in each town or district would be spent there;
- (4) the disbursement of the Purse Fund would be spread over a period of not less than two years;
- (5) the money would be paid in instalments on presentation of monthly bills of expenditure, but reasonable advances might be made to keep the work going. No money would be spent on administration or propaganda at provincial or district level;
- (6) the earmarking of donations would be made at the time when donations were made and not after;



- (7) any request for funds over 75 per cent of the collections received from a district would be considered when the district was too poor or when the population of Harijans there was larger than was generally the case;
- (8) schemes of welfare received from taluqas would also be considered where the taluqas have paid money towards the Purse Fund;
- (9) Provincial Secretaries, District Secretaries and other staff employed in the welfare schemes would be paid out of the quota of 75 per cent sanctioned for the schemes.

It was much more difficult to spend money wisely than to collect it, wrote Gandhiji. The chief difficulty lay in finding whole-time, trustworthy and otherwise competent workers. Schemes which admitted of Harijans being given employment should be given preference over those that required specially qualified staff. The aim of every scheme should be the greatest and quickest amelioration of the educational and economic condition of the Harijans with the funds available. Any general rules formulated in this regard could only be elastic. [*Ibid*, pp. 238-39]



PART III
REVIEW OF MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE



CHAPTER X: IN AFFLICTED BIHAR

1

Gandhiji completed his tour of the South on 9 March 1934, with meetings at Hyderabad and Secunderabad, and then proceeded to Bihar, having been summoned there by Rajendra Prasad to provide guidance to workers in the work of reconstruction and rehabilitation of earthquake victims. On the way he broke journey at Allahabad, spending some time to visit Swarup Rani Nehru and Kamala Nehru, both of whom had been ailing.

At Mogulserai Gandhiji was met by Rajendra Prasad, Jamnalal Bajaj and J. B. Kripalani, who all joined him on his journey to Patna. Gandhiji's party comprised Valjibhai Desai, Himmatlal Khira, Prithuraj Asar, Mira behn, Uma Bajaj and Kisan Ghumatkar. [Kali Kinkar Datta, *Gandhiji in Bihar*, p. 140]

Gandhiji arrived at Patna late at night on 11 March. The following morning in a message recorded in the *Earthquake Bulletin*, Gandhiji reported his arrival to the afflicted people of Bihar and reminded them that the quake of untouchability was much worse than that of Mother Earth. The reflection, he said, should "chasten us and make the calamity more bearable" [C.W.M.G., LVII, p. 266]

Explaining the interruption of the Harijan tour that the Bihar visit necessitated, Gandhiji, in a statement published in *Harijan* said:

It is a matter of sorrow to me to interrupt the Harijan tour. It had to be, because it was clear duty to answer the call from Shri Rajendra Prasad. . . . While anti-untouchability work is undoubtedly greater and its message of a permanent character, like all chronic diseases it can dispense with personal attention in the face of an acute case, which that of Bihar is.



Gandhiji assured anti-untouchability workers that he intended to resume the tour as soon as circumstances permitted, and planned to take Utkal (Orissa) and Assam first. [*Ibid*, p. 305]

Gandhiji spent two days at Patna, devoting his energies to the correspondence that had piled up. There was obviously an immense amount of writing to do. In a letter written on the evening of 12 March Gandhiji reported feeling so tired that he could not write any more with the right hand and had to do the writing with the left. [*Ibid*, p. 269]

On the 13th Gandhiji also met the workers engaged in relief work and motored round the city to get an idea of the devastation wrought by the earthquake. The following morning he wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel:

I visited the city yesterday. Many Government buildings have been rendered unserviceable. In Patna alone there has been an estimated loss of about a crore and a half. Eighty persons (at a public meeting later he revised the figure to 84) were killed and 400 injured. But the destruction in Patna is nothing compared to that in the other parts. [*Ibid*, pp. 274, 292]

Early in the morning on 14 March Gandhiji proceeded to Motihari. He was accompanied by Miss Hogg, Miss Muriel Lester, who had been in India since early February and had been joining Gandhiji on his tour off and on, and Mira behn. Rajendra Prasad and another leader, Krishna Dev Sahay, were also with him. Halting on the way at Lalganj and Kesaria in Champaran district, the party reached Motihari at 8 p.m., having been on the move continuously for 14 hours across rivers and along dusty, bumpy roads. And yet Gandhiji was up at midnight, thinking the hour was 3 a.m. When he discovered the mistake it was too late, for the correspondence awaiting attention would not let him go to bed again. [*Ibid*, p. 277]



Later in the morning Gandhiji went round the affected areas in the town, accompanied by local workers. In the evening he addressed a public meeting. He told the people that it was not a time for talking. He had come to see them and help them. The relief committees had the money but they must not expect charity. They must work. Only those disabled and unable to work could expect alms. To beg was to commit theft. Deputations of those who had lost their houses met Gandhiji and asked that they be given loans to build new houses or to repair the old ones. Gandhiji told them that from his experience in Gujarat he knew that such loans were never returned. He saw no difficulty in giving gifts to the middle class people on a higher scale according to their needs, but said while considering their cases the cases of those dying of starvation could not be ignored.

Workers engaged in relief work in Champaran district met Gandhiji and discussed with him the problem of reclamation of land. Gandhiji said it was not a fit case to be taken up by the Central Relief Committee. It must only take up work to which it could do full justice. As for reclamation of land buried under sand, beyond representing their case to the authorities, the Central Relief Committee should not take upon themselves any responsibility. Gandhiji expressed himself against loans being provided by the Central Relief Committee to the cultivators for reclamation of land. A private agency like the Central Relief Committee, he said, would find it difficult to recover the loans. Any monetary help would have to be by way of gift, but the number of people needing help was much too large and the money at the disposal of the Relief Committee was limited. Gandhiji advised the workers to cooperate with each other and with Government officials in the work of relief and offer prompt assistance to sufferers. [*Ibid*, pp. 283-85; *Gandhiji in Bihar*, pp. 141-42]



On 16 February Gandhiji proceeded to Muzaffarpur. At the public meeting which was held in the afternoon and was largely attended, Gandhiji told the audience that the able-bodied among them must not beg; they must work. Otherwise they would be guilty of the sin of theft. They must also accept the calamity as the will of God and purge themselves of the feeling of untouchability, which was a curse. [C.W.M.G., LVII, p. 287] Later, giving his impressions to a *Searchlight* correspondent, Gandhiji said:

My impressions are that what used to be for me a fair land, I witnessed as a land of desolation. Motihari, Haripore, Lalganj and Muzaffarpur are places which I had visited before. . . . To see in these places house after house, some of which I knew so well, in a dilapidated condition or heap of ruins was a heart-rending sight to me. Field after field covered with sand showed how difficult life must have become for the peasantry of several thousand acres of land. . . . In the midst, however, of this desert, it was a matter of joy to me to meet representatives of different relief societies, including those representing the Government Relief Department, and to find that they were working more or less in consultation with one another. [*Ibid*, p. 288]

2

Cooperation between the various agencies engaged in relief work and the Governmental agencies engaged in similar work was a noticeable feature throughout the months of relief operations. Apart from the agencies of the Government and the Bihar Central Relief Committee headed by Rajendra Prasad, other organizations engaged in relief work were the Indian Red Cross Society, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Memon Relief Society, the Kalyana Brata Sangha, the Marwari Earthquake Relief Association and the Distressed Cattle Committee.



These organizations operated with their own funds. The two major funds were of course the Viceroy's Earthquake Relief Fund, and the Bihar Central Relief Committee. The former opened on 19 January 1934, and closed on 1 October 1934. The subscription to this amounted to a total of Rs. 60,16,041. The subscriptions to the Bihar Central Relief Committee's fund came to Rs. 28,39,565 in cash and Rs. 3,30,587 in kind.

The Bihar Central Relief Committee was, in terms of the actual work done, by far the most massive relief operation at the popular level. Working under the inspiration and leadership of Rajendra Prasad, it employed no fewer than 2,000 workers, most of them activists of the Congress, to dispense relief in the twelve districts most affected. This was done through relief centres set up in each district. Donations in cash and kind came from all over the country and even from abroad. The response to the appeal for aid was so wide that when Rajendra Prasad published the report of the work, the annexure giving a list of donors exceeded 400 printed pages.

Handling of cash and articles coming in on such a massive scale, as might be imagined, presented the problem of account-keeping. This was handled by J. C. Kumarappa, whose services had been requisitioned by Rajendra Prasad at the very inception of the work. Of Kumarappa's work, Rajendra Prasad said in his autobiography:

It will be no exaggeration to say that had he [Kumarappa] not come here and organized the accounts in a thorough-going manner we would have landed in difficulties. We had no less than 2,000 workers spread over 12 districts and only a few of them had any idea of keeping accounts. There were various kinds of work and separate accounts had to be kept for each... But when Kumarappa's method was adopted everything became all right. .



. . . Every day more than 200 or 300 money orders were received. Parcels containing all sorts of articles were pouring in every day. . . . All these had to be accounted for differently.

When in the Central Assembly a member had the temerity to charge that the funds of the Relief Committee had been loosely spent by Rajendra Prasad, Bhulabhai Desai refuted the charge and in evidence placed on the table of the House a neatly bound audited statement of accounts. Rajendra Prasad wrote: "Kumarappa has really saved the honour of Bihar." [Pyarelal and Sushila Nayar, *In Gandhiji's Mirror*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 291-92]

In this regard the Government Publication *India in 1933-34* had this to say:

Throughout the operations leading men of all shades of opinion cooperated freely and effectively with each other and with Government. There was an absence of carping criticism and a general feeling that in the face of an unexampled catastrophe which had befallen Bihar, political controversies should be forgotten and all should unite in the work of restoration. [*India in 1933-34*, pp. 67-68]

The importance of such cooperation between the Governmental and non-Governmental agencies was the keynote of the resolution Gandhiji moved at the meeting of the Bihar Central Relief Committee held at Patna on 18 March 1934, at which he presided, having returned to the city on 16 March. The resolution, which Gandhiji himself drafted, tendered "respectful cooperation to the Government in the prosecution of the common object of relieving the unparalleled distress that has overtaken Bihar". Speaking on the resolution, Gandhiji said:

When a death occurs, we forget all dissensions for the moment thousands have died in Bihar and many cities and villages have been razed



to the ground. . . . Let us, in the face of this calamity, forget the distinction between Hindus and Mussalmans as well as between Indians and Englishmen. And the same principle should impel us to cooperation between the Government and the people and, therefore, it is our duty to offer our respectful cooperation to Government in the prosecution of the common object Let us not be afraid of the bogey that we would be strengthening the hands of the Government by our cooperation. If the Government has an accession of strength through the common attempt to succour the distressed, it is entitled to it. . . .

If the Congressmen fear that the prestige of the Congress will suffer through such cooperation I submit that the fear is purely imaginary. . . . We do not cease to be Congressmen because we cooperate with Government in a humane task.

Gandhiji adjured Congressmen that if they wanted to do relief work in Bihar, they must sincerely and whole-heartedly cooperate with the Government in the task, or else they must leave the work severely alone. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 288-92; *Gandhiji in Bihar*, pp. 143-46]

On the same day, in the evening, there was a public meeting, attended by an audience estimated at thirty to fifty thousand, which was a record for Patna. For the first time loudspeakers were used in Patna. The meeting was addressed by Madan Mohan Malaviya, Maulana Azad and Gandhiji.

Gandhiji, who had been presented an address on behalf of the citizens, told the gathering that he had no doubt in his mind that the calamity was a punishment for the sin of untouchability and they must take the right lesson from it. Contributions had been coming in for relief work from far and near. They must see that proper accounts were kept of the funds and every cowrie reached



the hands of the suffering people for whom it was meant. Secondly, those who had escaped damage or had suffered less must do their duty to those who had suffered more. Although Patna had suffered in the earthquake, with 84 killed and many times more injured, as compared to various other parts of the province it had escaped lightly.

Gandhiji urged the audience to give up untouchability. God had made no distinctions between the *savarna* and the *avarna*, between the Hindu and the Mussalman, in respect of the sweep of the havoc. They must blot out all distinctions of high and low and purify themselves. Untouchability had corroded the entire system.

To those who had suffered Gandhiji appealed not to resort to begging. Only those who were helpless were entitled to gratuitous relief. Those who were able to work must earn the relief by working for it. [*Ibid*, pp. 291-93]

The Bihar Central Relief Committee had invited representatives of various relief societies working in the districts of North Bihar and Monghyr for a meeting. Gandhiji spoke to them for an hour on 21 March. He emphasized the absolute necessity of all the societies working in cooperation with one another and in consultation with the Central Relief Committee. He warned them against any distinction being made of class, sect or religion in the distribution of relief. He advised them against construction of huts or semi-permanent houses being undertaken in a haphazard manner and to go by the advice of Government experts in the matter. Government had condemned many areas as unsafe in Motihari and Muzaffarpur and they must not build on sites so condemned.

In providing relief they must make sure that it reached the old, the destitute and the lame even when it was not asked for. The ant and the elephant should



not be treated alike. Workers should be guided by no other test except that of pure suffering. [*Ibid*, pp. 296-97]

A problem which, it was feared, might have disastrous consequences for the future of agriculture in Bihar, was that of sand deposits. Surveys conducted by the Government determined that though the area under sand was less extensive than first estimated, it was nevertheless immense. Of the 615 square miles covered by sand, 7 per cent contained deposits of less than six inches, 52 per cent had below one foot, while the rest had deposits of over two feet. Low crops, such as gram, were in some cases smothered by sand and destroyed. [*India in 1933-34*, pp. 60-61]

Then there was the problem of waterlogging and of choked wells, thousands of them in every district.

Gandhiji called upon the people and voluntary agencies to cooperate with the Government in solving these problems. At the same time he asked for help from non-Government experts in the field. On 21 March he wrote to Sam Higginbottom of the Agricultural Institute, Allahabad, to come and help. He asked him to visit the afflicted area and give opinion on:

- (1) how best and cheaply we can clean our choked wells;
- (2) how we can house the homeless;
- (3) how drain waterlogged areas;
- (4) how remove the sand which covers our fair fields.

Gandhiji added:

These are but the samples of work in front of us. Of course the Government and the people are working in unison. But you know my regard for your expert knowledge. Even if you do not show us anything new, I



personally will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have seen the area.
[C.W.M.G., LVII, p. 295]

3

A number of former inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram were now in Bihar, devoting themselves to the work of earthquake relief. They had come in various stages and from various places. While for the moment their hands were full with the work which demanded all their attention, the question still bothered them as to what they were to do after the work of relief was over. Following the Poona resolution that laid down the programme of individual Civil Disobedience many of them had been faithfully courting imprisonment in terms of the resolution, but it was more and more beginning to appear that enthusiasm was lacking.

On 22 March Gandhiji called them together at Patna for a talk. Those present included Jamnalal Bajaj, Lakshmidas Asar, Kedarnath Kulkarni, Swami Anand, Narayan Moreshwar Khare, Valji Govindji Desai, Harivadan, Chimanlal Bhatt, Raojibhai Patel, Maganbhai Desai, Ramachandra J. Soman, Madhav Savant, Himmatlal Khira and Prithuraj L. Asar.

Gandhiji told them that he had called them together to advise them not to offer Civil Disobedience and not to court imprisonment. Only those who felt independently that they would not be at peace without going to jail, he said, might court imprisonment. The struggle was bound to be a prolonged one and only those who were willing to die and get buried in jail should go to jail. The others should find occupations suited to them and earn money.

It was pointed out to Gandhiji that in some cases this might involve breaking a vow. Gandhiji said that many who had taken a vow about carrying on Civil Disobedience had done so impulsively and had not understood the full implications of it. The struggle would not be over in ten or twenty years. If



someone who took a vow faced a situation he had not dreamt of when taking the vow, he would not be bound to keep the vow. People must not imagine that if they dropped out of Civil Disobedience and jail-going and took to earning their livelihood, they would be lost to the struggle. Their time would come. In a few years' time the situation was bound to arise when they would be impelled to take the plunge. But for the time being he was beginning to have the feeling that as a Satyagrahi he was sufficient by himself. Satyagraha could not be a matter of politics. It was a religious matter. That being so it should be enough even if even one person resorted to it. Those going to jail from a religious conviction must try to win the hearts of people even in jail. The more they came closer to the British the better would they be able to persuade them to do justice by India.

Even those who considered Civil Disobedience as the only appropriate political programme should for the time being stay out, said Gandhiji. Just as he was the only representative of the Congress at the Round Table Conference, it was enough if he alone in the existing circumstances represented the political programme of individual Civil Disobedience. This of course did not mean that the Congress should give up the programme of Civil Disobedience. For that would spell the death of the Congress, which was then in disarray. The programme must remain. Indeed the Congress could have no other programme. But only the fewest must carry it out, that is to say, only those who felt that unless they offered Civil Disobedience they would not be at peace. [*Ibid*, pp. 299-305]

The attitude of mind revealed in the above talk to the Ashram workers found public expression a few days later. In a statement, drafted on 2 April but released to the Press on 7 April, Gandhiji advised all Congressmen to suspend Civil Disobedience for swaraj as distinguished from specific grievances and leave this matter to him alone. The statement ran:



I feel that the masses have not received the full message of satyagraha owing to its adulteration in the process of transmission. It has become clear to me that spiritual instruments suffer in their potency when their use is taught through non-spiritual media. Spiritual messages are self-propagating. . . . The introspection prompted by the conversation with the Ashram inmates has led me to the conclusion that I must advise all Congressmen to suspend Civil Disobedience for swaraj as distinguished from specific grievances. They should leave it to me alone. It should be resumed by others in my lifetime only under my direction. . . .

Henceforth, therefore, all who have been impelled to civil resistance for swaraj under my advice directly given or indirectly inferred, will please desist from civil resistance. I am quite convinced that this is the best course in the interests of India's fight for freedom. . . .

It is claimed for satyagraha that it is a complete substitute for violence or war. It is designed, therefore, to reach the hearts both of the so-called "terrorists" and the rulers. . . . But the indifferent civil resistance of many, grand as it has been in its results, has not touched the hearts of either the "terrorists" or the rulers as a class.

What were the civil resisters, thus freed, to do? They must prepare themselves for the call whenever it should come. They must pursue the path of self-denial and voluntary poverty. They must engage themselves in nation-building activities. Let it be understood that civil resistance was for those who knew and performed the duty of voluntary obedience to law and authority. [*Ibid*, pp. 348-50]

Pyarelal was then with Gandhiji. Having been released from jail on 21 February he had gone to Bihar to join Gandhiji on his tour. In a note, which



Gandhiji touched up, he further explained the reasoning behind Gandhiji's changed stance on the question of individual resistance. Pyarelal said the step being taken was a logical corollary of the Poona decision of July 1933. The expectation behind the Poona resolution had been that all those who could would offer Civil Disobedience and keep the flame alive till the movement should gather heat. The expectation had been belied. Almost to a man people had gone to jail because they felt they ought to, not because they must. They had hesitated and faltered and even the best had experienced mental anguish in prison. No good could come of sacrifice that was forced.

For any coercive political effect such Civil Disobedience was too insignificant; for spiritual effect it was too cumbersome and heterogeneous. It failed to satisfy the patriotic instinct of the terrorist for it could produce no immediate political results.

The enthusiastic popular response Gandhiji had received throughout his Harijan tour showed that Gandhiji could rely on thousands and thousands of people coming forward to offer civil resistance at his call, but there was the danger of indifferent numbers smothering the flame of individual satyagraha when there was the need for it to burn at its brightest. It was therefore necessary to retrace the steps and give the disorganized forces time to reorganize, rest and recuperate.

Pyarelal quoted Gandhiji as saying, "by allowing my best men to go now I would only be bargaining for the survival of the unfittest. The fittest would be reduced to utter wrecks for want of proper grounding, leaving the field a barren waste after I am gone."

Of course what Gandhiji said only applied to individual civil resistance, where perfection was called for on the part of satyagrahis. In mass Civil



Disobedience such perfection on the part of satyagrahis was not called for. The mistake had lain in sanctioning individual Civil Disobedience when perfect satyagrahis had not been forthcoming.

The country, as Gandhiji saw, had to pass through a period of darkness, depression and reaction, but the nation had sufficient vitality and resilience to get out of the morass. Gandhiji's mind, Pyarelal went on, was teeming with fresh constructive projects, involving setting up of new institutions to carry the country forward on its journey. Also, it needed to be remembered that Civil Disobedience had not been suspended. It still remained the programme of the Congress. [*Ibid*, pp. 508-10]

4

A strong section of the Congress leadership, as we have seen, had for long been pleading for the giving up of even individual Civil Disobedience and making a bid for power through constitutional avenues that they saw opening up in however small a measure in the schemes being announced by the British Government. Many had been in constant contact with Gandhiji while he toured in the Harijan cause.

On 31 March and 1 April some of these leaders met at Dr. Ansari's house in Delhi to consider the political situation and provide a new orientation to the policy pursued by the Congress. Nearly forty delegates representing all the provinces attended. Prominent among those present were Dr. M. A. Ansari, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Dr. Alam, R. K. Sidhwa, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Satyamurti, Bhakthavathsalam Mudaliar, Bhulabhai Desai (Chairman), K. M. Munshi, K. F. Nariman, G. V. Subba Rao and Mohanlal Saksena.

Gandhiji had made it clear that though Civil Disobedience must remain the programme of the Congress, those who wished to chalk out a supplementary



programme would be welcome to do so. Nevertheless the minds of the delegates at the Conference continued to be exercised by the question whether Gandhiji would approve of the revival of the Swaraj Party. The dominant opinion at the Conference also favoured calling off of the Civil Disobedience movement.

The conclusions of the Conference were embodied in a statement issued on 1 April. This said:

- (1) In the opinion of the Conference the All India Swaraj Party, which has been in abeyance, should be revived in order to enable Congressmen who are not offering individual civil resistance to undertake through an organization constructive programme as contemplated in the Poona statement.
- (2) In the opinion of this Conference it is imperative for this party to take up the Government challenge in relation to the forthcoming election to the Legislative Assembly to secure the election of its candidates on the following issues:
 - (a) To implement the country's mandate to get all repressive laws repealed;
 - (b) To reject the proposals contained in the White Paper and to get them replaced by the National Demand on the lines indicated by Mr. Gandhi at the Round Table Conference so that the country may reaffirm its confidence in the Indian National Congress.

The Conference set up a provisional committee with Dr. Ansari as president to draw up the constitution and programme of the new party. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 261-62]



Dr. Ansari, Dr. B. C. Roy and Bhulabhai Desai then proceeded to Patna to place before Gandhiji the conclusions of the Conference and to seek his approval for them. They had prolonged talks with Gandhiji on the 4th and the 5th of April, at the end of which Gandhiji gave his approval in a letter addressed to Dr. Ansari. In the letter Gandhiji said:

I have no hesitation in welcoming the revival of the Swaraj Party and the decision of the meeting to take part in the forthcoming elections to the Assembly, which you tell me is about to be dissolved. My views on the utility of the legislatures . . . remain on the whole what they were in 1920, but I feel that it is not only right, but it is the duty of every Congressman who for some reason or other does not want to or cannot take part in the Poona programme and who has faith in entry into the legislatures to seek entry and form combinations in order to prosecute the programme which he or they believe to be in the interest of the country. [*Ibid*, p. 263; C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 352-53]

Gandhiji's statement of 7 April advising Congressmen to abstain from offering Civil Disobedience was not only welcomed by the Council-entry circles in the Congress but also evoked a favourable response from the Government. On 16 April, answering questions raised in the Assembly, Harry Haig, Home Member, announced that the Government proposed to raise no obstacles to a meeting of the A.I.C.C. or of the Indian National Congress for the purpose of ratifying the statement of policy made by Gandhiji and for calling off Civil Disobedience. The Home Member was asked whether Government were prepared to remove the ban on the Congress Working Committee. The Home Member said if the idea was that the Congress Working Committee should be the body to call off Civil



Disobedience the Government would be willing to give the necessary authorization for the purpose.

The matter came up in the House of Commons too, where Samuel Hoare was asked whether following Gandhiji's statement ending Civil Disobedience, Government of India would announce an amnesty for political prisoners. Samuel Hoare said that local Governments had been following a policy of gradual release of Civil Disobedience prisoners, so that from 32,500, the number in jails at the end of April 1932, the number had come down to 1,450 at the end of March 1934, of which 600 were from Bombay. "If civil disobedience comes to an end," he said, "I hope it will be possible to expedite releases." He made it clear that his statement referred only to Civil Disobedience prisoners and not to terrorists in jail. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 267-69]

5

In May 1934 Bihar was host to a number of conferences and meetings of various sorts. To begin with, there was the conference of Congressmen associated with the Delhi initiative of previous March. This was held on the 2nd and 3rd of May. Since Gandhiji then happened to be in Ranchi, the conference had to assemble there.

On 1 May, before the conference opened, some leaders, among them Asaf Ali, C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Ansari, Rajendra Prasad, Sarojini Naidu, Dr. B. C. Roy, Bhulabhai Desai, Jamnalal Bajaj, K. M. Munshi, Deepnarayan Singh, Mathuradas Tricumji and K. F. Nariman, met Gandhiji and urged him to clarify his position with regard to his statement advising Congressmen to refrain from offering Civil Disobedience.

Gandhiji was told that his statement of 7 April and his having given the green signal to Council-entry was generally understood to mean that he had



advised complete suspension of Civil Disobedience on the part of the Congress. Gandhiji said if that was so, it was the imperfection of his language. Bhulabhai Desai remarked that people did not say that that was what the statement meant, that they only said that it was what it should mean, that the Congress ought to suspend Civil Disobedience. But, Gandhiji said, Sarojini Devi had observed that the interpretation put upon his statement in Bombay was that there would be suspension of Civil Disobedience on behalf of the Congress, and that his (Gandhiji's) disobedience would be quite individual. This was not so, he said. He would offer Civil Disobedience in the name of the Congress.

Rajagopalachari asked the conference if the Congress in that case was going to disown him. Bhulabhai replied that there was a third course, viz., that it might be possible to persuade Gandhiji not to treat it as the Congress disowning him but as his releasing the Congress from it. Gandhiji replied that he could not suspend Civil Disobedience in his own person, nor could the Congress. The Congress must not suspend Civil Disobedience because, he said, thousands of persons had ruined themselves in the movement. What answer could the Congress give them? "Are you afraid that the Congress will still be treated as illegal?" – he asked the leaders.

Nariman then raised another objection. He asked: "Is this dual programme – Civil Disobedience confined to one individual on the one hand and parliamentary work on the other – not inconsistent?" Gandhiji replied that it was absolutely consistent. The law-maker was no good if he was not also the law-breaker. Nariman said he could understand the same individual doing the two things at different times, but not an organization doing both the things at the same time. Gandhiji agreed that it would be difficult but not impossible. "If the Congress does not endorse my statement," he said, "you will be rendered



impotent, and you will be asked to give up position after position. If you say, with your back to the wall: 'Thus far and no further', the Government cannot defy you." [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 449-55]

6

But it became quite clear to Gandhiji that an important section of the Congress leadership was not in favour of continuing the programme of Civil Disobedience as its policy, however academic its possibility in practice.

On the other hand, those of the leaders still in jail, as well as the bulk of the rank and file committed to the continuation of the Civil Disobedience struggle, were not happy. They were bewildered. Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, and those of their way of thinking felt it was not a wise move to put a stop to the struggle. Vallabhbhai, still in prison, protested. Gandhiji wrote to him:

It seems strange that you feel perplexed . . . your letters show your pain. Nobody among those who are outside seems to have felt as you do. Jawaharlal did so of course, but I thought that he would understand the step after a while. . . . It is useless to ask me also why I didn't think of this in Poona. The right solution occurs only at the right time, and then alone does it work. [*Ibid*, p. 424]

But Patel was not reassured. And Gandhiji again wrote to him:

I have no remedy for your distress. Time alone can cure it. It should not be made easy for people to go to jail and enjoy themselves there. . . . I have not snatched away the weapon which I had put into people's hands. I have suspended its use in order to demonstrate its effectiveness. [*Ibid*, p. 456]

To Jawaharlal Nehru Gandhiji wrote:



You were before my mind's eye the whole time the decision was taking shape. I concluded that, though it might produce a momentary shock, you would ultimately see the truth of it and be glad. I wonder! [*Ibid*, p. 388]

But Nehru could not see the truth of it. He was appalled. He wrote later:

The whole statement frightened me and oppressed me tremendously. . . . A vast distance seemed to separate him [Gandhiji] from me. With a stab of pain I felt that the cords of allegiance that had bound me to him for many years had snapped. . . . Of the many hard lessons that I had learned, the hardest and the most painful now faced me: that it is not possible in any vital matter to rely on anyone. One must journey through life alone; to rely on others is to invite heartbreak. [Nehru, *Towards Freedom*, p. 312, quoted in Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 201]

Then there were the socialists in the Congress. They felt quite outraged. A statement by Sampurnanand succinctly summed up their mood. The statement ran:

Only a short time back Mr. Gandhi destroyed all vestige of organized Congress life in the country but advocated a truncated variety of satyagraha. Next he extended his blessings to the rejuvenated Swaraj Party, notwithstanding the Lahore Congress resolution . . . when he seeks to inject into us the virus of inferiority complex by saying that we, as a people, with all our sufferings, have proved ourselves unworthy of satyagraha, we cannot let this statement go unchallenged. . . . We are neither prepared to appoint Mr. Gandhi our sole champion nor promise not to resume the fight without his bidding. If this particular weapon is unfit for us, we shall simply have to find out another.



Gandhiji said he sympathized with Sampurnanand in his anger, but assured him that he had cast no reflection upon any of his co-workers. He had no doubt at all that in the extraordinary situation the country was facing, it was the wisest thing for him to advise Congressmen to suspend satyagraha, confining it only to himself. [*Ibid*, p. 408]

The Conference when it assembled on 2 May was well attended. Nearly a hundred Congressmen representing all the provinces were present.

Dr. Ansari, who was unanimously voted to the chair, referred to the Delhi decision to revive the Swaraj Party as an autonomous parliamentary section of the Congress and informed the delegates that Mahatma Gandhi had given his blessing to the initiative. He said it was intended that the Swaraj Party for the time being should concentrate on two fronts to counter the dual policy of the Government. The Party should supply an effective reply to the repressive policy of the Government and register the country's verdict against the proposals contained in the White Paper which, in the guise of a representative constitution, were really intended to perpetuate British rule.

Dr. B. C. Roy, moving for the adoption of the party's constitution explained that "on all broad policies" the party would be guided by the Congress organization, while in matters of internal administration and finance the party might not accept Congress guidance.

The constitution, as moved for consideration, provided that the Swaraj Party would be subject to the control and guidance of the Congress in all broad issues of national policy; that every person who was a member of the Congress would be eligible to be a member of the party; and that the object of the Swaraj Party was the attainment of swaraj by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means. The constitution laid down that the party would have a General Council,



an Executive Council and such special committees as might be appointed from time to time.

The most important resolution passed by the Conference was one on the White Paper and the Communal Award. The discussion revealed sharp differences on the Communal Award, with delegates from Bengal insisting that it should be rejected out of hand. The Conference had to be adjourned for an hour and a half to enable informal discussions on the matter.

The resolution as it was finally passed said that inasmuch as the proposals contained in the White Paper were a negation of the National Demand and calculated to perpetuate the political subjection and economic exploitation of the Indian people, the Swaraj Party should take all necessary steps to secure the rejection of those proposals by the country.

So far as the Communal Award was concerned the resolution went on:

The Conference is further of opinion that a consideration of the acceptance or rejection of the mode or proportion of representation as contained in the Communal Award is premature at this stage. The time for considering the same will arrive when the Constituent Assembly is convened.

Another resolution, laying down the policy and programme of the party more or less reiterated the economic policy programme passed at the Karachi Congress. An amendment moved by M. Masani urging the party to undertake "organization of peasants and workers for the purpose of participating in the struggle against Imperialism and Indian vested interests allied with them", was rejected.

Later in a statement Dr. Ansari, referring to the Socialist amendment, said the electorate to which the Congress had to appeal for votes consisted of only



about 15 lakhs of people mainly drawn from the bourgeois class and it would be bad tactics to antagonize them. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 271-84]

7

Gandhiji's 7 April statement had by all reckoning an electrifying effect on the political situation in the country. It led to an easing of tension all round and opened up opportunities for normal political activities that had for long remained blocked. Government having held out the assurance that no obstacles would be placed in the way of the meetings of the highest organs of the Congress, a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was summoned to meet on 18th and 19th May at Patna to make it easy for Gandhiji, then touring in Orissa, to attend.

The Socialists in the Congress took advantage of the opportunity to hold their own All-India Congress Socialist Conference a day earlier, i.e. on 17 May. About a hundred delegates from all parts of the country assembled at the Conference, the U.P. providing the largest contingent, led by Sampurnanand and Sri Prakasa. Although sharing a broadly socialist outlook, the delegates were by no means clear in their minds as regards the policy to be pursued vis-a-vis the impending elections. The Bombay group, for instance, openly advocated electoral activity, which course did not find much support among the rest.

Acharya Narendra Dev, who presided, in his address attributed the crisis in which the world was engulfed to the capitalist system and the race for armaments. Socialism, he said, was the only solution, as evidenced by the Russian experiment. Russia had done away with unemployment and its concept of five-year plans was being copied by other countries. He warned the delegates to avoid dogmatism and sectarianism and adjured them to take their stand on scientific



socialism. He was not much enamoured of the programme announced by the Swaraj Party. He said it was not the party that it had been in the twenties when C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru headed it. The policy then pursued had been one of consistent opposition to Government from within the legislatures and refusal to accept any office in the gift of the Government. The revived Swaraj Party had not enunciated any such policy of obstruction. It was a reformist body and the Constituent Assembly it advocated was merely another edition of the liquidated All-Parties Conference.

The Conference announced the setting up of an All-India Party of Socialists inside the Congress and appointed a committee to draft the constitution and the programme of the party. The committee comprised Narendra Dev (President), Jayaprakash Narayan (Secretary), Abdul Bary, Purushottamdas Trikumdas, M. R. Masani, Sampurnanand, C. C. Banerjee and Faridul Haq Ansari.

By a resolution the Conference opposed rescission, except by an open session of the Congress, of the Lahore Congress resolution calling upon Congressmen to boycott legislatures, and if the Congress chose to rescind the resolution, conduct of all parliamentary activity should be in the hands of the Congress organization.

M. R. Masani then moved a resolution directing Socialist members of the A.I.C.C. to have the following programme accepted by that body:

Objective of the Congress to be declared as setting up of a socialist state, where every adult would have the vote except those who had opposed the freedom movement. The political, social and economic principles for the state would be:

- (1) Transfer of all power to the producing masses.



- (2) Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the State.
- (3) Socialization of the key and principal industries . . . with a view to the progressive socialization of all instruments of production, distribution and exchange.
- (4) State monopoly of foreign trade.
- (5) Elimination of princes and landlords and all other classes of exploiters.
- (6) Redistribution of land to the peasants.
- (7) The State to encourage and promote cooperative and collective farming with a view to the ultimate collectivization of all agriculture in the country.
- (8) Liquidation of debts owed by peasants and workers.
- (9) Adult franchise on functional basis.

After considerable debate the resolution was passed. [*Ibid*, pp. 340-44]

Gandhiji was not much struck by the programme. For one thing it smacked of coercion and violence. Great reforms, he said in a talk with Masani, could not be introduced without great patience. Impatience was violence, patience was non-violence. [C.W.M.G., LVII, p. 27]

As for the programme, Gandhiji expressed his opposition to each and every part of it. In his view it seemed to ignore Indian conditions and many propositions in it assumed that there was necessarily antagonism between the classes and the masses or between the labourers and the capitalists. Abolition of princely rule that had been advocated was too large a question. It was enough, he said, to concentrate upon what was called British India. It was a large enough territory



for any party to operate in. The demand for progressive nationalization of all instruments of production, distribution and exchange" was too sweeping. Would they nationalize Rabindranath Tagore, who was an instrument of marvellous production? As for State monopoly of foreign trade, Gandhiji said the State, as it was, had already enough powers. The demand for cancellation of debts of workers and peasants was similarly ill-advised. The debtors themselves would not support it. The debts should certainly be examined. Some of them were of a kind that would not bear scrutiny.

Gandhiji similarly dismissed the demand for "elimination of landlordism". He said he was not for elimination but for just regulation of the relations between landlords and tenants. [*Ibid*, pp. 36-37]

Later, in a letter addressed to Narendra Dev, Gandhiji wrote:

Though I have all my life identified myself with the masses and renounced possession of private property, I do not contemplate the elimination of the princes and the landlords nor do I contemplate redistribution of land to peasants. I aim at reformation of the princes and the landlords. It is possible, without a violent redistribution of land, to secure for tenants rights which virtually amount to ownership.

Gandhiji also drew Narendra Dev's attention to certain glaring omissions in the programme of the Congress Socialist Party. These were: removal of untouchability, communal unity, khaddar as a means of identifying with the masses and providing immediate occupation till a better one was found, and total prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Gandhiji suggested that the party should revise its programme and present to the country practical socialism in keeping with Indian conditions in place of scientific socialism, which the party had called its programme. [*Ibid*, p. 275]



And yet, notwithstanding his antipathy to the programme, Gandhiji welcomed the rise of the Socialist group inside the Congress. As he said in a letter to Vallabhbhai Patel:

That group is bound to grow in influence and importance. I have welcomed the group. Many of them are respected and self-sacrificing workers. With all this, I have fundamental differences with them on the programme published in their authorized pamphlets. But I would not, by reason of the moral pressure I may be able to exert, suppress the spread of the ideas propounded in their literature. [*Ibid*, p. 405]

The official Congress comment on the Socialist programme came later, in a resolution of the Working Committee passed in Bombay on 14 August 1934. The resolution said:

Whilst the Working Committee welcomed the formation of groups representing different schools of thought, it is necessary, in view of loose talk about confiscation of property and necessity of class war, to remind Congressmen that the Karachi resolution . . . neither contemplates confiscation, nor advocacy of class war. The Working Committee is further of opinion that confiscation and class war are contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 300]

The A.I.C.C. duly assembled in Patna on 18 May. The venue was the compound of the Radhika Sinha Library building, where an enclosure capable of accommodating about two thousand persons had been put up. But, though the members were not more than about 150, the number of visitors coming to watch was nearly five thousand, many of them, including ladies, having been drawn by a desire to see and hear Gandhiji.



The meeting had two issues before it for consideration: ratification of Gandhiji's statement on Civil Disobedience and authorization and organization of parliamentary activity.

On Gandhiji's statement the following resolution was moved by Dr. Ansari:

Having considered the statement, dated 7th April 1934, of Mahatma Gandhi, this committee accepts his recommendation in regard to the suspension of Civil Disobedience.

Rajendra Prasad, who seconded the resolution, mentioned how Congress in the course of four years of struggle, had changed the policy first, at Poona, from mass Civil Disobedience to individual Civil Disobedience and now were confining the struggle to the person of a single individual. Gandhiji had not said that he would be offering civil disobedience today, tomorrow or at all, but only that when he thought it fit he would resort to it.

Many amendments were moved. Some asked the A.I.C.C. to suspend Civil Disobedience *sine die*, so far as the struggle for swaraj was concerned. Some asked for the summoning of a full session of the Congress to decide the issue. Some said satyagraha should either be open to all or to none.

Gandhiji, speaking on the resolution referred to the amendments and said he was surprised that none of the speakers had taken him to task for advising suspension of civil resistance for everyone except himself. The amendments moved were all unanimous in demanding suspension of Civil Disobedience. The fact surprised him but did not pain him. It only showed that his decision had come not a day too soon.

He could not agree with the demand that even as an individual he should give up the idea of offering Civil Disobedience. It was open to them to repudiate



his claim to represent the Congress, but they could not deprive him of the liberty of individual action.

Civil resistance, Gandhiji said, was a complete substitute for violence. Through it everyone would achieve his own swaraj. It had given spirit and new strength to the masses. Civil Disobedience therefore could not be given up. He told Congressmen:

I want you to remain outside not to live a life of comfort and luxury. I want you to remain outside to embrace voluntary poverty. In any future struggle none of you will get allowances for dependents who remain behind. There is no want of work outside the prisons. You can offer your lives to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. Will you neglect khadi and hope to win freedom for the villagers? Then there is untouchability. For you who will be outside there will be neither peace nor rest.

The A.I.C.C. passed the resolution as moved, rejecting all amendments.

The next resolution, the one on the parliamentary programme, was moved by Gandhiji himself. The resolution ran:

Inasmuch as there exists in the Congress a large body of members who believe in the necessity of entry into the legislatures as a step in the country's progress towards its goal, the All-India Congress Committee hereby appoints Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Dr. M.A. Ansari to form a Board with Dr. M.A. Ansari as president, called the Congress Parliamentary Board, consisting of not more than 25 Congressmen.

The Board shall run and control the elections of members to the legislatures on behalf of the Congress, and shall have the power to raise, possess and administer funds for carrying out its duties. The Board shall be



subject to the control of the All-India Congress Committee, and shall have the power to frame its constitution, and make rules and regulations from time to time for the management of its affairs.

Speaking on the resolution Gandhiji reminded the members that the idea of boycott of legislatures had originated with him and he had fought with many valued comrades in the Congress for a rigid enforcement of the boycott. Now that there was a virtual suspension of Civil Disobedience the demand for return to legislatures had resulted in the revival of the Swaraj Party under the leadership of no less a veteran No-changer than Dr. Ansari.

Gandhiji said he retained his disbelief in the legislatures as an instrument for obtaining swaraj for the masses. But he had been unable to wean some of the Congressmen from their faith in Council-entry. Not to let them go into the Councils would be to refuse to make use of the talents they possessed.

Some Provincial Congress Committees had suggested, Gandhiji said, that rather than create a separate Board, the A.I.C.C. should itself undertake Council work. But the A.I.C.C. must not be an exclusively parliamentary body. It must represent and regulate all the national activities of Congressmen: khadi, Hindu-Muslim unity, untouchability, prohibition, national education, organization of villages, village industries, industrial labour and the like. Gandhiji hoped that the majority would always remain untouched by the glamour of Council work. He had no fear that the whole Congress would reduce itself into a Council-going party.

As for the competence of the All-India Congress Committee to pass a resolution undoing what the Congress as a whole had done, Gandhiji said if the Congress had been in session, it alone would have been the body to consider the resolution. But in an emergency the All-India Congress Committee was bound to do all that the Congress could do when in session.



There was considerable opposition from opponents of Council-entry to the resolution, chiefly on the ground that the A.I.C.C. was not competent to pass it. But the President ruled that the resolution was perfectly in order.

The resolution was then passed by 85 to 32 votes. [*Ibid*, pp. 285-94; C.W.M.G., LVIII, pp. 3-12]

Those appointed to the Parliamentary Board were: Dr. Ansari, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dr. B.C. Roy, Sarojini Naidu, J.C. Gupta, M.S. Aney, K.F. Nariman, T. A. K. Sherwani, Khaliquzzaman, G. B. Pant, Gopichand Bhargava, Satyamurti, T. Prakasam, Sri Krishna Sinha, Asaf Ali, Seth Govind Das, K. M. Munshi, Bhulabhai Desai, Abul Kalam Azad, Sri Prakasa, Muthuranga Mudaliar and Dr. Satyapal.

One consequence of the appointment of the Congress Parliamentary Board was that the Swaraj Party, launched with such fanfare less than three weeks earlier, was rendered redundant. Indeed in a statement issued on 21 May, Dr. Ansari, its president, said:

In view of the resolution of the A.I.C.C. it was decided to adjourn the meeting of the General Council of the Swaraj Party *sine die*. The Parliamentary Board set up by the A.I.C.C. has begun to function. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 295]

Politics and politicians would not leave Gandhiji alone and he had perforce to divert his energies partly to political discussions and deliberations. This however, did not affect his touring schedule to any significant extent.

After spending about a week in Patna towards the end of March Gandhiji moved on. Everywhere in his speeches, while he appealed for funds for those who had suffered most in the earthquake, he also called upon his audiences to



eradicate untouchability from their midst. Speaking at Chhapra on 27 March Gandhiji said:

Today a terrible calamity has overwhelmed us all alike – Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians and the rest, the so-called high-born and the low-born, without favour or distinction. If even this terrible blow does not enable us to purge ourselves of 'pride of place and blood', to obliterate all man-made distinctions between man and man, then I would only say there is none so ill-fated as we. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 318-19]

He called upon relief workers to extend full cooperation to the authorities in the work of relief. There was no other way to rescue the masses from the overwhelming consequences of the disaster.

On 28 March Gandhiji spoke at the Sonapur railway station, where a large number of people had gathered. He did not alight from the train but spoke standing at the door of the carriage. He said that though there had been a liberal response so far as funds for earthquake relief were concerned, it still seemed an impossible task to make good the losses suffered by North Bihar. Would the recipients be satisfied with merely receiving their share of the gifts? It was time to learn a moral lesson from the calamity. He had received a complaint from Doms (a caste among untouchables) in a village nearby that they suffered from want of drinking water. God's wrath had fallen equally on the caste man and the outcaste. It was criminal to consider any human being an untouchable. Doms were also human beings and must not be denied the use of village wells.

At another railway station, Hajipur, where the damage from the earthquake had been extensive and people had been beset by untold miseries, Gandhiji referred with satisfaction to the help being provided by the Government. He asked the people not to turn themselves into professional beggars. Those who



were fit to do so should work for wages. In Saran district, he was told, about two thousand wells were badly needed. He asked the people to dig wells on a priority basis, since water supply was an urgent problem, and everyone, high or low, should have access to the wells. [*Ibid*, pp. 320-21]

On 29 March Gandhiji visited Sitamarhi and spent two days there. Here he made a fervent plea for communal unity and for abolition of untouchability. God, he said, had created different faiths as he had created the followers of those faiths. God's house had many mansions and they were all equally holy. They must respect the faith of their neighbours, while pursuing perfection in their own faith. Untouchability was abhorrent to the spirit of religion and must be given up. The real untouchables were impure thoughts – lying, covetousness and deceit. [*Ibid*, pp. 326-27]

On 30 March he spoke to the workers and later addressed a prayer meeting. Talking to the workers, Gandhiji emphasized the need for local people to work in relief schemes, such as that of digging wells, even on wage basis. Outsiders, he said, would not be any good. They must also extend full cooperation to the Government in its work of relief. Sitamarhi had a large population and it should not be hard to find workers to clean and dig as many wells as were immediately required.

At the prayer meeting Gandhiji asked people to learn a lesson from the calamity and sink all communal and caste differences, to build up unity and brotherhood amongst themselves which would purify them. He warned them against begging. Untouchability, which had taken deep roots in Bihar, must be eradicated. [*Ibid*, pp. 336-37]

From Sitamarhi Gandhiji proceeded to Darbhanga where on 31 March he addressed a public meeting. Gandhiji expressed his sadness at the sight that met



his eyes. Lands that once had smiled with plenty were covered with layers of sand. The palaces of the Maharaja, just as the huts of the poor had been razed to the ground. What could he do? What could the whole world do? Some monetary help would no doubt be forthcoming, but more than money what was needed was sympathy. But they must all learn a lesson from the catastrophe. He said:

Nature utters its warning to us in a voice of thunder. It flashes it before our eyes in letters of flame. But seeing we see not, and hearing we do not understand.

Speaking to the relief workers later Gandhiji mentioned the problem of relief to the middle class, who had been the hardest hit. The right thing must be done in the right way, he counselled. Reconstruction of houses and re-establishment of petty crafts was a stupendous undertaking and called for resources that only the Government could provide. The problem of water supply, however, was one that could be tackled by the Relief Committee. Wells must be got ready before the rains set in. Clear thinking, careful planning and energetic execution alone could save the situation. Carelessness, hesitation and doubt would spell disaster. [*Ibid*, pp. 341-43]

At Madhubani, a little way to the North from Darbhanga, where Gandhiji next went on 31 March, a huge public meeting had been organized, with an attendance of about 25,000. Gandhiji expressed his distress at the disaster visible on all sides. Towns, villages, palaces and mud houses looked as if they had been bombed by some enemy.

At Rajnagar he said he had felt crushed by the weight of human misery as he beheld the ruin spread out before him.

But even in the midst of a calamity of such mighty proportions, deep-seated social prejudices would not change. And Gandhiji's call for the giving up of



untouchability and for the treatment of Doms and others considered untouchable as human beings, was greeted with the waving of black flags. [*Ibid*, pp. 342-44]

On 2 April Gandhiji covered Saharsa, Bihpur and Bhagalpur once again. On 3 April he was at Monghyr, where he addressed a public meeting. He then went back to Patna, and remained there till 7 April.

In an interview he gave to a correspondent of *The Hindu* on 6 April he summed up his impression of the tour of Bihar. He said:

I have now covered almost all areas of destruction barring Purnea. Practically everywhere, owing to the scarcity of water, there is a real danger of famine. The rich fields covered with sand, rows upon rows of houses in towns and villages utterly destroyed, water and sand shooting up through stone and cement floors, walls and pillars waist-deep, palaces heaps of bricks, solitary walls or pillars standing as mournful reminders of the glory that was, improvised huts every moment in danger of catching fire, old sites not capable of being built upon for fear of subsidence during rains, cattle starving for want of fodder and some dying for want of water. Add to this the very real danger of floods reaching areas hitherto untouched by them.

The middle classes have been perhaps the hardest hit. Some of them have lost their all and are reduced to beggary. . . .

The latest estimate made by the Government of the area under earthquake sands is over 500,000 acres. The average cost of reclaiming one acre is, at the lowest estimate, calculated at twenty rupees. That means one crore. What relief it would be possible to give the owners of these fields is more than I can say at present. [*Ibid*, pp. 358-59]



Gandhiji was able to visit Purnea in the extreme East of the province only on 9 April, the last day of his tour in Bihar. Here at the public meeting an address was presented to him. He expressed his deep sympathy with the sufferers in their calamity and told them to have faith in God who alone could set things right.

He warned the inhabitants against the danger of floods, against which they must make preparations beforehand. The Government, the Central Relief Committee and the people themselves must make all efforts to avert the disaster. He again warned his audience that calamities such as had visited them were a result of sinfulness among the people. They must learn a lesson from it and root out the sin of untouchability from their hearts. [*Ibid*, p. 373]

The same day Gandhiji set out for Assam, where he would spend the next 12 days, i.e., till 21 April before returning to Bihar to take up the Harijan tour in the southern part of the province.



CHAPTER XI: RESUMPTION AND COMPLETION OF HARIJAN TOUR

1

Gandhiji's first halt in Assam was at Rupsi, where he arrived late at night on 10 April. On 11 April 1934 he addressed a public meeting in that town. He was presented a purse for the Harijan cause and an address, in which it was claimed that in Assam and Bengal the problem of untouchability was less acute than in other provinces. Gandhiji said he could not believe that such a claim squared with facts. For as soon as distinctions were made between man and man as high and low, untouchability came in. Those against whom distinctions were made felt them as keenly as people anywhere else. In Assam they did look down upon Doms, Bhangis and Chamars, who had come there from other provinces. All castes considered themselves superior to some other castes and Mussalmans, Christians and others were in some way or the other considered and treated as untouchables. Removal of untouchability implied that they did away with all such distinctions of high and low. For all were children of one God. [C.W.M.G., LVII, p. 375]

There were also public meetings on the same day at Dhubri and Barpeta, at which Gandhiji repeated the message. Later in the day he visited Gauripur, Bansbari, Chaprakata, Sorbhog, Howli and Sorupeta. [*Ibid*, p. 518]

On his way from Barpeta to Tezpur Gandhiji passed through Rangiya at dawn on 12 April. It was prayer time and Gandhiji spoke to the assembled crowd immediately after the prayer. He drew the attention of the audience to the verse that had been sung at the prayer:

नत्वहं कामये राज्यं नस्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥



(I desire not a kingdom, nor heaven, nor even freedom from the cycle of births and deaths; I desire only to relieve the pain of all that suffer.)

Could they, Gandhiji asked, sincerely utter that prayer and yet treat crores of fellow human beings as untouchables? If the verse really expressed their inmost feelings they must shun untouchability, which was a heinous sin. Untouchables truly were evil thoughts, which impelled them to commit sinful acts, such as taking opium, which dulled the intellect and promoted laziness. The addiction to opium must be overcome. [*Ibid*, p. 376]

The other engagements on 12 April included visits to Goreshwar, Tangla, Udalguri, Bindukuri, Rangapada and, of course, Tezpur, where Gandhiji addressed a public meeting. In the evening he left Tezpur for Gauhati by steamer. The party travelled by deck.

At Gauhati, where Gandhiji arrived at midday on 13 April he paid visits to a leper ashram and the Harijan quarter. Later he addressed a public meeting. In his speech he berated the local Municipality for the dirty living conditions of the Harijans. It was no good blaming the Harijans for their condition, he said; it was the duty of the Municipality to educate them out of their dirty habits. He expressed satisfaction at the fact that the famous Kamakhya temple had been thrown open to Harijans, but opening temples to Harijans by itself was not enough. They must not rest content until they had broken down the barrier which divided the Harijans from the rest of the community. [*Ibid*, p. 386]

The following day he had more engagements at Gauhati. He addressed a meeting of women and another of Marwaris, and later visited Chapramukh, Khetri, Nowgong and Furkating.

On 15 April Gandhiji spoke at a public meeting at Golaghat. He told the organizers what he had been saying at many meetings and in notes published in



Harijan, viz., that the expenses connected with the reception given to him or feeding him and his party should not be deducted from the purse collected for Harijan work. There was no need to incur any expenditure on printing addresses, which could be written in hand and presented to him accompanied by a translation in Hindi or English. If expenditure had to be incurred on propaganda, such as printing handbills, etc., it should not exceed five per cent of the purse collected. He reminded the audience that he was not touring the country in order to have receptions but to do business on behalf of the Harijans. [*Ibid*, p. 393]

The expenditure incurred by the reception committees everywhere on presenting him addresses and on fitting volunteers with uniforms remained a source of constant irritation to Gandhiji throughout the tour and every now and then he thought it necessary to speak up in protest. The Harijan Sevak Sangh had of course been trying to keep the local committees on the leash and asking for memoranda of expenses. Commenting on one such memorandum, that from Khandwa, where out of a purse of Rs. 3,000, Rs. 40 had been spent on printing the address presented to him, Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan*:

To think that the expenses on the addresses, uniform for volunteers and the like should be debited against the purse makes the reception not only farcical but demoralizing. . . . Caskets are unbecoming, addresses are unnecessary. A brief report on their Harijan activities should take the place of the addresses and it should be written in a clear handwriting and handed to me to enable me to deal with it. . . . Probably many of the committees have . . . not realized the impropriety of making the Harijan purse pay for addresses and caskets presented to one who claims to be a true servant of Harijans. [*Ibid*, p. 377]



From Golaghat Gandhiji proceeded on 15 April to Jorhat, visiting Ganakpukhari and Dergaon on the way. He spent three days at Jorhat, of which the first two were kept free of any public engagements to enable him to catch up with the correspondence and to have some rest. On the 18th Gandhiji received a deputation of Harijan workers and gave clarifications on certain aspects of the Harijan movement. He told them, in answer to a question, that the Harijan movement would certainly benefit other backward classes too, for once the law ceased to recognize untouchability, the untouchables would be treated as part of other backward classes and entitled to protection from the State along with them. [*Ibid*, p. 405]

From Jorhat Gandhiji paid visits to Charing and Sibsagar and then moved on to Dibrugarh on the 19th, taking in also Dimu, Sapon, Kwang and Dihing.

In Tinsukhia on 20 April, Gandhiji in a statement to the Press highlighted the problems faced by immigrant labourers. Theirs, Gandhiji said, was an unenviable lot, since in Assam they were treated on par with Harijans whether in their own provinces they were treated as Harijans or not. But he hoped that the anti-untouchability movement would help the coolies to become honourable citizens. At the public meeting he addressed at Tinsukhia later he again spoke about the condition of labourers from other provinces and appealed to the Assamese to work for their uplift and their fusion with the Assamese society. [*Ibid*, pp. 419-21]

Gandhiji's engagements in Assam ended on the 20th at Tinsukhia. On the evening of that day he took the train for the journey back to Bihar, for his month-long tour of March-April in Bihar had been confined to the North of the province and the touring had been primarily in connection with earthquake relief. He now proposed to resume the Harijan tour in the South of the province, which had escaped the seismic fury that had devastated the North.



Gandhiji reached Muzaffarpur after the long train journey from Assam at 10.30 p.m. on 22 April. On 23 April he had a minor engagement – that of opening Gokhalepuri, a cluster of cottages built in the suburbs of Muzaffarpur by Bajpai of the Gokhale Institute for housing people displaced by the earthquake. Also present on the occasion were Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Syed Mahmud and H. N. Kunzru.

Speaking at the ceremony Gandhiji expressed the view that in order to minimize damage from earthquakes small quake-proof houses should be built on the pattern of those common in Assam. He suggested to Rajendra Prasad that he should go and study the design of houses in that province. [*Ibid*, p. 429]

On the 24th Gandhiji travelled to Patna to start from there his tour of South Bihar from the 25th.

Almost from the start it became clear that the Sanatanist opposition to the tour was going to be much more obstreperous and violent than anything Gandhiji had experienced in the Southern provinces.

Gandhiji commenced the tour on the morning of the 25th. The first place in the itinerary was Arrah but on the way he had to visit a private temple thrown open to Harijans by a zemindar. Trouble on the part of the Sanatanists was apprehended and so instead of going by car the party took a lorry in a bid to escape the eye of the Sanatanists. The ruse was not successful and the lorry had to plough through a crowd of demonstrators, some of whom clung to the wheels of the lorry. They were overpowered and torn away from the lorry by volunteers. The scuffle that took place made Gandhiji sick. The Sanatanists, it appeared, were determined to court injury.



At Arrah, too, where a public meeting had been arranged, the disturbance was so much that Gandhiji found it impossible to address the gathering beyond saying a few words.

From Arrah Gandhiji took the train to Buxar, where he arrived at noon. He was greeted at the station not only with black flags but veritable rioting. A lathi blow hit the hood of the car in which Mira behn happened to be travelling. A scuffle between the rioting Sanatanists and reformer volunteers resulted in many broken heads on both sides. Gandhiji decided to walk to the meeting and sent word to the organizers to that effect. The whole route, a little less than a mile, he wrote later, was lined with dense crowds on both sides. [*Ibid*, pp. 456-59]

At the meeting, which he described as most successful, Gandhiji told the audience:

I am prepared to walk any distance from this place so that Sanatanists may kill me, if they like. I am alone responsible for carrying on the Harijan uplift movement and if any head should be broken it ought to be mine before anybody else's. . . . I have so far survived five or six attacks on my life. . . . I would gladly lay down my head on the lap of anybody who may be intent on killing me rather than give up my conviction regarding the Harijan uplift movement under threat from any quarter. [*Ibid*, pp. 432-43]

He reminded the Sanatanists that religion had nowhere been promoted by violence and appealed to reformer volunteers not to take any steps to protect him from violence from then on.

Gandhiji and party then boarded the train for Jashidih on way to Deoghar. The Sanatanists, headed by Pandit Lalnath, got on to the train, and every time the train stopped they would get out and wave black flags and shout hostile slogans. The crowds waiting at every station to see Gandhiji were huge, but they did not



molest the hostile group of Sanatanists in any way. At Jashidih, where Gandhiji and party got off the train, they found themselves in the midst of an ugly situation. It is best summarized in a statement Gandhiji issued to the Press. He said:

It grieves me to have to state that Sanatanist friends have given up all sense of self-restraint whether in language or in action. This morning when I alighted at a quarter past two at Jashidih, black flags were being waved prominently with all kinds of shouts. It was with difficulty that I was taken to a car. Lathis rained upon the hood of the car. One lathi or stone – I cannot definitely say which . . . was aimed at the pane at the back of the car. Fortunately I was the only occupant in the back seat and was sitting in a corner when the pane fell just on my side. I would certainly have been seriously hurt if I had been sitting in the centre. . . . I was not prepared for this wild demonstration. I would like to appeal to the best minds among Sanatanists and suggest that sanatana dharma will be ill served by vulgarity and violence. [*Ibid*, p. 433]

In his speech at the public meeting at Deoghar on 26 April, again, Gandhiji noted with regret that the local *pandas* who had during his earlier visit to the place in 1917 all acted as volunteers at his meetings had now been divided into two camps, one supporting and the other opposing him. Why the sudden change? – he asked. He noted with regret that in opposing him decency of language had been thrown to the winds. Leaflets full of untruths and half-truths had been distributed to malign him.

How could the Sanatanists arrogate to themselves the sole right to interpret what was sanatana dharma? Surely, Gandhiji said, he had as much right to preach dharma as he understood it as they claimed for themselves. He did not seek to coerce anyone. He only appealed to the reason and to the hearts of the people.



Referring to the question of temple-entry, Gandhiji said although he wanted all the temples to be thrown open to Harijans, he wanted this to be done with the consent of the temple-goers. He had in the course of his tour in South India formally opened a good many temples to Harijans and in all cases this had been done practically without a dissentient voice. In a solitary case, where an appreciable minority had been against the opening of the temple to Harijans, he had refused to perform the opening ceremony.

Similarly, on the question of the Temple-entry Bill, which was intended merely to remove legal obstacles in the way of temple-entry if a majority of temple-goers were in its favour, Gandhiji said he had always insisted that only the votes of temple-goers should be taken in eliciting public opinion on the Bill.

Then why the opposition? – he asked. Probably it was because through his anti-untouchability campaign public opinion was fast changing and the edifice of untouchability was crumbling and the Sanatanists were determined by hook or by crook to bring the tour to a halt. Gandhiji however warned the reformers not to resort to retaliation. Any violence on their part, he said, would lead to serious penance on his part.

He then drew the attention of the audience to the treatment of the Santhals, a tribal community that worshipped Hindu deities, followed Hindu customs and manners and had even adopted vegetarianism. It was a pity that the Santhals nevertheless were treated as untouchables. There was no warrant for them to be regarded as untouchables. [*Ibid*, pp. 434-38]

On the 27th and 28th Gandhiji spent a great deal of time with the Santhals. Speaking at a public meeting at Gumia on the 28th he expressed his joy that Santhals were producing great quantities of yarn and wearing cloth spun from it. But he told them that the quality of their product was not satisfactory, nor were



the techniques they employed. Their implements needed to be improved. The fault, he said, was to a large extent that of their instructors. Gandhiji appealed to the Santhals to give up drink, which was poison. [*Ibid*, pp. 445-46]

During these two days Gandhiji also paid visits to Chatra, Hazaribagh, Bermo and Jharia.

On 29 April he proceeded to Ranchi to be present there for the conference of the Swarajists on the 1st and 2nd of May, of which an account has been given in the preceding chapter.

On 4 May Gandhiji proceeded to Jamshedpur, where he addressed a meeting of the workers of the steel plant. He was pained to observe, he said, that even in a working class area Harijans had been relegated to a separate basti and were living in unhealthy hovels. Surely, workers at least should be free from the taint of untouchability.

Gandhiji also regretted that drunkenness was on the rise among the workers and so was goondaism. Barbaric methods, employed by no matter whom, must be deplored. [*Ibid*, p. 460]

The Jamshedpur meeting was Gandhiji's last public engagement in Bihar. On the following day he proceeded to Anguli to begin his tour of Orissa.

3

The public meeting at Anguli on 6 May was largely attended. Gandhiji spoke in Hindi and then the speech was translated into Oriya. Gandhiji pointed out to the audience that the Dharmashastras did not mention the names of communities that were considered untouchables, and thus there was no reason at all to treat them as untouchables. The pity was that ignorance was paraded as knowledge and darkness was taken for light. God made no distinctions between



His children. They should therefore wash themselves clean of the sin of untouchability. The Shastras did not teach that illiterate people should be shunned. They should be educated. It was the evil habits, such as drinking, that should be treated as untouchable. Idleness too should be treated as untouchable. Orissa, Gandhiji said, occupied a prominent place in idleness. They must work. When they had no other suitable work, they should pick cotton, spin and weave khadi.

Even after Gandhiji had finished his speech people wanted him to go on speaking. They surrounded his tent on all sides and the crowd continued to swell till there were about 25,000 persons pressing round the tent. Volunteers had to lie down round the tent to ensure its safety. For an hour and a half they kept up the clamour for Gandhiji to come out and speak to them. Gandhiji had to come out in the end. He told them that they were inconveniencing him and persuaded them to disperse, promising to speak to them later in the afternoon. [*Ibid*, pp. 463-64]

Gandhiji later that day visited Bamur, Meramandeli, Banurpal, Hindol, Sadashivpur and Cuttack.

Sanatanists had been obstructing him everywhere. As Gandhiji was approaching Puri, his car was surrounded by a crowd of lathi-wielding Sanatanists who blocked his way. No persuasion or pleading would make them get out of the way. Gandhiji opened the door of the car and without fear or anger stepped into the angry, shouting, menacing crowd. He took support of the shoulder of one of the demonstrators. Pyarelal described to us how this acted as magic. The lathis raised to attack the party were so held by the lathi-wielders as to make a passage for him and his party, a row of them holding the lathis on either side. Gandhiji and party walked through the passage so created and there was no violence.



Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. Gandhiji took the decision to walk for the rest of the tour.*

At Puri on 8 May Gandhiji made the announcement that he had decided to finish the balance of the Harijan tour as far as possible by walking. In a press statement he said even when the tour programme had been on the anvil he had suggested that it might be best to conduct the tour by walking from village to village. After the incident of violence by the Sanatanists the idea had again gripped him. He must show the Sanatanists that the Harijan movement was essentially a religious one and did not depend for its success on swift locomotion. Further, it must be remembered that the tour had not been undertaken solely to collect funds and in any case he was sure that even if he should walk for the duration of the tour, men and women workers as well as money needed for the cause would be forthcoming. Gandhiji went on:

And then I am tired of the terrific noises. Though they are an expression of people's affection and joy at seeing me, they jar on my nerves which have now become too weak to bear them. I am equally tired of the hustling that has become my daily lot. The pressing towards me of vast crowds and the frantic efforts of volunteers to protect me from these crowds are proving too much for my weak body. . . . The mania for touching my feet is a source of danger to my body. Hardly a day passes when I do not get light scratches from the nails of the merit-seekers.

The shouts, the pressing and the touching of feet, Gandhiji felt, could be lessened if he did not rush from place to place in a car. For the essential truth of the message to sink into people it had to be delivered to silent and listening crowds. Religious truth, or any truth, required a calm and meditative atmosphere for its percolation. [*Ibid*, pp. 466-67]



Gandhiji further explained the reasons for the step in letters to co-workers. Thus, writing to G. D. Birla on 10 May he said:

I am sure you will like the idea of my walking tour. I had had it in mind for a long time but the feeling was never so strong as now. Buxar and Deoghar would appear to have contributed much towards it. There is no doubt that a scholar like Panchanan Tarkaratna [an orthodox Sanatanist leader] was also involved in the Deoghar incident. How can such darkness be dispelled by travelling by train? [*Ibid*, p. 478]

To Mathuradas Tricumji he wrote on 15 May:

A tour on foot is an old aspiration of mine. I would even like to give up completely travelling by rail or car. That time has not come yet, but my mind is working in that direction. I, therefore, have often declared that I regard railway trains, cars, etc., only as a necessary evil. I have never taken pleasure in travelling by them. [*Ibid*, p. 495]

Having taken the decision Gandhiji immediately proceeded to implement it. He went to the public meeting at Puri held later on foot.

He informed the audience of the new arrangement and explained that by walking he would be emphasizing the spiritual nature of the Harijan movement. His own experience, fortified by a study of history, had convinced him that all conveyances, even bullock-carts, not only did not help but hampered the free operation of spiritual forces. Gandhiji assured the Sanatanist opponents of the movement that so far as he could help it, temples would be thrown open to Harijans only with the consent of temple-goers and never by force. [*Ibid*, pp. 469-70]

On 9 May Gandhiji issued yet another statement to the Press, appealing to co-workers that they should spread the news in the villages and instruct villagers



about the solemnity of the mission. All shouts must be abandoned. There should be no hustling and no touching of his feet. [*Ibid*, p. 472]

On 9 May Gandhiji and party walked to Chandanpur, a distance of eight or ten miles from Puri, stopping on the way at Harekrishnapur, where Gandhiji addressed a meeting.

Giving his impressions of the first day's walking tour in a letter to Vallabhbai Patel, Gandhiji wrote on 10 May:

I left the bed at one in the morning and feel quite fresh

. . . When we started yesterday in the morning, the news had not spread, but in the first village where we halted more and more people came as the day advanced. When we walked to Chandanpur in the afternoon, the road overflowed with people and the meeting which was held immediately on arrival here was attended by crowds which had poured in from all sides. We are camping in the open air on the outskirts of the village. [*Ibid*, p. 477]

* I was privileged to be an eye witness of a similar working of Gandhiji's magic touch in 1947 at the time of the partition of India. Gandhiji was visiting the Purana Quila in Delhi which housed a large number of Muslim refugees. An angry menacing crowd had gathered on the road. The person who had suggested the visit and was sitting in front, became nervous and asked the driver quickly to get out of the area. Gandhiji told him to stop. When the driver did not, fearing the angry crowd, Gandhiji was furious and shouted at him to stop. The crowd which had been left a little distance behind quickly surrounded the car as it stopped. Gandhiji stepped out – a sad frail figure – and placing his hands on the shoulders of two angry young men on either side for support, asked them all to move on to the lawn. As they sat down Gandhiji addressed them. They could see and feel the force of his love and his desire to help them. The eyes which were emitting sparks of hatred a moment earlier were filled with tears and they



told him of their sufferings and their grievances of various kinds, including that of lack of medical care. Gandhiji sent me to look after them as a doctor. It was a wonderful experience.

4

The Bengal revolutionaries all this while, totally ignoring the mainstream political happenings, concerns and popular mood, had gone on with their programme of terrorism. Notwithstanding stringent measures, almost amounting to martial law, introduced by the rulers in selected areas, such as Midnapore, Chittagong and Mymensing, there was no slackening of the reckless abandon with which these young men staked their lives in attempts to assassinate British officials and loot trains. Repeated admonitions from Gandhiji and other national leaders that terrorism as a means of winning freedom for the country was futile, ineffective and harmful, had no effect on them.

Following the assassination of the Midnapore district magistrate B.E.G. Burge on 2 September 1933, which caused the repressive wrath of the Government to fall on the entire district and resulted in death sentences being awarded to three youths, Nirmaljiban Ghose, Brajkishore Chakravarti and Ramkrishna Ray, and transportation for life to four others, came the raid on a mail train at Hijli on 28 October. While three mail peons were receiving mail bags at the station, about a dozen young men, armed with guns, revolvers and other deadly weapons, fell upon them and looted the mail bags. One of the peons later died of gunshot wounds.

The young men involved in the outrage were caught and tried. Four of them – Prankrishna Chakravarty, Satyabrata Chakravarti, Sarojkumar Basu and Hrishikesh Bhattacharya – were sentenced to death. Three were sentenced to



transportation for life, while three others were each sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 23]

The year 1934 opened with terrorist action in Chittagong, where on 7 January Europeans watching a cricket match subjected to an attack by bombs and bullets. Of the four young men involved in the attack, one was killed on the spot, two were severely wounded, while the fourth was arrested. A police officer was wounded while making the arrest. [*Ibid*, p. 17]

On 6 May 1934 an attempt was made to bomb a police station in Howrah district.

On 8 May came the attack on the Bengal Governor, Sir John Anderson, at the end of a race at Lebong. Several shots were fired at close range, but the Governor, sitting in his box, escaped unhurt. Two young men were involved in the attack. Both were overpowered and arrested, one of them having first received wounds from shots fired by the Superintendent of Police and the Governor's bodyguard. [*India in 1933-34*, p. 20]

Gandhiji, who heard the news at Kadua in Orissa on 10 May denounced the attempt on the Governor's life, calling it most deplorable. Non-violence, he declared, was the only remedy for all the ills of life to deal with which violence was being practised. It was a great tragedy that some young men were unable to see that there was no short cut to deliverance from evils. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 479-80]

The outrage was severely condemned by almost all shades of political opinion in Bengal and elsewhere. Nationalist Press, too, joined in the condemnation. The Government viewed this as a change in the public attitude towards the problem of terrorism. The Viceroy in his address to the Legislative Assembly during its autumn session, took note of this change with approval.



Gandhiji, in answer to a question as to what he intended to do to tackle the problem of terrorism, said:

I am a determined opponent of the cult of violence. Not a day passes when I do not do or think something about this question which is one of life and death to me. But . . . I need help from outside, both Indian and English, official and non-official. ... If I get the atmosphere for the work that I need, I would love to bury myself for some time in Bengal and see what possibility there is for me to battle with violence. But I have patience. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, p. 287]

5

On 10 May Gandhiji and party left Chandanpur and walked to Virpurushottampur for the night's halt. On the way Gandhiji addressed a meeting at Shivalichak and visited Virgovindpur and Sakhigopal Kadua.

Speaking at Virpurushottampur, Gandhiji regretted that Brahmins, instead of devoting themselves to the service of religion through *tapas*, social service and the quest of Brahman, were following all manner of professions to enrich themselves. A true Brahmin should have humility; he should not be proud of his knowledge and wisdom. It would not do to say, Gandhiji proceeded, that sinful people could not visit temples. Temples were like spiritual hospitals and were expected to minister to the spiritually diseased. Temples were for sinners, not for saints. [C.W.M.G., LVII, pp. 480-81]

The change in the mode of travelling rendered it necessary for Gandhiji to forgo visiting many places originally listed in his itinerary. In all such places, Gandhi Reception Committees had been formed and money for the Harijan Purse Fund collected. It was only natural for workers in such places to feel disappointed. In a message addressed to the people of Ganjam, where he was scheduled to visit



originally, Gandhiji explained his difficulty and sought understanding and cooperation from the workers. At the same time there was the question of the disposal of the funds collected. Gandhiji's message said:

I know that monies have been collected in anticipation of my visit to particular places. If the donors want to recall the gifts because I shall not be visiting their places the donations should be refunded and if any monies have been legitimately spent in connection with the tour out of the funds collected and if they desire them to be refunded they will be refunded on receipt of authenticated accounts if the expenses incurred are found to be legitimate.

But Gandhiji expressed the hope that the donations would not be recalled and instead during his pilgrimage substantial additions would be made to them. [*Ibid*, pp. 485-86]

From Virpurushottampur Gandhiji travelled to Dandmukund, Pipli and Balasore on 11 May. On 12 May he visited Scola and Balkati. On 13 May he went to Satyabhamapur, Baliana and Pipli. He remained at Baliana till the morning of 15 May, when he opened the Kunjabihari temple for the Harijans. Addressing the gathering on the occasion, Gandhiji said temples were a reflection of the society for whose use they were built. In ancient times, he pointed out, temples were centres of social service. They had primary schools for boys and girls, with pandits attached to them who provided lessons in Sanskrit to the seekers. They provided refuge to the poor and destitute.

There were still temples existing which had such institutions. Indeed it was not so difficult to carry out programmes of social service through the temples, if the trustees were so minded. No large funds were required for the purpose. The



schools might be run in palm groves, with the earth below and open sky above. What was required was men who had the strength of character. [*Ibid*, p. 496]

On 16 May Gandhiji addressed a public meeting at Kajipatna, where an address was presented to him on behalf of four villages. In the address the view had been attributed to Gandhiji that East and West were incompatibles. Gandhiji refuted the imputation. He was a follower of Advaita, Gandhiji said, and East and West, North and South were all the same to him. How could he make an untouchable of the West? What he had advised the people to do, he said, was to shun Western civilization, which stood for indulgence, while Eastern civilization stood for self-denial and self-restraint. It was a conflict not of the West and the East but of two divergent philosophies of life. The Harijan movement, which aimed at the eradication of untouchability, was the first step in the programme to break down all barriers which divided man from man. [*Ibid*, p. 498]

At Cuttack, where Gandhiji addressed a public meeting later in the day, Pandit Lalnath and his supporters created some disturbance. The organizers allowed him on to the dais and permitted him to address the audience, thus enabling him to let off steam. Gandhiji congratulated the audience on having given a patient hearing to the Sanatanist leader. They should always deal gently with their opponents, he advised, and try to convert them through persuasion. The cause of religion could never be advanced by violence or force. [*Ibid*, p. 499]

The same evening Gandhiji took the train to Patna, where he was scheduled to be present for the A.I.C.C. meeting to be held there on May 18 and 19, dealt with in the preceding chapter.

While at Patna Gandhiji had occasion to meet leading workers of the Harijan Sevak Sangh from various provinces and to finalize in consultation with them the



programme for the remaining part of the tour. Gandhiji conveyed a broad outline of the programme to Vallabhbhai Patel in a letter of 22 May in which he said:

This tour on foot will end in Balasore on the 12th [June]. It has been decided that after that we should stop walking and I should spend a few days in each province, doing the work from a fixed place. The programme is as follows: I should reach Bombay on the 14th and from there go to Poona on the 17th. Thereafter I go to Ahmedabad on the 26th and from there proceed to Sind. I will spend three days in Sind and three in Lahore and then go to the U.P. . . . I had called workers from all provinces to meet me in Patna. They were of the view that I must visit every province. It was finally decided that I must visit every province and stay in one place for a few days. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, p. 16]

It had earlier been planned that after finishing the Orissa tour Gandhiji should visit Bengal. But in view of the change in the mode of travel the schedule had to be altered and Gandhiji decided, in consultation with Satis Chandra Das Gupta, Dr. B. C. Roy and others, to bypass Bengal altogether. At one stage Gandhiji contemplated paying a short visit to Calcutta to discuss the difficulties being voiced in Bengal in regard to the Poona Pact and to receive the Harijan Purse Fund collected in Bengal, but later even this idea was given up.

Gandhiji left Patna on 20 May by train and reached Byree in Orissa on the morning of the 21st. From there he walked to the Gandhi Seva Ashram, Champapurhat, where he spent the night. On the 22nd he spoke to the workers, emphasizing the need to educate the people, especially Harijans, on hygiene and sanitation. [*Ibid*, p. 467]

During the 18 days from 22 May to 8 June, Gandhiji and party, walking from village to village every inch of the way, covered the following places:



Champapurhat, Gopinathpur, Patpur, Nishchintkoili, Kaktia, Salar, Kendrapara, Bari, Neola, Sahaspur, Purushottampur, Budhaghat, Jajpur, Bhandaripokhari, Todang, Bhadrak and Balasore. [*Ibid*, p. 467]

The speeches Gandhiji made at these places were necessarily repetitive, for he had but one theme to expound: eradication of untouchability, doing away with the barriers between high and low, Brahmin and Bhangi, touchable and untouchable. He called upon the high caste people to serve the Harijans. He called upon the Harijans to educate themselves, learn the ways of hygiene and sanitation, give up drinking and eating of carrion and take to spinning. He emphasized the point that the Harijan movement was essentially a movement of education, persuasion and change of heart and that there was no place for coercion in it. Speaking at Jajpur on 2 June, for instance, he said:

I shall explain to you what will be the result if untouchability is abolished against our wishes and also the result if it is removed with our consent. If untouchability is removed against our wishes, it means the destruction of the Hindu dharma. If Hinduism perishes there will certainly be no untouchable left. But that will not be for the good of humanity. If, however, untouchability is removed with the willing cooperation of the Hindus, with the purification of and atonement by caste Hindus, it will be something to be proud of and will be a blessed act. And the Hindu dharma which is on the decline today will have renaissance, and it will progress. [*Ibid*, pp. 49-50]

Gandhiji drew tremendous satisfaction from his walking tour of Orissa which lasted exactly a month from 8 May to 8 June, with the exception of four or five days spent in Patna and in the train journey to and from there. He told Harijan workers at Bhadrak on 7 June:



Those who took a direct part in the pilgrimage cannot but have been struck by the fact that real work lies in the villages. The vast mass of Harijans live there. Untouchability has its strongest roots there. Poverty, too, is most rampant in the villages. Therefore, the Sangh, while not neglecting the cities, should send its best workers to the villages and there do twofold work — serve the Harijans and the *savarnas* — the former by procuring for the young and the old educational facilities, clean water supply, admission to temples, betterment of economic conditions, removal of bad habits, e.g., carrion-eating, eating and drinking intoxicating drugs and drinks and inducing hygienic habits. [*Ibid*, p. 63]

Gandhiji's party was made up of about 50 persons. Each day at 3 a.m. they would set out from wherever they happened to be camping, preceded by five girls from the Ashram run by Rama Devi, wife of the Orissa leader Gopabandhu Das. Gandhiji said about these young ladies:

I marvelled at their capacity for walking bare-footed. Every morning, as soon as we reached our destination, these girls went out to Harijan quarters and brought me reports of what they had seen or done. They never knew what fatigue was. And though many of them had been brought up in the lap of luxury they put up with all the trials of a march which was by no means a soft job. [*Ibid*, p. 68]

The walking tour led to the spreading of Gandhiji's message of eradication of untouchability faster than anything else could have done. As Gandhiji and party were walking on foot some of the villagers from the village they were halting at, would walk with them up to the next village. Many from the surrounding villages joined them on the way. They would talk about what they had seen and heard when they went back to their villages. Gandhiji would have loved to continue the



walking tour. But he could not. Other pressing calls forced him to end it and use faster modes of travel.

At Balasore on 8 June Gandhiji announced that he would have to abandon the rest of the walking tour, which had been intended to go on till the 12th, because of the rains. For two nights running he and his party had been drenched in rain and while he was at a place called Turunga it had rained all day. Accordingly, on 8 June he took the train to Wardha. [*Ibid*, pp. 68, 467]

Before his departure Gandhiji spoke to a Press representative, giving his impressions of the Orissa tour. He said:

I have always considered Orissa to be the poorest of our provinces. The impression was strengthened by intimate contact with the villages visited during the tour. The enforced idleness among people is appalling. The Harijans in the villages I found to be exceptionally clean in their habits. Indeed in some of the villages their homes appeared to be cleaner than the homes of their fellow villagers. Intellectually, too, they appeared to me to be in no way inferior to others in spite of the social handicaps they are living under. [*Ibid*, p. 67]

7

Leaving Orissa on 8 June, Gandhiji reached Wardha in the evening of the following day. Here he remained till the 13th for consultations with Congress leaders who had come to Wardha for the meeting of the Working Committee on 12 June. On the 13th Gandhiji left for Bombay, where he had a busy schedule till the 18th.

Gandhiji's first engagement in Bombay was a meeting on 14 June with the members of the Bombay Provincial Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. These



included Mathuradas Vasanji, Dahanukar, Avantikabai Gokhale, Hansa Mehta, V. L. Mehta, P. Baloo, Narayan Kajoolkar, Dr. Solanki, S. K. Bole, J. K. Mehta and K. L. Jhaveri.

The Provincial Board of the Sangh, Gandhiji was informed, had given scholarships to numerous Harijan students and ran three chawls providing accommodation to nearly 200 Harijan families. Gandhiji suggested that the Sangh might consider running a decent eating-house, where Harijans could go without any restraint and which would, in cleanliness, be an object lesson to all, showing that Harijans had eating habits as clean as any average *savarna* Hindu. Gandhiji also advised the local Sangh to carry out an exhaustive census of the Harijans in Bombay and draw up a catalogue of their disabilities. In many matters the Bombay Corporation could also be approached to render help.

Gandhiji emphasized the need for educating *savarna* Hindu opinion for the removal of the barrier against Harijans in the matter of entry into temples, restaurants and other places.

Gandhiji also met members of the Gandhi Seva Sena which was a group of ladies led by Gosibehn Captain, granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, who had taken up the work of Harijan uplift. Gandhiji told them that one concrete way in which they could help the Harijan cause was to employ Harijans as domestic servants in their house. They must also educate Harijan women in the matter of hygiene and cleanliness. [*Ibid*, pp. 77-79]

On the 15th Gandhiji spoke at a meeting of women. He declared that he considered women superior to men in faith and love and expressed his belief that the battle against untouchability would be more than half won if he could have women's whole-hearted support for the cause. Untouchability had its origin not in religion but in pride of race and the tendency of the strong to keep down the



weak. If Harijans were allowed to mix with other sections of society on a footing of equality and all professions were thrown open to them, in a few years it would be impossible to believe that they could ever have been looked down upon. [*Ibid*, pp. 81-82]

Later in the day B. R. Ambedkar, along with Dr. Solanki, G. V. Naik, Amritrao Khambe and Baburao Gaekwad, called on Gandhiji.

Gandhiji invited constructive suggestions from Ambedkar and his friends as regards the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Ambedkar suggested that the Sangh might economize on education and medical relief, as these were attended to by the Government. Also, education in the first place only benefited the individual. The Sangh would be better advised to concentrate on the primary object of securing full civic rights for Harijans, such as the right to draw water from common wells and to send their children to public schools. Ambedkar mentioned cases of ill-treatment of Harijans by villagers. Gandhiji said the Sangh had been dealing with such cases and it would be a great help if Dr. Ambedkar was good enough to furnish full facts about all such cases that came to his notice. Gandhiji did not agree with Ambedkar that there was overlapping of effort in the matter of education. The demand was so great that the Sangh had been unable to do justice to it, for want of the right type of teachers. [*Ibid*, p. 82]

On the 16th there was a public meeting at Azad Maidan. Gandhiji braved rain to reach the meeting at the exact time announced. Mathuradas Vasanji of the Harijan Sevak Sangh presided. Gandhiji expressed himself dissatisfied with the leanness of the purse presented to him: Rs. 39,000, expected to be increased to Rs. 50,000. He said in so far as the Harijan purse represented the penance of *savarna* Hindus for their maltreatment of the untouchables, they must give to the utmost of their ability. He cited the case of a friend who had, since Gandhiji's



21-day fast, given up certain articles of diet and had been regularly remitting two rupees and four annas every month thus saved for the Harijan cause.

Gandhiji said he knew of no sin more heinous than the sins perpetrated by caste Hindus against untouchables in the name of religion. In Baroda State a worker of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Parikshitlal Majumdar, had been beaten up for drinking water from a *parab*, a roadside spot for supplying drinking water to the thirsty. He had been mistaken for an untouchable, which showed that you really could not distinguish a Harijan from a non-Harijan.

Was it any wonder that Harijans lived in dirty conditions and were prey to dirty habits, such as eating carrion, drinking liquor, etc., seeing that they were segregated and kicked at every step? Gandhiji mentioned the deplorable housing conditions of the Harijan employees of the Bombay Municipality and said Bombay could not be called beautiful till the Municipality provided better housing for Harijans. The expenditure involved would not be beyond the means of the Municipality, which counted its income in crores. [*Ibid*, pp. 84-86]

On 17 June a deputation of the All-India Swadeshi League called on Gandhiji. The deputation consisted of Lallubhai Shamaldas, K. M. Munshi, Mrs. Raiji, J. A. D. Naoroji, S. A. Brelvi, Vaikunth L. Mehta, B. G. Kher, Maganlal, Purushottamdas and Dhirajlal Modi. They wanted Gandhiji to give them a definition of swadeshi for their guidance. Gandhiji said:

For purpose of the All-India Swadeshi League, swadeshi covers useful articles manufactured in India through small industries which are in need of popular education for their support and which will accept the guidance of the All-India Swadeshi League in regulating prices and in the matter of wages and welfare of labour under their control. Swadeshi will, therefore, exclude articles manufactured through large and organized industries which



are in no need of services of the All-India Swadeshi League and which can or do command State aid.

Gandhiji said a body like the Swadeshi League need not become a self-appointed advertising agency for large industries as it had so far been. They had ample resources at their command and could well look after themselves. It was jaggery manufacturers rather than sugar factories that were in need of protection. Jaggery was superior to white sugar in nutritive value and jaggery production, which was threatened by sugar mills, must be kept alive.

Such small-scale and cottage industries could usefully employ hundreds of young men who were in need of employment. They could be a means of harnessing all the energy going waste. [*Ibid*, pp. 87-89]

8

Gandhiji spent the 18th of June in Bombay and then entrained for Poona where he arrived on the 19th morning. On 21 June Gandhiji paid a visit to the Mahila Ashram set up by D. K. Karve. This was Gandhiji's second visit to the institution, the first having been way back in 1915, soon after his return from South Africa. Gandhiji, speaking to the girls of the Ashram, expressed the hope that they would so conduct their lives as to be worthy of the great sacrifices of the Karves. Gandhiji expressed his regret at the fact that Hindi was only an optional subject at the institution while English was compulsory. He suggested that Hindi be made compulsory and English optional. They could not serve the country properly without a working knowledge of the national language. [*Ibid*, p. 95]

On 22 June Gandhiji spoke to a group of national education workers associated with the Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapith.



Gandhiji was asked if Harijans, while getting the benefits of national education from national organizations, could also receive education from Government schools. Gandhiji said so long as Harijans remained classified as Harijans the rules of national education that applied to others could not be applied to them. They could and should adopt all the means open to them to receive education, from Government institutions as well as national institutions.

National educational institutions, Gandhiji said, should aim at producing village workers as opposed to city workers. He emphasized the importance of primary education in the system of national education. [*Ibid*, pp. 97-98]

On 23 June Gandhiji spoke at a meeting held to commemorate the death of Prophet Mohammed. It was organized by the Anjuman-i-Fide-e-Islam. Gandhiji told the meeting that he had read while in jail Maulana Shibli's biography of the Prophet, which had been sent to him by Hakim Ajmal Khan. He had also read various other works on Islam and the Prophet. These studies had led him to the conclusion that for him the Koran and the Bible were as much sacred books as were the Vedas and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Mohammed was a great Prophet and so was Jesus Christ. Mohammed was godfearing and devoted to truth. He renounced everything and suffered privations. He was brave and feared none but God.

It was a pity, Gandhiji said, that though Muslims read the Koran, they did not follow its teachings. Nor did the Hindus follow the teachings of the *Gita* and the other scriptures. If both the communities followed the teachings of their respective faiths they would come to have respect for each other and communal quarrels would become a thing of the past. [*Ibid*, pp. 98-99]

On the 24th Gandhiji spent an hour and a half with a large group of Harijan workers – about a hundred of them – and answered their questions. He was



asked, since there was so much unemployment among graduates, if it would not be better to discourage Harijans from pursuing literacy education and to encourage them to take to vocational training. Gandhiji said it would hardly be right to recommend vocational training to Harijans before it had been successfully tried by the *savarnas*. Besides, academic training had its uses for the Harijans. Dr. Ambedkar, for instance, commanded great distinction. Though, Gandhiji said, he himself was a votary of vocational training, the Harijan Sevak Sangh could not force Harijans to opt for it.

As regards housing for Harijans, there was not much that the Harijan Sevak Sangh could do about it. It was a matter to be taken up by the municipalities. [*Ibid*, p. 102]

Later in the day Gandhiji addressed a public meeting. It was a noteworthy affair. Deputations of workers from various parts of Maharashtra were present with purses and reports of work done by them to be presented to Gandhiji. The Sanatanist opposition was represented by Shankarrao Lavate, a veteran public worker of Poona. Lavate told the meeting that he and his co-workers were not against the removal of untouchability. They only objected to legislation affecting the whole Hindu Community being pushed through with the aid of votes of other communities.

Gandhiji in his speech praised Lavate as a seasoned public worker whom he had known since 1915, and who reminded him of the *rishis* of old. Gandhiji assured Lavate that though it was his view that without enabling legislation temples could not be opened to Harijans and untouchability could not be removed, he did not want the legislation to be passed with the aid of Muslim or Christian votes. Such fears on the part of Sanatanists, Gandhiji said, were groundless. On the other hand, *savarna* Hindus in villages continued to oppress



Harijans. They were forced to eat carrion and carry dead cattle against their will. They were assaulted if they exercised their right to draw water from village wells. He called upon the Sanatanists of Poona to join hands in opposing such oppression. [*Ibid*, pp. 103-4]

On 25 June it had been planned to present Gandhiji with an address at the Municipal Hall. As Gandhiji was being taken there a bomb was hurled at a car carrying the Chief Officer of the Municipality, two constables and four others, causing injuries to the occupants. It was clear that the bomb-thrower had mistaken the car for the one carrying Gandhiji. Gandhiji in fact came to know of the incident only after he had arrived at the Municipal Hall. Five persons were detained on suspicion. Gandhiji's escape was providential and the whole country was shocked.

The programme at the City Municipal Hall went as per schedule. Gandhiji remained at the venue from 7.30 to 8 p.m. and received the address. Later Gandhiji in a statement said:

I have had so many narrow escapes in my life that this newest one does not surprise me. God be thanked that no one was fatally injured by the bomb. . . . I cannot believe that any sane Sanatanist could ever encourage the insane act that was perpetrated this evening. But I would like Sanatanist friends to control the language that is being used by speakers and writers claiming to speak on their behalf . . . I am not aching for martyrdom, but if it comes my way in the prosecution of what I consider to be the supreme duty in defence of the faith I hold in common with millions of Hindus, I shall have well earned it. . . . I have nothing but deep pity for the unknown thrower of the bomb. If I had my way and if the bomb-thrower was known, I should certainly ask for his discharge, even as I did in South Africa in the case of



those who successfully assaulted me. Let the reformers not be incensed against the bomb-thrower or those who may be behind him. What I should like them to do is to redouble their efforts to rid the country of the deadly evil of untouchability.

Speaking to the Press on the incident in Bombay on the following day, Gandhiji said no reform worth the name had ever been accomplished without the reformer holding his life as a stake for the cause. If it was decreed that he should sacrifice his life for the cause of removing untouchability it should be regarded as easy satisfaction. An age-old evil masquerading in the name of virtue could not be removed without an adequate measure of sacrifice. Gandhiji refused to condemn the Sanatanist opponents of the movement in general for the act of one person. He said he was not persuaded that the Sanatanists had organized themselves to oppose him by resorting to actual physical violence.

Gandhiji took the opportunity to speak out once again against the cult of the gun and the bomb. He said:

When I returned to India in 1915, I had prophesied that if the bomb found a habitation in this land, no matter what the cause was, it would not be restricted to that cause alone. That prophecy has more than once proved to be true. I would like further, at this juncture, to drive the truth home that if we are following violence in thought and word, it must some day or other assume concrete form, and it is not capable of being restricted to what one may call a good cause alone. [*Ibid*, pp. 108-11; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 36]

C. Rajagopalachari expressed the same view in a statement he issued condemning the outrage. He said:



The Poona outrage must bring wisdom to those who lightly hold the view that violence is legitimate in a good cause and may be tolerated for the achievement of rights. [*India in 1933-34*, p. 25]

All shades of public opinion were deeply stirred against the despicable attempt made on Gandhiji's life and newspapers joined in an unequivocal condemnation of the cult of the bomb.

9

On 27 June Gandhiji arrived in Ahmedabad on a week's tour of Gujarat and Kathiawar.

On the very day of his arrival in the city, Gandhiji had two engagements: a meeting with the workers of the Harijan Sevak Sapgh from various places in Gujarat and Kathiawar and a meeting of women.

At the meeting of the Harijan workers, wells for Harijans came in for special mention. It was suggested that a separate fund should be collected for the wells, as it was a gigantic task. Gandhiji expressed himself against a special fund for digging wells. They must do whatever they could and also accept help from the Sanatanists. If the workers were earnest they could easily find funds for the purpose.

Thakkar Bapa raised the point that digging separate wells for Harijans might be considered by some people as tantamount to perpetuating untouchability. Gandhiji said in any case Harijans could not be allowed to die for want of drinking water. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, p. 112]

The women's meeting that Gandhiji addressed later was held in the Krishna cinema hall. It had been organized by seven women's associations and was well attended. Gandhiji said it was an auspicious thing for him that his work in



Ahmedabad should begin with a meeting of women. For women were far superior to men in self-sacrifice, suffering and patience. They must strive hard to free themselves of the sin of untouchability and appeal to the hearts of other women. It was not enough to go round collecting funds. Whatever the Brahmins and astrologers might tell them, they must bear in mind that as good mothers they could not distinguish between one child and another. Indeed a dull, stupid and crippled child would be more deserving of their affection.

Oppression such as that of the untouchables in India existed in other parts of the world too. But nowhere else was it carried on in the name of religion. And yet religion, as laid down in the Shastras, contained no sanction for untouchability as practised. [*Ibid*, pp. 113-16]

On 29 June Gandhiji addressed a meeting of mill-hands, who presented him with a purse of Rs. 5,001 for the Harijan cause. He was also presented a handwritten address. Some Communists had distributed leaflets charging Gandhiji with capitalist sympathies and asking him what he had done for the textile workers when they had been on strike in Bombay, Sholapur, Kanpur and other places.

Gandhiji said he had been serving the working class for the preceding fifty years. He held different views from the Communists, but they were welcome to try and convert him to their view. He believed that the workers would gain nothing by liquidating the capitalists. In a way the workers too were capitalists. Money alone was not capital and in certain situations money would be useless. Labour was as much capital as money. The differences between the employers and the workers was that whereas the former were well organized the latter were not. Workers were oppressed because they were not conscious of their strength.

Both the workers and the capitalists should work in amity. Both the classes would benefit if they knew how to make good use of capital. [*Ibid*, pp. 117-22]



At the public meeting held on the same day Gandhiji was presented a purse of Rs. 25,000. He was informed that in all a sum of Rs. 32,000 had been collected in Ahmedabad of which 1,289 pice had been received from the children of Balubhai's school.

Gandhiji mentioned his visit to the Harijan colony the previous day and expressed his distress at the dirt and squalor of the slums which housed the Harijans. They were worse than even the slums of Poona and Bombay. Why should human beings, which the Harijans certainly were, be condemned to live like animals? The Municipality should do something about it. The mills too must do something to improve the chawls.

He appealed to the Sanatanists, even those who did not regard untouchability as a sin; to contribute money for providing housing for Harijans. The scriptures certainly did not say that Harijans should be kept in the condition of animals.

A certain type of untouchability, Gandhiji said, was observed everywhere in the world. No one would want to touch a dirty man. But the caste Hindus had turned six crores of human beings into slaves. They were considered untouchables by birth. Where was the sanction for it in the sacred books? Gandhiji appealed to all – Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis – to see that Harijans were not forced to live in such unhealthy conditions. They must act immediately to remedy matters. [*Ibid*, pp. 123-27]

Kathiawar's share of the Harijan tour was represented by the three days' visit Gandhiji, along with his party, paid to Bhavnagar from the 1st to 3rd July.

At the public meeting, which was the main engagement, Gandhiji was presented a purse of Rs. 30,000, which represented collections made in the various States of Kathiawar. Gandhiji chided the workers on the leanness of the



purse. Surely Wankaner could have collected more than the paltry Rs. 203? Then there were Morvi and other States. And Kathiawaris were enterprising people and could certainly have paid much more if properly approached.

Gandhiji exhorted the reformers to be patient with the Sanatanists. They must also be treated with respect. Many Sanatanists sincerely believed that untouchability as practised should continue otherwise there would be confusion of *varnas*. It was difficult for people to give up things they had been practising over a long period. The reformers must argue with the Sanatanists, but must not forsake gentleness, moderation and humility while doing so.

Gandhiji repeated his assertion that untouchability in its modern form did not have the sanction of the Shastras. If he was asked what this modern untouchability was, Gandhiji said, he would take them to the Bhangi quarters of Bhavnagar, or the weavers' quarters, to show how the Harijans lived. He concluded:

Untouchability is a gangrenous limb of Hindu society and if measures are not taken to remove it the society would become crippled. And a crippled society cannot go on like that, so that it will ultimately perish. Can dharma be preserved if we cut off one of its limbs? All the limbs of dharma are inseparable from one another. [*Ibid*, pp. 131-36]

10

Gandhiji's next halt was Ajmer where he spent the 5th and 6th July. The visit began on a jarring note.

A public meeting had been arranged as usual, but well in advance of the meeting Pandit Lalnath, the indefatigable Sanatanist opponent of the Harijan movement, who had, ever since the beginning of the tour, never slackened his



pursuit of Gandhiji and his party, met Gandhiji and obtained his permission to speak at the meeting to present the Sanatanist view. Lalnath and his group appeared at the meeting before the scheduled time and staged a black-flag demonstration. Gandhiji had issued specific instructions to volunteers to see that the black-flag demonstrators were fully protected from molestation by the public. Nevertheless there was a scuffle. The black flags were seized and trampled upon. Lalnath was assaulted and as a result received a cut on his head. When he rose to speak at Gandhiji's invitation, the audience interrupted him and would not let him proceed.

Gandhiji severely admonished the audience for the discourtesy. He said if they were not willing to hear the Pandit, it meant that they were not willing to hear him either. If he had a right to say that untouchability was a sin, Pandit Lalnath had an equal right to say that the anti-untouchability movement was a sin. The Harijan movement was a religious one in which there was no room for intolerance or physical violence. By indulging in violence they would kill the great movement. [*Ibid*, pp. 144-45]

Gandhiji's distress at the violence shown to Pandit Lalnath found expression in his decision to fast. He announced the decision in a statement from Karachi on 10 July. The statement said:

After much searching of the heart, I have decided to impose upon myself a fast of seven days, to commence on Tuesday noon August 7th, i.e., two days after my reaching Wardha, which I expect to do on the 5th of August next. This is the least penance I owe to Pandit Lalnath and those Sanatanists whom he represents. God willing, the Harijan tour will finish at Benares on the 2nd of August next. It is, perhaps, fitting that the end will be signaled by a penitential fast. May it cover all errors, conscious or



unconscious, of omission or commission, of me and my co-workers. The movement will not end with the fast. Let it open a new and cleaner chapter in the struggle for the emancipation of nearly fifty million human beings from thralldom imposed in the sacred name of religion. [*Ibid*, pp. 158-60]

The announcement of the fast by Gandhiji disturbed his closest colleagues. He reassured them. Writing to Vallabhbhai Patel on 11 July he said:

Please do not be unhappy at the news of my fast. It is absolutely necessary. Large crowds come to the meetings and the Sanatanists are on the war-path. People do not tolerate their conduct and, therefore, trouble is bound to follow. People will not listen to mere exhortations. One can convey one's message to vast masses of people only by fasting. Crowds at the meetings are larger than ever before and it is very difficult to control them. [*Ibid*, p. 168]

Gandhiji made the same point while speaking to Press representatives on the same day. He said:

You can influence the mass mind not through speeches or writings but only by something which is most well understood by the masses, that is suffering, and the most acceptable method is that of fasting. . . . The only language they understand is the language of the heart, and fasting when it is utterly unselfish is the language of the heart.

But it involved a risk to his health, the newspaper men pointed out. "Of course", Gandhiji said.

Any fast must require some risk, otherwise it has no meaning. It must involve torture of the flesh.

The decision to fast, he told them, was irrevocable, since he had made the announcement at the meeting in Ajmer that he would be undertaking some sort of penance. [*Ibid*, p. 171]



The four days from the 7th to the 11th July that Gandhiji spent in Karachi, were crowded.

On the 7th Gandhiji was accorded a reception by the Karachi Municipality, when the Mayor, Jamshed Mehta, presented him with an address. Gandhiji expressed satisfaction at the work done by the Municipality for the Harijans, but pointed out that Harijans still lived in unhealthy quarters. He called upon the city fathers to see that not a single Harijan was made to live in quarters where they themselves would not want to live. [*Ibid*, pp. 148-49]

On 8 July the problem of rural indebtedness, especially among Harijans and backward castes, was brought home to Gandhiji when he met some Harijan workers of Sind. They complained that Kabuli moneylenders harassed them and refused to accept payment even when their exorbitant claims as regards the principal and interest were admitted. Gandhiji said the workers must educate the Harijans and persuade them not to borrow, and if they must, they must not pay an interest higher than 6 per cent. In Tharparker, Gandhiji told the workers, there were 5,000 Bhils and Meghwads, original inhabitants and peasant proprietors of the district, who were fast losing their lands to moneylenders and being reduced to the status of landless labourers. Legislation would be required for their protection, but meanwhile a band of earnest workers must bury themselves among those people and serve them. [*Ibid*, pp. 150-51]

Later in the day Gandhiji addressed the businessmen of Karachi. Gandhiji said he had been receiving liberal financial help from the business community for the cause of the poor and the Harijans, for which he was thankful. But he thought it necessary to make it clear that though he was friendly with the Princes, officers, businessmen and the rich, he never forgot that he was a representative of the poor and the workers.



Businessmen, wealthy men and Princes were an inseparable limb of India. His duty did not demand that they should be destroyed in order to serve the poor. Their destruction would not serve the cause of the poor.

Gandhiji called upon them to function as trustees, treating their wealth as though it belonged to the poor. If benevolence did not teach them that lesson, selfishness would teach them. Experience showed that altruism and self-interest could be blended in trade. Genuine *artha* included *paramartha*. [*Ibid*, pp. 151-53]

Addressing the students of Dayaram Jethamal Sind College on 10 July, Gandhiji exhorted them to cultivate humility and use the learning which they would acquire for service. He drew the students' attention to the dirt and squalor of the Harijan quarter in the city. He asked the students to go and work among those who lived there and to help them. They did not have to give up their studies for that. They could do so in their spare time. He told the students that the boys of the Forman Christian College of Lahore, the Agra College and a college in Dehra Dun had been doing work of Harijan service. [*Ibid*, pp. 163-67]

On the 11th Gandhiji addressed the Parsis of the city. R. K. Sidhwa, secretary, Parsi Rajkiya Mandal, presented to Gandhiji a purse of Rs. 352 for Harijan work. Gandhiji thanked the Parsis for the purse and said he really had no right to seek their help for the anti-untouchability movement, since it was a question that concerned Hindus alone.

Gandhiji told the Parsis that they were a prosperous and philanthropic community, though a small one. Their entire population did not exceed one lakh, most of whom were settled in India, chiefly in Bombay and Gujarat. But they could help the poor of the villages of India by encouraging khadi. Men and women in Orissa, for instance, walked four to five miles every day to obtain rice worth



just one pice. They did not have even a loin-cloth to cover themselves with. They could spin and weave. But they found no buyers for the khadi they produced. The Parsis could certainly help in that area.

Untouchability was a virus that had contaminated all religions in India. Removal of untouchability also implied establishment of brotherhood amongst all religions. This did not mean doing away with the differences among religions. Gandhiji explained:

Just as men have different names and faces, these religions also are different. But just as men are all human in spite of their different names and forms, just as the leaves of a tree though different as leaves are the same as the leaves of the same tree, all religions, though different, are the same. [*Ibid*, pp. 174-78]

11

On the evening of 12 July Gandhiji took the train to Lahore to begin his five-day visit to the Punjab. The strain of the tour was beginning to tell on Gandhiji. Being buffeted night and day over a long period by waves of uproarious multitudes was having a deleterious effect on his health. On 12 July he confessed to a newspaper correspondent:

I wish I would get the quiet I am pining for in Lahore. The terrific noises that greeted me at every station have already shattered my nerves, which are now ill fitted to stand such strain, nor are these noises conducive to the reception of the message of essential brotherhood I am struggling to deliver. [*Ibid*, p. 179]

But the schedule he had to keep at Lahore hardly left room for the peace and quiet Gandhiji longed for. In addition to the numerous meetings he had to



address every day – of men and women students, Harijans, women and public meetings and the after-prayer meetings held every morning which were attended by vast crowds — there were numerous deputations of Harijans, Congressmen and of Sikhs and Hindus that called on him and sought his guidance or intervention on issues that exercised them.

In his speech at the meeting of students on 13 July, Gandhiji called upon the boys to work for cleaning society of the poison of untouchability, which was afflicting the 60 million Harijans, and had spread among caste Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other communities. They must break down the barriers that had been erected between man and man. He proceeded:

The purpose of education is that we know God and progress towards the ideal and get closer to Him. It is the strict law of God that anyone who desires to be close to Him should renounce the world and yet be in it. This is what the first *mantra* of the *Ishopanishad* exhorts us to do.

Gandhiji reminded the students that the money that had to be spent on their education came from the villages. It was incumbent on them to give something to the villages in return for it. The best way they could do so was to wear khadi, which was produced in the villages. [*Ibid*, pp. 182-84]

Speaking to the women students on 14 July, Gandhiji warned them against falling a prey to "outward show and fashion", which was much in evidence among young women in the Punjab. He said:

Our land is getting poorer day by day because of this destructive fashion. Our civilization, too, has been encouraging this luxury. If all of us fall a prey to pleasures, we shall be ruined. History teaches us that nations steeped in luxury and pleasure are destroyed. . . . If you wish to save



yourselves from such suicidal pleasures, this is the time. I appeal to you to be on your guard immediately.

He appealed to them, as he had appealed to men students, to devote the time they could spare from their studies to the service of Harijans. And of course they must learn to wear khadi and take up spinning, which had suffered a decline in the ten years since he had been in the Punjab last. [*Ibid*, pp. 188-89]

The public meeting, held in the grounds of the D.A.V. College Hostel on 15 July, was so crowded that the premises proved wholly inadequate to hold the vast audience. Gandhiji's speech was barely audible.

Gandhiji assured the meeting that there was no ulterior motive behind the Harijan movement. He refuted the charge, sought to be levelled by interested parties, that the movement was designed to increase the number of Hindus, or to score a victory over other communities. It was a purely religious movement, undertaken for the purification of Hinduism. [*Ibid*, p. 93]

At the prayer meeting held on 17 July, Gandhiji explained to the audience the three things that marked out a genuine worshipper, a man of God. The first of these was "spirit of friendliness and brotherhood for the oppressed and the depressed". This spirit could not express itself better than by befriending Harijans, which meant getting off their backs, ceasing to treat them as beasts of burden and permitting them to breathe and move freely.

The other mark of a worshipper was the service of *Daridranarayana* – India's starving millions, among whom were included Harijans. But there was this difference: whereas the poorest of the poor, if he was not an untouchable, could move about freely wherever he pleased, even the richest Harijan could not enter a Hindu temple or use a public well. While therefore the service of Harijans lay in the eradication of untouchability, the service of the poor lay in enabling them to



find work and to add to their scanty income. The best way to do this was by wearing khadi and engaging in daily sacrificial spinning.

The third mark that distinguished a true worshipper was the "spirit of silence". The noise and the din of meetings, Gandhiji said, jarred on him wherever he went. They must all endeavour to avoid making noise and cultivate a spirit of orderliness and discipline. [*Ibid*, pp. 201-2]

12

For purposes of the Harijan tour, as already mentioned, Gandhiji persuaded the Bengal branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and leading public workers such as Satis Chandra Das Gupta and Dr. B. C. Roy, not to insist on his visiting Bengal as scheduled. The change had been necessitated by his having to give a great deal more time to Orissa than the programme allowed, after he had decided to continue the tour on foot.

But problems other than those of the Harijan movement came up, problems that had to do with the changed political climate of the country following the decision of the Congress to enter the Councils. All over India, in the organisations of the Congress at all levels, factionalism and groupism that had existed on a subterranean level now suddenly came to the fore. The Punjab and Bengal were the worst affected and Bengal more so. Jawaharlal Nehru was later to write to Gandhiji:

Is not the Congress being rapidly reduced to a magnified edition of that shameful spectacle, the Calcutta Corporation during the last few years? Might not the dominant part of the Bengal Congress be called today "the society for the advancement of Mr. Nalini Ranjan Sirkar", a gentleman who rejoiced to entertain Government officials . . . when most of us were in prison and C.D. [Civil Disobedience] was supposed to be flourishing? And the



other part probably a similar society for a similar laudable object? [*Ibid*, p. 462]

The clash of ambitions brought on by lure of power surfaced most prominently during the elections for local Congress Committees, that were to be a preliminary to elections for the Provincial Committee. The local leaders, such as B. C. Roy, thought that Gandhiji's intervention might help in composing "domestic differences" and they requested Gandhiji to pay a short visit to Calcutta for the purpose.

Gandhiji agreed and decided to proceed to Calcutta from Lahore. He accordingly left Lahore on 17 July and reached Calcutta on the morning of the 19th. He was in Calcutta for three days, i.e. till the 21st, during which time his public engagements included discussions with representatives of the Depressed Classes, with students and addressing several public meetings.

The representatives of the Depressed Classes who met Gandhiji on 21 July, wanted to know why they had not been given a majority of seats on the Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Gandhiji explained that the Harijan Sevak Sangh was an organization set up by caste Hindus as an act of penitence, which the Harijans were in no way called upon to share with them. They could of course set up advisory boards to inspect and review the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. It was their privilege and their duty to do so. [*Ibid*, pp. 214-15]

Gandhiji next had a question and answer session with a group of students. The discussion was wide-ranging and brought out the revolutionary temper of the youth of Bengal. The students grilled Gandhiji on such questions as the effectiveness of non-violence in a mass struggle, on abolition of landlordism and on the Bengal detenus.



As regards the practical possibility of a mass struggle remaining non-violent, on which the students had expressed their doubt, Gandhiji asserted that throughout India's non-violent struggle for freedom, wherever violence had broken out, it had been resorted to not by the masses but by the classes, having been manipulated by the intellectuals. Even in violent conflicts the masses of fighting forces did not resort to indiscriminate violence, but had to obey orders. There was no reason why in a non-violent struggle the masses should not show the discipline that was shown by fighting forces in a violent action. When the message got through, the masses obeyed it. He pointed out that there had been no repetition of Chauri Chaura. Non-violence in action could be sustained only when it was accompanied by non-violence in thought.

Answering another question, Gandhiji said he did not believe that capitalists and landlords were exploiters by an inherent necessity or that there was an irreconcilable antagonism between their interests and the interests of the masses. All exploitation was based on cooperation, willing or forced. There would be no exploitation if people refused to obey the exploiter. What was needed was not the extinction of capitalists and landlords but the transformation of the relationship between them and the masses into something healthier and purer. Was it their contention, Gandhiji asked, that the so-called privileged classes were altogether devoid of patriotic sentiments? It had been his experience, he said, that when properly approached they were not averse to progressively sharing their riches with the masses. He asked the students to what extent they themselves had shed the habits of life they attributed to the capitalists. The idea of class war, Gandhiji said, did not appeal to him.

Was it not time for the youth of India to force a "social reordering" or must it follow the political effort? – Gandhiji was asked.



Gandhiji said a new social order could not be forced. That would be a remedy worse than the disease. He said he was all for a thorough-going, radical social-reordering, but it must be an organic growth, not a violent superimposition. [*Ibid*, pp. 216-21]

Gandhiji's short visit to Calcutta was not, so far as the Harijan movement was concerned, wholly bereft of gain. At the crowded public meeting held in Calcutta on 21 July he announced that he had during the visit collected a sum of Rs. 65,000 for the Harijan cause and before he left he hoped to receive further contributions. Even the Bengal Bus Syndicate, he was glad to find, had contributed Rs. 501. [*Ibid*, p. 222]

As for composition of "the domestic differences", which had been the purpose of his visit, Gandhiji told the press that he had had full and frank discussions with different groups and had come to the conclusion that, if party feeling was to be avoided, the Congress organization must be freed of manipulation of votes, even what amounted to purchase of votes. Party feeling in Bengal ran high and it was desirable to have unopposed elections if manipulation was to be avoided. Gandhiji was happy to note that 22 out of 48 districts had endorsed his suggestion. He had no remedy, he said, for purging the Congress of Bengal of "all undesirable elements". [*Ibid*, pp. 223-24]

13

From Calcutta Gandhiji made his way to Kanpur where he spent four days from 22 to 25 July. The visit constituted the U.P.'s share of the Harijan tour as per the revised programme. Accordingly all Gandhiji's time in Kanpur was devoted to the work concerned with the Harijan movement.

On 22 July, the day he arrived in Kanpur, Gandhiji spoke at the reception accorded to him by the Municipal and District Boards and later addressed a largely attended public meeting.



Gandhiji congratulated the Municipality upon the work the latter said it had done for the uplift of Harijans, but pointed out that the housing conditions of the Harijans in Kanpur remained deplorable. It was not so difficult to construct sanitary dwellings for Harijans and he hoped that the Municipality would take it up. [*Ibid*, p. 225]

The public meeting, it was feared, might be disturbed by the Sanatanists, who turned up in large numbers waving black flags, and the police was therefore present in strength to prevent any breach of the peace on their part. Gandhiji thanked the people of Kanpur for the purse of Rs. 11,000 presented by them, but said the amount was inadequate. Kanpur, he said, could give many times more.

Gandhiji then turned to the large number of leaflets distributed by the Sanatanists full of "palpable falsehoods and insidious half-truths, exaggerations and distortions". It was said, for instance, that in some places the reformers had slaughtered Sanatanists without mercy! He said it was a great tragedy that those falsehoods were being spread in the name of Sanatana Dharma.

Gandhiji declared that he considered it his religious duty to bear witness to truth as he saw it and no black flags, no bomb and no revolver could prevent him from discharging that duty. The movement was confined to the removal of the feeling of superiority and inferiority and had nothing to do with inter-dining and intermarriage, he said. The movement claimed for the Harijans the same social, civic and religious rights as were enjoyed by any other Hindu. As for temple-entry, Gandhiji repeated that in so far as it was conceived as a penance on the part of caste Hindus, it could not be brought into effect except with the full consent of those who worshipped in temples.

Gandhiji regretted the "elaborate police precautions" at the meeting to protect him and to ensure peace. Reformers and Sanatanists, he said, should



realize the importance of maintaining self-imposed discipline to obviate the necessity of police precautions. [*Ibid*, pp. 225-28]

The workers responsible for Gandhiji's schedule at Kanpur had set apart time exclusively for the Sanatanists and a group of them came for a discussion with Gandhiji on the 24th. Mahadev Desai, who had been released from Belgaum jail on 9 July and had joined Gandhiji at Lahore, wrote a resume' of the discussion for *Harijan*.

The first question they asked was how the temple-entry agitation was going to bring any material benefit to the Harijans. Gandhiji answered that while temple-entry might or might not bring material benefits to Harijans, it would certainly bring spiritual benefit to *savarna* Hindus, who would thereby purify themselves. The point was not whether Harijans would be materially benefited by throwing open temples to them or whether they cared to go to the temples or not. The point was that as Hindus, if they observed the rules of temple-entry followed by other Hindus, they ought to have the right of entering temples. If they were sinners, so were the rest of the temple-goers. After all, temples were meant for sinners; saints did not need to visit temples.

The Sanatanists objected that the Shastras did not sanction temple-entry and if Gandhiji said they did, then Gandhiji should also say that he was propounding a new Shastra.

Gandhiji said he believed in the same Shastra as the Sanatanists did. But the Shastris were by no means agreed on the question. While there was a section amongst them that held the view that the Shastras enjoined untouchability, there was an equally strong section that asserted that there was no sanction in the Shastras for untouchability as it was practised. There were besides numerous texts in the *Smritis* which contradicted each other and hence no text could be



accepted as the only one expressing the truth. There were many interpolations even in *Manusmriti*. [*Ibid*, pp. 238-40]

On the 25th Gandhiji made a short two-hour trip to Lucknow to address a public meeting. A purse of Rs. 1500 and ornaments valued at Rs. 500 were presented to him on behalf of the women of Lucknow. [*Ibid*, p. 245]

Back in Kanpur a deputation of landlords awaited him. They were alarmed at the rise in the Congress of the Socialist Party which advocated expropriation of private property.

Gandhiji assured them that they had no reason to fear any such change in the policy of the Congress as laid down in the Karachi Congress recognizing the right of private property. Only another session of the Congress could change the policy.

At the same time he warned the zemindars that the land belonged as much to the ryots as to them and they must not squander the gains from the land on extravagant living. Class war between the landlords and the peasantry could be averted only if they treated the peasantry as members of the family. Class war, Gandhiji said, was foreign to the essential genius of India which was capable of evolving a form of communism suited to it. Should an attempt be made in the Congress unjustly to deprive the landlords of their property, Gandhiji declared, he would throw his whole weight on the side of the zemindars. [*Ibid*, p. 247-49]

The question came up again at a meeting Gandhiji had with Congress and Harijan Sevak Sangh workers the following day. Asked what attitude Congressmen should adopt on the question of zemindari, raised by the newly formed Socialist Party, Gandhiji said the zemindars could not be robbed of their property without a just cause. Supposing a man had been given some land by the Government in 1857. Would it be fair to rob his grandchildren of the



property? If land had to be taken the State must pay compensation for it. Similarly a man purchasing land and paying a price for it could not be deprived of it.

Balkrishna Sharma 'Navin', a Congress Socialist, asked how, without abolition of landlordism, the condition of the peasantry could be improved. He pointed out that out of the Rs. 19 crores realized from the peasantry in rent, only seven crores went to the Government treasury, the rest 12 crores being appropriated by the zemindars.

The solution, Gandhiji said, was that the zemindars should render services worth Rs. 12 crores. Destroying the zemindars could serve no purpose. There were no zemindars in the ryotwari areas, such as Gujarat, but the condition of the peasantry was quite as bad. What was needed was to have the Tenancy Acts suitably amended. [*Ibid*, pp. 251-52]

From Kanpur Gandhiji proceeded to Benares, where he remained for a week from 27 July to 2 August. This visit was concerned primarily with the affairs of the Congress Parliamentary Board and meetings of the Working Committee and only marginally with the Harijan movement. It will therefore be dealt with in the following chapter.

From Benares Gandhiji went to Patna for a day and then left for Wardha, arriving there on 5 August, having concluded the Harijan tour.

During the tour Gandhiji covered altogether 12,000 miles, including 156 miles on foot, and collected about ten lakhs of rupees. In terms of mass contact and mass education the tour was a glorious success. Everywhere, without exception, the multitudes that turned out to see and hear Gandhiji exceeded expectations and broke all previous records. Women, no less than men, vied with each other to make their offerings to a cause that Gandhiji had made his own, with which he had so completely identified himself.



The 3rd of August 1934 having come and gone, Gandhiji was now free from the consequences of his vow not to involve himself in public affairs except those concerned with the Harijan movement. He could now express himself freely on political questions and decide his future course of action.



CHAPTER XII: CONGRESS PREPARES FOR COUNCIL-ENTRY

1

May 1934 marked a drastic shift in the policy pursued by the Congress in the preceding four and a half years. From being a party in rebellion it transformed itself, even though only in form, into a party in opposition. There was no dilution of the goal as spelt out in the Lahore Congress resolution: complete independence, which included severance from the British Empire at will. But the tactics changed, with the emphasis shifting from civil disobedience to Council-entry as the means to be employed, at any rate for the time being, for the achievement of the goal.

Consequent upon the Patna A.I.C.C. resolution suspending Civil Disobedience for swaraj, the Government of India, through a communique issued on 6 June 1934, lifted the ban on all Congress organizations. This was done grudgingly. Civil Disobedience, the communique noted, had only been suspended, not abandoned, and the Congress still adhered to the programme of agitation for severance of India from the British Empire in terms of the Lahore Congress resolution and it still retained within its fold "a skilfully trimmed communism" in terms of the Karachi resolution.

The ban on the Afghan Jirga and the Khudai Khidmatgars in the Frontier Province was not lifted, although they had been part of the Congress organization since 14 August 1931. The Government declared that though working in association with the Congress, they were "revolutionary" organizations. The various measures conferring special powers on Government functionaries at various levels were also not withdrawn. [*India in 1933-34*, p. 16; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 298-99]



It was, however, important that the Congress could once again function as a legitimate political organization. Having been in the wilderness for so long, party structures at local and provincial levels had all but been destroyed, with the surviving committees having been dissolved by the Acting President M. S. Aney in July 1933 on the advice of Gandhiji. It was a daunting task to piece together the remnants and make the Congress whole again. Nevertheless it was the task that faced the leadership if the Congress was to be made into a fit instrument for the coming elections.

Accordingly, the Working Committee, at its sitting in Wardha on 12/13 June, called upon "all Provincial and Local Congress Committees to complete all elections including those to the A.I.C.C. by the end of August 1934".

What followed did not present a pretty picture. Already, the go-ahead given to the Council-entry party by the A.I.C.C. at Patna had heralded a change in the mentality of Congressmen, especially those of them whose commitment to Civil Disobedience had not been very deep. In all their activities they kept the coming elections in mind. This could be seen in the earthquake relief work in Bihar. Gandhiji noted the change and on 8 June he wrote to J. C. Kumarappa:

It appears to me a great deal of the relief work is undertaken with political motives, especially after the A.I.C.C. decisions. The Bihar Central Relief Committee does not get the impartial and unadulterated attention of those in charge and the work is not what it should be because of mixed motives. Middle class relief is an answer to pressure. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, p. 67]

What Gandhiji, in his mild way, called 'mixed motives' were of course motives of personal aggrandizement, the pushing and elbowing, the naked



pursuit of power and pelf and factional friction for vantage positions in the organization.

As the organizational elections proceeded, so much corruption and indiscipline came to light that the Working Committee was forced to take note of it. At its Benares meeting held at the end of July it stated in a resolution:

The Working Committee has noted with deep regret that practices have crept into Congress election methods which are reprehensible and even calculated to invalidate elections. Such, for instance, is the habit of some parties making members by paying their fees with the only object of securing their votes. . . . The practice has also grown up in some places of candidates buying for the occasion sufficient khaddar to clothe voters temporarily for the purpose of complying with Article VII (iv)a of the Constitution. . . . [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 201-2]

Gandhiji was deeply pained. In a statement issued on 6 August from Wardha, a day before he began his seven days' fast, he said during the fast his mind would be filled with thoughts about the Congress and Congressmen, and proceeded to explain:

The acrimony with which Congress elections have been fought in some places and the unclean methods adopted by Congress workers by manipulating votes and grossly abusing the rule about habitual wearing of khadi have filled me with horror and dismay. . . . Though my fast has nothing to do with these unclean methods, how I wish Congress workers will detect my anguish in the words I have written and lighten it. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, 297]

On 16 August Gandhiji again reverted to the theme. In a statement to the Press he deprecated the "spirit of indiscipline and disobedience to laws and rules which we have ourselves enacted". He wished Congressmen to realize that they



were in the Congress "not in order to mount to office and fame, but to render mute service to the country". The Congress would perish as a national organization unless it was sustained by internal purity of those who composed the organization. [*Ibid*, p. 316]

3

An issue that gave rise to much controversy and caused dissensions in the Congress, resulting in the breaking away from it of a sizeable group, concerned the stand to be taken in regard to the Communal Award.

Ever since the Communal Award had been announced on 16 August 1932 there had never been two opinions in the Congress as regards the mischievous nature of the Award. It was seen as intrinsically bad, as further dividing communities and setting at naught any attempt to find a national solution to the communal question. So repugnant was it to nationalist sentiment that in order to thwart a part of it – the part relating to Harijans – Gandhiji had staked his life.

Muslims in the Congress, the nationalist Muslims, had not held any different view on the Award, for they had consistently expressed themselves against the principle of separate electorates, which the Award perpetuated. As soon as the Award was announced, many leading nationalist Muslims came out with statements condemning it. Thus, on 1 September 1932 Maulana Azad denounced it as "the most dangerous thing that could happen to Indian nationalism", which had "set one community against the other, without giving any tangible benefit to any community save the Europeans". Dr. Ansari and T. A. K. Sherwani had been equally vehement in condemning it. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 322]

But two years had passed since those statements were made. Much water had flown under the bridge since and important changes had come about in



Muslim politics, changes that had to some extent narrowed the gulf between the nationalist Muslims and the communalist Muslim groups.

On 4 March 1934, the two factions of the All-India Muslim League, which had been functioning as separate and rival organizations since 1928, decided, at a meeting in Delhi, to end the cleavage and unite under the presidentship of M. A. Jinnah. The event was seen as offering an inducement to nationalist Muslims and to adherents of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, who had been keeping away from it, again to enter it.

The Council of the now united Muslim League met on 1/2 April 1934 in Delhi under the presidentship of Jinnah. Jinnah appealed for unity among all Muslim organizations so that the Government could be confronted with united demands. A number of nationalist Muslims, among them Asaf Ali, attended the meeting. In his speech Asaf Ali eulogized Jinnah as a man of principles and expressed the hope that under his leadership the doors of the League would be thrown open to all and no attempt would be made by any one faction to monopolize the organization. Asaf Ali did not feel drawn to comment on the Communal Award. His doing so, he felt, might only complicate matters.

Then came the resolution on the Communal Award, which was to the following effect:

Resolved that they [the Council of the All-India Muslim League] accept the Communal Award so far as it goes, until a substitute is agreed upon by the various communities. . . .

Of the nationalist Muslims present, one voted against the resolution while the rest remained neutral.



Jinnah, in a statement later, denounced the White Paper proposals as "treacherous" and called for unity between Hindus and Muslims to prevent the scheme being foisted on India.

The emphasis placed on the Communal Award, he said, indicated the desire of the Muslims that any national demand in which they joined should incorporate safeguards which the Muslims considered to be the very minimum. Muslims were not behind any other community in their demand for a national self-government. [*Ibid*, pp. 317-19]

The position of the Muslim League under M. A. Jinnah was therefore this: in the absence of a national settlement of the communal question, give us what the Communal Award gives us and we shall support the national demand. Many nationalist Muslims felt strongly drawn to the idea.

Accordingly, in order not to antagonize the following of the League, the nationalist Muslims present at the Swarajist Conference at Ranchi on 2/3 May 1934, had pressed that a decision on the Communal Award be deferred. As a result the Conference had decided that a consideration of the acceptance or rejection of the Communal Award was premature at that stage.

The A.I.C.C. meeting at Patna later in the month, which approved the suspension of Civil Disobedience and sanctioned the Council-entry programme, advisedly said nothing on the White Paper and the Communal Award.

But to maintain silence on a public issue that aroused such strong passions as the Communal Award clearly did, was not likely to be acceptable to all Congressmen. Sections in the Congress, headed by Madan Mohan Malaviya and M. S. Aney, were much exercised over the question and continued to press for rejection of the Communal Award by the Congress. When the Congress Parliamentary Board met in Bombay on 15/16 June, the two leaders, both



members of the Board, met Gandhiji and strongly pleaded for rejection of the Award.

Gandhiji could not see the wisdom of the course. In his speech at the meeting of the Board he pointed out that the majority of the Muslims had accepted the Award. The thing to do would be to bring about a voluntary settlement of the communal question that would satisfy all the communities, but so long as such a settlement was not achieved, it would be "betrayal of the Muslims to shake their confidence in the Congress by taking up a position of uncompromising opposition to their view of the Communal Award".

The Parliamentary Board referred the matter for decision to the Working Committee. The Working Committee met in Bombay on 17 and 18 June and in a resolution unreservedly condemned the White Paper as in no way expressing the will of the people of India and declaring that the only satisfactory alternative to the White Paper was a constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage "or as near it as possible". So far as the Communal Award was concerned the resolution said:

The White Paper lapsing, the Communal Award must lapse automatically. Among other things it will be the duty of the Constituent Assembly to determine the method of representation of important minorities and make provision for otherwise safeguarding their interests.

Since, however, the different communities in the country are sharply divided on the question of the Communal Award, it is necessary to define the Congress attitude on it. The Congress claims to represent equally all the communities composing the Indian nation and, therefore, in view of the division of opinion, can neither accept nor reject the Communal Award as long as the division of opinion lasts. . . .



It is, however, obvious that the only way to prevent untoward consequences of the Communal Award is to explore ways and means of arriving at an agreed solution and not by any appeal on this essentially domestic question to the British Government or any other outside authority. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, pp. 455-56, *The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 300]

4

The resolution was passed in the teeth of sharp opposition from Madan Mohan Malaviya and M. S. Aney and on the morning of 18 June they intimated their desire to resign – Malaviya from the Parliamentary Board, which he headed with Dr. Ansari, and Aney from both the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board. Gandhiji tried to dissuade them, but they remained unbending, only agreeing to defer the matter till the next meeting of the Working Committee to be held in Benares in the last week of July. In a Silence Day note Gandhiji wrote:

It [the intended resignation of the two leaders] is painful, but if it must happen it must be endured. The Congress will survive the shock. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, p. 91]

Outside the Working Committee, among the Congress workers in general, but more especially in the Punjab and Bengal, there was confusion and bewilderment. Everywhere Gandhiji went, Congress workers met him and expressed their misgivings as regards the Working Committee's decision on the Communal Award. Gandhiji took great pains to persuade them that the decision taken was the only correct one under the circumstances. Hindus and Sikhs, he pointed out, had rejected the Award, therefore the Congress could not accept it; on the other hand the majority of Muslims had accepted the Award, therefore the Congress could not reject it. [*Ibid*, pp. 150, 173, 181]



When Gandhiji was in Lahore in the course of his Harijan tour a deputation of Sikhs "representing all progressive elements of the community" called on him on 15 July and expressed their strong disapproval of the non-committal policy of the Congress on the Communal Award. They informed him that though in all other matters they stood with the Congress, they were determined to carry on their fight against the Award and in pursuance of this programme intended to run their own candidates in the coming Assembly elections.

Gandhiji told the deputationists that the Congress had rejected the White Paper and the rejection and lapse of the White Paper also implied the lapse of the Communal Award. He assured the Sikhs that no solution of the communal question which was not acceptable to them would be acceptable to the Congress.

On the same day a deputation of the Punjab Hindus, led by Raja Narendranath, also called on Gandhiji, to express the resentment of the Hindus with the Congress position on the Award which, they said, did grave injustice to the Hindus and Sikhs. Gandhiji agreed with them as regards the iniquitous nature of the Communal Award but said the Congress had not approved the Award. The Congress stood for a mutually agreed settlement of the question of communal representation. [*Ibid*, pp. 191-92]

In a letter to M. S. Aney, written before the meeting of the Working Committee in Benares, Gandhiji said:

The more I think about it, the clearer I become that the Working Committee resolution is faultless. Non-committal is the only position the Congress can take up. We must not tease the communal boil. The more we tease it the worse it becomes. In my opinion it is a fatal blunder to turn our attention from the White Paper. If the Reforms are not killed, the Award will



stand in spite of agitation. The Reforms can be killed by sustained effort.
[*Ibid*, p. 253]

Gandhiji, and under his persuasion the Congress Working Committee, came strongly to hold the view that the need of the hour was for a sustained national effort to be mounted against the proposals contained in the White Paper and for a Constituent Assembly to be summoned to frame the future constitution of India. The Muslim League and Muslim opinion in general had come out strongly in denunciation of the White Paper and it appeared possible that a united national demand for the scrapping of the White Paper could be formulated. It was therefore necessary to train all the guns at the White Paper, ignoring the Communal Award, any opposition to which only tended to upset a large body of Muslim opinion and rendered national unity more difficult to achieve. The Communal Award was, in any case, seen as forming part of the White Paper, for the mode and quantum of representation of the various communities in the legislative institutions envisaged in the White Paper were to be based on the Communal Award. Therefore, if the White Paper was scrapped, the Communal Award would *ipso facto* cease to be operative; it would lapse.

The Working Committee, which met in Benares on 27 July, and at which M. S. Aney and Malaviya were both present, the latter by special invitation, could not persuade the two leaders of the wisdom of its stand on the Communal Award. In accordance with their resolve, therefore, they resigned from the Congress Parliamentary Board. M. S. Aney also resigned from the Working Committee. Their resignations were accepted. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, p. 28]

On 29 July the Congress Parliamentary Board approved the election manifesto drafted for the Congress by Gandhiji.



The Communal Award, the manifesto said, was by common consent intrinsically bad. It was anti-national. But the Congress could not refuse to take into account the attitude of Mussalmans in general, who seemed to want the Award; nor could the Congress accept the Award, as the Hindus and Sikhs rejected it. The only thing, therefore, that Congress candidates and the Congress could do was to assist in securing an agreed solution of the communal question. Such a solution could not be reached by appealing to a third party or power. The Parliamentary Board therefore intended to concentrate the attention of the voters on the rejection of the White Paper and, as the only alternative to it, upon securing and convening a Constituent Assembly.

A Constituent Assembly could be convened only as a result of an agreement between the governing power and the people. The Congress did not despair of such an agreement if the electors chose their representatives in the coming elections with a clear mandate that a Constituent Assembly was the only alternative to the White Paper. Even though the franchise was narrow, the verdict of the electorate, if it was unequivocal, could not be flouted. The Congress hoped that all communities would unite on that simple issue.

The work of Congress legislators would not be confined to securing rejection of the White Paper and acceptance of a Constituent Assembly. It would be their duty to press for the repeal of all repressive laws and ordinances, which had brought untold hardships to countless men and women during the Civil Disobedience struggle. They had been made to suffer privations, face lathi-charges, endure imprisonment and put up with heavy fines and confiscations of property. The extraordinarily drastic methods of repression adopted to deal with the Congress organizations in the Frontier Province would also demand the attention of Congress legislators. So would the methods adopted by the Government to deal with terrorism.



Congress representatives in the legislatures would also work to give effect to the Karachi Congress resolution on fundamental rights and economic programme, for political freedom must be accompanied by real economic freedom of the starving millions. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, pp. 255-57]

5

Having seceded from the Congress Malaviya and Aney announced their intention to form a Nationalist Party to organize a campaign against the Communal Award as well as the White Paper and to set up candidates for election to the Assembly who would work for the rejection of both. In order to ensure that their group avoided setting up candidates against Congressmen, they proposed that freedom be given to Congress legislators to vote on the Communal Award according to the mandate of their constituencies. Alternatively every legislator elected on the Congress ticket should be given freedom to vote according to his conscience.

This, Gandhiji said, might be permitted in a few special cases, such as those of Malaviya himself and Aney and a few others, but to permit freedom of conscience for all in the matter would nullify the Working Committee's resolution. Gandhiji counselled Malaviya not to involve himself "in the botheration of forming a new group". It would add to the prestige of both sides if contests between Congress candidates could be avoided. He wrote to Malaviya:

I am confident that your opposition by itself would suffice as an expression of disapproval of the Communal Award. I hope you will respond to my humble appeal. [*Ibid*, pp. 276-77]

No agreement resulted, since, as Gandhiji wrote to B. C. Roy, Malaviya would not be satisfied with less than 22 seats, a demand that Gandhiji found impossible to concede. [*Ibid*, p. 281]



On 18 August 1934 Malaviya convened a conference in Calcutta to bring into being his Congress Nationalist Party.

P. C. Ray, chairman of the Reception Committee, in his speech expressed the hope that the Nationalist Party would be a party "within the sheltering bosom of the Indian National Congress". Madan Mohan Malaviya, however, who delivered the presidential address, was not too sure of this. If need be, he said, his party would work outside the Congress and might include in it men who did not entirely subscribe to the creed of the party, which was the same as that of the Congress.

Malaviya dwelt on his association with the Congress and said that it would be unthinkable for him to do anything that would weaken the Congress or undermine its prestige. His quarrel with the Working Committee was solely over the question of the Communal Award. He had been trying for a compromise. He and Aney had advanced various suggestions for the consideration of the Working Committee, such as allowing freedom of conscience to Congress candidates in the coming elections on the question of the Communal Award. They had failed.

The Communal Award, he said, did not even benefit the Muslims. It gave them a few more seats here and a few appointments there, but it did not give them power. The Award was not merely an arrangement for seats. It was the foundation upon which the structure of the future constitution of India would be raised.

Malaviya reminded the Muslims that separate electorates were a device introduced in 1908 by the British and they had since been condemned by most political authorities. Even the Simon Commission had spoken against them. Malaviya reminded the audience that at the Round Table Conference in London Gandhiji had declared that the Congress would prefer to wander, no matter for



how many years, in the wilderness, rather than be party to a proposal under which the hardy tree of freedom and responsible government could never grow.

If the Communal Award was allowed to stand, Malaviya went on, self-government would never grow and British domination would continue for an indefinite length of time.

In a resolution the Conference recorded its strong disapproval of the Communal Award, as it retained and extended the evil of separate communal and class electorates and provided statutory majorities with separate electorates, which were fatal to the development of representation upon a national basis.

By another resolution the Conference decided that candidates for election to the legislatures "shall be elected from among Congressmen who are members of the Party", but in special cases the Party might support a nationalist who subscribed to the objects of the Party.

But who was a nationalist? – a delegate asked.

Anyone who stood for the nation, he was told. And if by this definition many of those who had opposed the Congress during the struggle became eligible for tickets, it could not be helped. After all, no single body of men could claim the monopoly of patriotism. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 260-63]

6

On completion of his nine-month long Harijan tour Gandhiji returned to Wardha on 5 August 1934. In a note he wrote for *Harijan* the following day he announced the end of the year of political silence, during which he was to devote himself wholly to the Harijan cause and take no active part in politics. While, he said, it was now open to him to speak and write on politics, he proposed to keep himself aloof from them as much as possible. The joy of the past self-



restraint was too fresh to fade from his memory and to induce volubility of political speech. His partiality for Harijan and kindred causes persisted, Gandhiji said, and would persist to the end of his life. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, p. 292]

In a statement issued on the same day Gandhiji also announced his intention to enter, from 7 August, upon the seven days' fast he had decided upon following the assault on Lalnath at Ajmer in July. Gandhiji proceeded:

The monster of untouchability will not be killed without constant and ceaseless effort on the part of workers who have faith in the mission and who have by patient toil built up personal purity and integrity. Let everyone also realize that fasting is not for everyone and for every occasion. Fasting without faith may even lead to disastrous consequences. [*Ibid*, p. 297]

Gandhiji started the fast at 6 a.m. on 7 August, attended by Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal, Balkrishna Kalelkar, Thakkar Bapa, Devraj and Prithuraj Asar. Kasturba, Prabhavati and Uma Bajaj too were there. Vasumati Pandit and Amtusslaam also arrived. The Harijan Sevak Sangh declared the week of the fast as "the Purification Week".

During the fast Gandhiji's mind was filled with the affairs of the Congress and the growing corruption in the organization, as explained in the statement issued on the eve of the fast, quoted earlier. In a letter to Mira behn he wrote:

Many changes are taking place in my mind just now. The corruption in the Congress is preying on me as it has never before done. I am conferring with friends as to the advisability of leaving the Congress and pursuing its ideals outside it. It is good that the corruption agitates me. I shall take no hasty step, but there it is. [*Ibid*, pp. 298-99]

But the corruption in the Congress was not the only thing that agitated Gandhiji's mind. There were several other things that were not quite to his liking, many incidents and happenings that would have justified his going on a much



longer fast, as he told the prayer meeting after beginning the fast. There had been instances of subtle untruth and breaches of *brahmacharya* at the Ashram. While one might fail to restrain the mind one must not be a hypocrite. His fast, he hoped, would spur workers on to further self-purification and introspection. [*Ibid*, pp. 301-2]

There were other matters, too, over which Gandhiji said he would be pondering during the fast and indeed during the whole of August, while he rested at the Ashram. He wrote to Agatha Harrison:

What is in store for me in September I do not know. But this I do know. To go to the Frontier Province or to Bengal or to both alternatively is a craving of the soul. . . . If the so-called Red Shirts are violent, I must know them and disown them. If they are not, I must defend them against the slur cast on them.

Gandhiji said that while such witnesses as Khurshed Naoroji, Verrier Elwin and Devadas Gandhi had testified to the non-violence of the Red Shirts, British official testimony was equally emphatic the other way, all of which could not be pure manufacture. The mystery could be solved if he was permitted to go and live in their midst. He would go to the Frontier to find out the truth. To Bengal he would go not to find the truth but to wean the terrorists from terrorism. [*Ibid*, p. 300]

On 14 August at 6 a.m. Gandhiji successfully completed the fast, "God be praised!" wrote Gandhiji in *Harijan*. He proceeded:

The fast was taken to impress upon the workers the truth that we can only win over the opponent by love, never by hate. Hate is the subtlest form of violence. We cannot be really non-violent and yet have hate in us. The dullest brain cannot fail to perceive that it is impossible by violence to wean



millions of caste Hindus from the evil of untouchability, which they have hitherto been taught to regard as an article of faith.

The fast, Gandhiji wrote, had operated to quicken the conscience of many workers. [*Ibid*, pp. 309-10]

During the fast Gandhiji did not suffer too much physical hardship except on the last day, which he described as a physical torture. But he had expected to go through such suffering. As he wrote to Mira behn, what was penance worth if it did not cause any physical suffering? [*Ibid*, p. 311]

Nevertheless the fast considerably weakened him. It was on 15 August that for the first time in eight days he again took up spinning. As he told a *Hindu* correspondent, the immediate task before him was to pick up strength. [*Ibid*, p. 316]

7

On 23 August the Temple-entry Disabilities Removal Bill of C. S. Ranga Iyer again came up before the Central Assembly. The Bill, it may be remembered, had been referred for circulation by the Assembly a year earlier to ascertain public opinion on it. Ranga Iyer moved that the Bill be referred to a Select Committee, which should give its report on it within a fortnight.

In his speech Ranga Iyer came down heavily upon the Congress for the way it had acted in regard to the Bill. He specifically mentioned Rajagopalachari. Referring to a statement of Rajagopalachari advising Congress candidates to go to the electorates on some well-defined political issues and leave aside the questions of temple-entry and untouchability, Ranga Iyer said the Congress was indulging in "humbug" politics by dropping the question of untouchables because it could not be exploited for election purposes. Rajagopalachari, he said, had



withdrawn "like a crab" from his earlier position when he and other Congressmen had gone from door to door begging for the support of Assembly members for the Bill. In the name of non-violence and religion the Congress had sidetracked the vital issue. Congressmen were cowards and slaves. But God was greater than the Mahatma and religious questions were bigger than Congress platform.

The Home Member, on behalf of the Government, opposed the motion to refer the Bill to a Select Committee. The opinions received, he said, showed that an overwhelming majority was opposed to the Bill. The opposition was not confined only to the orthodox section. Provincial Governments and Bar Associations had also expressed themselves against it, while the Depressed Classes Associations were not unanimous in supporting it. Support to the Bill was confined to the intelligentsia in the cities, most of whom were not temple-goers.

Ranga Iyer then withdrew the motion. He regretted that sufficient fire had not been kindled in the hearts of even the Depressed Classes for the reform. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 112-14; *India in 1933-34*, p. 40]

Gandhiji was pained by the burial given to the "ill-fated" measure and by Ranga Iyer's fulminations against the Congress. He wrote in *Harijan*:

So far as I am aware, there was hardly occasion for the anger into which he allowed himself to be betrayed or the displeasure which he displayed towards Congressmen. . . . It was not a measure in which Congress Hindus were more interested than the other Hindus. To have, therefore, dragged the Congress name into the discussion was unfortunate.

Gandhiji also set the record straight with regard to the role of Rajagopalachari in the matter. He wrote:

I had asked Shri Rajagopalachari . . . to ascertain informally . . . the views of the Hindu members of the Assembly, as, I thought, if it was discovered that a majority was opposed to it, steps should be taken to



have the Bill withdrawn. This was the very simple issue on which the Bill could either have been dropped or proceeded with. . . . Its fate ought not to have been decided on a side issue. If Shri Rajagopalachari or I had committed a mistake, we should have been made to pay for it. But the Bill was above persons.

As for the public opinion received on the Bill, Gandhiji said the questions underlying had been too technical for the public to decide. Gandhiji exonerated the Government of any *mala fide* in the matter. Given the material before it, it could only have taken the course it did.

The temple-entry battle would have to continue, wrote Gandhiji. It was of course not intended to have any temple opened to Harijans where the majority of temple-going caste Hindus were opposed to the move. But the law prevented the opening of temples even where the overwhelming majority of temple-goers were in favour of it, in which case permissive legislation was peremptory. Law alone could undo the wrong that the law had done. But the reformers must wait till such time as the passing of the required legislation became irresistible. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, pp. 381-83]

The Sanatanists, Gandhiji noted, were jubilant at the demise of the Bill. But he told the reformers not to mind their jubilation and not to judge them. He wrote:

Love is the only thing that can transform Sanatanists. . . . Again, let us realize that in their victory lies their defeat; in our humiliation lies our victory. . . . Reformers can now prosecute the temple-entry question with redoubled zeal.

The burial of the Bill did not mean the burial of the temple-entry movement. Wherever possible, reformers should try to have temples opened to Harijans by



the consent of the Sanatanists. It could be that those among the Sanatanists who had been opposed to the movement because of the Bill would now join the movement to have temples opened without the assistance of the law. As for the Bill, it was only suspended, not dead. If the Sanatanists did not cooperate, legislation would have to come. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 164-65]

8

Throughout the months of August and September Gandhiji remained troubled by the corruption that had come to light in the functioning of Congress organizations. Soon after his week-long fast he had begun to debate the advisability of his withdrawing from the Congress. As early as on 19 August he was writing to Vallabhbhai Patel:

There is no possibility of my leaving the Congress immediately. But I share my agony with you.

How can I leave the Congress till you and others permit me to do so? Personally, however, I do feel that there is no other way for me. I seem to be obstructing the growth of the Congress. . . . If the attitude of the ordinary Congressman is that no distinction need be made between truth and falsehood, violence and non-violence, khadi, calico, *Jagannathi* and muslin, then it is best that he should act accordingly. But that won't be possible till I leave. . . . I want to make you, Rajaji and others think about all these points. [C.W.M.G., LVIII, pp. 329-30]

Gandhiji summoned Rajagopalachari to Wardha on 26/27 August and discussed the matter with him. [*Ibid*, p. 371]

Early in September he prepared a rough outline of a statement he intended to issue on the possibility of his severing all official or physical connection with



the Congress, including the primary membership, and sent it to Vallabhbhai for his opinion.

Gandhiji wrote that notwithstanding all that he had said about corruption in the Congress, it remained the most powerful and the most representative national organization, with a history of uninterrupted service to the country and it was not with a light heart that he proposed to leave the organization. He was doing so because he was beginning to feel that his remaining in the Congress was likely to do it more harm than good. Gandhiji mentioned Jawaharlal whose advice he missed and Rajendra Prasad, who shared most of his ideals and to whom he would not be untrue. The Congress Parliamentary Board also must not 'suffer due to his withdrawal. [*Ibid*, pp. 403-6]

The feeling had been growing in him, wrote Gandhiji, that there were vital differences of outlook between him and the Congress intelligentsia. Their reason impelled them to take a course which they would gladly and enthusiastically pursue but for their unexampled loyalty to him. For him to draw upon that loyalty and devotion would be putting an undue strain upon them.

The growth of the Socialist group within the Congress was another reason. He would not want to use his moral pressure to suppress the ideas they propounded. But with all that, he had fundamental differences with the group.

For him to continue to dominate the Congress in spite of such fundamental differences was a species of violence. Of course he would be leaving the Congress only to serve it better.

At this stage the discussions Gandhiji was carrying with colleagues on the possibility of leaving the Congress were confidential. But newspaper reporters somehow got wind of them and *The Hindu* featured the story, attributing Gandhiji's decision to leave the Congress to his differences with Malaviya and



Aney. Gandhiji took exception to The *Hindu* report. In a statement he said it was wrong of *The Hindu* to have disclosed incomplete and unauthorized reports of confidential conversations. In any case whatever the decision that might be arrived at, it would have no connection whatsoever with his differences with Malaviya and Aney. [*Ibid*, pp. 406-7]

Later in a letter to K. Srinivasan, editor of *The Hindu*, who had defended himself by saying that he had published the report because the source was reliable and the news was authentic, Gandhiji chided him for the indiscretion.

He wrote:

It is unfortunate that I have not been able to appreciate your position. I think it is wholly indefensible, unless of course you take up the position that, as a newspaper man you have nothing to do with the nation, your sole concern is to purvey news – no matter how obtained and no matter whose cause is damaged – so long as the news you publish is authentic, wholly or in part. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 32-33]

9

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha on 9 and 11 September under the presidentship of Vallabhbhai Patel.

Gandhiji, Maulana Azad, Sarojini Naidu, K. F. Nariman and Jairamdas Doulatram attended. On the first day Madan Mohan Malaviya and M. S. Aney were present by special invitation.

The two Nationalist leaders asked that the Working Committee summon a meeting of the A.I.C.C. to consider the resolution passed by the Working Committee on the Communal Award. The Working Committee felt that since it had no doubt as to the wisdom of the resolution passed, it did not feel called



upon to refer the matter to the A.I.C.C. In any case a new A.I.C.C. was in the process of being elected. Still, if any member of the A.I.C.C. had a grievance against the Working Committee, he could send a requisition duly signed by any 30 members of the A.I.C.C. which would compel the Working Committee to convene such a meeting.

On the question of releasing, on grounds of conscience, candidates for election to the Assembly, from the obligation to conform to the Working Committee's resolution on the Communal Award, the Working Committee stated that no such exemption could be granted. The most commendable course would be to arrive at an agreement as to distribution of seats by an examination of the prospects of success of rival candidates and nominate those who had the best chance. In the absence of such an agreement the Working Committee decided not to contest seats for which Malaviya and Aney stood as candidates. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 202-4]

There were consultations on Gandhiji's proposed retirement from the Congress. The members of the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board were finally able to persuade Gandhiji that it might be safer for him to leave the Congress, if at all, after the forthcoming Congress session, due to be held in Bombay in the last week of October.

On 17 September Gandhiji issued a lengthy statement to the Press, explaining in detail the considerations that had led him to the decision to leave the Congress. Enumerating the differences that had grown between him and the Congress Gandhiji wrote:

It has appeared to me that there is a growing and vital difference of outlook between many Congressmen and myself. . . .



I put the spinning-wheel and khadi in the forefront. Hand-spinning by the Congress intelligentsia has all but disappeared. The general body of them have no faith in it. . . . The khadi clause of the Congress constitution has been almost a dead letter from the beginning and Congressmen have not been wanting who have reminded me that I am responsible for the hypocrisy and evasion about the working of the khadi clause. . . . I must own that there is considerable force in the argument.

Nevertheless my conviction is growing that if India is to win complete independence in terms of the toiling millions . . . the spinning-wheel and khadi have to be as natural to the educated few as to the partially unemployed and semi-starved millions. . . . The spinning-wheel is thus an emblem of human dignity and equality in the truest sense of the term. It is the handmaid of agriculture. It is the nation's second lung. Yet only a few Congressmen have a living faith in the Indiadwide potency of the wheel.

Then there was the Parliamentary Board, wrote Gandhiji. Though he was the author of civil disobedience, he was convinced that under the prevailing circumstances in the country and in the absence of any general scheme of civil resistance, a Parliamentary Party within the Congress was a necessary part of any programme that might be framed. Yet, when he urged the programme at the A.I.C.C. meeting at Patna, Gandhiji said, many of his best colleagues felt oppressed, though they hesitated to act according to their conviction.

Though suppression of one's views was virtuous and up to a point desirable for the healthy growth of an organization, it became a terrible oppression when one was called upon to repeat the performance from day to day.

Then there was the Socialist group. Gandhiji, as a democrat, would not want to use his moral pressure to check the spread of their ideas, and yet, if they



gained ascendancy in the Congress, as they well might, he could not remain in the Congress. For him to be in active opposition would be unthinkable.

Opposition was also beginning to be voiced in regard to the policy of non-interference advised by him in regard to Indian States.

Last of all, there was the question of non-violence. After 14 years of trial it still remained only a policy with the majority of Congressmen, whereas with him, Gandhiji said, it was a fundamental creed. Lacking faith in non-violence, Congressmen were unable to show that terrorism was bad. Terrorists were made to feel that many of the Congressmen had the same spirit of violence in their breasts that they had. Terrorists rightly argued that if the spirit of violence was common to both, the policy of doing or not doing violence was a matter of opinion.

Many Congressmen did not believe that means and ends were convertible terms and that where means were various and contradictory, the ends must be different and even contradictory.

Gandhiji proceeded:

It is the sum total of these differences which has sterilized the existing Congress programme . . . yet I have no other programme save the Congress programme now before the country. Untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity, total prohibition, hand-spinning with khadi and cent per cent swadeshi in the sense of the revival of village industries and general reorganization of seven lakhs of villages ought to give all satisfaction that love of one's country may demand.

Gandhiji said he proposed to test the feeling of Congressmen on the points he had touched upon by placing before the Subjects Committee of the



forthcoming Congress certain resolutions giving effect to the views he had enunciated.

The first amendment he would propose in the constitution was to have the words "legitimate and peaceful" replaced by the words "truthful and non-violent".

The second amendment would be to replace the four-anna franchise by the delivery by every member to the Congress of 2,000 rounds (one round equal to four feet) per month of well-twisted yarn of not less than 15 counts spun by himself or herself.

The third amendment Gandhiji said he would propose would be that no one should be entitled to vote at any Congress election whose name had not been on the Congress register continuously for six months and who had not been during that period a habitual wearer of khaddar. The difficulty that had been experienced in the working of the khaddar clause could be avoided by giving powers to the chairmen of the respective committees to decide the question whether a particular voter was or was not a habitual wearer of khaddar within the meaning of the constitution.

Another amendment Gandhiji proposed was to reduce the number of delegates to Congress sessions to 1,000, not more than one delegate per every thousand voters. To have full number of delegates would mean one million voters, not an overambitious hope in a country of 315 million people.

Gandhiji concluded:

My fear is that even the amendments I have named will hardly commend themselves to the large number of Congressmen who will attend the Congress. Nevertheless, if I am to guide the policy of the Congress, I hold



them and the resolutions in keeping with the spirit of this statement to be essential for the earliest attainment of our goal. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 3-12]

Reactions to Gandhiji's statement from Congressmen were not too heartening, and on 15 October Gandhiji issued another statement reiterating his resolve to leave the Congress.

Gandhiji began by saying that no doubt had been left in his mind that many Congressmen had not liked his proposals about habitual wearing of khadi and spinning franchise. He did not desire to carry the proposals by a majority vote. For their working a hearty assent of an overwhelming majority was required. Since such an assent did not appear probable, he proposed, subject to whatever the informal meeting of the A.I.C.C. might have to say, to retire from the Congress immediately after the session. Sardar Patel and Dr. Ansari, Gandhiji said, fully, concurred with this decision. The Khan brothers had also endorsed the step.

Lest his retirement be exploited to damage the cause of the Congress in the elections, Gandhiji reiterated his position on the subject for the benefit of Congressmen.

He said:

I am firmer than ever in my conviction that notwithstanding whatever I have said before to the contrary, I hold the representation of the Congress on the legislatures to be necessary. Boycott of legislatures was never meant to be a permanent step. . . . The present election campaign is a fight not among men but among political principles represented by men and women professing to represent them. It is the paramount duty of voters . . . to give their vote to the Congress candidates.

Gandhiji again commended his amendment on reducing the number of delegates to the annual sessions of the Congress from the existing 6,000 to 1,000, with each delegate representing 1,000 members who would all have been on the



Congress registers continuously for at least six months. The quota of delegates from any province would thus depend on the number of Congress members on its register and not on the population of the province.

Then there was the resolution to bring into being an All-India Village Industries Association on the lines of the All-India Spinners' Association. The latter organization, Gandhiji pointed out, had been serving over 5,000 villages and supporting 2,20,000 spinners and weavers and 20,000 carders. During the ten years of its existence the Association had disbursed a sum of 2 1/4 crores of rupees among the villagers, of which three-quarters went to the spinners and 95 lakhs to the farmers who produced the cotton. On an average spinners, weavers and carders added Rs. 12 each to their annual earnings, in some cases more.

Gandhiji appended to the statement the proposed amendments, as he desired the Congress to consider them. [*Ibid*, pp. 174-84, 223]

10

The Congress met in Bombay for its 48th session from 26 to 28 October under the presidentship of Rajendra Prasad. It was a grand affair. The sprawling Congress *pandal* at Worli, designated Abdul Ghaffar Nagar, remained crowded with delegates and visitors, the number of the latter reaching 80,000.

Contrary to doubts expressed by Gandhiji, the Congress approved by an overwhelming majority, though with minor modifications, the amended draft constitution presented by him.

The Subjects Committee could not see its way to changing the wording of the creed from "legitimate and peaceful" to "truthful and non-violent" and it was decided to refer the issue to the Provincial Congress Committees for their opinion. But most of the other amendments proposed by Gandhiji were agreed to and carried in the open session.



Gandhiji had proposed that the number of delegates to the Congress sessions should be reduced from 6,000 to 1,000. The Congress decided that the maximum number of delegates to a session should be 2,000, each delegate representing 500 primary members instead of 1,000. Out of this number 511 would come from urban constituencies and 1,489 from rural constituencies. An urban constituency was defined as a town with a population of 10,000 and above. Provincial quotas would be based on population, each delegate roughly representing a population of 1,50,000.

The total membership of the A.I.C.C. was brought down from the previous 350 to 166. Gandhiji's proposal that the delegates to the Congress should comprise the A.I.C.C. for the ensuing year was not found to be feasible.

The clause regarding the spinning franchise proposed by Gandhiji for those seeking election to an office of the Congress or membership of a Congress Committee was widened, requiring a candidate to have performed

some manual labour continuously for six months immediately before the date of nomination for election, on behalf of or for the Congress, equal in value to 500 yards per month of well-spun yarn of over ten counts, and in time to eight hours per month, the forms of acceptable labour alternative to spinning being prescribed from time to time by the Working Committee.

...[For the new constitution as finally adopted, vide C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 247-57]

The forms of such labour prescribed were ginning, carding, weaving, dyeing, tailoring, knitting, carpentry, smithy, building work, nursing, distributing medical aid in villages, hawking khadi, scavenging, etc.

The most important resolution passed by the Congress concerned the setting up of the All-India Village Industries Association. The resolution, drafted by Gandhiji, read:



Whereas organizations claiming to advance swadeshi have sprung up all over the country with and without the assistance of Congressmen and whereas much confusion has arisen in the public mind as to the true nature of swadeshi and whereas the aim of the Congress has been from its inception progressive identification with the masses and whereas village organization and reconstruction is one of the items of the constructive programme of the Congress and whereas such reconstruction necessarily implies the revival and encouragement of dead or dying village industries, besides the central industry of hand-spinning, and whereas this work, like the reorganization of hand-spinning, is possible only through concentrated and special effort unaffected by and independent of the political activities of the Congress, Mr. J. C. Kumarappa is hereby authorized to form under the advice and guidance of Mr. Gandhi an association called the All-India Village Industries Association as part of the activities of the Congress.

The said Association shall work for the revival and encouragement of the said industries and for the moral and physical advancement of the villages and shall have the power to frame its own constitution, to raise funds and perform such acts as may be necessary for the fulfilment of its objects.

A few amendments, moved by the Socialists, whose spokesmen said they were "opposed to the principle underlying the resolution", were defeated, and the resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority. [*Ibid*, pp. 220, 226]

J. C. Kumarappa, who was still in Patna, struggling with the accounts of the Bihar Central Relief Committee, had no inkling that he had been put in charge of the new organization. He had not been sounded in the matter beforehand. He was upset when he came to know about it. Gandhiji wrote to him on 3 November:



You might have seen the resolution. . . . The question is when you can come. I do not want you to take up this work before you can be disengaged from the responsibility there. . . . I have no doubt you have the full text of the resolution there. [*Ibid*, pp. 282-83]

Gandhiji apologized to Kumarappa for not having taken his consent beforehand and asked him to accept the secretaryship of the A.I.V.I.A. which he did.

11

On 23 October the Subjects Committee discussed Gandhiji's proposal to retire from the Congress. Gandhiji reiterated the reasons for the intended step, leaving no doubt in the minds of the members that his resolve was irrevocable. He however assured them that there was not the slightest desire on his part to forsake the post of duty or give up Congress work. He was leaving the Congress, he said, to lift the weight which had been suppressing it, in order that it might grow and he himself might grow with it. He was leaving in order to develop the power of non-violence.

The members of the Subjects Committee were not persuaded. Madan Mohan Malaviya made an eloquent appeal to Gandhiji to reconsider. Gandhiji had no right to leave the Congress, he said, after having led it for 14 years. "You have a proper cabinet with you," he said. "Your soldiers are ready to follow you in the fight. Why do you want to leave all these to themselves and go out of the Congress? I make a personal appeal to you, with all my love and regard for you, not to retire at this juncture."

However as Gandhiji remained unshaken in the resolve he had taken, the Congress finally passed the following resolution:



The Congress reiterates its confidence in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and is emphatically of the opinion that he should reconsider his decision to retire from the Congress, but inasmuch as all efforts to persuade him in that behalf have failed, this Congress, while reluctantly accepting his decision, places on record its deep sense of gratitude to him for the unique services rendered by him to the nation and notes with satisfaction his assurance that his advice and guidance will be available to the Congress whenever necessary. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 215-18; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 227-59]

The forty-eighth session of the Indian National Congress was thus over. A number of important events associated with it mark it out as one of the landmark sessions in the history of the Congress. These were: a drastic revision of its constitution along the lines proposed by Gandhiji, the setting up of the All-India Village Industries Association to make the Congress a village-oriented organization, and finally, the retirement of Gandhiji from the Congress.

Summing up his impressions of the Congress session later in a statement to the press, Gandhiji wrote:

This session of the Congress has been a revelation to me. I had expected a battle royal with the members of the Working Committee about the vital amendments I had suggested and afterwards withdrawn, and equally vital alterations in the constitution on which I was insistent, but which had no connection whatsoever with my retirement from the Congress. But I found that, apart from my retirement, which they had ascertained was a moral certainty, members of the Working Committee wanted the amendments after their own fashion. . . .



The same revelations awaited me in the Subjects Committee. The alteration of the creed was not carried, but it was not summarily rejected. It was referred to Provincial Congress Committees for opinion. . . .

The manner in which the 1,500 delegates assembled here waived their undoubted right of having copies of the amended draft constitution was an exhibition of generosity and faith of which any nation would be proud. And yet all amendments were passed by the delegates with overwhelming majorities after they had understood what they were and what were their implications. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 265-66]

12

On 30 October Gandhiji wrote to Rajendra Prasad, President of the Congress, resigning from the All-India Congress Committee, and to the Secretary, Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, resigning from the primary membership of the organization. [*Ibid*, pp. 269, 270]

Gandhiji's withdrawal from the Congress, the possibility of which he had made known to Congressmen and the public in his statement of 17 September and reaffirmed in another statement of 15 October, nevertheless led to conjectures and wild guesses as to the reasons that led him to take recourse to the step. It was suggested that he had left the Congress in a huff, solely because of the corruption that had gripped the organization.

Though the reality of the corruption could not be denied, it was nevertheless not the cause, even partly, of Gandhiji severing his links with a party over whose destiny he had virtually presided for so long. Gandhiji took great pains to remove public misunderstanding on the issue. Writing to an Englishman he said:

You have misunderstood my retirement from the Congress. I have not left it in disgust. Congressmen as individuals are both good and bad. But Congress is uniformly good. God's creatures are both good and bad. Is God



therefore less good? I have retired to give it greater strength. I had become a dead weight. [*Ibid*, p. 396]

There were others who thought his growing differences with Jawaharlal Nehru, then in jail, and with the Socialist group in the Congress, which gave expression to Nehru's views, precipitated the step. In his speech at the Subjects Committee Gandhiji tried to remove that misconception.

The reasons lay deeper. They concerned differences of outlook that were being manifested in political debates inside committees and were reflected in political activities of Congressmen. Gandhiji realized that Congressmen conceived both the goal as well as the means to achieve it in terms quite different from his own.

With Civil Disobedience now a closed book and constructive activities as represented by khadi and spinning having been taken over by the Charkha Sangh and the work of Harijan uplift and anti-untouchability programme in general by the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the only form of work left to the Congress was that of Council-entry, which Gandhiji never considered as being within his province. Gandhiji, therefore, instead of striving within the Congress, chose "the path of surrender", as he had done once before in September 1925 when he had handed over the Congress to Motilal Nehru and the Swaraj Party and chosen to devote his energies to the development of khadi, creating for the purpose the All-India Spinners' Association.

At the meeting of the Subjects Committee on 23 October, Gandhiji made his position perfectly clear. He said:

I do not believe – I must frankly confess to you – in the so-called constitutional means of giving liberty to any people. I know no historical instance of pure constitutional agitation . . . having ever clothed a nation



with liberty. I cannot claim to have read the history of all nations. I have not the historical instinct, but from what I know I can say that constitutional agitation never regained lost liberty. It is in the nature of things impossible. [*Ibid*, p. 215]

Gandhiji's leaving the Congress did not in any manner imply that he would be taking no interest in what the Congress did or failed to do. It only meant that he would no longer be subject to the discipline of the Congress and that he would not take part in the day-to-day working of the Congress. But he would continue to watch from a distance, he said, the enforcement of principles for which the Congress stood and Congressmen might expect, whenever he felt like giving it, a criticism of methods that might be pursued by the organization as a whole or its members as individuals. [*Ibid*, p. 264]

So far as he could see the future, Gandhiji wrote to Agatha Harrison, there was no likelihood of his initiating or precipitating mass civil disobedience for some years to come. He would test the genuineness of public feeling by keeping himself aloof from the Congress and watching from a distance how Congressmen in general took to the constructive programme. [*Ibid*, p. 275]

In another letter, written to Carl Heath, Gandhiji was even more explicit. Gandhiji told Heath:

I have retired from the Congress because, among other reasons, I want to impose silence upon myself, so far as it is humanly possible, about the political measures of the Government. I want, in my voluntary isolation, to explore the yet hidden possibilities of non-violence. Every action I am taking, no matter in what department of life, is being taken with that end in view. The only axe that I have to grind on this earth is to try to understand the ultimate truth of things which, at present, I seem to see only dimly. And



after a laborious search I have come to the conclusion that if I am to see it in any fullness I can only do so by non-violence in thought, word and deed. [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 50]

13

Non-violence, in Gandhiji's view, required that in the situation then existing, civil disobedience on his part for swaraj, and even on the part of others on local issues, was not to be thought of Repression continued. Not a single repressive law, as Gandhiji pointed out to Carl Heath in his letter of 10 December, had been repealed. The press remained effectively gagged. There was no freedom of movement in areas such as Bengal and the N.W.F.P. But the course Gandhiji suggested to Congressmen was "to submit to repressive laws in so far as it is humanly possible to do so". In an interview to Nirmal Kumar Bose Gandhiji said:

Before civil disobedience can be practised on a vast scale, people must learn the art of civil or voluntary obedience. . . . Only when they have learnt that art can they successfully disobey something which they want to destroy in the non-violent way. This is why I should advise all workers not to fritter their fighting strength in many-sided battles, but to concentrate on peaceful khadi work in order to educate the masses into a condition necessary for a successful practice of non-violent non-cooperation. [C.W.M.G., LIX, p. 317]

How anxious Gandhiji was to be on the right side of the law and to avoid situations which might involve courting imprisonment is shown by the way he handled the matter of Abdul Ghaffar Khan's arrest and imprisonment and also the question of his own visit to the Frontier Province.

The Khan brothers, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and elder brother Dr. Khan Saheb, were released from prison on 27 August. But so afraid were the rulers of their immense popularity, especially of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, that they were prohibited



from entering the N.W.F.P., their home province. Jamnalal Bajaj offered them his hospitality at Wardha and accordingly they stayed at Wardha in the main in the immediately following months, going out on short visits to Bengal and the U.P.

On 7 December a police party came and arrested Abdul Ghaffar Khan under a warrant under Section 124-A issued by a Bombay Magistrate. The exchange that took place between Gandhiji and the Khan is interesting.

Gandhiji said: "Khan Saheb, this is not an occasion when we may not offer defence. We must engage our own lawyer and offer defence."

Abdul Ghaffar Khan: "That may be, but I am averse to defending myself in a law-court. Ever since 1919 you have taught us not to recognize law-courts and I should hate this time to do otherwise."

Gandhiji: "I quite see, but we do not want to go to jail now if we can help it and hence I would urge you to engage a lawyer." [*Ibid*, p. 429]

While the case was pending Gandhiji remained in correspondence with Vallabhbhai Patel on the kind of defence Abdul Ghaffar Khan should put up.

He was tried in Bombay on 15 December and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment. On receiving the sentence Abdul Ghaffar Khan told Patel, who was present, that there must be no protest demonstrations or meetings. The best way his friends could express their sympathy for him would be for them to serve the villagers. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, p. 43]

Then there was the question of Gandhiji's contemplated visit to the N.W.F.P. The idea of such a visit had taken hold of Gandhiji early in September and in the following months it had become stronger. He had given public expression to it in his statement of 17 September. [C.W.M.G., LIX, p. 9]



Gandhiji was a free man. No restrictions had been placed on his movements and he had not been forbidden to enter any province. Yet, before undertaking the visit, which he thought might be possible after the middle of December, Gandhiji considered it necessary to ascertain the wishes of the Viceroy in the matter. In his letter to the Viceroy's Private Secretary of 15 November, giving notice of his intention, he wrote:

Though I know that there is no legal bar against my entering the Frontier Province, I have no desire to do anything that may bring me into conflict with the Government. It is my earnest effort to avoid such conflict in so far as it is humanly possible.

In reply dated 25 November Gandhiji was curtly told that the Viceroy had discussed the matter with the Government of the Frontier Province and with his Council and regretted that he and they were unanimously of opinion that it was not desirable for Gandhiji to pay a visit to the Frontier Province "at the present time".

Gandhiji wrote again on 28 November, saying he was pained by the Government's decision, which placed him in an awkward position. He wanted to know what was meant by the phrase "the present time".

The answer was:

The expression "at the present time" implies that His Excellency's decision will hold good till he is satisfied that conditions are such as to render a visit unobjectionable.

On 11 December, releasing the correspondence with the Government on the subject to the Press, Gandhiji said:



I would warn the public against thinking that the correspondence is closed and that I am waiting for the first opportunity to court arrest by proceeding to the Frontier in the teeth of His Excellency's advice to the contrary.

I have no desire to offer civil disobedience at the present moment. . . . I propose to try all possible constitutional means to obtain the necessary permission. . . . My endeavour is to avoid every occasion for civil disobedience of authority, in so far as it is humanly possible to do so. [*Ibid*, pp. 348, 406, 442-43]

The line of action Gandhiji thus proposed to the workers was: silent service in the villages to ameliorate the economic condition of the people and no defiance of authority even under the gravest provocation, even though, as Gandhiji told Carl Heath in a letter, "my own power of endurance is being tested beyond my capacity". In a letter to Agatha Harrison Gandhiji wrote on 2 November:

I am . . . resisting every temptation to invite civil disobedience by the people. There is temptation enough. Even the prisoners in Bombay who were thought to be discharged are still in the various jails of the Presidency of Bombay. Buildings which have been seized by the Government are not being returned. I can multiply such instances drawn from various provinces. Nevertheless I know that I have to live down these irritations and so have fellow workers. That appears to me just now the best form of resistance, if it may be so called. [*Ibid*, pp. 275-76]



CHAPTER XIII: THE VILLAGE INDUSTRIES MOVEMENT

1

The setting up of the All-India Village Industries Association represented yet another major step taken by the Congress, under the persistent counselling, coaxing and leadership of Gandhiji, towards identifying itself more completely with the rural masses. The khadi movement, initiated by Gandhiji during the first Non-cooperation movement and taken up as a sustained, organized activity in September 1925 with the founding of the All-India Spinners' Association, along with the efforts made by Gandhiji throughout the preceding years to have the yarn franchise incorporated in the Congress constitution, had gone a considerable way towards achieving this goal. Congressmen engaged in constructive work could legitimately take pride in the fact that through the khadi activity some 2,20,000 spinners and thousands of carders and weavers in 5,000 villages had found employment. In monetary terms about three crores of rupees had gone into the pockets of the poorest in the villages. Khadi had come to occupy a place of high honour. It had become a symbol of nationalism and patriotism. It had become, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "the livery of freedom".

And yet what had been achieved was but a fragment of what still remained to be achieved. It was but one hesitant step forward on a road that was long and winding. In a country the size of India, with seven lakh villages and a rural population then estimated at 320 million, a much more massive and continuous operation was called for if a measure of economic self-sufficiency was to be ensured for the masses. Dwelling on the problems that had to be faced Gandhiji in a speech at the Gandhi Seva Sangh on 30 November 1934, mentioned what he had seen during his extensive Harijan tour of the preceding year. It was clearly



borne in upon him that the way in which khadi work was being carried on was hardly enough either to universalize khadi or to rejuvenate the villages. It was confined to a very few and even those who used khadi exclusively were under the impression that they need do nothing else and that they might use other things irrespective of how and where they were made. He proceeded:

Khadi was thus becoming a lifeless symbol, and I saw that if the state of things was allowed to go on, khadi might even die of sheer inanition. . . . There were multitudes of men with quantities of enforced leisure on their hands. . . . These people, I said to myself, could never win swaraj. For their involuntary and voluntary idleness made them a perpetual prey of exploiters, foreign and indigenous. . . . So I said to myself: let these people be asked to do something else; if they will not interest themselves in khadi, let them take up some work which used to be done by their ancestors but which has of late died out. There were numerous things of daily use which they used to produce themselves not many years ago, but for which they now depend on the outer world.

Gandhiji mentioned, as instances, articles of diet such as rice and flour. Earlier the villager had pounded his own paddy and ground his own flour. But gradually rice mills and flour mills had come into the picture and millions of women had been driven out of employment. White sugar had replaced jaggery and factory-made articles of diet like biscuits and candies had invaded the villages. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 408-9]

The condition of the village people had consequently been going from bad to worse day by day. Gandhiji wrote:

Bit by bit they are being confined only to the hand-to-mouth business of scratching the earth. Few know today that agriculture in the small and



irregular holdings of India is not a paying proposition. The villagers have a lifeless life. Their life is a process of slow starvation.

Extinction of village industries would complete the ruin of the seven lakh villages of India. [*Ibid*, p. 355]

The task, therefore, was to rescue the villages of India from the onslaught of ever-proliferating mills by providing impetus, in an organized way, to the village industries that had become extinct or were on the verge of becoming extinct for want of patronage. If economic swaraj was to be ensured for the millions, mass manufacture of articles of daily use had to be replaced by a system of manufacture by the masses.

To this end Gandhiji found it necessary to redefine swadeshi. Swadeshi had all along been construed to mean articles manufactured in India as distinguished from articles imported from foreign countries. Gandhiji came to the conclusion that this was "an unconscious fraud" perpetrated upon the people. It was "self-deception". [C.W.M.G., LVII, p. 293]

As early as in June 1934, when members of the All-India Swadeshi League met him, Gandhiji suggested to them the following definition of swadeshi:

For purposes of the All-India Swadeshi League, swadeshi covers useful articles manufactured in India through small industries which are in need of popular education for their support. . . . Swadeshi will, therefore, exclude articles manufactured through large and organized industries. . . . which can and do command State aid. [*Ibid*, p. 88]

Later in a talk Gandhiji elaborated:

The old emphasized the indigenous nature of the products, irrespective of the method or the produce or the prospects of the product.



I have ruled out organized industries not because they are not swadeshi, but because they do not need special support. . . . According to the new orientation . . . I would certainly have our swadeshi organization to seek out all village industries and find out how they are faring. We will have experts and chemists who will be prepared to place their knowledge at the disposal of villagers. We will, through our experts, offer to test the articles manufactured by village handicrafts men and give them suggestions to improve their wares and would sell them if they would accept our conditions.

As distinguished from mere swadeshi, this was "cent per cent swadeshi", because swadeshi, Gandhiji felt, was in danger of being watered down. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 87-88]

2

Fostering this "cent per cent swadeshi" was the programme that the All-India Village Industries Association was intended to pursue. On 18 November 1934, Gandhiji wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel:

I see from your three letters that you have not got a clear picture of the Village Industries Association in your mind. The idea behind it is that we should exclusively buy from villages whatever articles they can produce. . . . If it is our duty to do what I am suggesting, then all of us should use pens, ink, knives, soap, jaggery and sugar manufactured in villages and flour and rice ground or milled in villages. I have mentioned these things only as examples. . . . Only then shall we be able to establish the swaraj of our dreams, devoted to the welfare of villages, and only then will it be non-violent swaraj. [*Ibid*, p. 371]

On 22 November Gandhiji wrote to B. Shiva Rao, inviting him to serve on the Central Board of the Association, but only if he had a living belief in the formula



underlying the object, namely that all the articles of daily use should be bought from the villages. He posed the question:

Do you recognize the necessity, so far as it is possible, of eliminating the city factories and mills which are fast displacing the village industries and supplying the daily wants of the villagers, thereby confining 90 per cent of the population of India to bare agriculture? [*Ibid*, p. 383]

Critics were not lacking who thought the programme was foredoomed to failure because it ignored the laws of economics, that it was in effect an attempt to take the country backward rather than forward. Har Dayal Nag, an eminent scientist, for instance, argued that flooding the country with cottage-made goods would not bring any benefits. The handlooms, he argued, could produce khaddar but could not produce its buyers. Many of those who spun did not wear khaddar, the *gur* producer would not mix the *gur* he produced in his tea or milk, nor would the owner of a village shoe factory use for his own wear the rough shoes he produced.

Gandhiji commented:

This is no programme of producing shoddy goods in the villages and forcing them on unwilling buyers. There is to be no competition, foredoomed to failure, with foreign or swadeshi corresponding articles. The villagers are to be their own buyers. They will primarily consume what they produce. . . . They will manufacture for the cities what the latter want and what they can usefully manufacture.

He concluded:

The present programme is the foundation of an all-round improvement in the tottering condition of the seven lakhs of India's villages. It is work that



is long overdue. It has to be done, no matter what India's political condition is. It includes every class of villagers from the scavenger to the *sowear* [moneylender]. It is work in which all parties can whole-heartedly join. [C.W.M.G., LX, 414-15]

The voice of "modern civilization" spoke through Srinivasa Sastri. Gandhiji, though he had misgivings as to Sastri's possible response, nevertheless wrote to him, seeking his cooperation and that of the Servants of India Society, for which he said he longed. Sastri answered:

To my unaided mind, you appear to be opening the first campaign of an endless and quixotic war against modern civilization. Long ago you proclaimed yourself as its sleepless enemy, and now you would, if you could, turn it back on the course it has pursued for several millennia. I reel at the mere thought. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 362-63]

The tone was reminiscent of Voltaire, who, commenting on Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality", in which Rousseau had argued that man was naturally good and had been corrupted by civilization, had written to the author:

I have received your book against the human race, and thank you for it. Never was such a cleverness used in the design of making us all stupid. One longs, in reading your book, to walk on all fours. But as I have lost that habit for more than sixty years, I feel unhappily the impossibility of resuming it. [Russell, Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy*, London, 1957, p. 715]

Gandhiji, answering Sastri through the columns of *Harijan*, admitted to the desire on his part to "destroy or radically change much that goes under the name of modern civilization", but said the attempt to revive and encourage the remunerative village industries was not part of such an attempt, except in so far



as everyone of his activities, including the propagation of non-violence, could be described as such an attempt. He wrote:

In seeking to revive such village industries as are capable of being revived, I am making no such attempt as the friend [Sastri] ascribes to me. I am trying to do what every lover of village life, everyone who realizes the tragic meaning of the disintegration of villages, is doing or trying to do. Why am I turning back the course of modern civilization when I ask the villager to grind his own meal, eat it whole, including the nourishing bran, or when I ask him to turn his sugarcane into *gur* for his own requirement, if not for sale? Am I turning back the course of modern civilization when I ask the villagers not merely to grow raw produce, but to turn it into marketable products and thereby add a few more pies to their daily income? [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 54-55]

3

Another quarter which, not unexpectedly, made its lack of sympathy for the Village Industries movement known in very strong terms was the Government of India. It was alarmed by the reference in the Congress resolution setting up the Village Industries Association to the aim of the Congress being "progressive identification with the masses", and was scared by the thought that the activity might be intended to further the political objectives of the Congress.

It acted at once to thwart the movement. A confidential circular was despatched to Government officers all over India, drawing their attention to this new development and requiring them to make every effort to counter the activities of the Congress in the villages.

It was pointed out that Gandhiji's "new ideal" might indicate a "contemplated revival of the subversive movement on a much more extended



scale involving the masses living in the villages" and it was necessary to forestall him in what he intended to do. Government officers were accordingly advised to undertake tours in the rural areas to apprise the villagers of the efforts the Government had made and was making to improve their condition.

The "forestalling" was done by allotment of a sum of Rs. one crore under the budget for distribution to the provinces for economic development of rural areas. The money was to be spent on schemes designed to increase the economic welfare of the people as well as those intended to improve their health and education. Of the sum allotted Rs. 15 lakhs were set aside for developing the cooperative movement. The balance was distributed among the provinces on the basis of their rural population. Local Governments were asked to submit to Government of India schemes covering the most pressing needs of village life such as anti-malaria schemes, village water supply and village drainage, consolidation of holdings, construction of village roads and promotion of local works of improvement. [*India in 1934-35*, pp. 107-8]

Asked to comment on this, Gandhiji said:

I should be very glad if Government were to take the wind out of my sails. Much of the work I propose doing is what the Government ought to do. Let Government do whatever they can do, only let not anything be superimposed on the people. . . . I do not trench on ground covered by others. Thus, in my campaign for unpolished rice, hand-ground flour and village-made *gur*, I am simply asking people not to pay for undermining their health. . . . My only object is to abolish idleness, to help people to turn their time to good account, to prevent misfeeding and to stop all economic waste. The whole of my campaign . . . should be looked at in that light. [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 72-73]



When Gandhiji's attention was drawn to the apprehension expressed in the Government's secret circular that the mass contact with the villagers might be used by him to prepare for a campaign of civil disobedience on a much more extended scale, Gandhiji said:

It never crossed my mind; I have never worked in that indirect fashion. It would defeat the very end that I have in view. I want the material and moral growth of the villages for itself, and if it is achieved, it would be a full satisfaction of my ambition. [*Ibid*, p. 104]

The Government's apprehensions were of course without any foundation whatsoever. Gandhiji had been emphasizing at every turn that the movement was to be wholly non-political. Indeed members of the All-India Village Industries Association were to pledge themselves not to participate in any kind of civil disobedience.

The circular gave rise to vehement protests all over India. Nationalist newspaper took the Government severely to task and in the newly constituted Central Legislative Assembly, when it met for its first session on 21 January 1935, Congress members, participating in the deliberations of the Assembly after a lapse of several years, hauled the Government over the coals for the ill will it had shown towards the Congress in issuing the circular.

S. Satyamurti led the attack. He brought forward an adjournment motion to censure the Government, quoting extensively from the circular and contending that it betrayed a degree of suspicion unworthy of any decent Government. The assumptions underlying the circular, he said, were either untrue or misleading or exaggerated. It was clear that the Government had expected the Congress to split at its Bombay session over any of the several issues: such as Council-entry, the formation of the Nationalist Party, the Socialist programme or the withdrawal of



Gandhiji from the Congress. To the surprise of the Government this had not come to pass.

The Home Member on behalf of the Government defended the issue of the circular, which he said was confidential and merely implied that Government were "talking in private". He was baffled that there had been a leak and promised severe action against anyone found to have been responsible. The motion was talked out. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 102, 105-6]

4

The passing of the resolution by the Congress did not immediately result in the formation of the All-India Village Industries Association. Indeed the Association formally came into being only on 14 December. Many problems concerning the programme and organization remained to be sorted out and the interregnum was filled by consultations Gandhiji carried on with leading public personalities and discussions in the columns of newspapers as regards the scope of activities to be taken up and the machinery to carry them on. Early in November in a statement to the Press Gandhiji explained that the work would have four parts, viz.,

- (1) to encourage and improve the known industries that are likely to perish for want of support; (2) to take charge of and sell the products of those industries; (3) to carry on the survey of such village industries as need to be revived and supported; and (4) to attend to village sanitation and hygiene.

Gandhiji asked the workers that whilst the Association was in the process of formation, they should set about encouraging hand-pounding of rice, grinding of whole-wheat flour by village *chakkis* and popularizing *gur*. [C.W.M.G., LIX, p. 304]



Gandhiji came to attach very great importance to the quality of rice both on grounds of economics and health of the villagers. He felt that the polished rice that the rice mills produced was harmful to health. It was human greed, which took no account of the health or wealth of the people who came under its effect, which was responsible for the "hideous" rice mills one saw in all the rice-producing tracts. [*Ibid*, p. 2]

To be on surer ground as regards his position in these matters, Gandhiji sought scientific opinion. He wrote to various authorities to elicit opinion. On 8 November he wrote to Dr. B. C. Roy, posing the following questions:

- (1) Do you consider that unpolished rice is superior to polished rice from the nutritive standpoint?
- (2) If unpolished rice is better than polished rice, is there any difference between unpolished rice turned out from mills and unpolished rice hand-pounded?
- (3) Is there any difference in nutritive value between whole-wheat meal stone-ground on the indigenous *chakki* and whole-wheat meal ground in the ordinary mills?
- (4) Is *gur* produced in the village *kolhus* superior to the sugar manufactured in the sugar mills? . . .
- (5) Is oil pressed in the village *kolhus* superior to the oil pressed in the oil mills? [*Ibid*, pp.304-5]

Most people consulted wrote back saying that there had not been enough research in the matters enquired about for them to form any opinion. [*Ibid*, p. 410]

A few experts however came forth with their opinion, which supported Gandhiji's position. Among these was Dr. M.A. Ansari, who wrote:



In the process of polishing rice, all outer coverings of the grain are removed . . . containing vitamin B, fat and protein; which are necessary for health and growth. It has been proved that the absence of vitamin B from polished rice has been instrumental in causing beri-beri. Unpolished rice, on the other hand, . . . retains vitamin B as well as the protein, fat and mineral matter.

. . . The wheat grain consists of bran or outer envelope mainly composed of cellulose, the kernel consisting of starch and the germ consisting of soluble starch, protein and some fat. . . .

In the process of milling, the germ and the bran are rejected, and with it undoubtedly are discarded some of the most useful chemical constituents of wheat. [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 33]

Apart, however, from the nutritional virtues of hand-husked rice and hand-ground flour, these were of paramount economic importance to the villagers because of their employment potential. Writing to a woman worker, who had protested against the idea of returning to such primitive activities, because among other things she said the whole brunt of husking and grinding would fall on women, Gandhiji said:

I have no partiality for return to the primitive method of grinding and husking for the sake of them. I suggest the return, because there is no other way of giving employment to the millions of villagers who are living in idleness. In my opinion, village uplift is impossible unless we solve the pressing economic distress. Therefore, to induce the villagers to utilize their idle hours is in itself solid uplift work. [C.W.M.G., LIX, p. 413]

As the activity got going and workers at village level took up the hand-husking of rice and hand-grinding of wheat, reports came pouring in.



Gandhiji wanted the workers to study the question in detail both in its nutritional and economic aspect. For instance he wrote to a worker:

Have you enquired about the difference in nutritive value between unpolished rice from the mills and unpolished rice pounded by hand? Will you also describe the village instruments for husking rice? What use do you make of the husk? What is the daily wage earned for husking for eight hours and the wage for spinning for the same time in the same area? What is the difference between the price of mill-husked rice and that of hand-husked rice? ... Is this activity self-supporting? [*Ibid*, p. 341]

To another worker he wrote:

I would like you to tackle the four things that are already before the public: pounding of rice by the hand, grinding of flour through the village *chakkis*, purification and popularization of *gur* and restoration of better processes of tanning of hides in the villages. [*Ibid*, p. 359]

In yet another letter to a worker Gandhiji asked:

How many days does it take for paddy to dry for husking after it is harvested? Or can it be husked immediately after it has been harvested? How much is the husk? How much paddy can be husked in an hour? What is its cost? [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 204]

Some workers complained that unpolished rice took longer to cook and was not easily digested. But Gandhiji produced the testimony of many who had undertaken the experiment that though such rice indeed took a little longer to cook, it was not difficult to digest. The rice took longer to cook, wrote Gandhiji, because the pericarp, which contained all the richer constituents of rice, required to be cooked thoroughly. The trick was to soak the rice in cold water for three



hours before cooking. It had to be cooked till it became one solid mass. [*Ibid*, pp.231, 257-58, 311 and *ff.*]

The encouragement to hand-husking of rice, hand-grinding of wheat, oil-pressing by village *kolhu*, *gur*-making, tanning and shoe-making were thus some of the activities that the All-India Village Industries Association would have vigorously to pursue. But there would be other activities, other village industries to be identified for encouragement and Gandhiji invited ideas in this connection.

A worker suggested addition of pottery, hand-made paper, stone-dressing, hand-shelling of groundnuts, extraction of oil from orange peel and preservation of palmyra fruit. Gandhiji commended the list to other workers, and advised them to commence work at once without asking for directions. He wrote:

The idea behind the village industries scheme is that we should look to the villages for the supply of our daily needs and that, when we find that some needs are not so supplied, we should see whether with a little trouble and organization they cannot be profitably supplied by the villagers. In estimating the profit, we should think of the villager, not of ourselves. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 387-88]

5

So ambitious was the village industries scheme as conceived by Gandhiji, so all-encompassing in its sweep and so revolutionary in its import that he clearly saw that it could not be executed unaided. Gandhiji therefore felt that he must invite the cooperation and support of all agencies – Government and non-Government – and all men, whatever their political predispositions and affiliations.

Gandhiji first of all looked for eminent men in different departments who could be depended on to provide guidance in the work of the Association when called upon to do so. They would form an advisory board of experts to be



consulted when needed. They would not be expected to meet together or even be members of the Association. Their task, Gandhiji said, would be

merely to advise the Association, whenever reference is made to them, in matters in which they possess special knowledge, e.g., in chemical analysis, food values, sanitation, distribution of village manufactures, improved methods of developing village industries, cooperation, disposal of village waste as manure, methods of village transport, education [adult and other], care of infants and many other things.

Gandhiji approached various eminent people inviting them to give their consent to serve on the Advisory Board, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, G. D. Birla, M. Visvesvarayya, and Sir Robert McCarrison, a nutrition scientist. Most of them readily gave their consent. Visvesvarayya, however, demurred. He could not sympathize with the Village Industries movement, because in his view the problems of poverty and unemployment in India could not be tackled except through mechanized large-scale industry. [*Ibid*, p. 350]

Gandhiji wrote to him:

I see that we hold perhaps diametrically opposite views. My conviction . . . is that in India at any rate for generations to come, we shall not be able to make much use of mechanical power for solving the problem of ever-growing poverty of the masses. We are too many and we have so many idle hours at our disposal that it would be suicidal to make use of mechanical power and allow human power to run to waste. [*Ibid*, p. 388]

Gandhiji had given expression to the same view a little earlier in an article in *Harijan*. He had written:



Mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case in India. . . . The problem with us is not how to find leisure for the teeming millions inhabiting our villages. The problem is how to utilize their idle hours, which are equal to the working days of six months in the year. [*Ibid*, p. 356]

To Sam Higginbottom of the Agricultural Institute, Allahabad, who later agreed to serve on the Advisory Board, Gandhiji wrote on 11 November:

I am sure you realize one fundamental fact. . . . India has in her teeming millions so many superfluous days that she does not need to free the energy of her sons for superior or more remunerative work through highly developed machinery. In her 350 million children she has so many living ready-made machines, and if she can utilize their labour, half of which is running to waste, the double starvation of the body and mind will cease. [*Ibid*, p. 324]

Speaking later at a public meeting at Nagpur, Gandhiji further elaborated:

Now, how can a country with crores of living machines afford to have a machine which will displace labour of crores of living machines? It would spell their unemployment and their ruin. We have to employ all these crores of human machines that are idle, we have to make them intelligent machines, and unless cities decide to depend for their other needs on the villages, this can never happen. We are guilty of a grievous wrong against the villagers, and the only way in which we can expiate for it is by encouraging them to revive their lost industries and arts by assuring them of a ready market. [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 256]



The All-India Village Industries Association, "a self-acting, independent and non-political organization" formally came into being on 14 December 1934, with its central office at Wardha, in a bungalow with a 13-acre garden attached, lent for the purpose by Jamnalal Bajaj.

It had eight foundation members, who also formed the first Board of Management. They were: Shrikrishnadas Jajoo (President and Treasurer), J. C. Kumarappa (Organizer and Secretary), Gosibehn Captain, Dr. Khan Saheb (substitute for Abdul Ghaffar Khan, then undergoing imprisonment), Shoorji Vallabhdas, Dr. P. C. Ghosh, Lakshmidas Purushottam Asar and Shankerlal Banker.

All the eight were eminently qualified for the task entrusted to them. Shrikrishnadas Jajoo had been a distinguished lawyer before he gave up practice to devote himself wholly to constructive work and was the President of the All-India Spinners' Association, Maharashtra Branch.

J. C. Kumarappa was a chartered accountant who had given up a growing practice in Bombay to take up an honorary appointment as professor at the Gujarat Vidyapith. He had served on the Public Debts Committee appointed by the Congress and had later distinguished himself as the financial adviser of the Bihar Central Relief Committee.

Gosibehn Captain was a granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji and had completely identified herself with khadi work.

Shoorji Vallabhdas was a prominent merchant of Bombay, keenly interested in khadi activity. He was the organizer of the Swadeshi Bazar, dividends from which were devoted solely to the promotion of village industries.

Dr. Khan Saheb, elder brother of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, had belonged to the Indian Medical Service.



Lakshmidas Purushottam Asar had given up a lucrative business in Malabar to join the Sabarmati Ashram. He was the main pillar of khadi work in Gujarat and during the floods in Gujarat in 1927 had been the right-hand man of Vallabhbhai Patel in relief work. He had also done commendable work for earthquake relief in Bihar.

Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was a scientist of high calibre. He had given up a high post at the Government Mint to devote himself whole-heartedly to public service.

Shankerlal Banker had studied advanced chemistry in England before taking up public work in India in 1916. He was the Secretary of the All-India Spinners' Association and possessed extensive knowledge of the condition of Indian villages. [*Ibid*, pp. 16-17]

The Board was entrusted with the task of defining the programme of village reconstruction work from time to time and coordinating the policy followed in different centres. It would collect funds as required for the discharge of its functions, but it was understood that it would work with as little monetary help as possible.

Decentralization would be the keynote of the Board's Policy. The whole country would be divided into as many areas as there might be workers or agents, who would carry out the Board's programme in their respective areas. The workers would be selected from among those who were able, so far as possible, to devote their whole time to the work of the Association. They would collect funds for their own work.

The experts' panel, called the Board of Advisers, which would be called upon to give advice on technical matters as required, consisted of eighteen persons. They were: Rabindranath Tagore, Jagdish Chandra Bose, P. C. Ray, C. V. Raman,



Ramdas Pantulu, Jamal Mohamed, G. D. Birla, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, S. Pochkhanwalla, Sam Higginbottom, Dr. Jivraj Mehta, Dr. M. A. Ansari, Maj.-Gen. Sir Robert McCarrison, Dr. Rajabally V. Patel, Dr. S. Subba Rao, Dr. B. C. Roy and Dr. Purushottam Patel.

The constitution of the Association defined its object as being "village reorganization and reconstruction, including the revival, encouragement and improvement of village industries, and the moral and physical advancement of the villages of India".

It was laid down that the Association would function under the guidance and advice of Gandhiji.

The organization would consist of (i) the Board of Management, (ii) Members, (iii) Agents, (iv) Honorary Workers, (v) Paid, whole-time workers and (vi) Associates.

Anyone wishing to be a member of the Association was required to sign a pledge promising to devote the best part of his energy and talents to the furtherance of the Association's object, which was "the all-round welfare of the villages of India", not to take part in any campaign of civil disobedience, to seek in the work cooperation of all irrespective of political differences and to use articles of village manufacture in preference to any other. [C.W.M.G., LIX, pp. 449-53]

On 20 December Gandhiji issued to the Press the by-laws of the Association as framed by the Board of Management. Among other things, these defined the duties and functions of agents.

The agents were, to begin with, expected to make a survey of industries that might be revived, improved or introduced in their areas and submit to the Central



Office suitable programmes based on their investigations for examination. They would be expected to attend to the sanitation and hygiene in the villages within their areas. They would be expected to carry on propaganda, raise funds for carrying on the work but not for their own use, and appoint paid workers where necessary and feasible. They would further be expected to submit monthly reports of work to the Central Office along with abstracts of receipts and payments. [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 10-12]

Later a permanent Board of Trustees was also set up to "hold funds and properties on behalf of the Association" and to "disburse them in accordance with the instructions of the Board of Management". The Trustees were: (1) Shrikrishnadas Jajoo (Treasurer), (2) J. C. Kumarappa, (3) Jamnalal Bajaj, (4) Dr. Khan Saheb, (5) Dr. Gopichand Bhargava, and (6) Vaikunth L. Mehta. [*Ibid*, p. 477]

7

The organizational infrastructure was now in place but the first steps were yet to be taken towards actual work being taken in hand and Gandhiji was flooded with queries from workers as regards the programme. To provide guidance to the workers Gandhiji wrote three articles in *Harijan* under the title "How to Begin", published in three consecutive issues beginning with that of 25 January 1935.

Gandhiji advised each worker to begin with himself and replace articles of foreign make or city make that he used with those produced in the villages. Tooth-brushes thus could be replaced by *babul* twigs, tooth paste or tooth powder by charcoal dust mixed with salt.

Gandhiji was emphatic that polished rice from the mills should be replaced by hand-husked unpolished rice. Most people thought hand-husking meant hand-pounding of paddy, which only removed the husk and left the grain intact.



There were some varieties of paddy that were difficult to husk by this process. Gandhiji advised that paddy of any such variety should be boiled before husking.

Chemists, especially from Bengal, raised the objection that scientists and nutritionists who had given their opinion in favour of unpolished rice might not have been able to distinguish between hand-pounded part-polished rice and wholly unpolished rice that Gandhiji recommended. They further contended that the pericarp, which even a slight polishing removed, might be unnecessary for the system if not also injurious. Gandhiji argued that in the process of pounding it was not only pericarp that was removed but also aleurone and embryo containing vitamins.

It was true that unpolished rice took longer to cook, but it was more delicious in taste than the polished rice. [*Ibid*, pp.311, 319]

Next to rice came wheat as the most important item of diet. The branless flour that the mills produced was, Gandhiji said, as bad as polished rice. The wheat flour hand-ground in a *chakki* was superior to and cheaper than mill-ground flour, if only because it saved the cost of grinding. Besides, the richest part of wheat was contained in the bran.

Speaking at a public meeting at Indore on 23 April 1935, Gandhiji said:

Mill-ground flour is vitaminless flour, mill-ground flour kept for days is not only vitaminless but poison. But we will not exert ourselves to produce flour which we must eat fresh every day, and will pay for less nutritious things and purchase ill-health into the bargain. This is not an abstruse economic truth, it is a fact which is daily happening before our eyes. [*Ibid*, p. 463]

The next article demanding attention was *gur*. *Gur* was superior in food value to refined sugar produced in factories. Retention of *gur* and its use by the people would mean several crores of rupees retained by the villagers. The



difficulty about the production of *gur* in the villages was that sugarcane growers needed money against their crops and could not afford to wait till they had turned cane-juice into *gur* and sold it. For this a remedy had to be found. [*Ibid*, pp.150-51]

Oil-pressing in village *ghanis* was another activity that the Village Industries Association was expected to take up. This industry had the potential of employing a large number of villagers. It could, besides, make available tons and tons of oil-cake as a by-product for the semi-starved cows and bullocks. Oil-pressing was on the decline in villages and needed to be revived. Allowing for one *ghani* to seven villages, which was an underestimate, there would be a minimum of 100,000 *ghanis* lying idle. And if each *ghani* cost Rs. 30 to manufacture, then a sum of three million rupees was lying unutilized, which was a terrible waste. [*Ibid*, p. 300]

Gandhiji also pleaded for encouragement to be given to non-violent bee-keeping and production of what he called "innocent honey", that is to say, honey collected without killing the bees. Bee-keeping thus pursued possessed immense possibilities and might be cultivated as a hobby. It could provide health-giving food to sickly Harijan children. Experiments should be made, said Gandhiji, to see whether honey could become a common article of diet. [C.W.M.G., LIX, p. 88; LX, p. 149]

Gandhiji also started using, and encouraging others to use, hand-made paper for writing and inexpensive village-made reed pens for writing with. True, hand-made paper was expensive and in short supply, but one could reduce the need for writing and when writing, pack more matter in a given amount of space. [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 20, 30; LXII, pp.20, 322]

Cow-protection and development of cattle wealth was another important area that demanded immediate attention. True, there was the Goseva Sangh, an



organization exclusively devoted to cow-protection. But though not quite defunct, its activities had been languishing, even though it had been running a dairy or two. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 94]

If cow-protection was to be pursued with any success it was important that people understood the importance of cow's milk and cow's *ghee* and gave these preference over buffalo's milk and buffalo's *ghee*. Gandhiji had long held the view that cow's milk was superior to buffalo's milk. As early as in March 1927 he had strongly expressed this view and cited the opinion of medical men and dairy experts in support of it. [C.W.M.G., XXXIII, pp. 198, 294]

Now with the economic and nutritional betterment of the villages having assumed top priority, the issue was once again brought to the fore.

Early in January 1934, Gandhiji asked Haribhau Phatak of Poona, a worker keenly interested in the village uplift works, to consult scientific opinion to determine whether cow's milk, which was superior to buffalo's milk as food for infants, was equally so in the case of adults. [C.W.M.G., LIX, p. 127]

Writing to Shivabhai Patel, who wanted buffalo upkeep to be included in the programme of the Village Industries Association, Gandhiji expressed the view that giving encouragement to keeping of buffaloes would interfere with the cow-protection work. One who understood the *dharma* of cow-protection would not speak for the buffalo, he said. [*Ibid*, p. 163]

Gandhiji addressed various competent authorities with a questionnaire seeking their opinion on the comparative virtues of cow's milk and buffalo's milk. He said it was a matter of national importance. Rao Saheb D. L. Sahasrabuddhe of the Agricultural Institute, Poona, carried out the desired enquiry and sent his findings to Gandhiji. According to the findings fat and casein of cow's milk were more easily digestible than those of buffalo's milk. They also contained vitamins,



especially vitamin A, in greater amount, which were necessary equally for children and adults.

S. K. Apte of the Gopalak Sangh, Sholapur, also wrote to Gandhiji informing him of the opinion of about 50 medical men and research workers, who had been approached in the matter by the Gopalak Sangh. They all held the view that (1) buffalo milk was injurious to children, whereas cow's milk made a good substitute for mother's milk; (2) cow's milk was more easily digestible by the sick than buffalo's milk; (3) buffalo's milk, according to some dairy experts, was difficult to digest for a person of any age, because on account of the excess fat it contained, it formed "soap in the intestine"; (4) cow's milk was useful for the intellectual growth of children, though nothing could definitely be said as regards its effect on the intellectual growth of adults; and (5) if cows instead of buffaloes were kept in a city it would have a beneficial effect on the general hygiene of the city.

The findings, Gandhiji said, sufficiently proved the superiority of cow's milk over buffalo's milk. [*Ibid*, pp.193, 248-50]

The researches of Dr. N. N. Godbole, Professor of Industrial Chemistry, Benares Hindu University, also showed that cow butter-fat was in every way superior to buffalo butter-fat, as the former contained iodine – an ingredient which might or might not be contained in the latter – and more of vitamin A. It was, besides, more easily digestible. [*Ibid*, pp. 356-57]

Notwithstanding the overwhelming testimony of doctors and *vaid*s in favour of cow's milk as against buffalo's milk, Gandhiji noted that most people still preferred buffalo's milk and *ghee* made from it. The preference was more marked in the matter of *ghee*. This was because buffalo *ghee* was whiter in appearance and thicker in consistency; some people also found its taste better. This was



unfortunate, said Gandhiji, and if the tendency persisted, it was bound to lead to the neglect of the cow, since it was impossible to keep alive both the cow and the buffalo. One of the two must perish and if the cow perished, the buffalo too must follow, because even as it was, the buffalo was dying. It would be a great contribution to the work of cow-protection if people were to stick to cow's milk and *ghee* made from cow's milk. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 94]

Speaking later at a meeting of Gandhi Seva Sangh, Gandhiji expressed the same view with even greater emphasis. He said:

I would insist that we should have only cows. . . . When one calls me obstinate I feel that I have some kind of insistence. And all that I insist upon is that we should not take buffalo's milk but only cow's milk. . . . I shall be content even to die while insisting on it. [*Ibid*, pp.245-46]

8

Then there was the question of village sanitation, an important item in the programme of the Village Industries Association. Gandhiji made a fervent plea to the intelligentsia – medical men and students – to take up the broom and engage themselves in this work. Tanks and wells should be cleaned, dung heaps should be got rid of. Lanes and streets should be cleaned of rubbish which should be separated and put to different uses: rags could be used to make paper, bones and other such stuff could be ground and turned into manure.

Gandhiji attached special importance to the disposal of human excreta which littered village lanes and village surroundings. He advised students to become willing scavengers and teach the villagers to conserve the golden manure that human excreta represented. He commended the method advocated by Poore in his *Rural Hygiene*, for the disposal of night-soil. This was to bury it in pits from nine inches to one foot deep and to cover it up with earth for a period of



about eight days, at the end of which time it would be converted by bacterial action into sweet-smelling manure. Gandhiji quoted G. I. Fowler, who in his book *Wealth and Waste* had stated that a proper disposal of human excreta would realize Rs. 2 per head per year. This would mean, said Gandhiji, a gain of sixty crore rupees for India from its population of 30 crores. Brultini had also asserted in his book *The Use of Waste Materials*, Gandhiji said, that nitrogen derived from the 2,82,000 residents of Delhi was sufficient to fertilize a minimum of 10,000 and a maximum of 95,000 acres. [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 119, 303]

A number of co-workers undertook the functions of scavengers in Sindi and Ramnagar, villages in the vicinity of Wardha. They included Mahadev Desai, Mira behn, Kanu Gandhi, Jamnalal Bajaj and two of his children, Madalasa and Ramkrishna. Every morning they visited the villages with brooms, shovels and buckets and did the cleaning up. On occasion Gandhiji too accompanied them. The villagers were encouraged by the example and joined in the work. Gandhiji told them:

Just a number of six inches wide and a foot deep trenches would do, with open space in between, on which the earth dug out should be banked up in ridges, the people to use the two banks of the trench as seats. This is the simplest device. . . . All that you have to do is to cover the evacuations with the earth near by. . . . Your crops will be increased without any extra expense or effort, your health will improve . . . and your village will be turned into a clean spot. [*Ibid*, pp. 299-301]

The work of sanitation in the villages was thus not only of paramount importance for ensuring better health for the people but also a source of increasing fertility of the soil, obviating the need for medical aid.



Gandhiji throughout retained his antipathy towards doctors, hospitals and medicines in general. In his seminal work *Hind Swaraj*, written in 1909, he had condemned the whole system of medicine, arguing that doctors and medicines, in alleviating the pain of the body, only saved it from the punishment it deserved for indulging in overeating and other sins and thus weakened the mind, encouraging indulgence and vice, not to mention the fact that many medicines contained animal fat and other substances tabooed by religion. [C.W.M.G., X, pp. 35-36]

The Village Industries Association, Gandhiji said, while concentrating on sanitation and hygiene, must refrain from dispensing medicines, except perhaps quinine, castor oil, bicarbonate of soda and iodine. Talking to some missionary ladies he explained:

I am of opinion that a good deal of medical help is given only in order to make people more helpless. Medical help, in most cases, is practically thrown at them, and so it is lost on them. . . . We must first concentrate on the prevention of disease, we can tackle the disease itself later on. [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 324]

Gandhiji noticed that with the commencement of the activities of the A.I.V.I.A. many workers had taken to distributing free medicines among the villagers – allopathic, ayurvedic, unani or homoepathic or all combined. Druggists were only too willing to oblige because they knew it would bring them more buyers later. More than three-fourths of those drugs, he wrote, were not only useless but imperceptibly if not perceptibly, harmful to the body. Therefore, he went on,

A.I.V.I.A. is leaving medical relief of the kind I have decided severely alone. Its primary care is education in matters of health as well as of



economy. Are not both interrelated? Does not health mean wealth for the millions? Their bodies, not their intellects, are the primary instruments of wealth. The Association, therefore, seeks to teach people how to prevent disease. . . . Hence the Association does not contemplate opening dispensaries. [*Ibid*, pp. 384-85]

9

After the conclusion of the Congress session in Bombay Gandhiji had repaired to Wardha, where he spent the next two months, absorbed in the work of giving shape to the programme and organization of the Village Industries Association. On 29 December he arrived in Delhi in connection with the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. He was put up at the Harijan Colony in Kingsway Camp area, where G. D. Birla had donated a 20-acre plot costing Rs. 30,000 for the purpose.

The hut that had been put up for his residence, Gandhiji saw, was no hut, but an impressive 16-foot high structure with iron and concrete pillars, built on a raised plinth. He was distressed. He had expected, he said, a thatched hut, which would have cost not more than Rs. 500. He rejected the explanation of N. R. Malkani and other workers that everything had to be arranged hurriedly and severely reprimanded them for the extravagance. A spittoon costing a rupee and a half bought for his use further added to his exasperation. Surely, he said, a small earthen cup costing almost nothing would have been adequate. He refused a bedstead, preferring to sleep on the floor. He remarked:

If we cannot live like them [the poor], must have better food and better clothing, let us at least have the poor consolation of doing without a bedstead. [*Ibid*, pp. 35-36]



The Central Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh met twice – on the 2nd and 5th of January – during Gandhiji's presence in Delhi. At the meeting held on the 2nd of January, the pledge contained in the constitution of the Sangh which the members of the Board were required to sign, came in for debate. The pledge read: "I do not consider any human being as inferior to me in status and I shall strive my utmost to live up to that belief."

Members objected that all human beings could not be equal in status. "Are we to regard our servants as equal to us in status?" they asked.

Gandhiji told them that Harijans expected no less from them. Removal of untouchability meant one thing to a Harijan, another thing to a caste Hindu and quite another to a Harijan Sevak.

"I quite see the thing," said Rameshwari Nehru, "but how can I sign the pledge when I know that I do not treat my servant as equal to me in status?" She pointed out that while she slept on a cot or a sofa, her servant stood at the door.

Gandhiji told her that that need not imply any superiority of status on her part. If she slept on a feather bed, that was because it had become a need with her. He said he was not after extinguishing all differences between individuals, which in any case could not be done. Gandhiji alluded to the *Bhagavad Gita*, v, 18, and said even though there were obvious differences between a Brahmin, a dog and a dog-eater, the *Gita* enjoined that one should look upon them with an equal eye. What they must strive to overcome was the assumption of superiority. All men were equal in the eyes of God and of law and it was the ideal they must try to live up to. The pledge therefore was absolutely essential. The pledge was adopted. [*Ibid*, pp. 44-45]

At the meeting on 5 January the Central Board discussed the budget estimates. Gandhiji told the members that every pie received must be considered



as a dedication to God and used as a sacred trust. Nothing should be distributed free. He would not tolerate such items as post, telegrams, etc. Message could be sent through men willing to take them. Above all, there must be no paid propaganda. He said:

I do not see any need for separate propaganda. Actual solid work is the most eloquent propaganda.

. . . The mutest servant is the most eloquent propagandist. Run a school yourself for Harijans, open a well or temple, help in digging a well or building a village school-house for Harijans. That will be true propaganda. . . . I should, therefore, not hesitate to drop the column for propaganda. [*Ibid*, pp. 58-59]

Writing in the same vein to a worker, Haribhau Pathak, later, Gandhiji said:

My own impression is that paid propaganda creates no effect whatsoever. . . . If you utilize 90 per cent of the funds for propaganda and reserve 10 per cent for schools, how would you measure the success you would have attained in the conversion of *savarna* Hindus as we are able to measure the result by the number of schools and hostels that we succeed in opening and conducting? Daily I have letters from Harijans complaining of our spending money for purposes other than opening schools, hostels and the like. I have no letter from anywhere complaining that we do not carry on enough propaganda. [*Ibid*, p. 85]

Removal of untouchability and uplift of Harijans economically and socially, throughout remained the overriding concern of Gandhiji. Speaking at a Harijan industries exhibition at Delhi on 30 December 1934 he expressed distress at the thought that Dheds, Chamars, etc. were treated as untouchables and alienated from Hindu society. No industry or profession through which one sought one's



livelihood could be considered degrading. It was a pity that hides worth crores of rupees were exported from the country and Harijans were deprived of a source of livelihood. [*Ibid*, pp. 36-37]

Speaking again at the Harijan Colony on 2 January 1935 Gandhiji said he needed rest. Indeed he had several years of arrears of rest to cover. But how could he have any rest while a fire raged within him? How could any Hindu, knowing that Hinduism was on the brink of an active volcano, afford to have a moment's rest? Not till the volcano had been extinguished.

The volcano remained to be extinguished. Harijans continued to be used as slaves, they continued to be ill-treated, belaboured and even killed. From Meerut and Kanpur had come reports of Harijans having been beaten up and one Harijan at either place killed by zemindars. [*Ibid*, pp. 46-47]

The work for the uplift of villages undertaken under the aegis of the All-India Village Industries Association did not exclude work of Harijan service. It was extension of Harijan service and complementary to it, as Gandhiji explained to a reader of *Harijan* who had been under the impression that Gandhiji had taken up village industries work because the Harijan work had finished. Village industry, Gandhiji told him, was a "natural consequence of intense Harijan propaganda". The items of work taken up by the Village Industries Association were those that affected the Harijans first and foremost. It was they who lived on rice and flour and salt and nothing else. Further, the majority of those engaged in the husking of paddy were Harijans, and it was they who had been displaced by the mills. [*Ibid*, p. 202]

When some readers took exception to the way the columns of *Harijan* were being occupied with the development of the village industries scheme, Gandhiji wrote:



Any problem connected with the welfare of villages as a whole must be intimately related to the Harijans, who represent over a sixth part of India's population. If villages get good rice and flour, Harijans will benefit by the change as much as the rest of the population. But there is a special sense in which the Harijans will benefit. Tanning and the whole of the raw hide work is their monopoly, and economically this will occupy perhaps the best part of the new scheme. [*Ibid*, p. 15]

10

While in Delhi, Gandhiji had occasion to be interviewed by Mrs. C. Kuttan Nair, a woman activist from Cochin and Edith Howe-Martyn, a birth control enthusiast from England, on different dates. Mrs. Nair raised the question of co-education, which, she held, might go a long way in removing sex obsession among the young.

Gandhiji said the experiments he had conducted with co-education had not produced happy results. The best thing would be to begin with the family. Boys and girls should grow together freely and naturally. Co-education would then come of itself.

As for contraceptive devices, for the use of which the interviewer pleaded to save women from unwanted motherhood, Gandhiji expressed his firm conviction that any artificial aid to birth-control was evil. He said:

Women should learn to resist their husbands. If contraceptives are resorted to, as in the West, frightful results will follow. Men and women will be living for sex alone. They will become soft-brained, unhinged, in fact mental and moral wrecks, if not also physical.

Gandhiji expressed himself against permitting exceptions even in cases where women were too weak for child-bearing. One exception, he said, would



lead to another till it finally became general. The best thing in such cases was for husbands and wives to live apart.

As for the argument that contraceptives were necessary to curb the fast-expanding population, Gandhiji said it should be left to nature. If people wanted to multiply like rabbits, they must also be prepared to die like rabbits. However, Gandhiji said, he would not mind voluntary sterilization in the case of men. [*Ibid*, pp. 67-69]

Speaking to Edith Howe-Martyn on the same subject later, Gandhiji was equally categorical. He said:

Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward, but as he has the brute in him, he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially as the downward course presented to him in a beautiful garb of virtue. . . . If I were to popularize the religion of indulgence I know that men would simply clutch at it. . . . The downward instinct requires no advocacy, no argument . . . and unless you regulate and control it, there is danger of disease and pestilence.

Howe-Martyn, in the true romantic way, expressed the view that there was divinity in creating new life through the sexual act. And if there was also devilishness in it, then it was a point where the divine and the devil became one, as all life was one. Gandhiji retorted:

There is an essential unity in all life, but there is diversity, too, and one has to penetrate it and find the unity behind. . . . Where there is truth, there must be untruth; where there is light, there must be shadow. You cannot realize the wider consciousness unless you subordinate completely reason and intellect, and the body too. [*Ibid*, pp. 95-97]



S. Radhakrishnan, who was doing a book on Indian philosophy in collaboration with J. H. Muirehead, asked Gandhiji to state what his religion was, how he was led to it and what was its bearing on social life.

Gandhiji said his religion was the religion of Truth. He saw God as Truth and Truth as God. And as he pursued Truth, he was daily being led nearer to it by constant prayer. The bearing of the religion of Truth on social life, Gandhiji said, was obvious:

To be true to such religion one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life. . . . Hence for me there is no escape from social service; there is no happiness on earth beyond or apart from it. [*Ibid*, pp. 106-7]

Here we see a reaffirmation of *karma* (action) as distinguished from *jnana* (knowledge) as path to self-realization, as described in the *Bhagavad Gita*, v & vi. For an aspirant there are one of two attitudes and one of two courses possible. He can either cultivate total detachment, making no distinction between good and evil, happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, which in their totality expressed one and the same Reality, the same Self. In such a case service of society loses all relevance. For who is to serve whom? God serving God is a logical absurdity. This was how some of Gandhiji's eminent contemporaries, such as Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi and somewhat earlier Ramakrishna – though not his disciple Vivekananda – experienced self-realization. Since in their eyes evil did not exist, they could eschew all action and rejoice in the Self.

The other attitude possible for an aspirant is to see evil as evil, to recognize the existence of pain and suffering and endeavour to remove or at least to mitigate it. Buddha and Gandhiji belonged to this category of seekers. A



discussion between Gandhiji and J. P. Bhansali in April 1935 throws light on these two attitudes. Bhansali, having led the life of a mendicant, begging for food and subsisting on neem leaves and corn flour mixed with water for three years, returned to Wardha to meet Gandhiji.

Gandhiji asked him if in his meditation he was ever troubled by "all the surrounding misery". Bhansali said he could feel the misery but was powerless to do anything about it. He could not exclusively devote his attention to relieving the misery of the distressed.

But if a thorn was piercing someone's foot, Gandhiji expostulated, would he not help pull it out? If someone were going through agonies, would he not want to tend him? It was all right subsisting on corn flour and neem leaves, but in order to eat he must offer sacrifice. Gandhiji mentioned Jain *munis* and sannyasis who lived on alms, and only imparted spiritual teaching and said:

It is their duty to impart spiritual teaching, but all the same they must offer some sacrifice in the shape of bread labour, and rather than expect their food as a reward of their services, they should, like true Brahmins, live on the charity of the people. All therefore that I have to tell you again and again is that you must shake yourself of this illusion. To do no work is no renunciation. It is inertia.

Bhansali said he was not convinced. [*Ibid*, pp. 401-3, 436-39]



PARTS IV - V

THE CONGRESS ENTERS PARLIAMENTARY ARENA

THE CONGRESS IN AND OUT OF OFFICE



CHAPTER XIV: PREPARING FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

1

On the conclusion of the Congress session in Bombay on 28 October 1934, the delegates returned to their respective provinces to plunge into the work of propaganda related to the impending elections to the Central Legislative Assembly. Indeed the Congress session had only temporarily interrupted that work, which had been going on from 29 June onwards when the election campaign had been formally inaugurated in Bombay by Sarojini Naidu and Satyamurti on behalf of the Congress Parliamentary Board. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 36]

However, notwithstanding the fact that the ban on the Congress had been lifted, Congress workers had not been finding it easy to function in a normal way. They were hampered by all sorts of restrictions and prohibitions, for all the restrictive laws with which the rulers had found it necessary to arm themselves in order to crush the Civil Disobedience movement continued to remain in force and what Gandhiji described as "the gloved fist" remained ever poised to strike at the slightest suggestion of activity or utterance considered seditious. Throughout the years 1934 and 1935, the period when the British were giving the final touches to their brand of constitutional reforms and trying hard to wheedle the Congress into accepting them, repression continued to rage with unabated fury.

Apart from thousands of detenus still languishing in prisons, some of the tallest among the leaders of the country had been arrested, convicted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment on the flimsiest pretext. Jawaharlal Nehru had been serving a two-year term in a prison since 12 February 1934 and all pleas for his release on compassionate grounds in view of his wife Kamala Nehru's critical state of health, by leaders of the Labour party, notably



Lansbury and Attlee, in Britain, and by various other important people in India, including Tagore, were unceremoniously turned down. [Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 208]

On 1 December 1934 Dr. Satyapal, a prominent Congress leader of the Punjab, was arrested and convicted for sedition after he had delivered a speech in Delhi in support of Asaf Ali, who was a Congress candidate for the Central Assembly. He was sentenced to one year in prison. On 15 December, as noted earlier Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was in like manner tried for sedition for a speech delivered in Bombay and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In Bengal Sarat Bose, detained under Regulation III of 1818, continued to be kept in prison and it was as a detenu that he contested and won the election for the Central Assembly. His brother Subhas Bose returned to India on 3 December to be by the bedside of his dying father – as it happened he arrived too late. He was served with restraint orders directing him not to leave his residence, not to address any public meeting, give interviews to visitors or communicate or associate with anyone except members of his family. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, p. 41]

The trade union movement, which had over the years grown into an important component of the national movement, was similarly made a target of attack. Legitimate trade union activity was sought to be suppressed and workers were subjected to police brutality.

Discontent among industrial workers had continued to be on the rise throughout the years following the end of the war and in mid-thirties it had again become acute. This was because notwithstanding the fact that industries in all sectors, whether coal or jute or textiles, had been earning enormous dividends, the wages of the workers had remained more or less stagnant and living conditions of workers in all departments, whether housing or health or



education, had continued to get worse. In 1935 the textile workers in Bombay, for instance, were earning anywhere from Rs.4-8 as to Rs. 48 per month. The earnings of workers in the unorganized sector were even more miserable. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 200]

The workers' discontent found vent in strikes, the only weapon available to them. On 23 April 1934 textile workers in Bombay went on a general strike, which continued almost till the end of June, throwing more than 90,000 workers out of work and paralysing textile production. Textile workers in Nagpur, Sholapur and Delhi also later joined the strike.

The strike was dealt with a heavy hand. At a very early stage the Bombay Special (Emergency) Powers Act, 1932 was invoked to arrest the entire leadership of the workers, including Nimbkar of the Girni Kamgar Union and Manibehn Kara of the All-India Trade Union Congress. Workers' demonstrations were repeatedly lathi-charged and twice fired upon. [*India in 1933-34*, pp. 16-18; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 28-33]

On 14 May the coolies of the East Indian Coal Field at Giridih, who had been on strike demanding higher wages, were fired upon and two workers were killed.

On 30 May police raided the premises of trade unions in Calcutta, seized literature and office records and sealed the offices. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 31-33]

According to the figures put out by the Government, the total number of strikes during the year was 159, as against 146 in the preceding year and the number of men involved was 2,20,808, as against 1,64,938 in the previous year. The number of working days lost (47,75,559) was more than double those lost in 1933 (21,68,961). The majority of disputes related to wages. [*India in 1934-35*, p. 29]



On 23 July 1934 the wrath of the rulers descended on the Communist Party, which, with its committees, sub-committees and branches, was declared an unlawful association under the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908. The reason advanced was that the Party had as its object interference with the maintenance of law and order and that it constituted a danger to public peace. The argument was advanced that the spate of strikes that the country had been witnessing owed their inspiration and organization to the persistent and dangerous activities of the Communist Party, which aimed at the violent overthrow of the existing order of society and attainment of independence for India by means of an armed revolution. The English-owned and Muslim press, as was only to be expected, welcomed the ban. Nationalist opinion, however, was outraged, for it was seen for what it was: an attack on the national movement and an attempt to entangle the newly organized Socialist Party and the radical elements in the Congress. [*India in 1933-34*, pp. 31-32]

2

The Congress thus faced considerable odds in its election campaign.

The issues on which the Congress concentrated during the election campaign were rejection of the British Government's White Paper, summoning of a Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise or as near to it as possible, repeal of all repressive laws and implementation of the economic programme contained in the Karachi Congress resolution. The elections were thus also a test for the contention of the British Government that the constitutional proposals contained in their White Paper were acceptable to the people of India as a whole and that the Congress represented only a miniscule minority.

The election results, when they came, demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that the Congress enjoyed the fullest confidence and trust of the people



of India. They were a repudiation both of the reforms being touted by the Government and its policy of repression.

The new Central Legislative Assembly, announced to be the last under the Government of India Act of 1919, was to be composed of 145 members, distributed as follows:

Elected:		
General	49	
Special electorates	56	Total 105
Nominated:		
Officials	26	
Non-officials	13	
Berar representative	1	Total 40

As a national, non-communal, non-class organization, the Congress thus could expect to contest seats only in the 49 general constituencies. Of these it won 44, losing only five seats, and those to Congress Nationalists in the Punjab and Bengal. The Liberals, the Hindu Mahasabha and even the Justice Party of Madras, which had a well-knit organization and enjoyed the support of the bureaucracy, were all routed.

The total rout of the Justice Party in Madras was a slap in the face of the Government, not only because the membership of that party was composed largely of loyalists and landed interests but because it supported the British policy in all its essentials. It stood by the White Paper, albeit on the condition that it was modified according to the memorandum of the British Indian delegates and it ridiculed the Congress demand for a Constituent Assembly and its non-



acceptance of the Communal Award. Shanmukham Chetty of the Justice Party, who had been President of the outgoing Assembly, was openly supported by the Government, as was another candidate, Diwan Bahadur Ramaswami Mudaliar. Both lost. [*Ibid*, p. 38]

In the Punjab and Bengal the Congress lost seats to the Congress Nationalists because of the very strong Hindu sentiment against the Communal Award in those provinces. The fact of the Congress having adopted a non-committal position in the matter worked to its disadvantage. The reverses were also partly due to the infighting in the Congress, which was much more serious in the Punjab and Bengal than in any other province. For the losses in the Punjab, for instance, Gandhiji roundly blamed Dr. Satyapal, who, notwithstanding his "inexhaustible energy, courage and suffering", had the "knack of often estranging good people from him". [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 90]

The position of the various parties in the Central Assembly as it emerged after the elections was as follows:

Total number of seats contested: 104 (election for one seat in Bihar and Orissa was not held)

The Congress	44 seats
The Congress Nationalist Party	11 seats
Independents (of whom 18 were Muslims)	22 seats
European Group	11 seats
Others	12 seats

Except on the question of the Communal Award, which they unequivocally rejected, the Congress Nationalists, headed by M. S. Aney, were pledged to act in unison with the Congress in the Assembly. Therefore in effect the Congress



could on most occasions count on the support of 55 members in a House of 144. The 22 Independents, headed by Jinnah, were thus placed in a position where they could tilt the balance on any issue at the time of voting. Though in most matters they were expected to support the Congress block, they were nevertheless conscious of their balancing position and Jinnah very cleverly utilized this advantage in his own interest. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 189-90]

3

The elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were over in the first week of November. On 23 November the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee was published. The appointment of the J.P.C. in April 1933 constituted the follow up upon the British Government's White Paper, published on 15 March. The J.P.C. had thus taken 18 months to finalize its conclusions on the constitutional reforms contained in the White Paper proposals. Its recommendations were considered as of crucial importance, since the Bill to be presented to Parliament on the Indian constitution was likely to differ little on fundamental issues from the recommendations contained in the J.P.C. Report.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee was composed of 32 members – 16 each from the two Houses of Parliament – with Marquess of Linlithgow as Chairman. Delegates were chosen from British India (21 members) and from Indian States (7 members) to assist the Committee in its deliberations. The Indian delegates could participate in the discussions and examine witnesses. They submitted a Joint Memorandum of their own to the Committee, but though the Committee recorded its appreciation of the help rendered by the Indian delegates, it totally ignored their views. [*Ibid*, pp. 185-86]



The whole of the J.P.C. Report filled two volumes. The Report proper, comprising the Committee's recommendations and proceedings, was in two parts. The pith of the Report was contained in part I, which consisted of 427 pages.

In the introductory section of the Report the Committee, while recognizing Indian aspirations for freedom as expressed in the strong manifestations of public opinion, proceeded to argue that such recognition by itself could not be a sufficient guide in finding a solution of India's constitutional problems. Responsible Government must be subject to statutory safeguards, without which it could have little or no hope of success. Safeguards were essential if flexibility, strong executives, an efficient administration and impartiality between conflicting interests were to be assured.

The Committee expressed the view that while the new constitutional system in India must be founded on the principle of Provincial Autonomy, it was at the same time necessary to readjust the Central constitution if the powerful centrifugal forces released by the working of Provincial Autonomy were to be kept in check and the unity of India safeguarded.

It was agreed on all hands that the ultimate aim of the British policy in India must be an All-India Federation, comprising both British India and the Indian States. The attraction of the Federation to the States, however, clearly depended, in the Committee's view, on the fulfilment of the condition that in acceding to the Federation the States would be assured of a real voice in the determination of its policy.

The Committee, while recognizing that Provincial Autonomy must precede any change at the Centre, at the same time expressed the view that the interval



between Provincial Autonomy and the inauguration of the Federation should not be longer than was warranted by administrative considerations.

Provincial Autonomy. The White Paper plan for a delimitation of the spheres of government between the Centre and the Provinces, with the administration of residuary subjects being vested in the Governor-General, was endorsed. So was the creation of Sind and Orissa as new Provinces. The White Paper proposal that dyarchy in the Provinces should be abolished and that in carrying on administration the Governor in most matters would be amenable to the advice of non-official Ministers chosen from among the members of the Legislature, was also accepted. The Governor, however, was vested with such large powers that the Ministers' power to govern was reduced practically to a nullity.

What were described as Excluded Areas were placed directly under the administration of the Governor. Then there were matters left to the Governor's "discretion", including withholding of assent to legislation. Though the department concerned with the maintenance of law and order was to be transferred to a Minister, he could do nothing to alter the Police Act and regulations made under it. He was not to be shown the records of the Intelligence Department.

The Governor might, further, assume direct charge of any department in any Ministry, if he thought it necessary to do so to cope with crimes of violence the object of which was to overthrow the Government. The Committee recommended that in Bengal the Governor should be instructed, if the terrorist situation did not improve before the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in that Province, to exercise his powers immediately. In the case of breakdown of the constitutional machinery the Governor, it was recommended, should have the



power to suspend the Legislature and assume direct charge of the administration. This was in effect a proposal to deny Provincial Autonomy to Bengal.

The Committee approved the proposal concerning the Provincial franchise, which increased the electorate from 7 million, including 315,000 women, to 35 million, including 6 million women, i.e., from the existing 3 per cent to 14 per cent of the population.

While this widened the popular base of Legislatures, the Committee proceeded to nullify the improvement by recommending Second Chambers for the Madras and Bombay Presidencies in addition to the U.P., Bihar and Bengal recommended in the White Paper. It is to be noted that Indian political opinion had been unanimously against Second Chambers. The Madras Legislative Council indeed had defeated a resolution proposing creation of a Second Chamber in November 1932.

For Communal representation the Committee stuck to the scheme laid down in the Communal Award as modified by the Poona Pact in regard to the representation of the Depressed Classes. It however expressed the view that the seats allotted to the Depressed Classes in Bengal under the Poona Pact might be reduced and their representation in some other Provinces proportionally increased.

Federation and the Indian States. The Committee were at pains to emphasize that the entry of the States into the Federation, which would be of advantage both to British India and to the States, must be voluntary on the part of the Princes. The Committee accepted the principle proposed in the White Paper that the Federation should come into existence only when the Rulers of States representing not less than half the total population of the States and entitled to not less than half the seats allotted to the States in the Federal Upper Chamber



had signified their desire to accede. Representatives of the States in the Federal Legislature, it was further stipulated, must be appointed by the Rulers of the States. As to the ratio of representation between British India and the States, the White Paper proposal was accepted. This was that in the Upper Chamber, consisting of 260 members, 104 seats — two-fifths of the total number — should be allotted to the States, while in the Federal Assembly the States should have 125 out of a total of 375 seats. Thus 24 per cent of the country's population comprising the States was to be assigned 40 per cent and 33 1/3 per cent representation respectively in the Upper and Lower Houses.

The rights of paramountcy exercised by the Governor-General over the Indian States would not be transferred to any Federal authority. Outside the Federal sphere the States' relations would be exclusively with the Crown.

Responsibility at the Centre. The J.P.C. Report, in defining the scope of responsibility scrupulously avoided making any reference to Dominion Status. The White Paper proposal that the Governor-General should have direct responsibility for the administration of Defence, External Affairs, Ecclesiastical Affairs and British Baluchistan, and that in this task he should be assisted by three Counsellors not responsible to the Legislature was approved. In the administration of other departments the Governor-General was to be guided by the advice of Ministers chosen from the Legislature, but here, too, he would have "special responsibilities" including the responsibility for financial stability and credit of the Federation, in the discharge of which he would be assisted by a Financial Advisor.

Federal Legislature. The Committee accepted the White Paper proposal in regard to the number of seats in each of the two Houses, viz., 375 in the Federal Assembly and 260 in the Council of State, and the ratio in each House between



British Indian and States' representatives, as also the seats apportioned to different communities in the Lower House. This worked out as follows:

Council of State: Total number of seats 260.

States share 104 seats. British India 156 seats. Of these 156 seats 10 seats were reserved: for Europeans (7), Anglo-Indians (1) and Indian Christians (2), 6 seats were left to the Governor-General to fill at his discretion, leaving 140 seats for the Provinces. These remaining 140 seats were to be assigned as follows: General electorate 75, Muslims 49, Depressed Classes 6, Sikhs 4, Women 6.

The Federal Assembly. Total number of seats 375. The States share 125 seats. British India 250. These were distributed in the following manner: Hindus (including Scheduled Castes) 105, Muslims 82 seats, other minorities 26, Industry and Commerce 11, Labour 10, Landlords 7, Women 9.

In regard to the method of election of members of the Lower House, the Committee, departing from the prevailing practice and from the recommendation of the White Paper, decided that direct method of election should be discontinued and indirect should be substituted for it. That is to say, the members should be elected by Provincial Lower Houses through separate electorates, members of each community voting for its own representative.

The members of the Council of States were to be similarly elected by Provincial Upper Chambers where there were bicameral Legislatures and by electoral colleges akin to Upper Chambers in Provinces which had unicameral Legislatures.

This was a preposterous innovation. The introduction of indirect method of election to what was supposed to be a popular House was unparalleled in Federal



constitutions. The intention obviously was to take away with one hand what was given with the other by widening the franchise.

The Public Services. Recruitment for the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police Service would as heretofore be continued to be made by the Secretary of State and the Provincial Governments would have no power even to transfer officers of those services. Recruitment for other All-India services would be made by the Federal Government.

The Judicature. The White Paper had proposed setting up, in addition to a Federal Court, a Supreme Court for hearing appeals from Provincial High Courts in civil cases and criminal cases involving death penalty. The Committee rejected the idea of Supreme Court, as it might, in their view, result in the overlapping of jurisdictions of the two apex courts. It proposed instead that judges of the Federal Court might sit in two distinct Chambers to judicate over two distinct sets of cases.

Commercial and other forms of discrimination. The Committee were particular to provide against any kind of discrimination which might unfavourably affect the interests of British traders whether in Britain or in India. They proposed that the Constitution Act should incorporate provisions which would prevent penalization of British imports and ensure that the conception of partnership with the United Kingdom was not destroyed. The Governor-General, they said, should also be empowered to prevent measures, legislative or administrative, which would subject British goods, imported into India from the United Kingdom, to discriminatory or penal treatment. The Committee proposed detailed rules under which Indian laws imposing certain restrictions should not apply to British traders in the United Kingdom or those connected with companies incorporated in India.



Fundamental Rights. The Committee rejected the proposal, as it had been rejected in the White Paper, that the Constitution should contain a declaration of the fundamental rights of the subject. But a provision might be included, they said, to ensure that no British subject, Indian or non-Indian, would be disabled from holding public office or from practising any trade, calling or profession by reason only of his religion, descent, caste, colour or place of birth. There should be further provision against expropriation of property except for public purposes.

Constituent Powers. The Committee expressed the view that, since the Constitution must mainly depend for its success upon provisions to ensure a balance between various conflicting interests, it was impossible to grant powers of constitutional revision to Indian Legislatures. They could pass resolutions suggesting constitutional modifications, which would then be placed before both Houses of Parliament by His Majesty's Government with a statement as regards action proposed to be taken.

The Committee rejected various other alternative drafts of the Report, including one put up by Attlee and other Labour members of the Committee, which proposed fixing a definite date for the inauguration of the Federation without waiting for the accession of a prescribed number of States, giving wider powers to the popular component in the executives at the Centre and in the Provinces and limiting the powers of the Governor-General. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 545-56; *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 204-6]

The White Paper, as has been noted earlier, had been unanimously rejected by the Indian political opinion. The rejection of the J.P.C. Report was even more categorical and unqualified. For the Report, while retaining all the repugnant and



reactionary features of the White Paper, had added a few of its own which were much worse.

Gandhiji made no public comment on the document, but in private letters to friends in England, such as Agatha Harrison and Carl Heath he unequivocally condemned the Report. Sympathizers in Britain had taken up the attitude that, bad as the J.P.C. Report was, it nevertheless represented an advance on the existing position. They pleaded with Gandhiji not to do anything which might lead to the withdrawal of the Government of India Bill, which codified the recommendations of the J.P.C. Report and had been introduced in Parliament on 19 December 1934. On 3 January 1935 Gandhiji wrote to Carl Heath:

You seem to regard the possibility of withdrawal of the forthcoming Bill as a calamity. In my opinion . . . it will be a blessing both for England and India, for the simple reason that persistence in the measure in the face of an almost unanimous Indian opposition to it would mean an unbending attitude on the part of the British Parliament and utter contempt for Indian public opinion.

Gandhiji then summarized his objection to the J.P.C. Report, emphasizing that there was no provision in it for automatic advance of India to complete independence, that it saddled India with a greater financial burden than the country was then bearing, that it denied popular control over the army or over the currency, that Governors in the Provinces had been invested with powers so sweeping as to make a mockery of Provincial Autonomy and that British exploitation of India had been made firmer than ever. Bad as the existing constitution was, Gandhiji wrote, the new one would be infinitely worse. [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 47-49]

Earlier, on 20 December, Gandhiji had written in a similar vein to Agatha Harrison. He had said:



Sir Samuel Hoare's philosophy demands that Indian wishes should not be consulted, much less respected, except when they reflect those of his advisers. . . . The Congress has decided that nothing is acceptable unless its wishes are taken into account. . . . Therefore you friends on your side should, if you can, resolutely say that the existing state should remain till time has arrived for a change by consent of the 'governed'. [*Ibid*, pp.13-14]

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Patna on the 5th, 6th and 7th of December 1934 and in a resolution rejected the J.P.C. Report, which it described as being "in several respects even worse" than the White Paper. The resolution said:

The Committee is of opinion that the said scheme should be rejected, well knowing that the rejection must involve the necessity of struggling under the present constitution, humiliating and intolerable as it is, until it is replaced by one framed by a Constituent Assembly in accordance with the Congress resolution on the subject.

The Committee appealed to the newly elected members of the Central Assembly to reject the scheme sought to be thrust upon India in the name of reforms. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. II, pp. 218-19]

The National Liberal Federation, at its annual session at Poona at the end of December 1934, in a resolution, moved by Srinivasa Sastri and carried unanimously, rejected the J.P.C. Report, which had, "in utter disregard of almost the entire body of Indian opinion of all shades including the British Indian Delegation, introduced further highly objectionable and reactionary features, rendering impossible responsible government in the Provinces and at the Centre".



Supporting the resolution speaker after speaker in angry and bitter tones tore the Report to pieces, demonstrating how destructive it was of Indian interests in every sphere and how it sought to make the British stranglehold upon India even tighter than it was.

Srinivasa Sastri declared that if a constitution based on the J.P.C. Report was thrust upon India "there would be no peace in the land nor would there be peace between England and India and bitterness would increase". Dominion Status for India, which had been promised by the Viceroy, by the British Cabinet and by the Parliament, found no mention in the document. Sastri severely castigated the Princes for the role they were playing in the affair and allowing themselves to be used as "blocks in the way of India's march towards freedom".

C. Y. Chintamani similarly subjected the Report to devastating criticism and declared that it was totally unacceptable. The proposals contained in the Report, he said, were stamped with absolute distrust of Indians. Such an insulting offer was unworthy of England to make and unworthy of India to accept.

H. N. Kunzru, who presided at the session, N. M. Joshi, R. P. Paranjpaye, Chimanlal Setalvad, A. D. Shroff, Phiroze Sethna, P. N. Saprú and Cowasji Jehangir all rejected the Report with one voice. [*Ibid*, p. 270-84]

The U.P. Political Conference, held on 30 December 1934, and the Andhra Political Conference held on the same day, similarly rejected the proposals contained in the J.P.C. Report. [*Ibid*, pp. 323, 328-29]

The Muslim leadership, too, was not satisfied with the Report. The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim Conference on 23 December passed a resolution recording its considered opinion that "the constitutional advance proposed by the Joint Parliamentary Committee is, as a whole, disappointing and falls considerably short of the aspirations of the people of India." It regretted that



due weight had not been given to the recommendations made by the British Indian Delegation. It however stopped short of rejecting the proposals contained in the Report. [*Ibid*, p. 44]

5

British political opinion, on its part, was not unanimous in supporting the proposals. The debate in the British Parliament on the issue – from 10 to 12 December 1934 in the House of Commons and from 13 to 18 December in the House of Lords –brought to the fore sharp differences between the Government and the Labour leadership. Col. J. C. Wedgwood of the Labour Party asserted that Indian opinion not only rejected the J.P.C. Report, it was terrified of it. Communal representation, which the Report sought to perpetuate, would permanently divide India and would never be acceptable to the Hindus. Attlee objected to the Report because it showed distrust of the active political force of India, especially of the Congress. He warned that the Congress was a force that could make or break any constitution. Isaac Foot, Liberal, said he would not vote a single safeguard unless he was satisfied that they were for the good of India.

In the House of Lords Labour attack on the Report was led by Strabolgi and Salisbury. Strabolgi saw in the Report little hope for the Indian masses. He described the Communal Award as "the most hideous denial of everything in which the Labourites believe."

But Labour representation in the Parliament was a negligible element and both Houses overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Government's motion accepting the recommendations of the Select Committee as the basis of revision of the Indian Constitution – Commons by 491 to 49 and Lords by 238 to 62. [*Ibid*, pp. 42-44]



Even the Legislatures in India, consisting of persons and interests who, by and large, could not be described as supporters of the Congress or the cause for which it stood, could not swallow the Report. Provincial Council after Provincial Council came out with resolutions demanding modification of the proposals contained in the Report.

On 17 January 1935 the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council expressed itself as of the view that the scheme as a whole was highly unsatisfactory and inadequate to meet popular aspirations, as it was hedged round by undesirable safeguards. The Council urged substantial modifications and inclusion of the term Dominion Status in the preamble of the India Bill.

On 2 February the C.P. Council similarly expressed itself against the Report which it described as "unsatisfactory, unacceptable and unworkable" unless it was modified to include Dominion Status.

On 15 February the Bombay Council rejected the Government motion for the consideration of the J.P.C. Report. [*Ibid*, pp. 18-21]

The newly constituted Central Legislative Assembly took up consideration of the Government motion on the J.P.C. Report on 4 February 1935.

Bhulabhai Desai, on behalf of the Congress Party, moved an amendment asking that the Report be rejected. It did not meet Indian aspirations, Desai said, for it denied to India the control of external relations, the control of currency and exchange, the control of fiscal policy and the control of the day-to-day administration, for all these had been made reserved subjects. Then there were the discretionary powers, special responsibility and the right of veto given to the Governor-General. There was thus no responsibility at the Centre. The same was the case in regard to the Provinces, where the Ministers would be



placed between the devil and the deep sea with the extraordinary powers of the Governors on one side and the protected services on the other.

Fazlul Haq, N. V. Gadgil, Abdul Matin Chaudhury, Dr. Khan Saheb, N. M. Joshi, C. V. Deshmukh, Pramtha Nath Bannerji and Cowasji Jehangir in their speeches supported the amendment of Bhulabhai Desai and called for the rejection of the Report.

Desai's amendment consisted of two parts. While the first part called for the rejection of the J.P.C. Report, the second part, moved as an amendment to another amendment, moved by Jinnah, said that the Communal Award be neither accepted nor rejected. Both were lost, the first by 72 to 61 votes, the second by 84 to 44 votes.

The amendment moved by Jinnah was in three parts. The first part accepted the Communal Award "so far as it goes, until a substitute is agreed upon by the various communities concerned". This was passed by 68 to 15 votes, the Congress members remaining neutral.

The second part was concerned with Provincial Governments. It mentioned the many objectionable features of the scheme in this regard, such as establishment of Second Chambers, the extraordinary and special powers of the Governors and provisions relating to police and the secret services and declared that unless these were removed, the scheme would not satisfy Indian opinion.

The third part was about the Federation. Federation, it said, was totally unacceptable to British India and efforts should be made by His Majesty's Government to consider how best to establish for British India alone a responsible government.



Both parts were carried by 74 to 58 votes. It may be mentioned that whereas in the Provincial Councils official members refrained from taking part in the voting, this practice was not followed during the voting on the J.P.C. Report in the Assembly. Jinnah's amendment on the Communal Award was carried by the Muslim bloc and officials voting together, while the Congress members did not vote. The other parts of Jinnah's amendment were carried by Jinnah's Independent group and the Congress voting together, with the officials voting against. [*ibid*, pp. 122-30, 287]

As to the reaction of the Indian Princes to the scheme, now that the Government of India Bill was being debated in Parliament, they began to have doubts as to the wisdom of joining the Federation. What they wanted was to keep all the powers and privileges of their autocratic rule and by joining the Federation be enabled to have a say in the affairs of British India, too. The Government of India Bill, as drafted, they realized, was not designed to make their dream come true. There were pitfalls.

The Chamber of Princes at a meeting held in Delhi on 22 January 1935 passed a resolution emphasizing that the inauguration of the Federation depended upon a clear recognition of the sovereignty of the States and their rights under treaties and engagements.

A further meeting of States' Rulers and Ministers held in Bombay on 25-26 February noted that the Bill and the instrument of accession did not secure the States' vital interests and that without modification and alteration on fundamental points the Bill and the instrument of accession could not be regarded as acceptable to Indian States.

One of the "fundamental points" was the form of the instrument of accession. As incorporated in the Bill the instrument of accession was in the form



of declaration on the part of a Prince of his willingness to accede to the Federation, subject to the assent of the King, and accept the provisions of the Act as applicable to his state. The Princes argued that accession could not be a unilateral declaration, that it would have to be a "treaty" of accession between two contracting parties, creating reciprocal rights and obligations. They insisted that the transfer of power from the Indian States to the Federal authority should be for federation purposes only and that "sanctity" of existing treaties with the Crown must be explicitly safeguarded. They further argued that the Government of India Act as a whole, being an Act of Parliament, could not be binding in the case of States, because the States were not under the authority of Parliament.

Samuel Hoare tried his best to conciliate the Princes, but the chances of his succeeding were already receding. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 435-50]

For even though the constitution being hammered out in London was only in the nature of window-dressing, retaining for Britain the substance of power while giving away the shadow, there were forces in Britain, led by die-hard Conservatives such as Churchill, who were not happy at the idea of parting with responsibility even if it was only in name. They had been consistently fighting against the scheme and refused to be persuaded by Government spokesmen that nothing was really being lost to the British.

On 26 February in the House of Commons Churchill moved that the debate on the India Bill be adjourned and "the momentous rejection by the Princes of the Government's scheme of Federation" be taken into consideration. Churchill declared that the Federation was dead and that the Government should go back to the Simon Commission's proposals. The Simon Commission, it may be remembered, had rejected the idea of responsibility at the Centre. [*Ibid*, p. 23]



Though Samuel Hoare was putting up a brave face he and his colleagues in the Government were losing their confidence about the Federation materializing. They were wondering whether it was worthwhile going ahead with the Bill. Churchill and Courtauld, he came to know, were bringing pressure to bear upon Patiala and Dholpur, and Rothermere and others were spending large sums of money in dissuading the Princes from coming in. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 207-8]

6

While the shadow-boxing over the India Bill went on in Britain, the Congress carried on its battles inside the Assembly.

During the budget session of the Assembly, held in Delhi from 21 January to 9 April 1935, the Congress, though commanding no more than 55 votes of its own, was able to challenge the Government at every step and get away with it.

The very first occasion when it crossed swords with the official bloc was on 22 January, when N. C. Bardoloi brought an adjournment motion on the continued detention of Sarat Chandra Bose, who had been elected to the Assembly while he was in prison. He had been formally summoned by the Governor-General to take his seat in the Assembly. But the Bengal Government, Bardoloi said, continued to keep Bose in detention, thus committing breach of privilege of the House. The Government denied that the Assembly, which was a subordinate legislature created by an Imperial Statute, had any privileges beyond those given by the Statute. The summons issued by the Governor-General, it was further said, had no legal force, as it was only a formal invitation.

Jinnah supported the adjournment motion. He argued that even if privilege did not exist the Assembly could censure the Government for detaining a person so long without a trial. The motion was carried by 64 to 58 votes. This was the



Congress Party's first victory in the Assembly. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 107-9]

Another test of strength came during the debate on the Indo-British trade agreement signed in London on 9 January 1935. K. L. Gauba moved that the agreement being unfair to India be terminated forthwith. The Government argued that the agreement had done no more than crystallize past fiscal practice and that it would help the cause of goodwill between England and India.

Swami Venkatachalam Chetty, Baijnath Bijoria, both representing Indian commercial interests, lashed out at the agreement as being against the policy of protection laid down by the Assembly in 1923. Jinnah said the agreement was a halter round the neck of India and a handicap in entering into agreements with other countries.

Bhulabhai Desai subjected the agreement to a detailed criticism and showed that it was fashioned entirely to further British commercial interests against those of India. K. L. Gauba's resolution calling for the termination of the agreement was carried by the Assembly by 66 to 58 votes. [*Ibid*, pp. 117-21]

On 22 February the Assembly took up debate on the Railway budget. The policy pursued by the Railway Board was attacked on all sides. Demands were made for the Indianization of the Railway administration and restoration of salary cuts was mercilessly attacked except in the case of officers drawing less than Rs. 100 per month. It was pointed out that the Railways had made no contribution to the general revenues for the preceding five years. Creation through the new constitution of a Statutory Railway authority was also attacked.

On 22 February Bhulabhai Desai's cut motion for a reduction of the demand for the Railway Board to one rupee was carried by the Assembly by 75 to 47 votes. The Governor-General restored the grant. [*Ibid*, pp. 132-38]



The Finance Bill, incorporating the budget proposals for the year 1935-36, was presented in the Assembly by Finance Member James Grigg on 28 February 1935. The proposals drew fire from the opposition, led by the Congress, on several counts. Restoration of the emergency cuts in the salaries of Government officers was vehemently opposed. The demand was made that the surcharge on income-tax be entirely abolished and the level of income assessed for tax purposes be raised from the existing Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2,000.

Though the Assembly rejected by 67 to 65 votes – a very narrow margin – Bhulabhai Desai's cut motion refusing monies to the Executive Council, inasmuch as they were a family of parasites who ate up for various services 86 crores of rupees, several other cut motions were passed. The one on salt duty, which was reduced from Re. 1- 4 as. to 12 as. was passed by the Assembly by 63 to 55 votes.

Another motion passed by the Assembly was that reducing the rates of post-cards and various other postal articles and postal charges. The motion raising the level of minimum taxable income from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 2,000 was also passed.

Needless to say the Viceroy ruled out all the cuts approved by the Assembly and sent back the Bill for reconsideration. The Assembly not condescending to oblige, the Viceroy used his power of certification to restore the grants. [*Ibid*, pp. 142-72]

That the Muslim leadership from Jinnah to Fazlul Huq had made common cause with the Congress in rejecting the J.P.C. Report and the Government of India Bill based thereon, did not imply that the Muslim leadership had given up its intransigence on the communal question and decided to support the national demand. Their reasons for rejecting the proposed Constitution were quite different from those of the Congress. The Muslim League, as Jinnah's amendment



passed by the Assembly showed, was particularly categorical in denouncing the arrangement proposed for the Centre. The reason for this was the Muslim fear that with the Princes joining the Federation, Hindu majority in the Federal Legislature would become even more overwhelming than it would be otherwise, since most of the Princes were Hindus. They therefore desired and demanded that the Centre should be left with the fewest possible subjects and the areas of Provincial Autonomy should be widened, even to the extent of the Provinces having the right to maintain their own armed forces. By this device it would be possible to bring into being autonomous Muslim provinces in the eastern and north-western parts of the country, which would act as a counterpoise to Hindu predominance in the rest of the country. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 214]

A national solution of the communal question resulting in communal understanding thus remained unachieved and mutual suspicion and distrust between communities, especially between Hindus and Muslims, continued to vitiate national politics and affect the behaviour of parties and individuals.

In order to minimize communal discord and bickerings and evolve an alternative to the British Government's Communal Award, the Congress decided to make yet another effort at parleys with the Muslim League. Accordingly Congress President Rajendra Prasad initiated talks with M. A. Jinnah, President of the All-India Muslim League. The talks began on 23 January 1935 and continued for more than a month, terminating on 1 March. In a joint statement they reported their failure to arrive at a settlement. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. I, p. 295]



A communal accord thus remaining elusive, the situation remained volatile and communal tension like a miasma hung over the country in greater or less measure, with occasional flare-up in rioting.

In Lahore serious trouble erupted between the Sikhs and Muslims when on 29 June 1935 a crowd of Sikhs proceeded to demolish a mosque situated within the precincts of the Shahidganj Gurdwara. The premises had been in the possession of the Sikhs for many generations and had been the subject of prolonged litigation. A crowd of Muslims assembled in front of the Gurdwara and a clash was averted only through police intervention. The Sikhs were persuaded not to go on with the demolition. On 8 July, the Sikhs, led by some hotheads, went ahead and demolished the mosque. This led to much resentment among the Muslims. They organized *jathas* to march to the Gurdwara. On 23 July seven such *jathas* defied prohibitory orders and were arrested and sent to prison for six months. The ill-will between the two communities continued to simmer. On 20 September more than a lakh of Muslims gathered at the Badshahi mosque to protest against the demolition of their shrine. On 8 November a crowd of more than 50,000 Muslims, carrying drawn swords marched through the streets of Lahore to express their anger against the demolition.

On 10 December the Governor of the Punjab explained the Government policy on the dispute relating to Shahidganj: "Solution by consent if possible, and, if not, to uphold the decision and orders of the civil courts." Neither party was satisfied. [*India in 1934-35*, pp. 104-5; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. II, pp. 23-24]

Near-riot situations came to be created in many other parts of the country. On 4 August 1935, in Champaran a Hindu mob of 3000 invaded a Muslim place



of worship. The police had to open fire to stop it, killing 5 persons and wounding 7.

On 25 August a communal riot broke out in Secunderabad, leaving 3 killed and 88 injured. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. II, p. 23]

In Karachi serious trouble arose when a Muslim, Abdul Quaiyum, sentenced to death for the murder of a Hindu who had allegedly insulted Islam, was executed on 19 March 1935. A crowd of 25,000 Muslims immediately gathered at the place of burial and insisted on taking the body in procession through the streets of the city. The persuasion of the authorities had no effect and in order to avert the danger of a serious communal riot and also in self-defence – for the mob had assumed a threatening posture – the police was obliged to open fire at short range. The firing left 47 persons dead and 134 injured. [*India in 1934-35*, p. 100]

The Congress in the Assembly condemned the shooting. K. L. Gauba charged that the Executive had bungled the execution and the local leaders had not been taken into confidence. He brought forward an adjournment motion, which was carried by 67 to 52 votes, members of the Nationalist Party remaining neutral. Jinnah demanded an independent commission of enquiry. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. I, p. 160]

In the wake of the awakening among the Harijans as a result of the anti-untouchability movement, caste Hindu atrocities against the untouchables had been increasing. This had been so especially in Gujarat. In that Province there had been instances, such as in Dholka, of Harijans being murdered. In Kavitha, near Ahmedabad, Rajputs mercilessly attacked Harijans for daring to send their children to schools. In Kathiawar Harijans were being persecuted because plague



had broken out among the cattle, for which Harijans were held responsible. Harijans were in perpetual fear of injury to their persons and property. [C.W.M.G., LXI, p. 380]

So insecure did the Harijans in Kavitha find themselves that they decided to vacate the place and move elsewhere. Gandhiji blessed them in the effort. He wrote:

If people migrate in search of employment, how much more should they do so in search of self-respect? I hope that well-wishers of Harijans will help these poor families to vacate inhospitable Kavitha. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 11]

Vallabhbhai Patel visited the place and brought about an understanding between the caste Hindus and the Harijans. He did not like the idea of the Harijans having to migrate from the place. Gandhiji declared that in acting as he did Vallabhbhai had committed an error. [*Ibid*, p. 81]

Dr. Ambedkar reacted to the situation in an entirely different way. On 13 October 1935, at the Bombay Presidency Depressed Classes Congress at Yeoli, he called upon the Depressed Classes to leave the Hindu fold and embrace any other religion which guaranteed to them equality of status. This was perhaps the first time that Dr. Ambedkar announced his preference for the mass conversion of Harijans. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. II, p. 29]

Gandhiji was shocked. In a statement to the Press issued on 15 October he said:

I can understand the anger of a high-souled and highly educated person like Dr. Ambedkar over the atrocities committed in Kavitha and other villages. But religion is not like a house or a cloak which can be changed at



will. It is more an integral part of one's self than one's body. If Dr. Ambedkar has faith in God, I would urge him to . . . reconsider the position and examine his ancestral religion on its own merits and not through the weakness of its faithless followers. . . . I am convinced that change of faith by him and those who passed the resolution will not serve the cause which they have at heart; for millions of unsophisticated, illiterate Harijans will not listen to him and them when they have disowned their ancestral faith, especially when it is remembered that their lives, for good or for evil, are intertwined with those of caste Hindus. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 37]

In an article in *Harijan* of 26 October Gandhiji again wrote:

Secession of stalwarts like Dr. Ambedkar can but weaken the defences of Harijans. We know, as a matter of fact that non-Hindu Harijans, no matter how eminent they may be, are not able to help Hindu Harijan Such is the hold untouchability of the Indian type has on the people in India. [*Ibid*, p. 65]

On 10 November at a conference at Nasik, 800 Depressed Classes youths burnt copies of the *Manusmriti* and other Hindu sacred books. Lighting a funeral pyre of Hinduism they threw into it Hindu sacred books one after another. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1935, Vol. II, p. 32]

On 31 May 1935 one of the worst seismic disasters in the history of the country hit Quetta in Baluchistan. Geologically the earthquake was of a lower intensity than that of Bihar a year and five months earlier. But because of the fact that it came at night, at 3 a.m. to be precise, when the entire population lay asleep, it caused much greater devastation of life. No less than 25,000 people perished, most of them in their beds, buried under the falling debris of their



houses. The entire police force of the city was decimated and troops had to be drafted for the work of relief.

Gandhiji in a statement from Wardha on 6 June called upon the people to pray. He said:

The appalling disaster in Quetta paralyses one. It baffles all attempt at reconstruction. The whole truth about the disaster will perhaps never be known. The dead cannot be recalled to life. . . .

Our prayer is a heart search. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without His support. No effort is complete without prayer, without a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it has not God's blessing behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification, to inward search. [C.W.M. G., LXI, pp. 137-38]

The country's anguish at the tragedy became more unbearable because the Government immediately declared Martial Law and clamped a ban on the entry of outsiders into the region. In Bihar relief work on a massive scale had become possible because of the voluntary effort of many non-official agencies, especially the Central Relief Committee. In Quetta the Government put its foot down against all voluntary assistance in the work of relief. Notwithstanding the fact that nearly 20,000 people were feared to be trapped within the ruins and salvage operations on a massive scale were the need of the hour, the authorities refused to relent. Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy twice, seeking permission for volunteers to go to Quetta to undertake the work of relief. The request was turned down. [*Ibid*, pp. 142, 149]

The troops in the area did put their best foot forward and, with the help of the railways, which had not suffered much damage, started the evacuation of



survivors by 2 June. By 17 June 32,000 persons had been evacuated to camps in the Punjab, Sind and the N.W.F.P.

The salvage work to dig up dead bodies and property from the ruins, however, was not taken in hand till September and was only completed on 21 March 1936. During this operation a total of 12,607 houses were salvaged and over 8,000 dead bodies were exhumed. [*India in 1934-35*, pp. 102-3]

10

Gandhiji, having withdrawn from the Congress and its day-to-day political activities, generally avoided involvement with concerns that occupied political leaders. He gave all his energies to work at grass-roots level being carried on under the aegis of organizations like the All-India Village Industries Association, the All-India Spinners' Association and the Harijan Sevak Sangh. He was more than ever convinced that it was only through organizing and consolidating work at the village level to bring about the economic, physical and moral betterment of the villagers and thus building up sanctions that the country could extricate itself from the morass in which it appeared to be plunged. The situation in every way appeared gloomy, but Gandhiji had hope. He wrote to a correspondent on 3 January 1935:

We have very difficult times here in every way. But I don't lose hope. I know that winter must be followed by summer. [C.W.M.G., LX, p. 51]

He constantly asked workers to give up doubt, depression and despair and engage themselves in the work of the service in villages. Speaking at a prayer meeting he said:

Swaraj does not depend on jail-going. If it did, there are thousands of prisoners in jail today. It depends on everyone doing his or her own task.



That task has been shown to you. Go to the villages, identify yourselves with villagers, befriend the untouchables, make Hindu-Muslim unity a concrete fact. Do not despair although there may be Hindu-Muslim riots in the country, but go ahead with the work before you and be sure that He will pull you through. [C.W.M.G., LXI, p. 89]

As the work of the Village Industries Association gathered sweep, problems came up. One important problem thrown up was how to keep village-made articles competitively as cheap as possible and at the same time ensure a decent wage to the workers. A tendency had grown among the Agents to keep the production costs low by paying the artisans engaged in production as low a wage as possible. Gandhiji deprecated this. Associations such as the A.I.S.A. and A.I.V.I.A., he said, could not follow the commercial maxim of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. Poor village artisans had been exploited far too long. Philanthropy must not become a cloak for exploitation. If the articles produced could not be sold at competitive prices, the buying public must be instructed about the abject condition of the people. Gandhiji rejected the philosophy of free trade and the utilitarian principle of the largest good of the largest number. He wrote:

Not killing competition but life-giving cooperation is the law of the human beings. Ignoring the law is to forget that man has feelings. Not the good of the few, not even the good of the many, but it is the good of all that we are made to promote, if we are 'made in His own image'. [*Ibid*, p. 250]

While there could be no uniformity between the wages of weavers on the one hand and ginners, carders and spinners on the other, the former being too few and the latter too many and the disparity between the earnings of the two classes being too great, it was still important that the wages of spinners be raised



from the prevailing two pies per hour to 12 pies per hour, thus ensuring that they got eight annas for eight hours of work. [*Ibid*, p. 251]

Lest the raising of spinners' wages result in the production of more yarn than could be utilized, Gandhiji suggested removing from the list of spinners those who did not need the support of spinning for their food. There were thousands, said Gandhiji, who spun to gain a few pice for buying tobacco, bangles or the like. They could be told to abstain from competition with those who needed a few coppers to buy food. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 12]

The Council of the All-India Spinners' Association, meeting at Wardha between 11 and 13 October 1935, considered Gandhiji's proposal and duly passed a resolution that a standard of minimum wage for the spinners be fixed, based on eight hours of work, sufficient to procure 20 yards of cloth per year and maintenance of a minimum scale of food requirements. It was also decided that producers should restrict their operations to those spinners who depended on spinning for their requirement of food. [*Ibid*, pp. 471-72]

11

The propagation of Hindi or Hindustani, especially in the South and in Bengal, which Gandhiji had adopted as a mission in the very early years after his return to India from South Africa, also claimed Gandhiji's attention during this period. In a speech at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan held at Indore on 20 April 1935, Gandhiji gave figures about the progress of work relating to Hindi propagation in the South, achieved since 1918, when the work had first been taken up. He said:

Six lakh South Indians endeavoured to learn Hindi, 42,000 sat for various Hindi examinations, Hindi was taught in 3,200 places, 600 teachers were trained, and today this work is being carried on in 450 places. The Snataka examination was started in 1931 and today there are 300 Snatakas.



Seventy Hindi books were published and in Madras 8 lakh copies of them were printed. Seventeen years ago Hindi was not taught even in a single high school in the South, but today it is taught in 70 high schools. [C.W.M.G., LX, pp. 444-45]

Workers engaged in the propagation of Hindi had to face a certain amount of opposition too. Fears were expressed that Hindi might replace regional languages. Some others thought that it might replace English. Gandhiji tried to allay apprehensions on both counts. He said:

I have always maintained that we do not wish under any circumstances to do away with the regional languages. All we want is that for maintaining inter-provincial relations we must all learn Hindi.

As for English, it was also needed "for the study of science and of modern literature, for contact with the rest of the world, for trade and commerce, for keeping in touch with officials and for various other things. . . . English is an international language." [*Ibid*, pp. 447-48]

12

In July 1935 Fascist Italy invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). Public opinion everywhere was outraged. Gandhiji at first refused to make any public comment on the question on the ground that a verbal expression of opinion would be valueless unless he was able to follow it up with action. [C.W.M.G., LXI, p. 302]

Later, in an article, explaining the implications of "that matchless force" *ahimsa*, he answered the question what ill-armed Abyssinia could do against well-armed Italy. He wrote:

If Abyssinia were non-violent, she would have no arms, would want none. She would make no appeal to the League [of Nations] or any other



power for armed intervention. She would never give any cause for complaint. And Italy would find nothing to conquer if Abyssinians would not offer armed resistance, nor would they give cooperation, willing or forced. Italian occupation in that case would mean that of the land without its people. That, however, is not Italy's exact object. She seeks submission of the people of the beautiful land. . . .

England, which had strongly opposed Italy's aggression against Abyssinia could also, in Gandhiji's view, play her part in defusing the crisis. In the same article he continued:

If Englishmen were as a nation to become non-violent at heart, they would shed imperialism, they would give up the use of arms. The moral force generated by such act of renunciation would stagger Italy into willing surrender of her designs. . . . The effect of such conversion would mean the greatest miracle of all ages. And yet if non-violence is not an idle dream some such thing has some day to come to pass somewhere. I live in that faith. [C.W.M.G., LXII, pp. 28-29]

This non-violent approach to resistance to aggression Gandhiji gradually developed into a principle as time went on. Later, during the Second World War, he was to recommend it to England and to Czechoslovakia. He had come firmly to hold the view that conflict could not be overcome by conflict, that wars could be averted or stopped only by the application of moral force, the force of non-violence.



CHAPTER XV: THE TUSSLE FOR THE SOULS OF HARIJANS

1

The Government of India Bill was passed by both houses of British Parliament in July and, having received Royal assent on 4 August, became the Government of India Act, 1935. The Act represented the culmination of a process that had begun some eight years earlier in 1927 with the appointment of the Simon Commission. During this long period of gestation it had passed through a series of stages: the Report of the Simon Commission, the three Round Table Conferences, the White Paper, and finally the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee. While the Act had been on the anvil there had been several changes of Government in England: the Conservative Government of Stanley Baldwin had been replaced by the Labour Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald, which in turn was supplanted by a so called National but in fact Conservative dominated Government under Ramsay MacDonald, which again had given way to a Conservative Government under Baldwin. There were as many changes among the incumbents heading the India Office. The exercise was started under Birkenhead, continued under Wedgwood Benn and was completed under Samuel Hoare, who successively served as Secretaries of State under the three Governments.

A great deal of British statecraft, political dexterity and draftsmanship had gone into the making of the Act and the mood among the members of the ruling party, after the deed had been done, was self-congratulatory. They had answered to their own satisfaction the question: how to seem to be parting with power without actually doing so, how to let go the shadow while retaining the substance. Baldwin, praising the Reformed Constitution said:



It is my considered judgment in all the changes and chances of this wide world today that you have a good chance of keeping the whole of that subcontinent of India in the Empire for ever. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 209]

The Act, which incorporated the recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, provided two constitutions, one for the Provinces and another for the Centre. The Provincial part set up autonomous, self-governing Provinces. This was an advance on the position of the Provinces in the earlier constitution inasmuch as they were now not to be treated as subordinate administrations enjoying only those powers which were devolved on them by the Centre, but as autonomous units of a Federation. Another redeeming feature was the enlargement of the electorate: from the previous 2.8 per cent to 11 per cent of the population.

The benefits that these advanced features might have brought were, however, vitiated by provisions that ensured that there would be no diminution of the autocratic powers exercised by the Governors, who remained paramount in all fields of administration and legislation, and by the enlargement of the area of communal electorates which made a mockery of popular representation.

In a number of Provinces bicameral legislatures were instituted.

So far as the Federal part of the Constitution was concerned, the scheme had been so devised as to make it impossible for the liberal and progressive elements to obtain or exercise power in the interests of the country. The Legislature would be bicameral, both Houses being dominated by the nominees of Princes, representatives of minorities and special interests and officials. As if this were not enough the Governor-General was vested with extraordinary and overriding powers in all departments of government. Ministers appointed by the



Governor-General, though required to command a majority in the Legislature, were not to be responsible to the Legislature.

A further snag was that the Federation would come into existence only if and when the Princes in sufficient numbers – representing not less than half the total population of the States – agreed to join. If this did not happen, it was laid down, the Government of India Act, 1919, would continue to be in force at the Centre, which in the end turned out to be the case. Responsible Government at the Centre remained as distant a goal as it had ever been.

The use of the phrase Dominion Status as the goal of Indian policy was carefully avoided. Willingdon, it appeared, had pleaded with the India Office for inclusion of a promise of Dominion Status in the preamble to the Constitution, but Samuel Hoare told him that with a preamble of that kind the British Parliament would never pass the Bill. Accordingly the Preamble to the Government of India Act of 1919 was retained in the new Constitution. . A British constitutional expert, A. B. Keith, later commented in a book that the preservation of the smile of the Cheshire cat, after its disappearance, had been adduced by the critics as the best parallel to this legislative monstrosity. [*Ibid*, p. 207]

2

Political parties in India, predictably, were almost unanimous in rejecting the Act. The British Government's White Paper had been bad and had been rejected. The Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, based on it, had been worse, and had been similarly rejected. The Government of India Act was found to be the worst and was even more summarily rejected.

The Indian National Congress considered the Act at its 49th annual session held in Lucknow in the middle of April 1936. Its resolution read:



Whereas the Government of India Act, 1935, which is based on the White Paper and the Joint Parliamentary Report and which is in many respects even worse than the proposals contained in them, in no way represents the will of the nation, is designed to facilitate and perpetuate the domination and exploitation of the people of India and is imposed on the country to the accompaniment of widespread repression and the suppression of civil liberties, the Congress reiterates its rejection of the new constitution in its entirety.

The Congress . . . declares that no constitution imposed by outside authority and no constitution which curtails the sovereignty of the people of India . . . can be accepted. . . . The Congress therefore reiterates and stresses the demand for a Constituent Assembly in the name of the Indian people and calls upon its representatives and members in legislatures and outside to work for the fulfilment of this demand. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. I, pp. 248-49]

Jawaharlal Nehru in his presidential address at the session denounced the Act as "even more retrograde" than the White Paper, which the Congress had rejected, "a charter of slavery to strengthen the bonds of imperialist domination and to intensify the exploitation of our masses". Even if the country had to submit for a time to that charter of slavery, said Nehru, inherent in that enforced submission was the right and the desire to rebel against it and to end it. [*Ibid*, p. 272]

The All-India Muslim League held its 24th session in Bombay on 11-12 April 1936. The Chairman of the session, Syed Wazir Hasan, referring to the Government of India Act, said:



A Constitution is literally being forced on us by the British Parliament which nobody likes, which no one approves of. After several years of Commissions, Reports, Conferences and Committees, a monstrosity has been invented and is being presented to India in the garb of this Constitution Act. It is anti-democratic, it will strengthen all the most reactionary elements in the country. . . . It will enchain and crush the forces making for democracy and freedom.

M. A. Jinnah, permanent President of the League, said the new Constitution provided for only two per cent responsibility with 98 per cent safeguards and special responsibilities of the Governor-General and even the two per cent responsibility which it promised had been hedged in by having the Legislatures composed of two Houses. Pressure must be put on the British Government to modify the Constitution, said Jinnah. How to do so was the question. Armed revolution was not possible, non-cooperation had been tried and found wanting. Only a constitutional agitation, carried on by all the parties standing shoulder to shoulder, could be effective. It was unfortunate that the safeguards asked for by the Muslims had not been found acceptable by the majority community.

The League passed the following resolution:

The All-India Muslim League enters its emphatic protest against forcing a Constitution upon the people of India, as embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935, against their will, in spite of the repeated disapproval and dissent expressed by various bodies and organizations in the country. . . .

The League is clearly of the opinion that the All-India Federal Scheme of the Central Government, embodied in the Government of India Act, is fundamentally bad. It is most reactionary, retrograde, injurious and fatal to the vital interests of British India vis-a-vis Indian States, and it is calculated



to thwart and delay indefinitely the realization of India's most cherished goal of complete Responsible Government, and is totally unacceptable. [*Ibid*, pp. 294-96]

The Sikhs were equally vehement in denouncing the Act. At the Khalsa Darbar held at Moga on 28 December 1935, Sardar Mangal Singh, referring to the Act, said:

The British Government have not considered the unanimous opinion of the whole politically-minded India. It therefore cannot be regarded as an agreed Constitution but a Constitution which has been forced upon an unwilling and helpless people.

The National Liberal Federation was equally categorical in its rejection of the Act. In a resolution dated 30 December 1935, it said:

The National Liberal Federation of India . . . regrets that in utter disregard of almost unanimous Indian opinion, the British Parliament not only did not accept a single suggestion for improvement from India's point of view but imposed the Government of India Act, 1935, on the country with further objectionable provisions added.

The Liberal Federation reiterates that no Constitution can satisfy Indian opinion which does not approximate as nearly as may be to the Constitution of the Dominions and concede to the people of India full rights of national self-government. . . .[Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 212]

Indian political parties of all hues thus showed near unanimity in rejecting the new Constitution that the Government of India Act, 1935, foisted on India.



But registering their rejection of the Act was one thing, translating that rejection into policies and programmes was quite another. Autonomous Provinces provided under the Act, it had been announced, would come into being on 1 April 1937 and elections for the Provincial legislatures were scheduled to be held before that date. Political parties and groups had willy-nilly to consider what policies and programmes they must pursue in the new scenario that would shortly unfold. While the new set-up did not enlarge the area of freedom and responsibility in any significant way, the legislatures, now representing a much large segment of population, could be used for fighting the Act, for sabotaging it; executives composed of popularly chosen ministers could give a popular orientation to policies and do something, if only to a limited degree, for the good of the people.

Then there were personal ambitions of power and privilege cherished by individuals which participation in the new scheme of things might satisfy. The coming of the Act accordingly engendered keen internal debates in all political parties on the exact policies to be pursued vis-a-vis the Act.

The Lucknow session of the Congress, held in mid-April 1936, which considered the Act, considered also the new situation that it would bring about and declared its programme in the following terms:

In view of the fact that elections for the Provincial Legislatures under the new Act may, according to official statements, take place before the next session of the Congress, this Congress resolves that in such an event candidates should be put forward on its behalf to contest such seats in accordance with the mandate of the Congress and in pursuance of its declared policy. . . .



The question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office by Congress members elected to the Legislatures under the Constitution having been agitating the country, the Congress, in view of the uncertainties of the situation as it may develop, considers it inadvisable to commit itself to any decision at this stage on the question and leaves it to be decided at the proper time by the A.I.C.C. after consulting the Provincial Congress Committees. [*The Indian Annual Register, 1936, Vol. I, p. 249*]

Thus while the Congress committed itself to contesting the elections to be held under the Act, it left the question of office-acceptance open. Other political parties, however, while expressing their complete disapproval of the Act, at the same time decided to make use of it in whatever way they could to further their interests.

The same resolution of the League which rejected the Act, thus explained the position of the League in this regard:

The League considers that having regard to the conditions prevailing in the country, the Provincial scheme of the Constitution be utilized for what it is worth, in spite of the most objectionable features contained therein, which render real control, responsibility of Ministry and Legislature over the entire field of Government and administration nugatory. [*Ibid, p. 295*]

By another resolution M. A. Jinnah was authorized to form a Parliamentary Board consisting of not less than 35 persons. This Board met in Lahore on 11 June 1936 and issued an election manifesto declaring that members of the Muslim League elected to Legislatures would work for the replacement of the Provincial Constitution and the Central Constitution provided under the Act, by a constitution ensuring full democratic self-government and in the meantime



utilize the Legislatures in order to extract the maximum benefit out of the Constitution for the uplift of the people. [*Ibid*, pp. 299-301]

The National Liberal Federation took a similar view. While it rejected the Act it said:

Nevertheless it has to be utilized to the best advantage of the people for the amelioration of their social and economic condition and accelerating the pace of further constitutional advance to Dominion Status. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, p. 246]

4

The Congress and other political parties in the country thus having committed themselves to contest the Provincial elections, the scene became warm with manipulative activities on the part of leaders of different communities and sections to secure for their own community as large representation as possible. The vote being now no longer confined to the most affluent as formerly, but also including in its ambit the less affluent sections of the population, greedy eyes began to be cast on the vote bank represented by the Scheduled Castes, who commanded under the Poona Pact a total of 148 reserved seats out of the general quota and could contest other seats too.

Dr. Ambedkar's call to the Depressed Classes to leave the Hindu fold and choose "any other religion which guaranteed them equal status" was taken as an invitation by Christian missionaries, Muslims and Sikhs to vie with one another for the souls of Harijans.

Gandhiji felt no resentment at the advice Dr. Ambedkar had given to his followers. He said he understood Dr. Ambedkar's position. Speaking at a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, he said:



Whatever Dr. Ambedkar does, we must bear it in all humility. Not only that, it would be service to Harijans. If he really hits us with shoes, we must bear even that. . . . If he and other Harijans who have no faith in Hinduism embrace another religion, that too would make for our expiation. We deserve such treatment. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 231]

But while Hinduism would deserve the rebuff from Dr. Ambedkar, what about the Harijans who would be subjected to mass conversion? Gandhiji wrote:

Religion is not a matter of barter. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. It does not lend itself to purchase in any shape or form. Or if such an expression can be used in connection with things of the spirit, religion can only be purchased with one's own blood. [*Ibid*, p. 280]

The missionaries did not agree. The prospect of cutting away from the body of Hinduism such a large chunk of population as the Harijans represented was too good to be passed. What did it matter if the Harijans had "no mind, no intelligence, no sense of difference between God and no- God", as Gandhiji described them? [C.W.M.G., LXIV, p. 18]

The word spread that Dr. Ambedkar could hand over 50 million people to those who were prepared to accept them. At a meeting of various Christian denominations in London held early in October 1936, an American missionary, J. W Pickett, declared that no less than "four and a half millions of the Depressed Classes in India have become the disciples of our Lord, and the witness they bear to Him in their lives is making the multitudes in India marvel". He quoted an example in the Telugu area, where 900,000 people had come to profess the Christian faith.



The Church Missionary Society of England appealed for an emergency grant of £ 25,000 to finance proselytization activities in India. It declared that in the preceding five years "no less than 30,000 caste people from fifty-one different castes have become Christians".

The Society referred to the "great conference of outcaste people who have decided to break away from Hinduism" and to mass movements towards Christianity and the development of young churches particularly in the Dornakal and Travancore Dioceses comprising no less than 300 villages, and expressed the view that there had been important repercussions all over India from the conferences of untouchables. Ezhawas of Travancore, numbering over 8,50,000, had expressed a desire to become Christians.

Gandhiji was distressed at the lies – he called them exaggerations – being so glibly spread by the missionaries. A reader ignorant of conditions in India might conclude, he wrote, that the figures related to the conversions due to the movement led by Dr. Ambedkar, whereas they related to the conversions to date commencing from the establishment of the first church in India hundreds of years earlier. And where were "the multitudes in India" who marvelled at the transformation in the lives of the four and a half millions of the Depressed Classes? Gandhiji said he had addressed meetings of Indian Christians and they had appeared to him no better than their fellows. "Indeed," he wrote, "the taint of untouchability persists in spite of the nominal change of faith so far as the social status is concerned." [*ibid*, pp. 149-51, 176-78]

Gandhiji deplored the large amounts of money being spent by Christian missions to secure conversion of Harijans and holding out to the latter the hope of real freedom and equality of social status. He wrote:



For Harijans there is no social equality, no real freedom anywhere except when it is first obtained in Hinduism. I am not thinking of individuals, I am thinking of the whole mass. The latter are so intertwined with the other Hindus that unless they become brothers with them instead of remaining serfs which they are, no change of label can avail anything. [*Ibid*, pp. 46-47]

Gandhiji was certain that if the Missionaries succeeded in their activities of converting Harijans to Christianity on a large scale, the results for the country would be disastrous. Talking to some representatives of Christian mass movements he said:

If there is an appreciable increase, there would be blood feuds between the Harijans themselves, more savage than the feuds we have in Bombay. Fifty per cent of the residents in Segaoon are Harijans. Supposing you stole away 10 Harijans and built a church for them, you would set up father against son, and son against father, and you would find texts in the Bible to support your action. [*Ibid*, p. 99]

Christian missionaries of various descriptions kept calling on Gandhiji to persuade him of the rightness of their cause. Surely, they argued, in the course of the work of service they did among the poor, it was their duty also to preach the Gospel. Christianity was a religion of sharing, and how could they share without supplementing their lives with words? "Preach and teach", they quoted Jesus as commanding them, for "Faith cometh by hearing".

C. F. Andrews expressed the view that though proselytization was not to be countenanced, it would be wrong to stand in the way of a person who, after considerable thought and prayer, said that he could not have his peace and salvation except by becoming a Christian.



Gandhiji did not agree. If a Hindu went to a Christian missionary seeking conversion, the latter should, he said, ask the Hindu to become a good Hindu rather than find goodness in change of faith. He told Andrews:

Supposing a Christian came to me and said he was captivated by a reading of the *Bhagavata* and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu, I should say to him: 'No. What the *Bhagavata* offers, the Bible also offers. You have not yet made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.' [*Ibid*, pp. 18-20]

There was no need, Gandhiji said again and again, of articulate expression for communicating religious experience. He told a questioner:

I take the simile of the rose I used years ago. The rose does not need to write a book or deliver a sermon on the scent it sheds all around, nor on its beauty which everyone who has eyes can see. Well, spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose, and I make bold to say that the moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surroundings will readily respond. . . . When there is no medium between me and my Lord and I simply become a willing vessel for His influences to flow into it, then I overflow as the water of the Ganges at its source. There is no desire to speak when one lives the truth. [*Ibid*, pp. 100-101]

Seek the certainties that elude you in your own faith, in the faith of your forefathers, and leave others to do the same, was Gandhiji's position in the matter of conversion. All religions were different paths in the ever continuing quest of mankind for spiritual truth and each represented the only valid path for its followers. And all religions being human, none could lay exclusive claim to truth.



The race for the souls of the Pulayas and Ezhavas and other sections of downtrodden Harijans of course continued.

5

Muslims were not behindhand in the attempts to draw Harijans into the Islamic fold. Pamphlets were printed and circulated, cursing and vilifying Hinduism. Everything held sacred by Hindus was caricatured so as to excite disgust towards Hinduism and *savarna* Hindus. Gandhiji summarized the contents of one such pamphlet which described the conversion of a Harijan boy. According to the pamphlet:

The new convert drinks from the same cup as the Moulvi and the remains of the water are drunk by the company. He is treated to a feast at a Munshi's palatial house. The feast fills the dining-hall with fragrance. "Every morsel was nectar, every portion was the water of life."

Gandhiji found it tragic to see that religion was dragged down to the low level of crude materialism to lure people into which the most cherished sentiments of millions of human beings were trodden underfoot. [C.W.M.G., LXIII, pp. 209-10]

An event from which the Moulvis sought to draw the maximum mileage was the embracing of Islam by Harilal Gandhi in May 1936. Harilal, Gandhiji's eldest son, had been passing through a particularly lean period of his life for some months. Indeed early in the year he had put everybody on notice that unless he was provided with a job he would embrace Islam or Christianity. A Nagpur lawyer, P. M. Naidu, had come to his help and secured him a job in the local Municipality. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 221]



But Muslim zealots had kept at him, dangling before him all kinds of allurements as a reward for his embracing Islam. He had succumbed. On 29 May in the midst of a large congregation at the Jumma Masjid in Bombay, Harilal announced his conversion. The speech he made was received with great acclamation and everybody wanted to shake hands with him and congratulate him. A brotherhood of Islam telegraphed to Gandhiji to follow the example of his son and become a Muslim.

Gandhiji was deeply hurt – not so much by Harilal's apostasy, which was "no loss to Hinduism", as by the enthusiasm being shown by some sections of Mussalmans over the event. As for Harilal, he said in a statement:

Everyone who knows my son Harilal, knows that he has been for years addicted to the drink evil and has been in the habit of visiting houses of ill fame. For some years he has been living on the charity of friends who have helped him unstintingly. He is indebted to some Pathans from whom he had borrowed on heavy interest. Up to only recently he was in dread of his life from his Pathan creditors in Bombay. Now he is the hero of the hour. . . .

Nothing will please me better than to find that . . . he had repented of the past and had suddenly become a changed man having shed the drink habit and sexual lust.

Gandhiji appealed to the Muslims to examine Harilal's conversion in the light of his past life and if they found that his conversion was a soulless matter, to disown him. Excessive indulgence, he said, had softened Harilal's brain and undermined his sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. [C.W.M.G., LXIII, pp. 5-7]



Muslim propagandists made full use of Harilal to vilify Hinduism. He was "perpetually in a drunken stupor" and his speeches were "unrestrained". When Ramdas Gandhi protested to him against the language of his speech at Rander he answered that it was their – the Muslims' – way of propaganda. [*Ibid*, p. 170]

Harilal's honeymoon with Islam was short-lived. In a few months the supply of money had dried up, leaving him to his own resources. Harilal got tired of the whole thing. On 10 November he announced that he was seriously thinking of becoming a Hindu again. [C.W.M.G., LXIV, p. 23]

Gandhiji was not impressed. As long as Harilal has not freed himself of his addiction," said he, "his conversion and reconversion can have no value." [*Ibid*, p. 23]

Before the end of the month Harilal was back in the fold of Hinduism – this time as a follower of the Arya Samaj.

6

The tussle for the souls of Harijans between the Christians and Muslims brought the Sikhs too into the field. They sent feelers to Dr. Ambedkar. On the initiative of some Bombay Hindus, among them Jugal Kishore Birla, Dr. B. S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha paid a visit to Bombay in June and had prolonged parleys with Ambedkar on the subject of mass conversion of the Depressed Classes to Sikhism. Moonje and Ambedkar agreed that from the point of view of Hinduism it would be desirable that the Depressed Classes should be converted to Sikhism rather than to Islam or Christianity. In a statement which in print must sound rather sordid and cynical, Ambedkar said:

Islam seems to give the Depressed Classes all that they need. Financially the resources behind Islam are boundless. Socially the



Mohammedans are spread all over India. . . . Politically the Depressed Classes will get all the rights which Mohammedans are entitled to. . . .

Christianity seems equally attractive. . . . Christian countries such as America and England will pour their immense resources if the Depressed Classes show their readiness to embrace Christianity. . . . Christianity has Government behind it. Politically Christianity will give them the same rights which Islam gives. Like the Muslims, Indian Christians are also recognized by the Constitution for special representation in the Legislatures and in the services. . . . Sikhism has few attractions. . . . Socially they cannot be much help to the Depressed Classes. They are confined to the Punjab. . . . Outside the Punjab, Sikhs are not recognized for special representation in the Legislatures and in the services.

. . . purely from the standpoint of the Hindus . . . Sikhism is the best. If the Depressed Classes join Islam or Christianity, they not only go out of the Hindu religion, but they also go out of the Hindu culture . . . if they become Sikhs, they remain within the Hindu culture. . . .

Dr. Ambedkar was quite aware of the larger consequences for the country of the Depressed Classes embracing either Islam or Christianity. By their going over to Islam, he pointed out, the number of Muslims would be doubled and the danger of Muslim domination would become real. If they went over to Christianity, the Christian population would go up to five or six crores and the British hold on the country would be strengthened. These dangers would be avoided if the untouchables were to embrace Sikhism. But for this Dr. Ambedkar wanted a *quid pro quo*. He wanted the advantages of the Poona Pact to be retained for the converts and he wanted the neo-Sikhs to be included in the lists of Scheduled Castes in the provinces other than the Punjab, who would be free



to contest with other Depressed Class candidates seats reserved for the Depressed Classes under the Poona Pact.

Dr. Moonje agreed and the following formula was put down on paper:

If Dr. Ambedkar were to announce his decision that he and his followers are prepared to embrace Sikhism in preference to Islam and Christianity and that he shall honestly and sincerely cooperate with the Hindus and the Sikhs in propagating their culture and in counteracting the Muslim movement for drawing the Depressed Classes into the Muslim fold, the Hindu Mahasabha will be prepared, in view of their having agreed to remain within the Hindu culture, to make an announcement that it will not object:

- (i) To the conversion of the Depressed Classes to Sikhism;
- (ii) To the inclusion of the neo-Sikhs in the list of the Scheduled Castes; and
- (iii) To the enjoyment by the Depressed Classes of the political rights of the Poona Pact by free competition between the non-Sikh and the neo-Sikh Depressed Classes as provided for under the Poona Pact.

Dr. Moonje on 30 June 1936 forwarded this formula to M. C. Rajah, another Depressed Class leader, for his approval. Rajah, in a sharply worded rebuke, told Moonje that he would have understood his concern if, as President of the Hindu Mahasabha, he had placed the spiritual interest of the Depressed Classes first. What he had suggested instead, was communal migration, conceived not in the interests of the Depressed Classes but to further the communal interests of Hindus and Sikhs. "We are not sheep and cattle to be bartered away in this fashion," he wrote. He further pointed out that if the Depressed Classes converted themselves to Sikhism, the Sikh-Hindu-Muslim problem would become



even more complicated than it already was, not only in the Punjab but throughout the country. He urged the Hindu Mahasabha to address itself to the task of making it easy for the Depressed Classes to stay within the Hindu fold. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, pp. 276-79]

Gandhiji was categorical in denouncing the Moonje-Ambedkar pact. Writing in the *Harijan* of 22 August 1936 he declared:

It must mean fratricide. Harijans themselves will be cut up into two rival sections and . . . their state then will be worse than it is today. . . . It is futile to argue that although there will be a nominal change of religion, there won't be a real one. . . . If in his anger or impatience Dr. Ambedkar refuses to see the obvious result, surely Dr. Moonje ought to.

And who are we, the self-constituted leaders, to barter away the religious freedom of Harijans? Has not every Harijan, however stupid or dull he may be, the right to make his own choice? [C.W.M.G., LXIII, p. 234]

Again, writing to Jugal Kishore Birla on 7 September, Gandhiji said:

Today I will only say that to me Sikhism is part of Hinduism. But the situation is different from the legal point of view. . . . If becoming a Sikh amounts to conversion, then this kind of conversion on the part of Harijans is dangerous. And that too with a stroke of the pen and without the Harijans being consulted. [*Ibid*, p. 267]

Some took exception to the views expressed by Gandhiji, saying it amounted to much ado about nothing. After all, they asserted, Sikhs to all intents and purposes were Hindus and so the conversion of Harijans to Sikhism would be no conversion.

Gandhiji said what mattered was what the Sikhs thought of themselves, not what others thought of them. Sikhs had a separate electorate. Dr. Ambedkar did not regard them as Hindus. He wanted a change of faith. If Sikhs were a sect of



Hinduism, no change in the Yeravda Pact would be necessary. No one who believed in religion as a sacrament could be party to the proposal put forward by Ambedkar and Moonje. [*Ibid*, p. 294]

7

While Harijans were thus being subjected to pulls from many sides and many quarters inimical to Hinduism and by implication inimical to the unity of the country which had Hinduism as the dominant faith, there were positive developments as regards the interaction between the Harijans and caste Hindus. There was also a manifestation of Harijans' interest in temple-entry.

In the U.P. early in January several *panchayats* of Balmiki sweepers, Bhagat Raidas and Chamars decided that satyagraha should be offered at all the temples of the Province which did not admit Harijans.

On 23 January 1936 the All-India Sanatan Dharma Conference, held at the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, unanimously decided that Harijans, being the followers of Sanatan Dharma, were entitled to enjoy all the privileges enjoyed by the other Sanatanists, including that of "Devadarshan". This last had earlier been denied to the Harijans. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. I, pp. 3, 5]

In the South, the citadel of orthodoxy, too, while the demand for temple-entry on the part of Harijans had been growing more strident with each passing day, the resistance to the demand on the part of caste Hindus was weakening in proportion. Writing in the *Harijan* of 28 March 1936, Gandhiji referred to the situation in Travancore:

They [the Harijans of Travancore] naturally chafe under any restriction on their liberty but most of all on the entry into temples. One hears that the large body of *savarnas* there are wholly in favour of removal of the bar. . . .



But Harijan sevaks should by an accurate referendum or some such means show beyond all doubt that a great majority of *savarna* Hindus are decidedly in favour of the opening of Travancore temples to Harijans precisely on the same terms as themselves. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 295]

Before the end of the year access to temples controlled by the Government in Travancore had been granted to Harijans. A proclamation issued by the Maharaja on 13 November 1936 said:

Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, . . . solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth, caste or community, be denied the consolation and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by us and our Government.

Gandhiji, welcoming the proclamation, said it had been made possible by the persistent efforts of the Travancore branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, headed by K. Parameswaran Pillai, to awaken the *savarna* Hindu conscience. The proclamation had assumed importance in view of the large amounts of money being spent by Christian missions in Travancore to lure away the Harijans. [C.W.M.G., LXIV, pp. 45-46]

Gandhiji called upon the workers not to rest as long as all the temples had not been thrown open to Harijans, "hypocrisy, wickedness and filth" had not been banished from all the temples and untouchability had not been eradicated from the very marrow of Hinduism. [*Ibid*, pp. 91-92]



There had been misgivings in the beginning that the rules and regulations for temple-entry to be framed under the proclamation might cramp the effect of the reform. But such misgivings proved groundless. The Travancore Harijan Sevak Sangh early in December reported that the actual working of the proclamation had been most successful, that excepting the innermost chamber, which had always been used only by the officiating priest, all other places, including *mandaps*, enclosed platforms, corridors, etc., were now as accessible to Harijan devotees as to caste Hindus. Harijans freely mixed and worshipped with caste Hindus and no special hours had been set apart for worship by them. There had been no display of hostility on the part of the *savarnas*.

Gandhiji expressed gratification that his misgivings had been dispelled and the actuality of the working of the "great and sweeping reform" had surpassed all expectations. Where only a few years earlier at Vaikom caste Hindus had threatened violence against the Harijans if they so much as crossed certain roads leading to the temple, now that very temple had been opened to the Harijans on absolutely the same terms as to any caste Hindu. The *Shankara Smriti*, by which the orthodox earlier swore, had given place to the *Maharaja Smriti*. [*Ibid*, pp. 125-26]

While all this represented a welcome development, with far-reaching consequences so far as the eradication of untouchability was concerned, the reform was left incomplete, in that the temples run by private trusts, including the famous temple of Guruvayur, which had earlier been the cause of a satyagraha led by Kelappan and over which Gandhiji had come very near to undertaking a fast, still remained closed to Harijans. But what had been accomplished in Travancore filled Gandhiji with hope. He wrote:



The opening of temples in Travancore must lead to their opening in the sister State Cochin and must also lead to the opening of the sister temple of Guruvayur. . . . Then come the great temples of Tamil, Telugu and Canarese India. Kashi Vishwanath, Dwarika and Puri temples in the North, West and East still remain closed to the Harijans. [*Ibid*, pp. 83-84]

In the sister State of Cochin there was, indeed, still resistance to the temples being opened to the Harijans in terms of the Travancore proclamation. In respect of the famous temple of Koodalmanikkam at Irinjalakuda, the Maharaja of Cochin issued an order on 15 April 1937, declaring that the temple had been polluted because a *tantri* (priest) who had officiated at a Travancore temple which had been open to the *avarnas* had officiated at the Koodalmanikkam temple and that purificatory ceremony in the temple was necessary. The offerings of the Maharaja had also been ordered to be withdrawn until further orders. [C.W.M.G., LXV, pp. 464-67]

The order was reprehensible on two counts. First, it arrogated to the Maharaja spiritual authority that did not belong to him. For the highest spiritual authority in regard to the temple had been vested in a functionary designated the Thachudaya Kaimal, to such an extent that he was regarded as the visible representative of the presiding deity of the temple, and even the Maharaja had to touch the pole of his palanquin when he was carried round the temple. This functionary was appointed by the Maharaja of Travancore. In issuing the order that he did, the Cochin Maharaja had thus placed himself in a situation of conflict with the Travancore Maharaja.

Secondly, the order in effect sought to regulate the private conduct of visitors to the Cochin temples. For in no temples not open to the Harijans were



trustees of the temples authorized to scrutinize the actions of *savarna* Hindus who visited temples as a matter of right. Gandhiji wrote:

In this crisis the duty of the public seems to me to be clear. Meetings should be held all over the country condemning the Cochin orders and asking for their withdrawal. The most orthodox Hindus can surely join such protest meetings even though they may not be in favour of throwing open all temples to Harijans I am inclined to think that the Travancore Durbar may well invite the opinion of pundits on the single question of the religious propriety of the Cochin order and undertake to abide by their opinion.

The Cochin order, Gandhiji said, could not be justified even on moral grounds. Professor Ramunni Menon had a few years earlier been ostracized by the Cochin Government and prohibited from entering temples because he had been polluted by his having undertaken a sea voyage. But when the son of the Maharaja of Cochin returned from England this rule was abrogated and admission to temples was given to all men returning from England. [*Ibid*, pp. 177-79]

8

In the wake of the Temple-Entry Proclamation Gandhiji paid a visit to Travancore at the invitation of the local Harijan Sevak Sangh workers early in 1937. He was in the State for nine days from 12 to 21 January. In the course of his stay he paid visits to and addressed public meetings at Trivandrum, Neyattinkarai, Venganoor, Tecklai, Thiruvattar, Nagercoil, Cape Comorin, Varakalla, Paripalli, Quilon, Thatharampalli, Haripad, Sherthalai, Vaikom, Etamanoor, Kumaranelloor, Thiruvappu, Kottayam, Changanacheri, Thiruvalla, Chenganoor, Aranmula, Elanthoor, Pandalam and Kottarakarai.



Immediately on his arrival at Trivandrum on 12 January Gandhiji told the vast crowd assembled at the station to receive him that this time he was visiting the State "as a humble pilgrim" to tender his congratulations to the Maharaja, his mother the Maharani and the Dewan, C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. He had so long kept himself away from the temples, Gandhiji said, since they had been barred to the Harijans, but since that disability had been removed by the Proclamation, he would take the opportunity to enter the beautiful Padmanabha temple.

At the meeting of the Ezhava Temple-Entry Proclamation Celebration Committee, Gandhiji told the audience that the Maharaja had given them a *Smriti* and now it was for them to make a success of its working. He had visited the great Padmanabha temple, Gandhiji said, and from the way the worship had been conducted by the priest he realized that "these temples were so many bridges between the Unseen, Invisible and Indefinable God and ourselves who are infinitesimal drops in the Infinite Ocean".

Coming to idol worship, which was the basis of temple rituals, Gandhiji said:

We are of the earth, very earthy, and we are not satisfied with contemplating the Invisible God. Somehow or other we want something . . . before which we can kneel down. It does not matter whether it is a book, or an empty stone building, or a stone building inhabited by numerous figures. A book will satisfy some, an empty building will satisfy some others, and many others will not be satisfied unless they see something inhabiting these empty buildings. . . . If you will approach these temples with faith in them, you will know each time you visit them you will come away from them purified. . . . [C.W.M.G., LXIV, pp. 233-39]

At Nagercoil, where no less than 50,000 people had assembled at a public meeting to see and hear Gandhiji, he was presented with addresses by a



number of organizations: the Municipal Council, the Hindi Prachar Sabha, the Hindi Prem Sabha and Nanjinad Sambar Sangam. Gandhiji expressed his astonishment at receiving separate addresses from the two organizations devoted to Hindi propaganda. He told the audience that ever since his arrival in Travancore he had been visiting temples, which had been forbidden to him before out of his own choice. Temples had played a great part in the growth of Hinduism. Did God reside in the temples? They must search and find out.

On 15 January Gandhiji visited the famous temple of Kanya Kumari at the Cape, accompanied by a large party of Harijans. It was, he wrote, "a dream realized in a manner and in a place where the realization seemed almost unthinkable before it was realized elsewhere". It was a miracle. With a stroke of the pen untouchability had been abolished in Travancore. But both *savarnas* and *avarnas* would have to work together to consolidate the gain. They must take the message of freedom to every hut. [*Ibid*, pp. 245-48]

At the large public meeting at Quilon on 16th January Gandhiji told the audience of the joy he felt when at the temples he visited he saw beaming faces of tens of thousands of Harijan men and women mingling with the *savarnas* without the slightest distinction.

What was Hinduism? How was it that it had contributed so many philosophers to the world? The essence of Islam was contained in the *Kalema*, the essence of Christianity was contained in 3.16 *St. John*. Did Hinduism have a mantra that expressed its essence? – Gandhiji asked. For him, he said, he had discovered it in the first verse of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*. This runs:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यांजगत्
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्



The verse said that all that is to be seen in this great universe is pervaded by God; enjoy what He gives you and do not covet anybody's wealth or possessions. All the other mantras of that *Upanishad*, Gandhiji said, were a commentary on that one *mantra*, as was the *Bhagavad Gita*. He suggested to the audience to imbibe the teaching of the *mantra* and carry it in Malayalam to every home in Travancore. [*Ibid*, pp. 257-60]

In all his subsequent speeches in Travancore Gandhiji dilated on the *Ishavasya* verse. At Haripad on 17 January he said the whole of Hinduism could be summed up in that one verse, that even if all the other Hindu scriptures were to be reduced to ashes and to go out of the memory of men, the destruction would be no loss if that one verse of *Ishavasya Upanishad* remained. The *Upanishad*, he said, enjoyed the reputation of being part of the Veda. He went so far as to declare that "the whole of the philosophy or religion found in any part of the world" was contained in that one *mantra*.

At Sherthalai and Vaikom on 18 January, Gandhiji's theme was again the *Ishavasya* verse. He interpreted the verse to mean that it called for renunciation and dedication on the part of all. The Travancore Proclamation, he said, was in keeping with the teaching of that verse. [*Ibid*, pp. 270-79]

Speaking at Kottayam, a stronghold of Christians, on 19 January, Gandhiji expressed his distress at the way people belonging to different faiths had been trying to detach the untouchables from the faith to which they had belonged for centuries. Hinduism, he said, was not a body of bad usages and superstitions, as it had been made out to be. He again dwelt on the message of the first verse of *Ishavasya* and said it was enough to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being – whether they had reference to this world or the next. There was nothing in the scriptures of the world which could add anything to that *mantra*. [*Ibid*, pp. 287-91]



At the meetings at Chenganoor and Aranmula on 20 January and at Kottarakara on 21 January Gandhiji again underlined the importance of the *Ishavasya* teaching: Renounce and enjoy, for everything in this universe is pervaded by the Lord. As per the teaching of the verse the essence of Hinduism lay in renunciation of everything, including one's body, for everything belonged only to God, nothing to men. [*Ibid*, pp. 293-306]

Throughout the nine-day tour of the State, Gandhiji's mood remained one of unalloyed joy. It had been a pilgrimage, he said, in the strictest religious sense: visiting temples that he had refrained from visiting earlier from choice. Thousands, *savarnas* and *avarnas* alike, accompanied him to the temples, thousands of others lined the routes leading to them, all observing exemplary silence. Gandhiji was moved to his innermost depths and expressed the feeling in his speeches.

9

In March 1930, at the commencement of the Salt Satyagraha Gandhiji had left the Ashram at Sabarmati, vowing not to return there until India had secured independence. A little over three years later, on 31 July 1933, he had formally wound up the Ashram and made the inmates vacate the premises. Ever since that day, for almost three years Gandhiji had been without a home, though off and on he went for extended stays to the Ashram at Wardha, founded and funded by Jamnalal Bajaj. But Gandhiji constantly longed to settle down for good in a village and carry on his work of village uplift in village surroundings. After his retirement from the Congress in October 1934 and the setting up of the Village Industries Association, the longing became overpowering.

In 1935, while staying at Maganwadi in Wardha with Gandhiji, Mira behn used to go out for early morning walks which led her to a small village near



Wardha called Sindi. She found the people of the village answering calls of nature on public roads in the immediate vicinity of the village. She reported the fact to Gandhiji, who asked her to go there every day and clean up the roads. But the inhabitants of the village would not cooperate, and the problem remained unsolved. One day, in October 1935, Gandhiji suddenly announced that he would himself go and live in Sindi all alone. But Gandhiji's health was not good and everyone was aghast at the idea of his staying alone in Sindi. Mira behn offered to go and live in Sindi instead and Gandhiji agreed. After going to the place Mira behn found that Sindi was no village, being almost a suburb of Wardha, and that the experiments with regard to village work could not be carried on there. She therefore suggested that as soon as someone could be found to take her place in Sindi, she should go to a real village. On Gandhiji agreeing, she went and settled in Segaon. But staying away from Gandhiji shattered Mira behn's nerves. When Gandhiji came to know of the fact, he told her that if she could not live in Segaon he himself would go there. This was in early February 1936. Mira behn then built a cottage for herself a mile away from Segaon on a ridge above a village called Varoda. [*Bapu's Letters to Mira*, pp. 273, 277]

Maganwadi was the headquarters of the All-India Village Industries Association, which Jamnalal Bajaj had given to Gandhiji for the purpose. J. C. Kumarappa was developing various village industries from there. The constructed portion of Maganwadi had been placed at Gandhiji's disposal. As elsewhere, here, too, a number of people came to live with Gandhiji and the place was becoming overcrowded. So Gandhiji decided to shift to Segaon on 30 April 1936. Jamnalal Bajaj took up the construction of a hut for Gandhiji on a piece of land in the village which he had donated for his use, Segaon being part of Jamnalal's *malguzari*. The hut was not ready on 30 April, when Gandhiji felt he must not delay his shifting



to Segaon. So he went, walking all the way from Maganwadi to Segaon. He sat under a guava tree near a well. A sheet was spread over the tree to keep out the sun. In those days there was no road to Segaon and wild animals frequented the village at night. So a trench was dug round the spot where Gandhiji and his small party were to sleep. Work on the hut was speeded up.

Speaking to the villagers Gandhiji told them that though he had made the removal of untouchability his life's mission and made no distinction between Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, or Rajput, Mahar or Chamar, he had no intention of forcing his views on them. He would only use persuasion, and he would serve them. He said:

I shall try to serve you by cleaning your roads and your surroundings, by trying to render such help as I can if there is illness in the village, by teaching you self-help by way of helping you to revive your handicrafts. If you will cooperate with me I shall be happy, if you will not, I shall be content to be absorbed among you as one among the few hundred that live here. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 332]

B. R. Ambedkar and Walchand Hirachand, who were scheduled to meet Gandhiji on 1 May, had to journey to Segaon to keep the engagement. Here they carried on their talks with Gandhiji in the shade of a tree. [*Bapu's Letters to Mira*, p. 284]

On 4 May Gandhiji had to move out again to keep certain engagements that had been fixed earlier and to have a short rest in the Nandi Hills, on which Vallabhbhai had insisted. Gandhiji had earlier suffered from a very mild stroke from which he had completely recovered. He suffered from hypertension and the doctors wanted him to take rest at Nandi Hills. He was able to return to Segaon finally on 16 June, by which time his hut was ready.



Segaon was a typical Indian village, "with no post office, no store for foodstuffs of quality, no medical comforts and difficult of access in the rainy season". To reach the place from Wardha one had to make one's way through bramble and bush and wade through slush and mire. It had a population then of around 600, a majority of them being Harijans. Three-fourths of the village land was owned by Jamnalal Bajaj, and he authorized Gandhiji to spend for the benefit of the villagers whatever income the property yielded.

The hut that had been put up for Gandhiji was a simple affair. Gandhiji described it in a letter:

The room is large enough, 29 x 14, with a 7' verandah running all round. In one corner of the verandah is a small kitchen and in another a bathroom for me. The walls are made of mud. The entire building is constructed with purely local materials. All around in this season our eyes rest on green fields. [C.W.M.G., LXIII, p. 142]

The hut was good enough, but Gandhiji said he had not been responsible for the planning of it and he had given it none of his art or labour. He extolled as a model the hut Mira behn had built for herself a little distance away on a hillock near another village, Varoda. He told Devadas Gandhi and Jairamdas Doulatram when they called on him in July:

It is a poem. . . . Did you study the position of her little bathroom and the inside of it? She has utilized every stone that the blasting of the underground rock in her well made available to her. The seat for the bath is all one stone fixed to the ground. Next to the bathroom in the same little hut is the latrine. No commode or wooden plank or any brickwork. Just two beautiful stones, half buried in the ground, and with two halves of kerosene



tins between the stones. . . . And now let us see the inside of the hut – all mud and split bamboo and wattle of palm branches. You note every little article in the hut and the place given to it. . . . Then see the bamboo mantelpiece . . . on which she keeps her earthen cooking utensils. Then see the little doorless windows and bamboo bookshelf and note the palms and peacocks over the windows moulded in relief by herself. Also note her little kitchen and the carding room. [*Ibid*, pp. 151-52]

Though a poem in mud and wattle, Mira behn's hut was intended to house Mira behn alone. Not so Gandhiji's hut. All the four corners and the middle of the room were soon to be occupied by a variety of men and women workers and visitors.

Of the workers, there were, to begin with, Bahvantsinha and Munnalal, who had earlier been helping Mira behn. They were soon joined by Amritlal Nanavati. Then Tukdoji Maharaj, a Maharashtrian recluse, came along to spend a month with Gandhiji. Others came for short periods. In July Kasturba Gandhi and Harilal's daughter Manu Gandhi arrived and then Lilavati Asar. On 30 July Rajkumari Amrit Kaur joined the party. Gandhiji's one room was fairly crowded. He wrote in a letter to his grandson (Harilal's son) Kanti:

You will now admit that my place has become similar to your dharmashala – one corner to me, another to Rajkumari, a third to Tukdoji Maharaj and a fourth to Munnalal. In the centre are Ba, Lilavati and Manu; and Tukdoji includes himself and his followers who stream in all day long. [*Ibid*, p. 186]

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was released from prison on 2 August 1936, and on the 4th went to see Gandhiji. He then stayed on. The sleeping arrangements accordingly had to be modified. Gandhiji informed Thakkar Bapa in a letter:



Tukdoji occupies the corner in front of me, Khan Saheb the one beside me; Munnalal by Tukdoji's side. Rajkumari's bed is between me and Tukdoji. On the wooden stand before her rests a rustic medicine box which is nothing but a used fruit case and other odds and ends. Ba, Lilavati and Manu accommodate themselves where they can. Again we have quite a different scene at night. Isn't houselessness one of the distinguishing characters of a *bhakta*? . . . Whatever it may be to others, Segaon is to me an inexhaustible source of joy. [*Ibid*, p. 218]

Visitors came in a continuous stream. Among the first to make the journey to Segaon was Rameshwari Nehru, who went to see him shortly after he first moved to Segaon in June. Soon thereafter came Pierre Ceresole with two missionary ladies, wading through mire "with their shoes and stockings on". Paul Lecler, an American, and Y S. Chen, a Chinese associated with the cotton industry, arrived on 8 August. A few weeks later Maurice Frydman, a Polish engineer, made the journey to discuss with Gandhiji the improvements that could be introduced in the spinning wheel. [*Ibid*, pp. 88, 90-94, 204-8, 240-41]

Then there were the political leaders, who needed Gandhiji's counsel and had to trek to Segaon to see him. Among them were Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and the Socialist Jaya Prakash Narayan. Some indeed made several journeys in the very first formative months of Segaon, when, it being the rainy season, the terrain was particularly hard to negotiate. [*Ibid*, pp. 253, 347, 429]

Gandhiji commended to the visitors the advantages of walking, quoting Thoreau. He wrote:

I have made it a rule that no one, unless he is completely disabled, should be encouraged to come here in a bullock-cart – not even



Jamnalalji with his heavy body. In fact I told him that trudging to Segaon and back was for him the best possible remedy to reduce his paunch and to add a few years to his life. And no one should fight shy of it.... [*Ibid*, p. 94]

11

More than half of Segaon's population of 600 was made up of Harijans. There were among them Mahars, Chamars and Bhangis. Untouchability, as may be imagined, ruled strong in the life of the village. Gandhiji came up against it right at the beginning.

The village had no public well, but there was a well built by Jamnalal Bajaj. Gandhiji had it declared open to Harijans and invited them to use it. They were at first hesitant. Then a Mahar or two came forward. Taking the cue a Bhangi also wanted to use it. That created an uproar, which only ceased when the Harijans stopped using it. There was nothing that Gandhiji could do in the situation. [*Ibid*, pp. 160-61]

Then there was the question of the village barber serving Gandhiji. The village headman made it very clear to Gandhiji that he would not cooperate with him on the question of untouchability and prevented the barber from serving Gandhiji. The headman said he was quite willing to let the barber shave Gandhiji provided he did not insist that Govind, a Harijan lad who had been serving Gandhiji as a cook, too, should receive his services. Gandhiji said Govind was like a son to him and he would not accept a service from which his son was deliberately excluded.

Gandhiji then took to cropping his head himself, dispensing with the services of a barber, even though in the end the village Patel relented and expressed his willingness to have the barber shave Gandhiji. [*Ibid*, pp. 186-87, 219, 220]



Another problem with which Gandhiji had to grapple with at Segaoon was disease. There were no medical facilities available – whether preventive or therapeutic. Gandhiji wrote:

Segaoon like most villages has its full share of malaria and other diseases which villagers suffer from. Of its population of 600 there is hardly anyone who has not suffered from malaria or dysentery. Of the record of nearly 200 cases that have come under my observation or Mira behn's, most are those of malaria or dysentery. The simple remedies at our disposal with dietetic control have served their purpose effectively. The villagers do not go to hospitals, they cannot even go to dispensaries. They usually resort to village quacks or incantations and drag on their weary existence.

Such widespread sickness was disheartening. Gandhiji was determined to make Segaoon malaria-proof. But it was easier said than done. The task was daunting. Everything about the village seemed to promote the prevalence of malaria. Gandhiji noted:

All round me the fields are water-logged. The crops are rotting. The ground is unwalkable unless you are content to wade through knee-deep mud. . . . Everything I have seen hitherto therefore convinces me that, if I am to make any approach to the village life, I must persevere in my resolve not to desert it in the hour of danger to life or limb. [*Ibid*, pp. 296-97]

Very soon Gandhiji himself was laid up with malaria. On 2 September, much against his wishes he agreed to be taken to the hospital at Wardha, where he remained till the 11th, even though the fever had been brought under control on the 3rd. [*Ibid*, pp. 263, 264-70, 429]



Towards the end of September Mira behn and Amritlal Nanavati fell ill with typhoid. Gandhiji personally undertook the task of nursing them. Their recovery was slow – they remained laid up for more than a month and there were occasions when their condition caused anxiety. At one point, around 3 October, Kakasaheb, Mahadev Desai and others thought that Nanavati should be removed to the hospital at Wardha, both in order to lighten the congestion and lighten Gandhiji's task and anxiety. Gandhiji said he was perfectly willing to let Nanavati go, but he would not permit his doing so on his account. He told Nanavati:

No son would think of leaving his father out of consideration for him. The father himself would feel deeply hurt if he whispered a suggestion of that kind. . . . I know that I can nurse you back to health as clearly as I knew that I could nurse Ba back to health when she was at death's door in South Africa, or as clearly as I knew that I could pull my son Manilal through his enteric which lasted for 42 days. . . . I know that I am doing all that is needed to pull you through.

Nanavati decided not to go. [*Ibid*, pp. 348-49]

12

On 3 October, when Jawaharlal Nehru, along with Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel, visited Segaon, he was flabbergasted to see Gandhiji wearing himself out nursing the patients himself. He said it was like King Canute attempting to stop the tides. Gandhiji told him:

Who else is to do it? If you go to the village nearby, you will find that out of 600 people there 300 are ill. Are they all to go to the hospital? We are suffering from our own sins. . . . How are we to teach these poor villagers except by personal example? [*Ibid*, p. 347]



Gandhiji had expressed his intention not to stir out of Segaoon for at least three seasons, that is, one year. He did remain in Segaoon for the larger part of that period, though the continuity of his stay had to be broken for a few days every now and then, when he was called upon to go out on important public business. His very first outing was between 23 October and 3 November 1936 when he had to keep various engagements in Benares, Delhi and Gujarat.

But Segaoon and its problems were never out of his mind. Speaking at the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, of which he had been elected President, on 31 October, he said:

I live in Segaoon today where in a population of 600 a little over ten are literate, certainly not more than fifty, very likely less. Of the ten or more who can read, there are scarcely three or four who can understand what they read and among the women there is not one who is literate.

The place is absolutely untouched by Wardha. I would have moved farther away had that not been the case. There we have only malaria. . . . What do they know of Spain and of Russia? What do they know of geography?. . . What am I to read to them? Munshi's novels?. . .

I am here . . . as those village folk's representative, unsolicited, unelected. . . . I shall one day ask you to go with me there. I am clearing the way for you. [*Ibid*, pp. 414-15]

Literature and art, as everything else, had to relate to the needs of the villagers. They had otherwise no use for Gandhiji.



CHAPTER XVI: GANDHISM OR SOCIALISM?

1

On 30 August 1935, Gandhiji sent urgent telegrams to the Viceroy and the Governors of Bengal and the U.P. urging unconditional discharge of Jawaharlal Nehru to enable him to catch the next scheduled flight to Europe to be by the side of his ailing wife, whose condition had been reported to be serious.

The Government, which had earlier turned down all such demands from other friends and well-wishers of Nehru in India and England, in a rare gesture, responded to Gandhiji's appeal and released Nehru on 2 September. On 3 September he left the Almora jail, where he had been incarcerated, for Allahabad, and on the 4th took the plane to Europe.

Gandhiji was glad. He wrote to Agatha Harrison:

The whole thing ended so well. This release of Jawaharlal stands out prominently as the one bright spot on the black and mournful surface.
[C.W.M.G., LXI, pp. 375, 429]

Gandhiji had come to feel strongly that it would be best for the Congress to have Nehru as its President for its next session, scheduled for April 1936. He lost no time in conveying the idea to Nehru. On 12 September he wrote to him:

I would like you to allow yourself to be elected President for the next year. Your acceptance will solve many difficulties. If you think fit send me a wire. [*Ibid*, p. 406]

There was considerable opposition to the idea from most of the other leaders of Congress. Ideologically they found his socialist views, which he had been energetically preaching before he was sent to jail, unacceptable. These views had been clearly and definitively enunciated by him during his



conversations with Gandhiji at Poona from the 10th to 14th September 1933 and in the letter he wrote to Gandhiji on 13 September. He had further expounded his views at great length in his tract *Whither India?* These went well beyond the ideological parameters within which the Congress functioned.

Temperamentally, too, they found Nehru had the knack of rubbing them up the wrong way. He was irascible and quick-tempered. They often complained of this to Gandhiji. On 21 May 1935, for instance, when Nehru was still in jail, Gandhiji was writing to Jairamdas Doulatram:

His [Nehru's] moods we know and must learn to tolerate cheerfully.

[Ibid, p. 82]

The leaders accordingly did their own exploring for the right person to head the Congress in the coming year. Bhulabhai Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel sounded Rajagopalachari. But, whether on his own or on Gandhiji's persuasion, he declined to run. *[Ibid, p. 411]*

Jawaharlal Nehru himself was aware that, given the ideological climate in the Congress and the fact that he could not soften his views on socialism, he might not be the right choice for the leadership of the organization. But Gandhiji assured him that in concrete terms his left-wing views need not be an obstacle in his functioning as President. On 22 September he wrote to Nehru:

If you are elected, you will be elected for the policy and principles you stand for. . . . As to the present policy of the Congress, whilst I can in no way be responsible for the detailed working of it, it is in the main of my shaping. . . . It is founded upon one central idea – that of consolidating the power of the people with a view to peaceful action.

As for the attitude that might be adopted by other leaders in the event of his being chosen President, Gandhiji assured Nehru:



So far as I know they will not resist you, even where they may not be able to follow you. [*Ibid*, pp. 438-39]

Nehru finally agreed to put on the "crown of thorns", but he continued to be tormented by apprehensions that on being elected he might have to deal with a hostile Working Committee. Rajendra Prasad, in trying to reassure him on this account, wrote to him on 19 December:

I know that there is a certain difference between your outlook and that of men like Vallabhbhai, Jamnalalji and myself and it is even of fundamental character. . . . I believe that unless a radical change comes to be made in the programme and methods of our work it will be still possible for all of us to continue to work together. [Michael Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 213]

But that was as far as Jawaharlal Nehru's colleagues were prepared to go.

2

Jawaharlal Nehru's stay in Europe lasted almost exactly six months – from the first week of September 1935 to the first week of March 1936, and most of this time he remained by the side of Kamala Nehru, first briefly at Badenweiler in Germany and then in Geneva, where she passed away on 28 February 1936. All this time he kept in constant touch with Gandhiji and friends in India through correspondence and his letters gave expression not only to his anxiety over his wife's inexorably deteriorating condition but also to his mental agitation at the turn the events had been taking in Europe. For with the rise of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, the situation had been moving towards a point where a major war appeared inevitable. Earlier in 1935 Italy had invaded Abyssinia and occupied it. Hitler, having repudiated the Versailles Treaty, had occupied the Saar Territory and was frantically rearming Germany and building roads for the speedy carriage of troops. He had also started persecuting and torturing the Jews and



Liberals and herding them into concentration camps. British and French right-wing politicians openly expressed themselves in sympathy with Hitler largely because of his fulminations against Bolshevism. In the East, too, the situation was no better. Japan, having conquered Manchuria and set up in that region a puppet regime, was carrying on hostile activities on the Chinese territory in preparation for a full-scale invasion of that country.

Most left-wing politicians of Europe as also Liberals and anti-Fascists of all shades were alarmed at the march of Fascism and militarism. Nehru shared their perception. The Congress, he felt, had to take an unequivocal stand in the matter. On 17 October 1935 Gandhiji wrote to him:

As to our attitude on the present world situation . . . it is our helplessness which imposes silence on us. There is no weakness. . . . It is merely a matter, if you will, of tactics in the best sense of the term. Anyway I have no sense in me of weakness. But I know that I cannot speak with effect at this juncture. I cannot give the lead without knowing what the people can do. . . . You have undoubtedly a much greater grasp of the situation than anyone of us has. . . . Therefore you may be able to evolve a dignified formula for national self-expression in speech as well as in action – assuming of course that at the present moment direct action is ruled out. [C.W.M.G., LXII, pp. 39-40]

Gandhiji was, thus, more than willing to bow to the superior knowledge of Nehru in international matters, but in the sphere of national policy, especially in regard to the ways to curb the exploitative powers of landlords and capitalists to ease the lot of India's peasant masses and industrial workers, there was a sharp divergence between their views. Answering a question at the meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh on 4 March 1936 Gandhiji informed the workers that



differences between him and Jawaharlal as revealed in their correspondence of September 1933 still persisted. He added:

But in spite of our differences we respect each other and desire to work together as far as possible. [*Ibid*, pp. 231-32]

Given the sharp cleavage in their views on the most vital national questions, why was Gandhiji so anxious to instal Nehru on the seat of power in the Congress, a course to which most of the other top leaders of the Congress were opposed? Brecher, Nehru's biographer, suggests that Gandhiji's reasons were as much personal as they were political. Among personal reasons he mentions Gandhiji's great admiration for Nehru and the fact that he wanted to offer Nehru "a token of sympathy for the loss of Kamala".

This might well have been the case, though Gandhiji had proposed Presidentship to Nehru almost as soon as Nehru was discharged from prison, almost six months before the death of Kamala Nehru. So the "sympathy" factor could not have played a very large part.

As for political reasons there was first the threat posed to the party unity by the ever-widening rift between the conservative and radical wings of the organization and the realization on Gandhiji's part that Nehru, who was looked upon by the socialists as their leader, was the one person who could "bridge the growing gap". Nehru himself wrote:

In a way I represented a link between various sets of Ideas, and so I helped somewhat in toning down the differences and emphasizing the essential unity of our struggle against imperialism. [Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 214]

Then there was the further consideration that Nehru was the only leader in the Congress, apart from Gandhiji, who had a mass appeal all over India. This



impressed Gandhiji profoundly. Comparing Nehru's hold over the millions to that exercised by Krishna and Jesus, he wrote:

Why are people touched as if by magic wherever Jawaharlal goes? They sometimes do not even know he has come, and yet they take sudden fire from the very thought that he is coming. . . . They do not want to hear him, they simply want to see him. And that is natural. You cannot deal with millions in any other way. [C.W.M.G., LXIV, pp. 100-101]

Moreover, Nehru being the youngest amongst the leaders of the Congress, Gandhiji regarded him as a link between the older and the younger generation and it was important to carry the younger men with the Congress.

3

At Savli, a little village in district Chanda in the Central Provinces, some of the most devoted followers and co-workers of Gandhiji assembled between 29 February and 6 March 1936 for a session of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Those invited had been told to bring with them lanterns, writing material, postcards, envelopes, postage stamps and soap. Those who had taken the vow to take *ghee* made from cow's milk were further asked to bring their own supply, since Savli was a poor village where milk and ghee were scarce. During the whole week the conclave lasted, milk for the visitors had to be fetched every day from Chanda, 34 miles away, and vegetables from Nagpur, a distance of over 120 miles. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 248]

At the Gandhi Seva Sangh session Gandhiji, in the course of talks and answers to numerous questions from co-workers, again explained what constituted the so-called Gandhism. Gandhiji did not believe that there was any such thing as Gandhism. He said he had not given a new philosophy but had merely suggested new applications of ancient ideas to solve the problems of the



people. Gandhiji was informed that a Committee for the promotion of Gandhian thought had been formed with Kaka Kalelkar as president and the following as members: Dada Dharmadhikari, Mahadev Desai, Swami Anand, Kishorelal Mashruwala, R. R. Diwakar, Haribhau Upadhyaya, Balubhai Mehta, Devsharma 'Abhay', Rajendra Prasad, Shankarrao Deo, R. S. Dhotre, Satis Chandra Das Gupta and S. P. Patwardhan.

But what was Gandhism? — Gandhiji asked. He proceeded:

I have conceived no such thing as Gandhism. I am not an exponent of any sect. . . . I could not presume to vie with the ancient law-givers. . . . The right to codify my thoughts cannot belong to me. Whatever is lasting will take shape after I am gone. Without any elaborate scheme I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal principles of truth and non-violence to our daily life and problems. . . . All that I have written is but a description of whatever I have done. And my actions alone are the greatest exposition of truth and non-violence. Those who believe in these can propagate them only by following them in practice.

The Gandhi Seva Sangh, Gandhiji said, must become a register of workers who gave expression to their belief in truth and non-violence through service of the villagers by way of promotion of handicrafts and khadi, through working for Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability. Beyond this the Sangh had no credal, regional or institutional limitations. Its members could belong to any caste or creed, any race or nation.

Voluntary poverty and body labour were, Gandhiji said, necessary requirements for those who would serve the villagers. By voluntary poverty was meant the readiness of a worker to draw from the Sangh only the very minimum for his subsistence. The Sangh had fixed Rs. 75 per month as the limit. Gandhiji



said while he considered the amount too high he could imagine cases where it could be justified. This of course did not mean that it should apply in all cases. A worker who could manage with just five rupees should not ask for more. As far as possible, however, workers must learn to maintain themselves only through their own physical labour.

In order to serve the villagers the workers must identify themselves with the villagers. Workers complained that the villagers did not understand them. In fact it was the other way round. It was they, he said, who did not understand the villagers.

We are working and spending money in the hope that the villagers will accept what we say. When we understand these people they, too, will cling to us. Till then, let us scavenge for them, distribute some medicines and teach them the laws of sanitation. . . . If they abuse us, let us bear it in silence. If they beat us, let us bear that also. . . . Let the people defecate wherever they choose. Let us not even ask them to avoid a particular place or go elsewhere. But let us go on cleaning up without a word. That is non-violence. Protecting their health, showing them the way and going on cleaning up is the only path we have to follow. Some day they are bound to understand.

Could a worker, if the villagers demanded it, run a shop to sell them betel leaves, *bidis*, tobacco, fish, tea, etc., at low prices? — Gandhiji was asked. He answered:

We can resort to every means to put an extra pice into the villagers' pockets. . . . If I go to the villages and find that the people cannot do without tobacco and *bidis*, I would sell these, too, even though I consider tobacco worse than alcohol. . . . My work has not been directed towards making



people give up smoking. The ideal is one thing, practice is another and what the people can do is yet another. . . . I shall certainly try to make people give up things which are considered bad. But I would give them those things till I could persuade them to give them up and continue with my work. [*Ibid*, pp. 215-16, 223-25, 239-40]

4

Kamala Nehru died in Geneva on 28 February 1936 and Jawaharlal Nehru returned to India, arriving in Allahabad on 12 March. He was not allowed much opportunity to indulge his grief at the great personal loss he had suffered. For duty called. The Congress session was just a month away and he had to get ready for the ordeal.

After the Gandhi Seva Sangh session at Savli Gandhiji had moved to Delhi. He arrived there on 8 March for a couple of weeks' rest, which was considered necessary in view of the high blood-pressure which had been troubling him. He wrote to Jawaharlal inviting him for talks. Jawaharlal came over on the 17th and the two leaders had prolonged talks extending over four or five days. No one else was present – not even Mahadev Desai – which was a condition Nehru had insisted on. [C.W.M.G., LXII, pp. 251-52, 271, 276]

Gandhiji had no plans to be present for the Congress at Lucknow. He had intended to visit Lucknow only for the opening of the Khadi and Village Industries exhibition on 28 March and to return to Wardha on the 29th. But then a visit to Allahabad was mooted, where Gandhiji had to open a library of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan on 5 April and then be present for the meeting of the Congress Working Committee on the 6th. He was pressed to stay on in Lucknow for the Congress session. He agreed.



The Congress session duly opened in Lucknow on 12 April under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. In his presidential address Nehru, in impassioned words, laid bare the contours of his political philosophy and set the temper and tone of the policies he wished to promote during his tenure as President.

He began by dwelling on the transformation of the Congress sixteen years earlier from "an ineffective body feebly functioning among the upper classes into a powerful democratic organization with its roots in the Indian soil and the vast masses who live on it", under the leadership and inspiration of Gandhiji. He denounced the "handful" of Liberals and Moderates, who "representing an age and a class which had had its day" had drifted away from the Congress, fearful of the national upsurge, and sought the shelter and protection of British Imperialism.

Indian struggle, Nehru said, was but a part of a wider struggle for freedom. The forces that moved the Indian masses were moving millions of people all over the world and driving them into action. Asia was astir from one end to the other, Africa was responding and Europe, torn by war, was struggling to find a new equilibrium. In the Soviet territories a new conception of human freedom and social equality was pitted against a host of enemies. The Indian problem could not be isolated from that of the rest of the world. India could not cut itself adrift from the forces that were shaping the world.

Two rival economic and political systems faced each other in the world, he said. One was represented by the U.S.S.R. where, in marked contrast with the rest of the world, astonishing progress had been made in every direction, though at a terrible cost, and where the problems of the capitalist world had ceased to exist. The other system was represented by capitalist countries, which were torn



by conflicts and progressive economic deterioration made worse by the great depression. Capitalism, in its difficulties, was more and more taking to Fascism, with all its brutal suppression of what the Western civilization had stood for. Fascism and Imperialism were two faces of decaying capitalism. While they came into conflict with each other, they also supported each other.

India, Nehru went on, had to take its stand with the progressive forces of the world which were ranged against Fascism and Imperialism. She was already struggling against one particular Imperialism – the British. He referred to the progressive denial of civil liberties, fiercest repression, the widening network of spies, policeman's bayonet replacing argument and all round moral and intellectual decay and vulgarization. It was a state of affairs that he said he found intolerable. And yet he found many Indians complacent about it, some even supporting it, some, who had made sitting on the fence into a fine art, were neutral when questions of civil liberty were raised.

And what of the Congress? There was, Nehru said, a spirit of disunion spreading over the land and petty conflicts were growing bigger and interfering with all activity. The touch with the masses had largely been lost, depriving the organization of life-giving energy. It had to be remembered that in all the mass struggles of the Congress the leadership had come from the middle classes, a vague group or groups, with a handful at the top closely allied with Imperialism and those at the bottom dispossessed and exploited. In the middle were centre groups, often longing to join the upper groups. It was thus a distracted class, looking in two different directions. It was fearful of losing property and therefore easy to pressurize. Though middle class leadership was indispensable for the Congress, it must look more and more towards the masses.



Dwelling on the need for socialist orientation in the policies of the Congress, the President said he saw no way of ending the poverty, unemployment, degradation and subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involved vast and revolutionary changes in the vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian States systems. It meant the ending of private property except in a restricted sense. It meant a new civilization radically different from the existing capitalist order. He would like, he said, to see the Congress being transformed in to a socialist organization and to join hands with the other forces in the world working for the new civilization. He realized, of course, that the majority in the Congress were not prepared to go that far. It was a nationalist organization and had to work on nationalist lines.

How did socialism fit in with the ideology of the Congress? It did not. Nehru said he believed that the poverty of the masses could be eradicated only through rapid industrialization. Yet he had whole-heartedly cooperated with the programme of khadi and village industries. They had a value in the existing situation, but they were a temporary expedient and not a solution of the problem.

As for the new Act, Nehru said though all the members of the Working Committee were of one mind that the Act ought to be rejected, they held different views as regards the manner of doing so. Indeed most of the members of the Working Committee did not agree with him in the matter. But whatever the final decision, there was a strong desire on the part of everyone to cooperate and work together.

The Congress, he said, must contest the elections. Only it must do so in order to take the message of the Congress to the masses. But having survived the elections, what must the Congress do? Must it accept office? It appeared to him



that to accept office under the conditions of the Act would be to negative the rejection of the Act and to stand self-condemned. It was dangerous to assume responsibility without power even in democratic countries. Little was to be gained and much to be lost by accepting office.

Nehru called for intensifying the contact of the Congress with the masses. He made a plea for affiliating producers' organizations such as trade unions and kisan sabhas, with the Congress. This would mean that the Congress would have individual as well as corporate membership and could influence, and be influenced by, other mass elements.

Nehru then went on to touch upon the impending threat of war in Europe and said the Congress must declare clearly its opposition to India's participation in any imperialist war. It must also offer its full sympathy to the peoples struggling against Fascism and Imperialism everywhere in the world.

Nehru concluded with a glowing tribute to Gandhiji. He said:

During this period of difficulty and storm and stress, inevitably our minds and hearts turn to our great leader who has guided us and inspired us by his dynamic personality these many years. . . . How many of us have that passionate desire for Indian independence and the raising of our poverty-stricken masses which consumes him? Many things he taught us long years ago it seems now – fearlessness and discipline and the will to sacrifice ourselves for the larger cause. That lesson may have grown dim, but we have not forgotten it, nor can we ever forget him who has made us what we are and raised India again from the depths. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. I, pp. 263-78]



On most issues the President carried the Congress with him though not exactly in the way he wanted.

For instance on the question of larger representation for the workers and peasants in the Congress, the delegates could not approve Nehru's idea of corporate membership for workers and peasants organizations, as it might lead to class conflicts within the organization. Instead a resolution was passed creating a mass contact committee consisting of Rajendra Prasad, Jayaprakash Narayan and Jairamdas Doulatram, which would examine the question of bringing about closer contact between the Congress and the masses. The Socialist amendment to the resolution, seeking direct representation of organized peasants and worker was lost.

Several resolutions, earlier approved by the Subjects Committee, were moved from the chair and passed without much debate. These concerned civil liberties, creation of a Congress foreign department, the World Peace Conference being held in Brussels to which Romain Rolland had invited the Congress, the war danger and expression of sympathy for Abyssinia.

The main political resolution, the one defining the Congress attitude to the Constitution Act of 1935 and the Provincial Autonomy to be introduced under it, covered in detail in the previous chapter, generated much heat and led to sharp exchanges between the advocates of office acceptance and opponents thereof, largely represented by the Socialist group but also including such right-wing stalwarts as Madan Mohan Malaviya.

T. Prakasam said he did not want office acceptance "in the ordinary accepted sense". What he wanted was that the enemies of the Congress should not be left to occupy places of vantage. If the Congress accepted office, Congress



committees could be set up in the seven lakh villages of India and the terror-stricken people would find new strength.

Satyamurti said "office-acceptance" was not the right phrase to be used for capturing power from the enemy. Would it not add to the strength and importance of the Congress, he asked, if there were among the delegates 50 Congress Ministers?

The Socialist group, represented by Sardul Singh Caveesar, Sampurnanand, Yusuf Meherally and M. R. Masani, argued that if the Congress meant what it said about rejecting the Constitution Act, accepting office under it was not the way to go about it. The purpose of entering legislatures, they said, should be to create deadlocks and not seek small advantages.

Govind Ballabh Pant, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad opposed the amendments both for and against office-acceptance. The Congress, they said, was opposed to the Act, but occasions might arise when acceptance of Ministerial responsibility could further the cause of swaraj. In any case the burden of the decision in the matter should be thrown on the A.I.C.C., including the time when such a decision should be taken.

All amendments were lost and the official resolution, declaring the commitment of the Congress to contesting the provincial elections but leaving the issue of office-acceptance open, was passed by an overwhelming majority.

An important resolution passed by the Congress, one on which there was a measure of unity between the right-wing and the left-wing was on the Agrarian Programme.

The resolution, moved by Bhulabhai Desai, drew attention to "the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry fundamentally due



to the antiquated and repressive land revenue system", further intensified by the slump, and emphasized the need for "a thorough change of the land tenure and revenue system". In view, however, of the fact that agrarian conditions in different provinces differed, the resolution called upon Provincial Congress Committees to make recommendations in detail to the Working Committee for being placed before the A.I.C.C. for the drawing up of "a full All-India agrarian programme".

By an amendment to the Congress constitution, the Congress did away with the Manual Labour clause, adopted at the Bombay session only a year and five months earlier. When Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya moved the amendment to delete the labour clause, to the surprise of all one delegate moved an amendment demanding retention of the clause. The delegates by and large did not favour retention of the clause. [*Ibid*, pp. 263-89]

It had for some years been customary for Congress sessions to dwell on the progress of the various constructive work activities. At the Bombay session constructive work had assumed even greater importance with the formation of the All-India Village Industries Association. Strangely the Lucknow session maintained complete silence on the question. Pattabhi Sitaramayya commented:

Not that no one thought about the matter, but that when a draft was prepared and placed before the Working Committee, it did not find favour with it and it was dropped at the Allahabad meeting of the Working Committee. [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 11]

The Lucknow session also decided to double the number of delegates fixed at the Bombay Congress. The All-India Congress Committee, too, was further strengthened. The Congress also decided to revert to the practice of holding its



annual sessions during the Christmas holidays, a practice that had been discontinued by the Lahore Congress. Consequently the 1931 Congress at Karachi had been held in March, the 1934 Congress in Bombay had been held in October and the Lucknow Congress had taken place in April. The next Congress however was to be held in December 1936, a mere eight months later.

6

The Lucknow session, then, it would appear, had gone a long way towards accommodating the views of its President. But the atmosphere in the Subjects Committee and at the open session remained tense. There was palpable though unexpressed antipathy and threat of friction between Jawaharlal and his band of Socialist supporters and the leaders who followed Gandhiji. As J. B. Kripalani was to put it later:

The main point of difference between the so-called old leadership and the Socialists was whether the country could afford to divide different sections of India's population to wage a class war when they were all united on the question of eliminating foreign rule from India and achieving independence. At that time there was no powerful capitalist class in the country. Almost the whole of the business class was with the Congress. Even many zemindars favoured the Congress demand for swaraj... Any doctrinaire socialist approach would have divided the forces working together for independence. [J. B. Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, Publications Division, Government of India, Delhi, 1970, p. 171]

Being sensitive to atmosphere, Nehru was oppressed by the feeling that though he had been made President of the Congress he did not represent the majority viewpoint as expressed in the Subjects Committee and at the open session. In the formation of the Working Committee, which was the prerogative



of the President, he therefore felt constrained to give full representation to the majority viewpoint while including a few Socialists. The following were the members of the Working Committee nominated by Nehru: Treasurer: Jamnalal Bajaj; General Secretary: J.B. Kripalani; Members: Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, C. Rajagopalachari, Subhas Bose, Narendra Dev, Jairamdas Doulatram, Shankarrao Deo, Jayaprakash Narayan, Bhulabhai Desai and Achyut Patwardhan. Thus out of fourteen persons nominated four were Socialists.

Jayaprakash Narayan, not having been elected to the A.I.C.C. could not function as a member and in course of time resigned. Subhas Bose was in internment. So in effect there were only two functioning "Socialist" members in the Working Committee, viz., Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan.

The Socialists, who looked upon Nehru as their philosopher and guide, were greatly disappointed. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai wrote to Nehru on 20 April:

I have passed the last few days in agony. Apparently you were only hope, but are you going to prove an illusory one? Some people had their doubts as to how far you will be able to withstand the combined opposition and influence of Gandhism. You were given an opportunity of reshuffling the Working Committee. They have manoeuvred to isolate you from the middlemen. We have been weakened both in the A.I.C.C. and the delegates. And the Working Committee you have formed is bound to prove more reactionary than the one it has replaced. [Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 223]

In the days that followed the Press carried reports of Nehru's public speeches in which he had given expression to his unhappiness at the pressure brought upon him in the matter of the names for the Working Committee. He also wrote to Gandhiji:



The Committee as it took shape was not my child, I could hardly recognize it and to some inclusions, as you know, I reacted strongly. Yet ultimately I submitted but inevitably with the thought that I was surrendering to others and almost against my own better judgment. [C.W.M.G., LXII, p. 475]

Gandhiji said that was not his view. He wrote in answer:

There was pressure if it may be so called only about Bhulabhai. And the first time his name was mentioned you had no objection. There was no pressure about any other member.

. . . I have been under the impression that you chose the members because it was the right thing to do for the cause. . . . I may say that your statement which your letter confirms has given much pain to Rajen Babu, C.R. and Vallabhbhai. [*Ibid*, pp. 454-455]

On of the same day (29 May) Vallabhbhai Patel wrote to Rajendra Prasad, enclosing a copy of Gandhiji's letter to Nehru and saying:

I cannot stand the attitude of injured innocence he (Nehru) has assumed regarding the nomination of members in the WC. . . . I don't think I can swallow it. It is a humiliating position in which I for one would not agree to stay at any cost. [*Ibid*, p. 476]

In May 1936 the Congress President undertook a hectic, whirlwind tour of the Bombay Presidency. He addressed several dozen meetings explaining the programme of the Congress to the people. In the course of his speeches he gave expression to views that were taken exception to by the old leadership of the Congress, in particular his belittlement of the importance of khadi and his



emphasis that the poverty and unemployment of India could not be eradicated except through socialism.

Jawaharlal explained that his remarks on khadi and spinning had been misreported. He said that though he had emphasized the importance of industrialization, he had also asserted that "for many reasons – economic, political, social — khadi was an important item in our programme and must be encouraged". Gandhiji was satisfied. It had been, he wrote, "a false alarm". [C.W.M.G., LXIII, pp. 15-17]

However, his unceasing propagation of socialism was not something he could explain away. Socialism formed the core of his message. This jarred on other members of the Working Committee. Things came to a head in the course of the deliberations of the Working Committee held at Wardha from 29 June to 1 July. On the very first day, 29 June, seven members of the Committee, viz., Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, J. B. Kripalani, Jairamdas Doulatram, Shankarrao Dev and Jamnalal Bajaj, jointly addressed a letter to the President resigning from the Working Committee. They wrote:

We feel that the preaching and emphasizing of socialism particularly at this stage by the President and other Socialist members of the Working Committee while the Congress has not adopted it is prejudicial to the best interests of the country. . . . We are of opinion that through your speeches and those of the other Socialist colleagues and the acts of other Socialists . . . the Congress organization had been weakened throughout the country without any compensating gain. The effect of your propaganda on the political work immediately before the nation . . . has been very harmful and we feel that in the situation created we cannot shoulder the responsibility of organizing and fighting the coming elections. [*Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, pp. 460-61]



Jawaharlal felt hurt by the tone of the letter and by the imputations in it and on Gandhiji's intervention Rajendra Prasad wrote to Nehru on 1 July, withdrawing the letter and the resignation. But the sting remained and was only made worse by the indictment contained in the explanatory missive. Rajendra Prasad wrote:

We have felt that in all your utterances as published in the Press you have been speaking not so much on the general Congress programme as on a topic which has not been accepted by the Congress. . . . There is a regular continuous campaign against us treating us as persons whose time is over, who represent and stand for ideas that are worn out and that have no present value, who are only obstructing the progress of the country and who deserve to be cast out of the position which they undeservedly hold. . . . Apart from all personal considerations we have also strongly felt that the ideals and the policy for which we have stood all these sixteen or seventeen years and which we believe to be the only right ones for the country are being most assiduously undermined and that your own views and sympathies are with those who are engaged in that game. . . .

As we have repeatedly told you all this impression has been created in our minds not by any single act or speech but as a result of the totality of activities and we feel that we owe it to you to tell all this in frankness. . . . [*Ibid*, pp. 462-65]

Nehru protested to Gandhiji against this "formidable indictment". So far as his views were concerned, he wrote, they were not casual. They were part of him and though he might change them or vary them in future, so long as he held them he must give expression to them. Because he attached importance to a larger unity he had tried to express them in the mildest way possible and more as an invitation to thought than as fixed conclusions. He reminded Gandhiji that both



in Delhi and in Lucknow he had made it clear that he must have freedom to express his views on social matters. The conflict, he went on, was undeniable, and he wondered if it would not be the proper course to place the whole matter before the A.I.C.C. The result might be his retirement and the formation of a more homogeneous Working Committee. [*Ibid*, pp. 466-70]

Gandhiji, answering on 8 July, pulled Nehru up. He wrote:

I am firmly of opinion that during the remainder of the year, all wrangling should cease and no resignations should take place. . . .

Why should it be so difficult for you to get on with those with whom you have worked without a jar for years? If they are guilty of intolerance, you have more than your share of it. The country should not be made to suffer for your mutual intolerance. [C.W.M.G., LXIII, pp. 127-28]

He wrote again in the same vein on 15 July. The letter said:

You feel to be the most injured party. The fact is that your colleagues have lacked your courage and frankness. The result has been disastrous. . . . having lacked the courage, whenever they have spoken they have done it clumsily and you have felt irritated. I tell you they have dreaded you because of your irritability and impatience of them. They have chafed under your rebuke and magisterial manner and above all your arrogation of what has appeared to them your infallibility and superior knowledge. They feel that you have treated them with scant courtesy and never defended them from Socialists' ridicule and even misrepresentation. . . .

I look upon the whole affair as a tragi-comedy. . . . [*Ibid*, pp. 144-45]

Nehru continued to feel quite uncomfortable in the company of his colleagues, who represented views with which his own were not in conformity



and again and again he felt that he ought to resign as President. Gandhiji again made him desist suggesting he should make up his mind to stay out his period and try to push through his policy through the team that he had. [*Ibid*, p. 179]

But the conflict of views between Nehru and the majority in the Working Committee was in the last analysis the conflict between socialism and Gandhism and in political circles it was seen as such. The subject was commented upon in the Press. *Literary Digest* reported Gandhiji as saying that Nehru's programme had ruined his life-work. Gandhiji denied having made any such statement. Under the heading 'Are We Rivals?' he wrote in *Harijan*, 25-7-1936:

I have never said anything of the kind. . . . So far as I am aware, Jawaharlal has come to the conclusion that India's freedom cannot be gained by violent means and that it can be gained by non-violent means. . . . My life-work is not, cannot be, ruined by Jawaharlal's programme. . . . [*Ibid*, p. 165]

Again in an interview in August Gandhiji refuted the charge that Nehru was pro-Russia. He said:

To say that he favours Russian communism is a travesty of truth. He says it is good for Russia, but he does not give an unequivocal certificate to it even about Russia. As for India, he has said plainly that the methods to be adopted in India would have to answer India's needs. He does not say that there must be class war, though he thinks it may be inevitable, and only recently he declared emphatically that there should be no confiscation without compensation. There is nothing in all this which I oppose. [*Ibid*, pp. 207-8]

In the last week of August at Segaon Gandhiji had prolonged talks with Jawaharlal, but the differences in their views could not be smoothed over. On 28 August Gandhiji wrote to him:



Our conversation of yesterday has set me thinking. Why is it that with all the will in the world I cannot understand what is so obvious to you? I am not, so far as I know, suffering from intellectual decay. Should you not then set your heart on at least making me understand what you are after? . . . And probably what is true of me is true of some others. [*Ibid*, p. 249]

8

Jawaharlal Nehru's speeches, both at the Congress at Lucknow and later during his tour of Bombay, Delhi and the Punjab, with their strong accent on socialism, had repercussions all over the country. Capitalists and Liberal politicians were alarmed. On 18 May 1936 in Bombay 21 leading businessmen of the city in a joint manifesto deprecated Nehru's call for ending vested interests in land and industry and private property except in a restricted sense.

Cowasji Jehangir, presiding at the Bombay Provincial Liberal Conference, held at Sholapur on 18 July, strongly criticized Nehru not only for his denunciation of Liberals but also for the socialist twist he was giving to the Congress policies. He said:

The President of the Congress is now carrying on a vigorous propaganda for a form of government for this country different to any visualized by the Congress up to now. . . . He sees no good in political freedom unless the freedom brings him a form of government such as Russia introduced and is now fast changing. He hates the word 'imperialism', not because imperialism may be an obstacle to political liberty but because imperialism will, under no circumstances mix with communism. . . . He has no faith in a democratic system of government again because he feels that communism and democracy cannot go together. . . .



Does he not realize that for the President of the Congress to openly advocate class hatred and bitterness is merely adding to our troubles at a time when every endeavour should be made for uniformity of policy and uniformity of action? [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, p. 251]

Later presiding at the annual session of the National Liberal Federation at Lucknow on 29 December, Sir Cowasji reverted to the theme. Referring to the Congress election propaganda, he said:

I am frightened less by their election talk than by the foundation they are laying of a class war which will ruin both the classes and the masses and may only be of advantage to a third party. . . . I had hoped that all non-Congress sections of society would realize the necessity of averting public mischief in the way of socialist programmes. . . . I must confess to a sad sense of disappointment. [*Ibid*, p. 242]

The issue figured even in the Council of State where, on 28 September, Sir Phiroze Sethna introduced a resolution recommending measures to check communism. Attacking Jawaharlal Nehru for his "vigorous propaganda" of communistic ideas, he mentioned the alarm it had caused among "capitalists, propertied classes or classes with vested interests". Nehru, he said, enjoyed great influence and popularity and his advocacy of socialism or communism had strengthened the forces which sought to destroy the existing order. He called upon all those opposed to socialism to organize their forces in order to combat and ultimately destroy the new-fangled and dangerous ideas imported from the West. Nehru, he went on, wanted to establish in India the dictatorship of the proletariat on the Russian model, and he sought to do so through revolutionary methods of class warfare.



P. N. Saprú objected that Sir Phiroze Sethna was converting the Council of State into the Liberal Federation. He also objected to the attack on Nehru, who was not present in the House to defend himself.

On behalf of the Government, Industries Secretary Clow and Home Secretary Hallett enumerated the steps Government had taken and was taking to combat communism on the one hand through measures to ameliorate the condition of factory workers and to reduce unemployment and on the other through punitive steps to suppress communist activity. Hallett pointed out that the Communist Party had been banned in 1934. The Council passed the resolution. [*Ibid*, pp. 66-71]

9

Notwithstanding the irritation caused to the old leadership of the Congress by Nehru's strident advocacy of socialism, Nehru's incessant and hectic tour of the country brought tangible gains to the Congress. Wherever he went the masses responded to him. Workers, peasants, students and women flocked to his meetings. It was a massive exercise of mass contact for the Congress.

Even as Nehru toured, it became necessary for the Congress to name its President for the coming session — the 50th — scheduled for December 1936. Nehru said if any of his colleagues was elected, he would cooperate with him. If the choice fell on him he dared not say no. Some leaders, notably Vallabhbhai Patel, were not, however, in favour of Nehru being re-elected. Rajagopalachari was again sounded through Satyamurti. But Gandhiji was not enthusiastic. He wrote to C. R.:

Sardar is desperately anxious for you to wear the thorny crown. . . . If you have directly or indirectly let S. think that you could be persuaded into



shouldering the burden, you should unhesitatingly say yes and end the agony of those like the Sardar. . . . [C.W.M.G., LXIV, pp. 63-64]

Rajaji again said no. Vallabhbhai then tried other names. On 15 November 1936 he wrote to Mahadev Desai:

How about Pantji? Bapu had mentioned his name at one point. You can raise it with him. As far as I am concerned, I would break loose and quit if he [Nehru] continues. Jivat [Kripalani] too is very cut up. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, p. 256]

This suggestion too came to nothing.

Finally Sardar Patel considered whether he himself could not contest. He had not liked the statement Jawaharlal had issued. Gandhiji did not feel inclined to go along. On 24 November he wrote to Vallabhbhai:

Nobody here shares your view. Personally I like Jawaharlal's statement. . . . What more could we expect? . . . if you think it is your duty to contest the election do so. [C.W.M.G., LXIV, pp. 70-71]

Withdrawing from the contest Vallabhbhai in a statement said:

My withdrawal should not be taken to mean that I endorse all the views Jawaharlalji stands for. Indeed Congressmen know that on some vital matters my views are in conflict with those held by Jawaharlalji. For instance I do not believe that it is impossible to purge capitalism of its hideousness. . . . I believe that when the masses awaken to the sense of their terrible condition, they will know how to deal with it. . . . The question of holding office is not a live issue today. But I can visualize the occasion when acceptance of office may be desirable to achieve the common purpose. There may then be a sharp division of opinion between Jawaharlalji and



myself. . . . We know Jawaharlalji to be too loyal to the Congress to disregard the decision of the majority, assuming that the latter lays down a policy repugnant to him.

. . . The Congress President has no dictatorial powers. He is the chairman of our well-built organization. . . . The Congress does not part with its ample powers by electing any individual — no matter who he is. I therefore ask the delegates to plump for Jawaharlalji... [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 32]

On 10 December 1936 the Working Committee, meeting in Bombay, confirmed the election of Jawaharlal Nehru for presidentship of the next session of the Congress.

10

Gandhiji had always insisted that if the Congress was to identify itself with the masses of India, its annual sessions must not be spectacular shows organized in cities at great cost, but should be held in village surroundings and should involve as little expenditure as possible. This had so far not been possible. All the Congress sessions — from the very first in Bombay to the 49th in Lucknow — had been held in cities. Now for the first time the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee decided to act according to the counsel of Gandhiji. A village, Faizpur, in Khandesh, was chosen as the venue for the Congress.

Gandhiji himself undertook the responsibility of supervising the preparations. He requisitioned the services of Mhatre, an architect, and the well-known artist Nandalal Bose for erecting and decorating the huge open-air pandal which could seat a hundred thousand people. Gandhiji and his party were at Faizpur on the 20th December, a full week before the date fixed for the Congress session, to see that everything was spick and span. He was pleased with what he



saw. The venue, called Tilaknagar, he said, was an exhibition in itself. It was a work of art. He congratulated Mhatre and Nandalal Bose on the achievement.

On 25 December Gandhiji opened the exhibition organized by the All-India Spinners' Association and the All-India Village Industries Association. He commended the effort of the organizers, for the exhibition did not contain even one superfluous exhibit and the crafts represented meant so much additional production. There was, for instance, hand-made paper, manufactured from *munj*, banana bark and bamboo. There were no city comforts or amenities. For the first time in the history of the Congress the food served to the delegates would be made up of unpolished rice and hand-ground flour. [C.W.M.G., LXIV, pp. 170-73]

On 27 December, the day the Congress session opened, Gandhiji again spoke at the exhibition ground. He re-emphasized the importance of khadi and other village industries for the achievement of the swaraj of his conception. Swaraj, as he conceived it, did not mean an imitation of British Parliamentary system, the Soviet system in Russia, or the Nazi or Fascist rule in Germany or Italy. India must have a political system suited to it. He described it as *Ramarajya*, i.e., sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Economically it must mean the uplift of every individual, male and female, by his or her conscious effort.

Coming to socialism, Gandhiji said all land belonged to God, that is, the state or the people. The best approach that could be made to it was through the spinning-wheel and all that it implied, for it represented the only non-violent substitute for violent dispossession.

Parliamentary programme was in the air. But it could not bring swaraj to the country. All it could achieve was preventing the Government from claiming



that rule by Ordinance and other oppressive laws had the sanction of popular representatives. In any case no more than, say, 1,500 individuals could enter the legislatures. The franchise itself was limited to a mere 3 1/2 crores. What about the remaining 31 1/2 crores, who did not have the vote? – he asked.

The only way for the entire 35 crores of the population of India was to take to the spinning-wheel and other village industries. Gandhiji reminded the audience that in 1920 he had said that if the fourfold constructive programme could be successfully worked India would have swaraj within a year. He was neither sorry nor ashamed to have made that declaration. He could still repeat that declaration and say that whenever the fourfold programme was achieved in its fullness, swaraj could be had for the asking. There would then be no need for civil disobedience and certainly no need for violence. The charkha, worked intelligently, could spin not only economic salvation of the country but could revolutionize the minds and hearts of millions and demonstrate to them that the non-violent approach to Swaraj was the safest and the quickest. [*Ibid*, pp. 190-95]

11

The Congress session opened at 4.30 in the afternoon of 27 December, when President Jawaharlal Nehru arrived at the venue in procession, riding a chariot drawn by six pairs of oxen. Gandhiji, accompanied by Kasturba was also on the dais.

In the eight and a half months that had elapsed since the preceding Congress session at Lucknow, the international situation had further deteriorated. The most frightful spectacle was the breaking out of a civil war in Spain. Spain, it may be recalled, had, after centuries of monarchical rule under the Aragons, the Bourbons and the Habsburgs, in 1931 become a republic after



overthrowing the dictatorship of an army general. In the general election held on 16 February 1936 the Popular Front had been returned to power and its leader Manuel Azana was elected President on 10 May 1936. Azana's Government had neither Socialists nor Communists on it, but it initiated a land reform (one per cent of the population then owned 51 per cent of the land) and other social reforms, which the large land-owners resisted. A revolt, led by Francisco Franco, Chief of the Army General Staff, and financed by land-owners and monarchists, began on 18 July 1936 in Spanish Morocco and then spread throughout Spain. By August 1936 Germany and Italy had fully intervened to help Franco's Fascists with arms. [Florence Elliott and Michael Summerskill, *A Dictionary of Politics*, London, 1957, pp. 274-75]

The President opened his speech with a reference to this "terrible and fascinating drama". Fascism in Europe, he declared, had been "pursuing its triumphant course, speaking even in a more strident voice, introducing an open gangsterism in international affairs". Earlier it had been Abyssinia, now it was the horror and tragedy of Spain. The drift, unless checked in time, must inevitably lead to world war.

British Imperialism, Nehru said, had a direct hand in enabling Fascism to grow so rapidly. It had signed the Anglo-German Naval Treaty with Nazi Germany. It had refused, in spite of international pressure, to apply sanctions against Italy. In the name of non-interference it had calmly watched Fascist aggression of Abyssinia. Now when Spain was assailed by Fascist military rebellion, aided by mercenary foreign troops, British Imperialism and the League of Nations dominated by Imperialist powers, did nothing to help the Spanish Republic while Fascist powers were helping the rebels.



Nehru wished the Congress could do something to render effective help to the Spanish Republic, but he knew that Indian people, themselves engaged in the struggle for independence, could not do much.

Although, Nehru said, a radical solution of the world's problems could be provided only by socialism, the Congress was not fighting for socialism. The Congress stood for full democracy in India. It was anti-Imperialist.

Nehru then dealt with the Government of India Act and the Congress demand for a Constituent Assembly. Next in importance to the demand for a Constituent Assembly was the opposition to the Federal Scheme. There was nothing wrong with the idea of federation as such, but the scheme as devised would place India not only under British exploitation but also under Indian feudal control. The opposition to the Federal Scheme must become the central pivot of India's struggle against the Act.

As regards the question of accepting or not accepting office, Nehru said, the decision would probably be taken after the elections. He himself felt that the logical consequence of the Congress policy would be to have nothing to do with office.

Nehru then dwelt on the problems of poverty and unemployment in the country, the ferment among the workers and strikes in the railways and elsewhere then going on, and declared that the workers must have an eight-hour working day, a guaranteed living wage and unemployment insurance.

Then there was the question of agrarian reforms. The Provincial Congress Committees had been asked to frame agrarian programmes, but the work remained incomplete. The problems of rural poverty were urgent. Radical reforms in the rent and revenue and the abolition of feudal levies were the need



of the hour, so was the need for a moratorium on and a substantial liquidation of debt.

The President was followed by Gandhiji, who made a brief speech. He expressed satisfaction at the fact that the Congress had been held in a village. Even so, he pointed out, the session was more crowded than ever before, with nearly two lakh people being present. He had wanted, Gandhiji continued, that not more than Rs. 5,000 should be spent on the Congress. That had not been possible, partly because rent had to be paid for the ground.

As for the demand for a Constituent Assembly, Gandhiji said:

The decision of a Constituent Assembly can be taken only when you have swaraj at your door. You can call a Constituent Assembly when you have got full strength. It cannot meet in Delhi but in the remotest village. . . . What I asked you to do in 1920 is still left unaccomplished today — charkha, prohibition, removal of untouchability. If you leave these things unattained, take to your heart an old man saying it — if you do not carry out these you will have lost swaraj. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, pp. 222-31]

Among the most important items on the agenda of the Congress was the consideration of the election manifesto, approved by the A.I.C.C. on 23 August 1936. The manifesto was drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru. It began by referring to the great movements led by the Congress for the freedom of the country and the people's response entailing much sacrifice and suffering. It then mentioned the economic crisis that had of late engulfed India and the world leading to progressive deterioration of the condition of all classes of Indian people and the growing poverty and destitution of the masses. The growth of the national



movement, coupled with the economic crisis, had resulted in the intensification of repression and suppression of civil liberties by the alien Government.

In the international sphere the crisis was heading towards a war. The manifesto reiterated the declaration of the Lucknow Congress that India would not be a participant in any imperialist war.

The Congress, it continued, rejected in its entirety the Constitution Act and believed that any constitution for India must be based on the independence of India as a nation and could be framed only by a Constituent Assembly. However in view of the situation that existed and to prevent the operation of forces calculated to strengthen the system of alien domination and exploitation, the Congress had decided to contest seats in the coming elections for the Provincial legislatures. It intended to do so not to perpetuate the Act but to end it. The Congress legislators would take steps to end the various regulations, Ordinances and Acts which oppressed the Indian people and smothered their will to freedom. The Congress realized that freedom of the country could not be achieved through the legislatures. Nevertheless it was important that the people should know what the Congress programme was and what the Congress stood for. Elections would obviously prove an effective means of education of the people.

At the Karachi session in 1931 the general Congress objective had been defined in the Fundamental Rights resolution. That resolution still held, though it had become necessary to give further consideration to the problems of poverty and unemployment. To this end the Lucknow Congress had called upon Provincial Congress Committees to frame full agrarian programmes.

In regard to rural debts there was need for framing a scheme including declaration of a moratorium, scaling down of debts and provisions for cheap credit facilities to the peasants.



In regard to industrial workers the Congress stood for a living wage, hours of work in conformity with international standards and machinery for settlement of disputes between employers and employees.

The Congress stood for removal of all sex discrimination and ensuring for women workers maternity and other benefits.

The Congress also stood for the removal of untouchability and encouragement of khadi and village industries, which had been the principal plank of the Congress programme.

The Communal Award of the British Government, the manifesto went on, had led to much controversy. The Congress attitude towards it had been misunderstood by some. The rejection of the Constitution Act by the Congress inevitably involved the rejection of the Communal Award. But the Congress had repeatedly laid stress on the fact that a satisfactory solution of the communal question could come only through the goodwill and cooperation of the principal communities concerned. The right way to deal with the communal question was therefore to intensify the struggle for independence and at the same time to seek a common basis for an agreed solution which would help to strengthen the unity of India. The effort of one community to change the Award in the face of opposition of another community would only confirm and consolidate the Award. The whole communal problem, it must be remembered, though important, had nothing to do with the major problems of India – poverty and widespread unemployment. It affected only a handful of people at the top. The peasantry, the workers, the traders and merchants and the lower middle classes of all communities were in no way touched by it.

So far as the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of ministries was concerned, the manifesto again expressed the view of the A.I.C.C. that it would be desirable to consider the matter after the elections.



The manifesto concluded by appealing to the country to give every support to the Congress in the elections. National welfare demanded it. The fight for independence called for it. With a clear majority Congress legislators would be in a position to fight the Act and to help in the struggle for independence. The Congress stood for a joint front comprising all classes and communities, bound together by their desire for independence. The manifesto ended: "Rally to the cause of the Congress, of India, of freedom." [*Ibid*, pp. 188-91]

In a resolution on elections and constituent assembly the Congress endorsed the election manifesto, calling upon candidates standing on its behalf to carry on their election campaign strictly on its basis and after election to conduct their work in legislatures in accordance with it. As regards the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office, immediately after the elections the various Provincial Congress Committees would take steps to consult their district and other local committees and send their own recommendations on the subject to enable the A.I.C.C. to decide the issue. [*Ibid*, p. 205]

13

By another resolution the Congress decided that after the elections a convention should be held consisting of Congressmen elected to the legislatures, members of the A.I.C.C. and other Congressmen to be decided upon by the Working Committee. The convention would put the demand for a Constituent Assembly in the forefront and decide upon steps to end the Act in the Provinces and oppose the introduction of the Federation Scheme at the Centre.

A very important resolution passed by the Congress was on the Agrarian Programme. The Lucknow Congress, it may be remembered, had recognized that the most urgent problem of the country was "the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry", the solution of which



involved the removal of the "antiquated and repressive land tenure and revenue systems", and called upon PC.C.s to submit their recommendations for framing an All-India Agrarian Programme. But such recommendations had not been forthcoming. Only in Bihar, the U.P., Maharashtra and the Central Provinces had any attempts been made to conduct enquiries into the condition of the peasantry. The Congress was therefore unable to formulate a comprehensive Agrarian Programme. Nevertheless the resolution said the following steps were necessary:

1. Rent and revenue should be readjusted and there should be substantial reduction in both.
2. Uneconomic holdings should be exempted from rent.
3. Agricultural incomes should be assessed for income tax on a progressive scale, subject to a prescribed minimum.
4. Canal and irrigation rates should be lowered.
5. All feudal levies and forced labour should be abolished.
6. Fixity of tenure with heritable rights should be provided.
7. An attempt should be made to introduce cooperative farming.
8. All debts beyond the capacity of peasants to pay should be liquidated. A moratorium on debts should be declared and steps should be taken to provide cheap credit facilities to the peasants.
9. Arrears of rent should be wiped out.
10. Common pasture lands should be provided and the rights of the people in tanks, wells, ponds and forests should be recognized.
11. Arrears of rent should be recoverable in the same way as civil debts and not by ejectment.



12. There should be statutory provision for a living wage for agricultural labourers.
13. Peasants Unions should be recognized. [*Ibid*, p. 206]

Though these steps fell far short of a fundamental restructuring of the land tenure system, they were nevertheless far reaching enough to make the Congress a peasant-oriented organization and ensure peasant votes for the Congress in the forthcoming elections.

The All-India Kisan Congress, which also met at Faizpur on 26 December under the presidency of N. G. Ranga, while welcoming the programme as enunciated in the Congress election manifesto, expressed its reservations. N. G. Ranga said the programme as adopted by the Congress did not go far enough and the peasants must continue to press for the acceptance of their charter of demands which they considered the absolute minimum. He called upon the kisans to vote for only those Congress candidates who would pledge themselves to support the minimum demands of the peasants. [*Ibid*, pp. 281-82]

14

The Congress concluded on 28 December and the following day Gandhiji left Faizpur for Segaoon (now renamed Sevagram). On 28 December he wrote to Nehru suggesting that if his advice about holding annual sessions of the Congress from then onwards in villages was found acceptable, the sessions should take place between February and March and not during Christmas holidays. "The sufferings of thousands in wintry weather," he wrote, "should be avoided if possible." [C.W.M.G., LXIV, p. 197]

As the Faizpur Congress was held during the Xmas holidays, this author too, along with a few other students of Lady Hardinge Medical College, went to



Faizpur to witness the proceedings. It was the first session of the Congress which this author was able to watch from beginning to end when she was sufficiently grown up to understand things. The author's brother Pyarelal arranged the accommodation. The author and her cousin Prakash Nayar in Gandhiji's camp, a simple tent with improvised sanitary arrangements. For the meals one had to go to the common mess, where everyone sat on the floor on school mats and food was served on plates made of dry leaves. As people sat down to eat wind blew sand and dust onto the food. On the following day Prakash and this author decided to forgo dinner. They told Pyarelalbai that they were not hungry. At 9.00 p.m. they lay down on the bedding spread on the floor. But they could not sleep and when Pyarelalbai came at around 1.30, Prakash told him that she was hungry. There was nothing available in the tent and the camp kitchen had closed a long time ago. He rummaged the improvised kitchen of Bapu's tent and found two pieces of dried up bread, a tomato and a little dried up *pudina chutney*. They both had a piece each. They had never had food that tasted more delicious.

Next day Bapu was leaving for Segaoon. Jawaharlal asked the girl students if they would like to go and see the Ajanta Caves. The girls gladly accepted his invitation. Acharya Kripalani and some other leaders accompanied the President. They were all in a big third class compartment. It was the first time that the author had such a close view of Nehru, who was greatly admired by all. One can still remember how he talked about blondes and brunettes on that journey. One had not been familiar with those terms till then.

There were crowds at every station during the night, eager to have Nehru's *darshan*. He had gone into another, probably first or second class compartment. Acharya Kripalani was with the girls in the third class. He had a great sense of



humour. He told some enthusiasts who refused to leave without seeing Nehru: "Why do you want to have Nehru's *darshan*? He is not a Mahatma like Gandhi. Is it not enough that you have seen us? Please go and let us sleep." The crowd would not listen. Kripalani then said: "Jawaharlal is not in this compartment. He has gone into his own compartment to have a smoke."

"Oh no, Nehru does not smoke", some among the crowd shouted. "Oh yes, he does," said Kripalani.

But the crowd did not believe him. Such was the childlike faith people had in their leaders in those days. They regarded them as men in Gandhiji's mould, which was at times rather embarrassing for some of them.

The party got off the train at Jalgaon the next morning and was driven to the Ajanta Caves. They were dark. There was no electricity there in those days. The guides had some fire-work type of device which, on being ignited, would give out a flare, lighting up a wall for a few moments to enable the murals to be viewed. One remembers how nicely Panditji showed the party, the cave paintings, patiently explaining the details of some of them. The crowd's admiration for him knew no bounds.

The Faizpur session of the Congress was an election-eve session. It was intended to gear up the Congress for the coming battle of the ballot. It discharged this responsibility commendably well, burying for the time being the ideological feud between socialism and Gandhism in order jointly to tackle the task ahead.

The Faizpur session, it is sad to note, took place against a communally volatile background. October had witnessed serious communal flare-up in Bombay, resulting from a temple-mosque dispute at Byculla. The five days of rioting had left 55 persons dead and over 500 injured. The rioting had erupted again in November, making it difficult for the Congress Committee to elect



delegates for the Congress session. The Working Committee had accordingly been obliged to decide "that the old delegates from Bombay should continue to function during the Faizpur Congress and after, till new delegates are elected".

[*The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, pp. 8-9, 11, 210-10]



CHAPTER XVII: THE ELECTIONS UNDER THE 1935 ACT AND AFTER

1

Immediately the Faizpur session was over the delegates dispersed to meet the challenge of the provincial elections scheduled for the months of January and February 1937.

In all the eleven Provinces of British India, including the N.W.F.P., Orissa and Sind, which had been newly made into separate Provinces, Congress cadres went to work in the villages, armed with the election manifesto calling for the rejection of the Government of India Act, 1935, summoning of a Constituent Assembly and promising a programme of land reforms spelt out in the Agrarian Programme resolution of the Congress.

Heading the campaign were Jawaharlal Nehru, the President, and Vallabhbhai Patel, Chairman of the Central Parliamentary Committee. The two leaders shouldered the largest share of the responsibility for the elections. They toured feverishly all over the country galvanizing the workers and carrying the message of the Congress to the voters in towns and villages. Jawaharlal Nehru in particular showed a dynamism that made a deep impression and electrified the country. Of his touring in the months preceding the elections his biographer writes:

His election campaign can only be described as a fury of activity. Like an arrow he shot through the country, carrying the Congress message to remote hamlets in the hills and on the plains. He covered some 50,000 miles in less than five months, using every conceivable means of transport. Most of the time he travelled by car, train or aeroplane, occasionally by horse, camel, steamer, bicycle or canoe, and, where necessary, on foot through the



trackless dusty plains. Even the elephant was harnessed into service. All told, about 10,000,000 persons attended his meetings and millions more lined the routes to catch a glimpse of the Congress's crown prince. . . .

His average working day ranged from 12 to 18 hours. [Michael Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 227-28]

In the conduct of the elections the Congress had to overcome not only the infighting that marred the functioning of the organization in almost all the provinces to a greater or lesser degree and resulted in subterranean sabotage of the campaign, but also had to contend with official hostility and repression. For, if there was one thing that the Government was bent upon, it was to see that the elections did not result in Congress majorities being returned to the legislatures. Many months before the elections a senior British official had noted in a memorandum:

. . . for the Congress party to achieve power at the outset of the new Constitution would be dangerous. . . . As our policy is to prevent any marked accession of strength to Congress, we should be deaf to the siren voice of the conciliators. We should recognize that the Congress are, and for a long time will remain, our enemies. We should treat them not vindictively but coldly, keeping them at arm's length, and we should encourage the political forces that are naturally opposed to them. [*Ibid*, p. 207]

All the repressive laws having remained in operation throughout the period, there were arrests, searches and seizures on a large scale throughout the country and the A.I.C.C. periodically issued long lists of Congress activists subjected to police high-handedness in various Provinces.

But all the attempts of the rulers failed to stem the tide of popular support for the Congress. The election results demonstrated that the Congress was the single most representative political organization of the people of India.



The overall picture of the position of the Congress as it emerged after the elections was as follows:

Provinces	Total number of seats in the Legislature	Seats won by Congress
Madras	215	159
Bihar	152	98
Bengal	250	54
C.P.	112	70
Bombay	175	86
U.P.	228	134
Punjab	175	18
N.W.F.P.	50	19
Sind	60	7
Assam	108	33
Orissa	60	36
Total	1,585	714

The Congress thus had absolute majorities in five of the eleven Provinces, viz., Madras, the U.P., the C.P., Bihar and Orissa.

It was the largest single party in four Provinces, viz., Bombay (86/175), Bengal (54/250), Assam (33/108) and the N.W.F.P. (19/50).

In the Punjab and Sind the Congress showing was poor — in the Punjab it could secure only 18 seats out of 175 and in Sind 7 out of 60.



With regard to the representation of Muslims, the Congress performance remained poor. Out of the total number of 482 seats reserved for Muslims in the eleven Provinces, the Congress contested no more than 58 seats, of which it won 24 — 15 of them in the N.W.F.P. alone. Madras and Bihar were the only two other Provinces which returned Congress Muslims — Madras 4 and Bihar 5.

In the U.P., which had 66 Muslim seats, the Congress contested 7 and lost all. In Bengal out of the 177 Muslim seats it did not contest even a single seat. In the C.P. out of 14 Muslim seats it contested two and lost both. In Assam it left all the 33 Muslims seats uncontested.

Who then represented the Muslims? Certainly not the Muslim League, which had been demanding recognition of its claim to being the sole representative organization of the Muslims. For in the Muslim majority Provinces of Bengal, the Punjab, the N.W.F.P. and Sind it was badly mauled. In Bengal out of the 117 Muslim seats it won 40. In the Punjab out of 86 seats it won 2 (in fact in the end it retained only one when one of the Leaguers defected to the Unionist Party). In the N.W.F.P. and Sind it did not win a single seat.

The results were more favourable to the League in the Hindu majority Provinces. In the U.P out of the 66 Muslim seats it won 29, the rest going to the National Agriculturist Party, a grouping of zemindars and taluqdars (9) and Independents (27). In Bombay it won 20 out of the 29 seats and in Madras 11 out of 28.

Thus in the Hindu-majority Provinces, the Muslim vote largely went to the League, in the N.W.F.P. the Congress secured a large part of it, in the Punjab it went to the Unionist Party headed by Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan and in Bengal the Muslim masses opted more for the Krishak Proja Party led by Fazlul Haq.

The Justice Party in Madras and the Democratic Swaraj Party in Bombay were totally routed.



The seats reserved for women in the various Provinces, with but a few exceptions, were all captured by the Congress.

As for the Scheduled Caste seats, the Congress showed very good results in Madras, Bihar and the U.P., winning respectively 26/30, 14/15, and 16/20 seats. In Bombay and the C.P. its performance was less good, having secured 4/15 and 5/19 seats in the two Provinces. In Bengal it failed to win a single scheduled Caste seat out of a total number of 30. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, pp. 168(a)-(p); Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 225-26]

3

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 27 February to 1 March 1937 to review the election results and to consider the future course of action. In a resolution laying down the policy to be followed by Congress members in legislatures, the Working Committee reiterated that the Congress was entering the legislatures to combat the Constitution Act, and to further the objective of *purna swaraj*. The immediate objective of the Congress legislators must be to fight the Act and stop the Federal part of it from being implemented. All Congress members of legislatures must be dressed only in khadi. They must not enter into alliances with other groups in legislatures without the permission of the Working Committee. The members must press for the implementation of the agrarian programme of the Congress. In particular they must work for (1) A substantial reduction in rent and revenue, (2) Assessment of income-tax on a progressive scale on agricultural incomes, (3) Fixity of tenure, (4) Relief from rural debt and arrears of rent and revenue, (5) Repeal of all repressive laws, (6) Release of political prisoners, interneers and detenus, (7) Restoration of lands and property confiscated during the Civil Disobedience movements, (8)



Eight-hour working day for industrial workers, (9) Prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs, (10) Unemployment relief, and (11) Reduction of high salaries and allowances and cost of administration.

Congress members of provincial legislatures must also give expression to demands of all-India application not within the purview of provincial legislatures, such as reduction of military expenditure, complete national control of trade, tariffs and currency, repeal of all-India repressive legislation, etc. They must mobilize public opinion in their constituencies in support of the demands they put forward in the legislatures. Work in the legislatures must be coordinated with outside activity.

The Working Committee left the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office to be decided by the A.I.C.C. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, pp. 174-76]

The Working Committee met again in Delhi from 15 to 22 March to finalize the resolution on office acceptance for the A.I.C.C., which met on 17 and 18 March. Gandhiji was present during the deliberations of the Working Committee. It was clear that opinion in the Congress on the question was not unanimous. Most Provincial Congress Committees had expressed themselves in favour of office acceptance. Most members of the Working Committee too felt the same way. On the other hand radical sections in the Congress, including the Socialists, were vehemently opposed to office acceptance and Nehru gave eloquent expression to their views. He reiterated his stand that office acceptance would inevitably involve cooperation in some measure with the repressive apparatus of Imperialism and would at best give the Congress the shadow of power without the substance, with all the undemocratic safeguards, reserved powers and mortgaged funds. He insisted that the Congress policy in the legislatures must be one of combating the operation of the Act in every way possible.



Gandhiji threw his weight in favour of office acceptance and indeed drafted the clause relating to the question. The resolution, as it finally took shape, while demanding that the new Constitution be withdrawn, and impressing upon all Congress members that their work in the legislatures must be based on the fundamental Congress policy of combating the new Constitution and seeking to end it, ended with the following paragraph:

And on the pending question of office acceptance . . . the All-India Congress Committee authorizes and permits the acceptance of offices in Provinces where the Congress commands a majority in the legislature, provided the ministerships shall not be accepted unless the leader of the Congress party in the legislature is satisfied and is able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to their constitutional activities. [*ibid*, pp. 177-78. For the resolution as drafted by Gandhiji, *vide* C.W.M.G., LXV, p. 3]

The resolution was passed by the Working Committee without a dissenting vote. When on 17 March at the A.I.C.C. Rajendra Prasad moved the resolution as approved by the Working Committee, it generated a fierce debate for and against office acceptance. No less than thirty speakers expressed their views on the question. The debate continued the whole of the following day.

The President was at great pains to clarify again and again that the Working Committee's approval of the resolution did not imply that there was unanimity of views on the question among members of the Working Committee. He referred to currents of thought which often came into conflict with each other. What was important was that there was "an overriding desire on the part of the Congressmen to hold together and fight together and win together", for internal dissensions would weaken the Congress more than anything else could.



A host of amendments were moved, among them one by Jayaprakash Narayan, which said that acceptance of ministerial offices by Congressmen was inconsistent with the policy adumbrated and would weaken the struggle for national independence. It would make Congress ministers a party to repression and exploitation which was implicit in the Imperialist regime and would thus discredit the Congress in the eyes of the people. Sardar Sardul Singh, Dutt Mazumdar, Balkrishna Sharma, Swami Sahajanand, Captain Awadhesh Prasad Singh, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and even Gandhians such as Pattabhi Sitaramayya and rightists such as Madan Mohan Malaviya and Purushottamdas Tandon, passionately argued against office-acceptance.

The case for office acceptance was argued by Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajagopalachari. They said acceptance of office did not mean any slackening of the policy to combat the Act. The idea was to use the position and power gained through acceptance of office to combat and end the Act. Besides the Congress ministers could do something for the amelioration of the condition of the masses. Among other supporters of office acceptance were Satyamurti, K. F. Nariman, Lala Dunichand of Ambala and, of all people, M. N. Roy.

Jayaprakash Narayan's amendment was rejected by 135 votes to 78. The official resolution was passed by 127 votes to 70, after all other amendments were rejected. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, pp. 190-205]

In the last week of March leaders of the Congress party in the provincial legislatures with Congress majorities were invited by the Governor to form ministries. Invitations were received by Congress Parliamentary Party leaders in Bombay, Madras, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces and Orissa. The leaders intimated to the Governors the terms of the Congress resolution and asked for an assurance that the Governors would not use, in regard to the



constitutional activities of their cabinets, their special power of interference, or set aside the advice of their ministers.

The Governors, one and all, drew the attention of the leaders to Section 54 of the Act and to para 8 of the Instrument of Instructions issued to the Governors, and asserted that the demand put forward by the Congress was constitutionally impossible.

The leaders of the Congress Parliamentary Parties in the Provinces concerned – B. G. Kher in Bombay, Rajagopalachari in Madras, G. B. Pant in the U.P, Shri Krishna Sinha in Bihar, Dr. N. B. Khare in the C.P. and Bishwanath Das in Orissa — thereupon refused to assist the Governors in forming ministries. Minority Party leaders were accordingly entrusted with the task of forming Governments in these Congress majority provinces.

4

Gandhiji in a statement issued on 30 March regretted the refusal of the Governors to give the assurance asked for. The condition laid down, he said, was not an impossible one and was well within the Constitution. He went on:

It is common cause that Governors have discretionary powers. Surely there was nothing extra-constitutional in their saying that they would not exercise their discretion against ministers carrying on constitutional activities. . . . A strong party with a decisive backing of the electorate could not be expected to put itself in the precarious position of interference at the will of the Governors.

The constitutional impasse that had been created and the views expressed by Gandhiji caused a flurry in the official circles in Britain. Lord Lothian, in a letter to *The Times* of 6 April, declared that Gandhiji's statement was based on a



complete misunderstanding of the way in which the system of responsible government worked in practice, and of paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Instrument of Instructions. He ventured to assert that in no case had a ministry possessed of a majority in the legislature asked or received any assurance that the Governor would not use his special powers. He cited the examples of Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

Lord Lothian expressed similar views in the debate on the subject in the House of Lords on 8 April. He further said that the Governors had no constitutional right or duty to interfere until certain circumstances arose.

Lord Zetland, Secretary of State for India, making a statement on the subject, referred to Gandhiji's statement of 30 March. The statement, he said, was so astonishing that it was explicable only on the assumption that Gandhiji had either never read the Act or the Report of the Select Committee or had completely forgotten, when he made the statement, the provision embodied in those documents respecting the special responsibilities vested in the Governors. Section 52 of the Act dealt with those special responsibilities, among them being the obligation to safeguard the legitimate interests of the minorities. "Let us suppose," he said, "that in a Province in which the Hindus were in a majority or in a Province in which the Muslims were in a majority, the ministry proposed an action which would have the effect of curtailing the number of schools available to the Muslims in one case and to the Hindus in the other. Their action would clearly come within the Congress formula . . . and it could not . . . be described as other than constitutional activity on the part of the ministry." It was to meet such possible situations that special powers of the Governors had been designed.

Gandhiji in a statement on 10 April, confessed his ignorance of the Government of India Act and a greater ignorance of the Select Committee's



Report. His advice to the Congress on conditional acceptance of office, he said, was based on an assurance of lawyers that the Governors could give the required assurance without an infringement of the Act. He asked for appointment of an arbitrational tribunal of three judges to decide whether it was competent for the Governors to give the assurance demanded by the Congress.

As for Lord Zetland's statement, Gandhiji said he was playing upon the old familiar tune of divide and rule. The Congress could not exist for two days if it disregarded the interests of minorities. The Congress ministries would dig their own graves if they trampled upon the rights of minorities or resorted to injustice otherwise.

Lord Lothian, in another letter to *The Times* on 12 April, referring to Gandhiji's proposal of arbitration, asked: Would the arbitration also be asked to decide what activities of the ministers were "constitutional activities"? If the arbitration decided that the Governors could constitutionally give the assurances the Congress asked for, would not the minorities in each Province protest vehemently against such assurances being given?

Gandhiji in a cable to *The Times* on 14 April, reiterated his demand for a tribunal. The refusal of Lord Zetland to submit his interpretation to an examination by a legal tribunal, he said, would raise a strong presumption that the British Government had no intention of dealing fairly by the majority party whose advanced programme they disliked.

He continued:

I prefer an honourable deadlock to dishonourable daily scenes between the Congressmen and the Governors. For in the sense the British Government mean, the working of the Act by the Congress seems impossible.



Speaking to the Press on 25 April Gandhiji said what he was asking for was that there should be no interference in the day-to-day administration by the Governors. He did not ask for a promise that a cabinet might never be dismissed. He wanted to put Congress ministries in a position where there would be no pinpricks from Governors such as the ones to which ministers under the Montford scheme had been subjected. Their position had been made unbearable and humiliating, and yet they had been unable to resign.

On 28 April the Congress Working Committee, which sat from 26 to 28 April to consider the question, spelt out the Congress demand for assurances in more specific terms. Its resolution ran:

The past record of the British Government as well as its present attitude show that without specific assurances as required by the Congress, popular ministers will be unable to function properly. . . .

The assurances do not contemplate abrogation of the right of the Governor to dismiss the ministry or dissolve the provincial Assembly when serious differences of opinion arise between the Governor and his ministers. But this Committee has grave objection to ministers having to submit to interference by the Governor with the alternative of themselves having to resign their office instead of the Governors taking the responsibility of dismissing them.

On 6 May in the House of Lords Zetland tried to reassure the critics that it was not contemplated that the Governor should immediately set himself in open opposition to the ministry if he saw a risk of his not seeing eye to eye with the ministry on some matter. "His Majesty's Government," he said, "have no intention of countenancing the use of special powers for purposes other than for



which Parliament intended them." The Governors would not normally be trenching upon the wide powers placed in the hands of ministries.

Gandhiji found the tone of Zetland's statement an improvement. Even so, he said, it was not enough to remove the deadlock. The Working Committee had provided the clearest possible annotation of the A.I.C.C.'s resolution. The Governors must give the assurance that whenever they should be faced with a situation which they found intolerable, they would take upon their shoulders the responsibility of dismissing the ministers instead of expecting them to resign or submit to the Governor's wishes.

The matter came up in a debate in the House of Lords on 8 May. Lord Lothian argued that under a system of responsible government there was not much difference between dismissal and resignation in actual operation. It was a minor point. Zetland said it would be always open to a Governor to dismiss the ministry and equally the ministry could resign. It would be better to leave the matter until a case arose.

Circles in the Congress found Zetland's latest stance sufficiently mollifying and felt that on the strength of it the Congress could accept office. Gandhiji's raising the question of resignation and dismissal did not go down well with them. "Everyone says it will be a great mistake not to accept ministry after Zetland's speech," wrote G.D. Birla to Mahadev Desai. Rajagopalachari too could not go along with Gandhiji's position. Gandhiji wrote to him on 11 June, admitting that there was force in the argument advanced by Birla.

But from my standpoint it is irrelevant. I want a sign from them before I take office, and I regard that sign as indispensable. Therefore, for me acceptance continues to be a fatal blunder till our condition *whatever it may be* [emphasis added] is satisfied. The fact, therefore, that my condition may



be demonstrably childish or meaningless does not affect my position.
[C.W.M.G., LXV, pp. 37, 70-71, 83, 155, 174, 175-76, 291-92]

The deadlock continued. Gandhiji said it might end in the suspension of the constitution leading to increased bitterness between Britain and India.

5

Finally on 21 June the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, issued a statement "for the benefit of the man in the street and the ordinary elector". The working of the ministries during the three months that had elapsed since the constitution came into operation, he said, had conclusively shown that the assurances that the Congress demanded were not essential to the smooth and harmonious working of the Constitution, and that the apprehensions that the Governors might gratuitously use their Special Responsibilities to impede or challenge the ministers in day-to-day administration, had no shadow of justification. The Act and the Instrument of Instructions made it clear beyond any possibility of question that in all matters falling within the ministerial field, including the position of the Minorities, the Services, etc., the Governor would ordinarily be guided by the advice of his ministers. There was no foundation for any suggestion that a Governor was free, or was entitled, or would have the power, to interfere with the day-to-day administration of a Province outside the limited range of responsibilities specially confined to him.

As regards the question of resignation or dismissal, normal constitutional practice leaned on the side of resignation. It was more consistent with self-respect. Both resignation and dismissal were possible, the former at the option of the ministers and the latter at the option of the Governors. But the Act did not contemplate that the Governor's option should be used to force the ministers' option and thus to shift the responsibility from himself.



The area of Special Responsibility of the Governors was clearly defined. The most important was the prevention of any grave menace to the peace and tranquillity of the Province, the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of the minorities and the securing to the Services any rights preserved for them under the Act.

The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha for four days from 5 to 8 July to consider the situation. On 7 July, it passed a resolution, drafted by Gandhiji, to the following effect:

... since the meeting of the Working Committee on April 28 last, Lord Zetland, Lord Stanley and the Viceroy have made declarations on this issue on behalf of the British Government. The Working Committee has carefully considered these declarations and is of opinion that though they exhibit a desire to make an approach to the Congress demand they fall short of the assurance demanded. . . . The Committee feels, however, that the situation created as a result of the circumstances and events that have since occurred, warrants the belief that it will not be easy for the Governors to use their special powers. The Committee has moreover considered the views of Congress members of the legislatures and of Congressmen generally.

The Committee has therefore come to the conclusion and resolves that Congressmen be permitted to accept office where they may be invited thereto. [*Ibid*, pp. 373-74; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, pp. 216-17, 236-70]

The resolution finally ended the deadlock. The minority ministries in the six provinces tendered their resignations and the decks were cleared for the Congress ministries to assume charge.



Although by July when the Congress was ready to take office the issue of leadership of the Congress parties in the various Provincial legislatures had been satisfactorily settled, in the days immediately following the elections it had been bedevilled here and there by personal ambitions of candidates for leadership coming to the fore and creating problems for the Working Committee.

In Orissa Nilkanta Das, a member of the Central Assembly, put forward his claim when the Legislature Party elected Bishwanath Das as its leader. The Working Committee put its foot down. At its meeting held between 15 and 22 March in Delhi it declared that it was neither proper nor advisable to interfere with the decision of the Legislature Party and advised Nilkanta Das to continue as a member of the Central Assembly and not to seek election to the Provincial Assembly. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, p. 181]

In Bombay the decision in regard to the leadership of the Legislature Party gave rise to acrimony that lasted a long time and left a bitter taste in the mouth of everyone concerned.

An obvious choice for leadership had been K. F. Nariman, a Parsi lawyer who headed the Bombay City Congress Committee and enjoyed immense popularity. On 4 March, soon after the election results had been announced, he went to see Vallabhbhai Patel and later took him out for a drive in his car. On the way he asked Patel for support in his bid for leadership. Patel expressed his inability to lend him the support he wanted but assured him he would not actively work against him.

Patel had reason for not supporting Nariman for leadership. In the Central Assembly elections held in 1934 the Congress had put up Nariman against Sir Cowasji Jehangir, another eminent and influential Parsi. At the last moment Nariman had withdrawn from the contest, letting the Congress down. The



Congress had hurriedly drafted K.M. Munshi to fill his place and lost the seat. Patel could not have forgotten.

Without consulting Vallabhbhai, who was Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, about 30 Congress legislators from Marathi-speaking areas of Bombay met at Poona and decided to elect Nariman as the leader of the party in the Legislature. When three days later they learnt from Gangadharrao Deshpande, leader of the Karnataka Congress, Shankarrao Dev, President of the Maharashtra P.C.C. and Achyut Patwardhan, the Socialist leader, that Vallabhbhai preferred B. G. Kher for the leadership of the Congress Legislature Party in Bombay, their ardour for K. F. Nariman cooled. On 12 March the Congress legislators met and with one voice elected Kher as their leader. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, pp. 261-62]

This was a signal for K. F. Nariman and his supporters to get up an agitation in the Press, attacking Patel for having pressurized legislators not to elect Nariman. Telegrams and other communications were also addressed by various individuals to the Congress President making the same charge.

When the Working Committee met in Delhi from 15 to 22 March, no less than 40 Congress legislators from Bombay met the President and through a signed memorandum drew his attention to the unseemly agitation being carried on on behalf of Nariman.

The Working Committee condemned the agitation as detrimental to the public life of the Province and injurious to the cause of the Congress. It rejected the contention that the leadership election had been influenced by improper conduct on the part of anybody, or by undue pressure from Sardar Patel as alleged. The Committee confirmed the election of Kher and asked those carrying on the agitation against his election to desist, as it amounted to terrorizing the Party. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, pp. 180-83]



But the agitation on behalf of Nariman only became more intensified. Nariman, on his part, began to flood the Congress and Gandhiji with letters. He first said he would welcome an enquiry by the Working Committee. Then he resiled and said he might not get justice at the hands of the Working Committee in a matter in which one of its own members was a party. He asked for a tribunal provided the Working Committee was agreeable. He even approached Govindrao Padgaonkar, a legal luminary of Bombay. Towards the middle of July he dropped even this demand. But he stuck to the charge that Vallabhbhai had intervened to his detriment in the election for leadership of the Congress Party. He cited in evidence some telegrams Vallabhbhai had sent to Gangadharrao Deshpande and Shankerrao Dev. Vallabhbhai in a statement on 14 July denied the charge and said the telegrams sent to the two Congress leaders mentioned had nothing to do with the election. Gandhiji wrote to Nariman that unless he was prepared to drop his charges against Vallabhbhai, he must agree to have an impartial enquiry.

On 2 August Gandhiji informed Nariman that he and D. N. Bahadurji would be prepared to arbitrate on the two related issues in connection with the Bombay Party election, viz., the role of Nariman in the 1934 Assembly election and the alleged interference by Vallabhbhai in the election of the Party leader. Nariman agreed.

The gathering of evidence, examination of witnesses, etc. took several months. It was in the middle of October that D. N. Bahadurji brought to Gandhiji his judgment in the case. The procedure was purely judicial. Over eighty witnesses testified and documentary evidence was voluminous. Bahadurji's judgment, Gandhiji said in a statement, occupied 14 foolscap sheets. His verdict was: "Charge against K. F. Nariman in respect of the election in 1934 was proved and the charge made by K. F. Nariman against Vallabhbhai was not proved."



Nariman accepted the findings and in a statement to the Press confessed that in the election of 1934 he had neglected his duty as a responsible office-bearer of the Congress and further that his charge against Vallabhbhai had been entirely unfounded. The confessional statement was drafted by Gandhiji and touched up by Bahadurji.

But a short while afterwards Nariman had second thoughts and recanted the statement, saying he had signed it out of consideration for Gandhiji's health.

Gandhiji was shocked at his *volte face* and severely took him to task. To Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru he wrote:

I am of opinion that by his conduct Shri Nariman has proved himself unworthy of holding any position of trust, not only because he has been found guilty of grave breach of trust in 1934 election and has failed to prove the charge brought by him against Sardar Vallabhbhai, but by his subsequent conduct . . . especially by his unfortunate recantation of the confession freely given by him in the presence of his counsel. [C.W.M.G., LXV, pp. 395, 412-13, 438-39, 443-44; LXVI, pp. 233, 234, 247-48, 253, 274, 284-85]

On 2 November the Working Committee by a resolution ordered the publication of the Arbitration Committee's report in the affair and declared that Nariman was unworthy of holding any position of trust and responsibility. He was divested of his position as President of the Bombay City Congress Committee. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, p. 15]

A problem of another kind arose in the United Provinces, and the way it was tackled on behalf of the Congress led to much misunderstanding between Nehru and Azad. The problem related to the relationship with the Muslim League.



The Muslim seats in the U.P Legislative Assembly, as mentioned earlier, were contested chiefly by the Muslim League, the National Agriculturist Party and independents. The Congress had entered only a token presence and had not won any seat. It had instead supported the Muslim League candidates, and the two parties had campaigned together in Muslim constituencies. Later, in a bye-election, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai of the Congress had been returned to the Assembly with Muslim League support. Pattabhi Sitaramayya writes:

Mr. Khaliquzzaman [a renegade Congressman who had joined the League] . . . worked in unison with the Congress. . . . And the intimacy of consultations and counsels went so far that no League candidate was being run against Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai when he contested a by-election and was returned unopposed. [*The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 690]

During the election campaign the tone of Jinnah, too, was conciliatory. In one speech he was quoted as saying:

Ours is not a hostile movement. Ours is a movement which carries the olive branch to every sister community. We are willing to cooperate, we are willing to coalesce with any group or groups, provided their ideals, their objects are approximately the same as ours.

In another speech he said:

There is no difference between the ideals of the Muslim League and of the Congress, the ideal being complete freedom for India. There could not be any self-respecting Indian who favoured foreign domination or did not desire complete freedom and self-government for this country. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 230]



After the elections, with the League having secured 29 out of the 66 Muslim seats in the Assembly, expectations were high in political circles that the two parties would also cooperate in the Government. To this end Khaliquzzaman met Jawaharlal Nehru on 12 May at Allahabad. Nehru proposed that the Muslim League legislators should join the Congress Party, as it would be undesirable to have a separate Muslim League Party in the Legislature. Khaliquzzaman did not take the proposal kindly.

On 12 July Khaliquzzaman met Azad in Lucknow. It may be mentioned that Azad was functioning as the chief adviser of the Congress on the selection of Muslim Ministers. Azad gave Khaliquziaman a paper containing the Congress conditions for the inclusion of Muslim Leaguers in the Ministry. The chief of these were: "(1) the Muslim League group in the United Provinces Legislature shall cease to function as a separate group." "(2) the Muslim League Parliamentary Board in the United Provinces will be dissolved and no candidates will thereafter be set up by the said Board at any bye-election". [*Ibid*, p. 230]

These were harsh conditions and amounted to a demand for self-annihilation on the part of the League. Nevertheless, it would seem, Khaliquzzaman was willing to go along provided two members of the League, he himself and Nawab Ismail Khan, were taken in the Ministry. Gandhiji, when Azad showed him the draft agreement at Wardha on 22 July, called it a good document.

Nehru and other Congress leaders of the U.P. feared reaction among Congressmen in general and Congress Muslims in particular and after much discussion decided that only one Leaguer could be taken into the Ministry. Khaliquzzaman on his part insisted that Muslim League legislators could join the Congress party if they were permitted to vote according to their conscience on



communal matters —"religion, religious ceremonies, language, culture, services, etc." The talks collapsed.

Maulana Azad, in the pages of his book *India Wins Freedom*, which were sealed for 30 years under stipulation by him and were published only in 1990, calls it a great blunder on the part of the Congress and holds Nehru responsible for it. He thinks the way in which the matter was handled gave the Muslim League in the U.P. a new lease of life. Many others too later gave expression to similar views. Sri Prakasa, writing many years later to Khaliquzzaman, said:

I recall the incident after the 1936-37 elections, and how the Congress and the League that had worked together in them parted company for the fault of the leaders of the former. [*Ibid*, pp. 231-32]

But there were grounds for Nehru and other Congress leaders harbouring suspicions of the intentions of the Muslim League. Notwithstanding a limited measure of cooperation in the U.P. and elsewhere during the elections, the fact remained that the leaders of the League, and especially Jinnah, had started a tirade against the Congress, describing it as an organization of the Hindus, which could never do justice to the claims of the Muslims. It was not without significance that a prominent Muslim Leaguer of the U.P., Raja of Salempur, accepted a Ministerial portfolio in the minority interim government formed by the U.P. Governor in April 1937. Gradually the League's position vis-a-vis the Congress hardened more and more. At the Muslim League conference held in Lucknow Jinnah declared on 15 October, 1937:

The present leadership of the Congress . . . has been responsible for alienating the Musalmans of India more and more by pursuing a policy which is exclusively Hindu, and since they have formed the governments in six provinces where they are in majority they have by their words, deeds and



programmes shown that the Musalmans cannot expect any justice or fair play at their hands. Wherever they are in a majority and wherever it suited them, they refused to cooperate with the Muslim League Parties and demanded unconditional surrender and signing of their pledges. . . .

. . . Hindi is to be the national language of India and *Bandemataram* is to be the national song and is to be forced upon all. . . . On the very threshold of what little power and responsibility is given, the majority community have clearly shown their hand that Hindustan is for the Hindus only.

Jinnah did not absolve the British from blame for this state of affairs. They had been a party to "the flagrant breach of the Constitution . . . in the matter of appointment of Muslim Ministers" for they know that persons they were appointing as Ministers did not command the confidence of Muslim representatives or the public outside. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 468-69]

Gandhiji described the speech as a declaration of war and in great anguish wrote to Jinnah on 19 October:

I had hoped you would reserve poor me as a bridge between the two. I see that you want no bridge. I am sorry. [*Ibid*, p. 257]

Jinnah answered that though he knew Gandhiji was not even a four-anna member of the Congress, his complete silence "all these months" had identified him with the Congress leadership. [*Ibid*, p. 470]

The League was now irrevocably set on a course of total confrontation with the Congress. As days and months passed and Congress Ministries in various Provinces tried to implement the programme of the party as it related to amelioration of the condition of the masses the antagonism between the two parties became more pronounced.



The Congress decision first to contest the elections under the new Constitution and then to assume office in the Provinces did not go down well with large numbers of workers who still swore by the constructive programme and the policy of keeping away from the legislatures. At the meetings of the Gandhi Seva Sangh held at Hubli from 16 to 20 April 1937, the issue figured prominently. Kishorelal Mashruwala, the President of the Sangh, registered his protest by resigning from Presidentship. What particularly distressed the members of the Sangh was that Gandhiji had been an active participant in the Congress decision, which had indeed been taken under his guidance. "Are you the same man who had advocated non-cooperation in 1920-21?" asked Kaka Kalelkar.

Gandhiji had to go to great pains to defend the decision. Yes, he said, his stance on the question of Council-entry had softened. But there was no loss of principles involved in the change. Changed situations called for changed responses. It had been said by Jamnalal Bajaj that truth and non-violence could not be pursued by going into the legislatures. Gandhiji said he did not agree. Electoral democracy was a necessary condition for the pursuit of the good of the millions. "In Swaraj, too," he said, "the legislatures will retain more or less their present structure, though it is possible there may be some change in the external form."

Thirty million people, about one-third of all who should have had the franchise, had acquired the right to vote. It was, Gandhiji said, no small thing. Thousands of Congress workers had approached them and taken to them the message of the Congress. This had never happened before. The Gandhi Seva Sangh, like the Charkha Sangh and the Gram Udyog Sangh, was an organ of the



Congress and would remain so as long as the Congress adhered to truth and non-violence.

The workers must remember, Gandhiji continued, that those who were now going into the legislatures were not going into Government legislatures. They were representatives of the people. Formerly those going into the legislatures went as representatives of the Government or of a handful of people. If truth and non-violence were to be practised in the legislatures, who would do so if not they? Legislatures were not institutions opposed to constructive work organizations. "I like legislatures. They are mine." said Gandhiji. "The Governor has been made the head, but the institution is mine. . . . With the help of the legislatures I wish to destroy this system. We are going into the legislatures to gain strength. We are not going into the legislatures to paralyse them."

Kishorelal's fear was that in the race for entry into the legislatures, truth and non-violence would be given the go-by. It would lead to a belief that swaraj could be more quickly secured through the parliamentary programme. Popular enthusiasm for the programme had so far been kept in check but now with the change in Congress policy, the dyke had burst, and there was no checking the flow. Earlier the talk had been of boycotting Councils, schools, law-courts and of destroying them. Now the language was different.

Kishorelal was also critical of the language in which the Congress resolution on the subject was couched. The last part of the resolution appeared to contradict the earlier three-fourths of the resolution. It was open to two different interpretations.

Gandhiji only partially agreed with Kishorelal. If, as Kishorelal said, the Councils programme was full of temptations, then the temptations had to be faced. Non-violence must be used to overcome the brute in man. Gandhiji



admitted that the language of the Congress resolution could be interpreted differently by different people. He interpreted it in one way, Jawaharlal in another. What was wrong with it? Gandhiji said:

Truth, as I know it, does not demand that the words a satyagrahi utters should have only one meaning. What he says may have not two but several different meanings. The condition merely is that the meaning should not be hidden, words should not be used for deception and should be necessary.

The *Gita* had two meanings – one spiritual, the other material, so had the language of Tulsidas. The drafting of Congress resolutions, Gandhiji said, had been generally done by him. They always admitted of two interpretations and he saw no objection to this because he had to carry the others with him. When he said that he would wreck the Constitution, he meant that he would wreck it through non-violence. Jawaharlal did not think it would be possible to do so. Rajendra Babu, Vallabhbhai and others were inclined one way, Jawaharlal another. But they had to work together. There had to be cooperation and compromise. In accepting the Councils programme, Gandhiji said, the Congress was not getting away from truth and non-violence. Indeed, it was a means towards approaching truth and non-violence. [C.W.M.G., LXV, pp. 99-106, 116-34]

Writing later in *Harijan* Gandhiji again explained his changed perception of the new Constitution. He wrote:

The Government of India Act is universally regarded as wholly unsatisfactory for achieving India's freedom. But it is possible to construe it as an attempt, however limited and feeble, to replace the rule of the sword by the rule of the majority. The creation of the big electorate of three crores



of men and women and the placing of wide powers in their hands cannot be described by any other name. [*Ibid*, p. 406]

Later, after the Congress ministries had assumed charge in Provinces, Gandhiji, answering a reader who had complained of *Harijan* being no longer confined to the cause of Harijan uplift but being full of all kinds of subjects, Gandhiji wrote:

The reason for exclusion [of other topics] no longer exists. . . . In the greater part of India the Congress is both in office and in power. It is true that the power is limited. But it is limited in terms of Complete Independence, not otherwise. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 188]

9

Just as Congress ministries were taking office Gandhiji came out with advice on the programme they should take up on a priority basis for implementation by provincial Governments.

The first task he advised them to take up was bringing about total prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs "not later than three years from 14 July 1937". Other items they should take up for immediate implementation were jail reform, so that jails became reformatories instead of being punitive departments, making salt available to the people free of cost and making sure that all Government purchases of cloth were in khadi.

Then there was the question of the personal behaviour of Ministers. India was one of the poorest countries of the world, with many millions living in semi-starvation. Its representatives could not afford to live in a style and manner out of all correspondence with their electors. Ministers must introduce rigorous simplicity in their life-style and in the administration. They could not afford to



copy in this matter the Governors and members of the Civil Service. They must, further, show by their behaviour that they were wholly free from any communal bias. They would have to demonstrate by every action of theirs that in their eyes there was no one high and no one low. Poverty and climate were common to all without distinction and their major problems were identical.

Office acceptance, Gandhiji concluded, was not intended to work the Act anyhow. In the prosecution by the Congress of its goal of Complete Independence, it was a serious attempt on the one hand to avoid a bloody revolution and on the other to avoid mass civil disobedience on a scale so far not attempted. [C.W.M.G., LXV, pp. 406-8]

But what about the relief to the peasantry? — critics asked. The rural population was burdened with excessive taxation, rack-renting, illegal exactions, indebtedness, illiteracy, superstition and disease. There was no need for him to mention relief to the peasantry, Gandhiji answered. The Congress had worked out an elaborate agrarian programme. The distress of the peasantry was the *raison d'être* of the Congress and every Congressman, even if only academically, was interested in the problem. There was thus no fear of the Congress neglecting the peasantry.

Bringing about total prohibition however was a difficult matter. Total prohibition meant "prohibition against sale of intoxicating drinks and drugs, except under medical prescription by a practitioner licensed for the purpose and to be purchasable only at Government depots maintained therefor." Prohibition had been made an integral part of the Congress programme in 1920. Now that the Congress was in power it was its moral duty once for all courageously and drastically to deal with the evil of drinks and drugs.



Unfortunately the question had been mixed up with the question of education. It had been pointed out that education in the Provinces was almost wholly financed with funds obtained from the liquor revenue and prohibition would therefore amount to starving the education departments of funds. To avoid this consequence of prohibition Gandhiji suggested making education self-supporting. Of course money could also be found by resorting to fresh taxation. Possession of inordinate riches by individuals should be considered a crime in a country like India. In England they had been taking away in taxes as much as 70 per cent of the earnings beyond a prescribed limit. In India there was no reason not to go much further than that. There could also be death duties. The best course, however, would be to make education self-supporting.

What was education after all? Literacy in itself was not education. Education should begin with the teaching of handicrafts and training the head through the hands. The State should take over the products of manufacture of the schools. A knowledge of the alphabet could be imparted to children after their curiosity had been built up and they had learnt to separate wheat from chaff. Primary education, by which Gandhiji said he meant education equal to the existing matriculation standard minus English, plus a craft, was of the greatest importance. College education, similarly, needed to be recast. There was no reason for the State to spend money on higher education. There would be degrees in engineering, medicine, agricultural science and so on. But they should be imparted by the different industries. The Tatas, for instance, could train mechanical and other engineers. Medical colleges could be attached to hospitals. Any agricultural colleges', to be worthy of the name, must of course be self-supporting on the basis of agricultural farms. [*Ibid*, pp. 447-53]



Acting on Gandhiji's advice, the Congress Working Committee, at its meeting held at Wardha from 14 to 17 August 1937, passed the following resolution:

In as much as prohibition has been one of the chief planks of the Congress since the inauguration of the Non-cooperation movement in 1920 . . . the Working Committee is of the opinion that it is incumbent upon the Congress Ministries to work for this end. The Committee expects them to bring about total prohibition in their respective Provinces within three years. The Working Committee appeals to the Ministries in other Provinces, and to the Indian States also, to adopt this programme of moral and social uplift of the people.

Gandhiji described the resolution as the greatest act of the Working Committee at any time of its chequered career. Objection had been raised, Gandhiji said, that prohibition could not be successfully implemented and that the Ministries would have to discontinue the experiment when they discovered that prohibition meant mere loss of revenue without any appreciable diminution of consumption, though illicit, of drinks and drugs. He did not share that view. What was needed was to take up prohibition as a movement to wean away from drink and narcotics those poor people and some rich people whom the habit had ruined. To this end Gandhiji suggested the following programme:

- (1) A drink map showing the locality of liquor and opium shops in each Province.
- (2) Closing them as liquor shops on the expiry of the licences.
- (3) Immediate earmarking of liquor revenue exclusively for the purposes of prohibition.
- (4) Conversion of liquor shops into refreshment and recreation rooms.



- (5) Employment of the existing excise staff for detection of illicit distillation and drinking.
- (6) Appeals to the educational institutions to devote a part of the time of teachers and students to temperance work.
- (7) Appeal to the women to organize visits to the persons given to drink and opium habits.
- (8) Negotiations with the neighbouring States to undertake simultaneous prohibition.
- (9) Engaging voluntary or paid assistance of the medical profession for suggesting non-alcoholic drinks and other substitutes for intoxicants and methods of weaning the addicts from their habit.
- (10) Revival of the activities of temperance associations in support of the campaign against drink.
- (11) Requiring employers of labour to open and maintain refreshment, recreation and educational rooms for the use of their employees.
- (12) Toddy-tappers to be used for drawing sweet toddy for sale or for conversion into *gur*.

Gandhiji also suggested ways to make up, to some extent, for the loss of revenue resulting from the enforcement of prohibition. Apart from raising taxes through death duties and from tobacco, including *bidis*, short-term loans could be raised. In the event of all these measures failing, the Central Government could be approached to curtail the military budget and proportionately increase grants to the Provinces. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 81-83]

It was pointed out to Gandhiji that prohibition had been tried in the United States and had failed. Gandhiji said India was not America. In America



drinking was not looked upon as a vice and millions drank. In India drinking was held reprehensible by all religions and it was not the millions who drank, it was individuals who drank. [*Ibid*, p. 60]

In accordance with what newspapers described as Gandhiji's "Instrument of Instructions", Congress Ministries in various provinces took up the prohibition programme in right earnest. In Madras Rajagopalachari, as passionate a prohibitionist as Gandhiji himself, soon after assuming office as Premier of the Province, brought forward a bill for the total enforcement of prohibition in one go, and creation of alternative sources of revenue. [*Ibid*, p. 127] He introduced Sales Tax and called it his Kama Dhenu (the cow of plenty). The money saved from drinks, he said, would be spent on purchasing house-hold goods and the Government would get money and the homes would have prosperity.

In Bombay, when the budget was presented on 17 August by the Ministry headed by B. G. Kher, prohibition formed part of the proposals. As a preliminary to bringing about total prohibition of alcoholic drinks, opium and hemp, toddy booths in the Bombay city were reduced by 25 per cent and no shops were allowed within a hundred yards of temples, mosques, schools and hospitals. Ahmedabad as well as a few other areas in Gujarat and Karnataka were constituted into "dry" or no-licence areas. The whole Presidency was to become dry in a phased manner.

In the United Provinces, where Govind Ballabh Pant had assumed charge as Premier, a beginning was made by introducing prohibition as an experimental measure in Etah and Mainpuri districts. It was also decided to bring about a reduction of liquor shops by 25 per cent and to have State-managed shops in certain places.



In Bihar, too, a beginning was made by starting prohibition in certain selected areas. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, pp. 286-308]

10

Gandhiji's appeal to the Ministers for austerity, simplicity and voluntary reduction in salaries and allowances was however found less easy to implement. It was a subject on which the Congress had had extensive deliberations and passed many resolutions. The latest had been the resolution passed by the Working Committee when it met from 5 to 7 July at Wardha to give its approval to assumption of office in the Provinces. The resolution ran:

Apart from free provision to be made by the State for residence and conveyance, the salaries of Ministers, Speakers and Advocates-General shall not exceed Rs. 500 per month, as laid down in the Karachi resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Programme. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. I, p. 217]

Gandhiji did not relish the idea that the Ministers should be provided, in addition to the salary of Rs. 500 per month, house-rent allowance and conveyance allowance. On 22 July he wrote to Nehru:

The Rs. 500 salary with big house and car allowance is being severely criticized. The more I think of it, the more I dislike this extravagant beginning. I talked about this, too, to the Maulana. [C.W.M.G., LXV, p. 427]

To K. M. Munshi he wrote on 24 July:

How can you expect any mercy from me? I can't approve of your princely salaries and additional princely house-rent allowances and conveyance allowances. Moreover you will draw your salary at one rate and your secretary at another and lower rate, though both of you are



guests of the same family. . . . To me this is like a fly in the very first morsel.
[*Ibid*, p. 434]

And what should be the scale of remuneration to be paid to Members of Legislative Assemblies? Gandhiji's suggestion, made to C. Rajagopalachari, was as follows:

I do hope you won't pay the Members for twelve months. I should regard [as enough] Rs. 2 per day *whilst* the Assembly is sitting, plus 3rd class travelling and actual out-of-pocket for coolies and tonga not exceeding Rs. 2. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 4]

Gandhiji in an article in *Harijan* referred to the Karachi resolution of the Congress fixing Ministers' salaries at Rs. 500 per month and wrote:

I must say in parenthesis that considering Rs. 500 as if it was the minimum instead of the maximum was a mistake. Rs. 500 was the last limit. . . . The Congress scale has been generally, for the past seventeen years at least, Rs. 75 per month. In its three great constructive All-India departments, national education, khadi and village industries, the authorized scale has been Rs. 75. . . . Why should the fact of becoming a Minister make the great difference we see? [*Ibid*, p. 17]

A month after the assumption of office by Congress ministries, the Working Committee again met at Wardha from 14 to 17 August. In a resolution on the subject the Committee asked that "salaries and allowances of Ministers and others should be reduced to the lowest possible limit consistently with efficiency". The Committee further laid down the following general rules:

For Ministers: Rs. 500 per month as salary, house allowance Rs. 100 per month, car allowance Rs. 150 per month.



Parliamentary Secretaries: Salaries and allowances to be left to the discretion of Ministers.

Members of Legislative Assemblies: It was recognized that the existing scale of daily allowance for which the Members were eligible was too heavy and needed to be overhauled. It was however laid down that daily allowance for the days of attendance should in no case exceed Rs. 10. If a salary had to be paid to the Members it should not exceed Rs. 75 per month, though an additional remuneration of Rs. 2/8 per day for the days of attendance could be given.

The Working Committee also directed Congress Members of Legislative Assemblies in Provinces where there were non-Congress Governments and where salaries and allowances had continued to be on a very high scale, to draw their emoluments on the scale laid down in the resolution. Should they however draw their salaries and allowances according to the rules they must hand over the difference to the Working Committee. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, pp. 312-13]

Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan* of 21 August 1937:

I have not hesitated to express my opinion that the salaries that the Congress Ministers have voted for themselves are much too high for the standard that should govern us in this poorest country in the world. . . . The salaries and the allowances are now a settled fact. The question now is, will the Ministers, their secretaries and the Members work so hard as to deserve the emoluments they will receive? Will the Members become whole-time workers for the nation and give a faithful account of the services they may render? Let us not make the mistake of imagining that the things are what we wish them to be or what they should be. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 61-62]



The installation of popular rule in the Provinces led to heightened expectations that the political prisoners lodged in various provincial jails and those serving life sentences in the Andamans would be released. But even before the ministries could come to grips with the matter, 187 prisoners serving life sentences for terrorist offences in the Andamans Central Prison started a hunger-strike on 24 July. They had earlier sent a petition to the Government of India requesting release of all detenus, State prisoners and convicted political prisoners, repeal of all repressive laws and withdrawal of internment orders, return of all the Andamans prisoners to India and all convicts to be treated as 'B' class prisoners. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, p. 3]

The petition was rejected, and on 30 July more prisoners joined the hunger-strike. Public opinion all over India was in consequence much exercised. There were meetings and demonstrations in Bombay, Calcutta and other large cities expressing sympathy for the prisoners and supporting their demands.

On 4 August the matter was raised in the Bengal Legislative Assembly through an adjournment motion. Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Home Minister, stating the Government's position, declared that the demands of prisoners could not be considered so long as the hunger-strike had not been called off.

On 9 August the debate was taken up again, with the Congress Members demanding the immediate release of all detenus. The Premier, A. K. Fazlul Huq, assured the House that whereas the policy of the earlier Government had been one of detention, the policy of his Government was release of detained persons. More than 1,000 detenus, he said, had been released and if circumstances were favourable, practically all the detenus might be released by September. [*Ibid*, pp. 126-27, 132-34]



A Congress member of the Central Legislative Assembly, Mohanlal Saxena, took up the cause of the Andamans prisoners with the Viceroy. In a letter dated 7 August, he pointed out to the Viceroy the inhuman conditions prevailing in the Andamans Central Prison, where scores of prisoners had fallen victims to insanity, tuberculosis and other wasting diseases. When in 1933 the prisoners had similarly gone on a hunger-strike, Saxena reminded the Viceroy, many had developed malaria within a short time and three of them had died. He appealed to the Viceroy to grant amnesty to the Andamans prisoners.

Lord Linlithgow was unrelenting. He pointed out to Saxena in reply that every one of the Andamans prisoners had been convicted by courts after a due process of trial. About a hundred of them had been convicted of dacoity. Of the remainder, over 60 had been convicted of murder, or attempt to murder and illegal possession of arms. Lord Linlithgow rejected the contention that the Andamans jail was particularly unhealthy. He argued that the death rate in the jails in India was higher than in the Andamans. Government could not, under threat of continued hunger-strike, surrender to the demand of the prisoners for repatriation and release. [*Ibid*, pp. 127-31]

12

On 16 August Rabindranath Tagore in a telegram appealed to Gandhiji to intervene to save the lives of the hunger-striking prisoners. On 27 August Gandhiji in a message sent through the Viceroy, appealed to the prisoners to heed the nationwide request and abandon the hunger-strike. He assured them that the country would do its best to secure relief for them. At the same time he asked them to assure him "that those who believed in terrorist methods no longer believe in them and that they have come to believe in non-violence as the best method".



On 29 August Gandhiji received the message that responding to his appeal an overwhelming majority of the prisoners had "suspended unconditionally" the hunger-strike and that only seven were still on hunger- strike. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 56, 74-75]

Gandhiji again assured the hunger-striking prisoners that the country would do everything to secure them relief. Meanwhile would they clarify their position on non-violence? The prisoners in their turn assured him that those of them who had ever believed in terrorism did not hold to it any more and were convinced of its futility as a political weapon. They asked Gandhiji to convey their demand for release of all political prisoners, detenus, State prisoners and internees and for repeal of all repressive laws.

Gandhiji persisted in his attempts to persuade the prisoners to suspend the hunger-strike. On 15 September in a press statement he announced the failure of his efforts. He expressed the hope that friends and relatives of the prisoners would persuade them to break the fast. At the same time he appealed to the authorities to release the prisoners. [*Ibid*, p. 131]

Bowing to popular pressure the Government in the end brought over sections of convict prisoners in the Andamans to the Alipore Central Jail. Demand for the release of the prisoners, however, continued to gather force. Leaders from Bengal, particularly the Bose brothers – Sarat and Subhas – and Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru, pressed Gandhiji to visit Bengal and strive with the Bengal Government for the release of the prisoners.

Gandhiji accordingly proceeded to Calcutta in the last week of October, reaching there on the 26th. On the 27th he held consultations with Premier Fazlul Huq and the prisoners and detenus. On the 30th he paid a visit to the Alipore Jail to meet the repatriate prisoners from the Andamans. He assured



them that he would do all he could to bring about their release, but they must on their part undertake not to resort to hunger-strike while he pursued his efforts. He said:

My days are numbered . . . maybe I may live a year or a little more and let me tell you that much of that time is going to be given in order to secure your release. I want to see you discharged before I die. That is the word I am giving you and I want you to give me your word that so long as I live to work for you you will not go on hunger-strike. [*Ibid*, p. 281]

Gandhiji had planned to return to Segaoon on the 1st of November and then pay another visit to Calcutta on 11 November to see the Governor and have another round of consultations with the Ministers. But a sudden rise in his blood-pressure made it necessary for him to have prolonged rest and precluded a long train journey. In consequence he had to remain in Calcutta till 17 November. He made use of the time by meeting the Governor (on 9 and 17 November) and the Premier and other Ministers, such as Khwaja Nazimuddin, B. P. Singh Roy, H. S. Suhrawardy and N. R. Sarkar (11, 16 and 17 November). He also visited the Presidency Jail and met the detenus brought there from Deoli.

Gandhiji's efforts bore fruit. On 18 November the Government of Bengal issued a communique defining its policy with regard to the question of release of detenus.

The communique reiterated that the policy of the Government, as enunciated in its declaration of 9 August in the Assembly, was one of "progressive release" of the detenus, as wholesale release of over 2,000 detenus might lead to possible recrudescence of violence. In view of the general improvement in the atmosphere and Gandhiji's assurance that he would meet the detenus and persuade them not to resort to terrorism the Government had decided to



accelerate the release of detenus and had issued orders for the immediate release of 1,100 detenus. The remaining detenus, some 450 in number, lodged in various camp jails, the communique said, would be released after Gandhiji had seen them and could assure the Government that they had given up belief in violence. The communique cordially welcomed Gandhiji's offer of assistance in creating the favourable atmosphere that was essential for the success of the policy. [*Ibid*, pp. 472-73]

Gandhiji congratulated the Bengal Government on their decision to release the detenus. The Bengal Ministry were not bound by the Congress election manifesto and did not share the ideology of the Congress. Yet they had travelled along Congress lines to a considerable extent.

The communique, Gandhiji said, was silent on the question of the Andamans prisoners, for the Government made a distinction between convicted prisoners and detenus, which was only right. But he hoped that in time it would be possible to secure the release of the Andamans prisoners also. [*Ibid*, pp. 303-5]

13

During Gandhiji's stay in Calcutta the All-India Congress Committee also held a meeting there on 29, 30 and 31 October 1937. Provincial Premiers, Ministers and Speakers of the Provincial Assemblies were also invited. But there were some important absentees too. Dr. Khan Saheb, Premier of the N.W.F.P., had not been able to come because of other engagements. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, and Jamnalal Bajaj had been taken ill and could not attend.

The session was a stormy one. The performance of the Congress Ministries, which had then been in office for a little over three months, came under blistering attack from Socialists, particularly in the field of law and order. In Bombay Home Minister K. M. Munshi had failed to cancel the curbs on the activities of some



twenty Communists. In Madras, S. S. Batliwala had been arrested on 2 October under Section 124 A on the orders of the District Magistrate at Tellichery and R. K. Sidhwa had moved for adjournment to consider the matter. M. R. Masani charged that Congress ministries had been dragging their feet on restoring civil liberties. He had feared, he said, that by accepting office the Congress ministries would more and more identify themselves with Imperialism. This should not be allowed to happen. Although in the provinces several political prisoners had been released, steps should have been taken to release all political prisoners and to have all repressive laws repealed. The whole armoury of repressive laws enacted between 1930 and 1932 had remained intact and there was nothing to prevent future Governments from misusing them.

Annapurniah from Andhra charged that in Madras, notwithstanding the assurances of C. Rajagopalachari that the C.I.D. would cease to function in Madras, political workers were still pursued by the C.I.D., houses were being searched and literature seized. He referred to the ban on the Summer School at Kottapatam, which had not been lifted in spite of the representation of the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee.

U. Sanyal pointed out that there were still ninety political prisoners in jails. Section 124 A, which had little to do with violence or non-violence, still remained in operation.

Kaleswara Rao, Parliamentary Secretary to Rajagopalachari, defended his Premier. Rebutting the misrepresentations, he said they were a travesty of facts. In Madras the Congress Government had returned all Press securities, removed all bans and released all political prisoners including the Moplah rebellion prisoners. The Moplah Outrages Act as well as the Criminal Tribes Act had been repealed. Patel, too, strongly defended Rajagopalachari, who, he pointed out,



had even released Yusuf Meherally, who had been convicted by the previous Government.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya moved a resolution denouncing the policy of repression being followed by the Mysore State. The resolution said:

This meeting of the A.I.C.C. expresses its emphatic protest against the ruthless policy of repression as indicated by the inauguration of various restrictive and prohibitory orders and political prosecutions launched in the Mysore State and also against the suppression of civil rights and liberties by denying the elementary rights of speech, assembly and association. This meeting sends its fraternal greetings to the people of Mysore and wishes them all success in their legitimate non-violent struggle and appeals to the people of Indian States and British India to give all support and encouragement to the people of Mysore in their struggle against the State for right of self-determination.

Kamaladevi denied that the resolution constituted interference with the affairs of the Mysore State. It was the Mysore State, she said, which was interfering with their normal activities. She herself had been pursued by the Mysore police and persecuted in the most insulting and vulgar manner.

Gadgil and Nariman supported the resolution, singling out the Dewan for a trenchant attack.

The resolution was carried amidst applause. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, pp. 350-62; C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 293]

Gandhiji did not like any part of the A.I.C.C. proceedings. He did not like the attack on the Ministries and he liked the Mysore resolution even less. Writing in *Harijan*, 13-11-1937, he observed:



The recent meeting of the A.I.C.C. showed . . . that some of its members were not at all in accord with the Congress Ministries, especially that of C. Rajagopalachari, the Prime Minister of Madras. . . . The critics had not cared to study the facts. They had not before them C. Rajagopalachari's reply. . . . I am convinced that in their action the critics departed from truth and non-violence. . . .

Gandhiji continued:

Much more offensive, in my opinion, was the Mysore resolution; and the pity of it is that it was carried with practically nobody to speak out for truth. . . . In my opinion the Mysore resolution was *ultra vires* of the resolution of non-interference. . . . The resolution did not set forth the correct state of affairs, and speeches were full of passion and without regard to the facts of the case. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 292-93]

The proceedings of the A.I.C.C. showed that the sympathies of Jawaharlal Nehru, the President, were with the critics of the Congress Ministries. He appeared to agree that the actions of the Madras Government were fit for enquiry. Only he did not think that this could be done at the A.I.C.C. As for the Mysore resolution, he entered into an argument with Gandhiji in an attempt to defend the resolution. There was nothing in the Congress Constitution, he said, which would preclude the A.I.C.C. from considering any matter it chose even if such discussion went contrary to a previous resolution passed by itself. Besides, the resolution did not really amount to intervention in the affairs of a State. "Is a mention of a State in a resolution intervention?" Nehru asked. "Is a demand for civil liberties or a condemnation of repression intervention?. . . Are we to refrain from condemning repression in a State in future whatever the nature of this repression?" [*Ibid*, pp. 471-72]



The critics thus enjoyed the tacit support of Jawaharlal Nehru and this piqued Gandhiji, so much so that he wanted Vallabhbhai and others to resign from the Working Committee. On 1 November he wrote to Vallabhbhai:

I have come to the conclusion that it would be best if all [of you] resigned. Even if the others don't resign, you should. Jamnalal is sure to resign. Who will be left then? Rajendra Babu? . . .

The reasons for resigning are obvious. The Mysore chapter and increasing differences of opinion. . . . You should make it clear that you cannot continue in the face of such strong differences in the Committee.
[*Ibid*, pp. 285-86]

Things did not come to the breaking-point. Jawaharlal Nehru himself climbed down somewhat in trying to explain his position to Gandhiji (through letters to Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji having been too weak to be troubled). Also perhaps because the next session of the Congress was only three months away.



CHAPTER XVIII: BASIC EDUCATION

1

Next to prohibition on the list of priorities that Gandhiji recommended to the Provincial Governments came education. Gandhiji had long held and emphasized again and again the view that the existing system of education, introduced into India by the British, was wholly unsuited to the needs of the country. Its emphasis on literary training, the pride of place it accorded to English by making it the medium of instruction and its total indifference to the development of manual skills rendered it irrelevant to the vast masses in the villages. Graduates that the Indian universities turned out year after year were fitted only to be employed as clerks in cities and were totally lost to the social milieu from which they came. Their so called education and the smattering of English they acquired served to isolate them even from the members of their own families.

What was worse, Gandhiji felt, this system of education was too expensive not only for the masses it was supposed to serve, so that it could benefit only a miniscule minority of people, but equally for the State, which could foot the education bill only out of the revenue derived from intoxicating drinks and drugs. So dependent was education on the excise revenue that one of the strongest arguments advanced against prohibition was that education would be starved of funds thereby. The fear was not imaginary. Education was a provincial subject and the Provincial Governments had very meagre financial resources at their command. Excise, in all the Provinces, was a major source of revenue. Gandhiji on his part was willing to do without education if there was no other way except liquor sale to meet the expenses on education. But he was convinced that it was not so. The system of education proposed by him would be education for life and would be far less expensive.



A restructuring of the whole of the system of education was therefore seen as an urgent requirement. This restructuring must ensure on the one hand a reshaping of the content and methodology of education so as to make it a vehicle of all-round physical, intellectual and spiritual development of the student and a help to self-reliance, and, on the other, lead to easing of the financial burden on the State exchequer by making education self-supporting as far as possible. Gandhiji wrote:

I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g., hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect.

But education did not end with the development of the intellect. Spiritual development, or the education of the heart and mind, was equally important. A proper and all-round development of the mind could take place only when it proceeded *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties. The two constituted an indivisible whole. They could not be developed piecemeal or independently of one another. Gandhiji continued:

Man is neither mere intellect nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education. [C.W.M.G., LXV, pp. 73-74]

Gandhiji had long held that there should be training in crafts *along with* the training of the intellect. He now proposed that crafts training should become a means of intellectual training. He wrote: "True education is that which trains all the three faculties, spiritual, intellectual and economic, simultaneously. No boy



leaving school should have to ask himself: 'What shall I do now?' His education should be a kind of insurance guaranteeing him a livelihood." [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 33]

Of course if crafts were taught mechanically there could be no intellectual training. If a student just wanted to be a carpenter he would learn the skill and know the use of carpenter's tools. But training in carpentry could also be used as means of education. The teacher, while teaching carpentry, could teach the student the history of wood and while explaining where and how wood was grown, could also teach him geography. He could teach the student to make illustrations of his tools. While teaching the economics of carpentry the teacher could also teach the student the rudiments of arithmetic and geometry. The same applied to spinning and other crafts. All this would comprise a seven-year course of minimum adequate education. [*Ibid*, p. 32]

Some among the orthodox educationists severely criticized Gandhiji's views. It was said that the self-supporting workshop schools of the kind Gandhiji recommended would in practice be exploiting child-labour. Mathematics could not be studied by calculating how much yarn would be needed for a piece of cloth, and science and geography could not be learnt by observing the growth and improvement of strains of cotton. "Let us not demand," a professor wrote, "that schools should produce not only men but also goods."

Gandhiji, answering the critics, wrote:

I admit that my proposal is novel. But novelty is no crime. I admit that it has not much experience behind it. But what experience my associates and I have, encourages me to think that the plan, if worked faithfully, will succeed. The nation can lose nothing by trying the experiment even if it fails. And the gain will be immense if it succeeds even partially. In no other way



can primary education be made free, compulsory and effective. The present primary education is admittedly a snare and delusion.

Gandhiji further explained:

Seven years are not an integral part of my plan. It may be that more time will be required to reach the intellectual level aimed at by me. . . . The integral parts of the scheme are:

- (1) Taken as a whole a vocation or vocations are the best medium for the all-round development of a boy or a girl, and therefore all syllabus should be woven round vocational training.
- (2) Primary education thus conceived as a whole is bound to be self-supporting.

At the Tolstoy Farm in the Transvaal, Gandhiji continued, he had tried the experiment. There the central fact was vocational training for nearly eight hours, with one or at the most two hours of book learning. The vocations there were cooking, digging, scavenging, sandal-making, simple carpentry and messenger work. The ages of the children ranged from six to sixteen. [*Ibid*, pp. 143-44]

It was not expected, as some thought, that spinning and weaving would be the only craft chosen. Any craft could be taught for which a student had an aptitude. Only, one school could not teach many crafts. The idea was that there should be one teacher for twenty-five boys. There could be as many schools of twenty-five as there were teachers available. Each school would specialize in one of the many crafts, such as carpentry, smithy, tanning or shoemaking. Each craft had to be used to develop the mind of the child. [*Ibid*, p. 138]. It was expected to build up the curiosity of the child and the teacher would feed information as the child asked for it. For instance, in learning spinning a child would want to know



how much yarn he had been producing and how much he produced in a week or in a month. So he would learn to write and add and so on. The information would be absorbed by the child without any effort.

3

On the eve of the Silver Jubilee of the Marwari School at Wardha, renamed Navabharat Vidyalaya, to be celebrated on 22 October 1937, Gandhiji put down the following propositions on the question of mass education to be considered by a conference of educationists and provincial ministers concerned with education which was to be held on the occasion:

(1) The present system of education does not meet the requirements of the country in any shape or form. . . . The excessive importance given to English has cast upon the educated class a burden which has maimed them mentally for life and made them strangers in their own land. Absence of vocational training has made the educated class almost unfit for productive work. . . . Money spent on primary education is a waste of expenditure inasmuch as what little is taught is soon forgotten and has little or no value in terms of the villages or cities.

(2) The course of primary education should be extended at least to seven years and should include the general knowledge gained up to matriculation standard less English and plus a substantial vocation.

(3) For the all-round development of boys and girls all training should so far as possible be given through a profit-yielding vocation. In other words vocations should serve . . . to enable the pupil to pay for his tuition through the products of his labour. . . .



This primary education should equip boys and girls to earn their bread, by the State guaranteeing employment in the vocations learnt or by buying their manufactures at prices fixed by the State.

(4) Higher education should be left to private enterprise and for meeting national requirements whether in the various industries, technical arts, belles-lettres or fine arts.

The State Universities should be purely examining bodies, self-supporting through the fees charged for examinations.

Universities will look after the whole of the field of education and will prepare and approve courses of studies in the various departments of education. . . . University charters should be given liberally to anybody of persons of proved worth and integrity, it being always understood that the Universities will not cost the State anything except that it will bear the cost of running a Central Education Department. . . .

It is claimed that if the whole scheme is accepted, it will solve the question of the greatest concern to the State — training of its youth, its future-makers. [*Ibid*, pp. 194-95]

The Educational Conference duly assembled at Wardha on 22 and 23 October 1937 under the presidentship of Gandhiji and was largely attended. Among those invited were B. G. Kher, Prime Minister of Bombay, Madras Ministers P. Subbaroyan and S. Ramanathan, U.P. Minister Pyarelal Sharma, C.P. Minister Ravi Shanker Shukla, Orissa Premier Bishwanath Das, Bihar Minister Syed Mahmood, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Zakir Husain, Vinoba Bhave, Kaka Kalelkar, N. R. Malkani, K. T. Shah, Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Mrs. Saudamini Mehta,



Gosibehn Captain, Dev Sharma, Nana Athavale, Nanabhai Bhatt, Dr. P. C. Ray, E. W. Aryanayakum, Ashadevi and Shriman Narayan.

Elucidating his four propositions, Gandhiji said while they concerned both primary and college education, the Conference would have to address itself chiefly to primary education, which was the "only education so called that was available to a very small fraction of the people in our villages". It was his opinion, he said, that the prevailing system of primary education was not only wasteful but harmful. Most of the boys were lost to their parents and to the occupations to which they were born. They picked up evil habits, affected urban ways and what they learnt was anything but education. The remedy lay in introducing vocational training as aid to education. The aim must be to make the boys and girls true representatives of Indian culture, Indian traditions and Indian civilization. This could be done only by giving them a course of self-supporting education. In this matter Europe planned its programme in terms of violence, because it believed in violence. If India wanted to eschew violence the system of primary education that he recommended was an integral part of the discipline that must be gone through.

Gandhiji said he had proposed finding the expenses of the teacher through the product of the manual work of his pupils, because he was convinced that there was no other way education could be carried to the crores of village children. Gandhiji concluded:

If we want to eliminate communal strife and international strife, we must start with foundations pure and strong by rearing our younger generation on the education I have adumbrated. That plan springs out of non-violence. I suggested it in connection with the nation's resolve to effect complete prohibition, but I may tell you that even if there was to be no loss



of revenue, and our exchequer was full, this education would be a *sine qua non* if we did not want to urbanize our boys . . . we have no alternative but this plan of education which is based on non-violence. [*Ibid*, pp. 263-66]

A lively and frank debate on the propositions laid down by Gandhiji followed. Among those who expressed their views on the new education scheme were Vinoba Bhave, Dr. P. C. Hay, Kaka Kalelkar, K. T. Shah, Dev Sharma, N. R. Malkani, B. G. Kher, Subbaroyan, Bishwanath Das and Zakir Husain.

The Conference resolved that as suggested by Gandhiji (1) free and compulsory primary education be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale, (2) the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue, (3) the process of education throughout the period mentioned should centre round some form of manual and productive work and all other abilities to be developed or training to be given should as far as possible be integrally related to the central handicraft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child. The Conference expressed the hope that this system of education would gradually be able to cover the remuneration of the teachers.

The Conference appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Zakir Husain to prepare a planned syllabus on the lines of the resolutions passed. Other members of the committee were E. W. Aryanayakum, K. G. Saiyidain, Vinoba Bhave, Kaka Kalelkar, Shrikrishnadas Jaju, J. C. Kumarappa, Ashadevi, Kishorelal Mashruwala and K. T. Shah. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, p. 451]

5

About a month later Zakir Husain submitted the report of the committee to Gandhiji. The following is a brief summary of the report:

Indian opinion is practically unanimous in condemning the existing system of education in the country. . . . It is neither responsive to the realistic elements of the present situation, nor inspired by any life-giving and



creative ideal. . . . There is therefore a demand from all sides for the replacement of the present system of education by a more constructive and human system, which will be better integrated with the needs and ideals of national life and better able to meet its pressing demand.

In this field, as in so many others, farsighted leadership has come from Mahatma Gandhi. . . . The basic idea of his scheme . . . is that education, if sound in its principles, should be imparted through some craft or productive work which should provide the nucleus of all other instruction. . . .

Modern educational thought is practically unanimous in commending the idea of educating children through some suitable form of productive work. This method is considered to be the most effective approach to the problem of providing an integrated all-sided education. . . .

In order to secure these advantages it is essential that two conditions should be carefully observed. Firstly, the craft or productive work chosen should be rich in educational possibilities. . . . The object of this new educational scheme is not primarily the production of craftsmen able to practise some craft mechanically, but rather the exploitation for educative purposes of the resources implicit in craft work. . . .

The report then went on to delineate the outline of the Seven Years' Course. The syllabus laid down was as follows:

I. The Basic Craft

The following may be chosen as basic crafts in various schools: (a) Spinning and weaving, (b) Carpentry, (c) Agriculture, (d) Fruit and vegetable gardening, (e) Leather work, (f) Any other craft for which local and geographical conditions are favourable. . . .



II. Mother Tongue

The report emphasized the importance of teaching the mother tongue and suggested that by the end of seven years of schooling the following objectives should be achieved: (1) capacity to converse freely, naturally and confidently about the objects, people and happenings within the child's environment; (2) the capacity to speak lucidly, coherently and relevantly on any given topic; (3) the capacity to read silently, intelligently and with speed written passages of average difficulty; (4) the capacity to read aloud clearly, expressively and with enjoyment both prose and poetry; (5) the capacity to use the list of contents and the index and to consult dictionaries and reference books; (6) the capacity to write legibly, correctly and with reasonable speed; (7) the capacity to describe in writing, in simple and clear style, everyday happenings and occurrences; (8) the capacity to write personal letters and business communications of a simple kind; and (9) an acquaintance with, and interest in, the writings of standard authors, through a study of their writings or extracts from them.

III. Mathematics

The syllabus of mathematics was worked out with a view to making pupils proficient in business practice and book-keeping and to develop in them the capacity to solve speedily numerical or geometrical problems arising in connection with their craft. To this end the report recommended the teaching of the four simple rules, the four compound rules, fractions, decimals, the rule of three, the use of unitary method, interest, elements of mensuration, practical geometry and rudiments of book-keeping.

IV. Social Studies

The curriculum for social studies recommended in the report was as follows:



A course in history, in geography, in civics and in current events, combined with a reverential study of the different religions of the world showing how in essentials they meet in perfect harmony. . . . The study should begin with the child's own environment and its problems.

The history course was to comprise Indian history in outline, the treatment to be biographical in the lower grades and cultural and social in the upper grades. Stress was to be laid on the history of Indian national awakening.

In civics the children were to be acquainted with the working of panchayats, cooperatives, municipal and district boards, use and significance of the vote and the growth and significance of representative institutions.

The course in geography would comprise the study of world geography in outline, geography of India and its relations with other lands, study of plants and animals in the home region and in other lands as controlled by geographical environment; study of weather phenomena, wind directions and rainfall and duration of day and night in different months; map study and map-making and local topography.

V. General Sciences

The objectives defined in the report were:

- (1) To give pupils an intelligent and appreciative outlook on nature.
- (2) To form in pupils habits of accurate observation and of testing experience by experiment.
- (3) To enable them to understand important scientific principles exemplified in (a) the natural phenomena around, (b) in the application of science to the service of man.



- (4) To introduce them to the more important incidents in the lives of great scientists. . . .

Sciences to be taught were nature study, botany, zoology, physiology, hygiene, physical culture, chemistry and astronomy.

VI. Drawing

The objectives laid down for this discipline were:

- (1) To train the eye in the observation and determination of forms and colours.
- (2) To develop the memory for forms.
- (3) To cultivate a knowledge and appreciation for the beautiful in nature and in art.
- (4) To draw out the capacity for tasteful design and decoration.
- (5) To develop the capacity to make working drawings of objects to be constructed.

To achieve these objectives the children were to be trained to make drawings to illustrate read or observed material, to make drawings from memory of plants, animals and human forms, to make designs and to practise scale drawing, graphs and pictorial graphs.

VII. Music

The objective of this study was to cultivate in children a love for beautiful music and to teach them to sing songs. Children were to be trained in a sense of rhythm.

VIII. Hindustani

Hindustani was to be a compulsory subject, so that after school the children as adult citizens should be able to cooperate with their fellow countrymen to whichever part of the country they might belong. In teaching Hindustani, the teacher was expected to emphasize the importance of



Hindustani as the lingua franca of India and as the means of uniting Hindus and Muslims. Both the students and teachers would be expected to learn both the Devanagari and Persian scripts. In non-Hindustani speaking areas Hindustani would be a compulsory subject in the 5th and 6th years of study, but the children would be free to choose only one of the two scripts.

The syllabus would be the same for boys and girls up to the 5th grade. In the 6th and 7th grades there would be provision for an advanced course of domestic science for girls. [*Ibid*, pp. 451-58]

6

The Wardha Scheme of Education received wide welcome in the country at large, though orthodox academicians while not opposing the scheme, expressed their reservations.

Thus, C. R. Reddy, Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University, speaking at the All-India Educational Conference held in Calcutta from 27 to 30 December 1937, expressed the view that the scheme was an attempt to transplant Ashrama education in place of the system of education "set up by the modern civilized world". Placing Gandhiji's ideas on education alongside Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*, he said while it was true that they could not be adopted in practical life, it could not be denied that they had contributed to human progress. The objective of the Wardha Scheme of Education, namely, the formation of a non-violent, non-aggressive society, could not be advanced, he said, unless people limited their wants and produced only what they consumed.

The Conference saw some heated debate between the supporters and opponents of the Scheme. K. G. Saiyidain, one of the most ardent protagonists of education through crafts said that in enunciating the scheme Gandhiji had sought to transform the existing "book schools" into "work schools", thereby



rescuing children from the intolerable boredom of a purely academic and passive education. Above all, the scheme had a profound psychological value inasmuch as it lifted educational problems of the country to an entirely new plane.

The opponents of the scheme, such as Kuppuswami Aiyangar, argued that any system of education whose basic idea was to train people to a particular vocation could not form a foundation for future progress.

The general view emerging from the Conference was that the time had not come to pass a verdict on the merits of the Wardha Scheme which required a more detailed study. [*Ibid*, pp. 460-61]

Gandhiji was aware that for several reasons large numbers of orthodox educationists were critical of the Scheme. One Socialist educationist who accepted the Scheme told Gandhiji that he knew some educationists would have nothing to do with the Scheme because it was based on a non-violent philosophy of life.

Gandhiji replied:

I know some leading men who would not accept khadi because it is based on my philosophy of life. But how can I help it? Non-violence is certainly at the heart of the Scheme, and I can easily demonstrate it, but I know that there will be little enthusiasm for it when I do so. But those who accept the Scheme accept the fact that in a land full of millions of hungry people you cannot teach their children by any other method, and that if you can get the thing going the result will be a new economic order.

Answering the criticism that such an economic order, by turning away from competition and minimizing trade with other countries would isolate India from the world and by simplifying life would cut out industrialization, Gandhiji said:



If I could produce all my country's wants by means of the labour of 30,000 people instead of 30 millions, I should not mind it, provided the thirty million are not rendered idle and unemployed. I know that Socialists would introduce industrialization to the extent of reducing the working hours to one or two in a day, but I do not want it.

Gandhiji was also opposed to the American President Hoover's idea of "abundance" – the village being flooded with motor-cars and radios. If the cars multiplied to that extent, Gandhiji said, there would be very little room left for walking. As for radios, he did not expect to live to see the day when all villages of India would have radios. He proceeded:

If by abundance you mean everyone having plenty to eat and drink and to clothe himself with, enough to keep his mind trained and educated, I should be satisfied. But I should not like to pack more stuff in my belly than I can digest and more things than I can ever usefully use. But neither do I want poverty, penury, misery, dirt and dust in India. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 354-55]

7

The Wardha Scheme of Education drew criticism from some quarters also for not having included religious instruction in the syllabus. Educational officers from Congress provinces who had come to Segaon for a fortnight's training, met Gandhiji on 6 July 1938 and asked him what place religious instruction had in the Scheme. Gandhiji answered:

We have left out teaching of religions . . . because we are afraid that religions as they are taught and practised today lead to conflict rather than unity. But on the other hand I hold that the truths that are common to all religions can and should be taught to all children. . . . The children can learn



these truths only through the daily life of the teacher. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, p. 154]

Reverting to the theme in an article in *Harijan* of 16 July 1938, he wrote:

Unless there is a State religion it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide religious instruction as it would mean providing for every denomination. Such instruction is best given at home or otherwise. . . .

As to the the necessity of teaching equal regard for all religions, I personally hold strong views. . . . I regard it as fatal to the growth of a friendly spirit among the children belonging to the different faiths if they are taught either that their religion is superior to every other or that it is the only true religion. If that exclusive spirit is to pervade the nation, the necessary corollary would be that there should be separate schools for every denomination with freedom to each to decry every other. . . . The result of such a policy is too dreadful to contemplate. Fundamental principles of ethics are common to all religions. These should certainly be taught to the children and that should be regarded as adequate religious instruction so far as the schools under the Wardha Scheme are concerned. [*Ibid*, p. 175]

8

Fear was also entertained among a section of educationists that the syllabus designed for the Wardha Scheme of Education might result in blocking the progress of higher education. G. A. Natesan wrote to Gandhiji about such fears and requested that till a well-considered scheme had been adumbrated and sufficient notice given of the changes proposed, no precipitate action should be taken.

Gandhiji assured Natesan, and others who thought like him, that so far as the Congress was concerned, no general policy had been laid down in regard to education, and that it was not envisaged to take any serious step without due



consideration and consultation with persons whose advice was of value in educational matters. But he reiterated his strongly held view that the existing system of education had caused great injury to the youth of the country and to "the languages and general culture of India". [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 80]

In an article in *Harijan* of 9 July 1938, Gandhiji wrote:

- (1) I am not opposed to education even of the highest type attainable in the world.
- (2) The State must pay for it wherever it has definite use for it.
- (3) I am opposed to all higher education being paid for from the general revenue.
- (4) It is my firm conviction that the vast amount of the so-called education in arts given in our colleges is sheer waste and has resulted in unemployment among the educated classes. What is more, it has destroyed the health, both mental and physical, of the boys and girls who have the misfortune to go through the grind in our colleges.
- (5) The medium of a foreign language through which higher education has been imparted in India has caused incalculable intellectual and moral injury to the nation. We are too near our own times to judge the enormity of the damage done.

His opposition to English as a medium of instruction in colleges did not mean, Gandhiji added, that he did not love the English language. The columns of *Harijan*, he said, were sufficient evidence of his love of English. English had a noble literature. But the nobility of English literature could not avail India anymore than the temperate climate or the scenery of England could avail her. India had to flourish in her own climate and scenery and her own literature even



though all the three might be inferior to the English climate, scenery and literature. Indian children must build on their own heritage.

In what language instruction should be imparted to students was, Gandhiji went on, not a question to be decided by academicians. They could not decide through what language boys and girls of a place were to be educated. That question was already decided for them in every free country. Nor could they decide the subjects to be taught. That depended upon the wants of the country to which they belonged. The academicians could only enforce the nation's will in the best manner possible.

Gandhiji concluded:

Thus I claim that I am not an enemy of higher education. But I am an enemy of higher education as it is given in this country. Under my scheme there will be more and better libraries, more and better laboratories, more and better research institutes. Under it we should have an army of chemists, engineers and other experts who will be real servants of the nation and answer the varied and growing requirements of a people who are becoming increasingly conscious of their rights and wants. And all these experts will speak not a foreign language but the language of the people. There will be truly original work instead of mere imitation. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 158-63]

"B.A.s and M.A.s with their brains sapped with too much cramming and minds almost paralyzed by the impossible attempt to speak and write English as Englishmen," Gandhiji wrote, "could be of no use either to themselves or to the State. The medium of instruction must be changed at once, and not gradually." Gandhiji continued:

Then in an incredibly short time we shall find text-books and teachers coming into being to supply the want. And if we mean business, in a year's



time we shall find that we need never have been party to the tragic waste of the nation's time and energy trying to learn the essentials of culture through a foreign medium. The condition of success is undoubtedly that provincial languages are introduced at once in Government offices and courts, if the Provincial Governments have the power or the influence over the courts. [*Ibid*, p. 212]

9

The Indian National Congress took up consideration of the Wardha Scheme of Education at its Haripura session held in February 1938. It generally approved the Scheme and authorized the creation of an All-India Education Board for implementing it. The relevant resolution passed by the Congress ran:

The Congress attaches the utmost importance to a proper organization of mass education and holds that all national progress ultimately depends on the method and content and objective of the education that is provided for the people. The existing system of education in India is admitted to have failed. Its objectives have been anti-national and anti-social, its methods have been antiquated and it has been confined to a small number of people and has left the vast majority of our people illiterate. It is essential, therefore, to build up national education on a new foundation and on a nation-wide scale. . . . The Congress is of opinion that for the primary and secondary stages basic education should be imparted in accordance with the following principles:

- (1) Free and compulsory education should be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale.
- (2) The medium of instruction must be the mother tongue.



- (3) Throughout this period education should centre round some form of manual and productive work and all other activities to be developed or training to be given should, as far as possible, be integrally related to the central handicraft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child.

Accordingly the Congress is of opinion that an All-India Education Board to deal with this basic part of education be established and for this purpose requests and authorizes Dr. Zakir Husain and Shri E.W Aryanayakum to take immediate steps under the advice and guidance of Gandhiji to bring such a Board into existence, in order to work out in a consolidated manner a programme of basic national education and to recommend it for acceptance to those who are in control of State or private education. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, pp. 298-99]

The All-India Education Board, better known as the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, with Dr. Zakir Husain as President and E. W Aryanayakum as Secretary, came into being in April 1938 with its headquarters at Segaon (now Sevagram) and immediately addressed itself to the task of preparing teachers for the new system of primary education.

The very first institution for the training of teachers that was started was the Vidyamandir Training School at Wardha. At the inauguration of the school on 21 April the trainees took a solemn pledge binding themselves to serve without a break for twenty-five years on a monthly salary of Rs. 15. More than a thousand applications had been received by the school, out of which only 166 had been selected for the training. Speaking on the occasion Gandhiji said the fact that so many were prepared to pledge themselves to work for 25 years on a salary of Rs. 15 per month was a proof that unemployment in the country had reached the



extreme limit. Many taking the pledge perhaps also hoped to make money in illegal ways. He proceeded:

I do not know that with all my patriotism I could bind myself to serve as a teacher for Rs. 15 per month. You must dismiss from your minds the thought that there may be profits left over in your schools to be divided amongst you. If, therefore, there is anyone among you who repents of the contracts, you will ask the Minister to relieve you. . . . I hope that God will give you the strength to abide by your pledge.

Explaining the importance of the Scheme of education which they were expected to work, Gandhiji told the teacher trainees:

This Scheme is wholly Indian. Its ideal was born in Segaoon. Real India is enshrined in the seven lakhs of villages. . . . I want you to drive away illiteracy from these villages, find out means whereby villagers can obtain food and clothing, and take the message of winning swaraj through truth and non-violence to the villages. . . . It is through handicrafts that instruction in geometry, history, geography and arithmetic will be given and an attempt will be made to meet the expenses of the school through the students' manual labour. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 34-35]

Various provincial Governments also took in hand the training of teachers. Training schools gradually came up in the Central Provinces, the United Provinces, Bihar, Bombay and in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. Boards of Basic Education and Training Schools were set up and Basic Education Officers were appointed. Training courses for teachers were also started in August 1938 by Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi and by Jatiya Kalashala in Masulipatam. The Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Poona, and Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad, helped the Bombay Government to train teachers.



The Governments of the U.P., C.P., Bihar and Jammu & Kashmir State set up Educational Reorganization Committees to revise the whole education system from primary to university level. The Central Advisory Board on Education also set up a committee under B. G. Kher, Premier of Bombay, to examine the Wardha Scheme in the light of the Abbot Committee Report on the Vocational Education in India, published in July 1937. [*Hindustani Talimi Sangh Ki Athvin Salana Report* (Hindi), Sevagram, Wardha, 1946]

In 1939, the training schools started in various provinces were as follows:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| (1) Basic Training School, Patna, Bihar | (Hindustani) |
| (2) Basic Training College, Allahabad, U.P. | (Hindustani) |
| (3) Basic Training School, Ramachandrapur, Orissa | (Oriya) |
| (4) Basic Training School, Loni, Maharashtra | (Marathi) |
| (5) Basic Training School, Katargam, Gujarat | (Gujarati) |
| (6) Basic Training School, Dharwar, Karnataka | (Kannada) |
| (7) Basic Training School, Jalgaon, Khandesh | (Urdu) |
| (8) Vidya Mandir Training School, Wardha, C.P. | (Marathi-Hindi) |
| (9) Vidya Mandir Training Institute, Wardha, C.P. | (Marathi-Hindi) |
| (10) Basic Training School, Coimbatore, Madras | (Tamil) |
| (11) Basic Training School, Srinagar, Kashmir | (Urdu) |
| (12) Basic Training Centre, Jamia Millia, Delhi | (Urdu) |
| (13) Basic Training Centre, Andhra Jatiya
Kalashala, Masulipatam, Andhra | (Telugu) |
| (14) Vedchhi Ashram, Gujarat | (Gujarati) |



In the same year (1939) the number of pupils in grades I and II in Basic Schools was 25,000 and the total quantity of yarn spun by them weighed 47 maunds and 12 seers. [*Two Years of Works: Report of the Second Basic Education Conference*, Jamianagar, Delhi, April 1941, Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Wardha, 1942, pp. 5-9]

10

Notwithstanding the interest evinced by Congress Governments in the Provinces in the Wardha Scheme of Education, the progress made, though not insignificant, was slow and its impact remained peripheral. Basic education developed, not as a substitute of conventional primary education, but parallel to it, as an alternative system. The reason was that it was a wholly novel venture. There was, for linking academic instruction with a craft, no previous research to go by, no foundation to build upon. Much depended on the teacher. Gandhiji told some teacher trainees on 3 February 1939:

We have today no books to go by, no precedents to guide us. Therefore we have to go slow. The main thing is that the teacher should retain his freshness of mind. If you come across something that you cannot correlate with craft, do not fret over it and get disheartened. Leave it and go ahead with the subjects that you can correlate.

He continued:

Our education has got to be revolutionized. The brain must be educated through the hand. If I were a poet, I could write poetry on the possibilities of the five fingers. Why should you think that the mind is everything and the hands and feet nothing?



At a meeting of teacher trainees on 3/4 February Gandhiji was told that some prominent educationists believed that sooner or later the handicrafts would have to give place to whole-hog industrialization and was asked if a society educated on the lines of the Wardha Scheme of Education would be able to survive the strain of such industrialization. He replied:

The issue before us is not as to what is going to happen generations hence, but whether this Basic Scheme of Education answers the real need of the millions that live in our villages. I do not think that India is ever going to be industrialized to the extent that there will be no villages left. The bulk of India will always consist of villages. . . .

As for what might happen if the Congress went out of power Gandhiji said:

Whatever happens to the Working Committee or the ministries, personally I do not sense any danger to the constructive activities of the Congress. Although started by the Congress, they have been having an autonomous existence for a long time, and have fully proved their worth. Basic education is an offshoot of these. Education Ministers may change but this will remain. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 371-72]

11

Since the development of basic education called for active involvement of provincial Governments, it remained confined to the Provinces controlled by the Congress. Muslim politicians, who controlled the Governments in non-Congress Provinces, not only did not cooperate, but even expressed their open hostility to the whole of the Wardha Scheme.

A. K Fazl ul Huq, the Premier of Bengal, speaking at the All-India Muslim Education Conference at Patna on 1 October 1938, warned that if the Wardha



Scheme was forced on Muslims in the Congress Provinces, it would widen the breach between Hindus and Muslims. He denounced the Scheme as one under which schools would be turned into factories or ashrams, exploiting child labour. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, p. 438]

The All-India Muslim League was even more thorough in its denunciation of the scheme. At the meeting of its Working Committee held at the residence of Jinnah in Bombay on 2/3 July 1939 it passed the following resolution:

. . . Apart from its origin, conception and communal aspect, there are fundamental objections to the scheme: (1) The scheme is calculated to destroy Muslim culture gradually but surely. . . . The scheme is intended to secure the domination of Hindu culture and language. (2) It imposes the Congress party ideology, and aims at inculcating, among others, the doctrine of ahimsa. (3) Its objective is to infuse the political creed, policy and programme of one party, namely, the Congress, in the minds of the children. (4) It has neglected the question of providing facilities for religious instruction. (5) Under the guise of the name of Hindustani, the scheme is meant to spread highly Sanskritized Hindi and to suppress Urdu. . . . (6) The text-books prescribed . . . are highly objectionable from the Muslim point of view, in that they are not only offensive to the feelings and sentiments of Muslims, but are mainly devoted to the praise of Hindu religion, philosophy and heroes, minimizing Islamic contribution to the world. . . . [*Ibid*, p. 347]

Even the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, not politically under the influence of the League, did not spare the Scheme. In August 1939 it issued a pamphlet containing, among other things, a severe criticism of the Wardha Scheme. The assumption in the Wardha Scheme that non-violence was an integral part of Islam and that Islam taught equal respect for all religions, the pamphlet said, was wrong. What Islam



taught was not equal respect for all religions but "toleration". [C.W.M.G., LXX, p. 108]

The scheme also suffered from the apathy, if not open hostility, of the bureaucrats in the Education Departments, and it was largely the commitment of the political leadership that kept basic education going. As soon as the Congress was out of power, basic education languished from lack of official encouragement. Many training schools were shut down.

A case in point was Orissa. Here a Board of Basic Education had been constituted in October 1938 and a Training School for teachers had been started at Bari in June 1939. In February 1940, 15 basic schools were opened. These however were ordered to be closed after a run of just one year. The Home Department hand-out giving the reasons for the closure of the schools said that with the children having to spend 3 hours and 20 minutes out of 5 1/2 hours of school time on spinning, there was danger of the schools degenerating into spinning schools. Moreover, they were uneconomical, being far more expensive than ordinary primary schools. The receipts per child had been only as. 8 instead of Rs. 3/9 estimated.

It was only after 1947, when the country became free, that the Basic National Education picked up the tempo again. The Scheme was accepted as Government policy and spread throughout the country, with varying degrees of efficiency. This expansion was mostly at the elementary stage. Gandhiji's death, however, dealt a severe blow to the spread and even continuance of the scheme. The momentum already gained however, carried the scheme forward for some time. Excellent work continued to be done at a number of places, and received very good evaluation reports from experts from within and from outside the country. But as a national programme it began to limp under a generally hostile,



or at best indifferent, bureaucracy and ignorant political leadership till it was finally given a decent burial by the Education Commission (1964-66). The Commission said that the vital principles of Basic Education should be absorbed by all stages of existing education and there was no need for a separate programme of Basic Education. So Basic Education lost even its identity. This was the end of the plan to convert all schools to the basic pattern. An experiment with vast potentialities for educational, social, economic and political reconstruction was thus lost. It was swallowed up by the existing system.

Gandhiji had conceived of Basic Education "as the spearhead of a silent social revolution fraught with the most far-reaching consequences." It was his instrument for building up a self-reliant non-violent India as the stepping-stone to a global non-violent society. He had called it his most important contribution which brought together all his important discoveries of a life-time of experiments. It still has great possibilities and one hopes that some day the experts may undo the damage done to Basic Education and the Government may retrace its steps. But for the present Basic Education has ceased to exist as a national programme.



CHAPTER XIX: THE HARIPURA CONGRESS AND AFTER

1

The fifty-first session of the Indian National Congress was held at Haripura, in the Bardoli Taluka of Gujarat, between 19 and 21 February 1938. The session assumed added importance from the fact that it was the first ever session held after the Congress came to power in the provinces, and it was called upon to spell out policies that the Congress must pursue in tackling the various national problems as a party in power.

Subhas Bose was the President of the session. His name for presidency had been unanimously recommended by all the P.C.C.s and he was duly elected to office on 18 January. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, p. 4]

Gandhiji had had his reservations about Subhas. As early as 1 November 1937, he had written to Vallabhbhai Patel that Subhas was "not at all dependable". However, he had said, there was no other choice. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 285]

The Haripura Congress was a massive affair. Vallabhbhai Patel, who had chosen the venue and organized the whole thing, saw to it that it should be a conclave to be remembered. Rajmohan Gandhi writes:

About five hundred acres of open space lent by Hindu and Muslim villagers lodged around 75,000 men and women. Gandhi had urged Vallabhbhai not to spend more than Rs. 5,000 on the session; the Sardar replied that he was ready to spend Rs. 5 lakhs. Roads were done up. A pontoon bridge was laid. Tractors levelled the ground. Five hundred cows were brought to the site a month in advance so that condensed milk and ghee could be made. A waterworks, a printing press and garden emerged.



So did a hospital, a bank, a post and telegraph office, a telephone exchange, buses and a fire engine! About a lakh of rupees went as wages to peasants and labourers of the neighbourhood. Remembering his brother, Vallabhbhai gave the name Vithal Nagar to the temporary town-in-a-village.

. . . Two thousand volunteers ran the kitchens and kept the sanitary areas clean. . . . A sandstorm, a cold wave and rain attacked Vithal Nagar but the tents and bamboo structures held out. A volunteer was, however, drowned in the Tapti. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1990, pp. 164-65]

The pandal for the open session, with its ten-foot high bamboo walls and six massive gates, looked like a fortress with battlements. Oval in shape, it had been planned to accommodate more than three lakh persons. There were separate enclosures for members of the Working Committee, for delegates of each province and for visitors.

While commending the "great organizing ability of the Sardar and his lieutenants as also his ability to command financial help from moneyed friends", Gandhiji warned that the scale could not be, must not be, repeated. Gandhiji also deprecated the classification enforced through enclosures. He wrote:

Classes were retained at Faizpur. At Haripura the classification was intensified. There were the leaders, ministers, delegates, visitors and the villagers. The division was not horizontal but vertical. . . . Why should Working Committee members have more conveniences than others? Why should they have food other than that of the villagers. . . . Vertical division of the camps into different classes sets a pernicious example to the vast number of villagers who attend the Congress. The Congress management



has to go out of its way to show the villagers that before it there is no prince and no pauper and that all are equal. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 402-3]

2

Subhas Bose, delivering his presidential address, reminded the delegates that, even though the Congress had accepted office in the Provinces, a course to which he personally had been opposed, the freedom of India had still to be won. To win that freedom the Congress must pursue, in the years to come, the method of satyagraha, or non-violent non-co-operation, which was not merely passive resistance but active resistance as well, so long as it was kept non-violent. Satyagraha on a mass scale might become necessary to oppose any forcible inauguration of the Federation.

The Congress, he said, must not slacken in its uncompromising hostility towards the proposed Federation. One of the most objectionable features of the Federal Scheme related to commercial and financial safeguards, with the major portion of the expenditure being kept out of popular control. Thus according to the Central budget for 1937-38, the Army expenditure came to 44.51 crores of rupees out of the total expenditure of 77.90 crores of rupees, or, roughly, 57 per cent of the total expenditure. It appeared that the reserved side of the Federal finances would account for nearly 80 per cent of the whole.

External affairs having been made a reserved subject, Bose said, the Federal Legislature would be deprived of the freedom to conclude trade agreements, nor would it be called upon to ratify trade agreements concluded by the Governor-General.

The President then dealt with the iniquitous and inequitable commercial safeguards embodied in the Act and showed how they were calculated to favour



British and European commercial interests at the cost of India's interests and how they would impede India's foreign trade.

As for the Federal Legislature, its composition was reactionary to a degree. Indian States, which accounted for 24 per cent of India's population had been given 40 per cent representation in the Upper House and one-third representation in the Lower House.

The Congress was not opposed to Federation as such, the President said. But the Federation must consist of free units, enjoying more or less the same measure of freedom and civil liberty and representation by democratic process of election. Indian States participating in the Federation "should approximate to the Provinces in the establishment of representative institutions, responsible government, civil liberties and the method of election to the Federal House".

Bose drew the attention of the Congress to the tremendous mass awakening during the recent years and dwelt on the need to evolve an organization of trained party cadres to control that awakening. Institutions such as the Labour Service Corps of the Nazis in Germany, he said, deserved careful study in this regard.

On foreign policy Bose expressed the view that the Congress must not be influenced by the "international politics of any country or the form of its State". In every country there would be found men and women who were sympathetic to India's aspirations whatever their own political views might be. Though Soviet Russia was a Communist State she had not hesitated to make alliances with non-Socialist States. Britain could no longer call herself the Mistress of the Seas. With the development of air power, battleships were no longer decisive in war. Distances had been obliterated and London lay at the mercy of any bombing squadron from a Continental centre. Air force had revolutionized warfare,



destroyed the insularity of Great Britain and rudely disturbed the balance of power of world politics.

Coming to the task of economic reconstruction, Bose dwelt on the need for a commission to draw up a comprehensive plan of reconstruction. He called for a radical reform of the land revenue system, including abolition of landlordism, liquidation of agricultural debts and extension of the cooperative movement. He also asked for a comprehensive scheme of industrial development under State ownership and State control. As for cottage industries, in a country like India, there would be plenty of room left for them.

The President also expressed his views on the question of a common script for Indian languages and suggested the adoption of Roman for the purpose. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, pp. 335-48]

3

The resolutions passed by the Congress did not reflect all the views expressed by the President. Sweeping land reforms including abolition of landlordism was not on the party's agenda in the immediate future. Similarly jettisoning of Indian scripts in favour of Roman was not a thing that could be countenanced.

The Congress was much exercised over the political crisis that had developed in the U.P and Bihar over the question of release of political prisoners. Release of political prisoners languishing in jails had been one of the commitments made by the Congress to the people in the election manifesto. When Congress Governments assumed charge in the Provinces in July 1937, among the very first steps they took was to start releasing the prisoners. Among those released were prisoners convicted for acts of violence and dacoity such as those of Kakori. The Ministers assured the Governors that the prisoners



concerned had given up their belief in violence and could therefore be no threat to law and order. The Governors acquiesced. But the local Congress committees committed what Gandhiji called a "political mistake". They held demonstrations when the prisoners were discharged, leading the British authorities to doubt if the Ministers' assertions that the prisoners had given up belief in violence were true.

The Governors accordingly stiffened their attitude and refused to countenance further releases.

On 15 February the Premiers of U.P. and Bihar ordered the release of all the political prisoners remaining in jails. The Governors concerned, with the concurrence of the Viceroy, withheld their approval of the order. Consequently Govind Ballabh Pant and Srikrishna Sinha tendered resignations of their Ministries.

The resolution passed by the Haripura session on the subject, drafted by Gandhiji, said:

. . . In the opinion of the Congress, release of prisoners is a matter coming essentially within the purview of day-to-day administration, which does not admit of protracted discussion with Governors. . . . In the opinion of the Congress, the interference of the Governor-General with the deliberate action of the respective Prime Ministers . . . is also a misapplication of Section 126(5) of the Government of India Act. . . .

The Congress does not wish to precipitate a crisis which may involve non-violent non-cooperation and direct action consistent with the Congress policy of truth and non-violence. . . .

On behalf of the U.P. Governor it has been stated that the demonstrations organized to welcome the Kakori prisoners and the speeches delivered by some of them had interfered with the policy of



gradual release of political prisoners. . . . The Congress invites the attention of Congressmen to the fact that indiscipline in speech and action, calculated to promote or breed violence, retards the progress of the country towards its cherished goal. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 376-79]

The Viceroy relented. In a statement issued on 22 February he said the Governors remained ready to agree to release of prisoners where no undue risk was involved, and that it was open to the Ministers, in consultation with the Governors, to pursue a policy of release of prisoners.

Returning to Lucknow and Patna the Premiers of the U.P. and Bihar accordingly met the Governors and secured from them the assurance that they would soon be issuing orders, on the advice tendered to them by the Ministers, to remit the unexpired sentences of the remaining prisoners. The Ministerial crisis in the two provinces was thus satisfactorily ended. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, pp. 309-11]

The resolution on Federation passed by the Congress said that while the Congress was not opposed to the idea of Federation, the Federation scheme as envisaged in the Act was objectionable on two counts: (1) It excluded from the sphere of responsibility vital functions of Government, such as defence, foreign affairs and the major portion of the finances, and (2) it sought to unite in unholy wedlock nominees of autocratic rulers of Indian States and the democratically elected representatives of British India. The Congress, therefore, called upon the Provincial and local Congress committees and the people in general as well as the Provincial Governments and Ministries to prevent its inauguration. In the event of an attempt being made to impose it despite the declared will of the people, such an attempt must be combated in every way and the Provincial Governments and Ministries must refuse to cooperate with it." [*Ibid*, p. 312]



On foreign policy the Congress resolution expressed the desire of the people of India to live in peace and friendship with their neighbours and with all other countries and to build international cooperation. Such cooperation, the resolution said, was impossible of achievement so long as roots of international conflict remained and one nation dominated over another and Imperialism held sway. The resolution condemned the British policy of supporting Fascism in Germany, Spain and the Far East and declared that in the event of war India "can be no party to an imperialist war and will not permit her manpower and resources to be exploited in the interest of British Imperialism". The resolution condemned Japanese aggression in China and expressed sympathy for China. It called for a voluntary boycott of Japanese goods. [*Ibid*, pp. 312-13]

The resolution on the States reiterated the commitment of the Congress to full responsible government and guarantee of civil liberty for the States' people and deplored the suppression of civil liberties in many of the States. However since under existing conditions the Congress was unable to function effectively in the States, the burden of carrying on the struggle for freedom, the resolution said, must fall on the States' people. "For this purpose independent organizations should be started and continued where they exist already within the States." The resolution assured the people of the States the solidarity of the Congress with them. [*Ibid*, pp. 299-300]

Explaining the implications of the resolution in a talk, Gandhiji said:

We want the States' people to carry on ceaseless work in the States, but not in the name of the Congress. The use of the name of the Congress may expose the Congress to insult. . . . The prestige of the Congress would suffer and not gain by the use of the Congress name. Mysore is a case in



point. It had a *bona fide* Congress organization but it could not prevent the Congress flag from being insulted. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 391]

The resolution was a signal for independent organizations, called Praja Mandals, being set up in many States.

4

A significant development that came in the wake of the formation of Congress Ministries in the Provinces was the rise of militancy among the kisans. The agrarian reform programme to which the Congress had expressed its commitment at Lucknow and then at Faizpur had raised the expectations of the kisans. They wanted Provincial Governments to give immediate effect to the programme.

Within the constraints under which the Provincial Governments had to act they did take steps towards meeting the expectations of the kisans. For instance, in Madras the Ministry cancelled most of the arrears of interest on debts. The Bihar Ministry proposed to save minimum holdings from the clutches of *sahukars*. The Bombay and Madras Governments also declared partial moratorium on agricultural indebtedness. A similar moratorium was declared by the U.P. Government. In Bihar and Orissa the Ministries passed tenancy laws conferring on peasants permanency of tenure and reducing the rents by more than 30 per cent. The Bombay Government abolished grazing fees. Criminal Tribes Acts in Madras and Bombay were repealed. Everywhere there was also remission of land revenue in view of the economic depression.

Such acts, while not giving full satisfaction to the kisans, roused the ire of the zemindars, who saw their rights threatened in many areas. In Bihar they threatened to start a "satyagraha" for the defence of their rights. The Congress Ministry, instead of facing the zemindars with the support of the peasants, chose



to enter into a pact with them, leading to a breach between the Congress and the Kisan Sabha. The cadres of the Kisan Sabha went round the countryside carrying *dandas* (sticks) and clashed with zemindars and their men. Swami Sahajanand, the Kisan Sabha leader, defended their right to carry *dandas* in self-defence. The kisans were resisting the forcible realization of arrears of rent by the zemindars for fear of a moratorium being declared. The Congress leaders declared that by arming themselves with *dandas* the kisans were being guilty of violence.

In Gujarat, similarly, kisans were carrying on agitation and holding rallies apart from the Congress under the leadership of Indulal Yajnik and Kamalashankar Pandya. They wanted to hold a kisan conference to coincide with the Congress at Haripura. Though Vallabhbhai "banned" the conference at Vithal Nagar, thousands of them nevertheless gathered at the venue, carrying on without light most of the time.

In the Central Provinces, the Punjab and Sind, Kisan Sabhas intensified their activities.

Kisan marches to provincial capitals also became a common phenomenon. The Ministries tried to stop them, but in vain. There were such marches at Patna, Lucknow, Rajahmundry, Bombay and other places in which lakhs of peasants participated. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. II, pp. 387-89]

At Haripura, the leadership of the Congress took stock of the situation. Many, especially Vallabhbhai Patel and Bhulabhai Desai, were of the view that since the Congress was in a large measure a peasant organization, there was no need for separate organizations, such as the Kisan Sabhas, to represent their interests. This view was not allowed to prevail. In the end the Congress passed a resolution to the following effect:



The Congress has already fully recognized the right of the kisans to organize themselves in peasant unions. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the Congress itself is in the main a kisan organization. . . . While fully recognizing the right of the kisans to organize Kisan Sabhas, the Congress cannot associate itself with any activities which are incompatible with the basic principles of the Congress and will not countenance any of the activities of those Congressmen who as members of the Kisan Sabhas help in creating an atmosphere hostile to Congress principles and policy. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, p. 302]

5

The spurt in agitations of all kinds and a general rise in the spirit of violence was not confined to the countryside. In the textile centres of Ahmedabad, Kanpur and Bombay there were strikes involving large numbers of workers. In Sholapur there had been a flare up involving groups described as Criminal Tribes. While Provincial Governments, controlled by the Congress, tried to deal with the situation by use of official machinery, at the organizational level Congressmen either failed to restore order or were themselves active participants in the incitement of disorder. Many Congressmen were openly critical of popular Governments resorting to repressive methods.

Gandhiji wrote:

Civil liberty is not criminal liberty. When law and order are under popular control, the Ministers in charge of the department cannot hold the portfolio for a day if they act against the popular will. . . . Non-violence in politics is a new weapon in the process of evolution. Its vast possibilities are yet unexplored. Congress Ministers, if they have faith in non-violence, will undertake the exploration. But whilst they are doing this . . . there is no



doubt that they cannot ignore incitement to violence and manifestly violent speech, even though they may themselves run the risk of being styled violent. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 268-69]

Writing again on the subject in the *Harijan* of 20 November 1937, he said:

Why are we living in Ahmedabad and Kanpur in perpetual dread of lightning or unauthorized strikes? Is the Congress unable to influence organized labour in the right direction? We may not distrust Government notices issued in the Provinces administered by Congress Ministers. It will not do to belittle their notices as we used to treat the irresponsible Government's notices. . . .

If in spite of honest efforts by Congressmen forces of disorder cannot be brought under control without the assistance of the police and the military, in my opinion acceptance by Congress of the burden of office loses all force and meaning and sooner the Ministers are withdrawn the better it would be for the Congress and its struggle to achieve complete independence. [*Ibid*, p. 301]

At the Calcutta A.I.C.C. in October 1937 the handling of law and order by Congress Ministries, it may be remembered, had come under fire from the Socialists, who had insisted that Congress Ministries must proceed to give immediate effect to the election pledges in regard to civil liberty, release of prisoners and repeal of repressive laws. The resolution moved by Masani to this effect had been referred by the A.I.C.C. for enquiry and necessary action to the Working Committee.

Early in 1938 the Working Committee at its Bombay meeting considered the matter in consultation with Gandhiji and passed the following resolution:



The Committee after full and careful consideration of the situation . . . record their approval of the work done so far by the Congress Ministries, and appreciate that further efforts are being made to enlarge the bounds of civil liberty and implement the Congress programme. . . . The Committee are of opinion that in order to facilitate and expedite progress in this direction . . . it is necessary to adhere to the Congress policy of non-violence and to discourage all incitement to violence. . . . Where necessary, Congress Committees should take disciplinary action against Congressmen who offend against the Congress policy.

Congress Ministries must guide themselves by the principle of civil liberty and the democratic approach by means of persuasion rather than by coercive action, but, in spite of every desire to avoid it, coercive action may become necessary, and in such cases Ministries will inevitably have to undertake it. Such coercive action should only be undertaken where there has been violence or incitement to violence or communal strife. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, p. 287]

6

Such then was the background against which the Haripura Congress was called upon to lay down the policy in regard to the agitations and marches taking place in the cities and villages day in and day out – agitations in which sections of Congress cadres often played a prominent part. Concerted efforts had been made by the leadership beforehand to see that Socialist criticism in this regard did not get out of hand. Efforts were made at the delegates level to exclude Socialists as far as possible. Long before the session Vallabhbhai Patel wrote to Rajendra Prasad to make sure that in the selection of delegates from Bihar all “anti-Gandhi elements” were eliminated. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, p. 265]



Election of delegates for the Congress session from Bihar had accordingly been a keenly contested affair, marked by many violent incidents. At one place in Sitamarhi in Muzaffarpur, earthen pots being used as ballot boxes were smashed and the presiding officer had to flee for his life. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, p. 1]

The speeches at the Congress session were frequently heated. Patel in particular subjected the Socialists to severe tongue-lashing. Gandhiji did not like this and expressed his disapproval. He wrote to Patel on 20 February:

Devadas complained against your today's speech. Then came Jayaprakash. He was extremely unhappy about it. I think your speech was too aggressive. The Socialists cannot be won over in this manner.

Gandhiji advised Patel to go up to the Socialists and seek their forgiveness. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 382]

The Working Committee, which Subhas Bose chose in consultation with Gandhiji and Patel, did not have a single Socialist represented on it. Masani, who had been an aspirant for membership protested to Gandhiji at his exclusion. Gandhiji asked Patel the reason and was told that in the Nariman affair, Masani had sided with Nariman. Masani denied this, saying that he had not taken sides. Still, Patel said, his inclusion would weaken the position of S. K. Patil, in Bombay. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, pp. 265-66]

After the Congress session at Haripura, Gandhiji went back to Segaoon and rested there for some time. On 16 March he arrived in Calcutta to pursue his efforts with regard to the release of political detenus and convicts in the jails of Bengal.



The parleys with the Bengal Ministers in this regard were time-consuming, because the Ministers were most of the time busy with their work in the Assembly which then happened to be in session and Gandhiji had to remain in Calcutta till 13 April. In the interim he paid a week-long visit to Orissa at the end of March in connection with a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh.

The communal situation had in the meanwhile continued to be on the boil, with sporadic rioting and stabbings provoked by minor incidents going on at various places in North India. In the third week of March there was a flare-up in Allahabad and police and even military had to be summoned to control the situation. This distressed Gandhiji. Describing this way of dealing with riots as "our failure", he wrote that it showed that the Congress had not yet become fit to substitute British authority, that the Congress was not "at the present moment capable of delivering the goods if it was called upon to do so". After seventeen years' practice of non-violence, he went on, the Congress should be able to put forth a non-violent army of volunteers numbering not a few thousands but lakhs who would be equal to every occasion where the police and the military were required, who would try to bring the warring communities together and be ready to die in the attempt. He concluded:

“To the extent that Congress Ministers have been obliged to make use of the police and the military, to that extent, in my opinion, we must admit our failure. That the Ministers could not have done otherwise is unfortunately only too true.” [C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 405-7]

Talking to co-workers in Calcutta on 22 March he reiterated the same view:

I feel ashamed that our Ministers had to call to their aid the police and the military. I am ashamed that they had to use the language that they did



in reply to the opposition speeches. I feel as if the Congress had lost and the British had won. [*Ibid*, p. 410]

8

The Gandhi Seva Sangh meetings, held in Delang in Orissa on 25, 26, 27 and 28 March were almost entirely taken up with the question of communal riots and how the workers should deal with them.

Going back to what he had said about the Congress failure with regard to the communal riots in the U.P., Gandhiji again said:

I believe that if today the Viceroy sent for Subhas Babu, or Jawaharlal, or me, and asked us what we wanted, I would reply that I was not equal to the task. Today we do not have the strength to respond. If we tell the Viceroy that we do not need the police or the army and that we can defend ourselves, that we have the weapon of non-violence, that the Muslims are our friends and so are the Pathans, that we shall ourselves tackle the Princes, that we shall bear with Sikhs, he would conclude that I was out of my wits.

The Congress, Gandhiji added, did not have power even over itself, let alone over others, for there were internal squabbles in the Congress to acquire control over the Congress office. If such a situation was allowed to continue the Congress would not be able to win swaraj in thirty years, let alone in one year.

Whatever success had been achieved had been achieved through non-violence. But it had been the non-violence of the weak, not of the strong. Gandhiji continued:

Non-violence is a weapon against which neither the sword nor any other power can prevail. Even if there are a crore of people on one side and



a single votary of non-violence on the other, even then the latter would not say that he would surrender to the might of arms. He will demonstrate the fact that poisonous gases and other weapons are futile against non-violence. . . .

If you are of the opinion that putting down riots by a non-violent army is an empty dream, you must also come to the conclusion that swaraj cannot be won through non-violence. [*Ibid*, pp. 415-24]

J. B. Kripalani objected that while Congressmen could certainly go and persuade warring groups to desist even at the risk of their lives, as they had in fact done in Allahabad, the problem was that there were secret stabbings. And if Congressmen went to the localities to which the goondas fled after stabbing people, the Congressmen, too, would get killed. And if leading Congress workers were killed by Muslim goondas, it would not make for Hindu-Muslim harmony. Indeed if, for instance, Gandhiji should thus get killed, Hindu-Muslim unity could not be achieved for the next two thousand years. Congressmen were not cowards. They had the courage to die, as they had demonstrated in Allahabad. The goondas had not spared them. The question was whether the Hindus' hatred of Muslims would in consequence increase or decrease.

Gandhiji saw Kripalani's point. But he insisted that if a few Congressmen should be killed that way, it would ultimately serve the purpose. Non-violence in such situations had not really been tried. Non-violence had so far been pursued only by individuals for personal salvation. But what was the good of non-violence which was confined to individuals? He said:

I am not interested in the liberation a man may get by practising non-violence after renouncing the world. I do not care for individual liberation which would leave others out. One can find liberation by serving others.



Non-violence, Gandhiji reminded the audience, had not been tried at all in relation to the Hindu-Muslim question. There had been Unity Conferences, there had been parleys with Jinnah, there had been talks with the Ali brothers. There had been some agreements. But all that did not constitute non-violence. Those were only political methods. The result was that the Congress had lost the respect both of the Hindus and of the Muslims.

Kripalani still persisted that if Congressmen went out and got killed by Muslim goondas, the hatred between the two communities would increase.

Gandhiji was not convinced. Love was not a matter of argument or physical force. If love proceeded from the heart Congressmen could not answer abuse with abuse and fists with fists. The test of love lay in the satyagrahis sacrificing themselves. The experiment must be tried. Congressmen must follow the goondas when they went back to their localities after stabbings and carry to them the message of love. He concluded:

We should increase our contacts with the Muslims in our village or locality in a spirit of service. We should widen our circle of Muslim friends. We should serve them with sincerity and not by flattering them. . . . I have in this matter less experience but more faith. . . . If you carry out this experiment your self-confidence will grow a hundredfold. You will know your strength. . . . As you tread the path of non-violence, new weapons will come into your hands of which I am not aware. [*Ibid*, pp. 424-28, 439-40]

Gandhiji's views on the riots and the duty of Congressmen attracted criticism from many quarters. It was said that his writing betrayed hysteria, that he wrote without sufficient data, that he had recanted his views on non-cooperation and civil disobedience, that Congressmen had never adopted non-violence as between themselves, that Gandhiji was expecting the impossible



from human nature, that if his position was accepted India could never attain independence, for the whole of India could never become non-violent.

Dealing with the criticism in *Harijan*, Gandhiji reiterated the propositions he had enunciated. Swaraj, he wrote, could not be obtained through non-violence unless the non-violence shown was that of the brave and such as to be effective in dealing with violence. As for his having written without sufficient data Gandhiji said he required no more data other than that there had been rioting and that the aid of the police and the military had to be summoned to control it. As for his expecting the impossible from human nature, Gandhiji said what he was concerned with was not so much human nature as the Congress nature. What he wanted to know was: did Congressmen have non-violence in them? And if they had, was it non-violence of the brave? His thesis was that if Congressmen had non-violence of the brave it should be enough to deal with the riots.

Gandhiji suggested that every Provincial Congress Committee should raise a corps of volunteers pledged to non-violence in thought, word and deed. And there should be a manual of instructions as to training, etc., prepared for universal use. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 9-12]

In another article in *Harijan*, Gandhiji wrote that non-violence was not a quality to be evolved or expressed to order. It was an inner growth depending for sustenance upon intense individual effort. Would-be volunteers wrote to Gandhiji offering themselves for enrolment. Gandhiji advised them to enlist co-workers themselves, form local corps, and begin training. Let them not confine themselves to preparedness for emergencies, but for the daily walk of life in all the departments, personal, domestic, social, economic, political and religious. [*Ibid*, pp. 39-40]



While Gandhiji exhorted Congressmen to cultivate Muslims and win them through love, communal tension continued to mount. The fires of hatred and ill-will were further fuelled by the propaganda unleashed by the All-India Muslim League through the Press and from the platform. The Congress and Congress leadership were slandered in the most vituperative language and painted as enemies of Muslims bent upon establishing a fascist Hindu dictatorship. The first salvo had been fired by Jinnah in his speech in Lucknow in October 1937 shortly after the Congress Ministries assumed office. Gandhiji protested to Jinnah that it was a declaration of war. Jinnah answered, asking Gandhiji for "constructive proposals" and the exchange of correspondence continued for some time.

Gandhiji pleaded and cajoled, asking Jinnah "on bended knees" to be what he earlier had been — a nationalist. Jinnah was cantankerous, argumentative, defiant. "Nationalism," he wrote, "is not the monopoly of any single individual. In these days it is very difficult to define it."

On 3 March 1938 he wrote to Gandhiji:

We have reached a stage when no doubt should be left that you recognize the All-India Muslim League as the one authoritative and representative organization of Musalmans in India, and on the other hand you represent the Congress and other Hindus throughout the country. It is only on that basis we can proceed further and devise machinery of approach.

Gandhiji answered on 8 March:

You expect me to be able to speak on behalf of "the Congress and other Hindus throughout the country". I am afraid I cannot fulfil the test. I cannot



represent either the Congress or the Hindus in the sense you mean. But I would exert to the utmost all the moral influence I could have with them in order to secure an honourable settlement.

Finally the two leaders agreed to meet. The meeting was fixed for 28 April 1938 in Bombay. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, pp. 359-62; C.W.M.G., LXVI, pp. 395-96, 480-81]

Jinnah was simultaneously in correspondence with Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru asked what the points of dispute were. Jinnah said they concerned "safeguarding the rights and interests of the Musalmans with regard to their religion, culture, language, personal laws and political rights in the national life, the Government and the Administration of the country."

In concrete terms he wanted negotiations on the following points:

- (1) The fourteen points formulated by the Muslim League in 1929.
- (2) The Congress should withdraw all opposition to the Communal Award and should not describe it as a negation of nationalism.
- (3) The share of the Muslims in the State services should be definitely fixed in the constitution by statutory enactment.
- (4) Muslim personal law and culture should be guaranteed by statute.
- (5) The Congress should take in hand the agitation in connection with the Shahidganj mosque and should use its moral pressure to enable the Muslims to gain possession of the mosque.
- (6) The Muslims' right to call *Azan* and perform their religious ceremonies should not be fettered in any way.
- (7) Muslims should have freedom to perform cow-slaughter.



- (8) Muslim majorities in the Provinces where such majorities exist at present must not be affected by any territorial redistribution or adjustments.
- (9) The "Bande Mataram" song should be given up.
- (10) Muslims want Urdu to be the national language of India and they desire to have statutory guarantees that the use of Urdu shall not be curtailed or damaged.
- (11) Muslim representation in the local bodies should be governed by the principles underlying the Communal Award, that is, separate electorates and population strength.
- (12) The Tricolour Flag should be changed or, alternatively, the flag of the Muslim League should be given equal importance.
- (13) Recognition of the Muslim League as the one authoritative and representative organization of Indian Muslims.
- (14) Coalition Ministries.

The list was tentative and subject to augmentation later. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, pp. 363-76]

At the special session of the All-India Muslim League held in Calcutta on 17-18 April 1938, Jinnah again breathed fire against the Congress. The Congress, he said, was a Hindu organization, out to annihilate the Muslim League. Ill treatment and injustice was being meted out to Muslims in the Congress Provinces and the Muslim League Council had been obliged to appoint an enquiry committee under Raja Saheb Mahmud Mehdi of Pirpur. The Congress wanted the Communal Award to go, separate electorates to go and, finally, the reservations to go. The High Command of the Congress, Jinnah concluded, had no policy except



opportunism and arrogance and believed that they had already become the rulers of India. [*Ibid*, pp. 382-85]

Gandhiji did not approach his 26 April interview with Jinnah with any high hopes. Taking the public into confidence he confessed that for the first time in his 50 years of public life he found himself in a Slough of Despond. The darkness had deepened and prayer become more intense. Gandhiji also clarified that he would not be meeting Jinnah in any representative capacity. He would meet him as a lifelong worker in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 36-37]

Of course nothing came of the talks. Jinnah's utterances became more bellicose. The tension further mounted.

At the annual session of the Muslim League, held at Patna between 26 and 29 December 1938, Jinnah again sounded the war drums. The war would be not against British Imperialism, but against the Congress and the Hindus.

All hopes of communal settlement, Jinnah declared, had been dashed on the rocks of Congress fascism. The Congress did not want a settlement on equal terms. The League did not want any concessions from the Congress. The Muslims wanted to advance as a nation. The Congress was a communal Hindu body and wanted to establish Hindu *raj*. Mounting a personal attack on Gandhiji, Jinnah said it was Mr. Gandhi who had destroyed the ideals with which the Congress had started its career. It was he who had converted the Congress into a Hindu body. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 344-46]

The Muslims were now a separate "nation", locked in combat with the rest of India, the other nation.

Edward Thompson, the British author, had an exchange with Jinnah on the subject. Thompson asked:



Two nations, Mr. Jinnah, confronting each other in every Province? Every town? Every village?

Jinnah: Two nations, confronting each other in every Province, every town, every village. That is the only solution. [Tara Chand, *The History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p.266]

10

While Gandhiji was attending the meetings of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Delang, an incident occurred that shocked him and upset his mental poise.

It came to pass that on 28 March, finding time on their hands, Kasturba, Durga Desai and Velanbehn paid a visit to Jagannath Puri and went into the temple there, even though the temple was barred to the Harijans. When Gandhiji came to know of it he was greatly upset. He told the Seva Sangh meeting on 30 March:

I felt humbled and humiliated when I knew that my wife and two Ashram inmates, whom I regard as my daughters, had gone into the Puri temple. The agony was enough to precipitate a collapse. The machine recorded an alarmingly high blood-pressure but I knew better than the machine. I was in a worse condition than the machine could show. The *Gita* teaches us the lesson of detachment, but that detachment does not mean indifference to shocks of this kind. . . . But I was to blame, and Mahadev was more to blame in that he did not tell them what their *dharma* was and how any breach would shake me. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 452]

It was now Mahadev Desai's turn to be upset. He went on a fast. He cried. He was brusque with Gandhiji. He even thought of leaving Gandhiji. Gandhiji pacified him. He wrote:



If you decide to leave, will Pyarelal stay on? And if Pyarelal leaves, will Sushila stay? Of what use to me is her extraordinary intelligence? . . . Why does it not occur to you that I could let all of them go if I let you go?

Gandhiji advised Mahadevbhai to read less, think more and, if necessary, take a day off.

Kasturba, of course, confessed her lapse with utter simplicity and thus made holier "our holy relationship of over fifty-five years". [*Ibid*, pp. 455-57]

11

From 1 May to 9 May 1938 Gandhiji was on a visit to the North-West Frontier Province. He had planned to visit that Province many times earlier, but every time some hitch had developed and he had been unable to make the visit. Now at last he was there, and very happy to be in the midst of the Khudai Khidmatgars about whom, he said, he had heard so much. He wanted to see with his own eyes how the Khudai Khidmatgars lived, moved and worked and to what extent they had assimilated the teaching of non-violence. Unfortunately, he said, his visit was too brief for him to form any conclusion in that regard. He however noted Khudai Khidmatgars outnumbered the volunteers in the rest of India and also that they were more disciplined. But unless the discipline was rooted in non-violence, it could be a source of mischief. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 68-69]

During his brief sojourn in the N.W.F.P., Gandhiji spoke at Peshawar, Utmanzai, Charsadda, Mardan and Kalu Khan. His theme in all his speeches was non-violence.

At Utmanzai, as usual, Gandhiji slept in the open courtyard under the sky. One day he noted an armed Khudai Khidmatgar patrolling on the roof of the barrack type rooms in which he lived during the day when not on tour. He asked



Badshah Khan next morning who was the patrol and why he was there. Badshah Khan replied, "Mahatmaji, these are bad times. I have allowed the volunteers to patrol on the roof so that the mischief-makers would keep away." Gandhiji listened to him quietly and when Badshah Khan stopped speaking, he tried to explain to him that non-violence did not permit use or even the show of force. He narrated a parable to illustrate his point.

The snake went to God and complained: 'The descendants of Adam are always killing my kind and my progeny. Please stop them from doing so.' God said, 'They are afraid of you. Will you give up your fangs and poison bag to remove their fear?' The snake said, 'All right, but please let me keep my hiss to scare away mischief-mongers.' God said, 'In that case the descendants of Adam will keep on crushing the heads of snakes.' The show of force negated the active force of non-violence or love to bring about a change of heart in the adversary, he explained. Badshah Khan heard him in silence. It was not clear whether he accepted Bapu's logic.

The address presented to him at the Edward's Mission College at Peshawar had contained a phrase to the effect that non-violent passive resistance was the most irresistible weapon "in the hands of the weak and the oppressed". Gandhiji took exception to this. He said:

It is curious, if not also surprising, that you should have made the same mistake after all these years of satyagraha in India. We may be weak and oppressed, but non-violence is not a weapon of the weak. It is a weapon of the strongest and the bravest. . . . Violence may well be the weapon of the weak and the oppressed. Being strangers to non-violence nothing else is open to them. [*Ibid*, pp. 66-67]



Gandhiji's insistence that non-violence was the weapon of the strong and the brave had special relevance in the atmosphere of communal violence then prevailing, which called for volunteers rushing into situations of communal conflict without a care for their own lives in an endeavour to restore peace. As Gandhiji said at Kalu Khan, the riots that had occurred in Allahabad and Lucknow would have been impossible if there had been non-violence in Congressmen. He continued:

There are thousands of members on the Congress register. If they were really non-violent, these riots would not have occurred. But we not only failed to prevent them, but even sought the aid of the military and the police to quell them. Some of our Congressmen argued with me that our non-violence was limited to our dealings with the Englishmen. Then I say that that non-violence was not the weapon of the strong, but of the weak. Active non-violence of the strong puts to flight thieves, dacoits, murderers. [*Ibid*, p. 72]

But even the Khudai Khidmatgars had a long way to go before it could be said that they had assimilated non-violence. Even while Gandhiji was there, in a village near Mardan, three Sikhs had been murdered by Pathans in broad daylight and the Khudai Khidmatgars in the place had made no attempt to prevent the crime or to apprehend the murderers. How could such a thing happen, Gandhiji asked, while they talked of non-violence? The Khudai Khidmatgars must befriend the bereaved and assure the fear-stricken of their sympathy and support. So long as such things continued to happen in their midst their non-violence must be in doubt. [*Ibid*, p. 71]

Gandhiji left Peshawar on 9 May and was in Bombay on 11 May. Here he spent ten days. He was on hand during the meeting of the Congress Working



Committee from 15 to 19 May and on the 20th he again met Jinnah to pursue his efforts for a Hindu-Muslim accommodation.

The Working Committee was called upon to deliberate upon, among other things, a Ministerial crisis that had developed in the Central Provinces, and the role of Dr. N. B. Khare, the Premier in it. The crisis had begun in March 1938 when the Minister for Law and Justice in Khare's cabinet, Sheriff, had, on his own, recommended to the Governor the release, on grounds of mercy, of six Muslims convicted for rape of a thirteen year old Harijan girl. Sheriff's action had aroused strong public criticism and Vallabhbhai Patel, in his capacity as Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board asked for an explanation from Sheriff and also suggested to the Congress Legislature Party in the C.P. Assembly to consider the question. At the meeting of the Party Sheriff expressed regret for having approached the Governor in the matter without consulting his cabinet colleagues and also offered to resign as Minister. Later in a statement, while regretting his mistake, he defended his action by saying that, considering the matter purely from the point of view of justice, he had been guilty of no impropriety. The Congress Working Committee, in order to do full justice to Sheriff, passed a resolution to the effect that, since it did not have all the facts before it to enable it to come to a decision, the matter be referred to an eminent jurist. Accordingly, on Gandhiji's advice, the matter was referred to Sir Manmath Nath Mukherjee, a retired judge of the Calcutta High Court. Sir Manmath in his report submitted on 7 May held that Sheriff's action was a grave error of judgment which had certainly led to a miscarriage of justice. Sheriff was then asked to resign. [Narahari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai*, (Gujarati), Part-II, Navajivan Prakashan Mandir, Ahmedabad, 1952, pp. 292-95; C.W.M.G., LXVII, p. 178]

Apart from Sheriff's case, another reason for the Ministerial crisis arose from the differences that had cropped up between Khare, who represented the



Marathi-speaking Nagpur area, and three of his Cabinet colleagues, Ravishankar Shukla, D. P. Mishra and D. K. Mehta, who represented the Hindi-speaking Mahakoshal, resulting in Shukla, Mishra and Mehta submitting their resignations from the Cabinet. There had also been charges of nepotism against some of the Ministers. Vallabhbhai called a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party on 24 May at Panchmarhi, where in the hot season the Government had moved, to consider the matter and compose the differences. At the meeting, which was attended by Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Azad as members of the Congress Parliamentary Board and the Presidents of the Provincial Congress Committees of the three regions of the Central Provinces, the differences between Khare and his three Cabinet colleagues were composed and the latter withdrew their resignations. Further, all the Ministers gave a promise in writing that they would work in complete harmony among themselves in future. After the meeting Vallabhbhai issued a statement in which he said that the Ministers had assured the Congress Parliamentary Board that they would effect necessary changes to improve the administration to make it more efficient, but upheld the charges of nepotism against Khare and Shukla.

Soon after, however, Vallabhbhai started receiving complaints that Khare had not been keeping the terms of the settlement reached at the Panchmarhi meeting. There were also reports in the Press on 19 July that two of the Ministers, Gole and Deshmukh, had resigned. Khare had on 15 July sent a report to Vallabhbhai, telling him what he had been doing to carry out the terms of the Panchmarhi settlement, and assuring him that he, Khare, would take no hasty step but leave the final decision to Vallabhbhai. He, however, did not mention in the report that Gole and Deshmukh had resigned.

The Congress Working Committee was to meet on 23 July and, on the strength of the assurances given to him by Khare, Vallabhbhai thought that the



Parliamentary Board would be able to consider and solve the problem before the Working Committee met. But in the meanwhile, on 19 July, Khare informed his Cabinet colleagues that he intended to resign as Premier and asked them to resign along with him in conformity with the usual parliamentary practice. On 20 July Shukla, Mishra and Mehta informed Khare in separate letters that they would not resign without instructions from the Parliamentary Board or the Working Committee. However, Khare resigned on the afternoon of that day and along with him two of his Cabinet colleagues, Gole and Deshmukh also resigned. The Governor then asked Shukla, Mishra and Mehta also to resign. Mishra and Mehta met Rajendra Prasad at Wardha and apprised him of the developments. Rajendra Prasad asked them to explain to the Governor that they were bound by the discipline of the Congress and to request him to wait till the meeting of the Working Committee on 23 July. He also sent a letter to Khare telling him that the Parliamentary Board was to meet on 22 July and advising him not to take any step before that and to withdraw his resignation. If however Khare was not inclined to do so, he might request the Governor to postpone action on his resignation till the meeting of the Working Committee on 23 July.

As desired by the Governor, Shukla, Mishra and Mehta met him at 2 a.m. on 21 July and explained to him why they could not resign. However they were informed by the Governor in the early hours of 21 July that they had been relieved of their charges as Ministers. Khare then formed a new Ministry and he and the other Ministers who were present with him took the oath of office.

The Parliamentary Board met on 22 July and, learning about the developments of the preceding day, summoned Khare and his new colleagues, as also the dismissed Ministers, to attend the meeting. Khare was told that what he had done was not worthy of the office he held and his new colleagues were



asked, if they felt they had made a mistake, to rectify it. After consulting among themselves they admitted their mistake and offered to resign. They sent in their resignations to the Governor on 23 July and informed the Parliamentary Board accordingly.

The Working Committee then met on 23 July. Khare, who had been summoned to attend the meeting, was asked to call a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party to consider the resignation of the leader of the Party and elect a new leader in his place. The meeting of the Legislature Party was fixed for 27 July and Khare said he would stand for re-election as leader at that meeting. The Working Committee asked him not to do so. The same advice was given to him again on 25 July. On Khare remaining adamant in his intention, he was asked to go to Segaoon and consult Gandhiji. He met Gandhiji at Segaoon on 25 July in the presence of the Congress President Bose and some members of the Working Committee. Gandhiji appealed to Khare to stand down and work as a camp-follower. Khare then drafted a statement to be issued to the Press, in which he "admitted an error of judgment" he had committed in presenting his "resignation to the Governor on the eve of the meeting of the Working Committee" and further said that he would be content if he was "permitted to serve as a camp-follower". Gandhiji made corrections and additions in the draft, after reading which Khare changed his mind and said he would consult his friends and then decide whether or not to issue the statement. Finally Khare decided not to issue the statement.

The Congress Working Committee then met on 27 July to consider Khare's conduct and passed a resolution saying that "by the series of acts committed by Dr. Khare, culminating in his resignation of his charge and demanding the resignation of his colleagues of their charges, Dr. Khare was guilty of grave errors



of judgment, which have exposed the Congress in the C.P. to ridicule and brought down its prestige". The resolution went on to say: "By all these acts of his Dr. Khare has proved himself unworthy of holding positions of responsibility in the Congress organization." As for the role of the Governor in the episode the resolution said by the ugly haste with which he had turned night into day and forced the crisis that had overtaken the Province, he had shown that he was eager to weaken and discredit the Congress in so far as it lay in his power to do so. [*Ibid*, pp. 295-99; C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 91, 213, 450-51]

The C.P. Congress Legislature Party met on 27 July at Wardha under the chairmanship of President Subhas Bose, and by an overwhelming majority elected Ravi Shankar Shukla as the leader of the Party. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, 260-64]

There was widespread criticism of the action taken by the Working Committee to discipline Dr. Khare and of its intervention in the C.P. Ministerial crisis as a whole. Gandhiji justified the action. He wrote:

Dr. Khare was not only guilty of gross indiscipline in flouting the warnings of the Parliamentary Board, but he betrayed incompetence as a leader by allowing himself to be fooled by the Governor. . . . The Working Committee would have been guilty of gross neglect of duty if it had failed to condemn Dr. Khare's action. . . . It was no pleasure to me to advise the Working Committee to pass the resolution it did. . . . I appealed to him bravely to stand down and work as a camp-follower. He himself seemed to be willing but he was badly advised. . . .

. . . the Congress conceived as a fighting machine has to centralize control and guide every department and every Congressman, however



highly placed, and expect unquestioned obedience. The fight cannot be fought on any other terms.

They say this is fascism pure and simple. But they forget that fascism is the naked sword. Under it Dr. Khare should lose his head. The Congress is the very antithesis of fascism, because it is based on non-violence pure and undefiled. Its sanctions are all moral. Its authority is not derived from panoplied black-shirts. Under the Congress regime Dr. Khare can remain the hero of Nagpur, and the students and citizens of Nagpur. . . . That is the glory and the strength of the Congress – not its weakness. . . . It is the only purely non-violent political organization of importance, to my knowledge throughout the world. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 223, 226]

13

The popular ferment in the States reached new heights in 1938-39. The formation of popular Governments in the Provinces and the Congress resolution passed at Haripura that Indian States participating in the Federation should approximate to the Provinces in the establishment of representative institutions and responsible government, lent an edge to the aspiration of the States' people for a voice in the States' administrations.

Immediately following the Congress session things hatted up in Mysore, where a wave of repression had already been going on. The A.I.C.C. had been compelled to pass a resolution at Calcutta in October condemning the severity of the repression.

The Congress at Haripura having declared that the popular movements in States must draw their strength from the people of the States and not rely on help from the Congress, the subjects of the Mysore Maharaja organized a Mysore State Congress and started what they called a flag satyagraha. They



began holding meetings and staging demonstrations and hoisting the national flag on public buildings. The State authorities answered by promulgating Section 144, prohibiting meetings and demonstrations and arresting the leaders.

Gandhiji advised the State Congress leaders that since what they were after was responsible government under the aegis of the Maharaja, they must respect the Mysore State flag and on ceremonial occasions must hoist it along with the national flag. [*Ibid*, pp. 44-45]

On 26 April in a village called Viduraswatham in Kolar district people defied the order banning the hoisting of the national flag and prohibiting meeting. The State police opened fire to disperse the meeting. As a result 32 persons lay dead and 48 injured.

Gandhiji condemned the firing on an unarmed crowd. He asked the Mysore authorities and Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan, to recognize the signs of the times and divest the Government of its autocracy and to make popular representatives responsible for the administration of Mysore.

At the same time he told the people of Mysore that the tragic deaths and injuries were a small price to pay for the liberty of the people. [*Ibid*, pp. 53-54]

In May at the intervention of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and J. B. Kripalani a settlement was arrived at between the State authorities and the Mysore State Congress. The terms of the settlement included the calling off of the satyagraha by the Mysore Congress, general amnesty on the part of the State to political prisoners and withdrawal of all repressive orders and the State flag to be flown alongside the national flag on ceremonial occasions.

Gandhiji welcomed the terms of the settlement. [*Ibid*, pp. 77-78]



The partial success of the people of Mysore, instead of liberalizing the other States, only further stiffened them against popular movements for responsible government. Repression everywhere became more intense. Gandhiji counselled strictest observance of truth and non-violence on the part of the States' people. He wrote in the *Harijan* of 9 July 1938:

They must be ready to face bullets without flinching but also without lifting their little finger in so called self-defence. Let it also be remembered that a satyagrahi's minimum is also his maximum. [*Ibid*, p. 158]

In Travancore sporadic meetings and demonstrations had continued throughout summer. On 16 July a demonstration was staged by the State Congress in front of the Assembly chamber. It was subjected to lathi charge by the police. On 22 August Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was arrested on entering the State in defiance of a prohibitory order.

On 26 August the Travancore State Congress started a civil disobedience campaign for responsible government. The Travancore administration assumed special powers to suppress the movement. Clashes between the police and the satyagrahis followed. On 31 August troops opened fire on demonstrators in Trivandrum. The President of the State Congress was arrested and sentenced to prison for one year. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 3-10]

Firing was also resorted to at Quilon and Puthupally, resulting in the death of one or two innocent persons and injuries to many.

The State authorities blamed the State Congress for the incidents, saying that the demonstrators had been guilty of stone-throwing and burning of buses. The State Congress laid the blame for such provocation on the State police.



Gandhiji asked for an impartial enquiry into the incidents. He drew the attention of the States to the awakening among the States' people all over India and wrote:

All the States may not live. The biggest ones can live only if they will recognize their limitations, become servants of their people . . . and depend for their existence . . . solely on the goodwill of their people. Frightfulness will feed the fire of violence that one feels smouldering everywhere. If the States are badly advised and they rely upon organized violence for resisting the just demands of their people, ahimsa, so far generated in the country as a means of redressing social injustice, will not protect them. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, p. 350]

Gandhiji asked for an enquiry into firings. The Dewan justified the firings and repression in general and refused the request for any enquiry by any outsider. Gandhiji in a statement said: "Not even the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh was justified." [*Ibid*, p. 311]

The Travancore Congress held the Dewan, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, responsible for the repression and for the unbending attitude of the State towards the Congress demands. They submitted to the Maharaja a memorandum containing various charges against him. Gandhiji advised that even if the charges could be substantiated, it was not wise to press them because they were of a personal nature. The State Congress had to fight for a larger cause: viz. responsible government in the State. Under Gandhiji's persuasion the charges against the Dewan were withdrawn. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 214, 216-17, 241, 267, 280, 287-89]

Also under Gandhiji's persuasion the State Congress withdrew the civil disobedience movement to enable the whole situation to be examined, and took up prohibition work instead. The State authorities in turn withdrew the



prosecutions launched against the leaders of the State. [*Ibid*, pp. 131-2, 200, 432-4]

15

The various small States in Orissa did not remain untouched by the wave of awakening sweeping the States. The rulers decided to crush the awakening by brutal and inhuman repression. In the State of Dhenkanal the Praja Mandal was declared an unlawful body and its leader, Hareemohan Patnayak, arrested for sedition. There were mass arrests and repeated firings, in which several people – according to an estimate nearly 20 – lost their lives. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, p. 312]

More or less the same story was being repeated in Talcher, another Orissa State. Gandhiji wrote:

From Dhenkanal have come to me stories of fiendish cruelty exercised by the State myrmidons under the shadow of the police supplied by the Paramount Power. I asked for evidence in support of some of the unnamable cruelties. And I have enough to inspire belief . . .

I understand that the persecuted people are taking shelter in British Orissa. Can the Ministers refuse them shelter? How many can they take charge of? [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, p. 152]

On 5 January 1939 R. L. Bazalgette, Political Agent, Orissa States, was murdered by an infuriated mob in Ranpur State.

Condemning the murder in a Press statement, Gandhiji said it should be a warning to all workers to be most careful in conducting mass agitations. They should realize that the slightest departure from non-violence was bound to harm the movement for freedom whether in the States or all India. [*Ibid*, p. 285]



The Talcher State police brutalities were so systematic and widespread that out of a total population of 75,000, no less than 26,000 fled to British Orissa. The refugees were not well looked after. They went through harrowing sufferings. Yet they stayed on, because they did not dare to go back. [*Ibid*, p. 318]

Gandhiji made it his concern to see that relief was made available to the Talcher refugees while they remained in exile and opportunities were created for them to return to their homes with an assurance of safety. Responsible Government in the States might not be the concern of the Ministers of Orissa, he wrote, but if there was plague in those parts or "butchery" was going on, it was very much the Ministers' concern. They could not sit comfortably in their chairs if they did not succeed in sending the refugees home with an "absolute assurance of safety and freedom of speech and social and political intercourse." [*Ibid*, p. 348]

16

Among other flashpoints were Jaipur and Hyderabad. In Jaipur a Jaipur Rajya Praja Mandal had been functioning since 1931 under the leadership of Jamnalal Bajaj. In December 1938 it was felt that the Praja Mandal should undertake famine relief work that some parts of the State were in need of. Jamnalal Bajaj therefore wanted to go to Jaipur to organize the work. But the State authorities to his dismay banned his entry into Jaipur on the plea that his activities were "likely to lead to a breach of the peace".

Bajaj, on Gandhiji's persuasion, decided not to defy the order, but gave notice to the authorities that the Praja Mandal would have to start civil disobedience for the restoration of civil liberties in the state. He made it clear that though the Mandal stood for responsible government in the State under the



aegis of the Maharaja, civil disobedience would not cover this demand. [*Ibid*, pp. 281-84]

The Jaipur authorities, headed by the English Prime Minister Beauchamp St. John, answered by banning the Praja Mandal.

Gandhiji warned that if action were taken against Jamnalal Bajaj and his associates, the Congress would not quietly stand by and the policy of non-intervention would not apply. This policy had been adopted by the Congress when there had been no awakening in the States. The moment the States' subjects became ready to fight for their rights the artificial boundary between the States and the rest of India was destroyed. Constitutionalism, legality and such other things were good enough within limits, but they became a drag upon human progress "immediately the human mind has broken these artificial bounds and flies higher". [*Ibid*, pp. 326-27]

On 5 February 1939 Jamnalal Bajaj crossed the border into Jaipur and was promptly taken into custody. He was first taken to Shekhavati, far away from Jaipur, and kept *incommunicado* under strong guard. Later he was kept in a place about 50 miles from Jaipur as a State prisoner. He suffered from pain in the knee and the place where he was kept was a haunt of tigers and other ferocious animals protected under the shikar laws of the State. He was released only in August.

In Hyderabad the State administration imposed a ban on the formation of the State Congress on 7 September 1938. The State Congress resisted the ban by a formal campaign of civil disobedience. This led to mass arrests of leaders and workers of the State Congress. A Public Safety Regulation was promulgated. Twenty-one newspapers were prohibited entry into the State. By December



there were more than 400 satyagrahis in jail, their sentences running from a few months to 3 1/2 years. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 306-7]

The State Congress agitation unfortunately got mixed up with similar agitations being carried on by the Aryan Defence League and the Hindu Civil Liberties Union, attracting the charge that it was a Hindu communal agitation. Indeed at the Patna session of the Muslim League held in December 1938 it was made clear in the speeches that the Muslim League regarded the agitation in Hyderabad as designed solely to bring Hyderabad under Hindu subjugation and to root out Muslim culture from the Deccan. [*Ibid*, p. 350]

Gandhiji, Nehru and other Congress leaders accordingly advised the leaders of the State Congress to suspend the civil disobedience movement and to give an opportunity to the Nizam to review the situation. The Working Committee of the State Congress followed the advice and withdrew the movement. It however warned that the withdrawal was not impelled by any sense of weakness on the part of the State Congress. It had more than 2,000 persons on its list ready to offer civil disobedience and had numerous offers from people outside the State to participate in the agitation. It demanded recognition of the State Congress, release of all civil disobedience prisoners and steps being taken towards inauguration of a scheme of responsible government with reasonable safeguards for the rights of the minorities. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, p. 243]

The Arya Samaj agitation however continued throughout the summer of 1939. Their demands were: (1) absolute freedom for the practice and preaching of the Vedic religion and culture, with due regard to the feelings of the followers of other faiths, and (2) full freedom for starting new branches of Arya Samaj and building of Arya Samaj Mandirs, Yajnashtalas and Havankundas.

Gandhiji continued his efforts at persuading the Nizam's Government, through correspondence with Sir Akbar Hydari, the Dewan, to concede the



religious demands of the Arya Samaj. His efforts bore fruit. The Nizam's Government through a communique issued on 19 July 1939, conceded all the demands. On 8 August 1939 the Arya Samaj withdrew its satyagraha. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 14; C.W.M.G., LXX, p. 90]

18

One State that proved very difficult to handle and gave no end of trouble to Gandhiji was Rajkot in Kathiawar. Its profligate ruler Dharmendrasinh, having squandered the State's savings, proceeded to oppress his subjects to raise money in various questionable ways. The State's subjects, led by U.N. Dhebar, resisted this and started a campaign for reforms. By September 1938 the agitation was at high heat. There were large-scale arrests of the agitators, beatings and even murders. On 28 October Gandhiji was writing to Manibehn Patel:

What is happening in Rajkot is wonderful. If the tempo is kept up, there is no doubt that the people will get what they want. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, p. 71]

Manibehn had placed herself in the forefront of the struggle, touring the villages and keeping up the morale of the peasantry.

Durbar Virawala, the evil genius behind the Thakore, was retired as Dewan of the State, when things got too hot. He was replaced by Patrick Cadell, an Englishman. Cadell took up a no-nonsense attitude towards Dharmendrasinh and bluntly told him to mend his ways and to make himself accessible to his subjects and "hear petitioners" for about an hour every day. He warned that if the Thakore did not change his behaviour the consequences might be unfortunate for him and his State.

Dharmendrasinh curtly told Cadell to mind his own business and not to forget that he was only an employee and not the ruler of Rajkot. A few days later



he asked Cadell, who had been appointed in August for a six-month term, to "leave and retire". This Cadell refused to do, and E. C. Gibson, the Resident, supported him. So he stayed on. [*Ibid*, pp. 472-76]

The people's struggle meanwhile continued. Dharmendrasinh complained to Cadell that his subjects no longer extended to him the same "love and loyalty" as before and that the sale of *Ijaras* (monopolies) and of grain was being boycotted by the people who had become defiant. Batches of satyagrahis from outside the State also came to participate in the struggle. When U. N. Dhebar was released from prison at the intercession of Cadell, there was a large meeting to welcome him. He was rearrested when the struggle intensified. Manibehn, too, was arrested along with many others.

Dharmendrasinh then invited Vallabhbhai Patel to Rajkot to bring about a settlement. Patel met the Thakore and his Council on the evening of 25 December and after prolonged talks an agreement was signed on the morning of 26 December, the terms of which were: (1) all repressive measures should be withdrawn; (2) all political prisoners should be released; (3) the satyagraha should be called off; (4) to draft the constitution a committee of ten persons should be appointed, seven of whom should be recommended by Vallabhbhai Patel and nominated by Dharmendrasinh. [*Ibid*, p. 274]

Gandhiji was very happy that the struggle had ended in an agreement between Vallabhbhai and the State. He called it the victory of non-violence. He congratulated Dharmendrasinh for having taken things into his own hands and for overruling the wishes of the English Dewan and the English Resident. [*Ibid*, pp. 274-76]

Gibson, the Resident, was not pleased. On 28 December he asked Dharmendrasinh over to the Residency and gave him a dressing down for having



invited Patel, an outsider and a most untrustworthy person, into the State. [*Ibid*, pp. 479-80]

The satyagraha was called off and the prisoners were released. On 4 January Patel submitted to the Thakore his seven names for appointment to the Committee. But unknown to him Virawala had been intriguing and on his prompting Dharmendrasinh went back on the agreement in so far as the personnel of the committee were concerned. On 21 January 1939 when the names of the unofficial members of the Committee were announced only three of the seven names recommended by Patel figured on the list. Representations from various interests, such as the Muslims, the Bhayats and the Depressed Classes, were cited as reasons for the change. The Thakore contended that the intention of the agreement was that he would have "liberty to accept or not the names put forward by Sardar Patel". [*Ibid*, pp. 470, 481, 485]

On 25 January Vallabhbhai Patel in a statement blamed Durbar Virawala and the British Resident for the *volte face* on the part of Dharmendrasinh and announced the resumption of the struggle, which would be kept strictly non-violent and in which, "for the time being" only Kathiawaris would be permitted to take part. [*Ibid*, pp. 469-72]

Kasturba Gandhi sought Gandhiji's permission to join the satyagraha. Gandhiji gladly consented, for was not Kasturba daughter of Rajkot? Announcing her intention to participate in the satyagraha in an article in *Harijan*, Gandhiji wrote:

My wife feels so much about the sufferings of the people that though she is as old as I am and much less able than myself to brave such hardships as may be attendant upon jail life, she feels she must go to Rajkot. [*Ibid*, p. 346]



Kasturba Gandhi proceeded to Rajkot on 3 February 1939 and was arrested as soon as she set foot in the State. She was taken to a place called Tramba. She was too frail to be kept in the jail alone and so Manibehn Patel and Mridula Sarabhai were sent as her companions. Gandhiji wrote brief notes to her every day, especially after he came to Rajkot but they did not reach her regularly and she often complained of not hearing from him. [Ibid, pp. 426, 429]

The repression during this second phase of the struggle was even more brutal. A reign of terror was let loose in the State. Summarizing the reports that were reaching him, Gandhiji wrote:

I repeat the charge of organized *goondaism*. The Agency police are operating in Rajkot. Wires received by the Sardar show that civil resisters are taken to distant places, there stripped naked, beaten and left to their own resources. They show further that Red Cross doctors and ambulance parties have been prevented from rendering help to those who were injured by lathi charges in Halenda. . . . [Ibid, p. 366]

19

In the last week of February reports reached Gandhiji that the satyagrahi prisoners in Rajkot Jail had been fasting against atrocities. The authorities, when approached, denied the allegations of atrocities and said the prisoners had been fasting without reason.

On 24 February Gandhiji wired to the Rajkot Council that he planned to pay a visit to Rajkot to enquire into things himself and also, if possible, to plead with the Thakore Saheb to repair the breach of faith with his people. He would ask for the prisoners to be set free. As for the personnel of the Committee, the matter could be negotiated, the only condition being that the Sardar's nominees would be in a majority in it. Gandhiji asked Sardar Patel to suspend the satyagraha.



Gandhiji was told that there had been no breach of agreement on the part of the Thakore Saheb and that no purpose would be served by his coming to Rajkot.

Nevertheless on 25 February Gandhiji left for Rajkot "purely as a messenger of peace". [*Ibid*, pp. 449-51]

Durbar Virawala had returned to Rajkot on the retirement of Cadell in January. Gandhiji arrived on 27 February and was met by Fateh Mohammed Khan, a member of the Council, along with Virawala, virtual ruler of Rajkot. They were both very respectful to Gandhiji and promised him full cooperation. But behind Gandhiji's back they were at work trying to drive a wedge into the movement by weaning away the Muslims and the Depressed Classes from the movement. At their prompting the Muslim Council of Action met Gandhiji and asked for representation on the Reforms Committee on the basis of separate electorates. Gandhiji said they could have two representatives on the Committee. The Garasia Association similarly asked for representation and Gandhiji conceded to them one nominee. [*Ibid*, pp. 463-65]

Gandhiji spent three exasperating days trying to negotiate with Virawala. The talks caused him intense dissatisfaction, for he found Virawala incapable of keeping his resolutions from moment to moment. Gandhiji's patience was exhausted. On 2 March he wrote to Dharmendrasinh, whom he looked upon as a son, asking him to announce that he stood by the notification of 26 December, to cancel the notification of 21 January and appoint five persons including U. N. Dhebar, P. P. Anada, V. M. Shukla, J. H. Joshi, and S. V. Modi, in addition to four of the Thakore's own nominees to the Reforms Committee, and release the satyagrahi prisoners. Gandhiji further suggested appointment of three or less than three officials as guides or advisers to the Committee.



Gandhiji gave notice that if Dharmendrasinh did not notify his acceptance of the suggestions by midday 3 March he would commence a fast which would continue till the acceptance of the proposals. [C.W.M.G., LXIX, pp. 2-5]

By midday 3 March no reply having been received from Dharmendrasinh, Gandhiji commenced his fast, preceded by the singing of *Vaishnava Jana* and *Ramdhun*. Making a statement to the press he exhorted the people to see that there were no bitter speeches or writings either about the Thakore or his advisers or the Resident. Gandhiji took note of the overpowering influence that Durbar Virawala exercised over the Thakore. Sober and influential persons, he said, had repeatedly told him that so long as Virawala retained his influence, there would be no peace in Rajkot. [*Ibid*, pp. 10-13]

When Gandhiji started his fast on 3 March, Kasturba was much distressed, especially as she was not by his side to look after him. Gandhiji consoled her. He also sent word asking her if he should entreat the State authorities to allow her to be with him during the fast. She replied: "No, by no means. I shall be quite content if they will let me have daily news of him. God, Who has taken care of him during all his previous trials will pull him safely through this too." [*Ibid*, p. 26]

Gandhiji sent a message to Kasturba that she was not to ask to be released or to be taken to him. If the authorities offered to bring her to him on their own, who was she to refuse? If they still did it she was to stay where they left her. She was to accept release only if it was un-conditional.

Kasturba was released only after Gandhiji had called off the fast on 7 March following an agreement with the authorities. She then joined him at Rashtriya Shala and took up the task of nursing him.

Late on 3 March Dharmendrasinh's reply came. He rejected Gandhiji's suggestions. The responsibility of choosing the members of the Committee, he



said, was his and it was impossible for him to allow any one to have "the final decision in a matter of such vital importance". [*Ibid*, p. 443]

On 4 March Gandhiji got in touch with the Resident, and through him with the Viceroy. In his letter to Gibson he expressed the view that in regarding the Thakore Saheb as responsible thinking ruler he had been giving currency to a fraud. The Thakore probably had not been allowed even to see the letter that Gandhiji had written to him. Durbar Virawala was the virtual ruler of Rajkot and he was utterly unreliable. Gandhiji called for immediate intervention of the Paramount Power to ensure that in terms of the notification of 26 December, the persons recommended by Sardar Patel were nominated to the Committee. [*Ibid*, pp. 22-23]

The Viceroy regretted that Gandhiji had undertaken the fast and informed him that Dharmendrasinh himself would preside over the Committee and "ensure fair play in the fulfilment of the Thakore Saheb's notification of December 26th". He invited Gandhiji over to see him as soon as convenient. [*Ibid*, p. 444]

Acknowledging the Viceroy's communication Gandhiji had the following message conveyed to him:

Breach of promise is the determining factor. If I get your clear assurance that the substance of the terms of my letter to the Thakore Saheb of the 3rd instant will be satisfied, I shall gladly break the fast. . . . Durbar Virawala should be removed. Thakore Saheb is a cipher, he does not rule. Durbar Virawala's will is law. A sympathetic Dewan should be appointed. . . . Prisoners should be released before I can leave Rajkot. [*Ibid*, p. 29]

The Viceroy in his letter in reply dated 7 March noted Gandhiji's feeling that there had been a breach of faith and suggested referring the matter of the



interpretation of the notification "to the highest judicial authority in the land, that is to say, the Chief Justice of India". He again invited Gandhiji to see him. [*Ibid*, pp. 444-45]

Acknowledging the Viceroy's letter the same day Gandhiji said it was sufficient warrant for him to break the fast and end the anxiety of millions. [*Ibid*, p. 32]

Breaking the fast, Gandhiji in a Press statement expressed his goodwill for the Princes. He said he did not agree with those who thought that India could never be free unless the Princes, who were a relic of the barbaric past, were done away with. It was not possible to wipe out the traditions of a hoary past. The Princes had a place in India. Only they must respond to the spirit of the time.

Gandhiji expressed his sympathy for the Muslims, Bhayats and Garasias of Rajkot and said they all would have representation in the new scheme of things. [*Ibid*, pp. 33-37]

Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Chief Justice, heard the parties on 27 March. The Rajkot Durbar was represented by Virawala, who, in a submission running to forty typed sheets full of vituperations against Patel, questioned the validity of the Thakore's letter of 26 December, saying it had been extracted from the Thakore "under duress" and "by fraudulent means".

Maurice Gwyer delivered his judgment on 3 April. The judgment completely vindicated the stand taken by Gandhiji and Patel. It said "the true construction of each document is that the Thakore Saheb undertakes to appoint the persons whom Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel may recommend, and that he does not reserve to himself any discretion to reject those whom he does not approve". [*Ibid*, pp. 103-4]



Armed with the Gwyer Award, Gandhiji on 7 April left Delhi for Rajkot, arriving there on 9 April. He was full of hope that it would now be possible to set up the Committee in terms of the 26 December agreement and get the work of reform going. The hope turned out to be illusory. For during Gandhiji's absence from the scene Virawala and Khan Fateh Mohammed had been at work inciting the Bhayats, the Muslims and the Depressed Classes to put forward their claims to be represented on the Committee.

Gandhiji said he was willing to give them representation on the Committee provided their nominees agreed to be nominees of Patel and to work with the rest of Patel's nominees as a team. Failing this, Dharmendrasinh could have the four names included by him in the list as per his notification of 21 January, thus increasing his strength on the Committee to seven, including the three officials, provided Patel was allowed to nominate eight persons, instead of seven, so that his majority on the Committee remained intact.

Day in and day out Gandhiji held prolonged consultations with the leaders of the Muslims and the Bhayats, trying to persuade them that they should agree to have representatives on the Reforms Committee on the condition that they would be nominees of Sardar Patel, that is to say, the Praja Parishad, and function as a team with them. They would not agree. They must have independent vote, they declared.

Failing in his efforts to make the Muslims and the Bhayats see reason, Gandhiji wrote to Dharmendrasinh on 14 April, giving a list of seven names on behalf of Sardar Patel for the Committee in terms of the 26 December notification. Dharmendrasinh in his reply questioned the eligibility of six of them. He declared that they were not residents of Rajkot. [*Ibid*, pp. 124, 135-39]



Then followed something that was to be a test of Gandhiji's faith in God and ahimsa. Reports came on 16 April that at prayer time in the evening that day the Muslims and Bhayats planned to hold a black-flag demonstration, also that a garland of shoes had been got ready for the occasion. Gandhiji made light of the report.

As soon as Gandhiji reached the prayer ground a crowd of demonstrators numbering about 600 assembled, carrying black flags and placards bearing inscriptions some of which were highly offensive. All the time the prayer went on, shouting on the part of the demonstrators continued. When Gandhiji got up to go he found the narrow passage leading out of the prayer ground blocked by the hostile crowd. He decided to walk rather than use the car. Gandhiji was pushed around so much that his frail frame could not stand the impact and he was seized by a severe pain in the region of the waste, brought on by mental shock. He sought relief through prayer. As soon as he was sufficiently composed he caught hold of a Bhayat demonstrator and placed himself in his protection. Leaning on his shoulder he walked to his car. [*Ibid*, pp. 460-62]

According to an account the demonstrators were actually looking for Vallabhbhai, who had unexpectedly gone to Amreli. When this was discovered there was curiosity about the route he would take to return to Rajkot. A neighbouring raja was suspected of wishing to have the Sardar murdered. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, p. 275]

In a Press statement Gandhiji gave vent to his anguish that the demonstrators had kept shouting slogans during the prayer. He said:

Their cries pierced me like arrows whilst I was trying to concentrate my mind on the words of the prayer. I have not attained the power of meditation which makes one impervious to all disturbances from without. .



. . . I appeal to those who feel grieved at my conduct in excluding certain names from the Sardar's list to bear with me. They may adopt all the just means to redress their grievances. The method they adopted today was very far from being just. [C.W.M.G., LXIX, pp. 142-43]

21

The Committee could not be formed and the work on devising a reformed constitution for the State was stalled. Gandhiji wrote to Gibson that he held Virawala responsible for all the delay. He invited Gibson, as the representative of the Paramount Power, to intervene to get things going. "I do not like the idea of troubling you or seeking the intervention of the Paramount Power," he wrote, "but I see there is no way out of the difficulty." [*Ibid*, pp. 155-56]

Gibson invited Gandhiji over for a talk and Gandhiji, though seriously ill with gastric flu, went over to see Gibson on 20 April. He then wrote to him:

I am tired of fighting unseen forces in Rajkot — a situation I have never been obliged to face throughout my life. The offer is that Parishad should withdraw from the proposed Committee altogether and that the Thakore Saheb should nominate his own Committee in terms of the notification, that this Committee should be formed at once and should present its report to the Thakore Saheb within one month and four days from its formation.

If the constitution that will be framed by the Committee is not in terms of the notification, the Rajkot Rajya Praja Parishad . . . should have the right to dissent from it.

The Committee's report and the dissenting report, Gandhiji said, could then be sent to the Chief Justice of India. [*Ibid*, p. 158]

Gibson said it was "a sporting offer". But Virawala, with whom Gandhiji had gruelling talks lasting five hours, turned it down.



Gandhiji gave up. In his talk with the Praja Parishad workers on 23 April, he advised them to try and convert Durbar Virawala. If they accepted his approach, he said, they, the seven nominees of Sardar Patel, should go to Virawala and ask him what they should do, that they would like to rely entirely on him, Virawala, for the implementation of the notification. [*Ibid*, pp. 162-66]

On 24 April, leaving Rajkot for Bombay, Gandhiji issued a Press statement. He said:

Rajkot seems to have robbed me of my youth. I never knew that I was old. Now I am weighed down by the knowledge of decrepitude. I never knew what it was to lose hope. But it seems to have been cremated in Rajkot. My ahimsa has been put to a test such as it has never been subjected to before. . . .

And so I have left empty-handed, with body shattered, hope cremated. . . . I have asked the workers to confer with Durbar Shri Virawala, to forget me and Sardar Patel, and if they get enough to satisfy their least wants, they may accept the offer without reference to either of us. I have told Shri Virawala, "I am defeated. May you win." [*Ibid*, pp. 168-71]

But winning over Durbar Virawala proved an uphill and a thankless task for the workers of Rajkot. He resented any sort of contact between Gandhiji and the local workers. When Gandhiji in a message told Dhebar to follow his own plan, Virawala protested that he was interfering. Gandhiji replied that he could not refuse guidance to those who sought his guidance. When Gandhiji informed Virawala that he intended to go again to Rajkot, Virawala said he must not think of going there unless invited by the Durbar. [*Ibid*, pp. 186-88]



Gandhiji nevertheless went back to Rajkot on 12 May and stayed on there till the end of the month. The very first thing he did on arriving there was to announce in his talk with the Praja Parishad workers that ahimsa required that he should renounce the Gwyer Award. On 17 May he formally announced it in a statement. Confessing his error in having gone to the Viceroy he said:

In taking the fast I sought immediate intervention of the Paramount Power so as to induce fulfilment of the promise made by the Thakore Saheb. This was not the way of ahimsa or conversion. It was the way of *himsa* or coercion. My fast to be pure should have been addressed only to the Thakore Saheb. . . . So far as I am concerned the Muslims and Bhayats can have anything the Thakore Saheb may be pleased to give them. . . .

I have been guilty of playing what may be called a double game, i.e., hanging the sword of the Award over his head and wooing him. . . . This method I admit is wholly inconsistent with ahimsa. [*Ibid*, pp. 269-70]

In talks with the workers Gandhiji again and again exhorted the workers to bend all their energies to convert Virawala. He could not be the essence of all that was evil in Kathiawar. [*Ibid*, p. 275]

At Virawala's suggestion Gandhiji even attended the Durbar held by Dharmendrasinh on 20 May. The workers were angry. Gandhiji told them that it had been a debt he owed to Virawala. He said:

I had offended him by having secured the Award over his head, and I owed it to him to wipe out the offence by attending the function. [*Ibid*, pp. 286-87]

Jawaharlal Nehru was later to say that Gandhiji had put back the clock of progress by a century or thereabouts by his Rajkot misdeeds. Gandhiji said he



was equally sure that he had rendered great service by his good deeds in Rajkot.
[*Ibid*, p. 369]

Behind the failure of Gandhiji in Rajkot was the British hand. Dharmendrasinh by himself would not have dared to defy Gandhiji and the Congress. The Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State:

It was of vital importance that the State should not allow itself to be rushed and that while ensuring that any action necessary to remedy shortcomings and grievances was taken, it should resist any endeavour on the part of the Congress to come in as arbitrators or the like. I told him that on that basis they can look for full support from me. . . . I have little doubt that if the Congress were to win in Rajkot case the movement would go right through Kathiawar and that they would then extend their activities in other directions. [Tara Chand, *The History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p.261]



CHAPTER XX: THE TRIPURI CONGRESS AND AFTER

1

Ever since the Congress embarked on the parliamentary programme, the door was also opened to the evils associated with such a programme. While leaders of unimpeachable integrity and records of public service and sacrifice sought to use elective office for the advancement of the cause of India's freedom, self-seekers and time-servers saw in the elective offices opportunities for self-aggrandizement and joined in the race to grab them.

That had been so even in the twenties. But at that time the Congress was not in office. After the Congress assumed actual Governmental power in the provinces in July 1937, only temporarily as it turned out, the situation was further aggravated. Corruption and indiscipline made such inroads into the organization that the leadership was alarmed.

The first symptom was the Congress registers swelling with bogus members. On 25 March 1938, Gandhiji lamented at the meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh:

I have seen that there were internal fights to acquire control over the Congress office. I find in the Congress names of persons who were not in the organization at all. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 420]

Gandhiji was asked the question: "How is it that in quality the Congress is not what it used to be in 1920-25? It has deteriorated. Ninety per cent of the members are not carrying out the Congress discipline. Can something be done to mend this state of things?"

Yes, there had been a marked deterioration, Gandhiji agreed. He mentioned the sacrifices of Motilal Nehru and Deshbandhu C. R. Das. He mentioned the Ali Brothers who had almost become fakirs. And there were many others he could



name. But when the fight became prolonged, enthusiasm waned, confidence in non-violence even as a policy was shaken and untruth crept in. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 194-96]

In September 1938 Gandhiji wrote:

It is true that violence, untruth and corruption have made inroads enough to warrant drastic measures in order to prevent decay overtaking the great organization.

He then cited reports that showed that enrolment of bogus members was going on uninterrupted everywhere. Attempts were being made to capture the Congress office — whether primary, sub-divisional, district or provincial. Members were sometimes enrolled without their signatures, no accounts of subscriptions were being maintained, and so on. [*Ibid*, pp. 371-73]

Sorrowfully Gandhiji wrote in an article in *Harijan* of 3 September 1939:

It looks as if Congressmen are not able to digest the power that has come to the Congress. Everyone wants to have a share in the spoils of office. And so there is an unhealthy competition to capture committees. [*Ibid*, p. 303]

Gandhiji's advice to every Congress worker was:

Either to apply the purge I have suggested, or, if that is not feasible, to secede from it [the Congress] for its own sake and prove his living faith in the creed and the programme [of the Congress] by practising the former and prosecuting the latter. [*Ibid*, p. 306]

Writing under the little "Internal Decay" on 23 January 1939, Gandhiji quoted a correspondent from Bombay who said that when he went to cast his vote to elect delegates for the Tripuri session of the Congress, he found that his



vote had already been cast. Impersonation of voters, he had written, had been on a large scale.

Gandhiji commented:

Besides the impersonation there is the wholesale tampering with the Congress registers, which contain bogus names. These registers have as much value as a box containing counterfeit coins. . . . Strife at Congress elections is becoming a common occurrence.

Gandhiji warned:

Rome's decline began long before it fell. The Congress, which has been nursed for over fifty years by the best brains of the country, will not fall the moment it has begun to decay. It need not fall at all, if the corruption is handled in time. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 320-21]

In a letter to Sampurnanand, a U.P Minister, in February 1939, Gandhiji gave vent to similar sentiments. He wrote:

I see clearly that the Congress is going downward each day. Selfishness, infighting, untruth and violence have crept into the Congress and are on the increase. I fear we are destroying ourselves because of our inner failures. Let us see what God wills. [*Ibid*, p. 468]

But the drift continued. On 5 May 1939 Gandhiji was constrained to remark at a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh:

I have become so impatient of the corruption prevailing in the Congress that I should not hesitate to bury the organization if the corruption cannot be removed. [C.W.M.G., LXIX, p. 210]

The Congress was also riven by factionalism. The extremist fringe frequently joined the Communists, Socialists and free-wheeling revolutionaries in fomenting



industrial and students' strikes and kisan marches and riots in the villages. Kisans in U.P., Bihar and elsewhere burnt crops, refused to pay rents, forcibly occupied lands and held out threats to the zemindars. [Tara Chand, *The History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 249]

Referring to the phenomenon, Gandhiji wrote:

The saddest case to come under my observation is that of a Congress Committee having incited the ryots of a zemindari simply to take possession of the lands of that zemindari. This act of spoliation was preceded by speeches of Congressmen reeking with violence. . . . It must be clear to every sane man that the act of confiscation will never last. Had it not been for the Congress Government, the spoliation could never have taken place.

Gandhiji also referred to cuttings he had received from the U.P., C.P. and Bombay Press. In one of the cuttings from the U.P. a lady writer, inveighing against zemindars, was quoted as inviting the kisans to a "feast of blood and thunder". In choicest invective she had given the call: "Take any weapon you can get hold of, strike and strike hard. . . . It is all yours and you must seize it by your powerful arms."

He would not have thought, wrote Gandhiji, that a daughter of India could be capable of such merciless violence. It was fortunate, he added, that the millions whom she addressed could not read.

Gandhiji concluded:

But this is not civil liberty; it is criminal licence. Swaraj will not come by way of falsehoods and violence. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 352-53]

The Congress leadership was finally compelled to take note of the growing turbulence. The A.I.C.C., meeting in Delhi from 24 to 26 September 1938, in a resolution drafted by Gandhiji said:



Inasmuch as people including a few Congressmen have been found in the name of civil liberty to advocate murder, arson, looting and class war by violent means, and several newspapers are carrying on a campaign of falsehood and violence . . . the Congress warns the public that civil liberty does not cover acts of or incitement to violence or promulgation of palpable falsehoods. In spite, therefore, of Congress policy on civil liberty remaining unchanged the Congress will, consistently with its tradition, support measures that may be undertaken by the Congress Governments for the defence of life and property. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 278-79; C.W.M.G., LXVII, p.368]

The resolution was not to the liking of the members belonging to the Socialist and Kisan Sabha groups, and when the resolution was voted, they staged a walk-out in protest.

Gandhiji described the walk-out as unfortunate, and wrote:

The walk-out has served one good purpose. It has brought out in clear light the fact that the Congress is not today the homogeneous body it used to be. It has members and parties who have no faith in the creed of its constructive programme. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, p. 401]

On 2 September 1938, Premier of Bombay, B. G. Kher, introduced in the `Assembly a Trade Disputes Bill, the purpose of which was to check strikes and lock-outs. Trade Union representatives in the Assembly opposed the Bill tooth and nail. S. V. Parulekar of the Servants of India Society described it as "wicked, tyrannical and diabolical". In a speech he said:

This "Gandhi cap Government" has shown by its acts that they are not the friends of the poor. They are there to work in the interests of the rich. . . . The workers in Bombay will take out monster demonstrations and will



create such a row that those who are responsible for the Bill will not be able to enjoy sound and comfortable sleep. . . . The Bill is a deadly poisonous pill coated with sugar. We must scratch the sugar and leave the poison to be swallowed by the framers of the Bill.

Gandhiji objected to this kind of language on the part of a member of the Servants of India Society. In a letter to N. M. Joshi, another trade unionist who had raised the question of civil liberty, Gandhiji wrote:

Do you suggest that they [the Provincial Governments] ought not to concern themselves with the sayings and doings of public men? I am not thinking of possible punishment. . . . I am thinking of peaceful action such as warning to reckless speakers. . . . So far as Parulekar is concerned . . . I am quite clear in my mind that there should be no prosecution against him and I am writing to Kher accordingly. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 226-27; *The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 149-51]

3

The fifty-second session of the Congress was scheduled to be held at Tripuri in Mahakoshal in March 1939. The question arose as to who should preside at the session. Subhas Bose, the President in office, expressed a desire to run for a second term. Gandhiji and several other leaders, among them Vallabhbhai Patel, opposed the move. They had not been whole-hearted in their support of Subhas's presidency even in 1938 but had gone along because there had not been any other option. But a second term for Subhas, they thought, would be too much.

The reasons were many. For one thing Subhas had been advocating the launching of a mass civil disobedience movement, a move which Gandhiji and the Congress said was not then on the cards, for there was not the requisite non-violent sanction in the country for the launching of such a movement. But Subhas



Bose, especially after the Munich Pact signed by Chamberlain and Hitler in September 1938, started "an open propaganda throughout India in order to prepare the Indian people for a national struggle which should synchronize with the coming war in Europe". [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 273]

In fact the delegates chosen for the Congress session from Bengal at a meeting at Jalpaiguri passed a resolution that six months' notice be given to the British Government and at the end of that period a mass civil disobedience movement be embarked upon. [C.W.M.G., LXIX, p. 209]

In regard to the powers of the President, too, Subhas Bose did not see eye to eye with the other leaders. As stated by Patel in his controversy with Nehru during the election of President for the Faizpur session in 1937, the Congress President functioned only as the chairman of a well-knit organization. He had no powers to frame policies. Bose was not happy with this position. He desired, as he said in a statement,

that new conventions should now grow up around the Congress President and his election. The position of the President today is no longer analogous to that of the chairman of a meeting. The President is like the Prime Minister or the President of the United States of America, who nominates his own cabinet. It is altogether wrong to liken the Congress President to a constitutional monarch. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. I, p. 316]

Gandhiji was also against Subhas's re-election because of his marked pro-Axis leanings. According to a report Subhas had been "in contact with the German Consul at Calcutta and was negotiating some arrangement". The admiration of Bose for Mussolini was also known to many. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, p. 278]



The matter of Presidentship came up at the meeting of the Working Committee held in Delhi in the last week of September 1938. But Jawaharlal had been away and Patel suggested to Gandhiji that it would be better to wait till he returned. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, p. 72]

In November Tagore wrote to Gandhiji, putting in a word on behalf of Subhas. Gandhiji informed Tagore that in his view Subhas needed to be free from Presidential work if he was to rid Bengal of corruption. [*Ibid*, p. 144]

On 9 December Gandhiji discussed the matter with Nehru and Azad for two and a half hours. Gandhiji tried to persuade Azad to contest for Presidentship. Azad kept refusing. Gandhiji on 21 December asked Nehru if he would want to "try again to persuade the Maulana". [*Ibid*, pp. 198, 227, 230]

At one stage Azad agreed, but then changed his mind again and withdrew. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, about whose candidature Gandhiji had been keen from the beginning if Azad did not stand, was then the only alternative to Subhas left. His candidature was accordingly announced, though only a week before the election. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, p. 278]

On 24 December seven members of the Working Committee, including Patel and Rajendra Prasad, came out with a statement regretting that Bose was making the Presidential election a matter of contest and commending to the delegates Dr. Pattabhi's name for election.

Bose in a counter-statement described it as unfair that in an election contest between two members of the Working Committee other members should take sides in an organized manner. He called for freedom of voting without any "moral coercion", and appealed to "Sardar Patel and other leaders to withdraw their whip and leave it to the delegates to vote as they like". He attributed the choice of Dr. Pattabhi, a "rightist", to the "prospect of a compromise on the Federal



Scheme between the right wing of the Congress and the British Government". He described the Presidential election as part of the fight against the Federal Scheme.

In yet another statement issued on 26 January 1939 Bose repeated the charge that notwithstanding the Congress resolution on Federation, which was of uncompromising hostility, the fact remained that some influential Congress leaders had been advocating the conditional acceptance of the Federation Scheme in private and public. Could anyone challenge the fact that in the coming year a compromise on the question would be effected between the British Government and the right wing of the Congress?

On 29 January delegates assembled at places fixed by the P.C.C.s to record their votes. The A.I.C.C. office received wires from all Provinces communicating the results of the voting.

Subhas Bose, securing 1,575 votes against Pattabhi's 1,376, was declared elected. Among the Provinces which opted for Subhas Bose were Tamil Nadu, Burma, Punjab, Kerala, Bengal, the U.P., Delhi, Assam, Ajmer Merwara and Karnataka. The provinces where Pattabhi fared better were Orissa, Gujarat, Berar (Vidarbha), Andhra, Bihar, Maharashtra, Mahakoshal, Sind, Nagpur and Bombay City. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 310, 313-20]

Commenting on the election of Bose Gandhiji in a statement issued on 31 January said:

I must confess that from the very beginning I was decidedly against his re-election. . . . I do not subscribe to his facts or the arguments in his manifestos. I think that his references to his colleagues were unjustified and unworthy. . . . And since I was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi not to withdraw his name as a candidate when Maulana Saheb withdrew, the



defeat is more mine than his. . . . I rejoice in this defeat. . . . Subhas Babu, instead of being President on the suffrage of those whom he calls rightists, is now President elected in a contested election. This enables him to choose a homogeneous cabinet and enforce his programme without let or hindrance. . . .

The minority may not obstruct on any account. They must abstain when they cannot cooperate. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 359-60]

Shortly after, on 5 February, Gandhiji put Subhas on notice that Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad had expressed the view that they and others serving on the Working Committee should resign from the Committee to enable him to choose a temporary team of his own. "So far as I can judge," Gandhiji wrote, "the old colleagues whom you consider as rightists will not serve on your cabinet."

On 22 February twelve members of the Working Committee in a joint letter sent their resignation to the President. Time had come, they said, when the country should have a clear-cut policy not based on compromise between different and incompatible groups of the Congress. It was but right that the President should select a homogeneous cabinet representing the views of the majority. The signatories were Azad, Sarojini Naidu, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Bhulabhai Desai, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Shankarrao Deo, Harekrushna Mahtab, Kripalani, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Jamnalal Bajaj and Jairamdas Doulatram. [*Ibid*, pp. 382-83, 486-87]

The fifty-second session of the Congress opened at Tripuri as scheduled on 10 March 1939 and concluded on 12 March. Gandhiji was then in Rajkot, recuperating from the effects of his fast. Expressing his inability to attend the Congress in a telegram to Subhas Bose, he said the doctors had advised him not



to leave before the 13th and that he could not disobey them. His only message to the Congress, sent in a telegram to Nehru, was that it should pass a resolution "to rid Congress of internal corruption". [C.W.M.G., LXIX, p. 42]

In a statement issued on 4 March he made the same point. He said:

In my opinion the one and only task before the Congress is to make supreme efforts to clear the Congress house of proved corruption and impurities. The strongest resolutions that the Congress may pass will be of no value if there should be no incorruptible organization to enforce them. [*Ibid*, p. 25]

The Congress was a crowded and turbulent affair. Nearly two lakh persons congregated in the vast pandal raised on the bank of the Narmada. A Wafdist Party delegation from Egypt was present at the session and received enthusiastic welcome.

Subhas Bose, who had been seriously ill and had been advised by the doctors not to make the long train journey from Calcutta to Tripuri, disobeyed medical advice and made the journey. But at Tripuri he was not fit enough to attend the session. Maulana Azad, being the seniormost among the members of the Working Committee, conducted the proceedings.

The President's address was read out at the Congress by his elder brother Sarat Bose.

Bose drew the attention of the delegates to the many significant developments that had taken place since the Haripura Congress of the preceding year, the most important being the Munich Pact and other international events which marked a setback to British and French imperialism in the matter of strength and prestige.



Coming to home politics, Bose declared that the time had come for the Congress to raise the issue of swaraj and submit India's national demand to the British Government in the form of an ultimatum. Time was of essence, because once there was stable peace in Europe, whether through a Four-Power pact or through some other means, Great Britain would adopt a strong Empire Policy. At the moment Britain felt herself weak in the international sphere. The British were not in a situation to face a major conflict like an all-India and awakening in the Princely States. The international situation being favourable, time was opportune for "a final advance".

The final advance, he said, would need preparation. The Congress would have to be rid of corruption, and the Congress would have to unite with all the anti-imperialist forces, such as the kisan and trade union organizations. Efforts of all anti-imperialist organizations "must converge in the direction of a final assault on British imperialism". [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 321-27]

The Congress passed several important resolutions, such as on India's national demand, on foreign policy and on Indian States.

The resolution on the national demand reiterated the Congress resolve to achieve independence and to have a constitution framed for the country by a Constituent Assembly elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise. With a view to speedy realization of the above objective the Congress called upon the Congress organizations at all levels, the Provincial Governments and people generally to work unitedly to eliminate disruptive forces which led to communal disunity and conflicts.

The resolution on foreign policy expressed disapproval of the foreign policy pursued by Britain, which had culminated in the Munich Pact. The policy was of deliberate betrayal of democracy. The resolution further expressed the horror of



the Congress at the terrorism of the Nazis against the Jews and continuous bombing from the air of rebel cities and civilian populations. The Congress condemned both imperialism and fascism.

The resolution on Indian States took note of the awakening of the people of Indian States in several parts of the country and said it was a prelude to the larger freedom comprising the whole of India. Referring to the resolution passed at Haripura, which had called upon the people of the States to conduct their own movements for freedom and not rely on the Congress, the resolution said it had been dictated by circumstances and was never meant as an obligation.

The resolution concluded:

The Congress has possessed the right, as it is its duty, to guide the people of the States and lend them its influence. The great awakening that is taking place among the people of the State may lead to a relaxation or to a complete removal of the restraint which the Congress imposed upon itself, thus resulting in an ever increasing identification of the Congress with the States' people.

But the resolution for which the Tripuri session is most remembered and which engendered the most heat was the one on the Reaffirmation of Congress Policy. This was drafted in the main by Rajagopalachari and moved by Govind Ballabh Pant. The resolution referred to "the various misunderstandings" that had arisen in the Congress and the country in the wake of the Presidential election and sought to clarify the position.

It said:

The Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies which have governed its programme in the past years under the guidance



of Mahatma Gandhi and is definitely of opinion that there should be no break in these policies and that they should continue to govern the Congress programme in future. This Congress expresses its confidence in the work of the Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets that any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members. In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such crisis, the Congress regards it imperative that its executive should command his implicit confidence and requests the President to appoint the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.

The supporters of Subhas Bose, among them Nariman, M.S. Aney, and of course Sarat Bose and the Bengal delegates generally, argued that the resolution amounted to a vote of no confidence in the President. The Congress constitution, they argued, never intended that the President should be no more than a figurehead. A variety of amendments having been moved and defeated, the resolution was carried by a show of hands amid shouts of "*Mahatma Gandhiki Jai*". [*Ibid*, pp. 327-43]

The passing of the Pant resolution by the Congress set the seal on the breach between the mainstream Congress leadership and Subhas Bose. Subhas felt grievously hurt by the resolution, parts of which he considered *ultra vires* of the Congress constitution. Subhas believed that the delegates were influenced in their voting by private hints and Press reports that the resolution had Gandhiji's full approval. Gandhiji told Subhas that it had been only on 24 March that he had seen the resolution for the first time in Allahabad. True some days before at



Rajkot he had been told that there would be a resolution "expressing confidence in the old horses". This he had thought would be in order, because Subhas's election was seen as an expression not so much of confidence in Subhas as no-confidence in the old team, especially Sardar Patel. [C.W.M.G., LXIX, pp. 80, 97]

Bose told Gandhiji that since the resolution had been passed it must be given effect to. The Working Committee must be formed in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji and it must command his implicit confidence. Gandhiji, he said, had two alternatives: either to accommodate the views of Bose in the formation of the Working Committee or to insist on his own views in their entirety. In the latter case, he said, they might come to the parting of the ways. [*Ibid*, p. 448]

The issue was whether the Committee to be formed should be a "composite" one, that is to say, with several viewpoints represented, or a "homogeneous" one, representing only one group. If the former, then the assumption would be that joint work was possible. If the latter, the assumption would be that joint work was impossible.

Of course if Gandhiji would accept the view of Bose with regard to the need for immediate launching of a mass civil disobedience movement, after an ultimatum, to enforce the national demand, Bose would willingly submit to any conditions that Gandhiji might want to impose. If, in that case, Gandhiji thought that the Congress would be able to fight better with another President, Bose would gladly step aside. Bose was prepared for "self-effacement" if that would serve the national cause.

Gandhiji, Bose said, was needlessly alarmed by "the bogey of violence". There was then in the country far less violence than before. As for rooting out corruption from the Congress, Bose was at one with Gandhiji. But he did not think that, taking India as a whole, there was more corruption than before. What



objection could then be to the idea of an ultimatum being served on the British? If Gandhiji were to do so and prepare for the coming struggle, Subhas Bose assured him that India could have swaraj "inside of 18 months at the most". The British Government would either respond to the demand without a fight – or, if the struggle did take place, it would not be a long-drawn one. [*Ibid*, pp. 452-53, 456]

Gandhiji answered that, as regards the formation of the Working Committee, it being the view of Bose that the Pant resolution was *ultra vires* of the Congress constitution, his course was clear. His choice of the Committee should be unfettered. Since the differences between him and the others were on fundamentals, a composite Committee would be harmful. Bose should forthwith form his own cabinet fully representing his policy. He should then place his policy before the A.I.C.C. and if he secured a majority, he should be enabled to carry it out unhampered.

Gandhiji dissented from the view of Subhas that the country had never been so non-violent as it was then. "I smell violence in the air I breathe," he wrote. The same about corruption. His impression, Gandhiji said, was that it was on the increase. He concluded:

In these circumstances, I see no atmosphere for non-violent mass action. An ultimatum without an effective sanction is worse than useless. [*Ibid*, pp. 90, 97]

In yet another letter Gandhiji wrote to Subhas:

I cannot, will not, impose a cabinet on you. You must not have one imposed on you, nor can I guarantee approval by A.I.C.C. of your cabinet and policy. . . .



My conviction is that working along our lines, in our own way, we shall serve the country better than by different groups seeking to work a common policy and common programme forged out of irreconcilable elements. [*Ibid*, p. 126]

Subhas Bose summoned the A.I.C.C. to meet in Calcutta at the end of April. He pleaded with Gandhiji to attend. Though laid up with fever in Rajkot he telegraphed Subhas on 19 April that he would make the journey to Calcutta. He again turned down the request to recommend names for the Working Committee in terms of the Pant resolution "in this atmosphere of mutual distrust, suspicion and in the face of marked differences of opinion between groups". [*Ibid*, pp. 133-34, 154]

Gandhiji reached Calcutta on 27 April and had prolonged conversations with Bose for three days. In a written communication to the President on 29 April he again urged Bose to choose his own Committee or to "discuss with ex-members the possibility of mutual approach". [*Ibid*, p. 180]

Starting the proceedings, Bose regretted his failure to constitute a Working Cabinet. The Pant resolution required that those nominated should command the implicit confidence of Gandhiji and Gandhiji had refused to recommend any names. Bose therefore had no option but to resign from Presidentship.

Jawaharlal Nehru pleaded with Subhas to withdraw his resignation. Perhaps he could nominate the members of the old Working Committee? As for the need for fresh blood to be introduced into the Committee Jairamdas Doulatram and Jamnalal Bajaj would soon be resigning and in their places Bose could nominate persons of his choice. But Bose could not reconcile himself to the old Committee being renominated. He remained adamant on resigning. The A.I.C.C. then



proceeded with the task of electing a new President. The name of Rajendra Prasad for the office was proposed, seconded and carried.

Rajendra Prasad announced that the new Working Committee would consist of members of the old Working Committee. Subhas Bose refused to serve on the Committee and so did Jawaharlal Nehru. In their places two new names were included: B. C. Roy and P. C. Ghosh. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 345-50]

On 3 May 1939 Subhas Bose announced the formation of a new bloc within the Congress, to be called the Forward Bloc. The object of the Forward Bloc, Subhas said, would be to "rally all radical and anti-Imperialist progressive elements in the country on the basis of a minimum programme, representing the greatest common measure of agreement among radicals of all shades of opinion". The Forward Bloc, he added, would function as an integral part of the Congress. [*Ibid*, p. 30]

6

Subhas Bose in his statement had said that he was resigning as President "in an entirely helpful spirit". Soon it was demonstrated that that had not been so. For shortly afterwards he and his followers came out openly against the Congress and its policies.

The A.I.C.C. met in Bombay from 24th to 27th June. The President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, in a long statement referred, *inter alia*, to the corruption and factionalism in the Congress. He said:

Even within the organization disruptive and anti-Congress elements have found place. The first and most urgent problem for the Congress is



therefore to purify the organization and make it a disciplined and effective instrument of the people's will.

Two resolutions were accordingly proposed and passed. The first said that no Congressman might offer any form of satyagraha in the Administrative Provinces of India without the previous sanction of the P.C.C. concerned. The second laid stress on the desirability of cooperation between the ministry, the Congress Party and the P.C.C. It directed that in administrative matters the P.C.C. must not interfere with the discretion of the ministry and that in case of differences in policy matters between the ministry and the P.C.C. the matter should be referred to the Parliamentary Sub-Committee. [*Ibid*, pp. 354-57]

The resolutions were opposed by the Socialist group, the Kisan Sabha elements and by Subhas Bose. But since they had been passed by a large majority it was expected that all Congressmen and all P.C.C.s would abide by them.

Subhas Bose and the Bengal P.C.C., however, made a great row over the two resolutions and decided that an all-India protest day should be observed and an agitation started. Meetings and demonstrations followed, in which Congressmen and many non-Congressmen participated. In Bengal the P.C.C. itself organized a demonstration in Calcutta. Subhas Bose was then the President of the B.P.C.C. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 263]

The Working Committee, at its meeting in Wardha held on 9-12 August, considered the situation. Bose in a letter to the President argued that it was his constitutional right to express his views on any resolution of the A.I.C.C. and the denial of it would amount to suppression of civil liberty within the Congress. That a leader of the stature of Bose, who was an ex- President and continued to hold many important official positions within the Congress should advance such arguments was not acceptable to the Working Committee. If every member



considered himself free to interpret the Congress constitution in his own way and acted on that interpretation, there would be perfect anarchy in the Congress.

On Gandhiji's urging, the Committee, in a resolution drafted by him, rejected Bose's contention, and declared that

For his grave act of indiscipline Shri Subhas Babu is declared disqualified as President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee for three years as from August 1939.

The Committee refrained from taking action against other members of the P.C.C. as they had acted under the inspiration of Subhas. [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 84-85, 403-4]

In a statement issued on 23 August Gandhiji took the responsibility for the action taken against Subhas, saying it had become necessary because Subhas had "pitted himself against the Working Committee, if not the Congress organization". Bose could appeal against the action to the A.I.C.C. and if the A.I.C.C. by a majority should express its disapproval of the action taken by the Working Committee, the Working Committee would gladly resign. [*Ibid*, pp. 112-13]

Subhas also spoke openly against the Prohibition policy of the Congress as it was being implemented. On 10 July 1939, he came out with strong denunciation of prohibition in Bombay. He argued that it would increase illicit distillation, leading to a rush of men to wet zones every evening. He also questioned the justification of levying a ten per cent property tax, not to bring relief to the poor but to finance prohibition. The Muslims in particulars, he said, would object to the tax being collected from them "in order to force non-Muslims to abstain from drink". Then the Parsis were opposed to prohibition for they were directly hit by it. Lastly, prohibition would result in many hotels and restaurants



being closed down and large numbers of people being thrown out of employment. Subhas expressed the view that prohibition should be introduced "by stages". [C.W.M.G., LXIX, p. 469-70]

Gandhiji read the statement "in pain and sorrow". Bose, he said, had used the arguments of the opponents of prohibition. The Ministers, he said, must pursue the policy undeterred by any opposition. Prohibition was the greatest moral reform in the Congress programme.

By referring to the opposition of Muslims to prohibition Subhas Bose was raising the communal cry and "playing a most dangerous game", Gandhiji said. The Bombay property owners would be paying property tax not because they were Parsis or Muslims but because they were property owners. Further, they would be paying the tax to finance the education of their children rather than having the drinkers to pay for it. Gandhiji appealed to Subhas to retrace his steps. [*Ibid*, pp. 429-31]

Bose did not retrace his steps. His hostility towards the Congress and its policies, publicly expressed, became further intensified, inviting expressions of hostility against him on the part of Congressmen. When he visited Patna in August 1939, he was greeted with black flags. Reports also came to Gandhiji that some Congress Committees had threatened action against any Congressman who might take part in receptions accorded to Subhas. Gandhiji expressed his disapproval of such unseemly behaviour. The Working Committee, he wrote, had taken disciplinary action against Subhas, and those who disapproved of the action had every right to join any demonstration in favour of Subhas. If meetings were being held in support of Subhas, others could hold counter-meetings disapproving of Subhas. Disturbing the meetings in support of Subhas and showing him black flags was not the answer. [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 150-51]



On 23rd November 1939 Gandhiji wrote to Subhas:

For the time being you are my lost sheep. Some day I shall find you returning to the fold, if I am right and my love is pure. [*Ibid*, p. 374]

This hope, as it turned out, proved illusory. For all practical purposes Subhas was now out of the Congress.

7

The sharpening of ideological and policy conflicts within the Congress and the increasing social unrest that was witnessed since the coming of popular Governments in the Provinces was contemporaneous with, and to a large extent a reflection of, the deterioration in the international situation. The clouds of war had been gathering in Europe since the mid-thirties. In the East in China, a full-scale war was already going on since 1937.

The British distrust of the Russians, which had during the nineteenth century led to the disastrous Afghan wars led, in the thirties of the present century, to the grooming of Fascist and Nazi dictatorships as a possible bulwark against Russia. When in October 1935 Mussolini's hordes invaded Ethiopia, ravaging the country and raining bombs and poison gas on the population, the League of Nations, led by Britain and France, did nothing to stop the aggression.

In the same year Hitler, having come to power in Germany in 1933, regained Saar, repudiated the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles on the rearming of Germany and started compulsory military service. He then prevailed upon Britain to sign the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, allowing Germany to build a strong navy.

In 1936, he remilitarized Rhineland. When in July 1936 Franco raised the banner of Fascist revolt against the Spanish Republic, Italy and Germany openly helped Franco without a squeak of protest from Britain and France, the so-called



democratic powers. Both proclaimed their neutrality in the conflict. The Spanish Civil war roused the conscience of humanity. Picasso expressed the torment of the Spanish people in his famous painting *Guernica*. Poets, writers and artists from many countries, among them Hemmingway, made their way to Spain and took up arms on the side of the Republic. They fought in vain. The Spanish Republic could not withstand the combined might of European Fascism. In 1939 Franco overran Spain. England and France quickly recognized the Franco regime.

Inside Germany Hitler's stormtroopers, the SS, hunted the Jews in an organized manner. They were rounded up and taken to concentration camps to be gassed, their properties taken over. Pursuing the doctrine of *lebensraum* (living space), Hitler marched his troops into Austria and annexed it. There was no opposition or protest from the so-called democratic countries of Europe. Hitler was encouraged to seek further conquests.

After Austria it was the turn of Czechoslovakia. The Northern part of Czechoslovakia, known as Sudetenland, had a majority of German inhabitants. Nazi groups in Sudetenland, inspired and encouraged by the German Government, raised the cry that they wanted to join the German Reich. Having assured Czechoslovakia that Germany had no designs upon Czech territory Hitler soon afterwards moved some ten divisions to its border. The Czech Government responded with a partial mobilization as a measure of defence. In his speeches Hitler started breathing fire against Czechoslovakia. Russia, France and under certain conditions Britain, were committed to intervene for the defence of Czechoslovakia. But they showed no desire to be involved. They talked of peace and disarmament.

On 29 September 1938, on Hitler's suggestion Daladier, Prime Minister of France and Chamberlain of the United Kingdom travelled to Munich for a



conference with Hitler. Mussolini was present at the conference, but Czechoslovakia was not represented. The agreement that was signed provided for immediate cession to Germany of certain Sudeten-German districts, for plebiscite in some others and for frontiers to be finally settled by an international commission. [Florence Elliott and Michael Summerskill, *A Dictionary of Politics*, p. 204]

Having sacrificed a peaceable third country at the altar of appeasement, Chamberlain, returning to England, announced that he had secured peace – "peace in our time", "peace with honour".

Gandhiji called it "peace without honour", an "inglorious peace". He wrote:

It is clear that small nations must either come or be ready to come under the protection of the dictators or be a constant menace to the peace of Europe.

He advised the Czechs to offer non-violent resistance. He wrote:

To seek to win in a clash of arms would be pure bravado. Not so if in defying the might of one who would deprive me of my independence I refuse to obey his will and perish unarmed in the attempt. In so doing, though I lose the body, I save my soul, i.e., my honour.

History, Gandhiji argued, provided no record of a nation having adopted non-violent resistance. Hitler and his likes knew only that men yielded to force. Unarmed men, women and children offering non-violent resistance without any bitterness in them would be a novel experience for them. Who could say that they would not respond to higher and finer forces? [C.W.M.G., LXVII, pp. 404-5]

Reverting to the topic again, Gandhiji expressed the view that the war had only been postponed, not averted. England and France had signed the Munich



Pact because they quailed before the combined violence of Germany and Italy. He again offered to the Czechs the way of non-violent resistance. They could lose nothing by trying the experiment. [*Ibid*, pp. 413-15]

Gandhiji was asked why it was that he had advised only the Czechs to apply the non-violent remedy. Would he recommend non-violence to the great powers, such as America, England or France?

Gandhiji answered that he had not found it necessary to recommend the non-violent way to these nations, for the simple reason that they were not in distress, while Czechoslovakia was. Czechoslovakia had been ailing, its existence was threatened and it was in need of a remedy. People, Gandhiji wrote, rarely became virtuous for virtue's sake. They became virtuous from necessity. There was nothing wrong in a man becoming good under pressure of circumstances. The Czechs had to choose between surrender to Germany's might or armed resistance carrying with it the risk of almost certain destruction. Non-violent resistance presented an alternative which had proved effective in somewhat similar circumstances.

Critics might ask, Gandhiji wrote, how it was possible for non-violence to be worked in Czechoslovakia when it had not shown "cent per cent success on Indian soil". It certainly was possible, Gandhiji wrote:

What may ultimately prove impossible of acceptance by crores of people, undisciplined and unused till but recently to corporate suffering, might be possible for a small, compact, disciplined nation inured to corporate suffering. I had no right to arrogate to myself any belief that India alone and no other nation was fit for non-violent action. . . . There is no escape from the impending doom save through a bold and unconditional



acceptance of the non-violent method with all its glorious implications.
[C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 93-94]

The Congress denounced the Munich pact in the most categorical terms. The foreign policy resolution passed at the Tripuri Congress had said:

The Congress records its entire disapproval of British foreign policy culminating in the Munich Pact, the Anglo-Italian Agreement and the recognition of Rebel Spain. This policy has been one of deliberate betrayal of democracy, repeated breaches of pledge, the ending of the system of collective security and cooperation with governments which are avowed enemies of democracy and freedom. . . .

The Congress dissociates itself entirely from British foreign policy which has consistently aided the Fascist powers and helped in the destruction of democratic countries. The Congress is opposed to imperialism and fascism alike and is convinced that world peace and progress requires the ending of both of these. In the opinion of the Congress it is urgently necessary for India to direct her own foreign policy as an independent nation . . . pursuing her path of peace and freedom. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 341-42]

8

Hitler and his SS had been pursuing inside Germany the policy of total extermination of the Jews and stories of the brutalities being perpetrated against the Jews had been pouring in. Gandhiji wrote:

. . . the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history. The tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler seems to have gone. And he is doing it with religious zeal. . . . If there ever could be a justifiable



war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war.

And so Gandhiji gave the same advice – that of non-violent resistance – to the Jews too. They must refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminatory treatment and be ready to be shot or cast in the dungeon. Suffering voluntarily undergone, Gandhiji wrote, would bring the Jews an inner strength and joy which nothing else could. [*Ibid*, pp. 138-39]

Answering the criticism that non-violence had no chance of success with Hitler and his stormtroopers and that they did not care if others suffered, Gandhiji wrote:

Hitler is but one man enjoying no more than the average span of life. He would be a spent force if he had not the backing of his people. . . . But I must refuse to believe that Germans as a nation have no heart or markedly less than the other nations of the earth. They will some day or other rebel against their own adored hero, if he does not wake up betimes.

The salvation of the Jews, Gandhiji argued, could not come through the defeat of Germany at the hands of the democratic powers. It would not change German heart, even as the earlier defeat had not changed it. It had only produced a Hitler, vowed to wreak vengeance on the victors. [*Ibid*, pp. 276-78]

In the East the situation was no different. What the Italian Fascists had done in Ethiopia and the Nazis were doing in Germany and in the conquered territories, the Japanese were engaged in doing on a much larger scale in China. Having started a full scale invasion against that country in July 1937 in order to "civilize"



it, the Japanese armies, supported by long-range bombers, had already killed and maimed millions of men, women and children, burnt down thousands of cities, towns and villages and bombed and destroyed universities and centres of industrial life. "A new order in the Far East" was in the process of being brought about. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 62-63]

The British, who had interests in China, were impotent in the face of the Japanese advance. In the treaty port of Tientsin, British citizens, men and women, were insulted by Japanese soldiery and the British Government could do no more than register a mild protest. Chamberlain admitted in a debate in the House of Commons: "At present we have not got in the Far East a fleet superior to that of Japan." Cecil Chetwood, another member of the Government, in the same debate admitted that if there were a naval attack from Japan it was possible that British possessions might be lost. "The moment the Japanese have destroyed China," he said, "they would certainly turn and destroy us."

It was natural that in India Japanese advance in China should be viewed with alarm and consternation. In the Central Legislature anxious members were asking the Defence Secretary about the distance to India from the advanced positions of Japan in China and about the range of the Japanese bombers. [*Ibid*, pp. 63-64]

The Congress had always viewed with apprehension the rise of Japanese militarism and the threat it posed to the Asian countries including India. It had on various occasions given expression to India's solidarity and support for the people of China. On 9 January 1938, the Congress gave a call for the observance of a China Day and collected medical supplies to be sent to China. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. I, p. 292]

The Haripura Congress in a resolution took note of the Japanese aggression in China. The resolution read:



The Congress has viewed with anxious concern the aggression of a brutal imperialism in China and the horrors and frightfulness that have accompanied it. In the opinion of the Congress this imperialist invasion is fraught with the gravest consequences for the future of world peace and of freedom in Asia. The Congress sends its deepest sympathy to the people of China in their great ordeal and expresses its admiration for the heroic struggle they are conducting to maintain their freedom and integrity.

The Congress called upon the people to boycott Japanese goods. [*Ibid*, p. 296]

The Congress also despatched a medical mission under Dr. M. L. Atal to China. The mission arrived in China on 14 September 1938 and was warmly welcomed. It served in the battle lines throughout the war. [C.W.M.G., LXVII, p. 432]

To the suffering Chinese Gandhiji offered the same advice he had earlier offered to the Ethiopians, the Czechs and the Jews: that of non-violent resistance. Early in December 1938 in a discussion with Dr. John Mott and other Christian missionaries, Gandhiji, while admiring the heroic resistance being put up by the Chinese masses, said:

I wish the Chinese success. . . . But when the position is examined in terms of non-violence, I must say it is unbecoming for a nation of 400 millions, a nation as cultured as Japan, to repel Japanese aggression by resorting to Japan's own methods. If the Chinese had non-violence of my conception, there would be no use left for the latest machinery for destruction which Japan possesses. The Chinese would say to Japan, "Bring all your machinery, we present half of our population to you. But the remaining two hundred millions won't bend their knee to you."



In support of his argument Gandhiji quoted Shelley from the *Mask of Anarchy*:

Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war.
And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew –
What they like, that let them do.
With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away. . . .
Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you –
You are many – they are few.

Gandhiji contended that if sufficient food was given to the tyrant, a time would come when he would have had more than surfeit. If all the mice in the world resolved not to fear the cat but to run into her mouth, the mice would survive. The cat would change its nature and refuse to eat the mice.



Hitler and Mussolini were not beyond redemption. Only they had not ever come across organized non-violence, said Gandhiji. [C.W.M.G., LXVIII, pp. 203-4]

10

The act of appeasement at Munich did not result in "peace in our time". Having incorporated the Sudeten districts of Bohemia and Moravia into Germany with the connivance of Britain and France and without the consent of Czechoslovakia, and having signed a solemn covenant guaranteeing the new frontier of Czechoslovakia, Hitler, on 15 March 1939 marched his armies into that country and quickly overran it. The Czechs, deserted by their friends and too weak to put up any resistance, capitulated.

The first act of Hitler after occupying Czechoslovakia was to dismember the country further. Slovakia was made an "independent" state under German protection.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis was a slap in the face of Britain and France. The rulers in Paris and London finally woke up to the need of containing German expansionism before they should themselves become victims of it. Frantic efforts were now made to reverse the policy of appeasement so far pursued. A programme of rearmament on the sea and in the air was taken in hand. Conscription was introduced and approaches were made to Russia for building a security system. Russia, whose advances in this direction had been consistently repulsed earlier by Britain and France, in her turn now refused to reciprocate. Poland, the next likely victim, was promised all-out support if its independence was threatened.

Hitler did not believe that the British promise of help to Poland would count for much when the crunch came, for Britain was not in a position to commit its forces in the East without making her own position in the West vulnerable.



Russia, however, might create difficulties. In order, therefore, to neutralize Russia before undertaking fresh acts of aggression in the Baltic area, Hitler in August 1939, approached Russia with the proposal for a non-aggression pact. Russia, anxious to divert the Nazi heat from its own borders and to encourage Hitler to take on Britain and France in the West, agreed. A non-aggression pact was duly signed between the two countries and Hitler felt free to turn his eyes towards Poland.

After a coup in which Danzig, a free city, and the Polish corridor joining it, were taken over, Nazi tanks, heavily supported by the air force, early in the morning of 1 September 1939, invaded Poland. Russian armies simultaneously marched from the East, and in a matter of just seventeen days Poland had been conquered and divided between Russia and Germany. Out of the 35 lakh Jewish population of the country 30 lakhs were rounded up and sent to concentration camps and gas chambers. More than half the population of Warsaw was massacred. Chamberlain on 3 September announced in Parliament that England was at war with Germany. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 276-77]

11

On the same day, 3 September 1939, in India, an extraordinary issue of the *Gazette of India* published two proclamations issued by the Viceroy declaring that "a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India is threatened by war" and that "war has broken out between His Majesty's Government and Germany".

Later in the evening the Viceroy, in a broadcast from Simla said: "I am confident that India will make her contribution on the side of human freedom and against the rule of force, and will play a part worthy of her place among the great nations and the historic civilizations of the world."



Trading with enemy firms or enemy subjects in British India was declared a punishable offence. Various ordinances were also issued further restricting the rights of the people. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 21]

This denouement had not been wholly unexpected. The Congress Working Committee at its meeting held between 9 and 12 August 1939 at Wardha had noted the war preparations going on and declared that India could not associate herself with the British Government in its war or be asked to give her resources for democratic freedom which was denied to it. As a first step towards this end the Committee had called upon all Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending the forthcoming session of the Assembly. [*Ibid*, pp. 214-15]

As early as on 26 August Linlithgow had written to Gandhiji expressing his apprehension that a war might break out, in which case he might want to invite Gandhiji to see him at once. He had expressed the hope that, should wiser counsels not prevail and should war break out, Gandhiji would not misunderstand him if he sent a telegram inviting Gandhiji to see him.

Gandhiji readily agreed to go if his presence at Simla was considered necessary. [C.W.M.G., LXX, p. 137]

The Viceroy's telegram came on 2 September, even before the British Government and the Government of India had made announcements declaring war on Germany. Gandhiji immediately proceeded to Simla. [*Ibid*, p. 152]

The question was how Gandhiji, the Congress and Indian public opinion in general would respond to the action of the Government of India dragging India into Britain's war against Germany without any previous notice or consultation with either the Central Assembly or the Provincial Assemblies or leaders of political parties.



The British Government was aware of the position of the Congress. The Congress had repeatedly, and on every possible occasion expressed its sympathy and support for the countries which became victims of Fascist aggression: China, Ethiopia, Spain and Czechoslovakia. It had given expression to its feelings of revulsion at the acts of savagery being committed by Japan, Italy and Germany and unequivocally condemned them.

But the Congress had equally categorically condemned the foreign policy of Britain, pursued from unalloyed imperialist motives, which had throughout the thirties aided and abetted the militarist regimes in Germany and Italy. The Congress therefore could not associate itself with Britain's foreign policy or get involved in any imperialist war. The Tripuri Congress resolution on the subject was clear and unequivocal.

Now that the war clouds had burst the Congress had to define its strategy anew.



CHAPTER XXI: WORLD WAR II AND RESIGNATION OF CONGRESS MINISTRIES

1

When the war cloud burst in Europe in September 1939 and India awoke to the realization that by a unilateral pronouncement of the Viceroy India had been made a belligerent country on the side of England in England's war against Germany, the experiment in Provincial Autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935, had been going on in the eleven Provinces of British India for almost two and a half years.

In Madras, Bombay, U.P., Orissa, Bihar, C.P. and the N.W.F.P. after a little over three months' rule by minority Governments, Congress Ministries had assumed office in July 1937 and by the first week of September, 1939, had completed twenty-six months of their tenure. In Assam the elections had put into power the Assam United Party headed by Mohammad Saadulla. However in September 1938 Saadulla, unable to face a no-confidence motion tabled in the Assembly against his Ministry, had tendered the resignation of his cabinet and a Congress Ministry under Gopinath Bardoloi had assumed charge. This Ministry had by now completed one year in office.

In Bengal, the Punjab and Sind, all three of which had Muslim majorities but where the Muslim League had been rejected at the hustings, the picture was as follows:

In Bengal the 119 Muslim seats in a house of 250 were equally divided between the Muslim League, the Krishak Proja Party and Independents. There having been no clear majority for any party, A. K. Fazlul Huq of the Krishak Proja Party, after having been snubbed by the Congress, allied himself with the Muslim League group and formed the Ministry.



In the Punjab the Unionist Party headed by Sikandar Hyat Khan secured a clear majority in the Assembly and formed the Government. The Ministry was supported by the Sikhs. The Muslim League was totally routed.

However, soon after the All-India Muslim League session in Lucknow in October 1937, at which Jinnah made his "declaration of war" against the Congress and the Hindus, both A. K. Fazlul Huq and Sikandar Hyat Khan declared the allegiance of their Ministries to the Muslim League. Thus the League found itself in power in the two Provinces without being elected to it. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 240-41]

In Sind too, the League had been rejected at the elections, not having secured a single seat in the Assembly. Khan Bahadur Allah Baksh of the Sind United Party, with a strength of 18 in a house of 58, had formed the Ministry with the support of the Congress and other groups and had been ruling the Province since April 1937, notwithstanding attempts to dislodge him.

2

In taking up the responsibility of office, Provincial Congress leaders were aware that they were taking up a task with which they had so far been unfamiliar. They had led agitations, articulated the grievances of the people and defied laws. They were now called upon to deal with agitations, find ways of redressing the grievances of the people and administer laws. It was a reversal of the role. What added to the difficulty was the fact that the Constitution under which they had to function placed severe restrictions upon their freedom to act. There were large areas of governance which were out of bounds to them and where only the writ of the Governors, or the Governor-General or the Secretary of State, ran. And they had to run the administration with the help of officers of the Civil Service and the Police Service, whom they could neither recruit nor transfer nor dismiss.



In the higher echelons these services were manned predominantly by Englishmen, who had never cared to hide their antipathy towards the Congress and Congress leaders. It was no joy to them to be obeying orders of the very men whom, during the Civil Disobedience days, they had assaulted, arrested, prosecuted and punished.

By far the greatest difficulty that the Ministries had to face was the paucity of funds. Of the total revenue resources of India more than 60 per cent was appropriated by the Central Government. What remained was distributed among the eleven Provinces. Thus the customs, excise, income tax, corporation tax, opium and salt monopolies fell to the Central share. So did the revenues from the railways, irrigation, posts and telegraphs, currency and mint, public works and sundry other levies.

The Provinces were left with land revenue, salt, excise, stamps, registration, motor vehicles, civil works, etc. In 1938-39 the revenues of the Central Government were projected at Rs. 119.5 crores, while nine Provincial Governments had a total income of Rs. 75 crores.

Considering that the Congress Ministries were pledged to bring down land revenue and rents charged from the peasantry and were further pledged to enforce prohibition, the revenues were expected to shrink even further. [*Ibid*, pp. 243-44]

The functioning of the Ministries, again, was not made easy by the fact that, politically, the Congress commitment to participation in the administration was at best half-hearted. It was conceived only as a tentative, tactical move in the continuing struggle for full national independence, to be given up whenever the situation should demand it. Many leaders, in particular Jawaharlal Nehru, never felt comfortable with the thought that in accepting Ministerial responsibility in



the Provinces the Congress was in a way cooperating with the oppressive system against which the country had been fighting. He kept reminding the Ministers that there was "a grave risk of our getting involved in petty reformist activities and forgetting the main issue. . . . We are apt to be misled by the illusion that we possess power. . . . It is manifest that the Congress is more important than any Ministry. Ministers may come or go, but the Congress goes on till it fulfils its historic mission of achieving independence of India." [*Ibid*, pp. 245-46]

The Ministries thus exercised their autonomy under the watchful eye of the top leadership of the party. Their responsibility to the legislatures and through them to the electorate was subject to the discipline of the Working Committee, enforced through the Parliamentary Board, consisting of Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who in Ministerial matters constituted the High Command. Their areas of responsibility were divided. Vallabhbhai Patel was in charge of the parliamentary affairs of Bombay, Madras, the C.P. and Sind; Rajendra Prasad watched over Bihar, Orissa and Assam; the U.P., Bengal, the Punjab and the N.W.F.P. were the charge of Maulana Azad. Between them they kept the Congress Ministries on a tight leash.

In the Ministerial crisis in the C.P. the role of the Parliamentary Board and Vallabhbhai Patel had been crucial. In the U.P. and Bihar when there was a row between the Governors and the Premiers of the two Provinces, the Premiers were not at first inclined to tender their resignations. They did so only when Vallabhbhai Patel insisted, saying it was a matter of "self- respect". Similarly Vallabhbhai Patel intervened when the Bombay Government employed an Englishman as headmaster of a school and also when a licence had to be issued for setting up electricity plants in Gujarat. [Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel*, pp. 267-68]

Gandhiji, too, watched the functioning of the Ministries with a vigilant eye. Thus, on 30 March 1939, he wrote to Nehru:



The events in U.P. disturb me. My solution is that you should become Prime Minister or dissolve the Ministry. You must get control over the unruly elements." [C.W.M.G., LXIX, p. 92]

The party exercising control over the Ministries drew criticism from various quarters. It was considered a serious infringement of democratic practices, a form of totalitarianism. P. N. Saprú, speaking at the Bombay session of the National Liberal Federation on 30 December 1938, observed:

That a body of men, however eminent, who are outside the legislature, should dictate to the Premier and his colleagues and that the Prime Minister and his colleagues should, forgetting their responsibility in the legislature, be controlled by them, is something which is quite inconsistent with democracy as we understand it. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 372-73]

Another Liberal Leader, R. P. Paranjpye, was even more scathing. At the December 1939 session of the Liberal Federation he roundly condemned the Congress for showing "totalitarian tendencies". He said:

The Congress Ministries in the eight Provinces could not by any stretch of imagination be called responsible to the members of their legislatures or the primary electors. They are the bonded slaves of a small junta called the Parliamentary Committee and of the Mahatma. . . . I can understand the Congress laying down general lines of policy. . . . But when it comes to one member of the Parliamentary Committee interfering in the choice of the personnel of the cabinets, or in the details of the administrative or legislative measures, even . . . in matters of appointments great and small . . . we are no longer within the domain of legitimate discipline but are dreadfully close to Fascism or Nazism. [*Ibid*, pp. 289-90]



Notwithstanding, however, the severe limitations within which the Congress Ministries had to function, they nevertheless blazed a luminous trail of achievements during their all too short tenure. They furnished conclusive proof of India's fitness for self-rule – a proposition which the British rulers had continuously asserted was open to doubt. Even hardened British Constitutionalists and administrators were compelled to express their admiration for the way the Ministries comported themselves.

Thus Reginald Coupland in his book, *The Indian Problem*, while deprecating the "totalitarianism" of the High Command, nevertheless observed that the Ministries enjoyed stability and the Ministers were capable and hard-working with a high sense of public duty, and dealt with finance in accordance with the recognized principles of public finance. He praised the achievements in the field of social reform and observed: "The old contention that Indian self-government was a necessity for any really radical attack on the social backwardness of India was thus confirmed."

Another observer, Hodson, remarked:

In social and economic reform, which was the substantive purpose of Provincial self-government from the popular Indian view-point, the Ministers were handicapped by financial stringency as well as the need to balance the interests of different sections of their supporters, but the advances made were considerable, and could not have been made by an alien Government dependent . . . on the support of the vested interests.

Secretary of State Samuel Hoare, Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, Harry Haig, the Governor of U.P. and Erskine, the Governor of Madras, also paid glowing tributes



to the Congress Ministries for their achievements. [Tara Chand, *The History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 253-54]

The tenure of the Congress Ministries was a period of increased civil unrest. Radical elements in the Congress and outside, claiming to represent the workers and peasants, pressed for immediate effect being given to the Karachi Congress resolution on fundamental rights, the Agrarian Programme adopted at the Faizpur Congress and the promises made in the election manifesto of the Congress. The expectations roused in the masses found vent in political agitations, labour strikes, and agrarian disturbances. Increased communal strife, fanned by openly belligerent utterances of the Muslim League further aggravated the situation. The Ministers were conscious of the need for action to redress the grievances of the people, which were of long standing, and sympathized with them. But while they endeavoured to devise schemes to ameliorate the lot of peasants and workers and other sections of the poor, as administrators they had to make sure that law and order was maintained and civil peace ensured. To do this they had in every case to fall back on the Criminal Procedure Code, Criminal Law Amendment Act and other such devices and seek the help of the police and the military when needed.

Given that the Congress was not ruling through out-and-out non-violence, Gandhiji saw nothing wrong in the Congress Ministries making use of the instruments invented by the British to maintain law and order. But the Congress would use them in a wholly different spirit. Referring to a case in Madras, Gandhiji wrote to Nehru:

I fear that often when the Congress is in power it will use language which its predecessors have used and yet the motive behind will be different. [C.W.M.G., LXVI, p. 25]



Writing on Civil Liberty in *Harijan*, he further explained his position:

Subject . . . to the general instructions laid down by the Working Committee for the guidance of Congress Ministers, the statutory powers [minus provisions in them intended by the foreign rulers for their own safety] . . . must be exercised by the Ministers against those who . . . preach lawlessness in the popular sense of the term.

Gandhiji did not agree with the contention that the Congress Ministers, who were pledged to non-violence could not resort to legal processes involving punishments. He personally, he said, had not found a way out of punishments and punitive restrictions in all conceivable cases. [*Ibid*, p. 268]

The Congress Ministries, then, did use the coercive apparatus of the State to deal with civil disorder and communal riots when persuasion failed to curb unruly elements. In other ways, however, their record in restoring and upholding civil liberty left nothing to be desired. Within the very first few months of their tenure Congress Governments in Madras, Bombay, U.P., Bihar and other Provinces energetically set about releasing political prisoners from jails, repealing the various punitive enactments and restrictive orders against individuals and organizations, refunding the securities realized from numerous newspapers, lifting bans from associations and books and suspending realization of fines imposed by earlier administrations. Thus in Madras the Moplah State prisoners, the Malabar Rebellion prisoners, the S.I. Railway strike prisoners, and the prisoners connected with the Ooty Bank Raid, the Madras Bomb Case and the Cocanada Conspiracy Case, were all released. Security deposits from newspapers amounting to Rs. 11,000 were returned. Proscription was lifted from as many as 19 Telugu and Tamil publications and retired Government servants were given permission to participate in politics.



In Bombay bans on no less than 232 associations, including those with communistic tendencies, were lifted, securities from newspapers amounting to Rs. 23,000 were returned and notices demanding securities amounting to another Rs. 64,000 were withdrawn. In only one case did the Bombay Government demand security from a newspaper under the Indian Press Emergency Powers Act, and that was for scurrilous writing and inciting communal hatred.

In the U.P. and Bihar, immediately after assumption of office the Ministries took up the matter of release of political prisoners and, as related earlier, came in conflict with the Governors. They won their point and, with but a few exceptions, the prisoners were released. In the U.P. the Prem Mahavidyalaya of Brindaban, founded by Raja Mahendra Pratap, had been banned by the British regime and its properties confiscated. The Congress Government lifted the ban and restored the properties to the owners.

In Bihar bans were lifted from 92 books. Externment and internment orders issued against 27 persons under the Bihar Safety Act were withdrawn. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 230-48]

4

One of the most important items on the agenda of the Congress Ministries and one which had been emphasized the most in the Congress election manifesto, was the agrarian programme. It was a programme that affected the largest masses of the poor in the villages of India and called for urgent implementation. Needless to say, it received top priority from all Congress Governments.

In the U.P., which had seen frequent agrarian trouble in the course of the preceding decade because of the harsh tenancy laws, the Government



immediately set up a Land Revenue Committee, and on the basis of its recommendations in April 1938 brought forward a Tenancy Bill, which comprehensively dealt with the problems of land tenure – occupancy rights, hereditary tenure, ejection from holdings, revision of rents, abolition of detention for non-payment of rent, and so on. The Bill was passed in the teeth of opposition from the landlords.

Measures were also taken in hand for the improvement of village roads, acquisition of land for expansion of village areas, extension of pasture land and fodder, grass and fuel reserves, reclamation of waste and fallow land, prevention of fragmentation and consolidation of holdings, etc. Steps were also taken to relieve rural indebtedness and amend the existing Debt Acts.

Commendable work was done in the field of education too. Apart from the basic training institutions started in connection with the Wardha Scheme of Education, mention of which has been made in an earlier chapter, steps were taken to fight illiteracy by starting adult education centres. As many as 960 adult schools were launched in 48 districts of the Province. Recurring grants for the education of the Depressed Classes were increased by Rs. 50,000. Compulsory primary education for girls was introduced in urban areas and a sum of Rs. 54,000 recurring was sanctioned for the employment of 150 women teachers in the primary schools for boys with a view to encouraging girls to join them.

For the encouragement of cottage industries, polytechnic institutions in Fyzabad and Unnao were provided aid for the training of instructors in spinning, weaving, dyeing and printing, carpentry, tanning, leather-working, basket-making and smithy. Instructors were also employed to take tuition classes in villages in the various industries. [*Ibid*, pp. 237-42]



In Bihar the Ministry set about giving relief to the peasantry by cancelling all enhancements of rents between January 1911 and December 1936. The rents were also scaled down in cases where soil had deteriorated or where there had been a fall in the prices of staple food crops.

The law governing the transfer of occupancy rights was also changed, making the right of transfer unrestricted and abolishing the *salami* that was required to be paid to the landlords before the transfer could be recognized. On account of the depression that overtook agriculture in 1929, many tenants had not been able to pay the rent on their holdings and as a consequence innumerable holdings were sold in execution of decrees for arrears of rent. The Bihar Government brought forward a special legislation to bring relief to such tenants. This was known as Bihar Restoration of Bakasht Lands and Reduction of Arrears of Rent Act. It provided for the restoration of lands sold and reduction of arrears of rent which had accumulated.

To provide relief to rural debtors, the Government enacted the Bihar Money-Lenders' Act. Under this measure money-lenders were obliged to keep proper accounts and give receipts to debtors for every recovery made. The rate of interest was also brought down to 9 per cent on secured loans.

Steps were also taken and sizeable sums allocated for the educational and economic advancement of the Harijans. [*Ibid*, pp. 246-50]

Government in almost all the Provinces took drastic steps to provide relief to agriculturists heavily burdened by debt. Rates of interest were reduced, in some cases to 6 1/4 per cent, as in Madras, existing debts were scaled down, and monetary assistance was provided to agriculturists to pay back the scaled-down debts.



In Bombay one of the most important measures taken in hand by the Congress Ministry was the Bill authorizing the Government to repurchase lands confiscated during the Civil Disobedience Movement and return the same to the original owners or their heirs without occupancy charges. This benefited scores of peasants in Kheda and other districts of Gujarat. The Government also abolished the grazing fee, thus forgoing Rs. 6 1/2 lakhs by way of revenue, and further granted remission of land revenue, which cost the exchequer Rs. 16 lakhs. A sum of Rs. 10 lakhs was spent on improving water supply to the villages.

Large sums were also spent on the advancement of education among Harijans and on adult education. [*Ibid*, pp. 233-34]

5

A contributory factor in the successful working of the Congress Ministries was the cooperation, however limited, extended to the experiment from the British side. The Governors by and large refrained from using their very wide special powers, and the Civil and Police services quickly fell in line. The British wanted the working of Provincial Autonomy to succeed, because they saw in it the acceptance in practice, by the Congress and other major political parties, of the Government of India Act, 1935 – or at least a part of it. The Congress on its part was anxious to use the limited Governmental power it had come to enjoy to strengthen itself, consolidate its hold among the people at the grassroots level and to alleviate, so far as it was possible, the economic and social distress of the people.

With the outbreak of the War and the Viceregal declaration making India a belligerent in the War, the situation changed, and it became clear from the very first day that things from then on could never be the same. The Congress Ministers, if they stayed in power, would be forced to give effect to the Defence



of India Ordinance, soon to be enacted as an Act, and various other Ordinances which took away the civil rights of the people and conferred draconian powers on the police and the magistracy. The whole administrative machinery would have to be geared to the needs of the War as seen by the Central authority. Provincial Autonomy would be on a tight leash. Could the Ministries continue to function under such circumstances? Much would depend on what the British would be willing to do to secure the cooperation of the Congress in the War.

The man in the street was of course anything but sympathetic towards the British. Gandhiji, while on his way to Simla in response to the Viceroy's invitation was greeted at the Delhi station with slogans asking him not to have any understanding with the Viceroy.

At the interview with the Viceroy on 4 September Gandhiji declined to commit the Congress either way. But he told the Viceroy that in the War his sympathies were with England and France. He said in a Press statement the following day:

I told him [the Viceroy] that I could not contemplate without being stirred to the very depth the destruction of London which had hitherto been regarded as impregnable. And as I was picturing before him the Houses of Parliament and the Westminster Abbey and their possible destruction, I broke down. I have become disconsolate.

. . . I am not therefore just now thinking of India's deliverance. It will come, but what will it be worth if England and France fall, or if they come out victorious over Germany ruined and humbled?

Yet it almost seems as if Herr Hitler knows no God but brute force. . . . It is in the midst of this catastrophe without parallel that Congressmen and



all other responsible Indians individually and collectively have to decide what part India is to play in this terrible drama. [C.W.M.G., LXX, p. 162]

On 8 September in a cable to Paderewski, at one time President of the Polish Republic, Gandhiji sent his heart-felt prayer to the Poles "for early termination of their fearful trial and for the grant of the required strength to bear the suffering whose very contemplation makes one shudder." [*Ibid*, pp. 163-64]

An indignant reader – and India was full of them – took Gandhiji to task for having expressed his sympathy for the cause of Britain and France and for having condemned Hitler. How was Hitler worse than Chamberlain? – he asked. Hitler was only avenging Germany's humiliation after the First World War. In his place Chamberlain would have done the same. In any case the reports coming to India were one-sided.

Answering the critic through *Harijan* of 16 September Gandhiji assured him that his desire for and power of resistance to England still remained unabated. However, he wrote:

In assessing the present merits, the past misdeeds of England and the good deeds of Germany are irrelevant. Rightly or wrongly, and irrespective of what the other Powers have done before under similar circumstances, I have come to the conclusion that Herr Hitler is responsible for the war. . . . If he succeeds in his design, his success will be no proof of the justness of his claim. It will be proof that the law of the jungle is still a great force in human affairs. It will be one more proof that though we humans have changed the form, we have not changed the manners of the beast. . . . I claim no infallibility for my judgment. All I claim is that my sympathy for England and France is reasoned. . . . What shape it should take is another matter. Alone I can but pray. [*Ibid*, pp. 169-71]



Gandhiji's unconditional expression of sympathy for Britain and France had its basis in pure non-violence. Pure non-violence required that whatever support was to be given to England and France should be given unconditionally. It required possession of strength which disdained to take advantage of the difficulty of the opponent.

When the issue came up before the Working Committee, which met in Wardha from 9 to 15 September, four days from 11 to 14 September were taken up wholly with consideration of the policy to be adopted towards Britain's war. Gandhiji found himself without any supporters for his position.

When the Working Committee assembled in Wardha the declaration of war was already a week old. During this time, and in fact starting in the last week of August, in anticipation of the outbreak of war, offers of money, men and personal services had kept coming to the Viceroy in an avalanche from the Princes of Indian States and other loyalist elements in the country who were also anxious to curry favour with the British. On 25 August Bengal Premier Fazlul Huq and the Punjab Premier Sikandar Hyat Khan, without waiting for the decision of the Muslim League in the matter, issued appeals to the people of Bengal and the Punjab to stand by the Empire in its hour of crisis. On 27 August several Indian rulers, including the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Maharaja of Travancore, the Nawab of Rampur, and the Maharaja of Kapurthala placed their services at the disposal of the King-Emperor. On 29 August the rulers of Jodhpur, Kolhapur, Bahawalpur, Sitamau (a small State in Central India) similarly offered their services for the war. The Maharaja of Nepal, not to be left behind, made an offer of 8,000 Nepalese troops for service in the war, which the British Government accepted. The Nawab of Bhopal, on 8 September, issued an appeal to the Muslims of India to sink their differences and help Britain. On 11 September



Maharaja Scindia of Gwalior addressed an appeal to his subjects to stand united and give unstinted support to Britain in the war. By 9 September a total of 83 rulers of states had expressed their loyalty to the Empire and made offers of men, money, material and personal service in the war. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 19-24]

There was, to be sure, never any doubt that the British rulers would always be able to mobilize such support from the Princes, loyalist politicians, the zemindars, taluqdars and other vested interests. But such support did not represent the national will. On the basis of it they could not expect to inspire the common people of India enthusiastically to participate in the war on their side.

The Viceroy in his address to the joint session of the two Houses on 11 September, after alluding to the principles at stake in the war, appealed to the people

to work together in the closest unity for the furthering of our common object. Nothing could be more significant than the unanimity of approach of all in India – Princes, leaders of great political parties, ordinary men and women. . . . I am confident that however difficult may be the days that lie ahead of us . . . India will speak and act as one and that her contribution will be worthy of her ancient name.

The Viceroy in the same address announced that the preparations for Federation, which were well advanced, would be held in suspense for the duration of the war. [*Ibid*, pp. 97-99]

When on 11 September the Working Committee took up consideration of the War crisis and India's role in it, it thought it important that Jinnah should also



participate in its deliberations. Subhas Bose and Jayaprakash Narayan had also been invited at Gandhiji's suggestion. Rajendra Prasad accordingly sent Jinnah a wire inviting him to Wardha. Jinnah answered that the Congress President could discuss the matter with him in Delhi later.

As mentioned, Gandhiji found that at the Working Committee, to which he and Nehru were special invitees, he was alone in pleading that the Congress should unconditionally lend its support, which could only be moral, to the British in their war. Almost the entire Committee, led by Nehru, was suspicious of British intentions in the war and, in view of its past record in the context of the crisis that had culminated in the war, full of doubts as regards British declarations that the war was being fought to safeguard democracy.

Nehru was charged with drafting a statement, which he did.

The statement drew attention to the principles, repeatedly stressed by the Congress, which should guide the nation in the event of war. The British Government had been consistently flouting those principles (they had for instance despatched Indian troops to Egypt and Singapore). A month earlier the Congress had called upon the Congress members of the Assembly to refrain from attending the next session of the Assembly in protest. Since then, the British Government had declared India a belligerent country, promulgated ordinances, passed the Government of India Act Amending Bill, and taken other measures which circumscribed and limited the activities of the Provincial Governments.

The Working Committee reiterated its entire disapproval of Fascism and Nazism, and their glorification of war and violence, and condemned the Nazi aggression against Poland. However, the Committee declared that the issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people themselves. If



cooperation was desired it could not be obtained through coercion but only through cooperation on equal terms.

The Committee took note of the declarations made by England and France that they were fighting for democracy and freedom but asserted that history belied their protestations. In Manchuria the British Government had connived at aggression; in Abyssinia they had acquiesced in it; in Czechoslovakia and Spain democracy was betrayed.

If the war was being waged to defend the status quo then India would have nothing to do with it. If it was being fought for maintenance and extension of democracy, then Britain must end imperialism in her own possessions and establish full democracy in India. A free, democratic India would gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence.

The crisis that had overtaken Europe was bound to refashion the world for good or ill. A new equilibrium would come into being and that equilibrium must be based on the ending of domination and exploitation of one country by another. India, being an outstanding example of modern imperialism, was the crux of the problem. Freedom was indivisible and every attempt to retain imperialist domination in any part of the world would lead to fresh disaster.

The Working Committee noted that many rulers of Indian States had offered their services and resources for the defence of democracy in Europe. Their first concern, the Committee felt, should be introduction of democracy within their own States.

In view, however, of the gravity of the occasion, the Committee said it did not desire to take any final decision at that stage. It invited the British Government "to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular,



how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present." A clear declaration about the future would be welcome, but it was far most important to give immediate effect to it to the largest extent possible.

The horror of war had to be checked in Europe and China and to that end the Working committee were prepared to give their cooperation. But it would be a tragedy if the war was carried on in the spirit of imperialism and to retain the structure which was the cause of the war.

The Committee appealed to the Indian people to remain united in that grave hour of peril. [*ibid*, pp. 226-28; C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 409-14]

The Committee passed the Statement on 14 September 1939 and the A.I.C.C. endorsed it at its meeting on 10 October.*

The President nominated Jawaharlal Nehru to the Working Committee (it may be remembered that Nehru had kept himself out of the Committee when it had been formed by Rajendra Prasad on his being elected President at the Calcutta A.I.C.C. following the resignation of Subhas Bose) and the Working Committee by another resolution appointed a War Sub-Committee with Nehru as Chairman and Maulana Azad and Vallabhbhai Patel as members.

* For the full text of the Working Committee's statement of 14 September 1939, see Appendix.

Gandhiji, commenting on the statement, paid a glowing tribute to Nehru. He wrote:

The author of the statement is an artist. Though he cannot be surpassed in his implacable opposition to imperialism in any shape or form, he is a friend of the English people. Indeed he is more English than Indian in



his thoughts and make-up. He is often more at home with Englishmen than with his own countrymen. And he is a humanitarian in the sense that he reacts to every wrong, no matter where perpetrated. . . . Hence the statement is a manifesto addressed not only to his own countrymen, not only to the British Government and the British people, but it is addressed also to the nations of the world including those that are exploited like India. He has compelled India, through the Working Committee, to think not merely of her own freedom, but of the freedom of all the exploited nations of the world.

Appealing to Congressmen to support the statement, Gandhiji said it did not lack strength. Congressmen should believe that there would be no lack of strength in action if action became necessary. Gandhiji hoped that other political parties and communities would join the Working Committee in demanding from the British Government a clear declaration of their policy with such corresponding action as was possible in war conditions. The question, Gandhiji said, was: Would Great Britain have an unwilling India dragged into the war or a willing ally cooperating with her in the prosecution of defence of true democracy? [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 176-77]

Elucidating the Congress position as adumbrated in the Working Committee's statement, Gandhiji wrote in a note:

Since the Congress is unable, owing to past experience, to give unconditional cooperation [as Gandhiji had advised], it can only cooperate if it is able to convince the country that it has in substance achieved its purpose and that therefore there is a complete understanding about it between the British Government and the Congress.



If there is a real understanding between the British Government and the Congress, it follows that there must be corresponding action even during the war. Thus Ministries must not be mere registering agencies of the measures coming from the Centre. Hence there must be some method at the Centre of having a Congress representation sufficient to give it a majority. [K. M. Munshi, *Pilgrimage to Freedom*, p. 57, reproduced in C.W.M.G., LXX; pp. 190-91]

There was some bafflement among a section of Congressmen and many others at Gandhiji commending the resolution of the Working Committee, which did not proceed from a non-violent attitude. How could he with his non-violence actively associate with and help the Congress whose policy was based on violence? – a Congressman asked Gandhiji.

Srinivasa Sastri commented:

In the not improbable event of India being a theatre of war, is Gandhiji prepared to advise his countrymen to bare their breasts to the enemy's sword? A little while ago I would have pledged my word he would do so, but I am not confident any more.

Gandhiji answered the question in *Harijan*. He wrote that though he would not want to be a self-appointed recruiting sergeant as in the previous war, his sympathies were entirely with the Allies. He saw the war as one between the democracy of the West and totalitarianism as typified in Hitler. He explained:

Unless the Allies suffer demoralization . . . this war may be used to end all wars, at any rate of the virulent type that we see today. I have the hope that India, distraught though it is with internal dissensions, will play an effective part in ensuring the desired end and the spread of cleaner democracy than hitherto.



As for the Working Committee's resolution, it was not wilful departure from non-violence. The Working Committee felt that the vast mass of Congressmen had never understood non-violence to mean that they would defend the country from outside aggression by non-violent means. They had not even discovered a method of dealing non-violently with communal riots and goondaism. Gandhiji concluded:

I would not serve the cause of non-violence if I deserted my best co-workers because they could not follow me in an extended application of non-violence. I therefore remain with them in the faith that their departure from the non-violent method will be confined to the narrowest field and will be temporary. [*Ibid*, pp. 203-6]

8

In inviting Jinnah, on 11 September, to join its deliberations, the Working Committee had been moved by its earnest desire that India's response to the Viceroy's declaration dragging India into the war without consulting her wishes should be a united national response. It should have known better. For during the preceding two and a half years, and especially after the Congress came to power in the Provinces, Jinnah and the Muslim League had moved decisively away from the national mainstream. They had now come to look upon the Congress not as a sister organization fighting for a cause in which both could join, but as a foe.

The Congress had not been unaware of the daily increasing belligerence of Jinnah, his fulminations against the Congress and the Hindus, and his attempts at all costs to unite all Muslims under the flag of the Muslim League. The Congress had been anxious and willing to go more than half way to propitiate Jinnah. Gandhiji, Subhas Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad had all, through



prolonged exchanges of correspondence with Jinnah, tried in their various ways to draw him out on what he considered the legitimate communal demands of the Muslims. They expressed the willingness of the Congress to satisfy all such demands. Jinnah refused to negotiate, insisting that an essential precondition to any agreement between the two organizations was the recognition by the Congress that the Muslim League was the sole, authoritative and representative political organization of the Muslims of India, while the Congress was the representative organization of the Hindus and would negotiate with the League on their behalf.

Jinnah obstinately stuck to this position and the Congress Working Committee was finally obliged to terminate the negotiations. On 12 October 1938, Subhas Bose wrote to Jinnah on behalf of the Committee:

Since the Committee do not find it possible to agree with the Council of the Muslim League as to the basis of the negotiations between the Congress and the League, the Working Committee regret that they are not in a position to do anything further in the direction of starting negotiations with the League with a view to arriving at a settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, p. 302]

Meanwhile, following Jinnah's speech of October 1937 at Lucknow, the Muslim League had started a virulent campaign against the Congress Ministries, accusing them of the design to establish a Hindu Raj and crush the culture and religion of Musalmans and annihilate their political rights. Vague and indefinite allegations of atrocities against Muslims were propagated. Singing of *Bande Mataram*, flying of the National Flag on public buildings and on public occasions and advocacy of Hindustani were cited as anti-Muslim activities.



A committee under Mohammed Mehdi, Raja of Pirpur, was appointed to collect all instances of atrocities on Muslims in Congress-governed Provinces. Vallabhbhai Patel, Chairman of the Parliamentary Board, directed the Congress Ministries to enquire into each allegation and submit a report. The Congress Governments after enquiries issued denials. Nevertheless the campaign against the Congress was not only continued but was intensified. The Governors were charged with having colluded with Congress Ministries in suppressing the Muslims by not using the special powers which the Act had conferred upon them to safeguard the interests of the minorities.

The Congress, suggested to Jinnah that if he agreed the Chief Justice of the Federal Court, Sir Maurice Gwyer, might be requested to look into the complaints. Jinnah replied that he had placed the whole matter in the hands of the Viceroy, who had been requested to take up the matter without delay. The Viceroy, however, allowed the matter to drop. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 269]

The charges, everyone knew, were trumped up, with no substance in them. Even British Governors testified to the non-communal nature of the Congress rule. Harry Haig, Governor of the U.P., wrote:

In dealing with the communal issues the Ministers, in my judgment, normally acted with impartiality and a desire to do what was fair. Indeed towards the end of their time they were being seriously criticized by the Hindu Mahasabha on the ground that they were not being fair to the Hindus.

The Governor of the C.P., Francis Wylie, similarly dismissed the charges as frivolous. In a paper he observed that "the accusations of gross anti-Muslim bias on the part of the Congress Ministries were of course moonshine".



The Viceroy, reporting to the Secretary of State on 12 December 1939, expressed the view that "while specific instances may admit of being proved in particular Provinces, it would be most difficult for Jinnah to prove any general anti-Muslim action on the part of the Congress Governments." [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 282-83]

9

The charges and accusations against the Congress Ministries, however empty of substance, were in reality deliberately whipped up to provide support for the creed of separatism which communally inclined Muslim political theorists of all kinds had been sedulously developing throughout the thirties, beginning with the scheme of Pakistan devised by Rahmat Ali and including other schemes.

They all had one thing in common, viz., that Muslim majority areas in the North-West and North-East should be separate political entities. The matter of separation was first considered in concrete form at the conference of the Sind Muslim League held in October 1938 under the presidency of Jinnah, where a resolution was introduced to the effect that it was "absolutely essential in the interests of abiding peace . . . that India may be divided into two federations, viz., the federation of Muslim states and the federation of non-Muslim states." [*Ibid*, p. 284]

The resolution was not pressed then. But soon afterwards, on 25 March 1939 the Muslim League Council appointed a committee "to examine and report on the various draft schemes of constitutional reforms put forward to secure the rights and interests of Muslims in India". The committee consisted of Jinnah, Sikandar Hyat Khan, Syed Abdul Aziz, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Abdul Haroon, Aurangzeb Khan and Liaqat Ali Khan. One of the schemes placed before the Committee was that of Syed Abdul Latif of Hyderabad.



The scheme rejected the idea that India was a composite nation and also rejected the concept of majority government, which meant the rule by a "majority nationality". It advocated a confederacy for India with Muslim homelands in North-West, North-East, the Delhi-Lucknow area, and the Deccan and "migration of Muslims and Hindus into the zones specified for them", at first voluntary and later as laid down by a Royal Commission to be appointed for the purpose. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 366-70]

Thus the Muslim League was now faced with the task of evolving its own scheme of federation as an alternative to the federation outlined in the Government of India Act, 1935, which it rejected. The rejection of the Federal Scheme on the part of the League was of course not new. But the rationale for the rejection was not the same as before. The League had decisively shifted its ground. In February 1935, for instance, in the Central Assembly Jinnah had roundly denounced the Federal Scheme as "fundamentally bad and totally unacceptable to the *people of British India*". He had not said *Muslim India*.

Similarly at the meeting of the Muslim League held in Bombay in April 1936 speakers had denounced the Federal Scheme as being "anti-democratic" and calculated to "strengthen all the most reactionary elements in the country". Saiyid Wazir Hasan, chairman of the meeting, had declared:

The Muslim classes and the Muslim masses will suffer from the new scheme *as much as any other section of the Indian people*.

The resolution passed at the meeting also rejected the Provincial part of the Act not because it would establish the rule of the Hindu majority in the Provinces, but because the rights and responsibilities it conferred on the Provinces were "worthless and ineffective". [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, pp. 211-12]



This was now all in the past. In the three years that had since elapsed, the three years that had seen Jinnah emerge as the supreme leader not only of the League but also of a number of other communal Muslim groups, which had merged themselves in the League, the Muslim League mentality had undergone a sea change.

Thus when the Council of the All-India Muslim League met in Delhi on 27 and 28 August 1939, it again rejected the Federal Scheme of the Act of 1935, but not for reasons it had advanced earlier. Now the Scheme was rejected on the ground that it was sought to be imposed on "the Muslims of India" (not the *people of India*) and allowed "a permanent hostile communal majority to trample upon their religious, political, social and economic rights."

The working of the Provincial part of the constitution was condemned because the Viceroy and the Governors had not exercised their "special powers to protect and secure justice for the minorities". [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 348]

It was a complete metamorphosis. The pupa had transformed itself into a butterfly. In September 1939, when India was called upon to define her attitude to the war, it was already too late to expect Jinnah and the Muslim League to join the Congress on a common platform for the attainment of a common goal. In the eyes of the League leadership the Congress was enemy number one.

To consider the Viceroy's declaration of 3 September 1939 and to decide the Muslim League's attitude to the war, the Muslim League's Working Committee met in Delhi on 18 September and passed a long resolution on the subject.



The resolution reiterated the views expressed in the 27 August resolution as regards Federation and the failure of the Governors to protect Muslim interests in the (Congress-ruled Provinces, and while welcoming the Viceroy's announcement of 11 September made in the Assembly that the work on the Federation had been suspended, expressed the wish that it had been abandoned. It called upon the British Government to "review and revise the entire problem of India's future constitution *de novo* in the light of the experience gained by the working of the present Provincial constitution of India".

The resolution proceeded:

That while Muslim India stands against exploitation of the people of India . . . it is equally opposed to the domination of the Hindu majority over Musalmans and other minorities and vassalization of the Muslim India and is irrevocably opposed to any "Federal objective" which must necessarily result in a majority community rule under the guise of democracy and a parliamentary system of government. Such a constitution is totally unsuited to the genius of the peoples of the country which is composed of various nationalities and does not constitute a national state.

Then condemning in one sentence the "unprovoked aggression" and expressing deep sympathy for Poland, England and France, the resolution hastened to warn that "real and solid" Muslim support would not be forthcoming in the war if the British Government and the Viceroy were "unable to secure to the Musalmans justice and fair play in the Congress-governed Provinces, where today their liberty, person, property and honour are in danger and even their elementary rights are most callously trampled upon".

The resolution further urged upon His Majesty's Government to give an assurance to the League that "no declaration regarding the question of



constitutional advance for India" would be made *"without the consent and approval of the All-India Muslim League nor any constitution be framed and finally adopted by His Majesty's Government and the British Parliament without such consent and approval."* [Emphasis added.]

If the cooperation of the Musalmans was desired by the British Government, the resolution concluded, it must create a sense of security among the Musalmans and take into its confidence the Muslim League, which was the only organization that could speak on behalf of the Muslim India. [*Ibid*, pp. 350-52]

11

Secretary of State Zetland, in the House of Lords debate on 26 September 1939, welcomed the condemnation of German aggression in Poland by all the political parties in India, but regretted that the Congress found it difficult to cooperate in the war "except upon conditions affecting the political relations between the two countries". He said the conditions had been expressed "in abstract terms" and he would not comment upon them. The Viceroy was, however, in contact with the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League and hoped to discuss with them the issue arising out of the situation.

On the following day he spoke again, when he expressed Britain's hurt feelings at the timing of the Congress demand. He said:

I cannot help expressing the feeling that it is somewhat unfortunate that they should have chosen this time to reassert their claims. . . . I think the British people are very susceptible to a treatment which they regard as honourable and appropriate to a particular occasion. . . .

I think that the time has been ill chosen by the leaders of the Congress for a reiteration of their demands. [*Ibid*, pp. 381-82]



Gandhiji took exception to the way Zetland had referred to the Congress, as if it was just one of the many political organizations in India. In a statement on 28 September from Segaon, made immediately after his interview with the Viceroy, Gandhiji said:

I maintain that the Congress is an all-inclusive body. Without offence to anybody it can be said of it that it is the one body that has represented for over half a century, without a rival, the vast masses of India irrespective of class or creed. It has not a single interest opposed to that of the Musalmans or that of the people of the States.

As for the timing of the Congress demand, surely the Congress had done nothing wrong in demanding from the British a declaration of their war aims. The Congress had every right to know that it could go to the people and tell them that at the end of the war India's status as an independent country was as much assured as that of Great Britain. [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 217-18]

On 3 October in a message to the British people Gandhiji said it would be "a serious tragedy in this tragic war" if Britain failed in the very first test of sincerity of her professions about democracy. Did the declarations, or did they not, include the full freedom of India according to the wishes of Indian people? The Congress had a right to ask the question. [*Ibid*, p. 229]

Repeating the demand for a declaration of war aims by Britain, Nehru in a statement issued on 7 October said that if war was being waged for democracy and self-determination and against Nazi aggression, it could have nothing to do with territorial annexations, indemnities or maintaining the Imperialist system. In that case India would join in the struggle of her free will. This would end the 100 years of hostility between Britain and India. The opportunity must be seized to recognize India as a free nation, with the right to draw up her constitution and



her charter of independence. The next step should be its application during the war, by allowing the people to have effective control of the governance of the country for the prosecution of war on India's behalf. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 384]

Incidentally Jawaharlal Nehru had now emerged as the single authentic spokesman of the Congress during this phase. Gandhiji again and again mentioned him as such with commendation. In a letter to B. C. Roy on 12 October he wrote:

Jawaharlal is the only man with drive to take my place. . . . We shall not get a more open and sincere man than Jawaharlal with his driving power. Make therefore what you can of me through him. I have hitherto influenced the country through the Committee. Now I must do so to the extent that I influence Jawaharlal. [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 248-49]

The A.I.C.C. met at Wardha on 9 and 10 October to consider the Working Committee's statement and passed it with some verbal modifications. The debate revealed that a large number of members were suspicious of British intentions and wanted the Congress to oppose the war, which was nothing but an Imperialist war. The statement therefore was not carried unanimously. About one-third of the members present voted against it.

Commenting on the resolution Gandhiji wrote:

I see that impatience had seized some Congressmen who want to be doing something to signify their opposition to a war which they believe to be for defending imperialism. I suggest to them that they will be defeating the common purpose by acting in opposition to the Congress decision expressed in the only way open to a democratic organization. They had their say at the A.I.C.C. meeting. They are in honour bound to defer direct action



till the Working Committee or the A.I.C.C. decides otherwise. . . . I beseech Congressmen at this juncture to desist from any action that would savour of indiscipline or defiance. [*Ibid*, pp. 249-50]

12

All this time the Viceroy remained in constant touch with the leaders of Indian public opinion. He summoned for interview at different times and individually almost all the top leaders of the Congress, he spoke again to Gandhiji, he spoke to Jinnah and a number of other leaders of the League. He exchanged views with the leaders of the Liberal Federation, the Hindu Mahasabha and important chiefs of Indian States.

While thus the lines of communication were kept open alternative plans to shelve any constitutional advance and to crush the Congress were kept in readiness. Even before the war broke out, the Viceroy had already approached the Secretary of State with the proposal that the work on the Federation should be shelved in the event of war. The Governors of Madras and Bombay had assured him, he wrote, that the Congress Ministers wanted to continue in office. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 280]

In the eventuality of the Congress opposing the war the Government mobilized its forces to deal with the situation. On 11 October 1939 the Governor-General addressed letters to Provincial Governors seeking their views on the steps to be taken if a situation should arise when the Ministries would tender their resignations and Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 would be brought into operation in the Provinces. The Governors were asked to give their views regarding: (1) the use of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 to declare Provincial Congress Committees and such other organizations unlawful, (2) initiating a lightning war or drastic action against any movement that might



be launched, (3) provision against sabotage, (4) adequacy of police force, etc.
[*Ibid*, p. 280]

The British response to the Congress Working Committee's statement of 14 September came on 17 October in the shape of a statement from the Viceroy. Linlithgow began by mentioning that since the outbreak of the war he had been busy meeting people. He had met Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee, he had met Jinnah and the representative members of the Muslim League, he had met the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes and many others – altogether 52 persons.

The conversations with so many different people had revealed, as was only to be expected, different points of view. Demands for special protection on one side being balanced by proposals for still more marked constitutional changes.

The Viceroy then proceeded to deal with the demands, which were:

- (1) What were the objectives of His Majesty's Government in the war?
- (2) What was the future that was contemplated in the constitutional sphere for the Indian "continent"? Was it possible for His Majesty's Government to define their intentions more precisely in such a manner as to leave no doubt as to the ultimate status envisaged for India?
- (3) In what way could the desire of India for a closer association with the prosecution of war be satisfied?

As regards the first question, the Viceroy said His Majesty's Government had not yet defined with "any ultimate precision their detailed objectives in the prosecution of the war". Such a definition could come only at a later stage and when it came it would not be a statement of the aims of any single ally. Much depended on the circumstances in which the war ended and on the intervening



course of the campaign. The broad general objectives could be stated. Britain had entered the war to "resist aggression", to ensure a better international system in which wars would not be inevitable.

As for the second question, viz., the future constitutional development of India, the Government of India Act, 1935, was already in operation in the Provinces, and whatever the difficulties encountered, it had shown that it was essentially sound and had transferred great powers and opportunities to elected Governments.

The Federal scheme too remained a sound proposition, though work on it had been suspended for the time being. The Viceroy then referred to the pledge contained in the preamble of the Government of India Act, 1919, and the reiteration of it by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 6 February 1935, that "the natural issue of India's progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status".

The Government of India Act was there, the Viceroy went on, but when the war ended and time came to resume consideration of the plan,

His Majesty's Government will, at the end of the war, be prepared to regard the scheme of the Act as open to modification in the light of Indian views.

In this task the British Government would spare no pains to further agreement. The minorities had made representations that full weight be given to their views and their interests in any modifications that might be contemplated. The Viceroy expressed his sympathy and appreciation of the motives that weighed with the people of India and emphasized the need for the "largest measure of agreement possible" in matters that affected the relations between communities, affected the Princes of India and the Europeans.



To secure the association of India in the prosecution of the war, the Viceroy proposed the establishment of a consultative group, representing the main political parties of British India and rulers of States, over which the Governor-General would preside. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 384-89; C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 414-19]

On the following day, 18 October, Zetland spoke in the House of Lords on the Indian situation. The minorities, he said, had been making "insistent demand for safeguards against consequences which, rightly or wrongly it is feared, might result from unfettered domination of the majority". His Majesty's Government could not ignore the demand. Communal antagonisms could not be abolished by closing one's eyes to them.

He commended the Viceroy's offer for the establishment of a consultative group to associate Indian opinion in the prosecution of the war. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 389-93]

13

Gandhiji in a sharply worded statement on 18 October expressed his profound disappointment with the Viceroyal declaration. It would have been better, he said, if no declaration had been made. He went on:

So far as I can see, the Congress will be no party to it, nor can the India of Congress conception be a partner with Britain in her war with Herr Hitler. The Indian declaration shows clearly that there is to be no democracy for India if Britain can prevent it. Another round table conference is proposed at the end of the war. Like its predecessor it is bound to fail. The Congress asked for bread and it has got a stone. What the future has in store for India I dare not foretell. [C.W.M.G., LXX, p. 267]



On 22 October the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha to take stock of the situation in the light of the Viceroy's declaration.

The Committee in its resolution said:

The Viceregal statement is an unequivocal reiteration of the old imperialistic policy. The Committee regard the mention of the differences among several parties as a screen to hide the true intentions of Great Britain. What the Committee had asked for was a declaration of war aims as a test of Britain's *bona fides* regarding India, irrespective of the attitude of opposing parties and groups. The Congress has always stood for the amplest guarantee of the rights of minorities. The freedom the Congress claimed was not for the Congress or any particular group or community, but for the nation and for all communities in India that go to build that nation. The only way to establish this freedom and to ascertain the will of the nation as a whole is through a democratic process which gives full opportunity to all. The Committee must, therefore, regard the Viceroy's statement as in every way unfortunate. In the circumstances the Committee cannot possibly give any support to Great Britain, for it would amount to an endorsement of the imperialist policy which the Congress has always sought to end. As a first step in this direction the Committee call upon the Congress Ministries to tender their resignations.

The Committee called upon all Congress Committees and Congressmen generally to be prepared for all developments and eventualities but warned them against any hasty action in the shape of civil disobedience, political strikes and the like. Emphasizing the need for strict non-violence, the Committee said any resistance that might have to be offered must be purged of all violence in keeping with the pledges reiterated again and again since 1921. [*Ibid*, pp. 419-20]



The resolution created commotion in India and abroad. Newspapers and agencies from all over the world, among them *The New York Times*, *The Daily Herald*, *Paris Soir*, *Popolo d'Italia* of Rome, *National Tidende* of Copenhagen, *Aften Posten* and *Telegraaff* of Amsterdam, the *Tass News Agency* of Moscow, *Arbizzi* of Madrid, *Dagen Synther* of Stockholm, the *Swiss News Agency* of Geneva, *La Nacion* of Buenos Aires, *Yomiuri Shimbun* of Tokyo, *Unsi Suomi* of Helsingfors and *Nation Belge* of Antwerp, requested Gandhiji to make a statement.

Gandhiji in his statement said the Congress had only asked Britain for a declaration that Britain's war aims included India's independence according to the charter framed by her elected representatives. The minorities question existed, but it was for the Constituent Assembly to solve it. Gandhiji concluded:

The least the Congress could do was to withdraw the Congress Ministries from Provincial administrations. Further action will wholly depend upon Britain's handling of the crisis. The Congress has left the door open to Britain to mend the mistake.

In a letter to Rajagopalachari on 23 October he wrote:

I am quite clear in my mind that what has happened is best for the cause. It is a bitter pill, I know. But it was needed. It will drive away all the parasites from the body. . . . We shall come to power with added strength. I shall still be trying for peace, if I keep my strength. [*Ibid*, pp. 290-91]

It was of course quite clear that the British would not mend the mistake, that they would not slacken their stranglehold on India and that a programme of civil resistance in some form or other would have to be worked out before long. The question was would it be kept non-violent? Gandhiji was not sure. The Congress organization, he wrote, was weak. There were quarrels within



committees, the instructions of the Working Committee were frequently not carried out. Rival groups had come into existence to seize power. Hindus and Muslims were ready to fight on the slightest pretext. If civil disobedience had to be launched it was necessary to put the organization in order and make it stronger. Gandhiji explained:

Though nothing is said in the resolution the control and management of civil disobedience has been left in my hands at the will of the Committee. Needless to say I have no sanction, never had any, save the willing and knowing obedience of the vast mass of Congressmen, registered and unregistered, to the instructions issued to them through the Committee, or . . . through *Harijan*. When therefore I find that my instructions have no running power, Congressmen will find me retiring from the field without ado. But if I am to retain the general control of the struggle, I shall want the strictest adherence to discipline. [*Ibid*, pp. 291-93]

The immediate programme in terms of the 22 October resolution of the Working Committee was clear and definite, viz., the Congress withdrawing from Governments in the Provinces. What must come after that was by no means clear, for Gandhiji must assess the situation and chart a course appropriate to it.



CHAPTER XXII: BACK TO CONFRONTATION

1

On 26 October in the House of Commons, Wedgwood Benn, Labour member and former Secretary of State for India, opening the debate on India, pointedly referred to the two questions raised by Gandhiji and the Congress in regard to the War, viz., (1) 'What are your war aims?' (2) 'If they are to secure freedom, then are we to share in that freedom?'

The Indians' complaint, he said, was: 'We have gone into the War and we were never consulted.' Of course it had to be remembered that the Viceroy had to act very swiftly. From the very early stage India was the target of the Nazi drive. If it had not been for Soviet Russia, Germany might have gone from Berlin to Vienna, from Vienna to Prague, from Prague to Warsaw and further. India had been in danger. Besides, could there be a wider divergence than existed between the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Hitler? Benn went on:

If you are asking India to make sacrifice which she is being asked to make, surely she is entitled to be assured that the cause for which this country is fighting is also her cause. It must be remembered that we stand at the bar of world opinion. It is up to us to prove before the world that we are sincere in the professions we make.

Samuel Hoare, replying for the Government, stoutly defended Britain's India policy, the aim of which, he said, remained Dominion Status. As evidence of British sincerity, he cited the successful working of Provincial Autonomy in India. "At a time when democracies were being destroyed in Europe," he pointed out, "we have seen eleven great democratic Governments come into being in India and join their forces with the democratic peoples of the world."



The Viceroy, he said, was impelled by a sincere desire for Indian goodwill and cooperation. In pursuance of this desire he had had a series of interviews with the leaders of Indian opinion and as a result of those interviews had made two definite proposals: the first was "a clear and definite statement that at the end of the war, there would be a consideration of the constitutional problem in the light of experience of recent years", the second proposal was that a Consultative Committee should be formed to discuss with him the many problems arising out of the War and to bring him into the closest and most constant contact with the trend of Indian opinion.

The Congress had rejected the proposal. "The non-Congress India, representing many millions of Indians" had substantially accepted it.

Could there have been a proposal that would have avoided this division of opinion between the Congress and non-Congress India? No, Hoare answered. He went on:

The Princes are afraid of domination by British India, the Muslims are firmly opposed to a Hindu majority at the Centre. The Depressed Classes and other minorities genuinely believe that responsible Government, meaning a Government dependent on the Hindu majority, will sacrifice their interests. These anxieties still exist. I wish they did not. But as long as they exist, it is impossible for immediate and full responsibility at the Centre on a particular date.

The British Government, he said, had made solemn pledges to the Muslims and other minorities and the European community from time to time that their interests would be protected and it could not be false to them.

It was a mistake on the part of the Congress to have rejected the Viceroy's proposal, he said. Non-cooperation might put the clock back by several years.



Non-cooperation would lead to civil disobedience, to breaches of law and order and to a vicious circle of riots and repression all over again. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 395-403; C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 421-26]

Gandhiji in a statement the following day welcomed the conciliatory tone of Samuel Hoare's speech but questioned its sincerity. He said:

When the protection of the minorities is pleaded against the declaration required by the Congress, the great pronouncement made by Sir Samuel Hoare sounds unreal. What the Congress has asked is not any sounding of Indian opinion but a declaration of Britain's intention. I have endeavoured to show that there is no such thing as real minorities in India whose rights can be endangered by India becoming independent. [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 302-3]

In a cable to *The News Chronicle* Gandhiji reiterated the Congress view. He said:

What Congress had asked was not an answer to India's demand for independence but it had reminded Britain of neglect to declare whether her war against Herr Hitler to preserve democracy included India. This had no connection with India's readiness to digest independence. But . . . the Viceroy began a sort of Round Table Conference in which one member did not know what the other said to the Viceroy. . . . The Hindu-Muslim and other difficulties are there. . . . The Congress has suggested a Constituent Assembly where every community will be fully represented to frame India's constitution. [*Ibid*, pp. 303-5]

Referring to Samuel Hoare's mention of the Princes and the minorities, Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan* on 30 October:



Do not the Princes stand much on the same footing as the Europeans? Many, if not most, of them are an imperial creation and sustained for imperial interests. The Princes in no way represent their people. If I published the complaints I receive weekly from the people of the States, I should need to double the size of *Harijan*. They make a woeful tale neither creditable to the Princes nor to their protector, the British authority. Does not this British protectorate mean naked imperialism? The Congress is invited to regard the Princes as a minority. British power is the overlord without whom the Princes cannot breathe! They are not free even to see Congressmen, much less to enter into any settlement with them. [*Ibid*, p. 317]

The Congress President, Rajendra Prasad, supported Gandhiji's comment on Samuel Hoare's speech and said:

Let the British Government throw on Indians the responsibility of producing an agreed constitution without any interference from outside and promise to give statutory effect to it when produced. That will be a genuine offer. Without it all talk of protection of minorities looks like an excuse for perpetuating the status quo. . . . Indians should not be blamed if they regard the plea in favour of minorities as a screen for protecting British interests. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 404]

2

Towards the end of October 1939, the Congress Ministries in the Provinces, in pursuance of the resolution of the Congress Working Committee, set about tendering their resignations. But before the resignations, the Ministries tabled in their respective Legislative Assemblies a resolution to the following effect:



This Assembly regrets that the British Government have made India a participant in the war between Great Britain and Germany without the consent of the people of India and have further, in complete disregard of Indian opinion, passed laws and adopted measures curtailing the powers and activities of Provincial Governments.

The resolution further asked that

in order to secure the cooperation of the Indian people . . . principles of democracy should be applied to India and her policy should be guided by her people, and that India should be regarded as an independent nation entitled to frame her own constitution, and further that suitable action should be taken in so far as it is possible in the immediate present to give effect to that principle in regard to the present governance of India, including arrangements whereby all war measures in this province may be undertaken with the consent of and executed through the Provincial Government.

When the resolution was moved in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 25 October, it was opposed by the Muslim League and Ambedkar. The Muslim League member A. M. K. Dehlavi introduced an amendment which *inter alia* stated that the parliamentary system of government in India had failed and that the entire problem of India's future should be considered *de novo* and also that the British Government should make no commitment in that regard "without the approval and consent of the All-India Muslim League". Ambedkar, though he shared the feeling of resentment expressed in the resolution at India not having been consulted before being dragged into the war, nevertheless thought that the resolution was both "improper and inopportune". He advanced procedural grounds for his view. Besides, democracy as envisaged by the Congress, viz., rule



by majority, was unsuited to India. He would not submit to a democracy wherein the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes would for ever remain a minority. Harijans were ill-treated by the administrations which were everywhere manned by caste Hindus. In any constitution that was framed, Ambedkar said "whatever provisions may be made relating to our safeguards must be certified as adequate by the accredited representatives of the Depressed Classes. He would support the demand for the independence only with such safeguards. The resolution was passed by 92 votes against 56. [*Ibid*, pp. 137-42]

In the U.P., too, where the Assembly took up the debate on the war resolution, moved by Premier Govind Ballabh Pant, on 27 October, Muslim League's Khaliquzzaman opposed the resolution with an amendment declaring that "the democratic parliamentary system of government under the present constitution" had failed and was utterly unsuited to the condition and genius of the people and that the whole constitutional question should be considered *de novo* and no commitment should be made without the approval and consent of the League, which alone represented the Muslims of India.

But if the Muslim League was the sole representative of the Muslims of India, Khaliquzzaman was the sole Muslim League member in the House and when he left after his amendment was rejected, the resolution was passed by 127 votes against 2. [*Ibid*, pp. 154-58]

In Bihar the war resolution was debated by the Assembly on 16 October, in Orissa on 3 November and in the C.P. on 4 November. In all the three Provinces the resolution was passed with active opposition from Muslim League members. [*Ibid*, pp. 167-83]

The first Congress Ministry to tender its resignation in terms of the Congress Working Committee's resolution was that of Madras, headed by Rajagopalachari.



The Ministry resigned on 27 October and the Governor, having failed in his efforts to instal a minority Ministry in the Province, accepted the resignation on 30 October and prorogued the Assembly.

The United Provinces Ministry, headed by Govind Ballabh Pant, resigned on 30 October and the Governor, on 3 November, accepted the resignation and suspended the constitution.

The Congress Ministries in Bihar and Bombay, headed respectively by Shrikrishna Sinha and B. G. Kher, tendered their resignations on 31 October. The resignation of the Bihar Ministry was accepted on 3 November and that of Bombay on 4 November. In both Provinces the constitution was suspended. The Orissa Ministry, headed by Bishwanath Das, resigned on 4 November and the Governor accepted the resignation on 6 November and took over the administration of the Province.

The N.W.F.P. Ministers, led by Dr. Khan Saheb, jointly tendered their resignation on 7 November, and the Central Provinces Ministry resigned on 8 November. The resignations of both Ministries were accepted by the Governors on 10 November.

In Assam, on 16 November, on the resignation of the coalition Ministry led by the Congress, the Governor invited the minority leader Mohammad Saadulla once again to form an alternative Government. On his agreeing, he was installed as Premier of the Province.

Thus out of the eight Provinces under Congress Ministries, seven were brought under direct rule by the Governors, while in one Province, Assam, the so-called popular rule continued. [*Ibid*, pp. 36-42]

On 7 November Zetland made a statement in the House of Lords on the latest situation in India. He informed the House of the resignations of Congress Ministries and assumption of administrative powers in the Provinces affected by



the Governors under Section 93 of the Government of India Act. The section, he said, was by no means a punitive one. It was meant to be enforced "when a situation has arisen in which the Government of a Province cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Act for carrying on the King's Government".

The Governors, he hoped, would, with the aid of official advisers and members of the public services, conduct the administration smoothly and efficiently. The only difference would be that they would be responsible to the Parliament rather than to the Provincial legislatures. He regretted that the Ministries which had been addressing their tasks with so much zeal, energy and resource, had found it necessary to withhold their further services from their country, but expressed the hope that it would be only for a temporary duration.

The Congress, Zetland said, had asked for a declaration to the effect that India was an independent nation and that its future form of Government should be determined by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of widest possible franchise without intervention from His Majesty's Government. The Congress had further asserted that the existence of racial and religious minorities in India was not relevant to the issue and that the Congress would through the constitution provide to the minorities such protection as was acceptable to them.

Zetland declared that the British Government found it impossible to accept this position. The British Government had obligations which it could not shed. Besides, as the discussions which the Viceroy had with Indian leaders had shown, a declaration in the sense proposed would not be acceptable to large sections of Indian population.

The various statements made by Zetland and Hoare in the two Houses of British Parliament amounted to this: that India's future constitution must be



decided not by Indians but by Britain; that the British had obligations to the minorities and to the Princes from which they could not back out; and that Hindu-Muslim agreement, in effect agreement between the Congress and the League, would be a condition preceding any constitutional advances.

Lord Samuel put the position succinctly in his speech in the House of Lords on

2 November. He said:

The Government say that if only Indians could agree among themselves on the outstanding questions as between the communities and between the Congress party and the States, at once Dominion Status could be brought into effect. But that in substance means that Muslims are to have veto on the introduction of Dominion Status. . . . That would mean one-fourth of the population of India is to decide the future of India rather than three-fourths.

[*Ibid*, p. 405]

Late in October the British Government instructed the Viceroy to initiate a tripartite dialogue between the British, the Congress and the Muslim League. Accordingly, at the Viceroy's initiative, there were a series of meetings and exchanges of correspondence between the Viceroy, Congress President Rajendra Prasad and Jinnah. Gandhiji, too, was involved. On 5 November the Viceroy declared that the talks had failed, that "there remains today entire disagreement between the representatives of major parties on fundamental issues". Unity mattered more to India than was perhaps always realized and henceforth there was nothing he had been more anxious to secure than unity. He would continue the effort, he assured the public.

But, he went on,

There are grave differences of view which have to be taken into account, which should be bridged. There are strong and deeply rooted



interests which are entitled to the fullest consideration and whose attitude is not a thing lightly to be brushed aside. There are minorities which are great in numbers as well as great in historic importance and in culture. Those are all factors to which full weight should be given. [*Ibid*, p. 411]

Gandhiji and Rajendra Prasad in their conversations with the Viceroy pressed him to come out with the position of the British Government in regard to the main issue raised by the Congress, viz., clarification of British war aims. They argued that the crisis in the relationship between the British Government and the Congress had risen not on account of the communal differences in India but because of the outbreak of the war in Europe and the action of the British Government in declaring India a belligerent country without the consent of the Indian people. The crisis was thus political and not related to any communal issue.

As regards the communal issue, which was being dragged in by the Viceroy again and again to cloud the main issue, the Congress had repeatedly stressed its earnest desire to settle all points of communal controversy by agreement and not by majority vote and it should present no difficulty to the British in declaring India an independent country, for such a declaration would apply to the whole of India and not to any particular community. [C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 433-34]

4

The resignation by the Congress Ministries and the failure of the talks with the Viceroy on the one hand and the heightened bellicosity of the Muslim League on the other appeared to put the lid on any possibilities of further constitutional advance. The deadlock led to further exacerbation of nationalist feeling. The leftists in the Congress had already been pressing Gandhiji to launch a programme of civil disobedience to vindicate India's right to freedom. Now they increased the pressure. The rank and file began to strain at the leash. Gandhiji



was inundated with impatient letters asking why he was delaying the launching of a mass struggle.

Gandhiji said he was not in a hurry. He advanced three reasons for not launching a civil disobedience movement at once: (1) the fact that the Viceroy was still trying to find a solution to the problem, (2) the fact that the Muslim League would oppose the move and (3) that there was not the requisite discipline among Congressmen.

On 30 October he wrote in *Harijan*:

Congressmen seem to be expecting a big move. Some correspondents tell me if I only give the call, there will be an India-wide response such as has never been made before. And they assure me that the people will remain non-violent. Beyond their assurance I have no other proof in support of their statement. I have proof in my own possession to the contrary. . . . I cannot identify myself with any civil disobedience unless I am convinced that Congressmen believe in non-violence with all its implications and will follow implicitly the instructions issued from time to time.

Apart from the uncertainty about non-violence, he wrote, there was the fact that the Muslim League regarded the Congress as the enemy of the Muslims. This made it well-nigh impossible for any successful non-violent struggle to be launched. It was bound to result in Hindu-Muslim riots.

Gandhiji advised that Congressmen should, for the time being, work to consolidate the Congress organization, and devote themselves to the work of communal unity, Harijan uplift and spinning. [*Ibid*, pp. 315-16]

On 8 November, commenting on the Viceroy's broadcast of 5 November announcing failure of the talks, Gandhiji in a statement repeated his conditions for a civil disobedience movement. He said:



Believing as I do the Viceroy's sincerity, I would urge fellow-workers not to lose patience. There can be no civil disobedience so long as, first, the Viceroy is exploring the possibilities of a settlement, secondly, the Muslim League blocks the way, and thirdly, there is indiscipline and disunity in Congress ranks. . . . So long as there is no workable arrangement with the Muslim League, civil resistance must involve resistance against the League. No Congressman can be party to it. [*Ibid*, pp. 336-37]

Congressmen were aghast at the position taken by Gandhiji. If the launching of civil disobedience was to be made dependent on a settlement with the Muslim League and on the Viceroy continuing his efforts at parleying, there would be no settlement either with the British Government or the Muslim League, wrote a co-worker. [*Ibid*, p. 342]

Another co-worker met Gandhiji and grilled him. Why was he afraid of communal rioting? There would be no riots, and if there should be any the Congress could deal with them. As for discipline, had Congress workers not shown enough discipline? When Gandhiji said there would be no civil disobedience, Congressmen did not start one. Why should Gandhiji go on waiting and make others wait? The co-worker even suggested that now that the Congress Ministries were no longer in power, peasants might be permitted to refuse to pay taxes. Even if it was not taken up on a mass scale, one or two men in a single village might withhold payment of taxes by way of protest. Gandhiji said in the prevailing circumstances it would be madness. The only programme Congressmen could fruitfully pursue for the time being was the constructive programme. [*Ibid*, pp. 354-58]

In the U.P the discontent among Congress workers, especially those with left-wing tendencies and having links with Kisan Sabhas, at the restraint being



advised by Gandhiji, was palpable. Very early in November Gandhiji was receiving reports of the great ferment and preparations for civil disobedience in the Province. Anonymous placards were being circulated asking people to cut wires and tear up rails. Gandhiji conveyed his distress at the state of things to Nehru in a letter he wrote to him on 4 November. "If people take the law into their own hands," he said, "I must give up command of civil disobedience movement." [*Ibid*, p. 328]

"Civil disobedience," Gandhiji wrote in another context, "is by no means the next inevitable forward step. It depends upon a variety of circumstances some of which I have already mentioned. Inaction is often the most effective action in the strategy of war, more so when the war is non-violent." [*Ibid*, p. 345]

The different perceptions of the Congress leadership on the one hand and Gandhiji on the other on the question of launching some form of civil disobedience remained most marked during the period. In a letter dated 26 October Gandhiji wrote to Nehru:

Perhaps this is the most critical period in our history. I hold very strong views on the most important questions which occupy our attention. I know you too hold strong views on them but different from mine. . . . I cannot move about. I cannot come in direct touch with the masses, not even with the Congress workers. I feel that I must not lead if I cannot carry you all with me. There should be no divided counsels among the members of the Working Committee. I feel that you should take full charge and lead the country, leaving me free to voice my opinion. But if you all thought that I should observe complete silence, I should, I hope, find no difficulty in complying. [*Ibid*, p. 297]



Although in the talks held between the Congress and the League representatives at the behest of the Viceroy no concrete arrangement had been arrived at, the Congress was hopeful that, given goodwill on both sides, it might still be possible to confront the British with a Hindu-Muslim united front. The leadership, accordingly, continued to keep in touch with Jinnah and other leaders of the Muslim League. Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad had meetings with Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan and got the impression that when the crunch came it would still be possible to secure the support of the League for India's demand for independence.

Replying to the Viceroy's assertion that the talks had left the two parties in "entire disagreement" on the communal issue, Jawaharlal Nehru in a statement said:

Does the Viceroy imagine that Mr. Jinnah or the Muslim League are opposed to such clarification [of the war aims] or the declaration of India as a free country? If so, I fear he is very much mistaken. I found, to my pleasure, that in regard to objectives Mr. Jinnah and I had a great deal in common. He did not entirely agree with our approach to the political problem and so we decided to send separate answers to the Viceroy. Our talks removed many misapprehensions and brought us much nearer to each other than we had been for some years past. . . . Let there be no mistake about this. No one stands in the way of an unequivocal declaration of war aims and India's freedom by the British Government except themselves. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 416-17]

Jawaharlal Nehru was of course right in ascribing the continuation of the deadlock to the British unwillingness to concede freedom to India rather than to



the unsolved communal question. But he was no doubt mistaken in interpreting Jinnah's civility in his talks with him as a change of attitude. For Jinnah remained implacably opposed to any constitutional arrangement, such as a Constituent Assembly, in which the Hindus would have an upper hand. But given the requisite will on the part of the British Government the Muslim League could have done nothing to prevent the inauguration of a responsible Government at the Centre. As early as 19 May 1939, Linlithgow had written to the Secretary of State:

No plan for federation based upon representative Government can be acceptable to those Muslims who contemplate the future course of Indian politics as an unending communal contest. . . . But I do not think that Muslims have it in their power to prevent the attainment of Federation or to make it unworkable. . . . Indeed I shall be most surprised if when the test comes Muslims do not work the Federal constitution to the best of their opportunities. [Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV, p. 296]

Therefore when they now said that there could be no immediate enlargement of the responsibility at the Centre because of the Muslim League's opposition to it, it was seen as a specious plea to frustrate any constitutional advance. The tacit British support to Jinnah worked to the advantage both of the British and Jinnah.

On 6 December 1939, Jinnah in a statement from Bombay called upon "Mussalmans all over India to observe Friday, the 22nd December, as the day of deliverance and thanksgiving – as a mark of relief that the Congress Governments have at last ceased to function". He instructed the provincial, district and primary League units all over India "to hold public meetings and pass resolutions and offer



prayers by way of thanksgiving for being delivered from the unjust Congress regime".

Coming at a time when it appeared that there were attempts being made on both sides to cool tempers and to promote communal concord, when Jinnah and Nehru were slated to meet a short while later, Jinnah's *fatwa* came as a bolt from the blue. There was a clamour of opposition from many quarters even outside the Congress. In Bengal sixteen Krishak Proja Party M.L.A.s publicly criticized Jinnah's statement even though the Krishak Proja Party was a staunch ally of the Muslim League. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 46]

Gandhiji, in a statement issued on 9 December expressed his distress at the step taken by Jinnah, and appealed to him and to Muslims to desist. He said:

The only concrete allegations against the Congress Ministries that I know of are contained in the Muslim League Committee's report called the Pirpur Report. I happen to know that the Parliamentary Sub-Committee [of the Congress] had referred the Report to various Congress Ministries, and I know also that the Ministers concerned had made careful investigations and reported to the Sub-Committee that most of the complaints were without foundation. It seems to me, therefore, that Jinnah Saheb has taken upon his shoulders the tremendous responsibility of being both the accuser and the judge.

He appealed to Jinnah to await the pronouncement of the Viceroy upon the allegations listed to whom Jinnah had referred the matter. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 18-19]

Rajagopalachari categorically denied Jinnah's allegation. He said:

I have said before, and I repeat again, that there was never any occasion for complaint, much less for interference. The Madras Ministry, like the Ministries in other Provinces, never gave room for complaint on the part



of minorities. On the contrary there may have been occasions when it may be stated that there was indulgence in favour of minorities. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 47]

Jinnah stuck to his position. In another statement issued on 13 December he demanded the setting up of a Royal Commission to investigate the Muslim League's charges against the Congress Ministries. He cited compulsory singing of *Bande Mataram*, the question of the Congress flag and the supplanting of Urdu by Hindi as instances of oppression of Muslims. The observance of the Day of Deliverance was, he said, an expression of the natural relief of the Muslims.

In yet another statement, issued on 17 December, he claimed that "the Day of Deliverance" was not directed against Hindus as a community but against the regime of the Congress. [*Ibid*, pp. 48-49]

6

The British were happy that things were going their way in India. On 14 December Secretary of State Zetland informed the House of Lords that the Viceroy's War Purposes Fund had swelled to £ 7,50,000. The Princes had made lavish contributions. The Nizam of Hyderabad, the Nawab of Rampur, the Maharajas of Bikaner and Kashmir and a host of others of their breed had not only offered cash contributions but expressed a desire to send their battalions of troops to fight in the War.

In the political field the deadlock, the Secretary of State declared, continued, the chief cause being the "difference of opinion between the Congress and the Muslim League". The Congress, he said, had declared "that no communal considerations arise in meeting the demands of the Congress". The British Government were unable to share that view. No constitution could be expected to function successfully which did not meet with the general assent of the



minorities who had to live under it. By far the most important minority were the Muslims and the Congress did not represent them. Of the 482 Muslims elected to the Lower Chambers of the Provincial Legislatures, he informed the Peers, only 26 had been elected on the Congress ticket. Here Zetland was being dishonest. For he did not at the same time inform the House that the Muslim League, which he recognized as the chief representative of the Muslims, had secured less than 25 per cent seats all over India in the same election.

In fact, he went on, the Muslims could hardly be described as a minority. They were "a community of from eighty to ninety millions, with race memories of days when for 200 years the Mogul dynasty ruled over the greater part of the Indian sub-continent".

He appealed to the Congress to try and understand the difficulties which were responsible for the attitude of the Muslim League.

Hindu-Muslim differences were only one of the difficulties in the way of responsible Government not being conceded to India, Zetland declared. There were others, such as the defence of India, British obligations to the Princes and European interests "built up in India by the enterprise of generations". [*Ibid*, pp. 417-19]

This was as clear an enunciation of British policy in regard to India as any. No constitutional advance could be countenanced so long as the communal question had not been settled to the satisfaction of the Muslim League. The onus of producing such a settlement was laid on the Congress. But even if the communal question should be got over, the British had other cards up their sleeve to prevent any constitutional advance: such as defence needs, or the Princes, or the European interests.



The Working Committee of the Congress met at Wardha from 18 to 22 December 1939 to take stock of the situation. Referring to the latest statement of the Secretary of State, in which he had sought to cloud the main issue of India's independence by dragging in the communal question, the Working Committee in its resolution declared:

In the opinion of the Working Committee the communal question will never be satisfactorily solved so long as the different parties are to look to a third party, through whose favour they expect to gain special privileges, even though it may be at the expense of the nation. . . . The Working Committee are aware that the independence of India cannot be maintained if there are warring elements within the country. The Committee are therefore entitled to read in the British Government's raising the communal question reluctance to part with power. The Constituent Assembly as proposed by the Congress is the only way to attain a final settlement of the communal question. The proposal contemplates fullest representation of all communities with separate electorates where necessary. It has already been made clear on behalf of the Congress that minority rights will be protected to the satisfaction of the minorities concerned, differences if any, being referred to an impartial tribunal.

The Committee drew up a slightly modified form of the Independence Pledge to be taken by Congressmen all over the country on 26 January 1940, "to help in the preparation already on foot". The resolution on the subject went on:

Owing to the crisis through which India and the world are now passing and the possibility of our struggle for freedom being continued in an intenser form, the next celebration of this day [Independence Day] has a special significance to it.



The pledge as now revised, read:

We believe that it is an inalienable right of the Indian people . . . to have freedom and enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any Government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further rights to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence.

We recognize that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. India has gained strength and self-reliance and marched a long way to Swaraj following peaceful and legitimate methods, and it is by adhering to these methods that our country will attain Independence.

We pledge ourselves anew to the Independence of India and solemnly resolve to carry out non-violently the struggle for freedom till Purna Swaraj is attained. We believe that non-violent direct action in particular requires successful working of the constructive programme of khadi, communal harmony and removal of untouchability. We shall seek every opportunity of spreading goodwill among fellow men without distinction of caste or creed. We shall endeavour to raise from ignorance and poverty those who have been neglected and to advance in every way the interests of those who are considered to be backward and suppressed. . . . [*Ibid*, pp. 249-50]

The addition made to the pledge was as follows:



Charkha and khadi are an integral part of our constructive programme for the resuscitation of the seven hundred thousand villages of India and for the removal of the grinding poverty of the masses. We shall, therefore, spin regularly, use for our personal requirements nothing but khadi, and, so far as possible, products of village handicrafts only and endeavour to make others do likewise.

We pledge ourselves to disciplined observance of Congress principles and policies and to keep in readiness to respond to the call of the Congress, whenever it may come, for carrying on the struggle for the independence of India. [*Ibid*, p. 250]

7

Asking Congressmen to learn the pledge by heart, Gandhiji, in an article in *Harijan* emphasized the importance of the implementation of the triple programme of khadi, communal harmony and abolition of untouchability to develop non-violence of the strong.

He wrote:

Congressmen should not be surprised if I would not declare civil disobedience unless I was morally certain that they had understood the full significance of non-violence and that they were carrying out the triple programme with as much zest as they would offer civil disobedience, so called.

Communal fellowship was not dependent, Gandhiji said, on pacts between leaders. Such pacts did not affect the ground-down millions. Communal fellowship had to be cultivated not only as between Hindus and Muslims but had to be universal and it must not have any political motive behind it.



Only those Congressmen must take the pledge, wrote Gandhiji, who had faith in it. He warned:

A vast organization like the Congress will not move in the direction of civil resistance unless I give the word. It is no matter of pride or joy to me. I should break under the weight of that responsibility if I were not conscious of the fact that I am nothing. Congressmen have trust in my judgment which is dictated by the living law of Truth and Love which is God. God speaks through the acts of men and women. In this case acts of Congressmen and Congresswomen have to speak. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 50-52]

But the acts of Congressmen and Congresswomen were speaking in different voices. The Socialists, represented by Jayprakash Narayan, Sampurnanand and Ram Manohar Lohia sought to dissociate themselves from the part of the pledge containing reference to the constructive programme. Jayprakash Narayan wrote that the Socialist group had never accepted the constructive programme as the only or even as an adequately effective weapon in the struggle and that that position of the Socialists had remained unchanged. He called upon students and workers to observe the Independence Day on 26 January 1940 by coming out of their schools and colleges and factories.

Gandhiji, commenting on Jayprakash Narayan's call for strike on the part of students and workers, wrote that that would be a lesson in indiscipline. And if the Socialist Party was unable to accept discipline, it must either remain indoors and silent or preach open revolt against the leadership.

Sampurnanand, similarly disagreeing with the mention of the constructive programme in the pledge, wrote that if the pledge meant a commitment to village industries as opposed to mass production, he as a Socialist could not accept it.



Such a mentality, Gandhiji wrote, would only interfere with mass propaganda. Sampurnanand must either throw himself whole-heartedly into the struggle or not at all. There had been talk of revolutionary mass movement. A Congressman had suggested that if only Gandhiji gave the call the response would be staggering on the part of the workers and peasants. Gandhiji said he dreaded the prospect. Unregulated and sporadic strikes must lead to violence and automatic suspension of the struggle. Surely the Socialists did not want him to embark on a struggle which he knew beforehand would end in disaster. Even if such a struggle should end in a final independence it would bring in its wake perfect anarchy. [*Ibid*, pp. 114-17]

The implications of the independence pledge in 1940, Gandhiji wrote were that: (1) if civil disobedience had to be started it would have to be more civil and more non-violent than ever before and accordingly those participating in it must render implicit obedience to instructions; (2) the taking of the pledge must not be mistaken for declaration of civil disobedience, it was intended to serve as an index of discipline among Congressmen and the masses; (3) students and workers should leave schools and colleges and factories only with the permission of the school and college authorities and factory managements, not otherwise.

Those who could should observe the day with a twenty-four hours' fast beginning on the evening of 25 January. Gandhiji wrote:

I am making a desperate effort to avoid the struggle. I believe that the best mind of England, nay, of the world, is sick of the exploitation by the strong of the less strong. I believe in the sincerity of Lord Linlithgow. . . . And I have not lost the hope that we shall have an honourable settlement without a struggle which, no matter how non-violent, must involve considerable suffering. [*Ibid*, pp. 125-27]



While on the one hand there was thus a display of impatience, militancy of temper and a disregard, if not contempt, for the constructive programme on the part of Socialists and other groups in the Congress calling themselves leftists, there were on the other hand acts of disobedience and defiance of instructions of the Working Committee at various levels and in various Provinces.

Gandhiji wrote:

Thinking from the purely practical standpoint and even apart from my conditions, the Congress organization shows signs of disintegration. The Bengal Committee is frankly defiant. Orissa is split up into two camps. Things are no better in Karnataka. A Kerala correspondent says that the Provincial Committee does not believe in the present policy and command and is trying by every means to undermine the influence of the Working Committee by ridiculing its programme. Things are not rosy in the Punjab.

[*Ibid*, pp. 70-71]

The Bengal Committee had of course for long been a prey to squabbling and infighting. The Working Committee at its December meeting had appointed an *ad hoc* Committee under Maulana Azad to conduct elections in Bengal. The Bengal P.C.C. declared that it would not recognize the Committee and asked the local committees to disobey it and to continue to deal with the B.P.C.C. The Azad Committee then resigned and was replaced by another *ad hoc* Committee under Atul Chandra Gupta. But this Committee too met the same fate. The B.P.C.C. remained rebellious and disaffiliated a number of District Congress Committees which had cooperated with the Committee appointed by the Working Committee. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 259, 274-75]

Pursuit of self-interest by Congressmen was evidenced in yet another area – that of Legislatures. The resignation by Congress Ministries had not led to the



dissolution of Provincial Legislatures. They had only been prorogued, which meant that the Legislators continued to draw their allowances. Gandhiji answering a question said:

I have no doubt that they ought not to draw these allowances. It is no use our saying it is Government money. There is nothing that belongs to Government. There are people who, when they go to jail, make all kinds of demands and do not hesitate to misuse jail property. . . . We would enhance our prestige if we decide not to draw these allowances. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, p. 63]

But Congress legislators not only continued to draw the allowances but were beginning to demand that these be raised.

Writing under the caption 'Congress M.L.A.s and Remuneration', Gandhiji referred to a letter he had received from a U.P. legislator that the remuneration of Rs. 75 a month being paid to the M.L.A.s was inadequate and must be raised. Though the Assembly stood prorogued, there were various select, regular and special committees still functioning which made a heavy demand on the time of the legislators. They had, in addition, to tour their constituencies.

A further point made by the correspondent was that sitting M.L.A.s who had acquitted themselves well should be renominated in all cases, to prevent underhand methods on the part of others to displace them.

Gandhiji answered that the arguments advanced for the upward revision of monthly remuneration of the M.L.A.s did not convince him. The work in the constituencies should be left to the party. In any case there were other parties besides the Congress represented on the legislatures and Congress convenience alone could not be the criterion. The most important consideration was: why should members draw anything while the Assemblies were in virtual suspension?



If a census were taken it would be found that many members were earlier not earning what they earned as legislators. It was a dangerous thing to make legislatures a means of earning more than one's market price.

As to the question of making the sitting members "permanent incumbents" the party would have to decide. [*Ibid*, pp. 89-91]

Communal peace, to which Gandhiji attached special importance in the context of a possible civil disobedience movement, remained fragile and tension was further exacerbated by the campaign of hate carried on by the Muslim League.

In Sukkur, in Sind, the direct action launched by a section of Muslims to take possession of Manzalgaah, developed into a campaign of riots. On 20 November 1939, the police was forced to open fire on a violent mob in which 21 persons were killed and 23 injured. But the rioting continued, resulting in the death of 29 persons and injuries to 26 in two days. Reports came to Gandhiji of the pathetic condition of the Hindus of the place — their men mercilessly butchered, their women and girls raped, their properties plundered. They pleaded to Gandhiji to do something to save them, especially since the Sind Government was not dealing with the situation with a firm hand.

Gandhiji advised them to learn the art of self-defence to protect themselves against robbers and rioters, and if they felt themselves too weak for it, to leave the place.

Hijrat, planned departure from a place, Gandhiji wrote, was not an unpractical proposition. It required courage and forethought. The second book of the Old Testament, known as *Exodus* gave the story of the planned flight of the Israelites. In modern times there was the example of the flight of the Doukhobours from Russia owing to persecution. If the Hindus of Sukkur were



unable to secure a settlement and did not feel able to defend themselves, then the only course open to them, Gandhiji wrote, was to vacate the place. [*The Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 43; C.W.M.G., LXX, pp. 391-92; LXXI, pp. 71-74]

9

Corruption and indiscipline in the Congress, made more pronounced by the coming into play of forces not committed to non-violence, such as those represented by M. N. Roy, the Socialists, the Communists and the followers of Subhas Bose, and the very volatile communal situation, were thus the primary factors that made Gandhiji hold his hand in the matter of a civil resistance campaign. Equally important was the fact that Gandhiji still cherished hopes of negotiations with the British Government resulting in an acceptable settlement. Here Gandhiji's hope to a great extent sprang from his sympathy for Britain in her war. Launching a civil disobedience movement when the British were engaged in a life-and-death struggle, it appeared to him, would be hitting below the belt. Explaining his views in the matter to some Congress workers, he explained the difference between satyagraha and civil disobedience. He said:

Satyagraha is a universal principle of which civil disobedience is one of the many applications. Satyagraha goes on no matter whether the opponent is in difficulty or not. . . . What is essential is that we should not embarrass an opponent who is in difficulty and make his difficulty our opportunity. . . . Civil disobedience is not the law of life; satyagraha is. Satyagraha, therefore, never ceases; civil disobedience can cease and ought to when there is no occasion for it. Then there are two kinds of civil disobedience — aggressive and defensive. Defensive civil disobedience becomes a duty when insult or humiliation is heaped upon us by an opponent. That duty would have to be



done whether the opponent is in difficulty or not. . . . Aggressive civil disobedience embarrasses the opponent, whether we mean to embarrass him or not.

Making England's difficulty India's opportunity was in no way justified, Gandhiji said. Direct action would become necessary when all progress towards independence became impossible and all negotiations with the Government proved fruitless. [C.W.M.G., LXXI, pp. 62-63]

Clearly at the end of 1939, with the channels of communication with the British Government still open, and the spokesmen of that Government still maintaining a pose of sweet reasonableness in their pronouncements, a situation had not arisen, in Gandhiji's view, when a mass civil disobedience movement might be considered a necessity. The deadlock in the political situation continued.

10

The period of eight years from 1932 to 1939 is one of crucial importance in the history of the national movement for freedom. It threw up issues and brought into the field forces that were to dominate the political scene throughout the years immediately preceding the final transfer of power to Indian hands. Indeed to a large extent it determined the character of that freedom.

The period first and foremost saw a mighty effort undertaken by the Congress under the inspiration, persistent urging and leadership of Gandhiji to bring the hundreds of millions of India's rural population into the fight for swaraj. The attack on the inertia that had settled on the countryside was many-dimensional and on many levels — social and moral, economic and cultural.

First to come was the anti-untouchability movement that swept through India like a hurricane from East to West and North to South and of which Gandhiji



himself was the storm centre. The Harijan Sevak Sangh, created soon after the Poona Pact, provided the organizational framework for the movement. The movement sought primarily to bring the Harijans, who formed sizeable sections of the population in every village and every hamlet, into the mainstream of Hinduism, securing for them the right of temple-entry and right of access to village schools, village wells and such other places and removing the humiliations that had been heaped on them for generations. It also sought to improve the economic and social position of the Harijans by taking education and productive work to them. It was an attack on the citadel of orthodoxy, on the barriers that had stood for centuries between high caste and low caste and on the ingrained prejudices against the untouchables rooted in the caste Hindu psyche. If Hinduism was to live, said Gandhiji, then untouchability must die. There could be no real swaraj without the complete eradication of untouchability.

Then in 1934 came the Village Industries movement, pushed through the instrumentality of the All-India Village Industries Association. The object of the movement was to revive the village industries that had been systematically destroyed or allowed to languish by India's British rulers in a bid to further their own commercial interests and to tighten their stranglehold on India's villages. Leather work, paper-making, basket-making, oil-pressing and a host of other such industries were introduced into hundreds of villages which had lost them. Villagers and national workers were advised, so far as possible, to use only articles produced in the villages and not depend on the cities for their supply. Along with spinning and khadi work already going on in the villages under the aegis of the Charkha Sangh, or the All-India Spinners' Association (A.I.S.A.) formed in 1925, the Village Industries movement provided a strong stimulus for the building up of swaraj economy in the villages, holding out the promise of a self-generating,



self-supporting autonomous village units free of any exploitative elements. The A.I.V.I.A. also undertook active research to improve village technology so as to reduce labour and improve production.

In 1937 came the Wardha Scheme of Education. The conception was comprehensive and had the potential, if it was successfully executed, of transforming people's ideas on the aim and content and methodology of education and evolving a non-violent peaceful society. What Gandhiji sought to do, through the new scheme of education that he had formulated, was to remove the distinction between learning and doing, between theory and practice and to turn education from an isolated pursuit of abstractions to a life-long process of learning by doing. Unfortunately, notwithstanding the whole-hearted commitment of a number of educationists of high standing to the scheme and encouragement given to it by education departments under the Congress Ministries, the impact of the scheme was not as wide or as deep as might have been expected. It was misunderstood by sections of Muslims, so that Jinnah and his Muslim League were able to exploit it for their own questionable ends. The bureaucracy too was hostile or indifferent and the scheme was allowed to languish.

While through intensive village work Gandhiji sought to lay the ground-work for the swaraj of his conception, and develop non-violent sanctions for the final battle to wrest freedom for India, on the constitutional level, the Congress, for the first time, by assumption of Ministerial responsibility in the Provinces, was enabled to come to grips with the problems of administration, law and order, taxation and to attempt agrarian and other reform and curb the exploitation of the peasantry at the hands of landlords and money-lenders. Thus in its negotiations with representatives of the Empire it could speak with knowledge and experience on constitutional and administrative questions.



Unfortunately, side by side with these positive developments, during the period 1937 to 1939 the evil plant of Muslim separatism also took root under the fostering care of Jinnah, the permanent President of the Muslim League. Up to 1937 Muslim communalist parties and leaders had presented their claims as minority claims. They had asked for reservations, separate electorates, safeguards of various kinds and larger share in public services. They had on all occasions declared themselves as standing for the freedom of India and for power to the people, on condition that their claims were satisfied. From 1937 onwards, and especially following the setting up of Congress Governments in the Provinces, their perception changed. Jinnah and the League now declared that the Muslims were not a minority in the Indian nation but a separate nation on an equal footing with the Hindus. They asked the Congress to recognize the status of the Muslims as a separate nation and the League as the sole representative of the Muslims. They now opposed the demand for responsible Government and rule by majority, calling it Fascist Hindu dictatorship.

Was this change of attitude the result of encouragement from the British? A case could certainly be made that it was. In any event one of the strongest arguments the British used against entertaining any proposals for constitutional advance was the unwillingness of the League to countenance it.

What shape things took will be the subject of the subsequent volumes.



APPENDIX



APPENDIX

THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE'S STATEMENT OF

14 SEPTEMBER 1939

The Working Committee have given their earnest consideration to the grave crisis that has developed owing to the declaration of war in Europe. The principles which should guide the nation in the event of war have been repeatedly laid down by the Congress and only a month ago this Committee reiterated them and expressed their displeasure at the flouting of Indian opinion by the British government in India. As a first step to dissociate themselves from this policy of the British Government, the Committee called upon the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending the next session. Since then the British Government have declared India as a belligerent country, promulgated Ordinances, passed the Government of India Act Amending Bill, and taken other far-reaching measures which affect the Indian people whose declared wishes in such matters have been deliberately ignored by the British Government. The Working Committee must take the gravest view of these developments.

The Congress has repeatedly declared its entire disapproval of the ideology and practice of Fascism and Nazism and their glorification of war and violence and the suppression of the human spirit. It has condemned the aggression in which they have repeatedly indulged and their sweeping away of well-established principles and recognized standards of civilized behaviour. It has seen in Fascism and Nazism the intensification of the principle of imperialism against which the Indian people have struggled for many years. The Working Committee must therefore unhesitatingly condemn the latest aggression of the Nazi Government in Germany against Poland and sympathize with those who resist it.



The Congress has further laid down that the issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people, and no outside authority can impose this decision upon them, nor can the Indian people permit their resources to be exploited for imperialist ends. Any imposed decision, or attempt to use India's resources for purposes not approved by them, will necessarily have to be opposed by them. If cooperation is desired in a worthy cause, this cannot be obtained by compulsion and imposition, and the Committee cannot agree to the carrying out by the Indian people of orders issued by external authority. Cooperation must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider to be worthy. The people of India have, in the recent past, faced great risks and willingly made great sacrifices to secure their own freedom and establish a free democratic state in India, and their sympathy is entirely on the side of democracy and freedom. But India cannot associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her, and such limited freedom as she possesses taken away from her.

The Committee are aware that the Government of Great Britain and France have declared that they are fighting for democracy and freedom and to put an end to aggression. But the history of the recent past is full of examples showing the constant divergence between the spoken word, the ideals proclaimed, and the real motives and objectives. During the war of 1914-18, the declared war aims were preservation of democracy, self-determination and the freedom of small nations, and yet the very Governments which solemnly proclaimed these aims entered into secret treaties embodying imperialist designs for the carving up of the Ottoman Empire. While stating that they did not want any acquisition of territory, the victorious Powers added largely to their colonial domains. The present European war itself signifies the abject failure of the Treaty of Versailles



and of its makers, who broke their pledged word and imposed an imperialist peace on the defeated nations. The one hopeful outcome of that Treaty, the League of Nations, was muzzled and strangled at the outset and later killed by its parent States.

Subsequent history has demonstrated afresh how even a seemingly fervent declaration of faith may be followed by an ignoble desertion. In Manchuria the British Government connived at aggression; in Abyssinia they acquiesced in it. In Czechoslovakia and Spain democracy was in peril and it was deliberately betrayed, and the whole system of collective security was sabotaged by the very powers who had previously declared their faith in it.

Again it is asserted that democracy is in danger and must be defended, and with this statement the Committee are in entire agreement. The Committee believe that the people of the West are moved by this ideal and objective and for these they are prepared to make sacrifices. But again and again the ideals and sentiments of the people and of those who have sacrificed themselves in the struggle have been ignored and faith has not been kept with them.

If the war is to defend the status quo – imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privilege – then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy and a world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it. The Committee are convinced that the interests of Indian democracy do not conflict with the interests of British democracy or of world democracy. But there is an inherent and ineradicable conflict between democracy for India or elsewhere and imperialism and fascism. If Great Britain fights for the maintenance and extension of democracy, then she must necessarily end imperialism in her own possessions, establish full democracy in India, and the Indian people must have the right of self-determination by framing



their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference, and must guide their own policy. A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic cooperation. She will work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy utilizing the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity.

The crisis that has overtaken Europe is not of Europe only but of humanity and will not pass like other crises or wars leaving the essential structure of the present day world intact. It is likely to refashion the world for good or ill – politically, socially and economically. This crisis is the inevitable consequence of the social and political conflicts and contradictions which have grown alarmingly since the last Great War, and it will not be finally resolved till these conflicts and contradictions are removed and a new equilibrium established. That equilibrium can only be based on the ending of the domination and exploitation of one country by another, and on a reorganization of economic relations on a juster basis for the common good of all. India is the crux of the problem, for India has been the outstanding example of modern imperialism and no refashioning of the world can succeed which ignores this vital problem. With her vast resources she must play an important part in any scheme of world reorganization. But she can only do so as a free nation whose energies have been released to work for this great end. Freedom today is indivisible and every attempt to retain imperialist domination in any part of the world will lead inevitably to fresh disaster.

The Working Committee have noted that many rulers of Indian States have offered their services and resources and expressed their desire to support the cause of democracy in Europe. If they must make their professions in favour of democracy abroad, the Committee would suggest that their first concern should



be the introduction of democracy within their own states in which today undiluted autocracy reigns supreme. The British Government in India is more responsible for this autocracy than even the rulers themselves, as has been made painfully evident during the last year. This policy is the very negation of democracy and of the new world order for which Great Britain claims to be fighting in Europe.

As the Working Committee view past events in Europe, Africa and Asia, and more particularly past and present occurrences in India, they fail to find any attempt to advance the cause of democracy or self-determination or any evidence that the present war declarations of the British Government are being, or are going to be, acted upon. The true measure of democracy is the ending of imperialism and fascism alike and the aggression that has accompanied them in the past and the present. Only on that basis can a new order be built up. In the struggle for that new world order, the Committee are eager and desirous to help in every way. But the Committee cannot associate themselves or offer any cooperation in a war which is conducted on imperialist lines and which is meant to consolidate imperialism in India and elsewhere.

In view, however, of the gravity of the occasion and the fact that the pace of events during the last few days has often been swifter than the working of men's minds, the Committee desire to take no final decision at this stage, so as to allow for the full elucidation of the issues at stake, the real objectives aimed at, and the position of India in the present and in the future. But the decision cannot long be delayed as India is being committed from day to day to a policy to which she is not a party and of which she disapproves.

The Working Committee therefore invite the British Government to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and



imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present. Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people? A clear declaration about the future, pledging the Government to the ending of Imperialism and Fascism alike, will be welcomed by the people of all countries, but it is far more important to give immediate effect to it, to the largest possible extent, for only this will convince the people that the declaration is meant to be honoured. The real test of any declaration is its application in the present, for it is the present that will govern action today and give shape to the future.

War has broken out in Europe and the prospect is terrible to contemplate. But war has been taking its heavy toll of human life during recent years in Abyssinia, Spain and China. Innumerable innocent men, women, and children have been bombed to death from the air in open cities, cold-blooded massacres, torture and utmost humiliation have followed each other in quick succession during these years of horror. That horror grows, and violence and the threat of violence shadow the world and, unless checked and ended, will destroy the precious inheritance of past ages. That horror has to be checked in Europe and China, but it will not end till its root causes of fascism and imperialism are removed. To that end the Working Committee are prepared to give their cooperation. But it will be infinite tragedy if even this terrible war is carried on in the spirit of imperialism and for the purpose of retaining this structure which is itself the cause of war and human degradation.

The Working Committee wish to declare that the Indian people have no quarrel with the German people or the Japanese people or any other people. But they have a deep-rooted quarrel with systems which deny freedom and are based



on violence and aggression. They do not look forward to a victory of one people over another or to a dictated peace, but to a victory of real democracy for all the countries and a world freed from the nightmare of violence and imperialist oppression.

The Committee earnestly appeal to the Indian people to end all internal conflict and controversy and, in this grave hour of peril, to keep in readiness and hold together as a united nation, calm of purpose and determined to achieve the freedom of India within the larger freedom of the world.

The Indian Annual Register, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 226-28

Owing to his [Pyarelal's] demise in 1982, the work would have faced disruption had the country not had another ardent devotee of Gandhiji and Kasturbaiji in Pyarelalji's sister Dr. Sushila Nayar to carry on the stupendous task. If Pyarelalji was Bhakta (devotee) of Gandhiji Dr. Sushila Nayar was a daughter of the House. With the help of all the materials collected by Pyarelalji and her own personal knowledge of events Dr. Sushila Nayar has provided the country with an authentic account of the life and events of the time.

I have the privilege of knowing Sushilaji for over forty years. She is one of those rare personalities on whom God had showered his choicest blessings. She combines in herself qualities like knowledge, wisdom, experience and competence on the one hand and virtues like integrity, dauntless courage, devotion to duty and utter selflessness on the other.

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