

# MAHATMA GANDHI

VOLUME VI

Salt Satyagraha  
The Watershed

SUSHILA NAYAR



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
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SALT SATYAGRAHA  
THE WATERSHED

By

SUSHILA NAYAR

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The Salt Satyagraha in the north and the south, in the east and the west of India was truly a watershed of India's history. The British rulers scoffed at the very idea of the Salt March. A favourite saying in the barracks was: "Let them make all the salt they want and eat it too. The Empire will not move an inch." But as the Salt Satyagraha movement reached every town and village and millions of people rose in open rebellion, the Empire began to shake. Gandhi stood like a giant in command of the political storm. It was not however only a political storm. It was a moral and cultural storm that rose from the inmost depths of the soul of India. The power of non-violence came like a great sunrise of history. ... It was clear as crystal that British rule must give way before the rising tide of the will of the people. For me and perhaps for innumerable others also this was at the same time the discovery of Gandhi and our determination to follow him whatever the cost.

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## FOREWORD

It is not an easy foreword to write. It is the foreword to Volume VI of Gandhiji's multi-volume biography by no less a person than Dr. Sushila Nayar. This volume bears the significant title Salt Satyagraha - The Watershed. I pressed Dr. Sushila Nayar to write the foreword herself. But I had to yield to her wish and write this foreword.

Curiously, I was up to my neck in the Salt Satyagraha movement. In South India, the outstanding leader of the Salt Satyagraha movement was Sri Rajagopalachariar. Just as Gandhiji marched with his Ashram volunteers towards Dandi to break the Salt Law, Rajaji marched to Vedaranyam to break the same law. I had the good fortune to be with him in his march; Rajaji began his march from Tirichinapalli.

The whole of Tamilnadu trembled under his gentle and nimble feet. The Salt Satyagraha in the north and the south, in the east and the west of India was truly a watershed of India's history. The British rulers scoffed at the very idea of the Salt March. A favourite saying in the barracks was: "Let them make all the salt they want and eat it too. The Empire will not move an inch." But as the Salt Satyagraha movement reached every town and village and millions of people rose in open rebellion, the Empire began to shake. Gandhiji stood like a giant in command of the political storm. It was not however only a political storm. It was a moral and cultural storm that rose from the inmost depths of the soul of India. The power of non-violence came like a great sunrise of history. It is impossible in a foreword even to mention the many episodes in this non-violent revolution. It was clear as crystal that British rule must give way before the rising tide of the will of the people. For me and perhaps for innumerable others also this was at the same time the discovery of Gandhiji and our determination to follow him whatever the cost.



Gandhiji had two intimate personal Secretaries. They were Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal. No two people were more different and yet so utterly united in their devotion to Gandhiji. Mahadev Desai was a forthcoming personality. Pyarelal, on the contrary, was a withdrawing personality. But both were scholars given to deep study of subjects dear to the heart of their master. Gandhiji trusted them both implicitly and would entrust matters of importance for them to do. A comparison of the two Secretaries will yield profound knowledge of not only themselves but of Gandhiji and his circle. The Secretaries came to know almost every person of consequence in the Gandhian revolution. I have a feeling that they knew all the great men in India of the time, so much so that they could tell us a story or two about some of them!

If you met Pyarelal, you would know at once here was a scholar and thinker at the highest level. Pyarelal's great volumes of Gandhiji's biography will for all time give him a place among the great biographers in any country or language. It is interesting to contemplate that a biographer and the person whose biography he wrote will live together for all time. Every thought and every word spoken or written by Pyarelal was in the service of Gandhiji.

I personally knew Pyarelal. He was to me a very lovable person. If you could succeed in getting him to open his heart, you would see nothing there but devotion and love for Gandhiji. I am happy that there is a "Pyarelal Foundation for Gandhian Studies and Research". Nothing could be a better memorial to him. It would also be a sister's homage to her brother who was everything to her. Brother and sister will go down the pathways of centuries in every book or writing on Gandhiji. May their names not fade from our minds as long as we live.

G. RAMACHANDRAN



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It gives me great pleasure while presenting this volume to the readers, to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me in its preparation.

First of all, I would like to thank Shri G. Ramachandran, the veteran freedom fighter, for writing a foreword.

I am most grateful to Shri C. N. Patel, Shri Haridev Sharma, Shri Tarlok Singh and Prof. James Hunt for reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

My grateful thanks are due to Shri M. V. Desai for his editorial assistance.

I thank my colleagues in the office, Shri J.P. Uniyal who joined me in February 1989 when I was writing Part-II of this book, and has undertaken the necessary research and helped in preparing drafts, as well as checking references. I thank Shri Ashok Sengar as the typist and Smt. Vimla Khosla, our office assistant, for attending to all odd jobs and keeping the accounts. I also thank Shri Manilal Pathak for typing help and Shri Y. P. Sama for coordinating the work as a labour of love.

Shri Surindar Kumar is to be thanked for preparing the accounts for the Auditors and Lodha & Company for auditing them.

My most sincere thanks are due to the Indian Council of Social Science Research for their financial support, which has enabled me to carry on this project. It is a labour of love on my part, but the staff has to be paid and the ICSSR grant has enabled me to do so.

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 the book, which I hope will serve to introduce the most poignant chapter of our freedom struggle to the younger generation.

New Delhi  
25 December 1992

SUSHILA NAYAR



## INTRODUCTION

### 1

This volume, *Salt Satyagraha: The Watershed*, covers the period of roughly six and a half years from the latter part of 1925 to the beginning of 1932. It was the most momentous period of India's freedom struggle. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Salt Satyagraha demonstrated, for the first time, the effectiveness of non-violent suffering in bringing about a change of heart in the British people and the Government. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy during the Salt Satyagraha, was so deeply moved by the sufferings of the satyagrahis that he wrote to the Secretary of State saying that he could not turn India into a sepulchre and rule over it. Irwin was emphatic that the British Government had to come to terms with the Indian leaders. It made an impact on London and Gandhi-Irwin parleys followed. For the first time the representative of the King-Emperor, the Viceroy, met the representative of the people of India, Mahatma Gandhi, "the naked fakir", as Churchill called him, on equal terms. The resulting Delhi agreement led to Gandhiji's participation in the Second Round Table Conference as the sole representative of the Congress.

The Round Table Conference failed but Gandhiji met many leaders in England in all walks of life and removed many misconceptions about India's freedom movement. It was not Gandhiji who sought the interviews in London this time. It was the leadership at all levels, intellectuals, artists, writers, and public men including political leaders who came seeking interviews with Gandhiji. He had not gone to London as a supplicant. He had gone there to meet the people and the leaders and explain India's case to them and he did a very good job of it both in England and wherever he could go in Europe on his way back to India.





Willingdon, who succeeded Irwin as the Viceroy in India, tried to reverse the tide, but he could not and did not succeed in spite of letting loose repression in its full fury. The tide from then on was to continue to flow in the direction of Independence of India. India's freedom struggle continued to gain momentum, in spite of some ups and downs, till British rule came to an end in the subcontinent on 15 August 1947, 90 years after the first uprising of the Indian people in 1857. India, though vivisected and bleeding, was at last free.

2

Gandhiji was released from Yeravda prison following an appendectomy operation on 5 February 1924. The Congress had split into two groups while he had been in jail: the pro-changers or Swarajists, who favoured entry into the legislatures, and the no-changers, who stood by the fourfold boycott - boycott of law courts, boycott of legislatures, boycott of Government- run or aided schools and colleges and boycott of Government services. Gandhiji on his release tried to reunite the two factions, though his heart was with the no-changers.

The Belgaum Congress was held under Gandhiji's presidentship in the last week of December 1924. Unity of the Congress was the goal Gandhiji pursued with all his strength ever since his release from prison. A united Congress alone, he felt, could give an effective fight to the British Government. In the pursuit of unity Gandhiji decided to hand over the political reins of the Congress to the Swarajists while he and his devoted followers, the no-changers, concentrated on constructive work-promotion of spinning and khadi for economic relief of the semi-starved peasantry; moral uplift of the masses through the removal of untouchability; and prohibition of intoxicating drugs and drinks which would lead to their moral as well as economic uplift. National education was to be pursued in order to prepare the youth to work for the service of Mother India; and Hindu-



Muslim unity was to be sought through the practice of equal respect for all religions, and through the common pursuit of constructive work by both Hindus and Muslims.

The All-India Spinners Association (A.I.S.A.) was set up at the A.I.C.C. meeting held at Patna on 22 September 1925, with Gandhiji as Chairman, Shankarlal Banker as Secretary and Jamnalal Bajaj as Treasurer. Most of the prominent pro-changers from all over the country were made members of the Board of the A.I.S.A. Khadi production and sale were organized on a sound business-like basis and made commercially viable. The A.I.S.A. raised its own funds. All Congressmen were expected to help and promote constructive work, but a majority of them did not have their hearts in it.

Gandhiji transferred the responsibility for political work of the Congress to the Swarajists at the Patna meeting of the A.I.C.C. A resolution was passed at the same time recognizing the work of the constructive work organizations like the All-India Spinners Association as Congress work. Events from then on till January 1932, the period covered by this volume, take up 21 Volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* -Volumes XXVIII to XLVIII. It was a period of consolidation and preparation. The Lahore Congress in December 1929, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, declared Poorna Swaraj as the goal of the Congress, and sanctioned a mass civil disobedience movement, to be carried on under Gandhiji's leadership to secure it.

Gandhiji toured all over India after handing over political work to the Swarajists. Wherever he went, he addressed meetings and held dialogue with all sections of the people: women, students and teachers, Congressmen, constructive workers, factory labour, orthodox Hindus, social reformers and Christian missionaries. He



tried to carry to them the message of the Congress and convince them of the need for taking up constructive programme. The constructive programme was to prepare the nation for satyagraha. It was to serve as a means of training *satyagrahis*.

Gandhiji wanted the Congress to be a democratic organization, "but democracy must not be brag and bluster", he said, "a passport to receiving service from the people.... If *Vox populi* is to be *Vox dei*, it must be the voice of honesty, bravery, gentleness, humility and complete sacrifice."<sup>1</sup>

Gandhiji laid great emphasis on swadeshi and khaddar. He said, "There can be no Swaraj for an idle nation.... This idleness is a great disease." Poverty was a symptom of illness. The idle had to be provided with work. The charkha alone could do it without dislocating the villagefolk from their village homes<sup>2</sup>

For Gandhiji, the charkha had a much wider significance. He said, "Its message is one of simplicity, service of mankind, living so as not to hurt others (economy of non-exploitation), creating an indissoluble bond between the rich and the poor, labour and capital, prince and the peasant."<sup>3</sup>

The spirit of swadeshi had nothing exclusive or chauvinistic about it, Gandhiji told a students' meeting in Calcutta. It was a discriminating, conservative spirit which would retain all that was best in national life, in ancient tradition and, at the same time, absorb by assimilation - not by base imitation -all that was best in the modern world, all that was best in the West, so that from good they might grow to better and from better to still better.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhiji expected Hindu-Muslim unity to flow from absorption of the two communities in common constructive work. He advised both communities to settle matters of dispute, such as music before mosques and cow-slaughter, through mutual understanding without sacrificing principles.



Gandhiji did not believe in separation of religion and politics. Writing on cow protection, he stated:

I believe from its very nature religion embraces economic, political and other problems. Religion, which is opposed to true economics, is no religion, nor that which is opposed to true politics. Economics devoid of religion should be shunned and political power uninformed with the spirit of religion is Satanic.<sup>5</sup>

As for the removal of untouchability, Gandhiji believed mere propaganda did no good, if there was no solid work behind it to elevate the Panchama (untouchables). In a speech at Poona, he said that untouchability had made Indians untouchables in the whole world. To see the condition of untouchable Indians, they should go to South Africa, see, and realize what untouchability meant. Untouchability was not, could never be, an essential part of Hinduism. "I look upon it as an excrescence of Hinduism. It does not protect religion but suffocates it."<sup>6</sup>

To the teachers Gandhiji said:

Self-Government means continuous effort to be independent of Government control, whether it is foreign Government or whether it is national. Swaraj Government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every detail of life.<sup>7</sup>

On another occasion, he said:

Surely, swaraj will not drop from the clouds. It will be the fruit of patience, perseverance, ceaseless toil, courage and an intelligent appreciation of the environment.<sup>8</sup>

He wrote in Young India:



The people of Europe have no doubt political power but no Swaraj. Asian and African races are exploited by the ruling class or caste under the sacred name of democracy. At the root, therefore the disease appears to be the same as in India. The same remedy is, therefore, likely to be applicable. Shorn of all the camouflage, the exploitation of the masses of Europe is sustained by violence. <sup>9</sup>

There was growing appreciation of Gandhiji's point of view in Europe. Invitations came to him from several countries including China besides Western countries, but he was unable to tear himself away from India. He was able to get away only when he went to London for the Second Round Table Conference in 1931. He visited as many places then in Europe as he could on his way back to India.

## 4

The President-elect of the Congress held at Kanpur in December 1925 was Sarojini Naidu. Gandhiji was glad to hand over the Presidency to her. Even before that, after the A.I.C.C. meeting, held at Patna in September 1925, where it was decided that Sarojini Devi was to succeed him, he left all political planning to her. She was to do the political work in consultation with Motilal Nehru, while he himself concentrated on constructive work.

From January to December 1926 Gandhiji stayed at the Ashram for rest and spiritual and physical recuperation as also to attend to the affairs of the Ashram and the A.I.S.A. The meetings of the A.I.S.A. became as important and meaningful as those of the All-India Congress Committee.

Gandhiji did a great deal of writing in 1926. Besides answering voluminous correspondence, he wrote for *Young India*. He began writing his autobiography in Gujarati, one chapter a week, for *Navajivan*. An English translation by Mahadev Desai, and later by Pyarelal, was published in *Young India* of the following week.



He started in the last week of November 1925 and completed it on 3 February 1929.

He also gave discourses on the *Gita* from 24 February 1926 to January 1927. These were published under the title *Gita Bodh*. He translated the *Bhagavad Gita* into Gujarati, which was published under the title *Anasakti Yoga*.

Srinivasa Iyengar presided over the Congress at Gauhati in December 1926. Gandhiji went there but his heart was not in politics.

The Madras Congress held in December 1927 was presided over by Dr. M. A. Ansari. It passed a resolution advocating complete independence. Gandhiji, though present in Madras, did not attend the Congress session. He did not approve of the independence resolution that had been passed. He believed in doing more and speaking less, unlike the younger leaders who liked to make fiery speeches without calculating whether they had the strength to follow up their words with requisite action. Gandhiji's correspondence with Jawaharlal Nehru on the subject of the independence resolution brought out their differences. But Jawaharlal continued to accept Gandhiji's leadership.

The Madras Congress appointed a Constitution Committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru and entrusted it with the task of formation of a scheme in consultation with other parties.

Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, had thrown a challenge that if Indians did not like the reforms proposed by Britain, they should themselves produce a blueprint acceptable to all parties. The Committee produced a draft, which found wide public acceptance all over the country. But the dominant Muslim leadership rejected the Report.



In the meantime, the British Government had set up a Commission under Sir John Simon to review the working of the Government of India Act of 1919, even though it was not yet 10 years, the period stipulated in the 1919 Reforms Act for its review. The Simon Commission was an all- white commission. Indians felt insulted and outraged and all parties joined hands to boycott it. The lathi charges on anti-Simon Commission demonstrations did not spare even prominent leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Jawaharlal Nehru. Lalaji received lathi blows at Lahore. Soon afterwards he died.

Indians in general, and especially the Punjab youth, came to believe that the police had killed Lalaji. Two of them threw bombs in the Central Legislature and some youths organized the assassination of police officer Saunders who had led the attack on Lala Lajpat Rai. Many were arrested and tried under the Lahore Conspiracy Case, which dragged on and on and ultimately in 1930 resulted in death sentences being passed against Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev and long terms of imprisonment for many others. This generated anger and resentment all over the country.

In 1928, the peasants of Bardoli offered a very well organized Satyagraha under Vallabhbhai Patel's leadership, against enhancement of land revenue. The Bardoli Satyagraha ended in a spectacular victory for the satyagrahis and earned Vallabhbhai the title of Sardar. There was widespread demand that Sardar Patel should lead the Congress in 1928. But Gandhiji threw his weight behind Motilal Nehru, who took over the reins of the Congress in December 1928.

The Calcutta Congress of December 1928 accepted the report of the Nehru Committee, which had recommended Dominion Status. Jawaharlal Nehru as



Secretary of the Congress accepted the decision but was resentful and unhappy. Gandhiji brought about a compromise by moving an amendment that if the British Government did not concede Dominion Status within one year the Congress would opt for complete independence.

There was a persistent demand that Gandhiji should take up the leadership of the Congress and preside over the next Congress session in December 1929. But he refused to do so. Congressmen then pressed for the acceptance of the name of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as the next Congress President but Gandhiji was emphatic that Jawaharlal should take up the reins of the Congress in 1929. Gandhiji succeeded in his efforts and Jawaharlal took over as President of the Congress at Lahore from his father to the great joy and happiness of Motilal. The Lahore Congress, under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru passed the resolution declaring complete independence as the goal of the Congress on 31 December 1929, as a year had passed and Britain had not conceded Dominion Status to India.

## 7

The boycott of the Simon Commission had brought various political groups together, but the independence resolution passed by the Lahore Congress resulted in their falling apart once again. The Liberals, the Muslim League and the depressed classes were all opposed to Satyagraha. But the Congress as a united body stuck to the programme of Satyagraha under Gandhiji's leadership. Through his speeches and writings as well as through interviews and discussions Gandhiji prepared the country for the struggle. He toured extensively. By this time, the Swarajists had been sufficiently disillusioned with the legislative work. The Congress therefore stood united behind Gandhiji.





Gandhiji issued guidelines for the Satyagrahis. He also issued a notice to the Government in which he laid down 11 demands. The demands included prohibition, reduction of rupee-pound ratio from 1s 6d to 1s 4d, reduction of land revenue, reduction of military expenditure by 50%, reduction of salaries of high officers, abolition of the salt tax, protective tariff on foreign cloth, and discharge of all political prisoners except those convicted of murder. Gandhiji felt that these points, if conceded, would strengthen the workers and the movement.

Several leaders were not in favour of launching a movement because of violence in the air and labour strikes in many places, which could become violent. But Gandhiji said that the movement would generate power in the nation to enforce its will and a non-violent movement would stem the counter-violence of terrorists.

## 8

On 2 March 1930, Gandhiji sent a letter to the Viceroy through Reginald Reynolds, a visiting English Quaker, in which he called British rule a curse which had impoverished the dumb millions through a ruinously expensive military and civil administration. The Viceroy, he wrote, received a salary of Rs. 21,000 per month as against the British Prime Minister's salary of a little over Rs. 5,400. Gandhiji added that nothing but unadulterated non-violence, which would be expressed through Civil Disobedience, would check the violence of the British Government. He stated that he would begin by disregarding the provisions of the Salt Law.

The Viceroy regretted Gandhiji's decision.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was organizing the Gujarat farmers for Civil Disobedience. He was arrested on 7 March. There was a protest hartal in most towns in Gujarat. On 9 March, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* announcing his plan



of march to Dandi. On 12 March, Gandhiji started along with 78 satyagrahis at 6 a.m. from Sabarmati Ashram. Pyarelal walked behind Gandhiji with his own and his master's kit on his shoulder. Gandhiji addressed meetings en route. There was great enthusiasm.

Women workers were unhappy that they had not been permitted to offer active satyagraha involving disobedience of laws. He explained to them that he did not wish to give a chance to the British to say that they could not be too harsh on the satyagrahis as there were women in the group. He advised women to work for prohibition and khadi, picket liquor shops and foreign cloth shops and go hawking khaddar from door to door to promote its sale.

The satyagrahis, led by Gandhiji, covered the distance of 241 miles to Dandi in 25 days and reached Dandi on 5 April. Abbas Tyabji, his daughter Rehana Tyabji and Sarojini Naidu with a host of others were there to receive them.

Gandhiji broke Salt Laws on 6 April by picking up a pinch of salt. All over the country, Salt Satyagraha was now started with satyagrahis picking and making salt from seawater and selling it. They were arrested and their salt was confiscated. But Gandhiji was left alone.

9

On 18 April at Chittagong some armouries were raided by 50 desperate young men. Sentries were shot dead. Telephone and telegraph offices were attacked. Gandhiji condemned these acts. Government hit back by reviving the Bengal Ordinance.

In the N.W.F.P. on 22 April, a Congress Enquiry Committee, proceeding to Peshawar in connection with the Frontier Crimes Regulation Act, was disallowed entry. There were protest demonstrations in Peshawar. The leaders were



arrested. On 23 April, violence broke out. A vehicle was burnt and a motorcycle rider was killed. The authorities called the Army and firing was resorted to, which continued from 1 a.m. to 6 p.m. killing 70 and injuring over 100. There was resentment among soldiers. 1/18 Royal Garhwal Rifles refused to obey firing orders. They were court-martialled and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. The news was suppressed by the Government of India.

There were riots in Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan and Hazara. On 22 and 27 April, there were riots in Madras.

On 28 April, the Viceroy issued the Press Ordinance. Newspapers in Delhi and other places decided to suspend publication. Newspaper offices were raided.

10

On 4 May, Gandhiji gave notice to the Viceroy that he would be leading a raid on the Dharasana Salt Works. He was arrested in the night at 0045 hours on 5 May 1932 and taken to Yeravda.

The raid at Dharasana was led by Sarojini Naidu on 6 May. Faced by a solid wall of armed policemen, she and the other satyagrahis sat down on the burning sand in the hot sun. Some hours later, she was arrested.

After Mrs. Naidu's arrest, there was a brutal lathi charge on the satyagrahis and armed cavalry was made to charge through the crowd. Volunteers removed the wounded on stretchers. Women volunteers dressed their wounds and bandaged them. New satyagrahis took their places. This went on for hours. An American reporter, Webb Miller, found the scene most sickening. It shook the conscience of godfearing men, especially Englishmen. Gandhiji before his arrest had told foreign, correspondents, "I want world sympathy in this fight of right against might."



Defiance of the Salt Law continued. Picketing of liquor and foreign-cloth shops also continued. Government started occupying the camps of satyagrahis and confiscating their property. Kasturba's young daughter-in-law Nirmala Gandhi was thrown out of her house at Bardoli which she had cleaned up to receive her mother-in-law. The police did not let her pick up anything, not even her baby's feeding bottle. There were confiscations and imprisonments all over the country but the satyagrahis kept their vow of non-violence. The Navajivan Press property was also confiscated.

Gandhiji was in jail from 5 May 1930 to 26 January 1931. First Kaka Kalelkar was sent to keep him company. Later, on Kalelkar's release, Pyarelal was transferred to the European yard to take his place. Gandhiji gave discourses on the Ashram vows every Tuesday after prayers. These were sent to Narandas Gandhi and published under the title Mangal Prabhat. Maganlal had passed away on 23 April 1928. This had been a big blow for Gandhiji. His brothers Chhaganlal and Narandas had been trying to help Gandhiji run the Sabarmati Ashram, as best as they could, till it was disbanded.

The First Round Table Conference met in London on 12 November 1930 with 89 delegates, all nominees of the Government; 16 from British parties, 16 from the Indian States and 57 from British India. A Federal Structure Committee and nine sub-committees including those on Minorities, Franchise and Federal Structure, were set up. A federal bicameral legislature was proposed. Jinnah insisted on the settlement of the Minorities question before proceeding any further. He and Ambedkar claimed separate electorates for Muslims and depressed classes respectively. The Round Table Conference ended on 19 January 1931 without achieving anything. Ramsay MacDonald made a speech in which he emphasized



the importance of safeguards and wider representation of Indians in the next phase. He stood for Indian responsibility, federation and safeguards, he said.

In India repression, firing and lathi charges following the Salt Satyagraha, continued. Irwin, in his address to the Central Legislative Assembly on 17 January 1931 condemned Civil Disobedience but praised the spiritual force of Gandhiji.

There was by then some slackening of the tempo of civil disobedience. On 21 January the Working Committee of the Congress met at Allahabad. It refused to recognize the work done at the first Round Table Conference or to accept MacDonald's statement of 19 January.

On 25 January, the Viceroy ordered the release of Gandhiji and members of the Congress Working Committee. They were released on 26 January in the evening, Government thus making sure that they would not be able to take part in the 26 January demonstrations, the day having been declared as Independence Day by the Congress after the Lahore session. It had been so celebrated in 1930 all over India with great enthusiasm. The Government did not wish a similar or bigger demonstration in 1931 by the people along with their released leaders.

Gandhiji on his release protested against the continuing repression and demanded an enquiry into police and military atrocities. The Viceroy was unable to concede the demand.

12

On 6 February Motilal Nehru passed away. Prison hardships had shattered his health. He was a man who had taken pride in not praying to God. On the death-bed however he remembered and recited the *Gayatri Mantra*, records Pyarelal in *In Gandhiji's Mirror*. Jawaharlal was heart-broken. Gandhiji consoled him and virtually took his father's place.

The Congress leaders gathered at Allahabad, including Gandhiji, were contacted by Sapru, Srinivasa Sastri and Jayakar, who had shortly before returned from the



Round Table Conference. They had been favourably impressed by the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald's address of 19 January advocating wider representation of Indians in the Second Round Table Conference. They impressed on Gandhiji that the Government wanted a settlement. Gandhiji was persuaded to meet the Viceroy. He agreed, though the left-wing Congressmen saw no point in his doing so.

On 14 February 1931, Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy seeking an appointment. The leftists in the Congress and the Tories in England did not like this development. Gandhi-Irwin parleys started on 17 February and continued until 4 March. The Gandhi-Irwin agreement, also known as the Delhi agreement, was signed on 5 March at New Delhi. The Viceroy conceded that there was much force in Gandhiji's demand for enquiry into some of the police actions, but as the head of the Government he had certain compulsions and could not agree to set up an enquiry. Similarly, he did not agree to abolish the salt tax but agreed to give freedom to the people in certain villages to make salt for their own use and even for selling it on their own.

Irwin laid emphasis on three constitutional Principles: Federation, Indian responsibility, and Reservations and Safeguards. As for prisoners, he was willing to release those who had been non-violent, but not those who had indulged in acts of violence. Gandhiji's pleadings for amnesty and the release of Bhagat Singh and others like him in the interests of peace and winning over the younger generation, failed.

The Viceroy agreed to return the confiscated lands and property still in Government's possession. He did not give a categorical assurance to reinstate village officials who had resigned or had been dismissed. But in practice they were in most cases reinstated.



It was the cordiality of the talk more than anything else, which created mutual confidence and led to give and take on both sides. Civil Disobedience was discontinued and the Congress agreed to take part in the Second Round Table Conference. Jawaharlal Nehru was unhappy.

13

Gandhiji left for Gujarat and then went to Bombay. The Communists attacked the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

In February and March, there were communal riots in Kanpur in U.P. The veteran journalist Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, a true friend of both Muslims and Hindus, was murdered.

There were difficulties in the implementation of the Delhi Pact. The officials created problems at every step. To add to the difficulties, Irwin was replaced by Willingdon. In August 1931, the Labour Government in Britain was replaced by a Conservative-dominated coalition Government although Ramsay MacDonald continued as Prime Minister. Then in the election held in October 1931 the Tories won a landslide victory. This led to a reshuffle and changes in the composition of the Government. Diehard Tories dominated. Sir Samuel Hoare became Secretary of State for India. There was a change for the worse in the attitude of the new Government towards India.

The Karachi Congress met from 29 to 31 March 1931 under the presidentship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. In December 1930, the usual time of the Congress sessions, Gandhiji and the other leaders had been in jail and the Congress session therefore could not be held. Bhagat Singh was hanged shortly before the Karachi session and Gandhiji met hostile crowds with black flags en route to Karachi. He was grieved at Bhagat Singh's and Rajguru's execution, but he could not have broken off the negotiations on the issue of their release. They had been guilty of violence. Gandhiji could forgive it but the Viceroy could not do so.



The Karachi Congress endorsed the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and appointed Gandhiji as the sole representative of the Congress to the Round Table Conference. The goal of complete independence was reiterated at Karachi and a resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes, which came to be known as the 20-point programme, was passed.

There was uncertainty till the last minute whether Gandhiji would go to London. The exchange of correspondence with Willingdon was unsatisfactory. Gandhiji was ready to cancel his going to London. Willingdon became anxious and invited Gandhiji to meet him at Simla. Gandhiji went to Simla to meet the Viceroy and the meeting resulted in allaying some of the doubts and anxiety and led to Gandhiji sailing for London on s.s. *Rajputana* on 29 August along with Mirabehn, Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal and Devadas. He reached Folkestone and then London on 12 September. Gandhiji and party travelled by second class.

#### 14

For Gandhiji the Indian struggle had a wider moral significance, going far beyond the issue of mere political freedom. As he approached the shores of England, in a message to the *Evening Standard* he said: "If India gains her freedom through truth and non-violence, I feel convinced it will be the largest contribution of the age to the peace of the world."<sup>10</sup>

He elaborated the idea in a message to America saying "... the Indian Conference bears in its consequences not only upon India, but upon the whole world ... the world is sick unto death of blood spilling. The world is seeking a way out, and ... perhaps it will be the privilege of the ancient land of India to show that way out to the hungering world."<sup>11</sup>

Gandhiji addressed Indian students in London and told them: "I have known the English nature in its hideous form in the Punjab.... I am more concerned in preventing the brutalization of human nature than in preventing the suffering of





my own people... people who become brutalized... not only drag down themselves but mankind also."<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji did not wish to end the British connection, but to transform it. "What cannot two nations do - one handful, brave with a record for bravery perhaps unequalled ... and another a very ancient nation, counted in millions, with a glorious and ancient past, representing at the present moment two great cultures, the Islamic and Hindu cultures...?"<sup>13</sup> The idea of Britain and India cooperating on equal terms for the good of the world was a recurring theme with Gandhiji.

In London, he stayed at Kingsley Hall, in East End, among the poor with Muriel Lester and her co-workers and commuted from there to St. James' Palace every day to take part in deliberations of the Round Table Conference. An office had been set up at Knightsbridge where the rest of the party stayed. Mirabehn stayed with Gandhiji and commuted with him. She was in charge of his food.

Gandhiji had agreed to go to the Second Round Table Conference with great hesitation because in India he could see no sign of a real change of heart, or willingness to part with power on the part of the British Government. Within a week of coming to London, he was becoming impatient with the "hopeless uncertainty" about the Government's intentions.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhiji claimed that the Congress represented "in its essence the dumb, semi-starved millions" and all other interests, he asserted, would have to "subserve the interest of those dumb millions".<sup>15</sup> He therefore advocated adult suffrage and opposed statutory protection of any class interest except those of the two great minority communities, the Muslims and the Sikhs. Adult suffrage, he said, should satisfy "all the reasonable" aspirations of Muslims, Depressed Classes, Christians and also the working classes.<sup>16</sup>



He proposed a village-wise electoral college, which would permit personal contacts between the candidates and the voters.<sup>17</sup> His ideas unfortunately did not find favour with others at the Round Table Conference.

15

The Congress had evolved a scheme of joint electorates with reservations for Muslims and Sikhs and statutory guarantees for the protection of their religious rights. If this was not acceptable, the Congress agreed to accept any other solution acceptable to Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. This agreement did not materialize in London, and Muslims and some others left it to Ramsay MacDonald to give a decision. Gandhiji refused to join in the request because MacDonald would not be arbitrating as an individual but as the Prime Minister of Britain.

On the issue of separate electorates for the depressed classes, Gandhiji's stand was clear and firm. Such an arrangement "would divide the Hindu community into armed camps"<sup>18</sup> he said. Appreciating the psychological reasons for Ambedkar's demand, he felt that "the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgment". "Will untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity?" he asked. "I would rather," he added, "Hinduism died than that untouchability lived." "If I was the only person to resist this thing [separate electorates for untouchables]," he warned, "I would resist it with my life."<sup>19</sup> Fateful words, which were to put him to a severe test and endanger his life before long.

16

The Second Round Table Conference failed to produce any worth-while result. The communal problem was the main hurdle, it was said. But really speaking it was the reluctance of the British Government to part with power which led to its failure.



Gandhiji was, however, able to meet many people in many walks of life and win many hearts in England as well as in Europe. Even the mill workers of Lancashire, who were out of work because of the boycott of foreign cloth, came to love him. He used his week-ends to pay visits to as many places and meet as many people as he could. He addressed many groups of peace workers and others.

Gandhiji left London on 5 December. Two detectives, assigned to watch over his security in London, accompanied him on his way back up to Brindisi. He went to Switzerland to meet Romain Rolland and his sister Madeleine. Edmond Privat and his wife, both peace workers, came to India with him. In France, as in England, he met many intellectuals and political leaders.

In Italy he met Mussolini and visited the Vatican. He was so deeply moved when he saw the famous pieta, (the statue of Christ being taken off the Cross and placed on his mother's lap) that he stood gazing at it for a few minutes.

He was not allowed to visit Egypt by trickery - giving him wrong information that the ship would not halt at Suez where it actually did stop. The Captain expressed his helplessness. He reached Bombay on 28 December.

In India, the situation was bleak. Jawaharlal and many others were already in jail. Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy, who refused to meet him. Civil Disobedience was revived. Gandhiji was arrested at Mani Bhawan in the night on 4 January 1932, and was taken to Yeravda. The hopes raised by the Gandhi-Irwin agreement came to naught. Indians would have to make more sacrifices on the altar of freedom before they could attain it.



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PART I  
THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM



## CHAPTER I

### SEARCH FOR A NEW STRATEGY

#### 1

Gandhiji was released from prison on 5 February 1924 though he stayed on in the hospital voluntarily till 10 March when he moved to Juhu in Bombay.

Some leaders had been meeting him in the hospital and he had started consultations and discussion on various subjects of national importance. This process was continued in Juhu.

At the time of Gandhiji's arrest, there was great enthusiasm for civil disobedience. Hindu-Muslim unity was at its peak and the Congress and the Muslim League were unitedly working for Swaraj, Khilafat and redress of the Punjab wrongs. The picture was completely changed by the time he came out of jail. Khilafat was no longer an issue, with Turkey having undergone political changes under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Pasha. Hindu-Muslim unity was in shambles with communal riots breaking out in many places. The Congress itself had split and there were pro-changers who wished to enter the legislatures as a step towards Swaraj and the no-changers who stood by the boycott and constructive work programme of 1922. Both the pro-changers, or Swarajists, and the no-changers expected Gandhiji to guide them and give them his support, even though everyone knew that his heart was with the no-changers.

Gandhiji was essentially a religious man. His devotion to truth and his constant endeavour to practise the Truth as he saw it, had given him an amazing capacity for clear thinking and a clear sight which enabled him to see what was in the minds of the opponents whom he negotiated with. It earned him the reputation of being a wise statesman.



Gandhiji had his finger on the pulse of the people. His ahimsa and love for the people enabled him to judge how far they could follow him on the path of self-suffering and sacrifice, which was the essence of India's non-violent struggle for freedom. He knew instinctively when it was time to halt and give them time to recuperate and rebuild their moral and physical resources. This he did by withdrawing the struggle and asking people to concentrate on the constructive programme. It prepared them to plunge into the next struggle with renewed fervour when he gave the call. Each successive struggle thus came to be marked by greater and greater popular participation.

After his release from prison in 1924, Gandhiji gave all his time to rebuilding national unity, cleansing of Hindu society by removal of untouchability, helping the economically deprived through the spinning- wheel and khadi and improving the social, moral, material and physical health of society in general by popularizing prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs. He was preparing the nation for a long non-violent civil disobedience struggle.

In the first few months, after he came out of jail, Gandhiji felt that he could best reorganize and reunite the two principal warring factions of the Congress and at the same time prepare the masses for the struggle that must come by tightening the screws on the Swarajists, by making them see the folly and futility of the Councils and bringing them back into the fold of constructive work. But he soon realized that he had underrated the Swarajists' resistance and tenacity.

With the flames of communal disturbances rising higher and higher in the country and the Government intensifying its attack against a divided Congress, with the Swarajists being the chief butt of the oppression that was being unleashed through the various ordinances, Gandhiji realized that the paramount task was to bring about the unity of the Congress, even if it had to be done on the terms of





the Swarajists. This he achieved through a series of steps: the Calcutta Pact,<sup>1</sup> its ratification<sup>2</sup> at Belgaum and then finally by practically handing over the Congress to the Swarajists at the A.I.C.C. meeting at Patna on 22 September 1925.<sup>3</sup> For khadi work the A.I.S.A. was set up by the Congress.<sup>4</sup> It had its own constitution and its own funds. The main activity of the Congress became political, centred in legislative work.

Gandhiji kept himself free to concentrate on the four items of constructive work: khadi, prohibition, anti-untouchability work and Hindu-Muslim unity. The Swarajists promised him cooperation and help. They now represented the Congress.

## 2

The mid-twenties were a period marked by apparent slowing down of the national movement for freedom. It was a period of preparation and realignment of forces. The tide of popular enthusiasm and popular action, which rose in 1919 and touched its highest point in 1920-21, had by 1925 all but spent itself. Gandhiji noted:

Many things were done in 1921- that year of excitement, intoxication and hope. The intoxication having subsided, depression has followed as a matter of course.<sup>5</sup>

Hindu-Muslim unity, which had been the most prominent feature of the Non-cooperation movement, now lay in ruins. In its place, there was communal distrust, deep and widespread. It sporadically manifested itself in communal riots in many places across the entire North India. Gandhiji's 21-day fast for communal unity, undertaken in September-October 1924, stemmed the rot for a time, but the respite was short-lived. Mutual animosity and ill will between the communities steadily hardened and all attempts by the leadership, including



those of the sub-committee formed by the Bombay All-Parties Conference to formulate a scheme of communal representation that would satisfy the Muslim leadership, ended in nothing. Gandhiji, though an ardent believer in Hindu-Muslim unity, which he was convinced was bound to come sooner or later, gave up his efforts. Again and again he said in his speeches and in talks with individuals, that on the Hindu-Muslim question his voice was a voice in the wilderness, that no one listened to him, and that therefore all he could do was to pray.<sup>6</sup>

In *Navajivan*, he wrote:

If fate has decreed that we should fight a few battles among ourselves, let us. This will not be the first instance of such fighting in the annals the world. Brothers sometimes fight with one another, but unite again.<sup>7</sup>

As regards khadi activity, the enthusiasm for which had been at its peak during the Non-cooperation days it suffered a marked decline among Congressmen during the two years of Gandhiji's incarceration. This was in spite of the efforts of no-changers, such as C. Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Jamnalal Bajaj, who worked indefatigably to develop khadi along scientific lines and made a success of it. Khadi gained in popularity among the people and achieved commercial success, but most Congressmen were indifferent to it. Gandhiji had hoped that the Calcutta Pact with the Swarajists, which gave them authority to carry on political activities in the Councils on behalf of the Congress while at the same time securing their agreement to the yarn franchise, would give a boost to the khadi programme within the Congress. It proved a vain hope. According to the report of the general secretaries for the year 1925 submitted to the A.I.C.C., the maximum monthly figures for yarn subscription for membership for the various provinces were as follows: Ajmer 19, Andhra 2,678, Assam 376, Bihar 1,539, Bengal 3,169, Berar 222, Burma 93, C.P. (Hindustani) 307, C.P.



(Marathi) 911, Bombay 544, Delhi 258, Gujarat 1,853, Karnataka 1,124, Kerala 174, Maharashtra 700, Punjab 321, Sind 212, Tamil Nadu 2,250, U.P. 1,443, Utkal 146. The total maximum membership was 18,339 <sup>8</sup>

That is not to say that khadi activity in the country as a whole was on the decline. Indeed, it was looking up. For the hard core of constructive workers, the so-called no-changers, had doggedly kept it up. In Bengal, for instance, Dr. Prafulla Ghosh was tirelessly going about all over the province, popularizing khadi by lectures and by hawking. He had given up a lucrative job and had chosen to live on no more than Rs. 30 a month. Gandhiji wrote:

It is a sign of the times that some of the most cultured people are at the present moment engaged in khadi work, with a selflessness reminding one of the old traditions of this land when national or religious service was rendered for the love of it.<sup>9</sup>

Gandhiji noted that there were many youths of great ability and education in several organizations in Bengal and outside Bengal who had made khadi their principal if not sole occupation and who were doing khadi work for a mere pittance. Commenting on the report of the All-India Spinners' Association, he wrote:

More khadi is being manufactured today than in 1921, more charkhas are plying than before, their output is larger, and the quality of khadi manufactured is superior to what it was four years ago. The work has become more systematized and better organized. <sup>10</sup>

The heart of Congressmen in general however was on political and constitutional changes that would widen the areas of autonomy in the provinces and at the



Centre and the approaching elections in 1926. The feeling grew that, with non-cooperation no longer holding the field, khadi and constructive activity in general could not be the whole of the Congress programme. Khadi could not bring freedom, it could at best help.

At the A.I.C.C. meeting at Patna in September 1925, in spite of the fact that the Swarajists were in a majority, an amendment was passed requiring all Congressmen to be habitual wearers of khadi. The Swarajist leadership was shocked. Sen Gupta said the Maharashtra members would have great difficulty in falling in with the requirement. Motilal Nehru, too, thought there would be difficulties in enforcing the requirement. Gandhiji went all out to accommodate them. He asked for a second vote. The amendment was defeated.<sup>11</sup>

Council-entry, whether with "constant, continuous and uniform obstruction" or "responsive cooperation" on its agenda, had been accepted by the Congress as the main plank in its political programme. But it was not Gandhiji's programme. He wrote:

I do not support going into the Councils. But I claim to be a practical man. I do not blind my eyes and refuse to see facts that stare me in the face. I recognize that some of my best friends and co-workers who sailed in the same vessel with me in 1920-21 have gone off the vessel and altered their course.... Council-entry being a fact which I cannot alter, I have had no hesitation in tendering to my colleagues the Swarajists such help as it is possible for me to give....<sup>12</sup>

In a press statement later at the time of the Kanpur Congress where Sarojini Naidu succeeded him as President, Gandhiji said his position was to remain passive and do the constructive work, leaving the working out of the resolution of the Congress entirely in the hands of the Swarajists unhampered by him and even aided by him wherever it was possible.<sup>13</sup> Gandhiji continued to adhere to



his position with regard to the utility of the Councils.' He wrote some time later to Srinivasa Iyengar:

The more I study the Councils' work, the effect of entry into the Councils upon public life, its repercussions upon the Hindu-Muslims question, the more convinced I become not only of the futility but of the inadvisability of Council-entry. I would welcome the day when at least a few of the comrades of 1920 leave the Councils to their fate and work if they like at the charkha programme or any other thing they wish. I have not a shadow of doubt that they will be the reserve force ready for mobilization when the time for battle comes. <sup>14</sup>

4

Gandhiji had gone on with the gruelling Bengal tour from May to the end of August 1925, first in the east and then in the west of the province. The tour was to propagate spinning and khadi and to collect funds for supporting khadi activity. After the demise of Deshbandhu C. R. Das in June, he had set up an All-India Deshbandhu Das Memorial Fund and asked for donations. The money was to be used for furtherance of the spinning- wheel. Rabindranath Tagore and Madan Mohan Malaviya, neither of them a khadi enthusiast, were happy to put their signatures to the appeal for funds. Gandhiji said he wanted ten lakh rupees for the fund.

In September 1925, after a short dash to Bombay and Ahmedabad, Gandhiji took up the tour of Bihar, covering Purulia, Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Patna-where he spent ten days before, during and after the A.I.C.C. meeting and Bhagalpur. He still had U.P., Maharashtra and Cutch on the schedule. He had been touring incessantly for one full year, following his 21-days' fast in 1924 and he was totally exhausted. Though there was nothing organically wrong with him, his tired limbs needed



rest. He could not go on putting up endlessly with the shouts of thousands of men however loving and full of admiration. From 15 October, therefore, Rajendra Babu absolved him from the Bihar tour, and he proposed drastically to cut down upon the tour schedule in U.P., Maharashtra and Cutch.<sup>15</sup>

From 16 to 18 October Gandhiji was in U.P., where he addressed meetings at Benares, Ballia, Lucknow and Sitapur. In Sitapur he attended a meeting of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and participated in the U.P. Political conference. He also addressed a meeting of the untouchables.

On the Cutch tour, which commenced on 21 October, Gandhiji was accompanied by Mahadev Desai and a few other co-workers. This was the first time Gandhiji was setting foot in Cutch.

At the public meeting at Bhuj, the capital of the State, on 22 October, the address of welcome presented to Gandhiji commended his efforts for the uplift of untouchables and assured him that the public of Cutch shared his views in that regard. But where were the untouchables? Gandhiji looked round and observed that the untouchables had been seated at the back of the compound in a corner fenced round with ropes. Rising to speak Gandhiji said:

In the address you have presented to me, you have said that you are doing your duty towards the untouchables. I had hoped that at least at a meeting to which I was invited, there would be nothing to separate the untouchables from the rest. But I observe that you have separated them here. That being so, I have decided that my place is among the untouchables. For I have been saying day in and day out that I consider myself a Bhangi. The position I have taken up does not betray false pride, or ignorance or western influence. I have made the claim from a desire to serve.



..... If therefore contact with me causes you hurt, you must renounce contact with me.... In this, there will be no disrespect to me. But if you invite me and then insult the untouchables it will be disrespect shown to me. . . . I would not stay a moment in a place where untouchables are insulted. You have in your address praised my satyagraha. I want to give you an object lesson in satyagraha. Either you allow the untouchables to approach me or seat me among the untouchables....

If you let the untouchables come near you will be doing a meritorious deed, not committing sin, you will be purifying Hinduism, not desecrating it.

But the audience did not appear to be in the mood to let the untouchables mix with the rest. Gandhiji said:

The majority being on your side has not hurt me, and has certainly not made me angry. Now let everyone remain where he is; I alone will go over to that side and take my seat there, for I have a special duty in this place and on this occasion.

He then went and sat amidst the untouchables, from where he addressed the gathering.<sup>16</sup>

Gandhiji asked those organizing public meetings for him to announce beforehand that untouchables would not be separated from the rest of the audience at any meeting but there would be a separate enclosure for those who did not want to mix with the untouchables.

But this was not the end of the matter. As soon as word spread that untouchables would be seated with caste Hindus at meetings organized for Gandhiji, a storm broke. At a meeting at Mundra Gandhiji said:



As soon as the report reached the people of Mundra, they sent a telegram to the secretary of the reception committee enquiring whether the latter was indulging in any undesirable mixing of persons.... The telegram that you sent broke the bounds of propriety.... It is an insult to invite me to a place where the untouchables are treated with nothing but contempt.<sup>17</sup>

Gandhiji's Cutch tour lasted from 21 October to 3 November 1925. He spoke, during this period, at crowded meetings in Bhuj, Mandvi, Kotda, Kothara, Veenjhan, Naranpur, Dumrao, Goghra, Khakhar, Bhujpar, Mundra, Kero, Kokva, Anjar and Tuni. There being few motorable roads, Gandhiji's party had to wade through quantities of sand and dust.<sup>18</sup>

5

Rabindranath Tagore had not been too happy with Gandhiji's emphasis on the charkha and spinning and gave expression to his misgivings in an article "The Cult of the Charkha" published in the Modern Review of September 1925. Tagore wrote:

Our *shastras* tell us that the divine *shakti* is many-sided, so that a host of different factors operate in the work of creation. In death, these merge into sameness; for chaos alone is uniform.... It is God's purpose that in the societies of man the various should be strung together into a garland of unity; while often the moral providence of our public life, greedy for particular results, seeks to knead them all into a lump of uniformity. That is why we see in the concerns of this world . . . so many marionettes pulled by the same string....

In our country, this ominous process of being levelled down into sameness has long been at work.





. . . Nothing is more wonderful to me than Mahatmaji's great moral personality. In him divine Providence has given us a burning thunderbolt of *shakti*. May this *shakti* give power to India, --- not overwhelm her, ---- that is my prayer! ....

How often have my personal feelings of regard strongly urged me to accept at Mahatma Gandhi's hands my enlistment as a follower of the charkha cult; but as often have my reason and conscience restrained me, lest I should be a party to the raising of the charkha to a higher place than is its due, thereby distracting attention from other more important factors in our task of all-round reconstitution....

Gandhiji, answering "Sir Rabindranath", wrote that the Poet's criticism of the charkha was "a poetic licence" which need not be taken literally. The charkha, Gandhiji asserted, did not make for "a death-like sameness" as Tagore feared. "The truth is," he wrote, "that the charkha is intended to realize the essential and living oneness of interest among India's myriads. Behind the magnificent and kaleidoscopic variety, one discovers in nature a unity of purpose, design and form which is equally unmistakable." He continued.

The idea of sameness or oneness was carried by Shankara to its utmost logical and natural limit and he explained that there was only one truth, one *God-Brahman*-and all form, *nam, rupa* was illusion or illusory, evanescent. We need not debate whether what we see is unreal; and whether the real behind the unreality is what we do not see. Let both be equally real if you will. All I say is that there is a sameness, identity or oneness behind the multiplicity and variety. And so do I hold that behind a variety of occupations there is an indispensable sameness also of occupation.<sup>19</sup>



This little passage forms one of the most succinct statements of Gandhiji's metaphysical position. The sameness of substance behind the multiplicity of forms was a paramount presupposition to which Gandhiji tenaciously clung. Here there was no dichotomy of the real and the unreal, the noumenon and the phenomenon, as in Kant. Both form and substance partook of reality in equal measure. The relative was not antithetical to the absolute. It was the way the absolute was manifested and could be comprehended. Philosophers, using logic, posed the problem in terms of "either-or". Either this or that. Gandhiji posited in its place "this as also that". He wrote:

I am an *advaitist* and yet can support *dvaitism* (dualism). The world is changing every moment, and is, therefore, unreal, it has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing it has something about it which persists and it is, therefore, to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *anekantavadi* or *syadvadi*.... I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his standpoint and a Christian from his.<sup>20</sup>

But why did the Poet come down so heavily upon the charkha? Gandhiji wondered whether it was jealousy that prompted the criticism. He dismissed the idea, for he could not see Tagore as a rival.

Ramanand Chatterjea took strong exception to Gandhiji's allusion to jealousy on the part of Tagore and his being called "Sir Rabindranath" and he expressed himself strongly in the *Modern Review*.

Gandhiji explained that the title had not been used in ignorance. He knew that the Poet had not renounced the title but had asked to be relieved of it. He had not been so relieved.\*



Therefore, in consultation with Andrews Gandhiji had come to the conclusion that the title not having been taken away, it would be courteous to make use of the title now and then.

As to jealousy, Gandhiji said he had referred to it because "not one but several Bengali friends and some Gujarati friends and even others mentioned the matter in that light."<sup>22</sup>

The ambivalence of Tagore's attitude towards Gandhiji and his programme, notwithstanding the great respect in which these two great sons of India held each other, was a widely noticed thing, especially as Tagore never made any secret of it. Here is a noting made by Romain Rolland in his diary:

*18-19 February 1925. Visited by L. K. Elmhirst, Tagore's companion in China and Buenos Aires.... L. Elmhirst ... speaks of them [Gandhiji's policies] ... (following his master) with obvious hostility and little understanding. The thinker who does not act finds it easy to point out discrepancies ... between the doctrine and the actions of a man who has the responsibility for 300,000,000 men.... One senses at the bottom of this the invincible antipathy between the free mind in love with all forms of life (and with a fair dose of dilettantism) and the puritan who imposes rules of mortification, asceticism and harsh disciplines on his disciples.... Gandhi's indifference to suffering--to his own as to that of others ... revolts Tagore to the point of injustice. It seems that he refuses to recognize its moral grandeur.*<sup>23</sup>

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\* Following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre Tagore wrote to the Viceroy:



The enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has with acute shock revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India....

. . . The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruent context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.

The Secretary of State, to whom the letter was forwarded, decided that nothing should be done, and the P. S. to the Viceroy wrote to Tagore:

His Excellency is unable to relieve you of your knighthood, and in the circumstances of the case, he does not propose to make any recommendation on the subject to His Majesty the King-Emperor.<sup>21</sup>

Another entry in Rolland's diary, under 21-29 June 1926 mentions Tagore's visit at which he spoke of his differences with Gandhiji. In the Khilafat matter, in Tagore's view, Gandhiji acted not for the unity of India but for the pride and force of Islam, factors which were responsible for the Hindu-Muslim disturbances which took place later.

Tagore took exception to Gandhiji's description of foreign cloth as "impure", a term carrying a religious flavour, and called it "idolatrous". Gandhiji, according to Tagore, said that he believed in idolatry for the people of India.<sup>24</sup>,

Arriving at Sabarmati on 6 November 1925 Gandhiji in an interview to the press elucidated his position vis-a-vis the Congress:



My mind is a perfect blank as to what I shall do in the Congress, except that wherever possible, I shall assist the Swarajists in accordance with my promise, but the Congress programme will have to be framed by Mrs. Sarojini Devi in consultation 'with Pandit Motilalji. <sup>25</sup>

Gandhiji saw no reason why the Liberals and the Independents should not now join the Congress and convert the Swarajists to their view. With the chief thrust of the Congress activity now being directed towards the Councils, and the yarn franchise having been made optional, there indeed appeared to be no valid reason why those who had left the Congress because of their dislike of non-cooperation should not now return to it and join their voice to that of the Swarajists in the national cause.

Very early after his return to Sabarmati, on 24 November to be precise, Gandhiji felt called upon to undertake a seven-day fast. It was necessitated, he wrote to correspondents, because many boys at the Ashram had been guilty of irregularities. As Gandhiji saw it, it was "the lightest fast", a mere nothing, and it was possible he might feel even physically the better for it in the end. Throughout the fast Gandhiji continued to perform his routine duties: he wrote for Young India and Navajivan and attended to his correspondence. On 30 November, the sixth day of the fast, he wrote:

But the public will have to neglect my fasts and cease to worry about them. They are a part of my being. I can as well do without my eyes, for instance, as I can without fasts. What the eyes are for the outer world, fasts are for the inner....

Well, this fast has nothing to do with the public.... There are grown-up men and women in the Ashram. There are boys and girls. The latter are trained to remain unmarried as long as possible.... If I am to deserve the



implicit trust of friends who support it (the Ashram) I must be doubly vigilant.... I discovered errors among the boys and somewhat among the girls. I know that hardly a school or any other institution is free from the errors I am referring to. It was not permissible to punish the boys.... Therefore, I could do no less to bring the youngsters to a sense of their error. So far the results seem to be promising.<sup>26</sup>

On 1 December, before breaking the fast, Gandhiji spoke to the boys. He told them that there had been three ways open to him: punishment, indifference and love. He had rejected the first two and chosen the way of love to deal with the situation. He went on:

You must have noticed that I receive my inspiration on such occasions from the hymn *Vaishnavajana to tene kahiye*. That hymn is enough to sustain me, even if I were to forget the Bhagavad Gita. To tell you the truth, however, there is one thing which is even simpler, but which may possibly be difficult for you to understand. But that has been my pole star all along during life's journey - the conviction that Truth is God and untruth is a denial of Him.<sup>27</sup>

After breaking the fast Gandhiji announced in a press statement that he was feeling perfectly well and that he hoped soon to regain the lost weight and vitality.<sup>28</sup> The loss of weight during the seven days of fasting had been nine pounds. In seven days after breaking the fast Gandhiji had regained over six pounds.<sup>29</sup>

Gandhiji spoke at various national educational institutions, including the Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad, where he delivered the convocation address on 5 December 1925. Commenting on the state of national education in the columns of *Young India*, he wrote:



There can be no doubt that national institutions are just now not popular. They cannot boast handsome and expensive buildings or furniture. They cannot boast highly paid teachers and professors. Nor can they claim continuity of tradition or method....

The so-called unattractiveness is, however, not the sole reason for the unpopularity of these institutions.... The boys have gone in for calculation and not knowing that patriotism is not a matter of mathematical calculation, have arrived at wrong conclusions and given preference to Government schools and colleges. No fault of theirs. Everything around us has been reduced to terms of commerce and bargain. It is too much to expect boys and girls to rise above the surrounding atmosphere.<sup>30</sup>

But this decline in national education as in other things left Gandhiji unaffected. It was his view that in spite of the fall in their standards the national educational institutions were "so many oases in the desert of our hopes and aspirations" out of which would rise the nation of the future. They were already supplying to the country the largest number of unpaid or poorly paid silent workers. There were to be found in every part of the country non-cooperating young men and even girls, who were devoting all their powers to the service of the motherland without the slightest expectation of reward.

## 7

An important issue that engaged the thoughts of the national leaders, including Gandhiji, concerned Indians settled in South Africa.

The racist regime in South Africa had been trying all its tricks to make the Indian traders and professional men leave South Africa. In 1924 Smuts had brought forward a Class Areas Bill (to which reference has been made in the preceding volume) which provided for commercial and residential segregation of Indians in



municipal areas throughout South Africa. Because of the general elections that ensued, and the defeat of Smuts and his party, the Bill lapsed. Hertzog, his successor, said he would not proceed with the Class Areas Bill but would try to achieve the same goal by other means. His Government accordingly introduced in the Union Parliament a Mines and Works Act Amendment Bill. The Bill was aimed at restricting the employment of Asiatics and Africans in certain occupations. Indians and Africans were not allowed to put their case before the Select Committee. The Bill was passed by the Union Assembly. The Senate, where General. Smuts had a majority, however threw out the Bill.

Hertzog's Government thereupon devised another measure and in July introduced it in the Union Parliament. This was the so-called Areas Reservation and Immigration and Registration (Further Provision) Bill. The provisions of the Bill constituted the most ruthless attack upon the status the Indians had so far enjoyed in the Union. In Natal and the Cape, for instance, Indians were free to buy, sell or lease property. But the Bill now provided that areas would be set apart in towns and cities where alone Indians would be able to buy and sell land, to reside and to trade. The Bill further provided that the Governor General could proclaim that no Indian could buy or sell land except within 30 miles of the coast. Indians owning properties elsewhere would be debarred from continuing to own those properties upon completion of their leases. The effect of these clauses would be to cripple the life and trade of the Indian community.

There were other obnoxious provisions in the Bill by which the Government sought to invest itself with powers to declare any Indian as a prohibited immigrant. Two districts of Natal, which had large populations of Indians, namely Utrecht and Vryheid, were sought to be reverted to the Transvaal, the intention being to declare the Indians residing there as prohibited immigrants under what was known as the "Deeming Order". The Bill was to be retrospective in effect, to





be brought into force from the last day of August 1925, irrespective of when it was finally passed.

Amod Bhayat, a leader of the South African Indian Congress, cabled to the press in India and to Gandhiji and other national leaders summaries of the Bill and sought their help in having it disallowed.

The Bill, he declared, was disastrous to Indian interests and a deliberate violation of the Gandhi-Smuts agreement of 1914, which recognized vested interests; that its ultimate aim was to drive Indians out of South Africa.

Malan himself while introducing the Bill on 23 July 1925 had admitted that the Bill went "a good deal further" in dealing not only with residential and commercial segregation but also land ownership.<sup>31</sup>

In India intense indignation was voiced against this latest outrage. On a call given by Sarojini Naidu, President-elect of the Congress, a countrywide hartal was observed on 11 October. Meetings were held and resolutions passed supporting the cause of the South African Indians.

The Government of India found it impossible to ignore public sentiment. They entered into correspondence with the Union Government of South Africa and suggested a conference to discuss a general policy to be adopted towards the Indians. The Union Government rejected the request. If there was to be a conference, they said, it should confine itself to discussing ways to reduce the Indian population in South Africa. They however agreed to receive a Government of India deputation, but they insisted that it should confine itself to collecting information on the condition of the Indian settlers.

The deputation, consisting of G. F. Paddison, Labour Commissioner, Madras, Raza Ali and G. S. Bajpai sailed for South Africa on 25 November 1925.



About the same time, a deputation of the South African Indian Congress also proceeded to India to put their case before the Indian people and the Government of India. The deputation, headed by Dr. Abdur Rahman, sailed for India on 23 November, landing in Bombay on 12 December. The deputation called on Gandhiji at Wardha on 17 December and then made its way to Calcutta where it waited upon the Viceroy on 19 December.

In the memorandum submitted to the Viceroy the deputation made the point that the Areas Reservation and Immigration and Registration (Further Provision) Bill, sought to be pushed through the Union Parliament, was pure "class legislation", intended to be administered solely against Indians, with other non-Europeans, such as Cape Coloureds, Natives, Malays, Mauritian Creoles, being exempted from its operation. Further, it was aimed at driving out the Indians from South Africa. The memorandum quoted from the speech of the Minister, while introducing the Bill, "that the Bill frankly starts from the general supposition that the Indian as a race in this country is an alien element in the population, and that no solution of this question will be acceptable to the country unless it results in a very considerable reduction of the Indian population in this country." The deputation stated that the principle of compulsory segregation for trading and residential purposes, which was distinctly laid down in the Bill, was one, which the Indian community could not accept. The tightening up of the immigration laws, the interference with the trading rights, further restrictions on owning land and acquiring leases and the utter disregard of the vested rights would crush the Indians and cause their financial ruin.

The memorandum urged the Viceroy to secure the Union Government's consent to a round table conference. In the event of the Union Government not acceding to the demand the Viceroy was requested to secure the King- Emperor's



disallowance of the Bill in terms of Section 65 of the South Africa Act, and failing that take the matter to the League of Nations to which the Government of India was a signatory.

Lord Reading in his answer to the deputation expressed full sympathy of the Government of India for the cause of the South African Indians. They had, he said, observed with apprehension that, in introducing the Bill, Indians had been described as an alien element in the population of the Dominion. The Government of India had made suggestions and representations and would continue to do so. South Africa, however, was a Dominion. Its parliament had full powers of legislation regarding its internal affairs. That position must be respected. The Government of India recognized that, especially in view of the fact that Indians in South Africa had no franchise, they had a special responsibility towards the Indians. He assured the deputation that on the return of the Paddison deputation the Government would formulate fresh proposals to which the Union Government might be disposed to agree.<sup>32</sup>

Voicing his concern Gandhiji wrote:

For the Indian settlers it is a question of life and death. The Union Government [of South Africa] seem to be determined to put an end to Indian existence in South Africa, not by straightforward means of forcible expulsion, but by dishonest process of squeezing.<sup>33</sup>

Gandhiji said he expected a great deal from the presence of Andrews in South Africa and urged the Government of India deputation not to yield on fundamentals. In the end, he felt, the South African Indians would have to depend on their own determined effort for the amelioration of their condition. India of course must do all it could.<sup>34</sup>



Early in October, Sarojini Naidu had been elected to preside at the fortieth session of the Congress to be held at Kanpur. It was the first time that an Indian woman had been elected Congress President. Gandhiji was very happy. He wrote:

Her election will give great satisfaction to our countrymen across the seas and give them courage to fight the battle that is in front of them. May her occupancy of the highest office in the gift of the nation result in freedom coming nearer to us.<sup>35</sup>

On 20 December, he wrote to her:

This is my last letter to you before we meet at Kanpur where a mere woman displaces a mere man. May your words come out of purity, may you adorn Indian womanhood and Hinduism. May your words be as balm to the Hindu-Muslim wound.<sup>36</sup>

The Congress duly opened on 26 December, 1925, and, after a minor fracas involving some 60 persons from Ajmer-Merwara whose status as delegates was not recognized by the Reception Committee but who nevertheless tried vainly to force their way in, settled down to its deliberations.

Sarojini Naidu, the President, delivered her address *ex tempore*, and hardly consulted the printed speech. She spoke for over an hour. In the shortest speech ever delivered by a Congress President, she covered most of the issues that agitated Congressmen.

She referred first to non-cooperation, that "gospel of sacrifice enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi", and said:

Whatever may be the verdict of history it cannot be gainsaid that the movement of non-violent non-cooperation that swept like a tempest over



the country shook the very foundations of our national life, and though today it is quiescent and its echoes are almost still, it has irrevocably changed the aspect of our spiritual landscape.

She asked the Congress to formulate a practical scheme of village reconstruction, take up the task of organizing industrial workers and remould the system of education and to "recreate our educational ideals so as to combine ... all the lovely regenerating wisdom of our Eastern culture with all the highest knowledge of art and science, philosophy and civic organization, evolved by the younger peoples of the West."

She insisted, with all the force at her command, that a complete course of military training should be included as an integral part of national education. "Whatever the experiments recommended by the Commission now sitting ... it is incumbent upon the Congress to form forthwith a national militia by volunteer conscription, of which the nucleus might well be the existing volunteer organization."

Coming to the anti-Indian legislation contemplated in South Africa, she said: "In the whole chronicle of civilized legislation there has never been so cruel and relentless an outrage against humanity as is deliberately embodied in the anti-Asiatic Bill." She assured the South African Indian delegation, present at the Congress, India's support to their courageous struggle to vindicate their inherent civic and human rights.

The President wept "tears of blood" at the dissensions and divisions between Hindus and Muslims. Though, she said, she was convinced that the principle of communal representation, whether through a joint or a separate electorate, frustrated the conception of national solidarity, she recognized that it was not possible to reach a satisfactory understanding without the most earnest collaboration between Hindu and Muslim statesmen. While she appealed to



Hindus to show greater tolerance, she asked Muslims not to permit their preoccupation with the "sorrows of Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Arabia" to make them forget their duty to India.

With the no-changers refusing to take cognizance of legislative bodies and devoting themselves wholly to the charkha and to the task of "ministering to the lowly and pitiful outcastes of our society", the Swaraj Party, she said, was the only political body engaged in the actual combat with bureaucratic authority. Was it not the unmistakable duty of all the other political parties in the country, irrespective of their particular labels and beliefs, to return to the Congress and join in devising a common programme of action?<sup>37</sup>

The most important resolutions passed by the Congress were those on the South African Indians, on the Franchise Question and on the Political Programme.

The resolution on the South African Indians was moved by Gandhiji. Speaking first in Hindi and afterwards in English, Gandhiji said the clear intention of the anti-Asiatic Bill was to drive Indians out of South Africa that not even doctors and barristers were exempted and not even those born in South Africa. He described as unsatisfactory Lord Reading's reply to the South African deputation that had called on him and the reason advanced by him for the inability of the Government of India and the Imperial Government to protect South African Indians. They could not get out of their responsibility in the matter by arguing that South Africa was a self-governing Dominion and that the anti-Asiatic legislation concerned its domestic policy with which the Government of India could not interfere. Had not the treatment of Europeans - the "Uitlanders" - in the Transvaal been a matter of domestic policy of the Transvaal Republic, and yet had it not lead to the intervention by the Imperial Government and the Boer War?



The resolution suggested three solutions of the question - arbitration, round table conference, and, failing both, the Government of India asking the Imperial Government to exercise the right of veto. It asked Indians to stand by their countrymen in South Africa in the hour of their trial and to render them full help. If they decided on satyagraha, India should render them all material help in its power.<sup>38</sup>

Dr. Satyapal moved, on behalf of Gandhiji, the resolution approving and confirming Part A of the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. at Patna regarding the alternative Congress franchise and creating the All-India Spinners' Association.

Hasrat Mohani opposed the resolution for its insistence that Congressmen, while attending to Congress work, should wear khadi. Why should there be a national uniform? It would shut out so many persons who otherwise were sympathetic towards the Congress, such as Sapru, Jinnah and C. Y. Chintamani.

The resolution was however carried by an overwhelming majority, only a few voting with Hasrat Mohani.<sup>39</sup>

The resolution on the political programme was moved by Motilal Nehru. It confirmed Part B of the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. at Patna, by which the Congress took up such political work as was necessary in the interest of the country, reiterated the faith of the Congress in civil disobedience and then invoked the terms offered to the Government for settlement of the political question in the resolution passed by the Central Assembly on 18 February 1924. That resolution had been moved by Motilal Nehru and had been backed by the Independents and others. It said:

This Assembly recommends to the Governor-General-in-Council to take steps to have the Government of India Act revised with a view to establish full responsible Government in India and for the said purpose (a) to



summon at an early date a representative Round Table Conference to recommend, with due regard to the protection of the rights and interests of important minorities, the scheme of a constitution for India, and (b) after dissolving the Central Legislature, to place the said scheme for approval before a newly elected Indian Legislature for its approval and submit the same to the British Parliament to be embodied in a Statute.<sup>40</sup>

The Government's response had been merely to appoint a so-called Reforms Enquiry Committee under Home Member Alexander Muddiman. The Committee had been assigned the task of enquiring into the difficulties arising from, or defects inherent in, the working of the Reforms. As for any constitutional advance, Government said it was an entirely separate issue "on which the Government is in no way committed".

The resolution on the political programme moved by Motilal Nehru at the Kanpur Congress continued:

This Congress adopts the terms of settlement offered by the Independent and Swaraj Parties of the Assembly on the 18th February 1924....

(1) The Swaraj Party in the Assembly shall ... invite the Government to give their final decision on the said demand, and in case no decision is announced before the end of February, or the decision announced is held not to be satisfactory ... the Party shall... intimate to the Government on the floor of the House, that the Party will no longer continue to remain and work in the present Legislatures as heretofore, but will go into the country to work among the people. The Swarajist members of the Assembly and the Council of State will vote for the rejection of the Finance Bill and, immediately after, leave their seats. The Swarajist members of ... Provincial





Councils ... shall also leave their seats and report themselves ... for further instructions. . .

(2) No member of the Swaraj Party in the Council of State, Legislative Assembly or any of the Provincial Councils shall thereafter attend any meeting of any of the said legislatures, or any of their committees, except for the purpose of preventing his seat from being declared vacant....<sup>41</sup>

Madan Mohan Malaviya opposed the resolution, saying it was neither fish nor fowl. He moved an amendment, supported by Jayakar, which said:

That the work in the Legislatures shall be so carried on as to utilize them to the best possible advantage for the early establishment of full responsible government, cooperation being resorted to when it may be necessary to advance the national cause, and obstruction when that may be necessary for the advancement of the same cause.

Malaviya also suggested omission of the para regarding civil disobedience.

Speaking on the amendment, he said the Congress would not be able to do what the resolution expected it to do. As for acceptance of office, that had been decided already by Vithalbhai Patel's accepting the Chair of the Assembly and Motilal Nehru's accepting the membership of the Sken Committee. As for civil disobedience, Gandhiji himself had admitted that the country was not fit for it. Unity, he said, was of paramount importance. No fight was possible without unity. While they said, the doors of the Congress had been opened to all sections of political opinion; one saw that Muslims and Zemindars were conspicuous by their absence at the Congress.

Jayakar, supporting Malaviya's amendment, announced that he, Kelkar and Dr. Moonje had resigned their seats in the Bombay Council, the Legislative Assembly



and the Central Provinces Council respectively. They had taken the step because they had been elected on the Swaraj Party ticket and they could no longer subscribe to the policy of the Swaraj Party. They wanted to educate the country for responsive cooperation.<sup>42</sup>

Malaviya's motion was lost without division.

The Congress was also addressed by two foreign dignitaries; Dr. Abdur Rahman, leader of the South African Indian deputation and Dr. John Haynes Holmes of the Community Church of New York. Dr. Abdur Rahman claimed that Gandhiji belonged to South Africa and that India would have to spare either Gandhiji or Sarojini Naidu to lead the South African Indians in their fight for their rights. Dr. Holmes said that if Dr. Abdur Rahman could claim Gandhiji for South Africa, might not he himself claim the Mahatma for the world? He told the assemblage that the Society of Friends, which he represented, regarded Gandhiji with the same reverence as Indian people did.<sup>43</sup>

Gandhiji had not taken any part in the discussion on the political resolution at the Congress. He however commented:

The reiteration of faith in civil disobedience means that the representatives of the nation have no faith in an armed rebellion. Civil disobedience may be a far cry. It may be nearer than many imagine. Time is irrelevant. Cultivation of the spirit of non-violent resistance is everything.

So far as the remaining in or the going out of the Councils was concerned, Gandhiji said the Swarajists must be regarded the best judges thereof and the others must not obstruct them.<sup>44</sup>



## CHAPTER II

### A YEAR OF SPIRITUAL STRIVING

#### 1

On his return to the Ashram, Gandhiji announced in *Young India* of 7 January 1926 suspension of his touring programme for about one year, more precisely up to 20 December 1926. During this time, he intended not to stir out of Ahmedabad. He gave three reasons for the step:

1. to give his tired limbs as much rest as possible,
2. to enable him to give personal attention to the Ashram, and
3. to enable him to put the affairs of the All-India Spinners' Association on a sound businesslike basis.

He had only one fear: that the collections for the All-India Deshbandhu Memorial, to be used for the A.I.S.A., might suffer. But with many friends having pledged large sums, he hoped it would not be too difficult to collect the target sum of ten lakhs.

The year of grace he was giving himself, Gandhiji said, was both an indulgence and a self-denial: indulgence in that he would have the opportunity to be with the boys and girls of the Ashram, which desire he cherished, and self-denial because he would be deprived of the pleasure of being amongst friends in different provinces and the masses who were bound to him by bonds that defied description.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhiji more or less carried out the letter of his decision to remain at the Ashram for one year. He remained there till 3 December 1926 except for about a week in May when he paid visits to Bombay, Deolali and Mahabaleshwar, in that order, to see Devdas Gandhi, who had had an operation for appendicitis, to see



Mathuradas Trikumji, who had been ailing with pulmonary tuberculosis and to see the Governor at his invitation in connection with the Royal Agricultural Commission. He again visited Bombay on 19 September to meet the South African Parliamentary Delegation, which had arrived in the city the previous day on the invitation of the Government of India, and again on 2 November, when he met the members of the Agricultural Commission.

At the Ashram Gandhiji devoted himself to writing for *Young India* and *Navajivan* and to the affairs of the A.I.S.A. He also attended to his voluminous correspondence, answering numerous queries on numerous subjects from critics as well as from followers.

For instance, answering a correspondent, he shows him the way to absolute joy and peace. He writes:

I do believe that complete annihilation of one's self-individuality, sensuality, personality-whatever you call it, is an absolute condition of absolute joy and peace. But here again what is individuality and personality, etc.? I draw no distinction between Buddhistic *nirvana* and *Brahma nirvana* of Shankara....

If an ocean drop should have an individuality of its own as apart from the ocean then a liberated soul could have an individuality of its own, he added.<sup>2</sup>

To another correspondent he wrote:

How can I help you find peace? It can only come from within and by waiting upon God and trusting Him with implicit faith. No man need ever feel lonely who feels the living presence of God near him and in him. Whatever peace I have found has been found by increasing faith in the hand of God being in everything. Calamities then cease to be calamities. They test our



faith and steadfastness. May you also find your peace in the midst of seeming strife.<sup>3</sup>

A few weddings also took place at the Ashram: Najuklal Choksi married Lakshmidas Asar's daughter Motibehn on 18 January and Rameshwar Prasad married Kamala, daughter of Jamnalal Bajaj on 28 February. There was severe simplicity in keeping with Ashram traditions. Gandhiji blessed the couples and spoke to the gatherings. At the wedding of Motibehn Gandhiji emphasized the importance and difficulty of practising *asvada* (self-control in the matter of taste) and *brahmacharya*.

"A single item can give all the tickle to the palate," he said, "the mouth waters all through the day, and we are aware of it." The thing to do was to eat for the sake of nutrition only without feeling delight in the savour.

It was, Gandhiji said, a bit incongruous celebrating a wedding at the Ashram when they were pledged to pursue the ideal of *brahmacharya*. But marriage, too, was a *dharma*. If sense of gratification could not be avoided altogether, it should be restricted to the indispensable. If desires could not be conquered, they should be harnessed and directed to one object. This surely was better than promiscuity.<sup>4</sup>

Writing on the subject, he said:

There are boys and girls in the Satyagraha Ashram and it cannot attempt to keep them unmarried against their will. It naturally becomes the Ashram's duty to help them to marry when they feel that they will not be able to observe brahmacharya throughout their lives.... Hence, instead of forbidding I have actually encouraged the Ashram to arrange them [marriages] under its auspices.<sup>5</sup>

For such marriages, marriage rites were simplified, and the rituals were revised in keeping with the needs of the times. The *saptapadi* (seven steps) in which the



bride and the bridegroom exchange pledges of loyalty to each other, was so revised as to emphasize the couple's total devotion to service.<sup>6</sup>

The load of work on Gandhiji during this period of "rest" at the Ashram was so great that he fell ill under the strain. In the last week of January 1926 he had prolonged high fever. It left him very weak. The *Navajivan* of 31 January accordingly carried an appeal to the correspondents for the time being to desist from writing to Gandhiji, who needed all the respite he could get.<sup>7</sup>

On 2 February 1926, Gandhiji had the Satyagraha Ashram Trust Deed executed. The Board of Trustees included Jamnalal Bajaj, Revashankar Zaveri, Mahadev Desai, Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazir and Chhaganlal Gandhi. By this deed the properties of the Satyagraha Ashram of the value of Rs. 2,75,000 became the properties of the trust.<sup>8</sup>

## 2

As soon as he regained a little strength Gandhiji plunged into the same hectic pace of writing. In *Young India* of 8 February, answering a correspondent Gandhiji explained his view of Hinduism. He wrote:

Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay, and subject to the laws of nature.... The changes in the seasons affect it.

It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it too. It is, and is not, based on scriptures. It does not derive its authority from one book... Hinduism is like the Ganges pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities on the way. Even like the Ganges, it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere....

... The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas, and Itihasas, did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods.... Because



at one time we used to chop off the hands and the feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? . . .

Hinduism abhors stagnation.... Every day we add to our knowledge of the power of *atman*, and we shall keep on doing so. <sup>9</sup>

The leitmotif in his writing during this period was of course the charkha and khadi, and he continued to appeal to all those who had faith in non-cooperation unflinchingly to pursue this activity. A very clear statement of the soundness of this programme of village revival is contained in Gandhiji's interview to Katherine Mayo and in his letter to her. He told her:

The testimony of the English historian (official), Sir William Hunter showed that the poverty of the masses is growing rather than decreasing. The villages I have visited show it. The East India Company records show it. In those days, we were exporters not exploiters. We delivered our goods faithfully. We had no gun-boats to send for punishing those who would not buy our goods. We sent out the most wonderful fabrics the world has produced. We exported diamonds, gold, spices. We had our fair share of iron ore. We had indigenous and unfadable dyes. All that is now gone....

The East India Company came to buy and remained to sell. It compelled us to cut off our thumbs.... Do I lay the blame on Britain? Certainly, I do.... By means the foulest imaginable, our trade was captured and then killed by them in order to make a market for their own goods. Practically at the point of the bayonet they forced us to work....

You say that the spinning-wheel, a few generations ago a household tool in the West, has there also disappeared.... They had a substitute for the spinning-wheel. Here we have no substitute, even now, for the millions.<sup>10</sup>



Gandhiji told Katherine Mayo she need not rely merely on the testimony of Sir William Wilson Hunter. She could have his statement verified by answering the following questions:

1. Was it or was it not true that nearly 80 per cent of India's population lived in villages and was dependent on agriculture?
2. Was it or was it not true that these peasants lived on small holdings and often as serfs of big zemindars?
3. Was it or was it not true that the vast majority of them had at least four idle months in the year?
4. Was it or was it not true that before the British rule these people had hand-spinning and ancillary industries to supplement their agricultural income?
5. Was it or was it not true that while hand-spinning had been entirely killed no other industry had taken its place?<sup>11</sup>

3

Critics were not wanting who chided Gandhiji for his claim that India's emancipation-political, economic and even spiritual - lay in the spinning-wheel.

Gandhiji said he primarily intended the villages to take up the spinning-wheel. His appeal to the city people was to spin by way of sacrifice - to show a way to the villagers. As for spiritual salvation, the spinning-wheel was not a thing to be despised. It helped in the pursuit of *brahmacharya*, it was "known to still the passions of those who have turned it in the fulness of faith". It was a powerful means of cultivating steadiness.

Cloth, Gandhiji pointed out, represented the biggest item of British trade. The accomplishment of the boycott of that cloth would awaken the British to a sense





of India's strength. If India could shape its cloth trade with Britain according to its will, it could also shape the political relationship with Britain.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji refused to be drawn into expressing his opinions on political questions that agitated the minds of the leaders of the parties. As he told Vijayaraghavachariar on 16 June 1926, he could not enthuse over the Councils; his politics were confined to the spinning-wheel, the removal of untouchability and the prayers for Hindu-Muslim unity. These three absorbed his whole time and attention.<sup>13</sup>

Non-cooperation along with all that went with it, and boycott of foreign cloth, Hindu-Muslim unity, eradication of untouchability, national education and prohibition, continued to remain for Gandhiji and the hard-core no-changers the only viable programme, even though it had been suspended as a movement.

When Gandhiji went to see the Governor of Bombay in May at the latter's invitation in connection with the Agricultural Commission, some expressed their doubts as to the propriety of such a course. Under the title, "Its Meaning" Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*:

Let me distinguish. Non-violent non-cooperation means renunciation of the benefits of a system with which we non-cooperate. We therefore renounce the benefits of schools, courts, titles, legislatures and offices set up under the system. The most extensive and permanent part of our non-cooperation consists in the renunciation of foreign cloth, which is the foundation for the vicious system that is crushing us to dust..... If then I go to any official for the purpose of seeking the benefits above named, I cooperate. Whereas if I go to the meanest official for the purpose of converting him... I fulfill my duty as a non-- co-operator.<sup>14</sup>



Non-cooperation thus essentially meant renunciation and sacrifice. Non-cooperation was not with persons, "but with an attitude that was responsible for the system which has seized us in its serpentine coils and which was reducing us to dust," he wrote.

The system had raised the standard of living among us, its creatures, wholly unwarranted by the general condition of the country. And since India did not live upon exploitation of other peoples, the expansion of the middle class who were also the middle men, meant extinction of the lowest strata. Hence, the smallest villages were dying out through sheer exhaustion. This was all plain to many in 1920. The arresting movement is yet in its infancy....

The process of self-purification must therefore be completed...Great as the sacrifice has been, it is nothing compared to the demands made upon us by the country....

. . . The golden rule to apply... is resolutely to refuse to have what millions cannot... The first thing is to cultivate the mental attitude that will not have possessions or facilities denied to millions, and the next immediate thing is to rearrange our lives as fast as possible in accordance with that mentality.<sup>15</sup>

Gandhiji wrote to Ambalal Sarabhai that he had never felt ashamed in admitting his errors, and if he thought that the non-cooperation movement was a mistake and that it had failed, he would certainly proclaim his error publicly. He was, however, convinced that the movement had done the country untold good and that in reality it had not failed. It was true that Swaraj had not been won in the sense of political power, but he attached little value to that fact. That people's



ideas had changed, that they had become more critical and had acquired courage, was no small gain.<sup>16</sup>

Gandhiji said that one true man was enough for any reform, no matter how impossible it might appear in the beginning. Ridicule, contempt and death might be, and often was, the reward of such a man, but though he might die, the reforms survived and prospered. He ensured their stability with his blood.<sup>17</sup>

One notices in his words the ring of Bhagavad Gita, ii, 40:

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ॥

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ।

Gandhiji repeatedly addressed readers and correspondents explaining the doctrines of non-violence and non-cooperation, to remove cobwebs of confusion and ignorance.

When a correspondent cited history to prove that an average person could not be a mahatma, Gandhiji wrote:

If we are to make progress, we must not repeat history, but make new history. We must add to the inheritance left by our ancestors. If we may make new discoveries and inventions in the phenomenal world, must we declare our bankruptcy in the spiritual domain? Is it impossible to multiply the exceptions so as to make them the rule?<sup>18</sup>

4

One of the most important projects Gandhiji took in hand during this period of withdrawal from politics was the writing of his autobiography. He commenced the work in the last week of November 1925 and had each chapter published serially in *Navajivan*, beginning with the issue of 29 November, and in *Young India* in Mahadev Desai's English translation, beginning with the issue of 3 December. Gandhiji could give only a fraction of his time to the task and the book took all of



three years and more to complete, so that the last chapter and the "Farewell" appeared in *Young India* of 3 February 1929. The chapters were carried simultaneously by *Indian Opinion* in South Africa and *Unity* of the USA.

The book is divided in five parts, each part consisting of varying numbers of chapters and no two parts being of equal length: thus while Part III consists of 23 chapters, Part IV has as many as 43. The total number of chapters is 167.

The writing was put together in book form first in 1927 when Volume I was published by the Navajivan Publishing House. The Gujarati edition titled *Experiments with Truth or an Autobiography*, had gone through five editions by 1929 when Volume II came out. Chapters XXIX- XLIII of Part V were translated from Gujarati into English by Pyarelal as Mahadev Desai was away in Bardoli in connection with the agrarian enquiry there.

The English translation was first revised by Gandhiji for the subject- matter and then by Mira behn for the language. When the second edition came out in 1940, in one Volume, it had further been revised by V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. Navajivan brought out several reprints of both the Gujarati and English editions and also the abridged versions. By the end of 1967, 4,66,000 copies had been issued. Other publishers also brought out editions in Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Sanskrit. Foreign publishers also entered the field and Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Polish, Russian, Swedish, Arabic, Turkish and Serbocroat editions appeared in quick succession. There was also a Braille edition brought out in English.

Although *Autobiography* takes the story only to the Nagpur Congress in 1920, it has had a tremendous impact. It remains the single most important work elucidating in the clearest possible manner the theory and practice of truth and non-violence in every aspect of human life. Gandhiji looked at all his strivings in



moral and spiritual terms. They were directed towards self-realization. He thus explains his motive in writing, Autobiography:

What I want to achieve - what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years - is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end. But as I have all along believed that, what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open; and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value. There are some things, which are known only to oneself and one's Maker. These are clearly incommunicable. The experiments I am about to relate are not such. But they are spiritual, or rather moral; for the essence of religion is morality.<sup>19</sup>

Many have compared Gandhiji's Autobiography with the Confessions of St. Augustine and the Confessions of Tolstoy. But St. Augustine's work is concerned essentially with dogma and it has never had that universality of appeal that Autobiography has enjoyed. As for Tolstoy, many critics, Stephan Zweig, one of them, (Adepts in Self-Portraiture) suspect that he magnified some of his "sins" in order to hide some other sins. Gandhiji was far too truthful to indulge in any such stratagems.

In the section, "Farewell" Gandhiji says:

My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain.... The little fleeting glimpses ... that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly



convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact, what I caught is only the faintest glimmer of the mighty effulgence....

To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life.... I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

. . . I must reduce myself to zero. So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. Ahimsa is the farthest limit of humility.<sup>20</sup>

5

The *Bhagavad Gita* was a life-long preoccupation with Gandhiji. Being a Vaishnava Hindu, he studied with devotion all the sacred lore of Hinduism. He was deeply influenced by the *Ramayana - Ramacharitamansa* by Tulsidas in particular. His other favourite reading comprised the *Bhagavata*, the *Yogavashishtha* - its "Mumukshu Prakarana" in particular, the *Ashtavakra Gita* and *Ishopanishad* and other Upanishads. None of these scriptures however carried with him the same importance as the *Bhagavad Gita*. It was for him the book of books; it was the "spiritual dictionary"; it was the Mother.

Gandhiji's interest in the Gita was first awakened when he read Edwin Arnold's *Song Celestial* during his student days in London. Later he was to speak on it, write on it and translate it into Gujarati with a commentary of his own. This last work was translated into English by Mahadev Desai and published in 1930 under the title *The Gita According to Gandhiji*. The *Gita Bodh* comprises letters written by him to the inmates of the Ashram from the Yeravda Central Prison in



November 1930 and January-February 1932. He also made a selection of the verses of the Gita for Ramdas Gandhi, giving the selection the title *Ramdas Gita*. Gandhiji's first major undertaking in this direction, his *Discourses on the Gita*, pertains to the year of Gandhiji's self-imposed abstention from politics during 1926. The work comprises talks on the *Gita* he delivered every day after the morning prayer from 24 February to 27 November 1926. The total number of talks dealing with the text is 197 and another 20 by way of conclusion.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is of course a work that has been translated and commented upon by seers and scholars down the ages. Some of the works that became classics in themselves are the commentaries of Shankara and the Maharashtrian saint Jnaneshwara. More recently, Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* and Annie Besant's translation of the *Gita* have been deservedly praised.

Different commentators have, however, approached the *Gita* differently, each deriving from it a message that supports and reinforces his own metaphysical and spiritual position. Shankara thus has read in the *Gita* an exposition of the Advaita doctrine. Indeed, it forms part of the *Prasthanatrayi* from which the theory of Vedanta has been developed. Jnaneshwara's work emphasizes the importance of bhakti, while Tilak lays emphasis on karma.

Gandhiji refused to accept uncritically any of these approaches. He conceded that each of them was right in its own way but right only within limits. As he wrote at one place:

The *Gita* does not give the central importance to *karma* nor to *jnana* nor to *bhakti*. It gives importance to all these ... *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti* all three are essential, and each in its place is of central importance. Without *bhakti*, human effort by itself will not succeed, and without *jnana*, *bhakti*



will not bear fruit. Hence, we see at places *bhakti* or *jnana* treated as a means, which helps us in doing the right *karma*.<sup>21</sup>

The *Gita*, Gandhiji said again and again, was not an exhortation to fight and kill. It did not preach violence and it did not negate non-violence. Complete non-violence was of course an impossible ideal to attain for an embodied being, for so long as the body existed *karma* could not be avoided. Achieving total non-violence thus implied achieving total freedom from *karma*, for all *karma* involved violence. Gandhiji said:

When we have renounced *karma* mentally, all attachment to it will have ceased. Such a person will not even think what his duty is.... It is not he who will be doing that. If I am not responsible even for my breathing, I am doing it under force, not willingly.... *Karma* done in the spirit of *yajna*, that is, for the benefit of others, does not bind. To do *karma* for the benefit of others means to enlist ourselves as soldiers in God's army, to dedicate to Him our all, body, mind, wealth and intellect.<sup>22</sup>

That, in Gandhiji's view, was the meaning of *karma* and *akarma* in *Bhagavad Gita*, iii, 4-9. He said:

The *Gita* does not decide for us. But if, whenever faced with a moral problem you give up attachment to the ego and then decide what you should do, you will come to no harm. This is the substance of the argument; which Shri Krishna has explained in 18 chapters.<sup>23</sup>

Concluding his talks Gandhiji said:

My enthusiasm for the *Gita* grows by the day.... I get daily more absorbed in it. We, who are given to self-indulgence, cannot always taste this joy. The real joy comes from *bhakti*, that is, it is spiritual.





Referring to the cosmic vision of the Lord in chapter xi Gandhiji says:

Vyasa has described the vision so vividly that we feel as if we see it with our own eyes. Beholding it, we wonder what our own place in the universe is. It is nothing. It is as small as a grain of dust. What are we in this universe of stars, suns and planets? .... We are nothing, compared with that visible manifestation of God, this vast universe.... As we understand this more and more, we should become steeped ever more fully in bhakti.<sup>24</sup>

6

Gandhiji kept on receiving invitations from various foreign countries to visit them. In 1926, he came very near to saying yes to visits to at least two countries - Finland and China.

The Finland visit was mooted in connection with the World Conference of the YM.C.A. to be held in August 1926 in Helsingfors. The invitation came through the efforts of K. T. Paul and Gandhiji wrote to him that friends were in favour of his going if only because in their view the voyage would do his health some good, but that he himself would want to go only if he thought he could accomplish some work of service through going.

There was also the matter of his diet to be sorted out which might present some difficulty. Rajagopalachari expressed misgivings about the visit. On 26 May Gandhiji informed Devadas that K.T. Paul had collected Rs. 6,000 for the journey and that it looked as though the visit would have to be made. In case he went, he said, Devadas and Mahadev Desai would accompany him.

Shortly afterwards Gandhiji discovered that in extending to him the invitation the Y.M.C.A. had been "a passive instrument" in K. T. Paul's hands. He conferred with Andrews and then drafted a letter to Paul. He wrote:



Mr. Andrews has been with me for the last three days. He has read the whole of the correspondence between us and we have both come to the conclusion that the invitation should be finally accepted.

Before the letter could be despatched Gandhiji gave the matter further thought and decided to write to Paul a different letter. This said:

Mr. Andrews has been here for the last three days. He also has read your letter and the rest of the correspondence between us. After deep and prayerful consideration, we have both come to the conclusion that the invitation should be cancelled and that I should decide not to go to Finland.<sup>25</sup>

On 6 June Gandhiji again wrote to Paul finally clinching the issue. He said:

The letters made it clear to me that the idea of the invitation was prompted by you out of your great goodwill towards me and your exaggerated notion of my influence over people.... But I feel more than ever convinced that the time is not yet for me to leave India on such slender pretext as is furnished by the correspondence before me. The call to go out of India for service has got to be pressing an overwhelming....

. . . You will please forgive me for all the trouble that you have been put to on my account.<sup>26</sup>

The invitation to visit China came through the agency of A. A. Paul, who wrote to Gandhiji on 24 February 1926 conveying to him the invitation from the Students Christian Association of India, Burma and Ceylon to visit China. On 4 May he sent to Gandhiji copies of two letters received from T. Z. Koo, a Chinese intellectual, explaining the aim and scope of Gandhiji's proposed visit. Gandhiji said he could not commit himself so far in advance. "If they want me this year, now that I have



not gone to Finland, it is easier to be more definite. But then, this year can only be a hurried visit," he wrote.<sup>27</sup>

But the hosts themselves were not able to fix a firm date even for 1927. On 10 December 1926, Gandhiji wrote to A. A. Paul wondering what was going on about the contemplated Chinese visit. His Indian programme for the entire year was so heavy and there were so many other such considerations. He would like to know definitely, at the earliest possible moment, if and when he must go to China. His own feeling was that in the then disturbed state of China the visit would miscarry. His message was one of unadulterated non-violence and truth. People were ill fitted to receive such a message when feelings ran high and blood was hot.<sup>28</sup>

The visit did not materialize.

## 7

A new entrant to the Ashram towards the end of 1925 was an Englishwoman, Madeleine Slade.

Daughter of the British Admiral Sir Edmond Slade who, at one time commanded the East Indies Station of the British Navy, India was not altogether a strange country to Madeleine. As a young girl of 15, she had been around a good deal in India and Ceylon. Although her movements then had been severely restricted by the requirements of protocol, so that she could only socialize with members of the British ruling circles and Indian royalty who hobnobbed with them, she could not remain altogether immune from the impact of India: its sights and sounds and smells, its naked and hungry millions.

Madeleine was not cut in a conventional mould. Her aspirations did not run in the direction of marriage and family. As a child she had loved solitude, disdained toys and shown interest in things that would not interest most other children of



her age.<sup>29</sup> She loved nature and this love stayed with her all through life. The rippling of streams, the twittering of birds, the souging of pines, the mooing of kine sent her into raptures.

She also had a wanderlust. This she attributed to what she called a trace of gypsy blood in her: a great-great grandfather on her mother's side had married "a gypsylike beauty who was possibly of Eastern European origin".<sup>30</sup>

Madeleine loved horses and horse riding, a passion she developed as a child. When barely twelve, she used to go hunting with her maternal grand-father. The rough riding across the country to the sound of the hunting horn and the voices of the hounds, thrilled her.<sup>31</sup> She gave up hunting fairly early as she disliked violence but the love of horses and riding stayed with her.

Music was the ruling passion of her life, especially German classical music, especially Beethoven. When she first listened to Beethoven, as a young girl of perhaps 14, her whole being stirred and awoke to something, which had remained unknown to her till then. Ever since, Beethoven's symphonies and sonatas became the staple nourishment for her spirit. At considerable expense and inconvenience to herself, she even organised Beethoven concerts in London, at a time when Germans and German conductors were far from popular among the English, after the First World War.

It was therefore only to be expected that when she heard of a work that was partly based on the life of Beethoven, she should want to read it. This was *Jean Christophe*, a novel by the French author Romain Rolland, running into ten volumes.

The difficulty was that Madeleine knew no French, or not enough to be able to do justice to a piece of superb literature. She therefore decided to improve her French first, and to this end spent some months in Paris, first as a paying-guest



with an old comtesse and later in a pension. Here she laboriously plodded through the many volumes of *Jean Christophe* with the help of a dictionary.

Having finished the novel Madeleine became impatient to meet the author. Two meetings with Romain Rolland came off at his cottage in Switzerland. At one of these meetings, Romain Rolland mentioned to her a biography of Gandhi he had written. But who was Gandhi? Madeleine had not heard the name. "He is another Christ," Romain Rolland told her.

Back she went to Paris and saw copies of *Vie de Gandhi* prominently displayed in book shops. She bought a copy and read it through. As she finished it, it flashed upon her like lightning that she must leave everything and throw her lot with Gandhiji and India. Destiny was beckoning her. The call had come and she must not tarry. Promptly she wrote to a travel agency booking her passage to India. Then she thought again. Was she fitted for the life she would have to lead as a member of Gandhiji's Ashram? Shouldn't she first prepare herself mentally and physically for her life in India? She decided to wait for a year.

This was in October 1924 when Gandhiji was recovering from his 21-day fast undertaken for communal unity. Madeleine sold a trinket and sent the proceeds - a sum of £ 20 as a thanksgiving offering to Gandhiji, letting him know at the same time that she intended to join him but only after she had undergone a period of preparation and training.

In course of time, a letter came from Gandhiji, giving her the go-ahead. Gandhiji wrote: "If a year's test still impels you to come, you will probably be right in coming to India."<sup>32</sup>

By way of training herself for the Ashram life Madeleine gave up meat and discarding all furniture in her room, took to sitting and sleeping on the floor, much to the distress of her parents, who were deeply concerned. She then



acquired a spinning-wheel and religiously gave time to spinning - only it had to be wool. There was no cotton available in England for spinning. She also began subscribing to *Young India*.

October 1925 came round and she set sail for India, landing in Bombay on 6 November and arriving in Ahmedabad by train the following day. Vallabhbhai, Mahadev Desai and Swami Anand had been sent by Gandhiji to receive her at the station. They took her to the Ashram. She writes:

As I entered, a slight brown figure rose up and came toward me. I was conscious of nothing but a sense of light. I fell on my knees. Hands gently raised me up, and a voice said: 'You shall be my daughter.'... Yes, this was Mahatma Gandhi, and I had arrived.<sup>33</sup>

From that day on she took to celebrating her birthday on 7 November, which she decided was the day of her spiritual birth. Gandhiji gave her the name Mirabai or Mira behn, after the saint-poetess of Rajasthan.

Mira behn saw that the room allotted to her at the Ashram contained the usual furniture, including a bed and table and chair. She had it removed and spread mats on the floor. The first duty assigned to her was the cleaning of the Ashram latrines, which she attended to with meticulous devotion. She also took lessons in Hindustani, written in Devanagari script, and spinning. Communal living was not exactly her cup of tea, and the food, too, in the beginning presented difficulties and upset her stomach. But she made herself *like* the Ashram routine. It was a small price to pay for the privilege of being near Bapu.

A short while later Mira behn, in spite of Gandhiji advising her patience, took a vow of celibacy and had her hair shorn off. This latter action caused some bewilderment among the women inmates of the Ashram, for it set Mira behn apart from the rest of them.



Within a few weeks of her arrival Mahadev Desai, being given to the pursuit of literature and languages, thought of taking advantage of her presence at the Ashram to learn French from her. Mira behn agreed to give him lessons for an hour every day. The catch was that neither had thought it necessary to consult Gandhiji first. Hardly had Mahadev done two lessons when Gandhiji came to know of it from Mira behn.

Gandhiji summoned Mahadev Desai and gave him a talking to. Could Mahadev give an hour every day to learning French? Mahadev said he would find the time somehow. Gandhiji told him he would be stealing the time for his time was not his own. Besides, how could he think of learning French when the country was engaged in a life-and-death struggle? Every minute of Mira behn's time, moreover, was precious. She must be helped to make the best use of her time. Rather than indulge in the luxury of learning French from her, Mahadev would do well to give her lessons in Hindi or Sanskrit for an hour every day. One could do without a knowledge of French, for whatever was written in French was soon translated into English.

And that was the end of Mahadev Desai's French lessons.<sup>34</sup>

Gandhiji watched over Mira behn's welfare and her education in Hindi and spinning like a father. He took her along with him to the Congress session at Kanpur and then sent her, first to Kanya Gurukul, then in Delhi, and then to various other places to improve her Hindi. He saw to her food and health needs and introduced her to rural India and its masses on the one hand and to the elite and leaders of the emerging India on the other. She also became a bridge between Gandhiji and the Indian leadership and the British officialdom.



What is ahimsa? The knotty question again came up for discussion in the columns of *Young India* in October 1926. The discussion was provoked by no less than 60 stray dogs - some of them rabid - having been killed on the orders of Ambalal Sarabhai who headed the Municipal Corporation. He had consulted Gandhiji and taken his approval. The Humanitarian League of Ahmedabad expressed consternation that Gandhiji should have considered it right "to kill rabid dogs for the reason that they would bite human beings and by biting other dogs make them also rabid." Angry letters poured in. Some barged in to confront Gandhiji, without caring for his convenience. They were angry, bitter and arrogant. There were many Jains among them.

Gandhiji, in a series of articles in *Navajivan*, later translated for *Young India* by Mahadev Desai, explained the parameters of ahimsa in practice.

Taking of life, Gandhiji wrote, might be a duty under certain circumstances. Man destroyed plant life in order to sustain himself. He killed mosquitoes, and carnivorous beasts, which pestered villagers. Even a man who had gone mad and killed others needed to be killed, he wrote and added:

The fact is that ahimsa does not simply mean non-killing. Himsa means causing pain to or killing, any life out of anger or for a selfish purpose, or with the intention of causing injury. Refraining from so doing is ahimsa.<sup>35</sup>

As for the dogs, Gandhiji said it was his "firm conviction" that the critics' sorry plight was due to a misconception of ahimsa. Practice of ahimsa could not result in impotence, impoverishment and famine. Ahimsa was the religion of Kshatriyas: Mahavir and the Buddha were both Kshatriyas, so were Rama and Krishna. Ahimsa was the extreme limit of forgiveness, but forgiveness was the quality of





the brave. How could those who could not look after cows, who belaboured them with sticks, raise a hue and cry when a stray dog was killed?

Which was better- that five thousand dogs should wander about in semi-starvation, living on dirt and excreta and drag on a miserable existence or that fifty should die and keep the rest in a decent condition?

Merely taking life was not always *himsa*, one might even say that there was sometimes more *himsa* in not taking life.<sup>36</sup>

Gandhiji cited figures of cases of rabies in Ahmedabad city and district -1117 in 1925 and 990 in the first nine months of 1926. He wrote:

The harm is not confined to cities alone and it must stop. We do not wait until the serpent bites us. The rabies of the dog is concealed in its capacity to bite.<sup>37</sup>

Gandhiji further wrote:

For the purpose of the discussion I make no distinction between a rabid dog and a man who has run amuck and is in the act of dealing death. Habitual violence is a disease. The habitually violent man goes on in his murderous career only because he is beside himself. Both a rabid dog and a rabid man are worthy of pity. When they are found in the act of injuring others, and when there is no other remedy than to take their life, it becomes a duty to do so to arrest their activity. The duty is all the greater in case of a votary of ahimsa.<sup>38</sup>

Letters from readers continued to pour in objecting to the views expressed by Gandhiji. One of the correspondents offered the opinion that the "characteristic of an exalted soul is that he remains unaffected by the misery around him".



Gandhiji answered that "he is callous rather than exalted, who has not learnt to melt at others' woe, who has not learnt to see himself in others and others in himself'. Intense longing for the happiness of others was the mother of the discovery of ahimsa. And the sage who was the embodiment of compassion found his soul's delight in renouncing his own physical comfort and stopped killing for his pleasure the dumb creation around him.<sup>39</sup>

The controversy on the question surfaced again after two years, in September 1928, when on Gandhiji's instructions an ailing calf at the Ashram was put to death.

The calf had been maimed in a fall and had been in great pain. The veterinary surgeon who had been called had declared the case to be "past help and past hope". In the circumstances, Gandhiji, after consultations with the managing committee and then the whole Ashram, decided to put the calf out of its pain. A poison injection was administered to the animal and "the whole thing was over in less than two minutes".

There was widespread disapproval of this action of Gandhiji by well-meaning correspondents who declared that Gandhiji had no right to take life even to relieve suffering.

Gandhiji asserted that situations might be visualised where true ahimsa would lie in taking life rather than in not taking it.<sup>40</sup>

Questions were raised by correspondents on the moral validity of euthanasia. "Supposing," a reader asked, "my elder brother is suffering from a terrible and painful malady and doctors have despaired of his life... should I in the circumstances put him out of life?"



Not quite, Gandhiji answered. He set down the following conditions the fulfilment of which alone would justify taking life from the point of view of ahimsa:

1. The disease from which the patient is suffering should be incurable.
2. All concerned have despaired of the life of the patient.
3. The case should be beyond all help or service.
4. It should be impossible for the patient in question to express his or its wish.

So long as even one of the conditions remained unfulfilled, the taking of life would not be justified.<sup>41</sup>



## CHAPTER III

### UNITY IN SHAMBLES

#### 1

While Gandhiji concentrated on his spiritual pursuits at the Ashram at Sabarmati, in the political arena outside, following the open split between the Swarajists and the Responsive Cooperationists led by Jayakar at the Kanpur Congress, a sharp polarization of forces was proceeding apace. From Bombay Jayakar, Moonje and Kelkar issued a statement declaring that they proposed to carry on propaganda against the Congress resolution passed at Kanpur and in favour of responsive cooperation. They also announced that they were resigning their seats in the legislatures.

On 16 and 17 January 1926, members of the Responsive Cooperation faction of the Swaraj Party in the Bombay Legislative Council met to lend their support to Jayakar and Moonje. A number of them, including Velkar, Mukandam, C. M. Saptarshi, J. C. Swaminarayan, M. B. Power, P. C. Joshi, H. D. Saheba, D. N. Patil, M. K. Dixit, H. M. Mehta, H. N. Narielwala, N. R. Ganjal and L. B. Bhopatkar issued a statement commending the action taken by Jayakar, Moonje and Kelkar.

The Berar Responsive Cooperationists, going one better, not only resigned from the Swaraj Party but also from the C. P. Council.

On 14 and 15 February, a conference of Responsive Cooperationists was held at Akola under the presidentship of Jayakar. The conference by a resolution announced the formation of the Responsive Cooperation Party, with Jayakar as President, Joseph Baptista as Vice-President and D. V. Gokhale as General Secretary. M. R. Cholkar, B. G. Khaparde and L. B. Bhopatkar were appointed Secretaries respectively for C.P. (Marathi), Berar and Maharashtra.



The new party issued a manifesto declaring that "the best course, under the present circumstances, is that of responsive cooperation, which means working the Reforms ... for all they are worth, and using the same for accelerating the grant of full responsible government."

"Working the Reforms" was further explained as including "the capture of all places of power, responsibility and initiative which are open to election by, or otherwise responsible to, the party within the legislatures."<sup>1</sup>

2

The All-India Congress Committee met in Delhi on 6 March to consider steps to be taken in pursuance of the resolution passed at the Kanpur Congress with regard to the walk-out of the Swarajist members from the legislatures, should there be no satisfactory response forthcoming from the Government to the national demand contained in the Central Assembly resolution of February 1924, asking for full responsible government.

The A.I.C.C., after heated deliberations, passed a resolution moved by S. Srinivasa Iyengar, which said:

This meeting ... is of opinion that the insistence of the Secretary of State and the Government of India on full cooperation by representatives of the people under existing conditions clearly demonstrates the intention of the Government to coerce the nation into abject submission, without making any advance on the present vicious system of Government. The Committee therefore calls upon Swarajist members of the various legislatures to follow the course laid down... by the Congress at its Kanpur session. This Committee hereby calls upon the party in the Assembly to leave their seats after raising the constitutional issue once again by moving, on the 8<sup>th</sup>



March, that the first demand for grant which may come up for discussion be omitted.

S. Satyamurti moved an amendment to the effect that the resolution must be made binding on all Congressmen in the legislatures and not only the Swarajists. But this was vehemently opposed by Lala Lajpat Rai and Abhyankar, saying the Swarajists could not impose their discipline on other factions in the Congress. The amendment was rejected.<sup>2</sup>

In the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 March Motilal Nehru, the leader of the Swaraj Party, rose to speak and having first treated the Government to "a feast of grievances", declared that civil disobedience being impossible in the prevailing state of the country, rent as it was by communal strife, and remaining in the legislature being equally useless, the Swarajists had decided to leave the Assembly. He said:

We go out today, not with the object of overthrowing this mighty Empire. We know we cannot do it even if we wished it. We go out in all humility, with the confession of our failure to achieve our objects in this House....

There is no more for us here. We go out into the country to seek the suffrage of the electorates once more.... We will try to devise those sanctions, which alone can compel any Government to grant the demands of the nations....

Motilal Nehru and the Swarajists then walked out. The President of the Assembly, V. J. Patel, adjourned the House till the following day, saying that with the withdrawal of the Swarajists the House had ceased to be representative in the sense in which it was intended to be by the Government of India Act. Since that was so, he advised the Government to



bring forward only such business as was absolutely necessary for the purpose of carrying on the administration.<sup>3</sup>

## 3

Madan Mohan Malaviya, after his open breach with the Swarajists at the Kanpur Congress, was carrying on his own campaign for responsive co-operation. In the last week of February 1926 he resigned from the Independent Party which he had been heading in the Assembly and set out to mobilize opinion for the formation of a Nationalist Party, which would follow the Congress creed but oppose the policy laid down at the Kanpur Congress. It would utilize legislatures, unsatisfactory though they were, to the best possible advantage by pursuing the policy of responsive cooperation including acceptance of office.

While Malaviya was holding a series of meetings in North India on the question, in Bombay and elsewhere Jayakar's Responsive Cooperationists and leaders such as Annie Besant, Jinnah and C. Y. Chintamani were working in the same direction. On 3 and 4 April in Bombay, a conference was arranged of non-Swarajist Congressmen, Responsive Cooperationists, Liberals and others. The conference was attended by about 125 persons, prominent among whom were: T. B. Saprú, M. A. Jinnah, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dinshaw Petit, Annie Besant, Jamnadas Dwarkadas, M.R. Jayakar, D. V Gokhale, H. N. Kunzru, K. Natarajan and B. Shiva Rao.

After two days of hectic debate, with the Liberals opposing the notion of the new party having any association with the Congress, the formation of the Indian National Party was announced.

The Party's objective was establishment of full responsible government for the country by peaceful and legitimate means, not including mass civil disobedience or general non-payment of taxes. The Party would use the Government of India



Act, 1919, unsatisfactory as it was, to the fullest extent possible, including acceptance of office.

Nearly all those attending the Conference were appointed members of the Committee of the Party, with the exception of Jayakar, Baptista and D. V. Gokhale, who chose to stand out.<sup>4</sup>

The British appeared to be jubilant over the development, which marked a clear breach in the ranks of the Congress. The official publication, *India in 1925-26*, hailed the Conference as "probably the most representative political meeting held in India since 1921".

Motilal Nehru regarded the formation of the new party as a challenge to the Swaraj Party. He described it as "a conglomerate in the first stage of geological formation".<sup>5</sup>

Gandhiji was distressed to see the leadership of the Congress thus being split up and each faction pulling in a diametrically opposite direction to the other. But he found himself helpless to do anything in the matter. On 28 March, he wrote to Ghanshyamdas Birla:

Please believe me I would do my utmost if I could bring both the parties together. But for the present the task seems to be beyond my capacity ... leaving aside personalities, when we compare the two creeds, the Swaraj Party's creed is certainly more commendable, though both of them are inferior to non-cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

4

In April 1926, Motilal Nehru with a view to patching up the differences, approached Gandhiji with a proposal that the Swarajist leaders might meet the Responsive Cooperationists at a conference at Sabarmati on a date convenient to Gandhiji. He requested Gandhiji to fix a date and telegraph to Jayakar and





others. Gandhiji accordingly invited Jayakar, Aney, Moonje and others to Sabarmati on 20 April. The notice had to be short because Gandhiji was planning to leave for Mussoorie for a short sojourn on 22 April. Gandhiji was however in two minds whether to go or not to go. The matter was decided by tossing a coin. The Mussoorie visit did not come off.<sup>7</sup>

The Conference at Sabarmati was attended by Gandhiji, Sarojini Naidu, Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai, Jayakar, Aney, Moonje, D. V. Gokhale and G. A. Ogale.

The Conference concerned itself with the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. in Delhi on 6/7 March 1926, which had laid down that Congressmen would

- (a) refuse to accept offices in the gift of the Government until, in the opinion of the Congress, a satisfactory response is made by the Government;
- (b) refuse supplies and throw out budgets until such response is made by the Government, except when the Working Committee instructs otherwise.

The discussions hinged on what would be "a satisfactory response". It was agreed that the response would "be considered satisfactory in the provinces if the power, responsibility and initiative necessary for the effective discharge of their duties are secured to ministers and the sufficiency of such power, responsibility and initiative in each province shall be decided in the first instance by Congress members of the Legislative Council of that province, subject to confirmation by a committee consisting of Pandit Motilal Nehru and Mr. M. R. Jayakar."

The agreement was signed on 21 April 1926 by Sarojini Naidu, Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai for the Swaraj Party and M. R. Jayakar, N.C. Kelkar, B. S. Moonje, M. S. Aney, D. V Gokhale and G. A. Ogale for the Responsive Cooperationists.<sup>8</sup>



It soon became clear however that each party had signed the agreement having in mind its own interpretation of its terms. These differences of interpretation were manifested with a great deal of acrimony at the meeting of the A.I.C.C. held at Ahmedabad on 4 and 5 May 1926, primarily to ratify the agreement.

Before the meeting was actually held, much behind-the-scenes parleying went on between the Swarajists and the Jayakar group on the wording of the resolution to be adopted. There was no agreement. When the meeting convened, Motilal Nehru made the statement that whereas the Responsivists interpreted the Sabarmati Pact to mean that the Reforms should be worked, the Swarajists disagreed with this interpretation and were clear that the Reforms were to be worked only after certain conditions had been met by the Government.

The Responsive Cooperationists thereupon expressed their inability to attend the deliberations of the A.I.C.C. and the Sabarmati Pact could not be ratified, leaving the parties doggedly to cling to their own different programmes as regards cooperation or otherwise with the Government in the Councils and acceptance of office.<sup>9</sup>

The Nationalists, Liberals and Responsive Cooperationists had thus ranged themselves against the official policy of the Congress not to have anything to do with the Reforms and not to accept office until there was satisfactory response from the Government, of which there appeared to be no hope.

5

While the leaders of the parties were thus taken up with the momentous question of whether or not to accept ministerial and other offices in the gift of the Government, the rising tide of communalism was threatening the very foundations of nationalism.



In April 1926, communal riots suddenly broke out in Calcutta and continued with varying intensity for many months. Within the very first ten days of the rioting 44 persons lay dead and 584 were injured. According to the report of the Police Commissioner, there was widespread incendiarism and plundering of shops. Numerous temples and gurdwaras were desecrated and the idols broken. Several mosques and dargahs were treated in a similar fashion.

The press, especially the Indian languages press, openly took sides and far from trying to bring the two communities together, each newspaper only incited its readers to greater violence.

The panic that gripped the citizens was so great that there was a daily exodus of people of all walks of life from the riot-affected areas.

During the second phase of the riots, beginning on 22 April, no fewer than 66 persons died and 391 were injured. A particularly reprehensible feature of the rioting at this time was the way roving bands of criminals attacked isolated individuals in lonely spots.

Conservancy arrangements throughout Calcutta became disrupted during the riots and the streets stank. Sweepers did not dare to venture out for fear of attacks by goondas. In certain areas, volunteer youths offered their services for cleaning up the streets.<sup>10</sup>

Riots erupted again in the city in July, raging fiercely from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> of that month. Help from army authorities had to be called in to quell the disturbances. The casualties showed 28 dead and 226 wounded.

In all cases, the rioting erupted in the wake of, or in consequence of, religious processions: *Rathjattras*, Arya Samaj processions and Moharram processions. As regards playing of music, Hindus claimed the right and asserted that the practice



of playing music before mosques at all hours of the day had always been there. Muslims, on the other hand, claimed the right and asserted that the practice of stoppage of music before mosques at all hours of the day and not only at the times of public worship had been in vogue.

The Government of Bengal on 6 June 1926, issued a resolution saying that processions passing by mosques at times of public prayer, which would be specified, should stop playing music, except in the case of Nakhoda Mosque at Chitpore Road, in the vicinity of which all processions at all times would have to stop playing music.

A meeting of the Hindus of Calcutta, held on 4 July-1926, called the Government resolution "an interference with the religious rights and usages of the Hindus as laid down in the Shastras and enjoyed by them from time immemorial".<sup>11</sup>

In this connection the so-called Bengal Pact, offered to Muslims by C. R. Das on behalf of the Swaraj Party on 17 December 1923 came more and more under attack. Through this Pact C. R. Das had one-sidedly committed Hindus to refrain from playing music in processions passing by any mosque, at any time of day or night, whether there was namaz going on or not. The Pact appeared to have ignored altogether the existence of temples, churches and other places of worship. It was argued that the concession granted to Muslims under the Pact was against all custom and that even the Calcutta police authorities had shown greater respect for the existing rights of non-Muslims to take out processions with music on public streets. The licence for processions prohibited music before temples, mosques, churches, gurdwaras, synagogues and other places of worship at the time of public worship, which meant congregational prayer.<sup>12</sup>

The Pact came more and more under attack from elements within the Swaraj Party even as opinion polarized on communal lines causing a split in the Party.



Almost upon the heels of the April riots in Calcutta came the Bengal Provincial Conference, held on 22 and 23 May at Krishnagar. Virtually the only issue before the Conference was the Bengal Pact. The deliberations were marked by a great deal of acrimony over certain views expressed by the president of the Conference. In the end the leader of the Swarajists, J. M. Sen Gupta, and a good many others supporting the Bengal Pact, left the Conference.

The Conference then passed a resolution which, inter alia, rescinded "the Bengal Pact entered into at Serajgunj as it is of opinion that the Pact is based on communalism."<sup>13</sup>

J. M. Sen Gupta, president of the B.P.C.C., then called an emergency meeting of the B.P.C.C. for 13 June, calling upon the members, at the same time, to elect another Executive Council, since many in the existing Executive Council were opposed to the Bengal Pact. At the meeting Sen Gupta asserted that the Pact was the very foundation upon which the Congress work in Bengal and indeed in the whole of India depended, and that therefore those who were opposed to it had no place in the Council. The Executive Council was accordingly dissolved.

This made the split in the Party inevitable. T. C. Goswamy, B. C. Roy, R. C. Chunder, N. R. Sarkar and U. B. Bose shortly afterwards came out with a manifesto in which they asserted that although the Bengal Pact had been worked out by their leader C. R. Das in good faith and in the expectation that Hindus would be prepared to surrender a great deal in pursuit of communal harmony, it was impossible "to overlook the fact that the Pact has never been ratified either by the Indian National Congress or by either of the two communities". The signatories further expressed the view that separate electorates conceded in the Pact were fraught with the danger of creating a permanent division between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>14</sup>



Changes were taking place in Muslim politics too. In April 1926 Sir Abdur Rahim set up a Bengal Muslim Party. In the manifesto that he issued he spelt out the constitutional framework for which the party would be working. This envisaged "a federation of autonomous provinces, the Central Government's function being confined to the administration of such subjects as directly concern the whole of India". Referring to the situation in Bengal the manifesto asserted that though Muslims constituted 56 per cent of the population of the province, they suffered from "considerable disabilities and difficulties regarding their political and economic development". The manifesto commended the resolution passed at the Muslim League session in December 1925 that there should be adequate representation of the minorities in legislatures "without reducing the (Muslim) majority in any province to a minority or even to an equality". It asked that the representation of the various communities in the Bengal Council should be in proportion to their numerical strength and that election be by means of separate electorates.<sup>15</sup>

The All-India Khilafat Conference, which met in Delhi on 8 and 9 May 1926 under the presidentship of Maulana Suleman Nadvi, also took up a confrontationist attitude vis-a-vis Hindus. Even Hakim Ajmal Khan, who was chairman of the reception committee, did not mince words in criticizing "Hindu communal activities" such as *shuddhi* and *sangathan*. He pointed out that the sufferings of the Hindus in the Moplah rebellion and in Kohat riots had infused a new life in their communal activities, but when Muslims had similarly suffered at Arrah and Kartarpur a few years earlier, Muslims had taken no action. So much was the resentment shown against Hindus at the Conference that when one speaker used the expression "Hindu brethren" he was shouted down and told not to use the word "brethren" for Kafirs.



The Conference, through a resolution moved by Mohammed Ali, changed the Khilafat creed to include the safeguarding of "religious, educational, social, economic and political interests of Indian Mussalmans" and reforming and organizing them.

Mohammed Ali also supported the resolution on *Tanzim* and *Tabligh*. He said it was the duty of every Muslim to convert non-Muslims to Islam.<sup>16</sup>

Thus on either side of the communal divide there was a stiffening of attitudes and disinclination to extend any concessions to the opposite party. Communal riots were increasing in area, scope and intensity. The Calcutta riots were soon followed by riots in Rawalpindi, Pabna, Allahabad, Dacca and Delhi.

In Rawalpindi, the spark that ignited the fire was a Sikh procession that passed the Jumma Masjid with a band playing music. This incensed the Muslims and a series of incidents culminated in large-scale rioting, which claimed 14 dead and 50 wounded. In addition, a great deal of property was destroyed.

In Pabna, the discovery of broken idols of Hindu gods and a fracas in front of a mosque roused passions that culminated in large-scale rioting in which even villagers from the surrounding countryside took part.

In Allahabad on 12 September, two persons died and 27 sustained injuries in the riot that engulfed the city. Taking out of a procession by Hindus and playing music while passing a mosque was the ostensible cause of the riot - ostensible because the processionists had taken special care to see that they passed the mosque well before the time of the evening *namaz*. Even so, elements inside the mosque threw brickbats at the procession.

In the Dacca riots, about 70 persons were injured. The riot started on the Janmashtami day over the Hindus' insistence on taking out processions with



music. They claimed that it was according to custom. The authorities seized guns and daggers and took 172 persons into custody.

In Delhi riots occurred on 24 June and 27 August. Sixty-nine persons including 11 policemen were injured and three killed. The riot had been started by a bolting pony in the market.

## 7

India was thus thrown into the vortex of communal turmoil. The language of social amity, harmony and brotherhood had lost its edge altogether and in the streets of cities knives appeared to rule. National life, in the words of Viceroy Irwin, who had taken over from Reading in April, had "suspended its activities" and "ranged its component parts into opposite and hostile camps".

While the proximity of the elections, scheduled for November 1926, no doubt had a share in exacerbating feelings, the causes of the aberration certainly appeared to go deeper, for the rioting continued well into the following year. Nationalist opinion was almost unanimous that one of the chief causes of communal disturbances was the pernicious system of communal electorates, firmly grafted onto the constitution by the Act of 1919. The rulers disclaimed any responsibility for it. Irwin in his widely publicized Chelmsford Club speech in July 1926 clearly said that "these arrangements were the result of a compact to which Indian opinion at the time of the introduction of the Reforms desired effect to be given. The Franchise Committee found that the evidence received by them was unanimously in favour of communal electorates and recommended that action should be taken in accordance with the commonly expressed desire."<sup>17</sup>

Gandhiji was not inclined to absolve the rulers of the responsibility entirely. He wrote to Norman Leys, leader of the Independent Labour Party of Britain:





I know that primarily the fault is ours.... But when an outside power whose strength lies in our weakness notices our dissensions, it takes advantage of them consciously or unconsciously. Everyone in India knows this and feels the effect of it also. Some honest British officials have not hesitated to make the admission before me and some have unguardedly betrayed themselves by making inconvenient admissions or remarks.<sup>18</sup>

In another letter to the same addressee, Gandhiji wrote:

But a clash of arms will not move me. Any real movement for freedom is like new birth and all its attendant travail. If we have to go through a purgatory, we must face it for the priceless boon.

He continued:

I look upon the present feud between the two as a healthy sign in a way. It is really unconsciously a battle for freedom. It was possible for them to have avoided this if they could have assimilated the programme of 1920. But the energy and national consciousness that were called into being in 1920 could not possibly remain dormant and, as they could not find their way in a healthy channel, they have taken the unhealthy course of internecine bloody feud.<sup>19</sup>

1926 was thus a year of the dismantling of the edifice of national unity at all levels and consolidation of the forces of reaction. Gandhiji's decision to keep himself away from the politics of the country throughout the whole of the year was widely regretted and appeals were addressed to him to step out of his self-imposed seclusion and take up the leadership.

The sentiment in the country is best expressed in one such appeal signed by Syed Mahmud, Saifuddin Kitchlew and ten others, and published in the press on 6



September. The appeal referred to the "unspoken anxiety and eagerness of the millions" of Indians who were unable to voice their sentiments, because they respected "the self-denying ordinance" Gandhiji had imposed on himself, and proceeded:

... the nation has watched with breathless suspense the triumph after triumph of the forces of reaction, surrender after surrender which you seemed to be making.... There are many, however, who never understood the sublime sacrifice dictating your actions ever since your unconditional release from jail.

The signatories called upon Gandhiji to forgo his vow and by way of suggestion put forth the idea that he might begin by inviting a conference of the various parties and individuals, including Malaviya and Abdur Rahim, Jayakar and Patel.<sup>20</sup>

Gandhiji said his withdrawal from politics was dictated by considerations of health and the Ashram affairs and in any case, the year was drawing to a close. Moreover, he had not been inactive. So far as the Councils were concerned, he had no aptitude for them. He would continue to concentrate on eradication of untouchability, national education and spinning.

Gandhiji told the signatories not to be disheartened by Hindu-Muslim dissensions. The fighting, however unfortunate, was a sign of growth. "It is like the Wars of the Roses. Out of it will rise a mighty nation ... even a bloody way is better than utter helplessness and unmanliness."

Gandhiji expressed his inability to bring the parties together. Their method was not his method. The millions for whom the signatories claimed to write were uninterested in the party complications.<sup>21</sup>



As the date of the elections approached, fissiparous activities in the councils of political parties and group clashes outside further increased.

South India had its own version of social conflict in the perpetual fights between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Even before the election campaign started, Congress workers more and more came under attack by Justice Party men, who spat upon them and abused and humiliated them. Congressmen asked Gandhiji how they should react consistently with non-violence. Gandhiji wrote:

Those who cannot be non-violent at heart are under no obligation to be non-violent under the circumstances mentioned by the correspondent.... I have often noticed that weak people have taken shelter under the Congress creed or under my advice, when they have simply by reason of their cowardice been unable to defend their own honour or that of those who were entrusted to their care. I recall the incident that happened near Bettiah when non-cooperation was at its height. Some villagers were looted. They had fled leaving their wives, children and belongings to the mercy of the looters. When I rebuked them for their cowardice in thus neglecting their charge, they shamelessly pleaded non-violence.... Non-violence is not a cover for cowardice..... It is a conscious, deliberate restraint put upon one's desire for vengeance. But vengeance is any day superior to passive, effeminate and helpless submission.<sup>22</sup>

8

After the Swarajists had staged a walk-out from the Assembly and the Provincial Councils, the other elected members continued their battle against the entrenched bureaucracy inside these bodies over various issues.

One such occasion came when on 25 August the Home Member Sir Alexander Muddiman moved the Bill to amend the Criminal Procedure Code to bring all



writing promoting communal hatred within the scope of the power of forfeiture. The Bill, he assured the House, would be used largely in cases of inflammatory pamphlets.

Hari Singh Gour opposed the motion, charging the Government with trying to take advantage of the absence of Swarajist members in the House to rush through anti-people legislation, notwithstanding the President's warning against bringing forward contentious measures.

Lajpat Rai denounced the Bill as a very serious encroachment on the liberties of the press. It was an insidious measure, which would be abused by the Government and the police. In his view, no legislation could cure communal trouble so long as the leaders of the two communities did not themselves make an effort to bring about peace. "Don't hit below the belt," he told the Government.

Malaviya was less scathing in his attack. He thought the Home Member had been moved by a sincere desire to bring about peace. He also agreed that pamphlets of an inflammatory character were printed by both the communities. He however asked for the Bill to be referred to a Select Committee.

Jinnah too opposed the Bill and supported its being referred to a Select Committee. But he insisted that in any case the operation of the Bill should be limited to a specified number of years.

The Home Minister did not agree to the Bill being referred to a Select Committee. On 26 August the following day, the Bill was considered clause by clause and passed with a comfortable majority.<sup>23</sup>

A great deal of energy of Congress President Sarojini Naidu and the leader of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly, Pandit Motilal Nehru, was devoted to efforts for



reuniting the various factions which had left the party or were about to do so. The tussle with the Responsive Cooperationists of Maharashtra was followed by a tussle with Lala Lajpat Rai, whose attitude towards the Swaraj Party and its policies had always been somewhat equivocal.

Before the Kanpur Congress Lajpat Rai had been unsparingly critical of the policy of the Swarajists, so much so that he had, at the Subjects Committee, opposed the resolution concerning the walk-out from the Councils. He had then, to the surprise of many, joined the Swaraj Party.

On 24 August 1926, Lajpat Rai wrote to Motilal Nehru that he could not any more remain a member of the Swaraj Party. The walk-out from the Assembly, in his view, had been "more harmful to the Hindus than to any other class or community", for out of 40 to 50 Swarajist members not more than five or six were Muslims. The walk-out thus drastically reduced Hindu representation in the Assembly.

Motilal Nehru in his rejoinder expressed surprise that it had taken Lajpat Rai eight months to discover this, which was clear at the very outset when the walk-out resolution was first discussed by the Congress. He also reminded Lajpat Rai that he had been elected to the Assembly because a member of the Swaraj Party, Raizada Hans Raj, had vacated his seat for him, with the understanding that on being elected he would join the Swaraj Party. He also charged that Lala Lajpat Rai's letter was "a most characteristic contribution to the electioneering propaganda of the Hindu Sabha."

There was a further exchange of letters, full of charges and counter- charges, which led to further bitterness between the two sides. Lajpat Rai was, by that time, out of the party.<sup>24</sup>



Gandhiji was not unduly worried over the friction, which he considered a passing phase. He expressed the conviction that before long both Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai would be working under the same flag. He wrote:

Lalaji sees no escape from communalism. Panditji cannot brook even the thought of it. Who shall say that only one is right? Both attitudes are a response to the prevailing atmosphere. Lalaji who was born to public life with swaraj on his lips is no hater of it now. He proposes to mount it through communalism, which he considers to be an inevitable stage in our evolution. Panditji thinks that communalism blocks the way and he therefore proposes to ignore it even as auto-suggestionists ignore disease.<sup>25</sup>

Motilal Nehru made yet another attempt to woo Malaviya and Lajpat Rai on a common basic programme on which the party could fight the elections as a united body.

The terms of compromise offered by Malaviya were as follows: No acceptance of office in the provinces unless Bengal detenus were tried or released and other conditions were fulfilled by Government, which a committee of nine would consider satisfactory. The committee would comprise four Swarajists, four Responsive Cooperationists and the Congress president. The list of candidates for the election would also be revised by the Committee.

In the Central Legislature Malviya proposed discriminate obstruction and throwing out of the budget demand, and even the Finance Bill, if the interests of the country did not suffer thereby.

Motilal Nehru did not find it possible to deviate from the policy laid down by the resolutions of the Congress passed at Kanpur and Delhi. The talks broke down.



Malaviya and Lajpat Rai then convened a conference of Congressmen in Delhi on 11 and 12 September 1926. Delegates came from U.P., C.P., Punjab and Bengal. Prominent members of the Responsive Cooperation Party from Maharashtra were also present.

The Conference concluded with the formation of an Independent Congress Party. The resolution containing the programme said the Party would work the Legislatures and accept offices if a majority of legislators in the Councils thought the terms satisfactory. The party would work in concert with the Responsive Cooperation Party.

The Responsive Cooperationists promised the party their full cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

9

The general elections came round in November 1926. The conditions in the country were far from propitious for the Congress. The dissensions in the leadership led to demoralization in the ranks. The situation was made worse by the fact that there was no sign of any let up in communal tension.

Gandhiji kept himself strictly aloof from the elections and electioneering. He was nevertheless not left alone. Voluminous correspondence poured in from all parts of the country. Letters came from candidates, would-be candidates and rank-and-file Congress workers. There were various charges and accusations with appeals to Gandhiji to do something about it.

One correspondent complained of the Congress being packed with bogus members. Another wrote that women of loose character were being used by some people to canvass for Congress nominations for election to legislatures. Yet another correspondent sent Gandhiji cuttings to prove that candidates and their supporters were appealing to communal passions. And there were of course



complaints of money being freely used in way that could only be described as bribery. Gandhiji wrote:

Now that a large body of people are taking part in these public matters, the impurities which were hidden are coming to the surface. Unfortunately, if all my correspondents are right, there is not anything better left under the surface; in other words, impurities are not superficial, but they are in the whole body itself....

I draw the particular attention of all Congress workers to the painful allegations made. The latter must remember that the Congress creed is still unamended. The creed requires them to work for the attainment of swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means.... And if I have no creed for non-Congressmen to draw attention to, I wish they would realize that without purity of public life, swaraj is an impossibility.<sup>27</sup>

Gandhiji all along remained unshaken in his view that no good could ever come through the Councils, while they were to a large extent responsible for the rise in Hindu-Muslim tensions. Writing to a correspondent, he said:

It is moreover my firm conviction that this exaggerated importance we are giving to the Councils out of all proportion to their usefulness, if there ever was any, is keeping us apart. Everyone who remains outside the Councils thinks that he is losing something. And what is true of individuals is true of communities and, therefore, there is a mad rush over getting as much representation as possible and then getting in as many men as possible with a communal taint.<sup>28</sup>

Could the Government of India Act, 1919, he asked, be an instrument for securing for the Indian masses any sort of responsible government? Even if ministers in the provinces were given the powers asked for and made responsible to the





popularly elected Councils, one could hardly call it a representative Government. Out of nearly 240 million inhabitants, something less than seven and a half million were qualified to vote either for the Central or Provincial Legislatures.

The results of the general elections left the Swarajists, or, more correctly, the Congress, more or less where it had been. The Party secured a signal success in Madras, where the main antagonist had been the Justice Party of the non-Brahmins. Roughly, half of the seats contested were secured by the Congress Party. In Bihar and Orissa, the Congress managed to hold its ground, though most of the candidates elected were Responsivists even though they had fought the election on the Congress ticket. In Bengal and Bombay, the Party was worse off than before. In C.P. it was very much weaker than before. In Punjab and U.P. the Swarajists were almost routed. In U.P. the party lost all the Hindu seats for the Assembly except Motilal Nehru's, which was not contested. In the Punjab Council the Party won two seats, in U.P. their number fell from 31 to 19 and in C.P. from 44 to 15.

In the Central Assembly, the Congress won 40 out of a total of 104 elected seats. The rest of the elected members were made up of Muslims, Responsive Cooperators, Independents, Hindu Mahasabhaites and those not affiliated to any party.<sup>29</sup>

The overall position of the parties in the Central Assembly following the third general elections under the Act of 1919 was as follows:

Congress 40, Nationalist 20, Muslim Centre Party and non-party 17, Independents 16, Europeans 10, Nominated 41 (official 26, others 15). Total 144.

*India in 1927-28* has the following note on the parties:

*Swarajist*: The Swarajists are opposed to the present constitution. They question the right of Parliament to determine further stages of advance,



and desire to attain swaraj or Home Rule by obstructing to such an extent as to make the working of the present constitution impossible.

Leaders: Pandit Motilal Nehru, Srinivasa Iyengar.

*Nationalist Party:* The Nationalists regard Dyarchy as unworkable. Their policy is not total support of the Government. They desire to attain Swaraj or Home Rule as early as possible but only by constitutional means.

Leaders: Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai.

*Non-Party:* As the name signifies these members have not formed any particular party and vote on each matter as they like - sometimes with and sometimes against the Government.

*Independents:* The Independents desire progress but they do not believe in consistent obstruction. Sometimes they support the Government, sometimes they oppose it.

Leader: M. A. Jinnah.

*Europeans:* The Europeans believe in steady orderly progress and generally support the Government.

Leader: Sir D'Arcy Lindsay.

*Nominated:* The nominated members have no definite programme. They are nominated to secure representation of particular interests. The officials naturally support the Government. Though the majority of the others support the Government, on certain questions some of them take up an independent line of their own and vote with one of the popular parties.

Leader: Sir Basil Blackett (Leader of the House, Finance Member of the Council)



*Muslim Party.* The Muslim Centre Party is conservative in outlook and is pledged to national progress to Home Rule which shall include full safeguards for the existing rights and privileges of the Muslim community and reasonable opportunity for their continued development in the future."<sup>30</sup>

It was considered significant that two Congress candidates had won the elections in Bengal while still in detention. These were Subhas Chandra Bose, fielded for the Bengal Provincial Council and Satyendra Chandra Mitra, fielded for the Central Assembly. Both candidates were then in Mandalay Jail, detained under the Bengal Ordinance. They won by overwhelming majorities.

## 10

The forty-first annual session of the Indian National Congress was held in Gauhati from 26 to 28 December 1926. Srinivasa Iyengar was the President.

Gandhiji was at first disinclined to go to Gauhati to attend the Congress. On Motilal Nehru's insistence, however, he decided to go. The period of one year's rest from politics that he had imposed on himself was also drawing to a close.

He was at Wardha, where he had been spending a couple of weeks in Vinoba's company. Jamnalal Bajaj had stayed at Sabarmati Ashram for some time in the early days with his family so that his children could be imbued with Gandhiji's teachings. It was at Sabarmati that his eldest daughter Kamla was married in simple Ashram style.

On returning to Wardha Jamnalal asked Gandhiji for Vinoba's services for setting up an ashram at Wardha. But Maganlal, the Ashram Manager, said he could not spare Vinoba. Vinoba was later sent to Gujarat Vidyapeeth as a teacher. Jamnalal repeated his request to Gandhiji after some time and Gandhiji sent Vinoba to



Wardha where Vinoba helped Jamnalal in developing an Ashram. Jamnalal's children were educated in that Ashram along with a number of other disciples of Vinoba. Gandhiji had now gone to Wardha to be with Vinoba and see his work for himself. He was very pleased, and felt very much at peace while he was there. He left Wardha on 21 December and reached Calcutta on 24 December. It was here on his way to Gauhati that he received the stunning news that Swami Shraddhanand had been murdered the previous day by a Muslim fanatic at Delhi. Gandhiji was overwhelmed with grief. The proceedings of the Congress were conducted under the shadow of the tragedy.

The circumstances in which the murder was committed were most revolting. The Swami had been convalescing after a severe attack of pneumonia a couple of months before and was confined to his bed, when a Muslim youth, Abdul Rashid, secured admittance into his room under the pretext of wanting to discuss religious matters with him and then shot the Swami.

The murder of this great Arya Samaj leader was symptomatic of the change that the communal climate of the country had undergone since 1919, when Swami Shraddhanand had addressed Muslim throngs from the Jama Masjid in Delhi. The immediate cause of course was the *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* activities that the Arya Samaj had been carrying on for some time and which were spearheaded by Swami Shraddhanand.

Gandhiji refused to grieve over the death, for Swamiji, he said, had died a hero and a martyr.

The Congress, in a resolution, which was to have been moved by Mohammed Ali but was instead moved by Gandhiji, "expressed its horror and indignation at the cowardly and treacherous murder" and paid tribute to the "brave and noble patriot who dedicated his life and his great gifts to the service of his country".<sup>31</sup>



The political resolution of the Congress, which defined its attitude towards the Government and the constitutional *pourparlers* in the coming months and years, was moved by J. M. Sen Gupta, having first been approved by the Subjects Committee. It read:

This Congress reiterates its resolve that the general policy of Congressmen in the Assembly and the various Councils shall be one of self-reliance in all activities which make for the healthy growth of the nation and of determined resistance to every activity, governmental or other, that may impede the nation's progress towards swaraj. In particular, Congressmen in the legislatures shall:

- (a) refuse to accept ministership or other office in the gift of the Government and oppose the formation of a ministry by other parties until, in the opinion of the Congress or the All-India Congress Committee, a satisfactory response is made by the Government to the national demand;
- (b) subject to clause (d) refuse supplies and throw out budgets until such response is made by the Government or unless otherwise directed by the All-India Congress Committee;
- (c) throw out all proposals for legislative enactments by which the bureaucracy proposed to consolidate its powers;
- (d) move resolutions and introduce and support measures and bills which are necessary for the healthy growth of national life and the advancement of economic, agricultural, industrial and commercial interests of the country, and for the protection of the freedom of person, speech, association and of the press, and the consequent displacement of the bureaucracy;



(e) take steps to improve the condition of agricultural tenants by introducing and supporting measures to secure fixity of tenure and other advantages with a view to ensure a speedy amelioration of the condition of the tenants; and

(f) generally protect the rights of labour, agricultural and industrial, and adjust on an equitable basis the relations between landlords and tenants, capitalists and workmen.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhiji did not participate in the debate over the resolution. He could not attach to the programme enunciated in the resolution the importance that others did. He expressed his views a few days later in a speech at Camilla:

But how many of us can take a direct part in the working of that programme? How many of us can enter Councils and the Legislative Assembly? How many of us are entitled to elect members of these legislative bodies? Are the millions of the villagers of India enfranchised? Is India living in her 10 or 20 cities, or is she living in her 700,000 villages?

The only programme that could weld together the 30 crores of Indian people, he said, was khadi and spinning. Spinning was the only activity which every villager, man, woman and child, Hindu and Mussalman, could take up with profit and at the same time uplift the whole of India.<sup>33</sup>

Gandhiji commended the Congress on passing another resolution, the one on khaddar franchise, moved by T. Prakasam and passed by the Congress after rejecting all the amendments. It amended section (iv) of the Congress Constitution to read:

(iv) (a) No person shall be entitled to vote at the election of representatives or delegates of any committee or sub-committee or any



Congress organization whatsoever, or to be elected as such, or to take part - in any meeting of the Congress or Congress organization or any committee or sub-committee thereof, if he has not complied with section (1) thereof and does not habitually wear hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar.<sup>34</sup>

While welcoming the improvement made in the franchise clause, Gandhiji was at the same time well aware that it was "the pressure of popular mind" that had extorted that improvement. The leaders, he said, had seen that khaddar was the only passport to the hearts of the villagers. It was khaddar that had won the elections for the Swarajists. In Madras, even those who were otherwise opposed to khaddar were obliged to wear it at the time of appealing to the electorate.<sup>35</sup>

Gandhiji was equally appreciative of the emphasis the Congress had laid on prohibition and anti-drink campaign. The President in his address had regretted that the Congress had lately been neglectful of the programme of total prohibition. No minister during the preceding six years, he had said, had been courageous enough to bring a bill for total prohibition and to resign his office on its rejection or disallowance.

Gandhiji, commenting, said that there was something wrong somewhere if, in a country such as India, which was overwhelmingly dry, ministers were unwilling to introduce total prohibition. He could not go along with the argument that introducing prohibition would amount to an interference with the right of the people. It was just like saying that prohibiting theft would interfere with the right of thieving. As for the loss of revenue that total prohibition would entail, Gandhiji pointed out that there was a huge military expenditure, much of which was entirely useless and based upon distrust of the nation. It was capable of reduction by more than 25 crores which was the revenue from drinks and drugs.<sup>36</sup>



The question of the grievances of Indian settlers in South Africa had continued to agitate the political parties in India throughout the period following the visit of the Addison Commission to South Africa and the visit of the South African Indian Congress deputation to India towards the end of 1925. C. F. Andrews had been putting in strenuous efforts in South Africa to make the Hertzog Government accept the idea of a round table conference in order to settle the question and obviate the need for such racial legislation as the Areas Reservation and Immigration (Further Provisions) Bill, which threatened the very existence of Indians in South Africa.

On the Hertzog Government agreeing in principle to have such a conference, a deputation from the S. A. Union Government had paid a visit to India in September-October 1925: Gandhi had welcomed the deputation on its arrival in Bombay on 19 September and had called for all goodwill to be shown to its members.<sup>37</sup>

On 24 November 1926, the Indian delegation sailed for South Africa to participate in the talks. The delegation was headed by Sir Muhammad Habibullah and included as members, G. L. Corbert (Deputy Leader), Srinivasa Sastri, Sir D'Arcy Lindsay, Sir Phiroze Sethna, Sir George Paddison and G. S. Bajpai.

The Union Government was represented by a delegation of seven persons headed by Interior Minister D. F. Malan.

When the Conference opened on 17 December 1926 there were prayers offered in India for its success. The appeal for prayers had been made by Andrews from South Africa and repeated by Gandhiji at the Congress in Gauhati.

The deliberations of the Conference continued till 13 January 1927 when an agreement was signed by the two delegations.





The agreement reaffirmed the recognition by the two Governments of "the right of South Africa to use all just and legitimate means for the maintenance of Western standards of life" while the Government of South Africa recognized that domiciled Indians who were prepared to conform to Western standards of life should be enabled to do so.<sup>38</sup>

But what was meant by "Western standards of Life"? Gandhiji had written many months earlier:

The Union Government is undoubtedly entitled to safeguard what they call Western standards of life by just and legitimate means and the only just and legitimate means that can be accepted are sanitary and economic laws. Thus, for instance, Indian lawyers must compete with European lawyers on equal terms and so far as I am aware, no Indian lawyer does otherwise. But I have discovered that there is discrimination used even against them ... even in the Supreme Court, clerks who appear before the Registrar on business must not be wearers of any but white skin. If that is called safeguarding Western standards of life by just and legitimate means the proviso is dangerous:<sup>39</sup>

The agreement then went on to unfold a scheme of "assisted emigration to India or other countries where Western standards are not required", for those Indians who would care to avail themselves of it.

Under this scheme, emigrants would be paid a bonus of £ 20 (£ 10 in case of children under sixteen) and free passage, including railway fares to the port of embarkation in South Africa and from the port of landing in India to the destination inland. A decrepit adult unable to earn a living would be provided a pension in lieu of or in addition to the bonus, out of funds kept in India by the Government of South Africa.



An assisted emigrant, should he choose to return to South Africa, would be permitted to do so within three years from the date of departure from South Africa (but not within one year- in case people were tempted to \ make use of the scheme to pay temporary visits home). After three years from the date of departure, the rights of domicile would lapse.

Emigrants so returning would have to refund the amounts of bonus and the money spent on passage and train fares in both countries.

As regards entry of wives and children, the Government of India would have to certify that the person for whom right of entry was claimed was the lawful wife or child of the person making the claim. In the event of divorce, no other wife would be permitted to enter the Union unless divorce was proved to the satisfaction of the Union authorities.

The agreement also provided for an inquiry commission to look into the question of Indian education in the province of Natal, for improving facilities for higher education for Indians, and for steps to be taken to improve Indian housing and sanitation.

In the matter of trading licences and their renewal, the Union Government agreed to the suggestion to curb the discretionary powers of the local authorities. It was also agreed that the issue of licences would be governed by statutory rules and in case of refusal of licences the reasons for such refusal would be recorded.

The Government of India would also consider the appointment of an Agent in South Africa, should the Union Government make such a request.<sup>40</sup>

Gandhiji described the settlement as honourable-not the best that could be achieved but the best that was possible: But he warned that the words "assisted emigration to India or other countries where Western standards are not



required" were open to the interpretation that Indians could be sent to countries other than India. There was no knowing, he wrote, what might happen to the poor ignorant men going to an unknown land where they would be utter strangers. Neither Fiji nor British Guiana had a good name in India.<sup>41</sup>



## CHAPTER IV

### COMMUNAL SCHISM WIDENS

#### 1

The widening of the Hindu-Muslim rift, expressed in riots and rowdyism during religious processions and demonstrations, was a most notable phenomenon during the year 1926. The leadership of the Muslims, whether in the Muslim League or the Khilafat Committee or the various provincial organizations, by their utterances and acts did nothing to improve the situation. They were concerned more and more with securing seats in the Councils and ministerships and jobs in the Government. Sir Abdur Rahim, for instance, was trying to induce the Viceroy to appoint a Muslim on his Executive Council. Irwin refused to be pushed and was reported to have remarked:

The Governor-General must hold himself free to make whatever appointment seems to him most in accordance with public interests.<sup>1</sup>

At the annual session of the All-India Muslim League, held in Delhi on 29, 30 and 31 December 1926, resolutions were passed demanding "adequate Muslim representation in the Central and Provincial Governments in India" and deploring the absence of a Muslim Minister in the Punjab. It was pointed out that though Muslims had an adequate number of seats in the Punjab Council, they could never defeat either the Hindus or the Government.

The resolution on Reforms and Representation, moved by M.A. Jinnah laid down the following "fundamental principles", which it said must be secured and guaranteed:

- (1) All legislatures of the country and other elected bodies be constituted on a definite principle of adequate and effective representation of the



minorities in every province without reducing the majority in any province to a minority or to an equality;

(2) Representation of communal groups shall continue to be by means of separate electorates as at present...;

(3) The territorial redistribution that might at any time be necessary shall not in any way affect the Muslim majority in the Punjab, Bengal and North-West Frontier Provinces;

(4) Full religious liberty... shall be guaranteed to all communities;

(5) No bill or resolution or any part thereof shall be passed in any legislature or in any other elected body if three-fourths of the members of any community in that particular body oppose such a bill or resolution or part thereof....

M. A. Jinnah in his speech assured the Government that though the League demanded a change in the Act of 1919, Muslims "were not in agreement with any policy of non-cooperation with the Government nor did they sanction the policy of obstruction or of making the reforms impossible". Muslims, he said, wished to work the Reforms. They were anxious to see that their position was thoroughly defined and secured.

By another resolution the League demanded introduction of the Reforms in the Frontier Province.<sup>2</sup>

The Muslim League now was definitely set on a course, largely charted by Jinnah, which must diverge more and more with the passage of time from that of the Congress and the national movement as a whole.

The communal situation continued to remain disturbed even after the elections. Riots took place in Ponabalia, in the Barisal district of Bengal, Larkana in Sind and



Lahore in Punjab. The causes too remained the same: *shuddhi* and *sangathan* on the part of a section among the Hindus and *tabligh* and *tanzim* on the part of the Muslims. On both sides, it was being realized that working out a *modus vivendi* on a political level and smoothing out of the differences that found vent in the press and platform and aggravated tension had become an urgent need. Leaders of the Congress were more and more coming to the view that it had been a mistake on their part to have countenanced communal electorates and that the sooner the pernicious system was got rid of the better it would be for all concerned.

On 16 March 1927, Sankaran Nair moved a resolution in the Council of State asking the Council to recommend to the Governor General that the communal electorates should be abolished. Speaking on the resolution, he reminded the Council of certain evils which had been predicted in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report to follow from the establishment of separate electorates. Many of those evils, he said, had already come to pass.

The Home Member opposed the resolution, saying if the demand were to be conceded all further reform would have to stop. He said:

Power has begun to be exercised by the representatives of the people; power has begun to be exercised by the representatives of the individual communities concerned, and it is the exercise of those powers by those individual communities that has given the edge to the present tension that exists.... The minority community ... is determined to see that it does not get lost in the general struggle....

We recognize that these separate electorates have been a difficulty, are a difficulty and will continue to be a difficulty... but we recognize also that without them there is no possibility of getting a large body of the



community to come in.... At any rate, had Parliament in 1919 forced a system of joint electorates in India in face of violent opposition, it seems certain that Hindu-Mohammedan relations would by now have become more bitterly estranged than they are.

The policy of divide-and-rule was obviously of great value for the British rule in India and the British were not prepared to give it up.

Mahmood Suhrawardy moved an amendment seeking "effective representation of minorities in every province by means of separate electorates" to be secured as a fundamental principle.<sup>3</sup>

On 20 March 1927, 30 prominent Muslim leaders assembled in Delhi to consider the question. They included M. A. Jinnah, Maharaja of Mahmudabad, Sir Mohammed Shafi, Sir Abdul Qaiyum, Dr. Ansari, Maulana Mohammed Ali, Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Mohammed Yakub, Mohammed Shafi and the Imam of Jama Masjid.

The Conference, presided over by Jinnah, agreed to accept the Congress proposal for joint electorates provided the following conditions were fulfilled:

- (1) Sind should be separated from Bombay Presidency and constituted into a separate province;
- (2) Reforms should be introduced in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan on the same footing as in any other province in India. It was further stipulated that in Punjab and Bengal the proportion of representation should be in accordance with the population. In the Central Legislature Muslim representation should be not less than one third.

Hindu and Sikh leaders, meeting separately soon afterwards could not see why the separation of Sind from Bombay and the extending of Reforms to N.W.F.P.



and Baluchistan should be connected with the question of joint electorates. It may be noted that these two demands had already been accepted by the Congress. Did the Muslims want a price for the concession they would be making to the Hindus? But Jinnah said the conditions laid down were the sine qua non of Muslims agreeing to any new scheme. The offer was to be accepted in its entirety.<sup>4</sup>

## 3

One of the issues on which elected Indians in the Central Assembly put up a determined fight against the Government was the Currency Bill.

The Bill originated from the report of the Royal Commission on Indian Currency published in August 1926. One of the recommendations of the Commission, namely the recommendation to stabilize the value of the rupee at ls. 6d. gold, gave rise to a powerful agitation. Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas, a member of the Commission, appended to the report a minute of dissent, in which he opposed the Commission's recommendation in regard to stabilization of the rupee at ls 6d. and the formation of a Reserve Bank. He proposed, instead, that the rupee should be stabilized at ls. 4d. gold. There had been no general adjustment of prices at ls. 6d. and the fixation of this ratio would give the foreign manufacturers an indirect bounty of 12 1/2 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

Basil Blackett, the Finance Member, introduced the Bill in the Central Assembly on 23 August 1926. This caused much resentment in nationalist circles, and even the Swrarajists considered the issue important enough for them to walk back into the Assembly, after having walked out of it on 8 March. As it happened, on Dewan Bahadur Rangachariar's motion, consideration of the Bill was postponed.<sup>6</sup>





Gandhiji was drawn into the controversy at the initiative of Purushottamdas Thakurdas, who wrote to Gandhiji seeking his assistance. Gandhiji wrote to him on 29 November:

I have been studying currency this month. Last week I finished reading the Royal Commission's report. I was very happy to read your minute. This does not mean that I understand the subject.... The distinction between Gold Exchange standard, bullion standard and Exchange standard is still not clear to me.<sup>7</sup>

On 22 February 1927, Gandhiji again wrote to Purushottamdas Thakurdas:

I have been closely following the agitation, that is, as closely as I can, in spite of incessant travelling. I have been studying the question carefully and carrying on an active correspondence with experts, chiefly Messrs Madon and Wadia....

If a pure gold standard is established, free mints opened, and a Reserve Bank established, does not the question of ratio disappear altogether? Will not things right themselves? Whereas if the ratio is fixed at 1 to 15 and all questions about gold, currency, mints and Reserve Bank shelved... will it not be worse than the existing state of things?<sup>8</sup>

This had been suggested to Gandhiji by Wadia and he wrote to B. F. Madon too on similar lines on the same day.<sup>9</sup>

When the matter came up again before the Assembly on 7 March 1927 the Bill was vigorously opposed by Madan Mohan Malaviya, who said the rate of exchange was being fixed in order to secure British interests and not the interests of the Indian people, and also by Victor Sassoon and Purushottamdas Thakurdas. Ghanshyamdas Birla, Jinnah, Srinivasa Aiyengar and Gavin Jones also spoke in



favour of the exchange ratio of 1s. 4d. But when the amendment to this effect, moved by Jamnadas Mehta, was put to vote, it was lost by 68 to 65 votes. The Government side won. <sup>10</sup>

## 4

When Gandhiji, on completion of his year-long stay at Sabarmati, set out from Wardha on 21 December for Gauhati to attend the Congress, he was starting on a programme of touring that would become more and more hectic in the days and weeks to come and cause a serious break-down in his health.

From Gauhati Gandhiji proceeded to Calcutta on 31 December and stayed there for four days. He spoke at a number of meetings and laid the foundation-stone of two annexes of the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan and Deshbandhu Memorial Hospital. On 3 January 1927, he paid a visit to the Khadi Pratishtan, Sodepur, and addressed a gathering, which contributed a sum of Rs. 3,500 for khadi work. Gandhiji was accompanied by Perin Captian, Mithubehn Petit and Jamnabehn-all three of them engaged in khadi activity. <sup>11</sup>

On 5 January 1927, he was at Camilla, where he visited the Abhoy Ashram, run by Dr. Suresh Chandra Bannerji, and spoke at a largely attended public meeting. The audience gave Gandhiji permission to speak in Hindi, but to show his appreciation of this courtesy, Gandhiji spoke in English. He called upon the Bengalis to learn Hindi, the national language. He called upon them to eradicate untouchability and to take to khadi and spinning. <sup>12</sup>

The All-India Hindu Mahasabha, at its annual session on 28 and 29 December 1926, had set up a Swami Shraddhanand Memorial Fund of Rs. 5 lakhs to carry on his work of *shuddhi* and *sangathan*<sup>13</sup> and Gandhiji, at all the public meetings he addressed, called upon the people to contribute liberally to this fund.



From Bengal Gandhiji proceeded to U.P. At Banaras on 9 January, he addressed four meetings of students, women, untouchables and lastly a public meeting. He asked for donations for khadi work and at the women's meeting the ladies gave generously, some of them even parting with their jewellery.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhiji also opened the khadi exhibition organized by the Gandhi Ashram at the Town Hall. The Gandhi Ashram Khadi centre had been set up by J. B. Kripalani in 1921 and ever since a large number of students had been devoting themselves to khadi work through this centre. In 1926 alone, it had produced khadi worth Rs. 66,000.

During the whole of February and the first week of March 1927, Gandhiji toured extensively in Maharashtra. In the course of 33 days from 2 February to 6 March, he visited nearly a hundred places and addressed as many meetings. There were days when he visited as many as eight places.

Everywhere at the meetings, there were paper decorations, buntings, garlands of flowers for Gandhiji and printed addresses with copies for distribution among the audience. Gandhiji deprecated the expenditure involved and suggested instead garlands of yarn and doing away with paper decorations altogether. He also advised against the practice of presenting the addresses in silver caskets, even though the caskets were often auctioned by him for far more than their intrinsic value.<sup>15</sup>

## 5

The visit to Akola, the last place in the Maharashtra itinerary, was in connection with the marriage of Manilal Gandhi and Sushila, daughter of Nanabhai Mashruwala, and a niece of Kishorelal Mashruwala, a close associate of Gandhiji. After the ceremony Gandhiji proceeded to Sabarmati, travelling third-class, because, he said, he must not spend on second-class for Manilal and his bride



and he also did not want to cut himself off from the new addition the very first day of her joining the family.<sup>16</sup> The practice of travelling third class had not yet been started by Gandhiji.

Gandhiji was at Sabarmati only for a week, from 8 to 14 March. He was then off again, addressing meetings at Mandvi, Vedchhi and other places in Gujarat. He then went to Hardwar to deliver the convocation address at Gurukul Kangri on 19 March. Returning to Maharashtra, he again addressed meetings in Bombay and Kolhapur, no less than seven on a single day at the latter place.

In between, there was the constant flow of correspondence to be attended to, discussions with visitors of all sorts on all sorts of issues, and weekly writing to be done for *Young India* and its sister publication *Navajivan*.

The pace was too hectic to be sustained for long, and on 26 March, Gandhiji suffered a collapse. Doctors examined him and found that he was in "impending danger of apoplexy due to high blood-pressure condition as a result of continuous overwork". They prescribed "absolute rest and freedom from his regular activities" for an indefinite period. He was also advised to cancel all his "present programmes".<sup>17</sup>

Gandhiji did not prove to be the best of patients. He argued with the doctors and refused to stop spinning, which he found relaxing. He would not implicitly obey the doctors in this matter, he said, unless they could claim infallibility, which, of course, they could not.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, argued Gandhiji, even if he followed the instructions and desisted from any kind of physical activity, such as reading, writing, talking or spinning, how could he desist from thinking? He wrote to M. A. Ansari:

If you say I may not reduce my thoughts to writing or not even give utterance by speech in the shape of conversation, I can somewhat



understand; but I do not know how I can prevent the doings of Hindus and Mussalmans from making me think furiously. Nor do I know how to prevent the growing starvation of millions acting upon my mind.

Gandhiji even cogitated upon the advisability of undertaking a fast to overcome the agitation of his mind. In the same letter to Dr. Ansari he continued:

I do feel that a prolonged fast is the only radical cure because during the 21 days' fast I could see that after ten days I had ceased even to think of the outside world. The starvation had created that temporary mental adjustment.... And, if in spite of the care that I am myself taking and in spite of the army of medical friends who see me and examine me, in spite of the quacks whose opinion I voluntarily seek and in spite of the undivided attention of devoted nurses, blood-pressure refuses to yield and weakness persists, I shall certainly risk causing temporary pain to many friends and impose a fast upon myself either to mend or end this vegetating and vexing state.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of the tremendous success of his tour in the cause of khadi - in Maharashtra alone he had collected a sum of Rs. 1,20,000 against a target of one lakh - his mood remained pessimistic. Shortly after illness struck him, he wrote to Satish Chandra Das Gupta:

I do not expect to go beyond 13<sup>th</sup> April 1928. I have nothing new to say or give. I may collect more, give a little more guidance and patch here and patch there. But really, the clock has struck for me.<sup>20</sup>

In the same mood, he wrote to Pyarelal:

An attack may prove fatal. The present one should be regarded as a clear notice. If not today, then some other day - I have stipulated the period till the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1928.<sup>21</sup>



And to Kaka Kalelkar:

Now what is there to follow except death? Let that too come by the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1928. This interval is not too short for the attainment of swaraj in my lifetime.<sup>22</sup>

Gandhiji was at Nipani when he had the stroke. It was mild and caused temporary weakness from which he recovered. But the danger of another more severe attack was there. On 1 April, he moved to Amboli, in the Konkan area, where he was put up in the bungalow of the Raja of Savantwadi.

The Raja was an enlightened ruler, who cared for his people and mixed with them. Gandhiji was much impressed by "the exceptional character of his "125 villages" and that he drew a fixed sum from the state revenues for his personal expenses."<sup>23</sup>

The Raja saw Gandhiji along with his Rani and begged him to prolong his stay at Amboli. Gandhiji said he very much wished he could do so, for it was such a "scented spot surrounded by picturesque scenery", but he must combine rest with work.<sup>24</sup>

On 18 April, Gandhiji left Amboli and proceeded to Nandi Hills, a mountain resort about 35 miles from Bangalore, at a height of 4,800 ft. from the sea level. The way lay through Belgaum, where he spent a day, reaching Nandi Hills on 20 April. For a couple of days after his arrival at Nandi Hills he was not left alone by visitors. He found the strain too great for him to bear. The blood pressure seemed to be going up, which was considered unusual, for the place was thought to be good for those suffering from high blood-pressure. Someone suggested flatulence might be a cause, which could be treated by taking the juice of fresh neem leaves with milk. Gandhiji started the experiment right away. He also started taking the



milk unboiled, fresh from the udders of goats that had been brought there. He was ever ready to experiment in dietetics.

Gandhiji constantly remained occupied with the thought that milk, apart from mother's milk, was not meant to be consumed by human beings and therefore a substitute for milk must be found. Turning almonds into milk did not help because they could not be made as readily digestible as milk. It was also his belief that foods, which did not come from animals, - such as sun-baked fruits, and sun-baked nuts, on which he had lived for several years, helped in the pursuit of *brahmacharya*.

Gandhiji's blood-pressure soon came down, by 2 May it was normal, and he started taking walks morning and evening. He was continuing to do a fair amount of letter-writing and wrote articles for *Young India* and *Navajivan*. He was also continuing the work on his Autobiography.

The co-workers saw to it that Gandhiji got as much rest as it was possible in the midst of the never-ending stream of visitors of all kinds, some of whom were quite talkative. C. Rajagopalachari was there to serve him. So were Gangadharrao Deshpande, Devadas Gandhi, Kasturba and Mahadev Desai.

In extensive conversations with Rajaji, Gandhiji gave his opinion of Srinivasa Sastri, who had been appointed Agent of India in South Africa on 7 May 1927 and had gone to Nandi Hills to see Gandhiji before his departure.

Sastri, Gandhiji told Rajaji, had made a tremendous impression in South Africa when he had visited that country in November 1926 as a member of the Habibullah deputation. That was because what Sastri said came straight from the heart. This was not the case with Vithalbai Patel, who was essentially a politician, though a staunch patriot who could not be bought. Sastri's failings were his



indecisiveness and hesitancy in initiating action. He could argue about policy and lay down principles; but when it came to action, he held back.

Gandhiji agreed with Rajaji that Vithalbhai had courage, which quality Sastri lacked. No one, he said, could be more just to Vithalbhai than he. Indeed, Vithalbhai was indebted to Gandhiji for his Speakership. Vithalbhai made use of people, but he could not get on with them. He could not get on with Motilal Nehru, Shankarlal Banker or Jamnalal Bajaj. He did not take people seriously and he did not himself want to be taken seriously.<sup>25</sup>

Among the many visitors of Gandhiji was Sir Mirza Ismail, then Dewan of Mysore. Gandhiji took up with him the question of cow-protection. The State, he said, should assume the responsibility of ensuring an adequate milk supply to the people. This called for improving the breed of cattle and increasing the milk yield. Along with dairying, tannery work should also be taken up, so that there would be no need to export raw hides to foreign countries.

## 6

Towards the end of May Nandi Hills suddenly became too windy for comfort. It also became cold. Even morning walks became difficult. Gandhiji and party therefore decided to descend to Bangalore and on 5 June, the move was made.

Bangalore remained Gandhiji's headquarters for the next three months, right up to the end of August. In July and August, however, his health having considerably improved, he toured extensively in Mysore. He visited Mysore city, Tumkur; Maddagiri, Arsikere, Hasan, Devengere, Shimoga, Harihar Sagar, Tirthahalli, Bhadravati, Chikmagalur, Belur, Tiptur and addressed crowded public meetings- in most places more than one-and collected donations for the cause of khadi.

Gandhiji, about this time, sponsored the candidature of Dr. M.A. Ansari for the presidentship of the Madras session of the Congress to be held in December





1927. He did it primarily to improve the communal atmosphere in the country, which had been vitiated by the widespread communal riots that had continued in 1927 with unabated fury.

When Dr. Ansari circulated a statement in which he philosophized on the policy of the Congress in relation to the role of the party in the Councils, implying that what was described as non-cooperation in the Councils was indeed cooperation, quite a few in the parliamentary wing of the party were rattled and Motilal Nehru took up the matter with Gandhiji. He suggested that Dr. Ansari might be asked to retire and Jawaharlal Nehru might instead be elected president.

Gandhiji wrote to Ansari, saying that given the debilitating and irresponsible atmosphere that prevailed his statement did not shock him. He added:

Keep those views to yourself. You are in no way called upon to publish them. For, if I am no politician, you are still less.... If my reading is correct, you and I, but you more than I, will not be expected to contribute to the discussion over Assembly and Councils programme, constitution-making and what not...you will commit no crime against God and Indian humanity if you announce to the world that you have no opinion on these matters which must be left to specialists and politicians. I am sure you have not made the mistake of supposing that I have sponsored your election because I considered you to be a brilliant political thinker or anything near that state. The country has acclaimed your election with one voice because you are a true and good Mussalman...announce that you have no political policy of your own to place before the country, that so far as that is concerned you will take up a strictly judicial and impartial attitude and act merely as a chairman of meetings...<sup>26</sup>



To Motilal Nehru Gandhiji wrote saying he was not inclined to favour Jawaharlal's election even if Dr. Ansari retired, but that it was highly likely that Dr. Ansari would do as suggested and agree to function merely as an impartial chairman.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Ansari agreed not to issue his statement and his election as president -stood.

7

Gandhiji began his tour of Tamil Nadu with a speech at the local college at Vellore. The following day he addressed a public meeting. He emphasized the importance of spinning-"the thread that is spun on the spinning-wheel," he told the audience, "binds the millions of paupers of India to us, the middle class". The city-dwelling middle class had been sucking from the villagers their very life-blood, reducing them to a state of perpetual starvation. They must show repentance by taking to spinning and khadi.

He also dwelt on the themes of eradication of untouchability, Hindu- Muslim unity and prohibition.<sup>28</sup>

Undeterred by the general weakness, which had not been entirely got over, although the mild paresis had quickly disappeared,<sup>29</sup> Gandhiji pressed on with his touring. He visited and spoke at Gudiatham, Arni, Madras - where he spent four days and spoke at as many meetings-, Canjeevaram, Cuddalore, Chidambaram, Mayavaram, Kumbakonam, Valangaiman, Mannargudi, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Puddukottah, Nachandipatti, Kadiapatti, Kanadukathan, Pallathur, Kottayur, Amaravatipur, Devakottah, Karaikudi, Siravayal, Tirupattur, Paganeri, Madura, Tirumangalam, Paramakudi, Virudhunagar, Rajapalayam, Koilpatti, Tuticorin and Tinnevelly.

During the month long tour - from the beginning of September to the first week of October 1927 - the most important issue Gandhiji came up against was the



widening rift between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and the charges and counter-charges they hurled against each other. Gandhiji refused to take sides, counselling both parties to show tolerance for the other's point of view. While the Brahmins, as "repositories of knowledge and embodiments of sacrifice", should give up what the non-Brahmins wanted, the non-Brahmins on their part should give up their hostility against the Brahmins. He said:

Resisting as you are, and as you must, untouchability, do not be guilty of creating a new untouchability in your midst. In your haste, in your blindness, in your anger against the Brahmins, you are trying to trample underfoot the whole of the culture, which you have inherited from ages past. With a stroke of the pen, maybe at the point of the sword, you are impatient to wreck Hinduism....<sup>30</sup>

It was during this time that the agitation in Madras for the removal of the Neill statue hotted up. Neill had been a Brigadier General in the British army at the time of the Revolt of 1857 and had been responsible for indiscriminate slaughter and the most inhuman torture of village populations in Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad and elsewhere - a quite unsavoury character even according to British sources. It was only natural that his being placed on a pedestal on Mount Road should be resented by the people. The agitation was begun by some young men belonging to the Tamil Nadu Volunteer Corps.

The agitators approached Gandhiji for help. Gandhiji blessed the agitation provided the agitators remained "independent and self-supporting" and did not do anything in the name of the Congress. He also warned them that there should be "no dishonesty, no self-glorification". They must be pure and above board and must stand or fall on their own strength of will.<sup>31</sup>



Gandhiji had been engaged for some months past in translating the *Bhagavad Gita* into Gujarati, and by the time the Tamil Nadu tour was underway he had more or less completed the task. On 8 September, Mahadev Desai wrote to Mira behn giving her the news. He further informed her that the translation was afterwards looked over by Kaka Kalelkar, Vinoba Bhave, Valji Desai and himself. The plan was to have it brought out in as many Indian languages as possible.<sup>32</sup>

The place of *Varnashrama* in Hinduism, untouchability and especially the question of temple-entry figured prominently in Gandhiji's speeches in Tamil Nadu. While he was in the neighbourhood of Madurai, he made the discovery that even Nadars, a prosperous and respectable non-Brahmin community, could not enter certain temples. He was shocked and at the public meeting he addressed at Rajapalayam he gave expression to his anguish and said that he was thankful he had been unable to visit the Meenakshi temple at Madurai for lack of time, for he would not want to enter a temple which was closed to Nadars.<sup>33</sup>

## 8

On 8 October 1927, Gandhiji started his brief tour of Travancore by making a speech at Nagercoil. Although the chief purpose of the tour was to collect funds for khadi work, the emphasis in the speeches he made in Travancore was on the eradication of untouchability, which existed in its most pernicious form in that state. Travancore was otherwise an enlightened State, he said. Untouchability, he told his audience at Nagercoil, could have no place in Hinduism.

He proceeded:

Let us not deceive ourselves into the belief that everything that is written in Sanskrit and printed is Shastra has a binding effect upon us. That which is opposed to the fundamental maxims of morality, that which is opposed



to trained reason, cannot be claimed as Shastra no matter how ancient it may be.<sup>34</sup>

He appealed to the Brahmin priests not to stand in the way of reform. It was a painful fact, but it was a historical truth, that priests, who should have been the real custodians of religion, had been instrumental in destroying religion. But the reformers must not be impatient. They must have faith in God, faith in themselves and faith in the cause, and they must on no account be violent even against the fiercest opponent.

The following day, at Trivandrum, Gandhiji met the Maharani Regent as also the Dewan and discussed with them in particular the question of the use by the untouchables of the roads around Thiruvappu and Suchindram. At the public meeting in Trivandrum on October 10, he referred to this matter and explained to the people that the needed reform did not rest wholly in the hands of the authorities. Governments, he said, could not afford to lead in matters of reform. In their very nature governments were but interpreters and executors of the expressed will of the people whom they governed.<sup>35</sup>

At Quilon again, where he addressed a public meeting on 11 October, he called upon the audience summarily to reject the advice of anyone who defended untouchability, which was like arsenic mixed in the milk of Hinduism.<sup>36</sup>

In the following days, Gandhiji spoke at Alleppey, Ernakulam, Trichur and Palghat, before moving on to Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

At Ernakulam, Gandhiji was received with great warmth on behalf of the Maharaja, who was then ill, and presented a sum of Rs. 500 for khadi work. Another Rs. 300 was given by the Maharani on behalf of her daughter, who was then in England. She also presented to Gandhiji yarn spun by herself and her daughter.<sup>37</sup>



The first session of the third Legislative Assembly elected in November 1926 began on 19 January 1927 in Delhi in the new Legislative Building - the present Parliament House - opened by the Viceroy on 18 January 1927. On 21 January 1927 Motilal Nehru, the leader of the Swaraj Party, moved an adjournment motion to discuss the non-attendance of Satyendra Chandra Mitra, who had been elected to the Assembly while in jail under the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act. Motilal Nehru took the view that the Government's refusal to allow a duly elected member of the Assembly to take his seat was an encroachment on the privileges of the Assembly and on the rights of the constituency, which had elected him.

The Home Member did not concede that the Assembly enjoyed any privilege of the kind Motilal Nehru alluded to and even if it had there would have been no breach of privilege in keeping Mitra in detention, because protection of person and property was of vital importance.

In the ensuing division the adjournment motion was carried by 64 votes against 46.<sup>38</sup>

On 24 January, the Viceroy formally inaugurated the proceedings of the Assembly. In the course of his speech, he referred to the situation in China, which had been causing the British considerable anxiety. Attacks had been made in the various treaty ports on lives and property of the mercantile communities, which included many Indians as well as British subjects, he said. To defend these mercantile elements, Irwin informed the Assembly, the Government had decided to send to China a contingent of troops including Indian soldiers.

On the following day, Srinivasa Iyengar sought permission to move an adjournment motion to discuss the question of the Government sending Indian



troops to China. The President found the motion in order, but the Governor-General disallowed it on the ground that to raise the question in the Assembly would be detrimental to public interest.<sup>39</sup>

But was it solely in pursuit of a defensive action that Indian soldiers were being despatched to China? The fact was that Chinese nationalism had been on the march to wrest the country from the clutches of the war-lords. The nationalist Government in Canton, first under Sun Yat-sen and after his death in 1925 under Chiang Kai-shek, had, with the assistance of Russian advisers, set up a very effective armed force composed of workers and peasants and this army had swept through Hankow and eastward along the Yangtze valley towards Nanking and on to Shanghai. This was essentially a war against foreign colonial powers whose creatures the war-lords were, and the colonial powers, Great Britain among them, were determined at all cost to crush the challenge to their supremacy. Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby write:

The advance of the revolutionary armies sounded like the hammers of doom to the foreign concession of Shanghai. From the interior came stories of riots, bloodshed and butchery, of strikes that closed down all foreign shipping and factories, of Chinese soldiers killing white men and raping white women.<sup>40</sup>

Commenting, Gandhiji wrote.:

So the fiat has gone forth that India is to send Indian soldiers to China, in reality to aid in suppressing China's bid for freedom, ostensibly to protect the foreigners. The Legislative Assembly had no voice in the matter. It had not even the power to express its academic opinion....

And yet it is a vital matter as could be imagined for the members of the Assembly not merely to discuss but to direct India's foreign policy. Our helplessness becomes never so apparent as when Indian soldiers are



shamelessly used to crush other people's freedom. Indeed, India is the key to the exploitation of the Asiatic and other non-European races of the earth. She is held under bondage not merely for the sake of her own exploitation but also that of her neighbours, near and distant.<sup>41</sup>

The events in China at this time were naturally a focus of interest for all colonial peoples struggling for freedom in general and for the Indian people in particular. At the International Anti-Colonial Congress held in Brussels between 10 and 16 February 1927, where the Indian National Congress was represented by Jawaharlal Nehru, China's struggle for national emancipation figured prominently. A joint declaration issued by the Indian and Chinese delegates said:

For more than three thousand years, the people of India and China were united by the most intimate cultural ties. From the days of Buddha to the end of the Mogul period and the beginning of British domination in India, this friendly intercourse continued uninterrupted.

After the East India Company had secured its firm hold on the greater part of India, the English began looking for new sources of revenue and new markets. They not only introduced poppy cultivation into areas where food had previously been grown, but also thrust Indian opium on the unwilling Chinese people by force of arms. Since the infamous opium war of 1840-1844, Indian mercenary troops have been sent again and again to China in support of British capitalist brigandage in that country. For 87 years, Indian troops have been permanently stationed as policemen in Hong Kong, Shanghai, etc. Time and again, they have been used to shoot down Chinese workers and have thus created ill-will in China against the people of India. Even as we make this declaration, Indian troops are again on their way to China in an attempt to crush the Chinese revolution.<sup>42</sup>





The Anti-Colonial Congress, by a resolution moved by a British delegate, demanded immediate withdrawal of all armed forces from Chinese territory and waters.<sup>43</sup>

10

The continued detention of freedom fighters under the Bengal Regulation had remained a source of great resentment in nationalist circles and repeated demands were made for the release of the Bengal detenus.

On 3 February 1927, a resolution was moved in the Central Assembly recommending (a) the repeal of the Bengal Regulation III of 1818 and similar regulations in force in other provinces and urging immediate release of all political detenus, and (b) grant of amnesty to all political prisoners then undergoing imprisonment.

The Home Member opposed the motion. He alluded to "plots directed against the lives of police officers" and attempts made against the life of the Governor, and declared that a revolutionary conspiracy existed against which it was necessary to fight. He refused to concede the demand for unconditional release of prisoners, but said, "a declaration that a detenu would on release take no part in revolutionary activities would be an element to be taken into consideration by Government".

Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Srinivasa Iyengar, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Jinnah, Madan Mohan Malaviya, T. Prakasam and others strongly castigated the Government for their unbending attitude on the question.

Motilal Nehru moved an amendment to the resolution demanding immediate release or trial of all detenus under the old regulations and the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925. The amendment was put to vote and was carried by 63 votes against 50.<sup>44</sup>



The question also came up before the Bengal Legislative Council on 23 February 1927, when the House took up discussion of a resolution moved earlier by K. Chatterjee, a Swarajist member, demanding immediate release of the detenus.

The Government, represented by Home Member Moberly, opposed the motion. It was nevertheless put to vote and was carried by 71 votes against 26.<sup>45</sup>

The matter also figured in the House of Commons in London. On 21 February, Labour member Thurtle asked the Under-Secretary of State for India what was being done about the Bengal detenus who had been in prison for over two years without trial. He pointed out that one of the detenus, Subhas Bose, was in a "very dangerous state of health". Was it the intention of the Government to murder the man?

On 14 March, the matter of Subhas Bose's illness was raised again by Lansbury. Lansbury reminded the Government that in April 1924 Bose had been appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation with the sanction of the Governor.

On 28 March Pethick-Lawrence again raised the question and elicited from the Government the answer that Subhas Bose would be allowed to go to Switzerland provided the ship by which he sailed did not touch any port in India and provided he agreed not to return to India until the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act had expired.

Subhas Bose, Under-Secretary of State Winterton informed the House, had not accepted the condition laid down.

On 9 May, the House was informed that Subhas Bose was being sent to Almora.<sup>46</sup>

But Subhas Bose's health continued to deteriorate and on 16 May 1927 he was unconditionally released by the Bengal Government.



Some younger elements within the Congress were impatient to initiate some action to accelerate the release of the Bengal detenus. One of them, Manchersha Awari, induced the Nagpur Congress Committee to start a satyagraha in pursuance of this cause. The Nagpur Congress Committee accordingly, on 25 April, passed a resolution to start civil disobedience against the Arms Act. The movement took the form of civil resisters getting hold of swords, spears and firearms without licence and openly carrying them around.

Awari let it be known that he had secured Gandhiji's consent for his movement of civil disobedience with regard to the Arms Act and the Explosive Substances Act. Gandhiji denied ever having given his consent to Awari for that form of protest. The indefinite detention of Bengal Regulation prisoners was certainly a grave injustice. But Gandhiji also saw that just then there was no atmosphere in the country for civil disobedience. Workers, he said, must rely on their own strength, endurance and discipline and should not look for a shield.<sup>47</sup>

In a letter to B. F. Bharucha Gandhiji pointed out that a satyagrahi could not break the Arms Act: From the outset the meaning of civil disobedience had been violation of such laws as were opposed to niti (ethics), so that while there could be violation of tariff or taxation laws, there could be no violation of laws that forbade thefts. Similarly, the man who carried on a peaceful campaign could not carry a sword or a rifle with the object of being arrested or for any other purpose. "The man who was out to die or to give up his life, could not carry a sword",<sup>48</sup> he said.

This letter was read out at a meeting of the Nagpur Congress Committee held on 2 July 1927 and in view of Gandhiji's strong disapproval, the movement was discontinued.



In the meanwhile, Manchershaw Awari, who had formed a "Republican Army" and had come to be popularly called General Awari, was taken into custody on 7 June. The father of the young man was concerned. Gandhiji wrote to him:

Bhai Manchershaw is a very good boy and also a very stubborn one. He does not listen to me as to you. When I was in Nagpur last, I had a long talk with him. I had asked him not to be impatient, but I found he was the type who would listen to none.<sup>49</sup>

In an article in *Young India* Gandhiji further explained his views in the matter:

I hold that it is the right of any Indian who wishes to bear arms to do so under lawful permission. I do submit that an Arms Act is not, and will never be, necessary of good government. I do not believe in the inherent right of every citizen to possess as many arms as he chooses without a licence.... I can also conceive the possibility of satyagraha being offered against an unjust Arms Act or its unjust administration, as I can justify satyagraha against an unjust act for preventing thefts or other crimes. But I do maintain that just as satyagraha cannot be offered against an unjust Crimes Act by committing the specific crimes, so can satyagraha not be offered against an unjust Arms Act by carrying arms.<sup>50</sup>

This, however, was not the end of the affair. The Nagpur Congress Committee, having withdrawn the movement on 2 July, again revived it on 2 August. Fifty volunteers carrying swords and spears marched in the streets raising slogans. On 23 August, the processionists came in to conflict with the police, with the result that many policemen were injured. A large number of satyagrahis - men and women - were taken into custody.<sup>51</sup>

A development that still further aggravated the already disturbed communal atmosphere was a court decision in a case involving scurrilous writing. The writing



concerned was a pamphlet published under the title Rangila Rasool in 1924 by Arya Pustakalaya, Lahore. It was an offensive, abusive tract that insulted the memory of Prophet Mohammed and could not but rouse passions. Gandhiji had condemned it and similar other writings in no uncertain terms. Abuse and caricature of the Prophet, he had written, could not wean a Mussulman from his faith and could do no good to a Hindu who might have doubts about his own belief. The harm it could do was obvious.<sup>52</sup>

The Arya Samajists, in answer, had flooded Gandhiji with extracts taken from similar publications directed against Hinduism and Arya Samaj. Gandhiji suffered the pain of going through some of them. And he was revolted.<sup>53</sup>

The Punjab Government directed the police to prosecute Rajpal, the author of Rangila Rasool. The trial took over two years. In January 1927, a court convicted Rajpal and sentenced him to imprisonment for 18 months and to a fine of Rs. 1000. The Sessions Court upheld the conviction but reduced the sentence. When the case went to the Punjab High Court on revision, Justice Dilip Singh, an Indian Christian, before whom the case came, decided that Section 153-A of the Penal Code, on which the prosecution had relied, was not meant or intended to prevent all adverse discussion of the life and character of a deceased religious leader. He accordingly accepted the revision and acquitted the petitioner.<sup>54</sup>

The case was decided on 4 May 1927. Immediately violent protests from the Muslims followed.

In Delhi on 30 June, a complete hartal was observed by Muslim shopkeepers and a monster meeting was held before the Jama Masjid. Fiery speeches were made by Mohammed Ali, Hassan Nizami, the Imam and others declaring that they would never tolerate anyone reviling the Prophet of Islam.<sup>55</sup>

The editor of a Muslim daily newspaper in Lahore commented on the High Court judgment in a manner that brought him within the reach of the law of contempt of court and he was sent to prison.



The excitement over the judgment spread to the NWFP, where Hindus were maltreated and subjected to economic boycott. In the Khyber Pass region Hindus were looted and served notice to quit.<sup>56</sup>

Gandhiji considered the attack upon Justice Dilip Singh unfortunate, unjustified and uncalled for, for he had delivered the judgment according to his interpretation of the law. The remedy therefore lay in suitably changing the law. Even if there was no agitation for amending the law the Government, Gandhiji said, would be bound to do so.<sup>57</sup>

In August 1927, Government introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly a Bill making it a specific offence "intentionally to insult or attempt to insult the religion, or outrage, or attempt to outrage, the religious feelings of any class of His Majesty's subjects." As modified by a select committee to which it had been referred, the operative part of the Bill read:

Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of his Majesty's subjects, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, insults or attempts to insult religion or religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with a fine, or with both.<sup>58</sup>

The Bill met with considerable opposition from unofficial members of the Assembly as one calculated to muzzle the press and stop expression of honest opinion by scholars and historians. But it also drew considerable support from a section of the House. Indeed, one Muslim member, Abdul Haye, moved an amendment making the offence unbailable and the amendment was carried. The amended Bill was finally passed by the Assembly on 19 September, 1927.<sup>59</sup>



The monster of communal carnage continued to stride the land unchecked. Not a month passed when there was not at least one ghastly riot somewhere.

On 11 July, Hindus and Muslims clashed in Multan, leaving a dozen dead and many more injured. Curfew was imposed and a military picket posted in the town to restore peace.

On 1 August, the scene of strife was Bettiah in Bihar, where a Hindu Sabha procession led to an armed clash in which 8 persons died and several more sustained injuries.

On 29 August, Bareilly saw a serious communal riot, which ended in heavy casualties. Prominent Hindu and Muslim citizens were appointed special constables to maintain peace.

On 4 and 5 September, there was widespread rioting in Nagpur, the scene of the Arms Act satyagraha only a month or two before. No less than 22 persons of both communities died and nearly 100 suffered injuries.<sup>60</sup>

To find a way out leaders of Hindu and Muslim opinion decided to put their heads together and on 30 August, at the initiative of Maulana Shaukat Ali a Unity Conference met at Simla. The Conference appointed a Unity Committee, which held meetings at Simla from 16 to 22 September. A sub-committee, consisting of Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dr. Moonje, Jairamdas Doulatram, Rai Kedarnath, Diwanchand, Sardul Singh, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr. Ansari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mohammed Ali and Dr. Kitchlew, deliberated on the vexatious question of so regulating cow-slaughter on the part of Muslims as not to offend Hindu sentiment and cause communal friction. However, the draft of a compromise produced by the Hindu members was not acceptable to the Muslim members



and the draft that the Muslim members produced was not acceptable to the Hindu members.

Similarly, on the question of music before the mosques, the Hindu proposals were not acceptable to the Muslims and the Muslim proposals were not acceptable to the Hindus.

The Conference thus ended in failure. Before dispersing, it issued a statement expressing its distress at the continued Hindu-Muslim riots occurring in the country, resulting in loss of life and property and earnestly appealed to the leading men of all communities to use their best endeavour to prevent such riots.<sup>61</sup>

At the Conference, it may be noted; Hindus were represented only by members of the Hindu Mahasabha. There had been no Hindu Congressman present.

Then on 27 and 28 October 1927 Srinivasa Iyengar summoned another Unity Conference in Calcutta, composed of Hindu and Muslim Congress leaders who were in Calcutta for a meeting of the A.I.C.C.

The Conference concerned itself with three items: (1) Disputes relating to conversion and reconversion between the two communities, (2) Slaughter of cows, (3) Music before mosques.

These had been long-standing issues and had defied all attempts at compromise ever since the Unity Conference of Delhi in 1924.

The resolution on conversion and reconversion, accepted by the Conference after prolonged discussion, laid down that every individual or group was at liberty to convert or reconvert another by argument or persuasion but must not attempt to do so, or prevent its being done, by force or fraud or material inducement; persons under 18 years of age should not be converted except along with their parents or guardians; and that there should be no demonstration or jubilation in support of any conversion or reconversion.





On the question of cow-slaughter Dr. Ansari made the point that during the days of non-cooperation, when no restrictions were demanded by the Hindus, the number of cows sacrificed in Delhi had come down from 700 to 3 or 4 each year, but that with the Hindus now demanding legal and other restrictions on cow-slaughter the number of animals sacrificed had again been going up.

The President put before the Conference a resolution on the questions of cow-slaughter and music which, while conceding the right of every community freely to profess and practise its religion subject to public order and morality, counselled the Hindus against taking out processions and playing music before mosques in a way "calculated to cause annoyance, special disturbance or offence to the worshippers in the mosques".

It also conceded the right of Muslims to slaughter cows "in any town or village in any place not being a thoroughfare nor one in the vicinity of a temple or a mandir nor one exposed to the gaze of the Hindus". The resolution also advised Muslims not to take cows for slaughter or sacrifice in procession.

After a number of amendments, including one moved by T. Prakasam, which subjected both cow-slaughter and music to local and municipal laws, decrees, special agreements and local customs and usages, the resolution was carried.<sup>62</sup>

Gandhiji was touring in the South when the Conference was held and he did not attend it. He said he had not been specially invited to it. Besides, while the question of Hindu-Muslim unity was an important question, Gandhiji did not think that he could assist the deliberations of the Conference. He held, he said, strange views about the way of bringing about unity, which in the atmosphere then prevailing would not find acceptance.

So he felt that his abstaining was a kind of service.<sup>63</sup>



PART TWO  
THE RUMBLINGS



## CHAPTER V

### THE SIMON COMMISSION BOYCOTT BRINGS UNITY

#### 1

The Government of India Act, 1919, which introduced the system of dyarchy under which a limited measure of autonomy was conceded to the Provinces, had contained a provision that the working of the Reforms would be subject to review after a period of ten years. The dyarchy of course had not worked, as the Congress, represented by the Swarajists in the legislative bodies, had refused to cooperate in working it.

Swarajist leaders in the Legislative Assembly had been continuously demanding the revision of the Act with a view to securing for India full self-governing Dominion Status together with responsible government in the Provinces and in 1924, Motilal Nehru had moved for summoning a Round Table Conference to recommend a draft constitution for India. The Government had rejected the demand. In September 1925 again, in an amendment to a Government resolution, Motilal Nehru asked that immediate steps be taken to move the British Government to make a declaration in Parliament embodying changes in the constitutional and administrative machinery of India that would make the government of the country fully responsible. The amendment also recommended the holding of a Round Table Conference for framing a detailed scheme based on the above principles, which would be submitted to Parliament to be enacted in to a statute.<sup>1</sup>

The Government obstinately resisted demands for any relaxation in the British stranglehold on India, but chose to go through the show of an enquiry into the working of the Reforms earlier than 1929, which was the due time for it.



On 17 October 1927, in Coimbatore Gandhiji heard from Vithalbhai Patel who, being the Speaker of the Central Assembly, was being used by the Viceroy as the intermediary, that Lord Irwin would like to see him in Delhi on November 2.

Gandhiji did not feel it would be any use his going to Delhi. Besides he had the Ceylon tour fixed for the beginning of November. But he could not say no and went.<sup>2</sup>

It turned out that the Viceroy had summoned Gandhiji to inform him of the British Government's decision to institute a Statutory Commission under Sir John Simon to go over the working of the Reforms. He wanted to be sure of Gandhiji's reaction and indeed invited his cooperation. Gandhiji refused to extend any cooperation but said he would "not himself initiate a movement for the boycott of the Commission" as he had long since abdicated the political functions of Congress leadership to the Swarajists.<sup>3</sup>

Writing to C. Andrews about his meeting with Irwin Gandhiji commented: "He is a good man with no power."

And Irwin wrote home:

I have broken the ice and met Gandhi. He really is an interesting personality.... He struck me as singularly remote from practical politics. It was rather like talking to someone who had stepped off another planet on to this for a short visit.<sup>4</sup>

On 8 November 1927, the Viceroy in a statement announced the appointment of the Statutory Commission, which was to have the following composition: Chairman - Sir John Simon; Members - Viscount Burnham, Lord Strathcona, E. C.



Cadogan, Stephen Walsh (later replaced by Vernon Hartshorn), George Lane-Fox and Clement Attlee.

The Commission, the announcement said, would be charged with "inquiring into the working of the system of government, the growth of education, and the development of representative institutions in British India, and matters connected therewith, and the Commission shall report as to whether and to what extent it is desirable to establish the principle of responsible government, or to extend, modify or restrict the degree of responsible government then existing therein, including the question whether the establishment of second chambers of the local legislatures is or is not desirable."

Indians were not included, it was said, because any advice they gave would represent views to which they were previously committed, their conclusions would be affected by a process of a *priori* reasoning and their judgment would be coloured by a desire "to see India a self-governing nation".

The procedure the Commission was expected to follow was to invite the Central Legislature to appoint a Joint Select Committee chosen from its elected and nominated unofficial members, which would draw up its views and proposals in writing and lay them before the Commission for examination.

The report of the Commission, when submitted, would be presented to Parliament, where a Joint Committee of the two Houses would examine it. The Joint Committee, while considering the proposals would also ascertain the views of the Indian Central Legislature, for which a delegation of members of the Central Legislative Assembly would be invited to England.<sup>5</sup>

The appointment of the all-white Statutory Commission was seen by wide sections of Indian opinion as an insult to India's national self-respect.



M. A. Jinnah immediately got in touch telegraphically with the leaders of various parties and groups, such as the Congress, the League, the Liberal Federation, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce, the Mill- Owners' Association and the Hindu Mahasabha. All were agreed in denouncing the Simon Commission and issued a joint manifesto. The Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha issued their own statements. The manifesto declared that the exclusion of Indians from the Commission was fundamentally wrong, and that the proposals about Committees of Legislatures being allowed to submit their views to the Commission and later to confer with the Joint Parliamentary Committee were wholly inadequate to meet the requirements of the case. India, the manifesto went on, could not acquiesce in the underlying assumption that Indians were to have no authoritative voice either in the collection of evidence or in making recommendations.<sup>6</sup>

S. Srinivasa Iyengar, President of the Congress, called upon all political parties to forget their differences and to unite in a firm policy of boycott and resistance. The Congress had made the demand in the Central Assembly for the grant of full responsible government and for a Round Table Conference or convention to settle the terms of a new constitution for India. All parties were agreed on the demand for swaraj. But as the British Government wanted a demonstration of India's fitness for swaraj, conclusive evidence for it could be furnished through an unqualified and effective boycott of the Simon Commission in all its parts and aspects. The Congress could not agree, he said, to an inquiry into India's fitness for swaraj. It was the right of the Indian people. All that was required was negotiations for a settlement between the British Government and the Indian people.



The Congress President also called upon the people not to give evidence, written or oral, not to vote for the Select Committees or serve upon them and not to give or attend parties in honour of the Commission. He called upon the Central and Provincial Legislatures to pass resolutions expressing want of confidence in the Commission, and the Indian Ministers in the Provinces to resign in protest.

At the same time, he called for steps to be taken by the Congress for framing a swaraj constitution.<sup>7</sup>

Gandhiji refused to be drawn into the discussion. He said it was an alien subject to him, but he would go by the opinion of the Congress. He had, he said, placed his conscience in the matter of the Simon Commission in the keeping of the President of the Congress.<sup>8</sup> He however emphasized that the act of appointment of the Commission needed, for an answer, "not speeches, however heroic they may be, not declarations, however brave they may be, but corresponding action adequate to the act of the British Minister, his colleagues and his followers".<sup>9</sup>

3

Gandhiji spent the greater part of November touring Ceylon. Arriving there on 12 November, he returned to India on the 30th.

The first four days of his Ceylon visit Gandhiji spent in Colombo, where he had a number of engagements. On the 13<sup>th</sup> he addressed meetings of the Chettiars-Tamil Indians settled in Ceylon for trade-and the Vivekanand Society. Speaking to the Chettiars Gandhiji counselled them to make sure that their conduct towards the indigenous population was above reproach. Possession of wealth must not make them giddy. It must carry with it greater sense of responsibility if it was to be a blessing to the possessor and those from whom it was earned. They must maintain accurate accounts and must treat every Ceylonese woman as sister, daughter or mother.<sup>10</sup>



On the 15<sup>th</sup> Gandhiji was presented a welcome address by the Colombo Municipality. More than half the members of the Municipality were nominated and the Chairman was an English civilian. Yet Gandhiji was received by the Municipality and indeed by the Government of the island with great warmth, the Governor sending his Colonial Secretary to receive him.<sup>11</sup>

Addressing students of the Ananda College on the same day Gandhiji appealed to them to adopt the right path taught by the Buddha. And what was the right path? Well, its first maxim was to tell the Truth, to think the Truth and to act the Truth.

Appealing for funds for the charkha activities, Gandhiji drew the attention of the audience to the fact that in the land where Gautama had lived and taught, which had been hallowed by his feet, there was dire poverty and distress, one reason for which was that the people had been deprived of their ancient industry of spinning and weaving.<sup>12</sup>

Another important engagement on 15 November was the meeting organized by the All-Ceylon Congress of Buddhist Associations at the Vidyodaya College, Colombo.

Addressing the gathering of priests and laymen Gandhiji asserted that Buddhism was really Hinduism in another guise. All that Buddha had done was to discard the evils, such as animal sacrifice, and rejecting meaningless verbiage, had ferreted out the golden truth from the Vedas. Buddha had never rejected Hinduism. The triumph of Buddhism in Ceylon, Burma, China and Tibet was therefore the triumph of Hinduism.

Gandhiji at the same time did not hesitate to express his disagreement with some of the doctrines associated with Buddhism. Buddha could not have meant that there was no God. He certainly rejected the idea of a God who had to be





propitiated with the blood of animals. Gautama had indeed reinstated God on the White Throne, which had been occupied by an usurper. He said:

He emphasized and redeclared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of this universe. He unhesitatingly said that the Law was God Himself.... God's laws are eternal and unalterable and not separable from God Himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection.

*Nirvana*, in the same way, said Gandhiji, was not the black, dead peace of the grave, as it was understood to be; it was the living peace, the living happiness of a soul, which was conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.<sup>13</sup>

On 16 November, at a meeting of Christian Missionaries, which he addressed, Gandhiji was asked whether he believed in the possibility of forgiveness of sins. Gandhiji said in his view there was no such thing as forgiveness on the part of God. God and His Laws were not distinguishable like earthly kings and their laws. God's forgiveness meant a new heart, a new way of feeling and thinking.

The means to this forgiveness were prayer and supplication. It was a gradual process and when the realization came, it was like a sudden miracle, wrought by what was called the "grace" of God.<sup>14</sup>

In the following days, Gandhiji addressed meetings at Negombo, Kurunegalia, Matale, Kandy, Badulla, and Nuwara Eliya before returning to Colombo on 22 November.

At a women's meeting on that day Gandhiji made a moving appeal to them for funds for khadi. He said:



When Mahendra came to Ceylon the children of the motherland were not starving materially or spiritually, our star was in the ascendant and you partook of the glory. The children are starving today and it is on their behalf that I have come with the begging bowl, and if you do not disown kinship with them... then you must give me not only your money but your jewellery as sisters in so many other places have done.<sup>15</sup>

Covering Pandura, Galle, Akmimana and Matara on 23 and 24 November Gandhiji again went back to Colombo on the 25<sup>th</sup> where he addressed no less than five meetings on that day: of the Law students, Young Men's Buddhist Association, Ceylon Indian Association, Reddiar Sangam and finally a farewell meeting.

Gandhiji spent four days from November 26 to 29 in Jaffna and during these four days, he spoke at about a dozen meetings. At most meetings, he emphasized the oneness of the messages of different religions and asked for tolerance and respect for their faiths. He also underlined the oneness of Hinduism and Buddhism.

At all the meetings, everywhere people gave generously for the khadi fund. According to the figures published in Young India the total collections made in Ceylon came to Rs.1,05,017.

December was given over to touring in Orissa. The tour distressed him. Never since the days in Champaran had he witnessed such deathlike quiet as he did on entering Orissa, he said. The quiet of Orissa was perhaps worse than the quiet of Champaran, for while the ryots in Champaran had had some spirit, the peasantry in Orissa displayed none. The people appeared to be living in a perpetual state of fear, being oppressed by the rajas, zemindars and petty officials.<sup>16</sup>

On 13 December, Gandhiji visited Puri where he addressed a public meeting and a meeting of women. He refused to visit the Jagannath temple, when informed



that it was not open to untouchables. "I shall not go to a place which is so filthy, where prostitutes are not forbidden to go but which untouchables may not enter," he is reported to have remarked.<sup>17</sup>

## 4

The forty-second session of the Indian National Congress opened in Madras on 26 December 1927. Dr. M. A. Ansari was the President of this session.

In his presidential address, Dr. Ansari laid bare the hollowness of the claims of the votaries of the Empire that its mission was one of civilizing inferior races. Quoting Cecil Rhodes and Joseph Chamberlain to the effect that the Empire was nothing but pursuit of commerce on the part of Britain, he described it as philanthropic burglary, whose history was written in blood and suffering from Congo to Canton.

The Congress, Dr. Ansari said, had tried various policies to attain the goal of self-government. It had tried cooperation for thirty-five years, non-cooperation for about a year and a half and obstruction from within the Councils creating constitutional deadlocks for four years. Cooperation and later Council work had brought no gains. Non-cooperation had not been given enough time.

Dr. Ansari dwelt at length on the Hindu-Muslim discord, which had gripped the country vitiating all efforts at united political action and commended settlement of the communal differences. He also asked that the resolution passed by the Gauhati Congress a year earlier, and the proposals framed by the Working Committee and accepted by the A.I.C.C. in May 1927 be implemented. The proposals envisaged (1) Joint electorates for elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, (2) reservation of seats on the basis of population in every Province and in the Central Legislature, (3) introduction of Reforms in N.W.F.P. and British Baluchistan, as demanded by the Muslim leaders, and constitution of



not only Sind but also Karnataka and Andhra as separate provinces, and (4) guaranteeing of liberty of conscience to all citizens.

This resolution, Dr. Ansari said, was a great advance on the Lucknow Pact of 1916.

The President asked for the boycott of the Statutory Commission and in its stead the drawing up by the Working Committee, in consultation with leaders of political thought in the country, of a Constitution for the country. Such a constitution, when framed, would be a gigantic experiment in democracy. It would have to be federal in nature, with Indian States as autonomous units in the federation.

Dr. Ansari reiterated the demand of the Congress for a Round Table Conference of Indian and British representatives for the settlement of the future of India.<sup>18</sup>

One of the resolutions passed by the Congress was on independence. It was moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and read:

This Congress declares the goal of the Indian people to be Complete National Independence.

In his speech, Jawaharlal Nehru defined this as meaning control of the defence forces of the country, control over the financial and economic policies of the country, and control of the relations with foreign countries.

The resolution had earlier been unanimously approved by the Subjects Committee of the Congress, with Annie Besant describing it as "a dignified and clear statement of India's goal".

An important resolution at the Madras Congress was one calling for boycott of the Simon Commission. It was moved by S. Srinivasa Iyengar, the outgoing President. The resolution read:



Whereas the British Government have appointed the Statutory Commission in utter disregard of India's right of self-determination, this Congress resolves that the only self-respecting course for India to adopt is to boycott the Commission in every form. In particular, (a) this Congress calls upon the people of India and all Congress organizations in the country (i) to organize mass demonstrations on the day of the arrival of the commission in India, and similar demonstrations in the various cities of India which the Commission may visit; (ii) to organize public opinion by vigorous propaganda so as to persuade Indians of all shades of political opinion effectively to boycott the Commission. (b) The Congress calls upon non-official members of the Indian Legislatures and leaders of political parties and communities in India and all others not to give evidence before the Commission nor cooperate with it in any manner; public or private.... (c) This Congress calls upon the non-official members of Indian Legislatures (i) neither to vote for nor serve on Select Committees that may be set up in connection with this Commission; (ii) to throw out every other proposal, motion or demand... in connection with the work of the Commission. . .

Annie Besant, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mohammed Ali spoke supporting the resolution, which was then carried by general acclaim.<sup>19</sup>

The resolution on Hindu-Muslim unity was moved by Sarojini Naidu, who described it as "the most vital, the most epoch-making of all the resolutions" passed or likely to be passed by the Congress. The resolution read:

### **Part A: Political Rights**

This Congress resolves that in any future scheme of constitution, so far as representation in the various legislatures is concerned, joint electorates in all the provinces and in the Central Legislature be constituted.



That... such representation of the communities should be secured for the present, and if desired, by the reservation of seats in joint electorates on the basis of population in every province and in the Central Legislature. . . .

That the proposal made by the Muslim leaders that the Reforms should be introduced in the N.W.F. Province and British Baluchistan... is, in the opinion of the Congress, a fair and reasonable one, and should be given effect to....

That with regard to the proposal that Sind should be constituted in to a separate province, this Congress is of opinion that the time has come for the redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis - a principle that has been adopted in the constitution of the Congress....

That in the future constitution liberty of conscience shall be guaranteed. . . .

### **Part B: Religious and other Rights**

This Congress resolves that:

1. Without prejudice to the rights that Hindus and Mussalmans claim, the one to play music and conduct processions wherever they please and the other to slaughter cows for sacrifice or food wherever they please, the Mussalmans appeal to the Mussalmans to spare Hindu feelings...and the Hindus appeal to the Hindus to spare Mussalman feelings....

And therefore this Congress calls upon both the Hindus and Mussalmans not to have recourse to violence or to law to prevent the slaughter of a cow or the playing of music before a mosque.

2. This Congress further resolves that every individual or group is at liberty to convert or reconvert another by argument or persuasion but no individual or group shall attempt to do so ... by force, fraud or other unfair means....



Persons under eighteen years of age should not be converted unless it be along with their parents and guardians.<sup>20</sup>

The resolution thus sought to undo the damage that the Congress - League Pact of 1916 had done. It sought to dispense with separate electorates, which were now seen as a stumbling block to national unity. The debate on the resolution was heated. Gauri Shankar Misra opposed it as being full of communalism. Maulana Azad, Madan Mohan Malaviya, G. B. Pant and Mohammed Ali strongly supported the resolution.

The resolution was carried unanimously amidst shouts of *Vande Mataram*, *Allaho Akbar* and *Mahatma Gandhijiki Jai*.<sup>21</sup>

Jamnadas Mehta moved a resolution on the need to frame a Swaraj constitution. The resolution authorized the Working Committee to confer with similar committees to be appointed by other organizations in the country and "to draft a Swaraj Constitution for India, on the basis of a declaration of rights and to place the same for consideration and approval before a special convention to be convened in Delhi, not later than March, consisting of the All-India Congress Committee and the leaders and representatives of other organizations".

The resolution was carried, with only two voting against it.<sup>22</sup>

5

During the Congress Gandhiji had been in Madras, having arrived there on 22<sup>nd</sup> December after completing his Orissa tour. He attended the Congress on the opening day but took no further part in the deliberations, partly owing to indifferent health.<sup>23</sup>

There were many things about this particular session of the Congress that were not to the liking of Gandhiji. He did not like the way the Reception Committee



permitted, alongside the usual khadi exhibition, an All-India Exhibition at which there were several pavilions assigned to foreign firms dealing with machinery and mechanical contrivances, foreign textiles and foreign watches and clocks. There was nothing at the exhibition to instruct the villagers.<sup>24</sup>

Gandhiji did not like the resolution about independence passed at the Congress, nor the fact that Jawaharlal Nehru had been instrumental in getting it passed. In pain, he wrote to Nehru on 4 January 1928:

You are going too fast. You should have taken time to think and become acclimatized. Most of the resolutions you framed and got carried could have been delayed for one year. Your plunging into the 'republican army' was a hasty step. But I do not mind these acts of yours so much as I mind your encouraging mischief-makers and hooligans. I do not know whether you still believe in unadulterated non-violence. But even if you have altered your views, you could not think that unlicensed and unbridled violence is going to deliver the country....<sup>25</sup>

Gandhiji made the same point in a comment he published in *Young India*:

Though I was not able to attend any of the Committee meetings, I could not fail to perceive that irresponsible talk and work were the order of the day. Indiscipline was not a rare feature. Resolutions involving great consequences were sprung upon the Subjects Committee and readily accepted by that august body without much thought or discussion. The Independence Resolution that was rejected last year was passed almost without opposition. I know that its wording was hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed.<sup>26</sup>

That there had been a change in Nehru's views, that there was a marked shift towards radicalism in his attitude, was only too clear after his return from Europe,





where he had not only attended the Brussels Congress of the League Against Imperialism, but also during November 1927 paid a visit to Moscow, where he had been positively impressed by the gains of the revolution.

But even before his visit to the Soviet Union, the change in the younger Nehru's outlook had become quite noticeable. In the entry of 1 May 1927, in his Diary Romain Rolland noted that Jawaharlal Nehru seemed to be "breaking away from Gandhism" claiming that the poorer classes - workers and peasants - were also breaking away (though they still revered Gandhiji) because they saw that Gandhiji was doing next to nothing to improve their material condition; Gandhiji would hear nothing of class conflict and preached purity of life to the workers as a remedy to their poverty. "As far as I can judge," Romain Rolland observed, "Nehru over the last two years has moved some distance away from the religious and moral side of Gandhi's doctrine."<sup>27</sup>

Jawaharlal was very much troubled by Gandhiji's criticism and wrote to him in anguish:

You have condemned in general language the proceedings of the Subjects Committee and specially selected some resolutions for greater criticism and condemnation.... You were not present yourself and it is quite conceivable that the opinions you may have formed after a personal visit to the Subjects Committee may have been different....

You have described the Independence Resolution as 'hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed'.... I wonder if you know that the resolution was discussed in the Subjects Committee for about three hours and more than a dozen speeches for and against were made. Ultimately, as you know it was passed almost unanimously both in the Committee and in the open



Congress. Were all the people in the Committee and the Congress who voted for it 'thoughtless'?

... I have thought over every word you said the other day in Madras on this question and it has merely confirmed me in my opinion.

But I doubt if anyone outside a small circle understands your position in regard to this....

You know how intensely I have admired you and believed in you as a leader who can lead this country to victory and freedom. I have done so in spite of the fact that I hardly agreed with anything that some of your previous publications - *Indian Home Rule*, etc., - contained. I felt and feel that you were and are infinitely greater than your little books. Above everything, I admire action and daring and courage and I found them all in you in a superlative degree....

Commenting on Gandhiji's insistence on the khadi programme Nehru proceeded:

Khadi will grow slowly ... but I do not see how freedom is coming in its train. As I mentioned before you, our khadi work is almost wholly divorced from politics and our khadi workers are developing a mentality, which does not concern itself with anything outside their limited sphere of work....

Pressing home his criticism of the whole of Gandhiji's outlook, Nehru proceeded to take him to task for his wholesale condemnation of Western civilization. He wrote:

. . . You have stated somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she had reached the pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I certainly disagree with this viewpoint and I neither think that the so-called Ramraj was very good in the past, nor do I want it back. I think that



Western, or rather industrial civilization, is bound to conquer India, maybe with many changes and adaptations....

You have advocated very eloquently and forcefully the claims of the *Daridranarayana* -the poor in India.... You do not say a word against the semi-feudal zemindari system which prevails in a great part of India or against the capitalist exploitation of both the workers and the consumers....<sup>28</sup>

Gandhiji, answering Nehru, said that it was because Nehru had been the chief partner in the transaction referred to that he had made the criticism he did. It was evident, he said, that the articles he wrote could alone deliver Nehru from the self-suppression under which he had been labouring for so many years. Gandhiji went on:

Though I was beginning to detect some differences in viewpoint between you and me, I had no notion whatsoever of the terrible extent of these differences. Whilst you were heroically suppressing yourself for the sake of the nation ... you were chafing under the burden of this unnatural self-suppression. And while you were in that state, you overlooked the very things which appear to you now as my serious blemishes....

If any freedom is required from me, I give you all the freedom you may need from the humble, unquestioning allegiance that you have given to me for all these years and which I value all the more for the knowledge I have now gained of your state. I see quite clearly that you must carry on open warfare against me and my views.... The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting-ground between us....



I suggest a dignified way of unfurling your banner. Write to me a letter for publication showing your differences. I will print it in *Young India* and write a brief reply....<sup>29</sup>

But Jawaharlal did not unfurl the banner of rebellion. Having got the thing out of his system he was at peace again.

6

Gandhiji left Madras for Ahmedabad on 28 December after the conclusion of the Congress. It had been planned for him to spend the month of January at the Ashram and then proceed on tour of Andhra and Karnataka. But the plan was cancelled by the Charkha Sangh in view of Gandhiji's poor health.<sup>30</sup>

But even while he stayed at the Ashram his hands were full. There were the affairs of the Ashram to be seen to. There was first of all the threat of malaria to be faced. Questions of sanitation, water supply, etc. were discussed. Then there was the problem of mosquitoes. Not everyone could be provided mosquito-nets. Gandhiji suggested applying of kerosene oil on the body when going to bed. He himself dispensed with the use of a mosquito-net, seeing that poor people would have to do without any.<sup>31</sup>

A major engagement was the Kathiawar Political Conference held at Porbandar from 20 to 22 January 1928 under the presidentship of Thakkar Bapa. Gandhiji emphasized at the Conference that they should abstain from criticising individual States for their failings. It was a conference of sheep, not of tigers. They were weak, lame and blind and the rulers and subjects should pull together and have bonds of affection. It was true that bad things were being done in many States, but worse things were being done outside the States.<sup>32</sup>



From Porbandar Gandhiji went to Vartej on 23 January and to Morvi and Wankaner on the 25th. At each place, he addressed largely attended public meetings. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Gandhiji returned to Ahmedabad.

A domestic event was the marriage of Gandhiji's third son, Ramdas, with Nirmala. The betrothal ceremony had taken place more than two years earlier on 15 October 1925. The wedding had been delayed because Gandhiji insisted that the bride-to-be should complete seventeen years before the marriage took place.

In keeping with the revised marriage rites, Ramdas and Nirmala began the day with some spinning on the charkha, followed by cleaning of the water pond, cleaning of the cow-shed, watering trees and reading from the *Gita*. At 9.30 in the morning all gathered together at the prayer ground and Gandhiji blessed the couple in a brief speech. According to a note in Young India:

It was a moving scene in Gandhiji's life. "Those present could see that Gandhiji on such occasions could be as human as any of them. He was nearly moved to tears as he referred to Ramdas and Devadas as two of his sons who had been brought up exclusively by him and under his care. The consciousness that the son had never deceived him, and had hidden none of his faults and failings from him nearly choked him with a feeling of grateful pride.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout his stay at the Ashram in this period, Gandhiji continued to be in indifferent health. In fact, the doctors wanted him to take complete rest. But he did not take the required rest; in fact, he introduced changes in his diet by way of experiment. On 28 January 1928, he wrote to Rajagopalachari:

But you know my nature. I cannot exist without dietetic experiment if I am fixed up at any place for any length of time. You know too that it has always been my intense longing to revert to fruit and nut diet or at least a milkless



diet if I at all could. I find now that I can easily do so and so I have done it  
...<sup>34</sup>

According to a letter of Mahadev Desai written on 11<sup>th</sup> February, Gandhiji's scale of diet at this time was as follows:

Currants 80, almond paste 6 tola, oranges 9, honey 6 spoonfuls, wheat flour made into chapatis, 8 tolas.<sup>35</sup>

The blood-pressure gave a reading of 214/120!

There was much public anxiety caused by the news of Gandhiji's ill health and anxious inquiries poured in. Gandhiji felt called upon to reassure the public through *Young India*. Referring to his dietetic experiments, he wrote:

They are to be as important as many of the most important activities which have engrossed me from time to time, and it was in the course of these experiments that the present so - called break-down has occurred. The alarming registrations of doctors' instruments have had no response in my own feeling....

Gandhiji informed the readers that he was continuing with his dietetic experiments under medical observations and that people should forget about his health for the time being.<sup>36</sup>

He remained for the whole of the year at the Ashram, except for occasional short distance travels when they could not be avoided.

A circumstance that brought much trauma to Gandhiji, and indeed to everyone at Sabarmati Ashram, was the passing away in April 1928 of Maganlal Gandhi.

Maganlal was one of the four sons of Khushalchand Gandhi, a cousin of Gandhiji, the other three being Chhaganlal, Narandas and Jamnadas. Of the numerous



nephews and nieces of Gandhiji, none could approach these four brothers in their total devotion to Gandhiji and the causes he espoused to the exclusion of all other pursuits. All four of them dedicated themselves entirely to activities in furtherance of khadi and spinning. And of the four brothers, Maganlal enjoyed a unique place in the affections of Gandhiji.

Maganlal had joined Gandhiji in South Africa, where he had gone to earn a livelihood. In 1904 when Gandhiji was setting up the Phoenix settlement, he invited relatives and friends in South Africa to come forward to help him. Maganlal was one of those who volunteered. Says Gandhiji:

The others went back to business. Maganlal Gandhi left his business for good to cast... his lot with me, and by ability, sacrifice and devotion stands foremost among my original co-workers in my ethical experiments.<sup>37</sup>

Maganlal Gandhi excelled at anything he took up. At the Phoenix Press, he was the most skilled compositor. In India, at Kochrab Ashram, Gandhiji wanted to start weaving activity. Maganlal mastered the art in no time and started training others.<sup>38</sup>

Later when Gandhiji set up the Ashram at Sabarmati, it was Maganlal who did most to give shape to Gandhiji's ideas. He was the natural manager of the Ashram and he retained the position till his death. Gandhiji had been grooming him as his heir.

Maganlal Gandhi left Sabarnati Ashram for Calcutta on 1 April, along with Jamnalal Bajaj and others to attend a meeting of the All-India Spinners' Association. On the return journey, he fell ill on 14 April while at Patna. His daughter Radhabehn was summoned. The ailment was first diagnosed as pneumonia. In spite of the best nursing provided by Brijkishore Prasad and others, his condition became worse day by day. Then delirium set in and on 23



April, he passed away. Brijkishore Prasad himself having been too unwell to move around, Anugrahanarayan Babu performed the funeral rites.

When news reached Gandhiji, it was his silence day. He forbade all expression of grief and gave instructions that no one must stop working. He broke his silence to express his own grief and to console those around him, Maganlal's widow, Santokbehn, daughter Rukmani and son Keshav. "Maganlal was the life of the Ashram, I am not it," he said, "it was his light that illumined me.... I could drink the cup of poison like Mirabai.... But this separation from Maganlal is more unbearable. But I must harden my heart."<sup>39</sup>

Writing in *Young India* under the title "My Best Comrade Gone", Gandhiji said:

He whom I had singled out as heir to my all is no more....

He was my hands, my feet and my eyes. The world knows so little of how much my so-called greatness depends upon the incessant toil and drudgery of silent, devoted, able and pure workers, men as well as women. And among them all Maganlal was to me the greatest, the best and the purest.

As I am penning these lines, I hear the sobs of the widow bewailing the death of her dear husband. Little does she realize that I am more widowed than she. And but for a living faith in God, I should become a raving maniac for the loss of one who was dearer to me than my own sons, who never once deceived me or failed me, who was a personification of industry, who was the watchdog of the Ashram in all its aspects- material, moral and spiritual. His life is an inspiration for me, a standing demonstration of the efficacy and the supremacy of the moral law...<sup>40</sup>





On 12 May 1928, the All-India Spinners' Association resolved to raise a memorial for the departed worker in the shape of a khadi museum. It was decided to collect a sum of one lakh rupees for the purpose. Gandhiji commended the idea.<sup>41</sup>

Things needed to be streamlined in regard to the common kitchen for many inmates wanted to run their own separate establishments. It was also felt that greater strictness was needed in enforcing the requirement of celibacy on the part of the inmates. Gandhiji also took the opportunity to recast the constitution of the Ashram and introduced what he described as revolutionary changes. (For the text of the revised constitution, published in *Young India*, 14 June 1928, *vide* Appendix II.)

But affairs of the nation occupied the greater part of Gandhiji's time.

## 8

An event, which attracted much public attention and caused much resentment all over the country, was the publication in the summer of 1927 of a scurrilous tract written by an American woman, Katherine Mayo, under the title *Mother India*. Practically every newspaper in India denounced the publication as a dirty attack on Hindus and Hinduism and it was widely believed and suggested that the British Government circles had subsidised Miss Mayo to produce the work in order to denigrate India and Indians and prejudice their case for self-government. In the Legislative Assembly, members openly charged the Government with having sponsored the writing. The Government, as was only to be expected, denied the charge.

Gandhiji was pressed to give his opinion and wrote a lengthy review in *Young India*. Describing the book as a "Drain Inspector's Report", Gandhiji tore to shreds the claim of the author that she had been "unsubsidised, uncommitted and unattached". Gandhiji said the book was untruthful in that the author



condemned a whole nation (in her words "the peoples of India", for she would not have India as one nation) practically without any reservation as to their sanitation, morals, religion, etc. It was untruthful because she claimed for the British Government merits, which could not be sustained. The author could see nothing good about Indians and nothing bad about the British and their rule.

Nevertheless, Gandhiji said, Indians could profit by reading the book.

He wrote:

We may repudiate the charge as it has been framed by her, but we may not repudiate the substance underlying the many allegations she has made. It is a good thing to see ourselves as others see us. We need not even examine the motives with which the book is written. A cautious reformer may make some use of it.<sup>42</sup>

Indians in the U.S.A. suggested that Sarojini Naidu should pay a visit there to undo the damage done by Miss Mayo. Gandhiji welcomed the idea. No writing undertaken in India, he wrote, could possibly overtake the mischief done by that sensation-monger, who had the ear of a gullible public hungry for and living on sensation. The public in America would never read what was written in India. But the poetess would draw crowds wherever she went and command a patient and respectful hearing. She would, by the magic of her eloquence, captivate American imagination.<sup>43</sup>

Sarojini Naidu's tour of the U.S.A. was very successful and proved very fruitful in removing the misinformation.

The Simon Commission landed in Bombay on 3 February 1928. India received the Commission with a countrywide hartal. Bombay wore a deserted look. There



were processions carrying black flags and shouting "Simon, go back". A mammoth meeting, attended by an audience of 50,000 and addressed by Moderate leaders, resolved to boycott the Commission in any shape or at any stage.

In Madras, there was a hartal when the Commission went there. A huge procession marched to the High Court shouting slogans against the Simon Commission. The police opened fire on the demonstrators, injuring several, two of whom afterwards died.

In Calcutta similarly demonstrating students clashed with the police and brought the transport of the city to a standstill.<sup>44</sup>

On 4 February 1928, when the Commission reached Delhi, there was a crowd waiting for it at the railway station, shouting slogans and carrying banners with "Simon go back".

Gandhiji had so far refrained from saying anything about the decision to boycott the Commission. But after the successful hartal Gandhiji congratulated the country. He wrote:

It did my soul good to see Liberals, Independents and Congressmen ranged together on the same platform. I could not but admire the courage of the students of Government colleges in absenting themselves from their colleges for the sake of the national cause.

Gandhiji asked for the hartal to be followed by "sufficient and persistent action" and for a joint organization of all parties to carry out the boycott, and possibly picketing, wherever the Commission went. He called for the boycott of foreign cloth to be taken up even more vigorously.<sup>45</sup>

On 16 February 1928, Lala Lajpat Rai moved a resolution in the Central Assembly recommending to the Governor-General-in-Council "that he be pleased to



convey to His Majesty's Government the Assembly's entire lack of confidence in the Parliamentary Commission which has been appointed to review the constitution of India."

Speaking on the resolution Lala Lajpat Rai said that he opposed the Simon Commission because he had no faith in the bona fides of those who had appointed it. Their ignorance of Indian conditions was the greatest disqualification of the members of the Commission. The Commission was incompetent to deal with the Indian problem. It could only be dealt with through negotiations and agreement.

Srinivasa Iyengar, speaking on the motion, said that though Lloyd George had promised the right of self-determination to be extended to the tropical countries, it was being denied to India. The matter was one for negotiations for the establishment of swaraj. The Commission, instead of advancing the cause of reform would cover the loopholes left by the Act of 1919 and would make the attainment of responsible government by India impossible.

M. R. Jayakar castigated the Commission for denying equality to Indian committees chosen to work with the Commission. That was so in regard to the taking of evidence. The Commission would take evidence in secret and Sir John would tell the Indian Wing, as he called it, what best it should know. As regards the report stage, the British Commissioners were responsible for their report to Parliament and not the Indian Wing whose report would be published simultaneously. "We reject the statements of Sir John," said Jayakar, "because it is not a *bona fide* statement."

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, supporting the resolution, made the same point. Even at the inquiry stage; he said, Indians were not to have equal status; Indians were



merely to give evidence. He quoted Birkenhead to the effect that Indian Legislature's Committee could only develop criticism and objection.

Motilal Nehru said though Sir John Simon was a great man, the biggest thing that an Imperialist Englishman could do would not meet the smallest possible demand of Indians. India would not surrender her right of self-determination.

Others who supported the motion were Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas, C. S. Ranga Iyer, Hari Singh Gour and Madan Mohan Malaviya.

The resolution was opposed by Punjab Muslim leader Sir Zulfikar Ali Khan, who introduced an amendment to the resolution seeking for the Simon Commission "favourable consideration of this Assembly".

Zulfikar Ali Khan was supported by M. C. Raja, who had been-nominated to the Assembly by the Government to represent the Depressed Classes: He welcomed the fact that the Statutory Commission had no Indian members. He criticized the Congress for being opposed to the principle of nominations to legislative bodies.

Two other Muslim leaders from Punjab, Mian Shah Nawaz and Sardar Mohammed Nawaz Khan also called for cooperation with the Commission, declaring that it was a tribunal, which they could trust.

Sir Darcy Lindsay, leader of the European group, as was expected, sided with the Government.

The debate concluded on 18 February, when the President put the motion of Lala Lajpat Rai to vote. It was declared carried by 68 votes to 62, amidst cries of "Bande Mataram!"

Hardly had the result of the voting been declared when a newspaperman, sitting in the press gallery, hurled down an attaché case, which caught Sir Basil Blackett



on the head. The Finance Member was stunned for a moment but suffered no permanent damage. The journalist concerned explained that he had meant the gesture as a reply to the speech Secretary of State Birkenhead had delivered a few days earlier at Doncaster, which had been threatening in tone.<sup>46</sup>

Motions of no-confidence in the Simon Commission were similarly passed in the Madras and D.P. Legislative Councils. In a few Councils, such as that of Burma, where the popular element was weak, resolutions were passed expressing confidence in the Commission.

For collecting evidence Sir John Simon had, in a letter to the Viceroy on 6 February 1928, put forward the plan of a "Joint Free Conference". For purposes of evidence in regard to Central subjects, this Conference would comprise members of the Statutory Commission and a Central Committee constituted by the two houses of the Central Legislature. When collecting evidence in regard to Provincial subjects the Indian wing would comprise non-official members of the Provincial Legislative Council.<sup>47</sup>

The Central Legislative Assembly having decisively expressed itself against the Commission there was no question of its electing its component of the Committee to work with the Commission. And the Committee had to be nominated by the Viceroy. The personnel chosen were: Sir Sankaran Nair, Sir Arthur Froom, Raja Nawab Ali (all elected members of the Council of State), Sardar Shivdeo Singh Uberoi, Sir Zulfikar Ali Khan, Sir Hari Singh Gaur, Dr. A. Suhrawardy, Kikabhai Premchand and Rao Bahadur M. C. Raja. Sir Sankaran Nair was appointed chairman of the Committee.<sup>48</sup>

On 20 February, Motilal Nehru, Srinivasa Iyengar, Madan Mohan Malaviya, M. A. Jinnah, Lajpat Rai and Purushottamdas Thakurdas, in a joint statement charged that the Government and the Commission, instead of being a unifying factor, had



been counting upon the division of opinion in India and warned that the policy would not succeed. The statement went on:

In the circumstances, we appeal to public - men of all parties - and to all political organizations in India to unite together (1) in settling sectional or communal differences.... (2) to prepare a draft constitution with the maximum amount of agreement, and to adopt it at a Convention and (3) to work for its establishment.

We also appeal to the Legislative Councils of the United Provinces, Bengal, Bombay, Punjab and Assam to follow the example of the Legislative Assembly, and of the Central Provinces and Madras. We dare not appeal to the Council of State.<sup>49</sup>

Having stirred the hornet's nest in India and without accomplishing anything on what it called its preliminary visit the Commission sailed back home on 31 March 1928.

11

The Commission again landed in Bombay on 11 October 1928 for its second visit, which was devoted to the collection of evidence and examination of witnesses.

It started its work with Poona, where the sittings lasted from 12 to 27 October with off days in between. Then it went to Lahore, from 30 October to 13 November; Peshawar, where it was from 17 November to 20 November; Delhi from 21 November to 27 November; Agra 28 and 29 November; Lucknow from 30 November to 10 December; Patna from 13 December to 20 December; Shillong from 2 January to 12 January 1929; Calcutta from 14 January to 25 January; Rangoon from 3 January to 6 February; Madras from 18 February to second week in March; Nagpur on 14 and 15 March; and finally Delhi, where the



Commission arrived on 18 March and held final sittings from 21 March to 4 April 1929. At these sittings, the Commission also heard the views of the Government of India.

At each place the Commission visited, it was greeted by hostile demonstrations waving black flags and shouting "Shame, Shame" and "Simon Go Back".

At many places, and especially in Lahore and Lucknow protesting crowds came in confrontation with the police, which indulged in indiscriminate lathi charges, injuring many front-rank leaders of the Congress.

In Lahore, where the Simon Commission reached on 30 October 1928, the protest demonstration was led by Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sardar Mangal Singh, Dr. Alam, Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Lala Duni Chand, Raizada Hansraj, Dr. Gopichand Bhargava, Maulana Zafar Ali and other prominent Muslim leaders. The procession, as it proceeded towards the railway station, was absolutely peaceful. When the procession was about 200 yards from the gates of the railway station, the police swooped upon it with lathis. Among those hit was Lala Lajpat Rai, who received a severe lathi blow on his chest. Others too were not spared. Raizada Hansraj, Dr. Gopichand, Dr. Alam and Dr. Satyapal were badly hurt.

At a large public meeting held in the evening Lajpat Rai charged that a British police officer of Lahore, named Scott, had first hit him and he was then struck by two other constables.<sup>50</sup>

Lala Lajpat Rai passed away on 17 November 1928.

Gandhiji, through articles, interviews and speeches at public meetings, paid glowing tributes to the Lion of the Punjab, recalling his services to the country





spanning half a century. His passing away, he said, meant the "dissolution of a great planet from India's solar system".<sup>51</sup>

The immediate cause of death was heart seizure. But it was widely believed that the lathi blows sustained by him during the 30 October demonstration had greatly contributed to his early death.

Gandhiji, writing to C. F. Andrews on 29 November said in this connection:

My own opinion is that the physical injury was not serious though having been received in the region of the heart, it might have proved fatal. . . . But there is no doubt that Lalaji received a nervous shock from which he never completely recovered. All his writings, all his speeches after the incident are eloquent proof of my statement.<sup>52</sup>

J. M. Sen Gupta, Chairman of the Reception Committee at the Calcutta Congress in 1928, alluding to the death of Lajpat Rai, said:

Indians are convinced that even if the assault was not the only cause of his death, it did hasten it.

The condolence resolution passed by the Congress expressed the same view. The resolution ran:

This Congress condemns the attack by the Lahore police on Lala Lajpat Rai and other leaders near the railway station, while leading the boycott procession on the arrival of the Simon Commission, as deliberate and unprovoked, and believes that the death of Lalaji was accelerated by the injuries he received at the hands of the police.<sup>53</sup>

Exactly a month later in Lucknow a similar outrage was repeated. Well before the arrival of the Simon Commission in Lucknow, there had been a wave of protest



meetings and demonstrations in the city organized by the Congress Committee. On 26 November, there had been a mammoth procession. This had alarmed the police and they were bent at all cost to stop any such demonstrations.

Another procession, organized on 28 November, was not permitted to proceed on the route notified by the Boycott Committee. The procession defied the police. It was a gesture to assert their right. The mounted police thereupon charged at the procession with batons, even pursuing people on the pavements. A large number were hurt, among them provincial Congress leaders Mohanlal Saxena, Pestonji and Kishan Prasad Kaul of the Servants of India Society.

On summons from the Local Congress workers Jawaharlal Nehru arrived in the city on 29 November. In the evening, a mass meeting was called at Aminabad. Immediately before the meeting, Jawaharlal Nehru had been attending a small *mohalla* meeting and when it dispersed, he and others decided to go to the mass meeting in batches of twelve. Jawaharlal Nehru had with him Govind Ballabh Pant, Khaliqzaman and Harkarannath Misra. They had hardly started when mounted police swooped upon them with batons, raining repeated blows on them. Govind Ballabh Pant was badly beaten up. He developed Parkinsonism, which was widely attributed to the police beating. Jawaharlal was also beaten.

On 30 November, when the Commission was due at the railway station, the police again refused permission for any procession to be taken out. A mammoth procession of anything from 50,000 to 100,000 persons nevertheless made its way towards the station. Groups of people then waited in the maidan near the station. The mounted police charged the crowds with batons and lathis, galloping the horses into the crowd. There were foot policemen too. Hundreds of people were hurt. The procession receded gradually, keeping in order. But after a time,



the crowd too retaliated against the unprovoked attack by the police and stones hit many policemen.<sup>54</sup>

Commenting on the police brutality Gandhiji praised the self-restraint shown by the Lucknow crowd. He wrote:

I claim that no crowd outside India would have retained the calmness that the Lucknow crowd did.<sup>55</sup>

Writing in *Navajivan* under the title "The Blood-stained Path" Gandhiji observed:

The Government and the Commission do not appear to be satisfied with the senseless beating up of Lalaji and his colleagues ... if the police in Lahore had no reason to assault Lalaji and his colleagues, the police in Lucknow had even less excuse for attacking Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues....

. . . the commission's path is stained with the blood of the innocent. The members of the Imperial Commission have, through countrywide strikes, black-flag demonstrations and processions, received due notice that the people do not welcome the Commission.... The fact that despite this, it goes round touring from one city to another amounts to nothing but an exhibition of authority.<sup>56</sup>

The members of the Commission left for England on 13 April 1929. In June and July 1929 they again had sittings in London with the Joint Control Committee to consider questions connected with the army and other matters.<sup>57</sup>



## CHAPTER VI

### THE BARDOLI SATYAGRAHA- I

#### 1

Bardoli first came into prominence in 1921-22 when Gandhiji selected it for launching the mass civil disobedience movement contemplated by him. The civil disobedience did not come off at that time, because there was brutal violence at Chauri Chaura, which led Gandhiji to suspend the movement.

In 1928, Bardoli was again in the limelight. In that year the taluka did resort to a mass civil disobedience movement by way of refusal to pay land revenue and it was a grand success as protest against increase in the tax. The movement was organized and led by Vallabhbhai Patel, whose qualities of leadership earned him the honorific "Sardar" (Leader). From then on Vallabhbhai was known as the Sardar by people all over India.

Bardoli is a taluka (tehsil) in Surat district of Gujarat. When the story opens early in 1928 it had an area of 222 square miles, 137 villages and a population of 87,000. The northern boundary of the taluka was formed by the river Tapti. In the rest of the three directions it was surrounded by the territories of the then Baroda State, except for a bit of Jalalpur taluka to the south-west.

The principal communities into which the population was divided were: Anavils- mainly agriculturists, Baniyas- mainly money-lenders but also cultivating land, and Kaliparaj (also called Raniparaj) - mainly landless labourers. The Kaliparaj community accounted for more than half the population - 11,000 being Kaliparaj proper and the rest thirty or forty thousand Dublas. The Dublas were Raniparaj, who had become serfs- bonded to their masters through usurious debts and



worked in their fields all their lives. There was also a sprinkling of Parsis, largely trading in liquor, and a small percentage of Muslims.

The Bombay Presidency being under the Ryotwari system, with no permanent settlement, the land revenue assessment had been subject to periodical review and revision, carried out generally after every thirty years or so. The last settlement in Bardoli had been in 1896 and a fresh settlement thus became due in 1926. "

A Deputy Collector, M.S. Jayakar, was appointed Assistant Settlement Officer to undertake the assessment. He recommended (1) an increase of 25 per cent in the existing revenue rates, and (2) transfer of 23 villages from lower to higher category for purposes of assessment, so that in effect the total land revenue was increased by 30 per cent - in actual terms it went up from Rs. 5,14,762 to Rs. 6,72,275. The increase of assessment in the 23 villages which were reclassified came to more than 50 per cent.

The Assistant Settlement Officer adduced the following reasons for his recommendation:

1. Construction of fresh roads and opening of the Tapti Valley Railway,
2. Increase of 3,800 in population,
3. Increase in number of milch cattle and oxen and agricultural implements,
4. Increase in number of pucca buildings,
5. Improvement in the condition of the Kaliparaj such as increase of education,
6. Abnormal increase in prices of food grains and cotton,
7. Doubling of agricultural wages,



8. Increase in the value of lease money and in the price of land, and
9. Increase of Rs. 15 lakhs in the value of crops at the 1924 price level as compared to prices 30 years earlier.<sup>1</sup>

The Bombay Government Resolution No. 725924 dated 19 July 1927 summarized the report thus:

that the taluka and petha (village administrative unit) have advanced in prosperity in the course of the past thirty years. The certain indications of prosperity are the increased demand for land and its increased value as shown by the statistics of sales and leases, which have been carefully compiled by the Settlement Officer, the higher rate of wages and the growth of population. But the most striking feature of the history of the settlement has been the development of cotton cultivation. Before the settlement was introduced, the area under cotton was 25,900 acres. It is now 40,099 acres. Cotton has largely replaced jowari, which has decreased from 27,554 acres to 18,642 acres. After taking these factors into consideration, the Settlement Officer proposes an increase of 30.59 per cent in the total revenue of the taluka and petha.<sup>2</sup>

When the contents of the report became known, there was great resentment. The Taluka Congress Committee at once appointed a committee with Narhari Parikh as chairman and Khushalbhai Morarji as secretary to prepare a reply. The committee toured the Taluka and collected evidence that gave the lie to the statistics given by the Settlement Officer. In a series of articles in *Navajivan* Narhari Parikh gave facts and figures to prove that no case existed for an increase in the assessment.

The Assistant Settlement Officer's report was considered by the Settlement Commissioner, F. G. H. Anderson. He did not agree with any of the arguments



adduced by that officer. He did not agree that the increase in the value of agricultural produce - Rs. 15 Lakhs - could be made a criterion for raising assessment, for it did not take into account the cost of production, which might have increased by the same or even larger amount, so that there might even be a case for reducing the assessment. He argued that the land revenue assessment should be based on the rental value and the rental value alone.

In his report, dated 9 April / 15 May 1926 sent to the Commissioner, Northern Division, Anderson had written:

The general conclusion from all recorded statistics is that the taluka in 1896 was either over assessed or assessed right up to the full limit of half the rental value.

Bardoli is perhaps almost the only taluka in the Presidency in which for about 30 years there has been no need to resort to any coercive methods or pressure for the recovery of the land revenue.<sup>3</sup>

But in regard to the rental value Anderson went by the statistics produced by Jayakar and concluded that 43,000 acres out of a total of 1,27,000 acres, or almost half the area under cultivation, was being leased out. The fact, as was later pointed out on behalf of the agriculturists, was that in seven years only about 42,923 acres had been leased out, which came to about 6,000 acres annually. On the basis of the faulty statistics of Jayakar, Anderson came to the conclusion that the assessment should be increased, not by 30.59 per cent as recommended by the Settlement Officer, but by 29.03 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

On 19 July 1927, the Government issued an order accepting the increased value of the crops as basis for revision of assessment, argued by the Settlement Officer, and also the new classification suggested by the Settlement Commissioner. But the Government stopped short of accepting the actual increases suggested by



the two officers, viz., 30.59 p.c. and 29.03 p.c. and instead decided that the assessment should be increased by 22 per cent, or more precisely by 21.97 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

To the agriculturists, this was equally unacceptable.

## 2

In September 1927 agriculturists of the taluka assembled in their thousands at a conference in Bardoli. Dadubhai Desai, M.L.C., presided. The conference passed a resolution calling upon the peasantry to withhold payment of the enhanced portion of the assessment.

The administration on its part issued orders to Talatis to begin collection of the revised assessment from 5 February 1928.

The people of the taluka approached Vallabhbhai for help. He was reluctant at first, saying that members of the Council were already advising them. The M.L.C.s (Members of the Bombay Legislative Council) went to the Governor but he upheld the decision of the officials. They then advised the peasants to go to Vallabhbhai and try other methods, as their methods of petitioning had failed.

Kalyanji Mehta and Kunvarji Mehta, two brothers, again went to Vallabhbhai, accompanied by Khushalbai, secretary of the Taluka Congress Committee, and he was prevailed upon to agree to guide the peasants. But he wanted to be sure that the peasantry would be ready for a no-tax movement and to put up with hardships that the fight was sure to entail. He asked the workers to go round the villages and ascertain the views of the people. The workers spread out to contact the people and in eight or ten days came back with their report saying that the people would be ready to undertake the fight and accept the consequent sufferings.





The agriculturists were inclined to withhold payment of only the increment over the old assessment. A deputation met Gandhiji at the suggestion of Vallabhbhai. Gandhiji did not approve of this line of action. He told them to ask the Government first to have the enhancement cancelled and only then to pay the assessment at the old rate. Gandhiji further advised them that they must be prepared to face all consequences and stand firm. Only then would their Satyagraha succeed.<sup>6</sup>

On 4 February 1928, Vallabhbhai arrived in Bardoli and presided over a conference of agriculturists. The conference was very well attended. At least 79 or 80 villages were represented. Vallabhbhai first informally sounded the agriculturists and found that, except for five or six villages which wanted the old assessment to be paid but not the amount of enhancement, all the others were agreed that no assessment should be paid till the enhancement was cancelled.

Vallabhbhai again warned, them that he would only stand by them if they were prepared to take risks. It was not a question that concerned only one taluka. It concerned many talukas and many districts. If they lost, all would suffer. He gave them seven days' time to consider the matter and went back to Ahmedabad.<sup>7</sup>

Bhimbhai Naik, Dadubhai Desai and Dr. Dikshit, all M.L.C.s, supported the plan of Satyagraha, saying that they had exhausted all constitutional avenues.

On 6 February 1928 Vallabhbhai wrote a detailed letter to the Governor requesting the postponement of the recovery and appointment of "an impartial tribunal clothed with adequate authority" to look into the whole question. In case the Government failed to do so, he informed the Governor, he would be forced to advise the people to refuse to pay assessment and peacefully and quietly to suffer the consequences of refusal. "If you feel it will help to discuss the matter with me personally," he wrote, "I am ready to come whenever you desire."<sup>8</sup>



Beyond a curt acknowledgement sent by the Governor's Private Secretary, informing him that his letter had been sent to the Revenue Member, Vallabhbhai received no reply to his letter.

On 12 February, Vallabhbhai again went to Bardoli and discussed the question in all its aspects with the representatives of the villagers and started a signature campaign to determine the willingness of the agriculturists to take up a no-tax movement. At the conference that was held, and at which M.L.C.s. representing Surat district were present, Vallabhbhai told the agriculturists that it was up to them whether or not to pay the assessment. If they did not want to pay, the Government could not compel them to do so. But if they took the decision not to pay, they must treat it as a pledge. He then let them discuss the matter and take their own decision. The conference passed the following resolution:

This conference of the people of Bardoli Taluka resolves that the revision settlement in Bardoli which the Government has decided to impose and collect, is, in its view, arbitrary, unjust and oppressive, and advises all the occupants to refuse payment of the revised assessment, until the Government is prepared to accept the amount of the old assessment in full satisfaction of their dues or until Government appoints an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and inquiry on the spot.<sup>9</sup>

The resolution was moved and adopted by the peasants present. Vallabhbhai took no part in the deliberations.

The battle was thus joined. Four centres of constructive work were already functioning in the taluka. These were at Bardoli, run by Kalyanji Mehta, Jugatram



Dave and Khushalbhai Patel; at Sarbhon, run by Dr. Tribhuvandas; at Madhi, run by Makanji Desai; and at Vedchhi, run by Chunilal Mehta and his wife.

Vallabhbhai asked for additional camps to be opened to carry on intensive Satyagraha education among the villagers and to frustrate the attempts of Government officials to break the unity of the people. New camps were thus opened at Valod, Buhari, Vankaner, Varad, Bamni and Kamalchhod near Valod.

Valod and Buhari were placed under Dr. Chandulal; Varad and its neighbourhood were placed under Mohanlal Pandya; Sarbhon was placed under Ravishankar Vyas; Bamni was put in charge of Darbar Gopaldas; Bardoli town was put in charge of Chinai, the Raniparaj- area of Valod was put in charge of Dr. Chandulal and Keshavbhai; Madhi was placed under Fulchand Bapuji Shah of Nadiad; Balda was put in charge of Ambalal Patel from Borsad. Naranbhai, a worker from Borsad, was posted at Buhari.

A publicity office was also started under Jugatram Dave to bring out daily news bulletins giving extracts from Vallabhbhai's speeches and news about the Satyagraha. Five thousand copies of these bulletins were printed at a press in Surat. These were extensively reproduced by various Gujarati and English newspapers not only in Gujarat but also outside. The English version of the news bulletin was looked after by Pyarelal. Gradually the print order for these bulletins went up to 10,000.<sup>10</sup>

The work of collection of funds for the Satyagraha was taken up by Manilal Kothari. Swami Anand also went to Bardoli and offered his services. He became personal secretary to Vallabhbhai and was of great help to him. He served right up to the end of the campaign.

Help also came from Abbas Tyabji and Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazeer. They did much to popularize the movement among Muslim agriculturists in making the



Satyagraha a success. Volunteers also came forward from among the agriculturists.

Women too responded with unbounded enthusiasm to the call of Vallabhbhai. Indeed, without their active and unstinted cooperation it would have been impossible to conduct the movement, the Sardar has recorded. They attended all the meetings in large numbers. They faced without flinching harassment at the hands of Government officials and their hirelings when they came with their attachment notices.

The movement had taken off in the midst of the marriage season. There were weddings everywhere, which claimed a large share of the energy and attention of the people. Vallabhbhai warned the people that if they had any marriages to celebrate they must get through them as expeditiously as possible. They could not afford to waste time in merriment and celebration. They had to be prepared for camp life as satyagrahis.<sup>11</sup>

On 17 February, Vallabhbhai at last received from the Government a reply to his letter of 6 February addressed to the Government. It stated that the Government was not prepared either to postpone the collection of land revenue according to the revised rates or to reconsider the revised rates or to give any kind of relief. It warned that if the people of Bardoli, whether on their own initiative or on the advice of outsiders, failed to pay up the land revenue, the Government would take recourse to the Land Revenue Code.

Vallabhbhai took serious exception to being called an outsider and to the threatening tone of the Governor's letter. He informed the Governor that though he belonged to Bardoli as much as to any other part of India he had gone to Bardoli at the invitation of the Bardoli people. He further reminded the Governor



that it was in fact he who spoke on behalf of a Government that was wholly composed of outsiders.

Releasing the correspondence to the press, Vallabhbhai wrote that he had examined the reports both of the Assistant Settlement Officer and the Settlement Commissioner and found that both were based on unreasonable grounds. He challenged the position of the Government that no one might question its decisions in the matter of land revenue. He reiterated the people's "final and firm demand" for the appointment of an independent tribunal.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji, writing in *Young India*, berated the Bombay Government for the insulting language they had used for Vallabhbhai, which, he said showed the utterly irresponsible nature of the Government. Asking people to support the demand for the appointment of an impartial tribunal, Gandhiji said the Satyagraha was not a no-tax campaign, nor a swaraj Satyagraha as contemplated in 1922. But though the object of the Satyagraha was local and specific, it had an all-India application. He added: "Whatever awakens people to a sense of their wrongs and whatever gives them strength for disciplined and peaceful resistance and habituates them to corporate suffering, brings us nearer swaraj."<sup>13</sup>

Gandhiji had offered to come to Bardoli to help Vallabhbhai, but the latter asked the Mahatma not to come and watch what the men whom the Mahatma had trained could do by themselves.

#### 4

On 15 February, the Government fired their first salvo to suppress the movement. Baniyas being considered rather timid in nature as a general rule, notices were served on 50 Baniyas of Valod and Bajipara asking them to pay up the new assessment.<sup>14</sup>



The notices further said that if they did not pay the assessment within ten days a penalty amounting to 25 per cent of the assessment would be levied.<sup>15</sup> But the Baniyas stood firm and did not pay.

All kinds of irregular methods from cajolery to harassment of various kinds were used to make the people pay. In a village, called Bedkuva, a Talati belaboured a Raniparaj peasant. In another case, two men were confined and let off on payment of the assessment.<sup>16</sup>

The organization for the Satyagraha meanwhile had made great progress. All the camps were doing remarkably good work. Gordhandas Chokhawala, working at Bamni, stated that, except for one village, all the rest of the 15 villages had signed the pledge of non-payment. He mentioned that confiscation operations had already begun, but when the attachment staff came round, they found the doors locked, because as soon as they were sighted, volunteers sounded warning of their coming by beating drums and blowing conchs. The residents locked up their houses and went away into their fields.

The speeches of Vallabhbai did much to rid the peasantry of the fear of officials and filled them with enthusiasm. In Sarbhon first the small landholders and then the bigger ones signed the pledge. The Sardar used language, which touched the hearts of the peasantry.

Fulchand Kasturchand Shah and his wife and his companions Shivanand and Ramnarayan came as volunteers from Kathiawar. Fulchand's homely songs, taken up by women and children, did much to popularize the Satyagraha. Mithubehn Petit also came and took up work among the women at Madhi. She was joined by Bhaktibehn Desai, wife of Darbar Gopaldas.<sup>17</sup>

Officials soon discovered that no amount of pressure, trickery or use of force and beatings would succeed in making the people pay the assessment. But they



continued to pursue these measures. In one case, they arranged with two Baniyas that when attachment operations were conducted against them, they should leave cash in places easily accessible to the search parties, which would be enough to pay the assessment. Sums amounting to Rs. 1500 and Rs. 785 were thus taken away by the officials. People saw through the trick and were angry with the Baniyas. Vallabhbhai tried to pacify the people but they felt that the two individuals should not be allowed to go scot-free. They were asked to make contributions to the Satyagraha fund by way of repentance, which they did. They contributed sums of Rs. 800 and Rs. 651.

Then there was the case of one particular village, Kadod, inhabited by Baniyas who had large land-holdings. This village kept away from the no- tax movement, the land-holders having already paid the revised revenue. Much of the land of the village had been leased out. The Satyagrahi agriculturists were so angry at the attitude of this village that they decided to punish it by not cultivating the leased out land and by not letting agricultural labourers work on the fields of the village. Later they decided to boycott the village completely till it fell in line. But Gandhiji disapproved of these drastic measures. He wrote:

It has been reported that the satyagrahis of Bardoli are getting ready to use the weapon of boycott against those who agree to pay the revenue to the Government. This weapon is a powerful one and the satyagrahi can use it only within limits. Boycott can be violent as well as non-violent. It is only the latter kind that the satyagrahi may use.

He gave examples of the two forms of boycott:

Non-violent boycott may mean not accepting any service. Refusal to serve may involve violence.



Non-violent boycott may include a refusal to dine at the house of the person boycotted, refusal to attend marriages and such other functions at his place, doing no business with him and taking no help from him. On the other hand, refusing to nurse the boycotted person if he is sick, not allowing doctors to visit him, refusing to help in performing the last rites if he happens to die, refusing to allow him to make use of wells, temples, etc., all this is violent boycott. Deeper reflection will reveal that non-violent boycott can be continued for a longer period, and no external force can prove effectual in terminating it, whereas violent boycott cannot continue for long and external force can be used in a large measure to put an end to it. Ultimately, violent boycott only does disservice to a movement... on this occasion the distinction that I have pointed out should be enough for the satyagrahis and the workers of Bardoli. <sup>18</sup>

## 5

As time went on the administration intensified the coercive measures to collect land revenue. Vallabhbai raised his voice against it. He appealed to the Patels not to help the Government in the work of confiscation and attachment. About 60 Patels met at a conference in Bardoli and resolved not to help the Government in its dirty work. Dublas and Dheds (untouchables) also resolved that they would not help in transporting attached property. <sup>19</sup>

Seeing that the stick alone was not having any effect, the Government dangled a carrot before the agriculturists. As a concession, the Government brought down 22 villages from the higher group to the lower group. Three villages where enhancement of 20 per cent had been recommended were brought under the original assessment. In another three in which assessment had been increased by 45 to 50 per cent it was reduced to 18 and 20 per cent. In the case of yet another





two villages where assessment had been increased by 58 per cent, this was reduced to 20 per cent. In 14 more villages, the enhancement was reduced from 50 to 20 per cent.<sup>20</sup> This too did not work.

Penalty notices now began to be served in larger and larger numbers. But with Patels refusing to have anything to do with attachment notices and other such proceedings, and with different caste organizations supporting the Satyagraha, the notices were not having the desired effect.

On 26 March Baniya land-holders in Valod and Bajipura were served notices that if they failed to pay up the assessment before 12 April their lands would be confiscated. The land-holders defied the Government and told the officials that they would not pay the assessment till justice was done.

At a meeting held to congratulate these land-holders on their bold stand, Vallabhbhai warned the agriculturists that the struggle would soon enter an even more painful phase. The struggle had not been launched merely to save them some money but to make the peasants realize that it was only because of the weakness of the peasantry that the Government was able to carry on. If they were fearless, no one could deprive them of their land. If the Government tried to deprive them of their land, there would be no Government left.<sup>21</sup>

Vallabhbhai moved continuously from village to village addressing large and small gatherings, exhorting people to stand firm in the face of all harassment and intimidation and not be cowed down. The organization was also strengthened. Every village had a nucleus of the organization, which was able to deal with proceedings of attachment and confiscation. The volunteers were ever ready with their drums and conchs to sound the warning of the officials' arrival. The atmosphere revived memories of 1922. Vallabhbhai was now the virtual ruler of the Taluka, without whose permission officials could get nothing done. He began



to be hailed as Sardar. It was the first time that this appellation was used for Vallabhbhai.<sup>22</sup>

## 6

The repressive measures being adopted by the Government in Bardoli and the spirit of dogged resistance being shown by the peasantry drew the attention of the people outside the Taluka and indeed outside Gujarat. A public meeting was held in Poona to pledge support to Bardoli. Even the Bombay Presidency Association, a Moderate body, passed a resolution supporting the struggle and recording its "great dissatisfaction" at the policy being pursued by the Bombay Government in dealing with the question and appealing to the Government to suspend collection of the increased revenue.<sup>23</sup>

A conference was held at Sholapur and soon after that, there was a spate of meetings at diverse places in Presidency: at Kadod, at Sarbhon and Sikar (in Bardoli) at which Vallabhbhai spoke and also at Surat. In Jalalpur Taluka also there were meetings at Jalalpur, Amalsad, Abrama, Satam, Ashtagam and Sisodra.<sup>24</sup>

In Baroda, the State Praja Mandal expressed its support for the Bardoli Satyagraha. Funds too started coming. Manilal Kothari donated Rs. 1000 and a car. Contributions came from Indians in South Africa too.<sup>25</sup>

Seeing that the situation was fast slipping out of its hands, the Government decided to exert itself to a greater degree. The Commissioner of the Northern Division, Smart, was directed to proceed to Surat and camp there. The Collector, who was out of the district at the time, was ordered personally to go to Bardoli. The Collector paid the visit on 14 April. He found all shops and the doors of all houses closed in his face. No one came forward to wait on him. He decided to proceed to the villages in the neighbourhood. But there was no taxi to be found which would take him. He was reduced to walking and thus proceeded to



Sarbhon. But by the time he got there, news of his approach had preceded him and here too he found the doors of all houses locked. The Patel and the Talati, when questioned, informed him that the agriculturists were quite prepared for their lands to be forfeited, but would not pay the assessment.

Returning to Surat the Collector issued a statement that while the agriculturists were quite willing to pay the revised assessment, they were being threatened with arson, harassment and boycott by outsiders who had no lands and no houses in Bardoli Taluka.<sup>26</sup> This distortion of facts was resented.

Attachment of buffaloes and other livestock became a regular feature. It also became quite indiscriminate. Frequently the Government's hirelings drove away buffaloes without even enquiring whether the animals they were taking away belonged to a family against which attachment proceedings were being carried out. In a village, one morning 58 buffaloes were attached and driven to Valod. The animals thus taken away were not properly looked after. In a large number of cases, they were not even provided water and fodder. In Bardoli Thana, one buffalo actually died of neglect. Villagers loved their cattle and felt the pain of their animals. They suffered with them.<sup>27</sup>

Supplementary police force was posted in the Taluka and Pathan toughs from Bombay were hired to terrorize the villagers. C.I.D. reporters took down everything that Vallabhbhai said in his speeches at various meetings. He was the only speaker at the meetings, all other workers having been forbidden from making speeches, for fear of providing the Government matter for action against them.

Attachments of property and seizure of cattle too having failed to shake the agriculturists in their resolve, the authorities took resort to arrests and prosecutions. In April, they arrested Ravishankar Vyas, a prominent worker, for



having persuaded a bullock-cart owner to refuse service to the Government officials. He was tried and sentenced to five months' rigorous imprisonment.

A few days later as many as 19 agriculturists were arrested at Vankaner on charges of obstructing Government work and creating a disturbance. While 8 of them were later let- off, 11 were sentenced to six months' hard labour. The Talati of Vankaner, who had been in service for 25 years, resigned his service in protest against such injustice and harassment.<sup>28</sup>

Gandhiji wrote:

Satyagrahi soldiers like Shri Ravishankar and Shri Chinai are in prison. Others too will follow them, as they ought to. If the people have any fire in them and if the Government does not wish to yield till the end, not a single soldier will remain outside prison nor a single landowner will own any property or remain outside prison.<sup>29</sup>

7

About this time, the Commissioner of the Northern Division in a private letter expressed his views as regards the movement. He wrote:

No one could be more anxious than I am to see that the poor people are not ruined by the misleading activities of agitators from Kheda who live upon the people... The agitators in Bardoli today are the same men who started the campaign of no land revenue assessment in Kheda district in 1918. The various tricks that have been played in order to prevent people who wish to pay land revenue assessment from doing so are all similar to those that were employed in 1918. People who are willing to pay land revenue assessment are being threatened by others with excommunication, social boycott, etc."<sup>30</sup>



The Commissioner further said in this letter that these "swarms of agitators" had been subjecting officers of the Government to "spying, mobbing and other indignities". It was of course all false. The letter became public, as often happens in such cases and caused resentment.

Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*:

It is an untruthful insinuation to suggest that the campaign was started by Kheda agitators. It was started by the Bardoli people themselves and the only person whose help and advice they sought was Sjt. Vallabhbai Patel....

It is untruthful to say that the officers of the Government are subjected to 'spying, mobbing and other indignities'.

Gandhiji took exception to workers being described as "swarms of agitators living on the people of Bardoli". It was an insult, he said, for which the Commissioner should be made to offer a public apology.

Among the workers the Commissioner had insulted were Abbas Tyabji, Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazeer, Dr. Sumant Mehta, Durbar Gopaldas, Dr. Chandulal and Dr. Tribhuvandas.<sup>31</sup> They were all highly honoured men who had been helping others all their lives.

The Commissioner's letter, and Gandhiji's reply to it, created a stir throughout the country and Bardoli became an all-India issue. Several other prominent men wanted to go to Bardoli to participate in the movement. But both Vallabhbai and Gandhiji dissuaded them. Many went in spite of their efforts at dissuasion.

Members of the Bombay Legislative Council representing Gujarat wrote to the Governor expressing surprise that the Government had not seen fit to concede the demand of the Bardoli agriculturists for an independent inquiry into the



revenue assessment. The Governor's secretary first said that the Government had not refused an inquiry by a Government officer, and when the M.L.C.s wrote that in that case they would be prepared to advise Vallabhbhai to accept such an inquiry, he backtracked, saying he had given no assurance of instituting an official enquiry.

The M.L.C.s were flabbergasted at being treated with such levity and all of them decided to resign from the Council. They wrote:

When the Government forgets its sense of responsibility, breaks the law in so grave a manner, and attempts to crush such fine and gentle people as the people of Bardoli are, then we feel it is our duty to send in our resignations of the membership of the Legislature as a protest against this autocratic policy of the Government.

The M.L.C.s resigning were Dadubhai Desai, Jivabhai Patel, Jethalal Swaminarayan, Vamanrao Mukadam, Bhimbhai Naik, H. B. Shivdasani and Dr. Dikshit. They were followed by Amritlal Sheth and Hirabhai Amin.<sup>32</sup>

The Congress Working Committee met in Bombay and among other things, considered the Bardoli situation. The resolution it passed on the subject said:

The increase in the land revenue assessment in the Bardoli Taluka is unjust and has been fixed on the basis of false and inadequate data. Not merely has the Government of Bombay refused to accept the request of the Bardoli satyagrahis for the appointment of an independent and unbiased committee to inquire into the whole question, but [it] has been taking ruthless steps against the people. The Working Committee of the Congress congratulates the Bardoli satyagrahis for the unflinching bravery with which they have been resisting the Government and its ruthless measures. It thanks Vallabhbhai Patel and his colleagues for standing by the side of



the Bardoli satyagrahis on this difficult occasion. It congratulates further those members of the Bombay Legislature who have given in their resignations as a protest against the autocratic policy of the Bombay Government....

The resolution condemned the Commissioner's description of the satyagrahi workers as a gang of agitators who had been misleading the people and requested Bombay Government to ask the Commissioner to tender a public apology.<sup>33</sup>

On 27 May, the Surat District Conference was held. Jairamdas Doulatram, who presided, graphically described at the meeting the repressive measures of the Government and the restraint shown by the agriculturists. He had been to Bardoli and had seen with his own eyes the horrors that were being perpetrated in Bardoli. He called for 12 June to be observed as the Bardoli Day all over India.

Gandhiji supported the suggestion of Jairamdas Doulatram, made at the Surat District Conference, "that June 12<sup>th</sup> or any other suitable day should be proclaimed as Bardoli Day when meetings representing all parties may be held to pass resolutions and make collections in aid of the sufferers of Bardoli."

Writing under the caption "Bardoli on Trial" Gandhiji exhorted the people not to be provoked into acts of violence by the misbehaviour of the Pathans posted in their midst. He wrote:

Imprisonments, forfeitures, deportations, death must all be taken in the ordinary course by those who count honour before everything else. When the terror becomes unbearable, let the people leave the land they have hitherto believed to be theirs. It is wisdom to vacate houses or places that are plague-infected."<sup>34</sup>



At the time, Gandhiji wrote the article an unsuccessful attempt had been made for a compromise by a self-appointed mediator, Dewan Bahadur Harilal Desai. The course he suggested was that the peasants should pay the enhanced assessment, after which the Government might agree to the appointment of an inquiry committee.

Vallabhbhai rejected this counsel. He wrote to Harilal Desai:

What can be the use of any inquiry if the enhancement is to be paid up? ... . . you would best serve the cause by refraining from any action if you cannot act strongly and do not feel the strength of the people as I do. Whilst I want to shut no door to an honourable settlement, I am in no hurry to close the struggle without putting the people to the severest test they are capable of fulfilling. I would have a brave defeat rather than an ignominious compromise.<sup>35</sup>

Gandhiji echoed the same sentiments. He wrote:

One hears rumours of intercessions by well-meaning friends. They have the right, it may be even their duty, to intercede. But let these friends realize the significance of the movement. They are not to represent a weak cause or a weak people. The people of Bardoli stand for an absolutely just cause.... Their cause is to seek an independent, open, judicial inquiry and they undertake to abide by the verdict of such a tribunal. To deny the tribunal is to deny justice which the Government have hitherto done."<sup>36</sup>

Bardoli had electrified India. The response from everywhere was overwhelming. Dr. Ansari, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Mohammed Baloch, M.L.C., went to Bardoli and were much impressed. Dr. Ansari declared the Muslims as a community with the people of Bardoli.





Bharucha and Nariman also went from Bombay and condemned the use of Pathan ruffians to cow down the satyagrahis.

Sikhs sent telegram offering to send volunteers. Sardar Mangal Singh and Dr. Satyapal went and stayed in Bardoli studying the campaign. Jamnalal Bajaj also went there.

The visitors were amazed by the organization of the struggle. There were 16 Satyagraha camps, with 250 volunteers. Their day began at 3 a.m., when they set out for the village with news bulletins for distribution and kept watch for the attachment parties. The enthusiasm among the women drew their unstinted admiration.

Detailed instructions had been issued to the agriculturists to meet every situation that might be created by the officials. To begin with, only those receiving confiscation or attachment notices kept their doors locked. Later whole villages adopted this course. Those who could not put up with the strain were advised to leave their homes. Since raiding parties of Pathans occasionally managed to get hold of carts and other property lying around, Vallabhbhai advised the villagers to dismantle the carts and keep the parts in separate places in thorns and bushes.<sup>37</sup>

Penalty notices, distraint processes, forfeitures and attachments having failed to make any impression on the villagers, Government warned that lands of peasants would be entered as Government lands, unoccupied waste, and sold. An announcement dated 31 May said:

By keeping their houses locked up and by threats to the village Patels and Vethias (village peons) of social boycott and ex-communication, every effort is being made by land-holders to evade payment.... The Government is left with no alternative but to forfeit land and to attach buffaloes and



immovable property and to seek the assistance of Pathans. What is wrong in that? ... The agriculturists are once again warned that their land will be treated as Government Khalsa, and once taken will never be returned. 1400 acres of land has been disposed of in this way and another 5000 acres will be disposed of similarly.

Vallabhbhai told the peasants not to lose heart, not to buckle under the threat of the Government. Since their cause was just, they must win in the end. In any case, who would buy the land? The Government said it had found purchasers for the attached property and attached land. It had not said who they were. He added:

The world knows that among these purchasers are chaprasis, policemen, and a few butchers who were specially persuaded to come from Surat. The land has been purchased by flatterers of the Government servants. What their reputation is everybody knows.

Vallabhbhai warned the purchasers:

The Parsis who have purchased the land will find men and women of their own community standing in their way in large numbers inviting them to shoot them before they use the land, to kill them before a plough touches their land, and then to use their bones as manure.<sup>3</sup>

Vallabhbhai directed Mithubehn Petit, Bhaktibehn Desai and his daughter Manibehn to put up huts on the land declared by the Government to have been sold, and to camp there.<sup>39</sup>

There were comments in all the newspapers all over the country on the Government announcement. V. J. Patel wrote to Gandhiji expressing his support for the Bardoli struggle and offering contribution of Rs. 1000 per month towards the Bardoli fund for which Gandhiji had issued an appeal. His letter said:



I feel that I cannot remain silent and inactive. I am sorry that I cannot at the present moment express my deep sympathy with the people of the Taluka and my strong disapproval of the coercive measures ... more tangibly than by sending the accompanying small contribution of Rs. 1000 towards the fund, which is now being raised on their behalf. I propose to continue to send the same amount from month to month so long as the struggle lasts.

On 5 June Nariman, Bhulabhai Desai and Narandas Bechar resigned from the Bombay Legislative Council. These resignations were followed on 8 June by that of Jairamdas Doulatram.<sup>40</sup>

It was now the turn of the Patels and the Talatis - described by Vallabhbhai as the two wheels of the Government bullock-cart to dissociate themselves from the black deeds of the administration. Before 12 June, the day fixed as the Bardoli Day, 63 Patels and 11 Talatis had tendered their resignations.

Gandhiji congratulated these officials on the brave stand they had taken. Writing in *Young India* under the caption "Immolation of Bardoli" he said:

The Government are using a Nasmyth hammer to crush a fly. For the sake of, to them, a paltry sum of Rs. 1,00,000, which the enhancement represents, they are resorting to force, untruth, flattery and bribery....

But more purifying than this suffering imposed by Godless and insolent authority, is the suffering which the people are imposing upon themselves. I refer to the resignations of sixty-three Patels and eleven Talatis of Bardoli and Valod. It is not a small thing for these people to give up their posts which hitherto they have used not unoften in order to make illegitimate additions to their ordinary emoluments... I tender my respectful congratulations to these Patels and Talatis."<sup>41</sup>



12 June was observed all over India as Bardoli Day. In Bardoli itself, people of the Taluka fasted for twenty-four hours and offered prayers. Elsewhere there were meetings and collection of funds to help the Bardoli sufferers. In Bombay, young men went from house to house collecting small sums. In Ahmedabad, textile workers, by paying an anna each, collected a sum of Rs. 1500. Cheques and money orders came pouring into the Satyagraha headquarters in Bardoli. The more prosperous were persuaded to pay larger sums. Some donated or lent cars for the Satyagraha work.

Lala Lajpat Rai sent telegraphically a sum of Rs. 2,000 and expressed regret that he had not been given a chance to come and work in Bardoli.

Vallabhbhai had not at first asked for funds from outside. He managed with what the local people could contribute. But as the campaign intensified and volunteers started coming from all over the country notwithstanding Vallabhbhai's and Gandhiji's advice against it, the need for finances became acute and Vallabhbhai asked Gujaratis to contribute. He also requested Gandhiji to make an appeal for funds. On 13 May, Gandhiji wrote in *Navajivan*:

In this sacrifice, financial support has chiefly come till today from Bardoli itself. Whatever contribution has been sent by anyone voluntarily, has been accepted. To do so hereafter would be beyond our capacity. Tomorrow the people of Bardoli may have no homes, no possessions, no fields, and no cattle. In such circumstances, Vallabhbhai has a right to ask for outside assistance....

. . . those who approve of this movement in Bardoli and those who see purity and courage in it should contribute all they can.<sup>42</sup>



He repeated the appeal through *Young India*, 31-5-1928.

The result was most encouraging. 'While in May the total collection had been a mere Rs. 10,000, in June it went up to Rs. 2,00,000 and in July to Rs. 3,00,000. Money also came from outside India: from France, Belgium, Japan, China, New Zealand, Malaya and Fiji.

The pace of attachments and forfeitures was also increasing. By June, the number of forfeiture notices issued had gone up to 5,000. Government started selling confiscated land by auction. Land worth Rs. 50,000, assessed for Rs. 1,200 and standing in the name of Ismail Gaba of Bardoli was declared as having been sold. Additional land worth Rs. 25,000 was further advertised to be sold.<sup>43</sup>

Vallabhbai administered a stern warning to the Government as well as to the purchasers of forfeited land. Said he:

So long as a square foot of land belonging to any agriculturist or to any participant in this fight remains forfeited, this fight will continue. For the sake of such land, thousands of Agriculturists are ready to die.... He who buys such land drinks the life blood of agriculturists. Whoever does that, will do well to give thought to the retribution, which will be meted out to him by God in this life."<sup>44</sup>

The satyagrahis stood firm with their backs to the wall. The Government was in a quandary.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BARDOLI SATYAGRAHA-II

1

In June, there was yet another attempt at intercession in the dispute. This was made by K. M. Munshi, then a member of the Bombay Legislature. He wrote to the Governor about the matter after seeing things for himself in Bardoli, asking him to do something before the situation further deteriorated. The Governor in his reply justified the increase in the revenue assessment. He rejected the demand for an inquiry, saying no Government could concede the right of private individuals to usurp the functions of the Government. The Government could not give up its "undoubted right of administration". In a scathing article, Gandhiji wrote:

'The undoubted right of administration' is the uncontrolled licence to bleed India to the point of starvation. The licence would be somewhat controlled if an independent committee were appointed to adjust the points in dispute between the people and the executive authority.... Where is in the modest demand of the people the slightest usurpation of the functions of the Government? But even the least check upon the utter independence of the executive officers is enough to send the Government into a fury....  
. . . The fact is the Government have no case. They do not want their revenue policy to be challenged at an open inquiry or the withdrawal of the enhancement. It is their (agriculturists') undoubted right to claim for their grievance a hearing before an impartial tribunal."<sup>1</sup>

And K. M. Munshi, on 17 June wrote back to the Governor:

80,000 men, women and children are inspired by a determined spirit of organized opposition. Your japti (confiscation) officer has to travel miles before he can get a shave. Your officer's car, which got stuck, would have



remained in the mud but for Mr. Vallabhbhai, officially styled 'agitator living on Bardoli'. Garda, to whom lands worth thousands have been sold for a nominal amount does not get even a scavenger for his house. The Collector gets no conveyance on the railway station unless one is given by Mr. Vallabhbhai's sanction... as Mr. Vallabhbhai passed through village after village; I saw men, women and children coming out with spontaneous homage.... In order to save their beloved cattle, 80,000 men, women and children with these cattle have locked themselves up in small and insanitary houses for over three months.

At the end of the letter, Munshi told the Governor that the only answer that lay in his power was to resign his seat in the Council.

Munshi then took upon himself the task of investigating into tyrannous methods being resorted to by the Government in dealing with the agriculturists. The members of the committee besides Munshi himself, were Huseinbhai Lalji, Dr. Gilder, Bhimbhai Naik, H. B. Shivdasani, N. B. Chandrachud, all M.L.C.s, and B. G. Kher, solicitor, who functioned as Secretary of the committee.

The committee took great care to make sure that its findings were supported by overwhelming and unimpeachable evidence. It examined as many as 126 witnesses in Bardoli.

Its conclusions were:

- 1) There were irregularities in the issue of forfeiture notices.
- 2) Over 6,000 notices were issued covering the bulk of lands in Bardoli -- quite disproportionate in value to the assessment recoverable.
- 3) Lands of the value of over Rs. 3,00,000 were disposed of for Rs. 11,000.
- 4) Distraint proceedings in many cases were illegal.
- 5) Forcing open of doors was resorted to as a matter of concerted policy.



- 6) There were many instances of distraints being levied after sunset and before sunrise.
- 7) Cooking vessels, beds, etc., which were exempt from attachment, were seized.
- 8) While levying attachments, officers did not care to find out whether the property attached belonged to a defaulter or not.
- 9) The animals distrained were very severely beaten.

The committee gave figures to prove that as a consequence sickness among animals had grown alarmingly.<sup>2</sup>

The committee's recommendations were:

1. The Land Revenue Policy should be revised and in particular the following changes should be made:
  - a) The relation between Government and agriculturists should be properly defined;
  - b) The principle of assessment should be brought in line with the civilized notions of land-tax prevailing in the West and an appeal to civil courts must be given where the assessment is found to be unsatisfactory;
  - c) The methods of recovery should be better defined in the Code itself and should approximate to the remedies for recovery of money claims as given by the civil law, maybe without the intervention of the civil law;
  - d) The power of disposal of forfeited lands at present given to the Collector and the Executive should be taken away;
  - e) The law should be so amended that the processes of recovery could not be put into operation before the expiry of the period of notice, and concurrently;
  - f) The order of distraints should be given in a form prescribed by the rules;





- g) The Collector must not have the power conclusively to decide what the articles exempted from distraint are and the distraint should not be effected before sunrise or after sunset and in no case by forcing open the doors in any manner;
  - h) The large powers now left with the Executive of making rules and passing resolutions should be taken away and the salutary provisions which safeguard the rights and liberties of the Khatedars must be incorporated in the Code.
2. In any campaign for the recovery of revenue, the departments like Police, Justice and Excise should not directly be made use of and considerations of the general well-being of the people should not be lost sight of by Government in a zeal for recovery of revenue.<sup>3</sup>

2

On 20 June, Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas and Lalji Naranji went to see Gandhiji at Ahmedabad to discuss the Bardoli situation. Sardar was also present on the occasion. Sir Purushottamdas and Lalji Naranji then met the Governor at Poona and pressed him to grant the inquiry demanded. The Governor refused to budge from the position the Government had taken up, that is, that the amount of enhancement must first be deposited in Government treasury and only then would the question of an inquiry be considered. There was of course no question of the agriculturists accepting this position and thus another well-meant attempt at compromise fell through. Lalji Naranji thereupon tendered his resignation from the Legislative Council of which he was a member.

In a speech to the agriculturists, Vallabhbhai commented:

The time for compromise or settlement has not yet arrived. There will be a satisfactory settlement only when the Government's attitude changes.



When there is a change of heart, we shall immediately find that bitterness and hostility, which now move the Government to action, have been replaced by sympathy and understanding.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after, in the third week of June, H. N. Kunzru, S. G. Vaze, editor of *Servant of India*, and Amritlal Thakkar (Thakkar Bapa) went to Bardoli to make their own inquiry into the assessment. They studied settlement reports and visited numerous villages. They specially considered to what extent the Bombay Revenue Code of 1879 and the Settlement Manual justified the almost exclusive reliance on rental value for the purpose of determining new assessment rates. They found that the table was seriously defective; the rental statistics had not been sufficiently scrutinized.

They came to the conclusion that the demand for a fresh inquiry was fully justified. Vaze in an additional statement laid emphasis on the fact that the Bardoli struggle was purely an economic one and no part of a mass civil disobedience movement.<sup>5</sup>

Motilal Nehru in a long statement referred to the Bombay Government's assertion that it was prepared to agree to a fresh inquiry provided the agriculturists first paid the enhanced assessment and said it was an extraordinary position to take up. If the assessment was prima facie wrong and unjust and merited reconsideration, it was manifestly absurd and illogical to demand payment of any dues under it.

Tej Bahadur Sapru also supported the demand for an independent inquiry into the assessment. He went further and said there ought to be an inquiry also into the methods employed in enforcing payment and dealing with the situation generally.<sup>6</sup>



There was thus growing unanimity in the country in support of the demand of the Bardoli peasantry for an independent inquiry into the revenue assessment. Even circles generally siding with the Government could not challenge the justness of the cause of Bardoli. The Anglo-Indian press, with the sole exception of The Times of India, spoke up in support of the popular demand. The Pioneer, for instance, wrote:

The main point that must be made and made without delay is that no impartial observer of the Bardoli dispute possessed of the plain facts of the case can resist the conclusion that the peasants have got right on their side and that their claim for an examination of the enhanced assessment by an impartial tribunal is just, reasonable and fair.<sup>7</sup>

The Statesman of Calcutta took a similar line.

The Times of India of course could not for long remain indifferent to such momentous happenings within the Presidency and at last, it sent its correspondent to see things for himself. The articles he wrote bore testimony to the amazing unity achieved in the taluka under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel who enjoyed to an extraordinary degree the devotion of the entire peasantry, including women, the remarkable organization of the camps and the hardships, which the people had to endure.

But the correspondent was alarmed by all this. He saw in it something sinister. His articles were carried under such headlines as "Peasant Rebellion in Bardoli", "Bolshevik Regime in Bardoli". He warned the Government that Vallabhbhai intended to set up a Soviet regime in Bardoli, with himself playing the part of Lenin.<sup>8</sup>

The situation was thus getting out of hand and the Bombay Government was under great pressure to control the movement before it assumed more ominous



proportions. It was felt that under the existing laws no provisions existed to crush a wholly non-violent movement. There were the provisions of the Revenue Code, but these were already being ruthlessly applied against the peasantry without any perceptible effect. What was now contemplated was to attack the leadership of the movement by invoking the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908. Government of India were approached for advice and L. Graham, Secretary, Legislative Department in a note dated 13 July 1928 gave his go-ahead. He wrote: As I understand the statement of facts supplied by the Bombay Government, there is a combination of satyagrahis, at the head of which is Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel, operating in the Bardoli taluka... and we have been told that the funds which are being collected throughout India are to be expended not on the cultivators of the Bardoli taluka but on these satyagrahis. I think then that there can be no doubt but that there now exists in Bardoli a definite combination of persons which is therefore an association within the meaning of Section 15(1) of the Act.

From the papers before me, I understand that the objects of this Association are at least threefold.

1. to prevent the land-holders from paying the land revenue due from them,
2. to prevent the execution of coercive processes, such as the seizure of moveable property, and
3. to prevent the cultivation by the new owners of lands which have been forfeited for failure to pay land revenue.

Graham held that the Governor would be justified in declaring the Bardoli Satyagrahis under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel an unlawful association.<sup>9</sup>

In mid-July 1928, Governor Leslie Wilson paid a visit to Simla to acquaint the Viceroy with the situation and talk things over with the officials of the



Government of India. On 15 and 16 July, he had exhaustive discussions with them on the situation in Bardoli. In the discussions, the following points emerged:

All holdings belonging to non-agriculturists totalling about 15,000 acres have been forfeited and out of this area, some 1,600 acres have been disposed of to new owners. Of the land in possession of defaulters who are agriculturists, which amounts to about 1,00,000 acres, about half has been forfeited to the Government, but not yet disposed of. The occupants are still cultivating this land, but they have been warned that the whole crop will be the property of the Government. The old tenants are still cultivating the land, which has been disposed of to new owners.

The note summarizing the discussions further said:

It is proposed to proceed with the forfeiture of all the remaining land held by agriculturist defaulters. The land may not be disposed of immediately.... The crops grown on such land would be Government property.

Should these measures not suffice to break the movement, it was agreed that recourse would be had to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 or other measures "to strike the men who are organizing the agitation".

As for any question of compromise, it was agreed that

the first condition of the settlement must be the immediate cessation of the agitation, the payment of the revised assessment and the abandonment of the claim for a non-official enquiry.

If the Government was satisfied on these points they might agree to grant an official enquiry.

These terms were to be stated by the Governor in his talks with the Satyagrahis, a group of whom, headed by Vallabhbhai, had been invited to see him at Surat



on 18 July. If the terms were not accepted by the Satyagrahis, it was decided that the Governor

would state in opening his Legislative Council on the 23rd instant what the Government of Bombay were prepared to do provided they received within a fortnight a clear assurance of the termination of the movement. He would make it plain that if the inhabitants of the taluka and those who speak for them reject this course the Government will take all necessary measures to enforce compliance with the law and to crush a movement which would then clearly be exposed as one directed not to representing reasonable grievances and to obtain a re-examination of the facts, but to coercing Government by direct action.<sup>10</sup>

4

Vallabhbhai Patel was on a visit to Ahmedabad to attend the district conference there when he received an invitation from the Governor to see him at Surat along with twelve representatives of the Satyagraha Committee on 18 July. Accordingly, Vallabhbhai, accompanied by Abbas Tyabji, Mrs. Sharda Meha, Mrs. Bhaktibehn Desai, Mithubehn Petit and Kalyanji Mehta went to Surat and had prolonged sessions with the Governor. The Governor reiterated the position arrived at in his discussions at Simla, set out in the following written statement:

In the first place, all the land revenue assessment should be paid up or the difference between the new and the old assessment should be deposited in the Government Treasury on behalf of the agriculturists. Secondly, the movement to withhold payment of land revenue assessment should immediately be stopped. If these two conditions are accepted the Government would be prepared to take steps to set up a special enquiry into the alleged errors of the official appreciation and calculation of facts



and figures either by a Revenue Officer unconnected with the present case, or by a Revenue Officer with a Judicial Officer associated with him, it being the duty of the latter to decide any disputed questions of facts or figures.

Vallabhbhai, anxious to arrive at a settlement, did not break off the negotiations on being presented with this harsh choice. He in turn put forth his own conditions, which the Government must meet before the withdrawal of Satyagraha could be considered.

These were:

1. All satyagrahi prisoners should be released.
2. All forfeited lands, whether sold or unsold, should be returned to their lawful owners.
3. Proper market price should be given to the owners of cattle and other moveable property, which it was contended, had been sold at ridiculously low prices.
4. All dismissals and other punishments of Government servants during the struggle should be cancelled or remitted.
5. As regards the enquiry, even an official committee would be acceptable so long as it was made clear that the enquiry would be open, impartial and judicial in character, before which it would be open for people to appear by counsel if they chose.

Most political leaders and most of the press supported the demands of the Satyagrahis. *The Leader*, *The Hindu*, *The Pioneer* and Mrs. Besant's *New India* strongly criticised the Governor's intransigent stand, characterizing it as a



demand for surrender on the part of the Satyagrahis. The Governor however remained adamant.<sup>11</sup>

On 23 July Sir Leslie Wilson devoted his entire opening speech at the legislative Council to the Bardoli question. He told the Assembly that, in spite of the best intentions of the Government no settlement of the question having been possible, the Government must announce its decision before the "elected representatives of the people". Issues had been raised in Bardoli, which had very wide significance, and indeed, it was common ground that the question had become one of all-India importance. The issue was not merely, whether reassessment of landlords in Bardoli Taluka was a fair or unfair one; it was "whether the writ of His Majesty the King-Emperor is to run in a portion of His Majesty's dominions or whether the edict of some non-official body of individuals is to be obeyed." The Governor warned:

That issue, if that is the issue, is one which Government are prepared to meet with all power which Government possesses....Before any enquiry can be promised it will be clearly demonstrated what is the issue before the Government and people of this Presidency and before the Government of India....Government is prepared to submit the whole case after the revenue due to Government is paid and the present agitation entirely ceases, to a full, open and independent enquiry as outlined in the statement already published."

The Governor reminded the House that these proposals were not "proposals put forward as a basis of compromise but definite and final decisions of the Government". He then went on to present the Satyagrahis with an ultimatum, asking the members concerned, that is, the M.L.C.s representing Surat district, to communicate the decision whether or not they on behalf of their constituents





accepted or refused the conditions which must be fulfilled before a fresh enquiry could be set up, to the Revenue Member, "within a fortnight from now".

The Governor threatened that if the conditions were not accepted and settlement not secured the Government would take what action they considered desirable and necessary and "utilize all powers to ensure that Government's statutory authority is maintained in every way".

He was not uttering a threat, the Governor said, but merely making a statement of fact. There had been a campaign of civil disobedience going on in Bardoli and civil disobedience was an act of lawlessness.<sup>12</sup>

5

In London Under Secretary of State Lord Winterton speaking in the House of Lords on the same day, lent support to the Bombay Governor. He said:

If the conditions mentioned by Sir Leslie Wilson in the Bombay Legislative Council today as regards Bardoli are not satisfied, the Bombay Government have full support of the Government of India in enforcing compliance with law and crushing the movement which would clearly then be exposed as one directed to coercing Government and not representing reasonable grievances.<sup>13</sup>

Vallabhbhai Patel in a statement soon after, expressed his anguish at the threatening tone of the Governor's utterance. He said the Bardoli people had not been fighting in order to have the right of civil disobedience vindicated. They were fighting through civil disobedience to induce the Government either to waive the enhancement, or, if they were not convinced that the enhancement had been improperly made, to appoint an impartial, independent body to enquire into the matter. The only question was therefore that of justice or injustice of the reassessment.



Vallabhbhai further asked that if the Government were prepared to have "a full, open and independent enquiry", they must not insist upon the payment of the enhancement, which was in dispute.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhiji, referring to the "Governor's Threat" wrote in *Navajivan*:

What can punishment inflicted by the State do to those who have given up the fear of death and the infatuation for possessions? What effect can a threat have upon those who love their self-respect above everything else? Hence, the Governor's threat and Earl Winterton's full endorsement of it cannot have any influence on the people of Bardoli.

At the same time, Gandhiji asked the satyagrahis not to be angry, for a satyagrahi had no right to be angry. They must not swerve from the path of truth. They must adhere to their demands, which were:

1. An independent and impartial committee to hear their complaints and give justice.
2. Implementation of the conditions which should form the basis of such committee, i.e. (a) release of those who have been imprisoned in connection with the struggle; (b) release of lands which have been confiscated in connection with the struggle; and (c) restoration of the direct losses suffered by the people and by other individuals for the sake of the people.<sup>15</sup>

Gandhiji sent a cable to C. F. Andrews, who was then in England, saying that the situation was worse, that Government seemed determined to humiliate satyagrahis and their leaders and insisted on abject acceptance by Council members representing Surat district of unintelligible terms well knowing these members had no influence in Bardoli, that Bardoli people were reported to be



absolutely firm, ready for any suffering and that papers predicted arrest of Vallabhbhai and co-workers on expiry of Governor's ultimatum. Gandhiji further said he expected to reach Bardoli any day upon Vallabhbhai's call<sup>16</sup>

The call from Vallabhbhai was not long in coming and Gandhiji hastened to Bardoli on 2 August. On 4 August at Sarbhon, he spoke to a large gathering of agriculturists who had come from 25 villages around Sarbhon to hear him. There were also, besides the volunteers, many Patels and Talatis among the audience who had resigned their jobs to participate in the Satyagraha. Gandhiji congratulated them and said:

We are all anxious for peace, but we want peace with honour, a peace that would be worthy of the Satyagrahis and the cause, which they represent.... A time may shortly come when Dr. Sumant, Abbas Tyabji and all the local workers and volunteers may be snatched away from you and clapped in to jail. Then will come your real test. Let each one of you, when that hour comes, defend the citadel of his honour with his last breath, for that is the meaning of swaraj.... The Government may riddle you with bullets or turn you out of your homes. You must be prepared for both.<sup>17</sup>

The apprehension that the Government might strike at the movement was not without basis. For as day followed day without any sign on the part of the satyagrahis to surrender, the Bombay Government, on 3 August wrote to the Home Department, Government of India, that they did not think there was any likelihood of the conditions being accepted by 6 August when the period of grace expired. They were therefore considering the question of taking steps under Criminal Law Amendment Act as well as utilization of provisions of the Land Revenue Code. Proclamation declaring Vallabhbhai and the satyagrahis an unlawful association would not be published until necessary force of police had



been moved to the district. Home Department was informed that the Government of Bombay, the Commissioner of the Northern Division and military authorities agreed that it would be desirable to have troops in readiness at Surat to be used in case of necessity.

The Home Department, forwarding the Bombay Government's proposals to the Viceroy, who was then camping at Jaipur, suggested a reply on the following lines:

Policy of attacking the organization is approved of generally and Government of India will be glad to receive your assurance that. . . measures contemplated are those most likely to afford reasonable prospect of weakening the movement in near future.... Government of India would like to be informed what immediate action is contemplated after issue of notification. Proceedings would presumably be taken against Vallabhbhai at once. Approximately how many others would be dealt with at the same time? From press reports, it would seem that on Vallabhbhai's arrest Gandhi would endeavour to take his place and court arrest. . . . If it becomes necessary to arrest Gandhi what are anticipated as probable reactions on Bardoli situation and in Presidency generally?

Secretary of State will have to be kept informed of what is contemplated.

The Viceroy's office, it would appear, had a more sombre appreciation of the ramifications of the policy of suppression urged by the Bombay Governor. On 5 August the Home Department was informed by Viceroy's office as follows:

Latest proposals of Bombay Government seem to me to represent considerable change of policy from procedure we agreed upon in Simla. It was clearly understood there that forfeiture and disposal of certain lands should be first action.... Grounds on which they now propose to take action against instigators... are not understood and I do not feel sufficient



confidence in Bombay Government's judgment to accept their new policy unquestioned.<sup>18</sup>

## 6

The M.L.C.s concerned were in the meanwhile frantically trying to look for a formula, which would make a settlement possible. They interviewed various authorities of the Government, including the Governor, only to discover that they were not prepared to alter the terms announced by the Governor. Munshi then interviewed Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai Patel to ascertain from them the minimum that would satisfy them. Their terms were that, pending the enquiry old assessment should be accepted and that the enquiry should be an open judicial enquiry, either by a judicial officer alone or assisted by a revenue officer and people should have the right to lead and test evidence, through counsel if necessary. The terms of reference for the enquiry should be:

Firstly, to enquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of Bardoli and Valod (a) that the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the Land Revenue Code; (b) that the report and the notifications accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong. And to find that if the people's complaints are held to be justified," what enhancement or reduction, if any, there should be upon the old assessment.

Secondly, to report upon the allegations made by or on behalf of the people about the coercive measures adopted by the Government in order to collect the enhanced revenue.

All lands to be restored; all satyagrahi prisoners to be released; all Talatis and Patels to be reinstated.



Gandhiji gave Munshi to understand that the demand for enquiry into coercive measures would, if necessary, be waived.

On 3 August, on the invitation of Sir Chunilal Mehta, Finance Member of the Governor's Council, Vallabhbhai Patel went to Poona. In the discussions between Vallabhbhai, Chunilal Mehta and the various Surat M.L.C.s it "was brought out that the Government was as anxious for an amicable settlement as Vallabhbhai and the M.L.C.s.

As things stood, the Governor had committed the Government to announcing an enquiry only on hearing from the Surat M.L.C.s within a fortnight from 23 July, i.e., on or before 6 August that his conditions were accepted. The deadline was approaching and some communication had to be sent to the Government on behalf of the Surat M.L.C.s. They were in constant touch with the Government through Chunilal Mehta, the Finance Member, and were given to understand that the Government were more than keen to avert a showdown; the spirit of the Governor's utterance in the Legislature on 23 July had been tempered by more sober counsel. At the same time, the Government would not accept anything, which would make it appear that they had climbed down from their position. As 6 August approached, therefore, it was not so much a question of defining the terms of the settlement, as of composing a communication the acceptance of which would not involve a loss of face for the Government.

After much deliberation a draft suggested by Sir Chunilal Mehta was accepted. It ran:

We are glad to be able to say that we are in a position to inform Government that the conditions laid down by His Excellency the Governor in his opening speech to the Council dated 23rd July will be fulfilled.



Vallabhbhai was not too happy with the draft, for it did not reflect the reality. The satyagrahis had not undertaken to fulfil the conditions laid down by the Governor in his address. But he was persuaded to agree. He consulted Mahadev Desai and asked him: "Would it not be departure from truth to send that letter when they had no intention to pay? What would Bapu say?" It was explained to him that the letter was not being sent from him, but from the M.L.C.s. It was nonsensical and everyone knew it. But if it satisfied the ego of the rulers, why should Vallabhbhai object to it? The letter as drafted, addressed to the Revenue Member, and dated 6 August, 1928, was signed by A. M. K. Dehlavi, Bhaisaheb (Thakur of Kerwada), Dadukhan Salebhai Tyebjee, J. B. Desai, B. R. Naik, H. B. Shivdasani and M. K. Dixit.

The Government then announced the following enquiry:

The enquiry will be entrusted to a Revenue Officer and a Judicial Officer, the decision of the Judicial Officer to prevail in all matters of difference between the two, with the following terms of reference:

To enquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of Bardoli and Valod

- a) that the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the Land Revenue Code;
- b) that the reports accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong; and to find out that, if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement or reduction, if any, there should be upon the old assessment.

As the enquiry is to be full, open and independent, the people will be free to lead as well as test evidence before it with the help of their representatives including legal advisers.



On 7 August in another communication addressed to the Revenue Member the Surat M.L.C.s asked for (a) release of all satyagrahi prisoners, (b) restoration of all lands forfeited, and (c) reinstatement of all Talatis and Patels who had resigned their offices.

The Revenue Member, answering the same day, said the Government "will release all satyagrahi prisoners and will be pleased to issue orders granting your second request". The Government also agreed to reinstate the Talatis and Patels.<sup>19</sup>

"All's well that ends well," wrote Gandhiji in *Young India*. He congratulated both the Government and the people of Bardoli and Valod and above all Vallabhbhai, without whose firmness as well as gentleness the settlement would not have been possible. He called upon the people to proceed with constructive work with redoubled vigour. They must better their economic condition by attention to the charkha, they must remove the reproach of drink from their midst, they must attend to village sanitation and they must befriend the untouchables.<sup>20</sup>

With forfeited lands restored to the agriculturists, the satyagrahi prisoners released and the Patels and Talatis reinstated, the agriculturists were told by Vallabhbhai to pay their old assessment. They did so willingly, so that in about a month's time there were no arrears left to be realized.<sup>21</sup>

## 7

Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai were flooded with messages of congratulations from all parts of the country and leaders of all shades of political opinion. Among those who hailed the signal triumph of the Bardoli Satyagraha were Sarojini Naidu, Lala Lajpat Rai, Annie Besant, Motilal Nehru, Rajagopalachari, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Shuiab Qureshi, Satyamurti, Subhas Bose, Richard Gregg, Lallubhai Samaldas and Srinivasa Sastri.<sup>22</sup>





In Government circles, however the mood was far from one of jubilation. The Civil Service, Gandhiji noted soon afterwards in an article, was not happy with the settlement. Indeed, bureaucrats had started creating difficulties in regard to the return of fines imposed on agriculturists during the Satyagraha. Those satyagrahis whose moveable property had not been attached did not have to pay anything, but those whose property had been attached were asked to pay a fine of 25 per cent for restoration of the forfeited property. Vallabhbhai objected to this most strongly. He won his point, but it showed that the officials were as unsympathetic towards the peasantry as ever. There had been no change of heart on their part. Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai had a feeling that Governor Leslie Wilson was good while his advisers were bad. This feeling partly emanated from the fact that in 1924 at the time of the Borsad Satyagraha the Governor had shown a more accommodating, "statesman-like" spirit. The difference however appears to have been only on the surface. For the Governor had been rueing the victory of the Bardoli Satyagraha as much as any of his other functionaries. On 16 August 1928, just ten days after the signing of the accord, he was writing to the Viceroy:

... I think it is of great importance to take into consideration, when there is any hint of a dispute about a reassessment, the political history and condition of the taluka or district concerned, with particular reference to the fact as to whether or not there has been evidence of teachings there of the policy of civil disobedience. This lesson has certainly been taught to me by Bardoli, and I cannot blame the Collector of Surat sufficiently for not taking immediate action and informing Government of the true state of affairs at an earlier date, particularly in view of the fact that Bardoli Taluka has a known history in this connection, and more particularly in view of what took place there in 1921.



. . . I would strongly urge that, before any such movement has had time to grow, it should be possible for any Provincial Government to make it definitely illegal for anyone to organize a campaign advocating non-payment of taxes due to Government, more particularly as the organized non-payment of taxes is a definite plank in Gandhi's platform of civil disobedience, and is one which very naturally appeals with much force to the ryot.

It must be remembered that Gandhi has always held that one of the strongest cards, which he can play against Government, is this non-violent civil disobedience by means of non-payment of taxes, and I cannot anticipate that in this Presidency Bardoli will be the last incident, for we have many threatenings since I have been here, in many parts....

I should be grateful if your Home Department would go into this question as to how it is possible to make any such organization definitely illegal. I am having it examined myself, and you may come to the decision that the best way would be by an amendment of the present law, so that exceptional action shall not have to be taken in each particular case.<sup>23</sup>

The Secretary of State, while commending the firmness shown by Leslie Wilson in the later stages of the Satyagraha, regretted that he had not shown enough firmness earlier. Writing to the Viceroy on 13 September, Birkenhead said:

I should have thought that in India directly law breaking begins, the hand of Government should descend on the [law] breakers. We rather pride ourselves on allowing political agitators plenty of rope to hang themselves, but I very much wonder whether among an ignorant credulous people it is wise...It may be all very well in a civilized country where the power of Government is well recognized... But in a continent like India, where ...



Government is seldom seen and never heard - what is the plain man to think when month after month he is incited to break the law and does break the law, and nothing happens to anyone?

The Secretary of State also said that Sir Leslie had also told him that the Government had no effective weapon for dealing with Satyagraha and asked the Viceroy if that was so.

The Viceroy assured him that the Criminal Law Amendment Act, Part II, under which an organization could be declared unlawful, should suffice. The Local Governments could take action under the provisions of the Act if an organization had for its object interference with the administration of the law.<sup>24</sup>

8

The settlement of 6 August marked the end of the civil disobedience phase of the struggle. It now remained for the committee of enquiry to be appointed and for it to proceed with its labour of collecting evidence. At the outset, a hitch arose as regards the personnel. Vallabhbhai Patel had had the impression, while the negotiations for the settlement were proceeding, that Davis of the Judicial Service would be one of the two members of the Committee. The Government however insisted that they had given no such impression and they appointed instead R. S. Broomfield as the Judicial Officer of the Committee. Broomfield, it may be remembered, was the Judge who had tried Gandhiji in March 1922 and sentenced him to prison for six years. The other member of the Committee, representing the Revenue side, was R. M. Maxwell.

The Committee formally started work from 5 November 1928, when Bhulabhai Desai appearing on behalf of the agriculturists, placed their case before the Committee. The actual enquiry began on 14 November from Bardoli taluka. The Committee visited 49 villages between the middle of November 1928 and end of



January 1929. They spent most of January in Chorasi taluka, where they visited 21 villages.

Narhari Parikh, Ramnarayan Pathak and Mahadev Desai were deputed by Vallabhbhai Patel to represent the agriculturists. These three workers in their turn were assisted by Mohanlal Pandya, Kalyanji Mehta and Gordhandas Chokhawala. The Committee in their report recognized the "valuable assistance" rendered by Narhari Parikh and Mahadev Desai.<sup>25</sup>

The Committee discovered, during the very early days of the enquiry, that the statistics of rentals appended by the Assistant Settlement Officer to his report were wholly unreliable, inasmuch as he had never even visited the villages concerned. In a large number of cases what he had treated as leases were no more than interest transactions. The Committee observed in their report:

Indeed, one cannot really be sure of anything in connection with these appendices, and as soon as one realizes that, the Talatis were mainly responsible for them it is hardly necessary to look for any other explanation of their deficiencies as material for a settlement.<sup>26</sup>

As regards the grounds which had been cited for raising the assessment, such as increased prosperity, improvement of roads, and so on, the Committee observed:

As for the alleged improvement in the condition of the roads ... not one of the old main roads, not even the road through Sarbhon to Navsari, can properly be described as good ... if the roads were any worse than they are, they would not deserve the name of roads at all.... As for the by-roads and tracks between villages, it is hardly possible that they have improved much, since in any worse condition they would not be usable, even by bullock-carts.



In the course of the proceedings, the Committee found overwhelming evidence to demolish the arguments of the Assistant Settlement Officer to prove that the general prosperity in the taluka had increased, whether by reference to increased population (3,800 in 30 years!), increased milch cattle, pucca houses and improvement in agricultural wages.

The Committee came down heavily on the Assistant Settlement Officer Jayakar for the way he had compiled his statistics, and for his failure to "explain the true character of the statistics which he had collected, and by pretending, or by allowing it to appear, that they had been properly scrutinized and verified", thus misleading the Settlement Commissioner and the Government.<sup>27</sup>

The Committee took great pains, through gruelling and prolonged cross-examination of the agriculturists on occasion, to determine the degree of prosperity and agricultural profits on which, ostensibly, the Government had based the enhancement of the assessment. They found that

the data in the reports, apart from rental and sales statistics, are obviously not sufficient to warrant either the general increases sanctioned in the maximum rates, or the much higher increases in the case of particular villages.<sup>28</sup>

The Committee then proceeded to frame what they called "constructive proposals" in regard to criteria for arriving at the data pertaining to sales and leases. In material terms, the report of the Committee, issued on 7 May 1929, reduced the amount of the revenue enhancement of the talukas of Bardoli and Chaurasi from Rs. 1,87,492 to Rs. 48,648 a saving of nearly Rs. 1,39,000. Thus they rejected the Government rate of 22 per cent increase as excessive and proposed, instead, an increase of 5.7 per cent.<sup>29</sup>



Gandhiji described the report as "an illuminating document" even though its actual finding on the question of the amount of assessment was faulty, and expected Vallabhbhai and the agriculturists to accept it. He wrote:

Throughout the brave fight the people put up, the question never was one of rupees, annas and pies, burdensome though the assessment was. The question was one of principle and justice.<sup>30</sup>

The Government accepted the report, but with a reluctance that they did not care to conceal. The Revenue Member said the Government had accepted the report "in order to close the matter, though it could draw conclusions just opposite of what the Committee had drawn on the data collected and accepted by them".<sup>31</sup>

Writing in *Young India*, Gandhiji described the Government as "incurable". The Bombay Government, he wrote, had accepted the Committee's report as it were at the point of the sword, for it knew full well that rejection of the report would mean a resuscitation of the whole agitation in a much more serious form than before. There was no grace or dignity about the acceptance. There had been not one word of regret for the many acts of oppression committed by the officials or for the gross errors of the Settlement Officer, which had cost the people a protracted struggle involving terrible hardships.<sup>32</sup>

The Broomfield-Maxwell report nevertheless could not but have repercussions elsewhere in India. In Punjab remissions in revenue amounting to several lakhs of rupees were given. In C.P. too, liberal suspensions of revenue recovery were allowed.<sup>33</sup>

In August 1929, in the Bombay Legislative Council, Pataskar moved a resolution asking for a committee on the lines of the Bardoli committee to go into the



revenue assessment of the talukas of Deogad, Rajapur, Khed Peta and Maudangad in the Ratnagiri district. The Revenue Member opposed the resolution, saying it would lead to incessant demands from other talukas. The resolution was nevertheless carried.<sup>34</sup>

Undoubtedly the Bardoli Satyagraha, though local in scope and strictly limited in its goals, stands out as one of the most successful examples of non-violent mass action involving the peasantry as a whole. It went a long way towards convincing the leadership of the national movement that Satyagraha on a mass scale, with the widest popular participation, organized and controlled by a leadership that adhered to the principles laid down by Gandhiji for the conduct of such movements, was the surest sanction for any constitutional negotiations with the British. It removed the gloom and lent to those struggling for swaraj a new confidence and a new strength.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SWARAJ CONSTITUTION

#### 1

The so-called Swaraj Constitution, produced by what came to be described as the Nehru Committee, represented the summation of a major constitutional effort mounted by the Congress to solve the vexed communal question in 1928.

In a way the genesis of the exercise lay way back in July 1925 when Secretary of State Birkenhead dared the Swaraj Party to "produce a constitution which carries behind it a fair measure of general agreement among the great peoples of India" if they did not like what the British had to offer them. Lord Birkenhead had given the assurance that such a contribution would not be resented; that indeed it would be most carefully examined by the Government of India and by himself.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhiji had questioned the sincerity of Lord Birkenhead's utterance, saying that the Secretary of State had made the offer knowing quite well that it would not and could not be accepted. Gandhiji had asserted that only a constitution backed by force, whether violent or non-violent, would receive the consideration of the British.<sup>2</sup>

The further widening of communal differences and the appointment of the Simon Commission impelled the Congress to accelerate its efforts to devise ways to patch up communal quarrels and establish unity between the communities. The Madras Congress of 1927 accordingly authorized the Working Committee

to confer with similar committees to be appointed by other organizations - political, labour, commercial and communal - in the country and to draft a Swaraj constitution for India, on the basis of a declaration of rights and





to place the same for consideration and approval before a special convention to be convened in Delhi not later than March 1928.<sup>3</sup>

In pursuance of the directive of the Congress, the Working Committee proceeded to organize a conference at Delhi in February 1928. Invitations were issued to no less than twenty-eight large and small organizations in the country to send delegates to the conference. Prominent among these were the National Liberal Federation, the Hindu Mahasabha, the All-India Muslim League, the Central Khilafat Committee, the Central Sikh League, the All-India Trade Union Congress, the Home Rule League, the Indian States' People's Conference, the Anglo-Indian Association, the Farsi Central Association, the All-India Conference of Indian Christians and the Land-holders' Association.

The Conference duly assembled in Delhi on 12 February and immediately got down to a discussion on the form of Government, with most delegates favouring a "dominion form of Government". This ran counter to the Independence resolution passed by the Congress at Madras. In the end, the Conference passed a resolution favouring a constitution establishing "full responsible Government".

On 22 February, the Conference appointed a committee to report on the following subjects: whether the constitution should be bicameral or unicameral, franchise, declaration of rights, rights of labour and peasantry, and Indian States.

What generated most heat was the resolution on the redistribution of provinces on linguistic basis and joint or separate electorates and reservation of seats. The Council of the Muslim League, meeting separately, put its foot down and declared that the Conference must first accept the proposals put forward by the League in March 1927 in Delhi and endorsed by the League session at Calcutta.<sup>4</sup>

These proposals, it may be remembered, were that (1) Sind should be separated from the Bombay Presidency and constituted into a separate province and (2)



Reforms should be introduced in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan. The Muslims in their turn would accept joint electorates, provided that in the Punjab and Bengal, which were Muslim-majority provinces, proportion of representation should be in accordance with population and in the Central Legislature Muslim representation should be not less than 33 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

These proposals were vehemently opposed by the delegates of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikhs at the Conference. The Muslim League's position was spelt out by Jinnah, who announced that nothing had been agreed upon by the League, which had not even formally appointed its delegates to the Conference. In the absence of definite authority from the League, he declared, he could bind himself to nothing. Very reasonably, he promised to do his best to persuade the Executive of the League when it met on 26 February.

In later years, Congress leaders were to become familiar with this technique of Jinnah: first agreeing to something and then wriggling out of it by saying, he could not commit himself without the League Council having first taken a decision in the matter. It was enough to drive everyone - including Wavell and Mountbatten - crazy.

2

Gandhiji in much distress wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru in answer to one of his letters:

I can't give you an adequate conception of my grief as I follow the Conference proceedings from day to day and read between the lines.... What a miserable show we are putting up against the insolence of Lord Birkenhead and the crookedness of the Commissioners.<sup>6</sup>



Gandhiji also reduced his views to writing on the many questions the Conference was taken up with. In a letter to Motilal Nehru, he explained his position thus:

**Electorate:** Gandhiji did not favour either separate electorates or reservation of seats. But the latter could be done away with only by mutual arrangement. If the Muslims did not agree, reservations could not be dispensed with, since the Congress was committed to them.

**The Constitution:** Gandhiji was personally still of the view, expressed by him earlier, that it was no use drawing up a Constitution without first having developed sanctions to enforce the demand. What he would prefer, instead of a Constitution, was a working arrangement between parties on such subjects as Hindu-Muslim arrangement, the franchise, the policy as to the Native States. Prohibition and exclusion of foreign cloth should be made an indispensable condition.

**Sanction:** More important than all else, said Gandhiji, was of course developing of sanction. Boycott of foreign cloth, with the assistance of mills if possible, without it if necessary, was essential for this. This task was perfectly capable of attainment within a measurable distance of time if sufficient public opinion could be created in its favour. If he had his way, Gandhiji said, he would concentrate exclusively on that task.<sup>7</sup>

When Gandhiji spoke of the assistance of mills, he meant of course that the mills should abstain from producing coarse cloth, which they passed off as mill khadi and which was a threat to genuine khadi. Such production had been going on, on a large scale, and Gandhiji was seriously concerned.

He wrote:



At present I am sorry to have to say that even some good mills are not ashamed to label their cloth 'khadi' simply in order to take an illegitimate advantage of the growing khadi atmosphere in the mofussil. If a working arrangement is to be come to, I expect that there will be a line of demarcation for the time being between the cloth to be manufactured by khadi centres and mills.<sup>8</sup>

Gandhiji wanted prices of mill cloth and khadi to be regulated by a special committee set up for the purpose. He very definitely asked that mills should cease to sell any mill cloth under the name of khadi or to manufacture any cloth that was likely to compete with khadi.<sup>9</sup>

That the tendency among the mills to carry on the "unfair, unpatriotic and illegitimate competition with khadi" had been increasing was shown by the figures of such production. While in 1925, mills had produced 6,50,48,487 yards of khadi, in 1926 the figure had gone up to 7,43,13,280 and in 1927, it had further gone up to 9,43,80,368 yards.<sup>10</sup>

But the mill-owners were proving recalcitrant and Gandhiji gradually came round to the view that it was going to be impossible to negotiate a boycott with them. Motilal Nehru entered into negotiations with Purushottamdas Thakurdas on the subject but nothing concrete emerged. Gandhiji informed Motilal that he had full knowledge that the mill-owners were starting a separate khadi organization "which would have nothing to do with us".<sup>11</sup> It was suggested that pressure might be brought to bear on the mills by organizing a boycott of mill-cloth. Gandhiji was not willing to go that far. He again wrote to Motilal Nehru:

"A negative attitude about mill-cloth will be quite enough to keep the mills under wholesome check. A positive boycott will only stir up bad blood without bringing us any nearer boycott of foreign cloth."<sup>12</sup>



The report of the committee appointed by the All Parties Conference at Delhi on 22 February was ready for the consideration of the Conference when it again assembled on 8 March. But the Muslim League delegates refused to have any discussion on it in the absence of their terms having first been conceded. The Conference decided to publish and circulate the report and again adjourned till 19 May.

When the Conference met in Bombay on 19 May, it was seen that the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League had drifted farther apart and no agreement on the communal question was possible. The Conference again got out of the impasse by appointing yet another committee - under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru. The Committee included: Ali Imam and Shuaib Qureshi, M. S. Aney, the Hindu Mahasabha representative and G. R. Pradhan, Sardar Mangal Singh, Tej Bahadur Sapru and N. M. Joshi to represent the Non-Brahmin, the Sikh, the Liberal and the Labour viewpoints respectively.

Jayakar, N. M. Joshi, Ali Imam and Pradhan dropped out of the Committee at various stages of its labours. The rest continued and made earnest efforts to find a way out of the deadlock. The Committee sat almost daily throughout June and continued its sittings for long hours. It found that it had to tackle problems more intricate than had previously been anticipated.

The very first question to be considered was with regard to the form of the constitution. A decision had to be taken as between Independence and Dominion status. "Full responsible Government" -the phrase used in the Delhi resolution earlier - was capable of different interpretations. The majority of the Committee were of opinion that their terms of reference required them to consider the



constitutions of self-governing Dominions as their model. The maximum degree of agreement was available only upon acceptance of Dominion Status.

In considering the communal question, the Committee were assisted, on the invitation of the Chairman, by a number of Hindu and Muslim leaders. Among them were Dr. Ansari, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Maulana Azad, C. Y. Chintamani, Moulvi Shafi Daudi, Dr. Kitchlew, Sachchidanand Sinha and T. A. K. Sherwani.

Jawaharlal Nehru, as General Secretary of the Congress, remained in constant attendance at the deliberations of the Committee and assisted it in compiling figures and in other ways.

The Committee had before it the census figures of 1921, which gave the break-up of the various communities in India as follows: Hindus 65.9 per cent, Muslims 24.1 per cent, others, including Buddhists (chiefly in Burma), Tribals, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and the rest, 10 per cent. While Hindus enjoyed an overwhelming majority in the country as a whole, Muslims were preponderant in N.W.F.P., Baluchistan and Sind and enjoyed majorities in Bengal and Punjab. In the rest of the country, they were minorities, the largest number being in U.P., where Muslim population was not quite 15 per cent. Strictly speaking then, neither Hindus nor Muslims were in need of any statutory protection. Nevertheless, such demands had been made.

The Committee considered a proposal for the establishment of Communal Councils to protect the interests of each considerable community, that is to say any minority community which had at least a population of ten lakhs (one million) in a given province. The proposal was that these Councils should look after schools, orphanages, dharmashalas, sarais, widows' homes, rescue homes and so on and encourage the minorities' languages and scripts.



On fuller consideration however the proposal was dropped, because it was realized that setting up of such Councils might only exacerbate communal feelings.

The communal problem thus resolved itself into the question of electorates, the reservation of seats, the separation of Sind and the form of government in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan.

The Committee came to the conclusion that separate electorates must be discarded altogether, if only because they tended to harm the minority community and benefit the majority community. Separate electorates made the majority hostile and impelled it to ride roughshod over the minority. The Committee's view was that joint or mixed electorates was the best course to pursue. In this, the Committee drew inspiration from the report of the Ceylon Reforms Enquiry Committee, which had recommended abolition of separate electorates throughout the island.

About the N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan, the Committee had no difficulty in recommending that "the status of these areas must be the same as that of other provinces". It was noted that the All Parties Conference had already agreed to this.

About Sind being made into a separate province, the Committee noted that the Congress, for its purposes, had already been treating it as a separate province from 1917 onwards on linguistic basis. It had no difficulty in deciding that the demand was a reasonable one even though it had not been very happily couched. The opposition of the Sind Hindus to the demand on the plea that there should be no encouragement given to setting up of provinces on a communal basis had no substance. The Hindus presumably were afraid of their economic interests



being affected if Sind passed under Muslim domination. But the Committee thought that this fear was groundless.

The Committee found the question of the reservation of seats - especially reservation of seats for the majority community in Punjab and Bengal but in no other province - the knottiest problem to unravel. It was realized that the demand for reservation in Bengal and Punjab was made by Muslims because they were not sure that otherwise the results of elections would necessarily reflect the majority status. The Committee had before it the example of Madras where the non-Brahmin majority - 96 per cent of the population - had asked for and were granted reservation of seats under the Reforms.

Under that dispensation 28 seats out of 98 had been reserved for them. The Committee noted that such reservation had every chance of leading to a non-representative body being elected and even a non-representative Government being formed.

In the opinion of the Committee it was absurd to insist on reservations for majorities and ask for responsible government at the same time. The two were incompatible.

Another proposal was that Punjab, Sind, N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan should be constituted into one province, in which case the Muslims would waive their demand for the reservation of seats in Punjab. The Committee refused to entertain the proposal, which in its view would mean the creation of an unwieldy province sprawling all over the north and north-west.

On a more detailed examination of the population figures in Punjab and Bengal, made available by Jawaharlal Nehru, the committee came to the conclusion that in point of fact the Muslims in these provinces had no grounds at all for fear that they might not be returned in majorities to the legislatures.





For purposes of communal distribution of population, Punjab, which had 29 districts, could be divided into four zones.

There was first the overwhelmingly Muslim zone, comprising fifteen districts. In some of the districts in this zone Muslims formed over 90 per cent of the population. In other districts it ranged from 60 to 80 per cent. Also, in this zone non-Muslim population did not consist wholly of Hindus, but also had substantial numbers of Christians and Sikhs. On the basis of one member representing 1,00,000 people, it was computed that 98 members would be elected to the Legislature from this zone, that is, 47.3 per cent of the total membership.

Then there were the districts of Lahore and Gurdaspur, which could be described as the prominently Muslim zone. Here the Muslims predominated over Hindus and Sikhs combined. The number of members to be elected from these districts would be more than 19, or roughly, 9.4 per cent of the membership.

Zone three would be made up of three districts where no community was predominant but where nevertheless Muslims formed the largest single community. These districts would return 13.3 per cent of the membership.

Nine districts, Zone 4, could be described as overwhelmingly Hindu-Sikh zone. The number of members to be returned from this zone would be 61 or more, about 29.7 per cent.

Muslims thus were certain of 47.3 per cent seats and had a good chance of capturing a majority of nineteen odd seats in Lahore and Gurdaspur. They would certainly get at least some seat in Zone 3. They were thus assured of a clear majority in the Legislature.

In Bengal the communal distribution of population favoured Muslims even more than in Punjab. In this province, from the overwhelmingly Muslim zone alone, not



taking into consideration the predominantly Muslim zone, Muslims were assured of 60 per cent seats. It was in fact the Hindu minority, although it was a very big minority, which was likely to suffer in an open general election without reservations.

Muslim majorities in Punjab and Bengal thus did not stand in need of reservation of seats.

The Committee accordingly unanimously passed a resolution recommending that there should be no reservation of seats in the Legislatures whether for the minorities or the majorities. If, however, this recommendation was not found to be acceptable then the reservation should be on the population basis without any weightage being given either to the minorities or the majorities.

The Committee took cognizance of the fear entertained by Muslims that although they formed almost a quarter of the population of British India, this position was not likely to be reflected in the Central Legislature, where, in a house of around 500 members Muslims were not likely to have more than 40 or 50 seats, won largely from Bengal and Punjab. Similar would be the case in the provincial Legislatures except those of the Muslim majority provinces and U.P. The Committee thought reservation of seats could be conceded to Muslims in the Central Legislature and in the Legislatures of provinces where the Muslims formed about 7 per cent of the population. Such reservation, however, should be strictly in accordance with the population, unlike what had been provided under the Congress- League Pact of 1916 and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

As regards the Muslim demand for the separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency, the Committee's view was favourable. The Committee considered that the provinces, as they then existed, had not been organized on any rational



basis. Under a more rational and democratic dispensation they would need, in many cases, to be reorganized.

The Committee argued that for the working of representative and democratic institutions in the country, popular participation in political, financial and administrative processes was essential. This could not be achieved through a foreign language. There were distinct geographical areas identified with distinct languages and in those areas provincial languages could alone ensure popular participation in Governmental processes. Language, therefore, along with geographical considerations, must form the basis of reorganization of provinces, where there was popular demand for them.

The demand for the separation of Sind was justified on both grounds of geography and language. The Committee supposed, further, that the population of Sind wished it, since no Muslim had come out in opposition to the demand and Muslims constituted 74 per cent of Sind's population. But the Committee was unable, in the absence of necessary documents and maps, to make any specific recommendation.

5

The Committee stressed the point that the Madras Congress had in its resolution laid down that the basis of the Swaraj Constitution should be a Declaration of Fundamental Rights. The Committee noted that several Dominions, such as Canada, Australia and South Africa did not have any Declaration of Rights in their constitutions, though in the Irish Free State's constitution there were various articles that might be grouped under that head. In the constitution of India, a Declaration of Fundamental Rights was necessary inasmuch as India was a dependency of Britain, and fundamental rights needed to be guaranteed in a way which would not permit their being withdrawn later under any circumstances.



Another reason for inclusion of such a declaration was the prevailing communal differences and fears entertained by minority communities that their rights might be trampled upon by the majority.

Under the heading Fundamental Rights, the Committee listed 19 such rights. These included security of property, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and assembly, right to education without distinction of caste or creed, equality before law, right to the writ of habeas corpus, equal treatment of all religions by the State, freedom to choose or not to choose religious instruction in schools aided by the State, freedom to use public roads, freedom to carry arms.

The legislative power of the Commonwealth would be vested in a Parliament consisting of the King, a Senate and a House of Representatives. The chief executive of the Dominion would be the Governor General, who would be appointed by the King.

The House of Representatives would have 500 members elected for five years. Every person of either sex who had attained the age of 21 and was not disqualified by law, would be entitled to vote. The Senate would consist of 200 members, elected by the Provincial Councils, with the number of seats to each province being allotted in accordance with the population of the Province.

The executive power would be vested in the King and would be exercised by the Governor General. The Governor General would appoint a Council of Ministers, consisting of a Prime Minister and six Ministers. The Council of Ministers would be collectively responsible to the Parliament.

For the provinces unicameral legislatures were recommended. The size of these legislatures would vary from province to province according to the population, approximately a constituency of 1,00,000 being represented by one member. The election would be by adult franchise, with every person of either sex who



had attained the age of 21 being entitled to vote. The life of the Provincial Council would be five years. The executive would be made up of a Governor and an Executive Council headed by a Chief Minister.

There would be a Supreme Court, with a Lord President and as many Judges as the Parliament might fix. The Lord President of the Supreme Court would be appointed by the Governor General in Council and would not be dismissed except by the same authority on a joint request of both Houses of Parliament, on grounds of misbehaviour or incapacity.

Similarly, in the Provinces there would be High Courts, each with a Chief Justice and as many Judges as the Governor General in Council might consider necessary.

There would be a Committee of Defence, to be appointed by the Governor General and headed by the Prime Minister. It would include as members Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commander-in- Chief, Commander of the Naval Forces and Chief of the General Staff.

All public services, which would become Commonwealth Services, would be controlled by a Public Service Commission to be appointed by the Governor General in Council.

As regards Indian States the Commonwealth would exercise the same rights and discharge the same obligations arising out of the existing treaties as were being exercised and discharged by the British Government.

Provinces would be reorganized on a linguistic basis on the demand of the majority of population of the area concerned.

There would be joint mixed electorates throughout India for the House of Representatives and the Provincial Legislatures.



The Committee considered that the Muslim demand for reservation of one-third of the seats in the Central Legislature was not justified, since the Muslims only formed about one-fourth of the population of the country.

In Punjab and Bengal there would be no reservation for any community.

In other Provinces there would be reservation of seats for Muslim minorities, with the right to contest other seats.

In the N.W.F.P., similarly, there would be reservation for the non-Muslims, with the right to contest other seats.

All reservations would be for a fixed period of ten years.

Sind would be separated from Bombay and, after enquiry into financial viability, would be constituted into a separate province.

Parts of Karnataka, it was recommended, would similarly be separated from the Provinces in which they were included and formed into a separate Karnataka province.

N.W.F.P. would have the same form of Government as the other provinces.

The Committee's report was signed by Motilal Nehru, S. Ali Imam, Tej Bahadur Sapru, M. S. Aney, Mangal Singh, Shuaib Qureshi, Subhas Chandra Bose and G. R. Pradhan.<sup>13</sup>

The next session of the All-Parties Conference was held at Lucknow from 28 to 31 August 1928. Dr. M. A. Ansari presided at the Conference. While welcoming the delegates, the Maharaja of Mahmoodabad reminded them that a terrible responsibility for the happiness or misery of 300 million human beings lay on them and that they should choose well. He called the Committee's report a historic event.



Madan Mohan Malaviya moved the resolution on the part of the report dealing with the form of the constitution. It read:

"Without restricting the liberty of action of those political parties whose goal is complete independence, this Conference declares:

(1) that the form of Government to be established in India should be responsible, that is to say, a Government in which the executive should be responsible to a popularly elected legislature possessing full and plenary powers;

(2) that such form of Government shall in no event be lower than that of any self-governing Dominion.

Jawaharlal Nehru, on behalf of those who stood for full independence, read a statement expressing his disapproval of Dominion Status. Although the preamble gave the votaries of full independence right to carry on their activities, he said, it did not in any way lessen the commitment contained in the second part of the resolution.

The resolution moved by Malaviya was put to vote and carried by general acclaim, with Jawaharlal and his group expressing their disapproval by abstention.

The Conference approved the recommendations contained in the report as regards the Indian States. As regards Sind, it stipulated that when it was reconstituted as a separate province the non-Muslim minority there would be provided reservation of seats on the same basis as the Muslim minorities in other provinces of India.

As regards redistribution of Provinces, the Conference resolved that...

(1) Necessary steps be taken to constitute Karnataka and Andhra as separate provinces;



(2) The question of C.P. (Hindustani), Kerala and other linguistic areas being made in to separate provinces be considered; and

(3) Boundaries of Assam and Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and C.P. (Hindustani), Kerala and Karnataka should be resettled.

News was received at the Conference that the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh leaders of Punjab had arrived at an agreement in regard to the reservation of seats and joint electorates. The agreement read:

The Punjab Muslims directly with the introduction of the scheme recommended by the Nehru Committee report accept its recommendations on communal representation including joint electorates without reservation of seats for any community in the Punjab provided that the franchise is based on adult suffrage.

The news of the agreement was received by the Conference with prolonged applause.

The Conference then passed a resolution, moved by Lajpat Rai, which adopted in principle the constitution outlined and recommended in the report of the Nehru Committee and further reappointed the Nehru Committee with powers to co-opt. The resolution asked for the recommendations contained in the report to be given shape as a bill to be considered by a convention of the various political and other organizations in the country.

The enlarged Nehru Committee, formed in accordance with this resolution had on it seven new names. These were Madan Mohan Malaviya, Annie Besant, M. A. Ansari, M. R. Jayakar, Abul Kalarn Azad, Vijayaraghavachariar and Abdul Kadir Kasuri. Shuaib Qureshi and C. R. Pradhan, who had earlier been on the Committee, did not figure on the enlarged Committee.

The Supplementary Report of the enlarged Nehru Committee came out in December. It did not materially differ from the earlier report. It merely made the





recommendations more precise, reducing them to the form of a bill, as desired by the All-Parties conference. A section on language was however added. This read as follows:

(1) The language of the Commonwealth shall be Hindustani which may be written either in Nagari or in Urdu characters. The use of the English language shall be permitted.

(2) In the provinces, the principal language of a province shall be the official language of that province. The use of Hindustani and English shall be permitted.

7

The All-Parties Convention, as visualized at the Lucknow All-Parties Conference, opened in Calcutta on 22 December and went on till January, 1929. It was an elaborate affair. Almost all the public bodies in the country were invited, with the number of delegates each could send being specified. These represented political organizations, trade unions and peasant organizations, commercial institutions, landholders, Indian States, women's organizations, communal, religious and social reform organizations, backward classes and other interests.

By far the largest representation was given to political opinion. The number of delegates assigned to the membership of legislatures being 470. This was followed by the All-India Congress Committee, 360, and National Liberal Federation, 40. Communal representation too was quite substantial, with the Hindu Mahasabha being assigned 100 delegates, the All-India Muslim League and the Central Khilafat Committee 50 each; Central Sikh League 30; All-India Conference of Indian Christians 25, and so on. Trade Unions were represented by the All-India Trade Union Congress, which body was assigned 50 delegates. Women's organizations too could send 50 delegates. There were large numbers of organizations under various categories who were each assigned 10, 5, 3 or 2 delegates.



Dr. Ansari, who presided at the Convention, in his opening address described the Nehru Report as heralding the dawn of a brighter day for the country. He appealed for burying of the communal differences, so that foundations of the edifice of a democratic India might be laid.

On 23 December S. M. Sen Gupta moved the resolution adopting the recommendation of the Nehru Committee in regard to Dominion Status. The resolution called for the same constitutional status for India as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Irish Free State, with a parliament and an executive responsible to that parliament, the country to be styled as the Commonwealth of India.

In the course of the discussion on the resolution, Srinivasa Iyengar, on behalf of the Independence League, read out a statement, which was also signed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and Satyamurti among others, distancing the signatories from the resolution. The signatories expressed themselves of the view that in consonance with the resolution of the Madras Congress declaring the goal of the people as complete independence, they proposed to carry on in the Congress and in the country such activity as might be necessary in favour of complete independence.<sup>14</sup>

The position that the Independence League took up was in consonance with a resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. at its meeting in Delhi on 3 November. The resolution had been moved by Srinivasa Iyengar and read:

(i) This meeting of the A.I.C.C. adheres to the decision of the Madras Congress declaring complete independence to be the goal of the Indian people and is of opinion that there can be no true freedom till the British connection is severed....  
Jawaharlal Nehru, supporting the resolution, had then made the point that unless the British connection was cut off root and branch, which the acceptance of Dominion Status as the goal did not contemplate, there was no chance for India



to attain her freedom. Motilal Nehru had argued that there was less difference between Dominion Status and Independence, and that Dominion Status, if offered, was not a thing to be spurned. His fear was that the British were not going to offer even Dominion Status.<sup>15</sup>

## 8

To get back to the proceedings of the Calcutta All-Parties Convention, Mohammed Ali too was one of the bitterest critics of the Dominion Status resolution. He called Sen Gupta a coward for moving the resolution. At the Delhi A.I.C.C. it had been Sen Gupta who had seconded Srinivasa Iyengar's resolution on independence.

Annie Besant, C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, Bepin Chandra Pal and the Liberals generally supported the resolution, and after all amendments had been withdrawn it was passed by acclamation.<sup>16</sup>

The Muslim organizations - the All-India Muslim League, the Central Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind had scrupulously kept away from the Convention. It was not till 27 December that the Muslim League sent its delegates under Jinnah to place the Muslim League view before the Convention. Recommendations of the Nehru Committee Report on the communal question were not acceptable to the League.

Jinnah stuck to the Muslim demands made earlier, namely,

- (1) that in the Central Legislature 30 per cent of the seats should be reserved for Muslims;
- (2) that Muslims in Bengal and Punjab, where they had majorities, should continue to enjoy reservations; and that
- (3) Sind should be separated from Bombay and such separation should not be linked with the establishment of a system of Government recommended by the Nehru Report:



Jinnah said no other delegate of the Muslim League would speak at the Convention. For his own part he did not propose to enter into arguments. He only desired to put the Muslim case before the Convention. It was essential for the minorities to feel secure. That could only be if the Muslim demands were met.

The convention rejected Jinnah's amendments.

On 30 December the Convention was confronted by the Sikh question. The Sikhs, according to the Nehru Committee, accounted for 1 per cent of the population of India and 11.1 per cent of the population of Punjab. Sardar Harnam Singh, representing the Central Sikh League, said the League had decided to withhold support to the Nehru Committee report. He had tabled some amendments relating to the Sikh representation in the Legislatures of the country. The purport of the amendments was that "in the Punjab there shall be 30 per cent reservation of seats for the Sikh minority and the Sikh representation in the N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan shall be adequate and effective". Harnam Singh pointed out that the Sikhs had been the rulers of Punjab, the Frontier Province and Kashmir before the advent of the British and in Punjab they paid 40 per cent of the land revenue. They supplied one-fifth of the man-power of the Indian army. The Sikhs, he said, were prepared to make any sacrifice to further the national demand, but they were distressed to find that the recommendations of the Nehru committee were motivated by communal consideration.

Having stated his point Harnam Singh walked out, followed by the other Sikh League delegates.

On 1 January 1929 the Convention adjourned sine die having recorded in a resolution its view that the resolutions it had passed indicated "the will of the nation as to the nature of the main principles of the constitution acceptable to it" and that "except on points on which notes of dissent have been recorded" it



was in general agreement "on the basis of the solution of communal problems" recommended by the Nehru Committee.<sup>17</sup>



## CHAPTER IX

### THE CALCUTTA CONGRESS

#### 1

The fight over the Nehru Committee Report now shifted to the Congress, held in Calcutta between 29 December 1928 and 1 January 1929.

The choice of President for the Calcutta session remained a matter of much speculation during the year. In view of the heroic lead given by Vallabhbhai Patel in the Bardoli satyagraha, there was a strong feeling in various Congress Committees that he should be chosen President. Motilal Nehru was keen that Jawaharlal should be selected, while in Bengal the feeling was strongly expressed that the presidentship for that year should go to Motilal Nehru. Malaviya's name also figured.

In July Gandhiji informed Motilal that Vallabhbhai had refused to shoulder the burden on the ground that even after the Bardoli movement was successfully concluded there would be a great deal of consolidation work to do from which it would be difficult for him to tear himself away. Gandhiji further told Motilal that in his view the honour should go to a younger man and no one was better suited than Jawaharlal.<sup>1</sup>

But soon Gandhiji made up his mind in favour of Motilal Nehru. He explained the matter in *Young India*:

The Congress crown has ceased to be a crown of roses. The rose petals are year by year falling off and the thorns are becoming more and more prominent. Who should wear such a crown? Father or son? Pandit Motilalji, the weather-beaten warrior, or Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the disciplined young soldier? Sjt. Vallabhbhai's name is naturally on



everybody's lips. Panditji says in a private letter that he as the hero of the hour should be elected and the Government should be made to know that he enjoys the fullest confidence of the nation. Sjt. Vallabhbhai is however out of the question just now.... My own feeling in the matter is that Pandit Jawaharlal should wear the crown.... But Bengal wants Motilalji to guide the Congress barque through the perilous seas.... He has moreover deep down in him a spirit of conciliation and compromise.... Let the impatient youth of the country wait a while. They will be all the stronger for the waiting.<sup>2</sup>

Although the proceedings of the 43rd session of the Congress opened on 29 December, the A.I.C.C., which had become the Subjects Committee for the purposes of the Congress, had already been in session since 26 December.

To begin with, Gandhiji had not been inclined to attend the Congress. He wrote to Motilal Nehru expressing his misgivings. What would be gained by his attending the Congress, he asked. He recognized that that part of the national work was also important, but his heart was not in it. He had become more and more inclined to give his time to what was concisely understood as constructive work.<sup>3</sup> He was also distressed that Subhas Bose and Bidhan Chandra Roy between them had arranged that at the Congress exhibition mill cloth would also be displayed. Gandhiji expressed his disapproval but did not make an issue of it.

Gandhiji reached Calcutta on 23 December and stayed with Jiwanlal. Motilal Nehru had work cut out for him as soon as he reached the station. During the day he did not even have time to spin, which he could do only at night.<sup>4</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, as soon as the deliberations of the Subjects Committee began, Gandhiji moved the following resolution on behalf of the Working Committee:



This Congress, having considered the constitution recommended by the All-Parties Committee report, welcomes it as a great contribution towards the solution of India's political and communal problems and congratulates the Committee on the virtual unanimity of its recommendations and whilst adhering to the resolution relating to complete independence passed at the Madras Congress, adopts the constitution drawn up by the Committee as a great step in political advance, especially as it represents the largest measure of agreement attained among the important parties in the country.

Provided, however, that the Congress shall not be bound by the constitution if it is not accepted on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1930 and provided further that in the event of non-acceptance by the British Parliament of the constitution by that date the Congress will revive non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and every other aid to Government.

The President is hereby authorized to send the text of this resolution together with the copy of the said report to His Excellency the Viceroy for such action as he may be pleased to take....

Having disposed of the political part of the programme, the resolution laid down in detail the activities Congressmen at all levels were required to take up. Emphasis was laid on the work for total prohibition and eradication of untouchability and for furtherance of khadi activity. Congressmen were further asked to address themselves to the tasks of removal of social evils and uplift of women.

Speaking on the resolution, Gandhiji described the Nehru Committee report as an "epoch-making" document. So far as the Delhi resolution of the A.I.C.C. was





concerned, he stated that he and other leaders considered it self-contradictory. That resolution, it may be recalled, approved the Nehru Committee Report and also reiterated adherence to the Madras Congress resolution declaring "complete independence to be the goal of the Indian people" and had declared that there could be no true freedom till the British connection was severed. The resolution now placed before the Subjects Committee, he said, was a compromise resolution, intended to conciliate both schools of thought prevailing in the Congress. Of course if the members were of the view that acceptance of the Nehru Report would not serve the best interests of the country, they must reject the resolution.

Gandhiji warned the Subjects Committee that they could not treat the Report piecemeal. They could not accept some parts and reject others. He had of course in mind the A.I.C.C.'s Delhi resolution which, while rejecting the Dominion Status recommendation of the Nehru Committee, had accepted the part dealing with the communal question. The report, Gandhiji said, must be accepted or rejected as a whole.

What was independence, after all? The content of independence would vary according to the strength of the nation. The independence of Nepal, for instance, was not the same as the independence of America. Let them not make too much of the word 'independent'.<sup>5</sup>

## 2

The younger section of Congressmen, which included, among others, Srinivasa Iyengar, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, was however not reconciled to the idea of Dominion Status. A number of amendments were moved. On the following day Jawaharlal Nehru moved an alternative resolution in the form of an amendment to Gandhiji's resolution.



It said:

This Congress adheres to the decision of the Madras Congress declaring complete independence to be the goal of Indian people and is of opinion that there can be no true freedom till British connection is severed....

Speaking on the amendment, Jawaharlal said he could not understand the argument that the Nehru Report must be accepted or rejected in toto. So far as action was concerned they were prepared to back the Nehru Report.

Jawaharlal made an impassioned plea for rejecting Dominion Status. By accepting Dominion Status, they would be showing to the world that they were prepared to accept the psychology of Imperialism, and that was a dangerous thing. If they lowered the flag of independence they would go back, mentally, at any rate, to the fold of Imperialism and give up the cause of the suffering nations which looked up to the Congress for help.

Annie Besant on the other hand, in her amendment, wanted the reference in the resolution to the Madras Congress taken out. She strongly supported the Dominion Status demand. A federation of nations, she said, was any day better than isolated independence.<sup>6</sup>

While there appeared to be no meeting ground as between the votaries of Dominion Status and Complete Independence schools, the dice, clearly, were loaded in favour of the older generation, which had every chance of carrying the day in case of a show down. But that would not make for unity in the organization, which was the need of the hour in the face of the threatening stance being adopted by the Government. Informal consultations followed in an attempt to find a formula that would narrow down the difference between the two positions and make the resolution of the Working Committee acceptable to the younger set of Congressmen, particularly to Jawaharlal Nehru.



On 28 December Gandhiji rose to request that he be permitted to withdraw the resolution moved on the 26th and to move in place of it another resolution. This would be unusual proceeding, he said, as a lot of discussion had taken place on the resolution and any number of amendments had been moved. But the Chairman ruled that all the amendments moved would be treated as amendments to the new resolution, which meant that, in essential parts, it did not much differ from the earlier resolution. Jawaharlal Nehru kept away from the Subject Committee's deliberations on the 28th. In the course of his speech seeking permission to withdraw his earlier resolution, Gandhiji explained the reason for the younger Nehru's absence. Jawaharlal, he said, was not in sympathy even with the resolution he now sought to substitute for the earlier one. He was of the view that it fell far short of what he wanted. In order to avoid bitterness, he sought to impose silence upon himself and remain absent. Gandhiji further said:

I do not share his belief that what we are doing at the present moment is not sufficient for the present needs of the country. But how can he help feeling dissatisfied? He would not be Jawaharlal if he did not strike out for himself an absolutely unique and original line in pursuance of his path. He considers nobody, not even his father, nor wife, nor child. His own country and his duty to his own country he considers and nothing else.

Gandhiji expressed the view that many times difficulties arose because people raised to the status of principles many things which were really not principles but merely matters of detail. The resolution that they had arrived at was a compromise resolution, one of adjustment and readjustment. Gandhiji was still of opinion that the resolution he sought permission to withdraw was a far superior resolution to the one he intended to move.



The meeting having permitted Gandhiji to withdraw the earlier resolution, he moved the following in its place:

This Congress, having considered the constitution recommended by the All-Parties Committee Report, welcomes it as a great contribution towards the solution of India's political and communal problems... and, whilst adhering to the resolution relating to Complete Independence passed at the Madras Congress, approves of the constitution drawn up by the Committee as a great step in political advance, especially as it represents the largest measure of agreement attained among the important parties in the country.

Subject to the exigencies of the political situation this Congress will adopt the Constitution, if it is accepted in its entirety by the British Government on or before December 31, 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by that date or its earlier rejection, the Congress will organize a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon.

Consistently with the above, nothing in this resolution shall interfere with the carrying on, in the name of the Congress, of the propaganda for Complete Independence.<sup>7</sup>

Madan Mohan Malaviya opposed the substitution of the resolution moved on the 26th, on the ground that the original resolution itself had been the result of a compromise. Also in the new resolution authority had been given to the Independence section to preach it in the name of the Congress.



There were various things in the new resolution with which Gandhiji himself was not too happy. He did not like the omission of the clause authorizing the President to send the resolution to the Viceroy. After all it was the Viceroy and the British Government who had to consider the demand. It would have been proper to retain the clause. Then, in the new resolution, the time given to the Government to accept or reject the demand for granting Dominion Status to India on the line laid down in the Nehru Report had been shortened from two years, mentioned in the original resolution, to one year. Gandhiji thought two years was a short enough time to rally and organize the forces to give battle to the Government. There were bogus members in the Congress, communal unity was still not in sight. All this would require time.

Srinivasa Iyengar joined forces with the old guard in supporting the resolution. Annie Besant, however, was far from pleased. She maintained that Independence could give the country nothing more than what Dominion Status could give it. Moreover, while Dominion Status could be got through constitutional means, they would have to fight the Government to enforce the demand for Independence. It also irked her, as it had Madan Mohan Malaviya, that the Independence section of the Congress was given the liberty to preach that creed in the name of the Congress.

Motilal Nehru thereupon ruled that those who stood for Dominion Status could also carry on propaganda in its favour in the name of the Congress. This seemed to satisfy Annie Besant.

Before voting on the resolution was taken up Subhas Bose wanted to make a statement on the resolution but was not permitted by the chair. He thereupon issued a statement to the press. He said that though he had no desire to vote against the resolution, he must make his position clear. The implication of the



resolution was that if the British Government accepted the constitution on or before 31 December 1929, the Congress would adopt it and thereby commit itself to Dominion Status. He and others of his thinking could not accept it as a fulfilment of the national demand. They stood for independence as an immediate objective.

The voting on the resolution was 118 for and 45 against". The delegates from Bengal either voted against or remained neutral. The Maharashtra block voted against the resolution.<sup>8</sup>

4

The open session of the Congress started at 2.30 p.m. on 29 December and was taken up wholly with the speeches of J. M. Sen Gupta, Chairman of the Reception Committee, and Motilal Nehru, the President. Among the many messages, received and read to the Congress on the following day, was one from Romain Rolland. It said:

The time has come when the enchained Prometheus struggles to free himself on the Himalayas... We in the west know too much of the abuses, errors and crimes of monstrous nationalism not to hope that India will escape the murderous route followed by the peoples of Europe and America, that she will raise herself above it and attain a superior status for the future of humanity.... May today begin an era which will bear in history the name of the Independence of India....

The Congress had to be adjourned on the 30<sup>th</sup> from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. because 20,000 workers and peasants broke into the Congress compound to assert their right under the aegis of the Congress. They held a meeting and passed a resolution declaring their resolve not to rest till complete independence was established in the country and exploitation by capitalists and imperialists ceased.



On 31 December when the Congress assembled at 2 p.m. the very first resolution to be passed was the one about the boycott of British goods, moved by Vishwanathan of Andhra. The resolution committed the Congress to carrying on a "vigorous propaganda for boycotting all foreign cloth in general and. British goods in particular". Without much discussion, the resolution was declared carried by an overwhelming majority.

Gandhiji then moved the Dominion Status resolution, which had generated such heat in the Subjects Committee before it was finally passed by the Committee. It appeared that though in the Subjects Committee the younger sections of Congressmen, who swore by full independence, had allowed themselves to be persuaded by Gandhiji and softened their opposition to the resolution, they had not been quite reconciled to it. Sections from Bengal even at the open session tried to defeat the Old Guard on the question of Dominion Status versus Independence. As soon as Gandhiji had spoken, after moving the resolution (there was so much noise at the session that his speech could not be heard and Jawaharlal Nehru had to repeat each sentence after him) Subhas Bose got up to move an amendment, saying:

The Congress adheres to the decision of the Madras Congress declaring Complete Independence to be the goal of the Indian people and is of opinion that there can be no true freedom till British connection is severed.

This Congress accepts the recommendations of the Nehru Committee as agreed by the Lucknow All-Parties Conference for settlement of communal differences....

Subhas Bose said that he was moving the amendment on behalf of the Bengal delegates, who were greatly exercised on the question. If he had not moved the amendment someone else would have done so. At the Subjects Committee, he



said, he had tried to keep the issue from being put to vote. But later the Bengal delegates had met and decided that they would be prepared to accept the vote of the House whatever it might be. Further, he said, the Independence of India League had taken the decision that the amendment should be moved.

The Independence of India League had been set up, as a group within the Congress, on 3 November 1928, at the time of the All-Parties Conference. Srinivasa Iyengar had been elected President and Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose Secretaries of the body. Its object had been defined as the achievement of complete independence for India and reconstruction of Indian Society on the basis of social and economic equality. Only Congressmen could be its members. In effect it acted as a lobby within the Congress.

Subhas said that he and the younger Nehru were regarded as moderates among the extremists and if the elder leaders were not prepared to compromise even with them, the breach between the old and the new would be irreparable. The youth of the country would not any longer follow the leadership blindfolded. They were the heirs of the future and it was for them to make India free.

Gandhiji's resolution, Bose said, had given to the British 12 months' time to accept or reject the demand. Did they really believe that the British could accept the demand? No one did. Then why lower the demand?

Bose was supported by Satyamurti and Nimbkar, the latter launching a vehement attack on the Nehru Report as a bourgeois scheme directed against the masses. Joglekar too was of the view that the Nehru Report perpetuated the system of exploitation under which 99 per cent people of the country were labouring. Jawaharlal Nehru too lent his support to the amendment.

Gandhiji was again called upon to speak on the resolution. He told Jawaharlal, Subhas and their supporters bluntly not to dishonour the compromise that had





been arrived at. They must stop the controversy about Independence and Dominion Status. There was no opposition between the two ideas. Those who swore by the Madras Congress must remember that the Nehru Committee, which had recommended Dominion status was the result of the Madras Congress resolution. Gandhiji also pointed out that the resolution was the result of a compromise, in which an attempt had been made to placate as many parties as possible. It would be dishonourable for them to go back on the compromise.

Why must they be prey to the doubt that nothing would be achieved within one year? If they had faith and followed the programme honestly and intelligently, he could promise them that swaraj would come within one year.

The amendment of Subhas Bose was then put to vote. It was a complicated matter because of the numbers involved and took an hour and a half from 11.30 p.m. to 1 a.m. The amendment was lost. There were 973 votes for and 1350 against. Gandhiji's resolution was then put to vote and carried.<sup>9</sup>

5

While moderates and extremists differed and fought over the nature of the constitution demanded in the resolution, there were no such differences over the second part of the resolution that outlined the programme of work, and that Gandhiji moved in the afternoon of 1st January 1929. It ran:

Meanwhile the Congress shall engage in the following activities:

(1) In the legislatures and outside every attempt will be made to bring about total prohibition of intoxicating drugs and drinks; picketing of liquor and drug shops shall be organized whenever desirable and possible.

(2) Inside and outside the legislatures methods suited to respective environments shall be immediately adopted to bring about boycott of



foreign cloth by advocating and stimulating production and adoption of hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar.

(3) Specific grievances wherever discovered and where people are ready shall be sought to be redressed by non-violent action as was done recently at Bardoli.

(4) Members of legislatures returned on the Congress ticket shall devote the bulk of their time to constructive work selected from time to time by the Congress Committee.

(5) The Congress organization shall be perfected by enlisting members and enforcing stricter discipline.

(6) Measures shall be taken to remove the disabilities of women and they will be invited and encouraged to take their due share in national upbuilding.

(7) Measures shall be taken to rid the country of social abuses.

(8) It will be the duty of all Congressmen, being Hindus, to do all they can to remove untouchability and help the so-called untouchables in every possible way in their attempt to remove their disabilities and better their condition.

(9) Volunteers shall be enlisted to take up work amongst the city labourers and for village reconstruction in addition to what is being done through the spinning-wheel and khaddar.

(10) Such other work as may be deemed advisable in order to advance nation-building in all its departments and in order to enable the Congress to secure the cooperation in the national effort of the people engaged in different pursuits.



In order to finance the activities mentioned in the foregoing programme, the Congress expects every Congressman to contribute to the Congress coffer a certain percentage of his or her income according to his or her ability.<sup>10</sup>

The requirement laid down in the resolution that Congressmen should contribute to the Congress coffers had been subjected to a great deal of debate in the Subjects Committee. Gandhiji had proposed in the resolution as originally framed a levy of 5 per cent of the income of those earning Rs. 100 or more per month. Delegates considered this too much. Govind Ballabh Pant suggested 1 per cent, someone else said 5 per cent should be charged from those earning Rs. 200 or more. Finally, no percentage was fixed.

The resolution was passed with only two dissenting.

The Calcutta Congress of 1928 thus formed yet another landmark in the history of the Congress and the national movement. For the first time the content and form of Swaraj was spelt out in terms of the lowest common programme acceptable to the widest sections of nationalist opinion. By one and the same resolution, on the one hand it served on the British Government an ultimatum to concede India's minimum demand, which was Dominion Status, within one year, and on the other formulated a programme which would unite the organization in concrete action and shape it in to an effective instrument for the fight that was to come. As everyone could see, the struggle was not only inevitable but imminent, since no responsible leader really expected the British to concede the demand.

But the Congress, as also the Nehru report, which formed the main theme of its deliberations, signalled also a fresh realignment of political forces in the country. A wide section of people, who had so far stood with the Congress in the cry for



responsible Government and joined it in denouncing the Simon Commission-and they included Extremists and Moderates, Liberals and Communalists-now would stand aside. Some indeed would find themselves in the opposite camp.

6

A considerable section of Muslim leadership now began to project demands which were calculated to oppose the stand taken by the Congress.

The Ali Brothers - both Shaukat Ali and Mohammed Ali - were among the chief protagonists of the "Minority" cause. At the session of the All- India Khilafat Conference, held in Calcutta from 25 to 27 December 1928, Mohammed Ali tore to shreds the whole of the Nehru report and the assumptions behind it. The session was not a representative one. Punjab, where the Khilafatists favoured the Nehru report, did not send delegates. Similarly, there was no representation from Bengal, for the same reason.

In a four-hour long oration Mohammed Ali regretted that Mahatma Gandhi and Sir Ali Imam, Motilal Nehru and the Raja of Mahmoodabad and other leaders found themselves in the same camp. Not very long ago, he said, Motilal had been sent to jail and his newspaper suppressed, for which the Raja of Mahmoodabad had been responsible.

What made the Maulana's blood boil was the attempt in the Nehru report to seek to establish the rule of the majority. When Rama ruled in Ayodhya, and Chandragupta and Asoka and Prithviraj ruled, or when the Khiljis, Lodis, Tughlaqs and Moguls ruled, there was no majority rule. The British Viceroy did not rule by majority. It was for the first time that they were demanding a form of Government in which majority rule prevailed. Since it was clear that in India Hindus were in majority, was it not therefore an attempt to establish Hindu rule?



Mohammad Ali was equally severe in his treatment of the doctrine of nationalism. It was his belief, he said, that God had made men and the devil had made nations. If religion was to be condemned because it led to religious wars, what about the killings for which national conflicts were responsible. If the number of lives lost in the jihads of Muslims and the crusades of Christians was to be compared with the lives lost in the First World War, the balance would be on the side of the latter. "Islam means peace and nationalism means war," Mohammed Ali declared.

The political resolution, moved by Hasrat Mohani, said:

In the opinion of this Conference the future constitution of India should be so framed as to provide for a Federation of Free and United States of India. This constitution should consist of: (1) Fully autonomous Provinces in India, (2) Large Indian States and groups of small Indian States when they join the Federation.

Every constituent member of the Federation should possess plenary powers within its jurisdiction and should have its legislature and Governor elected by the people of every constituent member of the Federation.

The Central Federal Parliament should consist of representatives elected by the constituent members of the Federation and should have jurisdiction only over such subjects as concern the whole of India and are entrusted to it by the constituent members of the Federation, which alone should be vested with residuary powers.

Mussalmans of India will not accept any constitution which would not be framed on the principles stated above.



Explaining his resolution, Hasrat Mohani said Muslims would never accept Dominion Status, which would only mean Hindu rule under the protection of British bayonets.

## 7

In Delhi there was a parallel gathering of Muslims, presided over by the Aga Khan and styled as the Muslim All-Parties Conference. The initiative for the Conference was taken by a group of 38 Muslim members of the Central Legislature. Invitations for the Conference were issued to (1) all non-official Muslim members of all Provincial Councils and the Central Legislature, (2) 20 Muslim representatives each from the All-India Muslim League (Jinnah), All-India Jamiat-ul-Ulema Conference, and (3) 20 Muslim representatives from each province of India. In addition, some prominent Muslim personalities were invited in their own right. Among these were Dr. Ansari, Sir Ali Imam, Hasan Imam, Maulana Azad and Yakub Hasan. Jinnah's League, at its Calcutta session, decided to have nothing to do with the Conference.

In addition to about 600 delegates a large number of visitors were present, the total number of all those attending being about 3,000. The Conference opened on 31 December and concluded on 1 January 1929.

The Aga Khan's presidential address was conciliatory in tone. While he called upon Muslims to press for their rights, he counselled them to avoid causes of friction with Hindus. One of these, he remarked, was cow-slaughter, for which a remedy had to be found. While cow-slaughter celebrated the sacrifice of Ibrahim, it must be remembered that Ibrahim himself never sacrificed a cow, nor did Islam specially enjoin sacrifice of a bovine. The camel and the sheep were more frequently mentioned. On the other hand, there were Muslim rulers who



discountenanced cow-slaughter. Babar had enjoined his son Humayun to respect the religious sentiments of Hindus, one of which was veneration of the cow.

The Aga Khan maintained that the Muslims of India were “not a community but in a special sense a nation composed of many communities and population outnumbering in the aggregate the total even of pre-war German Empire”. The chief question before the Muslims, he said was "the real representation of Muslims in all legislatures and self-governing bodies".

The Conference unanimously passed a resolution on the following lines: That in view of India's vast extent and its ethnological, linguistic, administrative and geographical divisions, the only form of Government suited to Indian conditions was a federal system, with complete autonomy and residuary powers vested in the constituent states, the Central Government having control only over certain matters of common concern. That separate electorates for Muslims had become the law of the land and Muslims could not be deprived of that right without their consent. So long as Muslims were not satisfied that their interests were safeguarded they would never agree to the establishment of joint electorates, with or without conditions. Muslim representation in the Central Legislature should not be less than one-third.

That Sind should be separated from Bombay and the Hindu minority in that province should be given representation in excess of its numerical ' strength.

That constitutional reforms should be introduced in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan.

The resolution asked for various other safeguards for Muslims.

The Conference marked the beginning of a divide between the Congress and the dominant Muslim leadership.



The Muslim All-Parties Conference at Delhi had been preceded by various Provincial Muslim All-Parties Conferences, such as those of U.P., Bengal and Bihar and Orissa, which had paved the way and set the tone for the Delhi Conference. The U.P. All-Parties Muslim Conference, held on 4 and 5 November 1928 at Kanpur, was presided over by Shaukat Ali, who in his address launched a blistering attack on the Hindus. He dwelt on the part played by Muslims in the Non-cooperation movement and how they had contributed a sum of Rs. 60 lakhs for the movement and how Gandhiji's travels were paid for and Motilal Nehru's *Independent* subsidised out of those funds. Nevertheless, Hindus and their leaders were opposed to Muslim interests. He proceeded:

Several well-organized prearranged violent attacks were made on Muslims who suffered all patiently, and their leaders asked them to behave with their sister community as brothers....

We could have wiped out a community by annihilating the Hindus when we were rulers of India and wielded absolute power. But Islam never wanted us to crush the weak. But in spite of all this, the Hindus with their leaders of today were deadly opposed to Muslims and their just interests.

The Hindus were well organized by virtue of the Mahasabha....

The Maulana invited the Hindus to declare in clear terms whether they wanted peace or a civil war. If they wanted war, Muslims were prepared to take up the challenge. Muslims were born fighters and would always be victorious.

The Nehru Report, he said, had been prepared to conciliate the Hindu Mahasabha and to bring the Moderates into the movement. Shuaib Qureshi, who was a member of the Nehru Committee, he charged, had been coerced into signing the Report, which he did not entirely approve.





Shaukat Ali's tirade against Hindus shocked Gandhiji. He wrote to him:

No, the speaker at Kanpur is not the Maulana with whom I have been so long familiar and with whom I have passed so many happy days as with a blood-brother and bosom friend. The Maulana of Kanpur is an utter stranger to me....

. . . I am not going into a controversy with you. I simply want to tell you that in my opinion, all your incitement is wrong, your judgment is one-sided and that the Mussalman is at least equally guilty with the Hindu, if not on the whole more so....

Gandhiji was particularly distressed at Shaukat Ali's statement that during the Non-cooperation days he had provided expenses for Gandhiji's travels. He wrote:

...The Khilafat Committee did pay for a time for my expenses at your instance, not on my request. . . . My travelling expenses have always been borne by friends.

And when I accepted your offer, I had Rs. 25,000 placed at my disposal by a common friend, whom you know, purely for my travelling as he was most anxious that I should never stint myself about these, nor draw upon any public funds for them. I had given you this information, but I agreed with you that it would be more graceful if I let you pay my travelling expenses. But in the manner in which you now put the matter, I feel inclined to offer to return the whole of these expenses with interest if you will accept them without being insulted or offended.<sup>11</sup>

The Conference passed several resolutions. There was one on Federation, which said:

In the opinion of this House, the future constitution should be a federal one in which provinces and Indian States should be given full autonomy,



enjoying fullest freedom in matters of internal administration. The Central Government should have the right to exercise authority in matters which concern the whole country. In the opinion of this House any system of Government which conflicts with the above mentioned principles will in no case be acceptable to Muslims.

Another resolution, seeking continuation of separate electorates for Muslims, was moved by Zahur Ahmed, who said that Muslims were not prepared to give up their "sacred right"; they did not want a change of masters from the English to the Hindu, for the slavery of the Hindus would be even more intolerable.<sup>12</sup>

The Bengal Muslim All-Parties Conference, held in Calcutta on 23 December 1928, under the presidentship of Sir Abdur Rahim, though free of outbursts such as that of Shaukat Ali at Kanpur, nevertheless ran along more or less similar lines. The resolution it passed inter alia stated:

... There shall be full responsible Government in the provinces and all the departments including law and order, should be responsible to the Provincial legislatures....

The Central Government shall deal with such subjects as concern the whole of India, i.e. defence, foreign affairs, inter-provincial relations, relations with Princely States, All-India communications, fiscal policy, customs, currency, and the like, all other subjects being placed in charge of the Provincial Governments which shall be vested with residuary powers.

That the same form of Government shall be introduced in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan as in other Provinces in British India. Sind should be constituted into a separate Province....



In the Central Legislature Muslim representation shall not be less than one-third.

. . . that in no province the representation of the non-Muslim minorities shall be less than one-third of the total number in the Council. ...

The representation of communal groups shall continue to be by means of separate electorates as at present...<sup>13</sup>

As for the Sikhs, they were not at all happy with the Nehru Report, which in their view had lowered the ideal of full independence. At the annual session of the Sikh League, held in October 1928, Baba Kharak Singh, in his presidential address, said the Report sinned against the self-respect and dignity of India.

The Sikh League by a large majority passed a resolution disapproving of the demand for Dominion Status and asking that the Sikhs (who according to the Nehru Report constituted 1 per cent of India's population) be given 30 per cent seats in the local legislature and Punjab to be given similar representation in the Central Legislature.<sup>14</sup>

1928 thus represented a watershed year in national politics. The major issues had now been made very clear and the position of each party and individual leader on those issues was clearly demarcated. The Congress, though after considerable debate, committed itself to accepting Dominion Status as defined in the Nehru Report, if it could be offered within twelve months. The dominant Muslim opinion, made up of the various Muslim League factions, Muslim All-Parties Conference and Khilafat organizations, not only rejected the report out of hand, but also questioned its underlying basis-rule by majority. A national pact, which



would reconcile the varying and often conflicting interests of important minorities such as Muslims and the Sikhs and make it possible for the parties to confront the British with the demands of a united India, was now farther off than it had even been.

During the Non-cooperation movement of 1920-21 there were two parties on the scene: the British power and Nationalist India. Now there were certainly three: The British, Nationalist India led by the Congress and a large body of Muslim opinion opposed to the Congress.

Some people think that the rejection of the Lucknow Pact by the Nehru Report sowed the seeds of separation. The seeds of separation however had been sown by the separate electorates accepted by the Lucknow Pact. It may be argued that having once accepted separate electorates, the Congress should have made greater efforts to carry the Muslim majority opinion with it. The result may not have been different, as shown in Gandhiji's failure to win over the Muslims at the Round Table Conference.



## PART III

### MOVING TOWARDS A SHOW-DOWN



## CHAPTER X

### THE MEERUT AND LAHORE CONSPIRACY CASES

#### 1

The twenties witnessed a ferment in the industrial working class that had not been seen in the earlier decades of the century. The non-violent mass agitations led by Gandhiji, such as the anti-Rowlatt Act movement and the Non-cooperation movement, were of course the primary agents for unchaining the revolutionary energy of the workers and harnessing it for the national cause. In all the hartals and demonstrations that were witnessed in major industrial towns in 1919, 1920 and 1921 industrial workers and students had taken a major part.

Trade unions, which had so far concerned themselves only with disputes over wages and conditions of work, now increasingly began to join the rest of the nation in raising their voice to protest against colonial rule.

A contributory factor was also the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and its fall out in the rest of the world. The seizure of power in Russia by the working class, or at least in the name of the working class, made the workers everywhere aware of their revolutionary destiny as a class and infused in them a militancy of temper and behaviour that in situations of conflict, such as strikes, could readily turn to violence.

This heightened awareness of their identity as a class led the workers to organize themselves into trade unions at much greater pace after 1918. At Ahmedabad the mill workers' strike in 1918-19 guided by Gandhiji resulted in the organization of the Majoor Mahajan. The Labour Union, the Indian Seamen's Union and the Clerks' Union came up in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. Shortly afterwards, many more trade union organizations came up in Bengal, U.P. and Punjab. In 1920 the



All-India Trade Union Congress was formed with initially 64 trade unions with a membership of 140,854 affiliated to it.

The spread of trade unionism led to a larger number of strikes. In 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1924 various industries in Bengal, Bombay, U.P., Bihar and Orissa were rocked by strikes over industrial disputes.

According to figures compiled by the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), in 1924 there were then no less than 167 trade unions in India with a total membership of 2,23,337. There were, besides, 8 federations of labour with a total membership of 1,95,800.

The mid-twenties saw a further spurt in strikes. In 1925 there were no less than 134 strikes. In September that year textile workers struck work in Bombay. The strike involved 33,249 workers and continued for two months. In 1926 workers of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway struck work. During the strike workers became violent and attacked the Kharagpur railway station. This resulted in the police opening fire on the strikers.<sup>1</sup>

In 1928 the labour front showed even greater activity. The total number of strikes during the year was 203, involving as many as 5,06,851 workers, as compared to 129 strikes involving 1,31,655 workers in 1927. The total number of working days lost was 31,646,040, greater than the total number of working days lost in the preceding five years.

Some of the strikes were marked by violence. On 20 March 1928 a body of striking railwaymen, estimated at between 2,000 and 4,000, proceeded to Bamangachi workshop near Howrah to force the loco workers to join the strike. There was police firing, resulting in the death of two workers.



A general strike in the Bombay textile mills lasted from 26 April to 6 October 1928. In this strike the workers lost in wages a sum of three and a half crore of rupees. Rationalization and retrenchment resorted to by the mills was responsible for the strike. The strike spread to Sholapur and at one time about 1,25,000 workers were out of work. At some places the strike was marked by violence. At one place there was police firing resulting in the death of one person and injury to another.<sup>2</sup>

2

The steadily growing assertion by the working class of its organized strength became a cause of great worry to the British rulers. They saw that even though the trade union movement was immediately concerned with wages, working conditions and matters of industrial dispute in general, politically it was nationalist and anti-imperialist in inspiration. Indeed, in a large number of cases workers' unions were organized and headed by leaders of the Congress and other political parties.

It was this latter dimension of the working class movement that had been causing anxiety to the Government of India.

A further cause for anxiety was the coming into being of political parties inspired by Marxist ideology and influenced by the success of the proletarian revolution in Russia. These included the Peasants and Workers Party and the Communist Party. The British claimed to have evidence that "Bolshevik" activities in India were being fostered, organized and financed by sources in Russia and Great Britain. Further, that a number of British Communist activists had been sent to India, at the behest of the Communist International set up in Moscow, to organize the workers in India against British rule.

The British decided upon a policy of ruthless suppression of the movement at the levels of organization, leadership and propaganda.





The first intimation of such intention on their part came by way of a Public Safety Bill, which the Government sought to move for consideration in the Central Assembly in September 1928.

The Government had not reckoned with the stiff opposition they would have to face from the elected members of the Assembly. As soon as Home Member Crerar got up to move the Bill on 6 September, saying that it was intended to provide the Government with powers to deport from India Bolshevik agents who were not Indians and did not normally reside in India, Motilal Nehru objected, saying that copies of the Bill had not been made available to the members three days before the introduction of the Bill as required under the rules.

Then when Crerar wanted to move the Bill on 10 September, Motilal Nehru raised a point of order, saying that the Legislature had no power to enact a law which would deprive any British subject of the rights granted to him by various charters. The President, however, permitted Crerar to move the Bill.

Speaking on the Bill, Crerar said there was evidence that the Comintern intended destruction of capitalists, replacing of the army by placing the arms in the hands of the proletariat, expropriation of landlords, nationalization of large enterprises and so on. He referred to the arrival in India in recent years of three British Communists and said the sufferings and privations of labourers in India were caused by Communist activities. He said:

I have convincing evidence that sinister and external influence had been and is at work... we have not to deal with mere visionary and fantastic theories, realization of which postulates complete destruction of the existing social order, but with a persistent and definite design to take the first and then ultimate steps to put them into operation.



Lala Lajpat Rai, Srinivasa Iyengar and N. M. Joshi opposed the Bill. N. M. Joshi, himself a prominent labour leader, challenged the contention that labour trouble in the railways, at Jamshedpur or elsewhere had been fomented by Communists.

Throughout September the Assembly remained seized of the Public Safety Bill. The Government produced in this connection a letter purported to have been written by M.N. Roy from England to a Communist in India, which the Government had intercepted. Roy promptly issued a statement denying he had written the letter and charged the Government with having forged it.

Madan Mohan Malaviya opposed the Bill on the ground that it took away the right of an accused to be tried. Even Bolsheviks had this right, he declared.

On 25 September the House threw out the motion for consideration of the Bill by 62 to 61 votes, the President giving his casting vote against the Bill.<sup>3</sup>

That of course was not the end of the matter. The Government again came up with the Bill during the winter session of the Assembly. Home Member Crerar again raised the bogey of the growing threat from the activities of the Comintern, with foreign propagandists coming to India to spread disorder. Strikes by workers, "murderous assaults", and other incidents, he said, had been taking place in Bombay, Calcutta and other industrial centres. Crerar said "the general policy of the Communist movement is to rouse a spirit of discontent and lawlessness in the masses whether industrial or agricultural, with the ultimate object of destroying by violence both the Government established by law and the present economic organization of society"<sup>4</sup> and substituting for it the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Government again faced determined opposition from the Congress benches. Rangaswami Aiyengar charged that the Bill was aimed not so much against Communist activities as against *bona-fide* trade union work.



On 7 February 1929 the Bill was referred to a Select Committee.

The British Government were quite unequivocal in their determination to crush the working class movement before it became a real threat.

In his opening address to the Legislative Assembly on 24 January 1929, the Viceroy had given expression to the Government's view in the matter. He had said:

The disquieting spread of the methods of communism has for some time been causing my Government anxiety. Not only have Communist agents from abroad promoted a series of strikes in the industrial world but the programme which they have openly set before themselves includes undisguised attacks on the whole economic structure of society. All classes alike are threatened by the spread of these doctrines and no Government can afford to ignore this insidious danger.... We have watched in the great city of Bombay the industrial labour population brought into a state of great unsettlement, excited, prone to violence and often deaf to reason, while in Calcutta we have seen a strike which appears to have no clearly reasoned basis. These facts are only symptomatic of a more general movement..."<sup>5</sup>

3

While the Public Safety Bill was with the Select Committee, Government machinery swung in to action against Communists and suspected Communists. On 20 March 1929, the police swooped on leading trade unionists in Bengal, Bombay, U.P. and Punjab and arrested 31 persons.

They included Kishori Lal Ghosh, Gopal Basak, Gopendra Chakravarti, D. Goswami, Shib Nath Banerjee, Philip Spratt, Ajodhya Prasad, Muzaffar Ahmed,



Shamshul Huda and Radha Raman Mitra - all from Bengal; S. V. Ghate, S. H. Jhabwala, S. S. Mirajkar, G. D. Adhikari, D. J. Thengdi, K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar, S. A. Dange, Shaukat Usmani, B. F. Bradley, M. G. Desai, A. A. Alve and G. R. Kasle - all from Bombay; Dr. Vishwa Nath Mukerjee, Puran Chand Joshi, Gauri Shankar, Dharmvir Singh and L. R. Kadam - all from U.P.; and Kedar Nath Saigal, Abdul Majid and Sohan Singh Josh - all from Punjab.

The arrests were made under Section 121 A of the Indian Penal Code. The charge was one of conspiracy to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India. Under Section 121 A, the Government did not have to prove any overt act on the part of the accused. If the intention was proved it would be sufficient for conviction. The maximum punishment was transportation for life. The warrants were issued by a Magistrate of Meerut, where the trial was fixed. It was thought that Bombay and Calcutta, from where the largest number of the accused came, would provide too many facilities to the accused and they might even ask for a trial by jury. Meerut was considered an out-of-the-way place and the Government could manipulate the trial as it wanted. Most of the accused were brought to Meerut handcuffed. The list of the accused was increased to 32 when some time later H. L. Hutchinson, editor of New Spark, was arrested at Nagpur and brought to Meerut to stand trial.

The trial was a long time coming. The accused continued to be kept in police custody and the Magistrate granted remand after remand every week. All bail applications were refused on the ground that since the case had been brought by Government after due care, it was more than likely that the accused were guilty.

The process of searches, seizure and arrests went on even afterwards. The police were particularly ruthless in U.P. Among those arrested in that province were



Munishwar Prasad Awasthi, Sailendra Nath Ganguly, Ajaya Kumar Ghosh, Virendra Pandey and Mahavir Prasad Pandey, Ram Gopal Shukla and J. N. Das Gupta (all from Kanpur), Anil Chandra Mukerjea from Benares, Narsingh Dutt Sharma from Mainpuri. In the Punjab, Hans Raj Vohra and Desraj were picked up from Lahore.

House searches were made in Allahabad, Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Benares and Mainpuri. In Kanpur the offices of *Pratap* and the house of Ganesh Shanker Vidyarthi were searched. In Benares Gandhi Ashram was searched and its manager, Anil Chandra Mukerjea, was arrested and handcuffed.

## 4

On 21 March 1929, Home Member Crerar, speaking in answer to a short notice question from Motilal Nehru, made a statement with regard to the charge against the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The charge as framed was that (1) A Communist International existed in Russia, which aimed at overthrowing governments all over the world by armed revolution; (2) The Comintern carried on its propaganda through various organizations such as the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Red International of Labour Unions, the League Against Imperialism, and so on; (3) The objective of the Comintern was to overthrow governments through strikes and armed uprising. Among the methods adopted were the creation of Workers and Peasants parties, inciting antagonism between capital and labour, incitement of strikes and hartals, propaganda by speeches, literature, newspapers, etc. and encouragement of movements hostile to Government.

After this description of the objects of Russia and the Comintern came the pith of the charge, which was that (4) Dange, Shaukat Usmani and Muzaffar Ahmed had entered into a conspiracy to form "branch organizations" of the



Comintern; (5) Spratt and Bradley were sent to India to further the aims of the Comintern; (6) all the accused named in the complaint entered into conspiracy to further the aims of the Comintern; (7) a Workers and Peasants Party was formed at Meerut and a conference of that organization was held there.<sup>6</sup>

Commenting on the indiscriminate arrests and prosecution of labour leaders, Gandhiji wrote:

. . . Presently it will be the turn of thousands not merely to risk but to face and even to court imprisonment if this reign of lawlessness under the guise of law is to be ended once for all.

It seems to me that the motive behind these prosecutions is not to kill communism, it is to strike terror. If by communism is meant seizure of power and property by violent means, public opinion was successfully fighting that demon. The Congress creed, indeed the creed of all political parties, is attainment of political liberty through non-violent means. But the Government by its action has given a strength to the cult of violence which it never possessed.... One thing is certain. Terrorism, like plague, has lost its terror for the public.<sup>7</sup>

5

In the Central Assembly on 1 April 1929, Law Member B. L. Mitter stood up to move consideration of the Public Safety Bill, as amended by the Select Committee.

M. R. Jayakar suggested postponement of consideration of the Bill, first, because ordinary law was enough to deal with Communists, as had been shown by the Meerut Case, and, secondly, the debate on the Bill was bound to refer to matters which were *sub judice*.



On 2 April President of the Assembly Vithalbhai Patel making a statement said that he had found that the fundamental basis for the Public Safety Bill was virtually identical with the case against the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. As the members were aware, the rules of business of the House provided that no question should be asked nor any resolution moved or motion for adjournment made in regard to any matter which was under adjudication by court of law. The rules of business even debarred members from making a mention of such matters while speaking on any motion. No real debate on the Bill, he said, was possible without an extensive reference and discussion of most of the matters that were *sub judice*. That being the case, the President said he did not think he could legitimately allow the Government to proceed with the Bill. The Government, in their statement, challenged the President's powers to withhold consideration of the Bill.

On 11 April the President got up to give his ruling in the matter. Hardly had he begun when two bombs were thrown from the visitors' gallery into the Assembly Hall. The bombs fell near the seat of Sir George Schuster. Sir John Simon was at the time watching the proceedings from the President's gallery. Three Government benches were torn to pieces by the blast. George Schuster, Raghavendra Rao, Shankar Rao and Bomanji Dalal were injured, the last named seriously. A Deputy Secretary S. N. Roy, sitting in the officials' gallery, was also hit. Copies of a red pamphlet with the caption "Hindustan Socialist Republican, Army Notice" were also thrown into the Assembly Hall.

Two young men, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Datt, were taken into custody and were reported to have confessed their guilt to the police.

The two accused were taken to different police stations for interrogation. President Patel in his statement rejected the Government's contention on the



scope of the Chair's powers, citing authorities. He ruled that the Chair had the inherent power to rule out a motion on the ground that it involved an abuse of the forms of procedure of the House. He therefore ruled the motion for consideration of the Public Safety Bill out of order.

Thereupon the Viceroy, speaking at the joint session of the two Houses of the Central Legislature on 12 April, regretted the decision of the President of the Assembly to disallow consideration of the Public Safety Bill in the Assembly, a decision in which, he said, the Government could not acquiesce. The only course left for the Government therefore was to secure by due authority such amendment of the rules as might be necessary to prevent any recurrence of similar interruption in "normal legislative procedure". That course the Government intended to follow without delay.

The necessary change in the rules was duly introduced. The Gazette of India of 24 August 1929 carried a notification introducing a new rule which read:

Notwithstanding anything contained in Rule 15 or Rule 17, the President shall not have or exercise any power to prevent or delay making or discussion of any motion relating to a Bill made by a Member in charge of the Bill, or to refuse to put or delay putting of a question on any such motion....<sup>8</sup>

As regards the powers sought by the Government through the Public Safety Bill, the Viceroy considered it imperative for Government to obtain such powers in other ways. He therefore proposed to take recourse to Section 72 of the Government of India Act, in order to issue an Ordinance giving the Governor-General-in-Council the powers in question.

On 13 April the Public Safety Ordinance, 1929, was duly promulgated. The Government under the Ordinance had the power to serve "removal orders" on





persons who directly or indirectly advocated "the overthrow by force or violence of the government established by law in British India or the unlawful destruction of property, or unlawful interference with the ownership of property" or sought to "foment or utilize industrial or agrarian disputes ... directly or indirectly subverting by force or violence organized government in British India." The Government could also declare forfeited any moneys or securities that they suspected were intended to further the above-mentioned "unlawful" purposes.<sup>9</sup>

## 6

The trial of Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Datt in the Central Assembly Bomb Case was held in Delhi on 12 June 1929. The two young men admitted the guilt, but in the course of their statement to the Court, argued that they had not thrown the bomb with the intention of hurting or killing anybody, the proof of which was that no one had been killed or even seriously hurt. They had dropped the bomb to register their protest. There was no justification, they said, for the existence of the Central Legislature, which was "a hollow show and a mischievous make-believe". They were not believers in violence. They rejected "utopian non-violence of whose futility the rising generation has been convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt". They were inspired by the ideals which guided Guru Govind Singh and Shivaji, Kemal Pasha and Riza Khan, Washington and Garibaldi, Lafayette and Lenin. They said they had offered themselves to bear the penalty for what they had done and to "let the imperialist exploiters know that by crushing individuals they cannot kill ideas". They had provided the warning and their duty was done.

They were convicted and sentenced to transportation for life.<sup>10</sup>

The trial in the Meerut Conspiracy Case also commenced on 12 June at Meerut, in the court of the Special Magistrate Milner White. Langford James opened the



case for the prosecution. His address to the court took three days - 12th, 13th and 24th. He spoke in all for no less than 17 hours.

The Government counsel said the accused were not nationalists or patriots. Indeed, they had only contempt for the nationalists. Gandhiji to them was a "grotesque reactionary", Jawaharlal Nehru a "tepid reformist", Subhas Bose a "bourgeois and ludicrous careerist", Lala Lajpat Rai a "scoundrel and politically dangerous" and C. R. Das a "poltroon". They were anti-country, anti-Government, anti-God, anti-family and anti-everything that a normal man considered decent. A large number of people connected with Bolshevism had indulged in ruthless killings at the behest of the Cheka and the OGPU, the Russian secret police organizations. Government counsel traced the history of Bolshevism through the First, the Second and then the Third International and pointed out how in Russia two and a half million of men, women and children had been butchered.

Counsel then dwelt on the Marxist theory of socialist revolution. He said Karl Marx had conceived the possibility of such revolutions taking place in industrially advanced countries such as England or Germany. It was ironical that it had been brought about in Russia, an agricultural country.

The Comintern had a direct hand in inciting strikes and so on. If a workers' strike took place in Bombay, greetings and financial assistance would immediately come from Moscow. Spratt and Bradley, two Englishmen who were among the accused, had been sent to India by the Comintern to further its work. Several others had preceded them, such as George Allison and Hutchinson.

Counsel narrated how these agents of the Comintern had been fomenting strikes in Bombay, Calcutta and elsewhere.

The question, he said, was not whether the accused were members of the Communist Party, it was whether they had entered into a conspiracy to deprive His Majesty of his sovereignty by class war and mass revolution. <sup>11</sup>



The British rulers' action against the leadership of the trade union movement in the country was no doubt also precipitated by their perception that even circles in the Congress and other Indian political parties were deeply suspicious of the hush-hush methods with which Communist workers carried on their work and even of their motives. Romain Rolland, after a meeting with C. F. Andrews on 16 September 1928 (about the time when the Public Safety Bill was being debated in the Assembly) thus recorded his views:

He [Andrews] says that communism has gained much ground in India, particularly in northern India and Bengal, and its gold is corrupting many of the poorer Indian leaders who are more easily open to temptation. Unfortunately, even some trade unionists are inclined to accept for their parties the sums offered them by communism under a show of disinterest but in fact to compromise them in their company. The moral change is rapidly taking place. Andrews foresees that very soon the question before the former supporters of Gandhi will no longer be cooperation or non-cooperation but violence or non-violence; and outcome of the debate worries him.<sup>12</sup>

But whatever label the rulers chose to give their high-handed, action, it was clear to all that it constituted an attack on the national movement and the Congress. In fact, no less than eight persons among the 31 accused were members of the A.I.C.C.

A Central Defence Committee was accordingly set up to conduct the defence of the Meerut prisoners. The Committee had prominent Congressmen upon it. The working Committee sanctioned a grant of Rs. 1,500 for the defence.<sup>13</sup>

The trial was a long-drawn out affair. Even the preliminary enquiries were not concluded until almost the end of 1929. The topic later featured in the Gandhi-



Irwin talks in 1931, when Gandhiji pressed for the release of the prisoners. Irwin refused to entertain any such request, but said he would see about expediting the trial.

Court proceedings however dragged on and it was not before 16 January 1933 that the Additional Sessions Judge, in whose court the case was ultimately tried, delivered his judgment. All but four of the thirty-one accused were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. Muzaffar Ahmed was sentenced to life imprisonment, S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar and Philip Spratt were awarded twelve years each, Bradley, Mirajkar and Usmani got ten years' transportation, and so on, the lightest sentence awarded being three years' imprisonment.

The Allahabad High Court, on appeal, confirmed the sentences but pointed out that the prisoners had already served more than four years' confinement. As a result, P. C. Joshi, G. M. Adhikari and two others were released. By the end of 1933 only Spratt, Muzaffar Ahmed, Dange and Shaukat Usmani were still in prison. By the autumn of 1935 all had been freed.<sup>14</sup>

## 7

Yet another trial witnessed in the year 1929 was that of the Lahore Conspiracy Case and the Saunders Murder Case.

I. P. Saunders, a police officer of Lahore and head constable Chaman Singh were shot down in a street in Lahore on 17 December 1928. Those who were responsible could not then be apprehended.

The assassination of Saunders was by way of revenge for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai on 17 November, exactly a month earlier, which was widely believed to have resulted from the injury Lalaji sustained in the police assault on him during the anti-Simon Commission demonstration in Lahore.



Gandhiji lost no time in denouncing the act. In *Young India* of 27 December he wrote:

The assassination of the Assistant Superintendent Mr. Saunders of Lahore was a dastardly act apart from whether it had a political motive behind it or not. Violence being in the air, there will no doubt be silent and secret approbation of the act, especially if it is discovered to have had any connection with the assault on Lalaji and his utterly innocent comrades.... I should not wonder if the assassination proves to be in revenge of the high-handed policy of the Punjab Government.

I wish however that it was possible to convince the hot-headed youth of the utter futility of such revenge. Whatever the Assistant Superintendent did was done in obedience to instructions. No one person can be held wholly responsible for the assault and the aftermath....

English books have taught us to applaud as heroic deeds of daring, even of freebooters, villains, pirates and train-wreckers....

This cannot be regarded as anything but a bad omen. Surely there is nothing heroic about a cold-blooded robbery accompanied by murder.... There is equally none in the deliberate secret assassination of an innocent police officer who has discharged his duty however disagreeable its consequences may be for the community to which the assassin belongs.... It is time we began, irrespective of nationalities, to regard deeds with mean motives or meaner consequences with nothing but horror, indignation and disapprobation, no matter how daring they may be. I know that this means a new valuation of such terms as heroism, patriotism, religiousness and the like. <sup>15</sup>



It was in the course of an investigation into a bomb incident that police were provided with information connecting Bhagat Singh with those responsible for the killing of Saunders. Bhagwati Charan too was mentioned. Investigations turned up more evidence. Thirty-two persons were identified as having been involved in a conspiracy that involved murder, abetment to murder, conspiracy to bring about revolution and other offences against the State. Of the 32, police could only apprehend 23; 16 of these were brought to trial while 7 turned approvers.

## 8

Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Datt, already sentenced to transportation for life in the Assembly Bomb Case, were among the accused in the Lahore Conspiracy Case too. The others were Raj Guru, Sukhdev, Kishorilal Ratan, Shiv Verma, Gaya Prasad, Jaidev Kapoor, Jatindranath Das (he was Assistant Secretary of the South Calcutta Congress Committee), Kamal Nath Tewari, Jatindra Nath Sanyal, Agya Ram, Des Raj, Prem Dutt, Surendra Nath Pandey, Mahabir Singh and Ajaya Ghosh. Those who could not be apprehended were: Bhagwati Charan, Yashpal, Bijoy Kumar Sinha, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Raghunath, Kailash and Satgurdoyal Awasthi.

The complaint was lodged by the police and the trial started on 10 July 1929 in the court of Rai Saheb Pandit Srikishen, Special Magistrate, in the Lahore Central Jail, where all the accused were lodged.

The charge was that the accused, along with other persons, had been engaged in a conspiracy to wage war against His Majesty the King-Emperor; that with this object they had formed the Hindustan Republican Association and the Indian Republican Army and held meetings in Lahore and other places; that their object was to be pursued by means of collection of arms, men, ammunition and money



for purchase of ammunition; that the money was to be collected by robbing banks and treasuries and committing dacoities involving murder and blowing up of trains; and that they intended to circulate seditious and revolutionary literature.

Government advocate Corden Noad cited the following among the acts committed by the accused: (1) Murder of Saunders and Chaman Singh on 17 December 1928; (2) The Assembly Bomb Outrage; (3) Dacoity at the Punjab National Bank, Lahore; (4) Dacoity at Maulnia, Bihar; (5) Attack on a U.P. police officer Banerjea. (6) Embezzlement of Government funds by a post office employee; (7) Manufacture of bombs at factories in Lahore, Calcutta, Agra and other places.

A wave of sympathy for the young men involved swept through the country. Even as they were being taken to court in handcuffs, a large number of students gathered outside were shouting slogans against the British Government and in support of the revolutionaries.<sup>16</sup>

The prisoners were ill-treated, and even beaten up in jail. They went on an indefinite hunger-strike in protest. Bhagat Singh, Batukeshwar Datt and Jatindranath Das began the hunger-strike immediately after they were produced in court on 10 July. Other prisoners followed in August. Government ordered forced feeding of the hunger-strikers. The condition of some of the prisoners deteriorated to such an extent that the authorities found it difficult even to carry them to the court. Even within the court they had to stand handcuffed. They were also assaulted.

The continued hunger-strike of the Lahore prisoners drew anxious attention from all over the country and meetings and demonstrations were held in many places demanding humane treatment of the prisoners.



On 13 September 1929 Jatindranath Das, having been on hunger-strike for 64 days, passed away. A wave of shock and grief spread throughout the country. In Calcutta, where his body was taken, a vast concourse of people collected for the funeral. According to one estimate the funeral procession was over two miles long and the number of people might have been 3 lakhs.

Following the death of Jatindranath Das the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners also went on a hunger-strike. However, in response to an appeal by the A.I.C.C. they gave it up.

In Bengal too the repressive machinery of the Government had swung into action, arresting important leaders of the Congress. They included Subhas Bose, Kiran Shankar Roy, B. K. Bose, J. M. Das Gupta, Satya Bhushan Das Gupta, Sailesh Nath Bisi and a number of others. They were all charged with sedition under Section 124 A.<sup>17</sup>

Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Datt continued their fight inside the jail against ill-treatment meted out to prisoners. Their demands included better diet and equal treatment with European prisoners. The trial proceedings could not be carried on because the prisoners, owing to prolonged hunger-strike, were not in a fit condition to be taken to the court.

On 12 September 1929 the Government brought forward in the Assembly a Hunger Strike Bill. Officially styled as the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill of 1929, the Bill provided that at any stage of an inquiry or trial, if a judge or magistrate was satisfied that any accused as a consequence of a single act or a series of acts had voluntarily rendered himself incapable of remaining before the court, the judge or the magistrate concerned might dispense with his attendance and proceed with the trial in his absence.





The Bill was vehemently opposed by the Congress members. Motilal Nehru pointed out that though the Punjab Jail Committee, which had met Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Datt, had promised them that their demands would be met, nothing had been done.

M. R. Jayakar, opposing the Bill, said the passing of the Bill would destroy the first principle of criminal jurisprudence in the name of remedying a lacuna. Even in the most summary trials, courts martial, no accused person was brought before a court martial if in the opinion of a medical officer he was unfit to stand trial.

Motilal Nehru brought a censure motion against the Government on the death of Jatindranath Das. The motion was carried by 55 against 47 votes.

The Government finally did not press for consideration of the Hunger Strike Bill.<sup>18</sup>

9

Gandhiji did not approve of the self-immolation of Jatindranath Das through hunger-strike. But he made no public comment on it, because he felt any expression of his views at that juncture might harm the cause by the officials distorting what he said.<sup>19</sup>

On 30 January 1930 Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Datt addressed a memorandum to the Home Member, Government of India, protesting against the continued ill-treatment including beatings meted out to the Lahore prisoners by jail officials, and asking for separate classification of political prisoners. They opposed any classification of prisoners on the basis of social status of offenders.

On 19 February the Government of India announced revision of the Jail rules. Three classes, 'A', 'B' and 'C' were provided according to social status, education and habits of life of prisoners. Undertrial prisoners were similarly divided into two classes according to social status, education and way of life.



On 1st May 1930 the Viceroy through an ordinance transferred the trial of the Lahore Conspiracy Case to a special tribunal of three judges to be appointed by the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court. The tribunal was authorized to proceed with the trial of any accused in his absence, if he voluntarily absented himself from the court or behaved in a way to delay the trial. Lord Irwin in a statement said the enquiry in the cases had gone on far too long - nearly nine months - and only some 230 out of 607 witnesses had been examined. Hence the need for a special tribunal.<sup>20</sup>

On 7 October 1930, after a protracted trial that went on for one year and three months, judgment was delivered in the Lahore Conspiracy Case by the special tribunal.

Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were awarded capital punishment; Kishorilal, Mahabir Singh, Bijaya Kumar Singh, Shiv Verma, Gaya Prasad, Jaidev Kapoor and Kamal Nath Tewari were sentenced to transportation for life; Kundan Lal was sentenced to 7 years and Prem Datt to 3 years' rigorous imprisonment. Ajaya Kumar Ghosh, Jatindranath Sanyal and Des Raj were acquitted.<sup>21</sup>

## 10

The reign of repression let loose by the Government did not stop at the Meerut and Lahore Conspiracy Cases. Literature and printing houses too were not spared. In June Ramanand Chatterjee, editor of the *Modern Review*, was arrested in Calcutta on a charge of sedition for having published *India in Bondage* written by Dr. J. T. Sunderland. The work itself was proscribed. The police raided the office of Ramanand Babu and took away 350 unbound copies, 101 cloth binding cases and 5 bundles of loose formes of the book.

Gandhiji commented:



Let them know that they are by such acts sending up the barometer of disaffection.

Helpless we may be today to avenge such wrongs, but the time is fast coming when we shall no longer be so helpless.<sup>22</sup>

In May 1929 the Governments of U.P. and the Central Provinces declared a ban on Pandit Sundarlal's work *Bharatmen Angrezi Rajka Itihas* and asked those possessing copies of the book to surrender them to the Government. The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Bombay, wrote to Seth Jamnalal Bajaj to surrender his copy of the book. Jamnalal refused to oblige. The police even searched his house. Commending Jamnalal's action, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*:

The proper answer to this insult is for everyone who has Pandit Sunderlal's volume in his possession to inform the police in his or her district and the press of such possession and challenge search or prosecution or both. If this course is adopted by the public and if there are many copies still untraced, the Government will soon discover that it will make itself a laughing-stock by continuing the fruitless searches of numberless houses. Searches, imprisonments and the like are effective only so long as they frighten people.<sup>23</sup>

The offensive against the growing working class movement was also carried on in the legislatures. In the Central Legislative Assembly, the Government brought forward a Trades Disputes Bill, designed to arm the Government with power to declare almost any strike illegal and make picketing a cognizable offence. What is more, it managed to have it passed by a majority of 56 votes to 38.<sup>24</sup>

At the annual session of the All-India Trade Union Congress held at Nagpur on 30 November 1929, under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, these developments were taken note of and the threat to the labour movement from the Government recognized. Nehru in his presidential address said:



We have had in India during the past year a general offensive against labour in which the Government and the employers have joined hands and cooperated together. The Trades Disputes Act and the Public Safety Ordinance were the first contributions of the Government of India. Then followed the trial of the thirty-two labour leaders and workers in Meerut and a large number of individual cases against labour workers.

The All-India Trade Union Congress was faced with a conflict of opinion as regards affiliations. There were rival international trade union bodies owing allegiance respectively to the Second International and the Third International. The Labour Party of Britain and the various social democratic parties of Central Europe represented the philosophy and outlook of the Second International. These parties had been sharing power with representatives of the capitalist class everywhere. Their chief enemy was no longer capitalism, but communism. The Meerut Conspiracy Case was largely viewed by the labour opinion in the country against this background.

At the meeting of the Executive Council of the AITUC, held before the open session, S. V. Deshpande, Secretary of the Girni Kamgar Union of Bombay, brought forward a resolution proposing that the AITUC should seek affiliation to the Pan-Pacific Secretariat, an organization controlled by the Third International. A heated two-hour long discussion followed and a number of trade union leaders including N. M. Joshi, V. V. Giri, Shiva Rao and Diwan Chamanlal decided to withdraw from the AITUC. Deshpande later withdrew his resolution.

Jawaharlal suggested that it might be better for them not to be affiliated to either organization. He said:

So far as the Second International is concerned the proximity and the occupancy of office in various countries has made its leaders betray their



principles and to become the exponents of a new type of imperialism, Labour Imperialism, which is nonetheless thorough. The main preoccupation of the Second International is no longer to fight against capitalism but to fight against communism....

Should we then ally ourselves to the Third International?...

Nehru did not feel that in the conditions then existing affiliation to the Third International could be more than a gesture. Besides, with all the good work undoubtedly done in Russia, he did not appreciate many of their methods. To affiliate with the Comintern would mean adopting their methods, which would not be desirable. The best course therefore would be to stay unaffiliated to either body.

N. M. Joshi, Dewan Chamanlal, V. V. Giri and others, who had kept themselves away from the open session of the AITUC, separated from it and formed their own All-India Trade Union Federation.<sup>25</sup>

11

The systematic attack by the British on the working class was seen by nationalist opinion as an attack on the national movement. It was an intimation that the Government's response to the demand of the Congress as formulated at the Calcutta Congress was going to be negative and that they planned not to negotiate on the demand but to suppress the civil disobedience movement when it came. In his 24 January speech in the Legislative Assembly, already referred to, Irwin made his attitude clear. He said:

I see very clearly that nothing but harm can come from a threat that unless a particular condition is fulfilled, which I believe to be mechanically impossible of fulfilment from the outset, an attempt will be made to



plunge the country into all the possible chaos of a civil disobedience. It is quite certain that no discussion of any kind can promise the least hope of success when either party to them approaches the task in the spirit of hostility and suspicion from which such an ultimatum springs. I recognize that although many leaders and schools of political opinion in India will refuse to march along the dangerous path of non-cooperation, many of them openly profess distrust of the attitude of Great Britain.<sup>26</sup>

In keeping with the tone set by this speech of the Viceroy, the policy of the British bureaucracy in 1929 remained one of house searches and arrests of Congress leaders and all round suppression of the working class.

According to the bulletins issued by the A.I.C.C. the police action against Congress activists was as indiscriminate as it was thorough. To mention a few instances: in Amritsar Dr. Satyapal was prosecuted and on 11th July, 1929, sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 500; Madduri Annapurnish, a former member of the A.I.C.C. and editor of the Congress was arrested and charged under Sections 124 A and 153 I.P.C. Other persons arrested were Ghani Abdur Rahman and Hakim Sikandar Khizr, Amritsar Congress leaders, and Sardar Ajit Singh, secretary of Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

Master Moti Singh, on his release after serving a seven-year sentence was rearrested on 23 July. V. S. Dandekar, Assistant Secretary of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee was arrested on 31st July under Section 124 A and taken handcuffed to Mainpuri.

Surendra Neogy and Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta were arrested for writing seditious articles and convicted.

Other leaders arrested, prosecuted and convicted for sedition were Subhas Chandra Bose, President of Bengal P.C.C. and member of the Working



Committee, Kiran Shankar Roy, B. K. Bose, J. M. Das Gupta, Satya Bhushan Das Gupta, Sailesh Nath Bisi, Purushottam Roy, Sushil Banerjea, Sardar Balwant Singh, Janaranjan Neogy and Hiralal Pande.

The arrests continued. An A.I.C.C. Bulletin issued on 27 November 1929 gave a list of the latest convictions, 12 in number, of leaders under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, the sentences ranging from one and half years to 3 years.

Another feature was the rough treatment meted out to political prisoners in jails. The Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners thus were not the only ones to have resorted to hunger -strike to protest against the misbehaviour of jail officials. The Government of U.P. made a statement in the Legislative Council according to which no less than 30 political prisoners in Lucknow, Bareilly and Agra Jails had resorted to hunger- strike for various periods at various times.<sup>27</sup>

These repressive activities were a clear signal from the British authorities that they had no desire to consider the demand of the Congress for the grant of Dominion status before 31 December 1929. The fight now appeared inevitable. What was more, it would be fought on the issue of full independence.



## CHAPTER XI

### PRELUDE TO THE LAHORE CONGRESS

#### 1

For the Congress 1929 was a year of preparation for the civil disobedience struggle to come. Though there were differences of opinion between the old guard and the younger elements in the leadership as regards the formulation of the goal, all sections were agreed that, should a struggle become necessary, it could only be fought under the leadership of Gandhiji. A corollary of this was that preparations for the struggle also had to be carried on under the guidance of Gandhiji, to ensure that people remained non-violent even in the face of provocation.

Following the conclusion of the Calcutta Congress session under the Presidentship of Motilal Nehru, in December 1928, the Working Committee met in Calcutta on 3 January 1929 and requested Gandhiji to prepare a scheme for boycott of foreign cloth. It was to be a major activity of the Congress organizations. Gandhiji had made it clear that boycott of foreign cloth would be the most important ingredient in the preparation for the coming struggle, and its concomitant, the spread of the charkha and khadi, must occupy the paramount position in the Congress programme.

Writing in *Young India* in answer to critics who thought that emphasis on the charkha and khadi did not make for enough excitement to attract people to the Congress, Gandhiji observed:

Is there not excitement enough in the programme if the Congressmen are serious about it? Picketing of liquor shops, foreign cloth shops and collection and burning of foreign cloth are exciting enough for any worker





and are enough to evoke all the resourcefulness that the best worker may be capable of....<sup>1</sup>

There was nothing to prevent Congressmen from picketing liquor shops or opium dens or from collecting and burning cloth, he pointed out. If they achieved boycott of foreign cloth they would remove from Britain's path the greatest incentive to greed, and if they stopped the liquor and drug revenue, they would force the rulers to reduce the ever-growing military expenditure.

Early in January Gandhiji, after attending the Congress session and the Convention on the Nehru Report, went back to Sabarmati and spent the rest of the month there. On his arrival in Ahmedabad he found the students of the Gujarat College - 700 in number -on strike. The strike was in protest against the victimization of some students by the Principal. The victimized students were among the many who had absented themselves from classes to participate in the demonstrations against the Simon Commission in October 1928 and consequently had not adequately prepared themselves for the terminal examination, which the Principal insisted they had to take.

Gandhiji congratulated the students upon the strike, which he considered as an auspicious sign. He asked them to make a success of it. For, if they lost, they would cause harm to themselves and to the country. They might have to face expulsion or fine. They should be prepared for both.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhiji further wrote:

There is in Government colleges too much of espionage and persecution of boys holding pronounced political views or taking any part in political gatherings not liked by the Government. It is high time that this unwarranted interference was stopped.<sup>3</sup>



On 30 January, with the strike continuing, Gandhiji addressed a meeting of the students and told them to keep their resolve to the end. They should not mind it if they had to lose a term or even a year. He also called upon them to take up the constructive work programme of the Congress.<sup>4</sup>

## 2

Gandhiji had pressing calls from various provinces to undertake tours there. Invitations had come from U.P., Andhra, Karnataka, Burma and Delhi and the coming months promised to be full.

Meanwhile a visit to Europe had been under discussion for some time. It had been postponed in 1926 and in 1927 and again in 1928 for one reason or another. He had told Romain Rolland he would make it in 1929. But he wanted the question to be decided by the President of the Congress. Personally he was inclined to set out on the journey right away. On 17 January he wrote to Motilal Nehru:

If I am to finish the European programme, I may not put off the visit till May and I dare not keep the many friends who have invited me in a state of suspense up to the very time of my sailing. And if I go at all I have to go to Germany, Austria, Russia, possibly Poland, France, England and, I would like to add, Italy, Turkey and Egypt, though I have no invitations as yet from the last three places. There are also pressing invitations from America to include America if I go to Europe.

But Motilal felt that the Congress affairs would not permit Gandhiji to be out of India for long in 1929. Gandhiji therefore cancelled the visit.<sup>5</sup>

Explaining his decision in *Young India* of 31 January, Gandhiji said that if the Government did not accept the Nehru Report before 31 December 1929, he must



declare himself an "independence-wallah", in which case he could not think of leaving India during the year of "probation and preparation". He must strain every nerve to carry out the preparatory programme.<sup>6</sup>

On 2 February, Gandhiji left the Ashram for his tour of Sind. The departure had been delayed by two days because of the cold wave that was then sweeping the country. So intense was the cold that, Gandhiji wrote to Mira behn, "the water in the buckets and the little reservoir had frozen", with the thermometer registering 28 degrees F., "an unheard of temperature for Sabarmati".<sup>7</sup>

The tour of Sind lasted from 3 February to 15 February, and covered visits to Karachi, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Larkana, Sukkur, Rohri, Padidan, Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas. At most of the places he addressed public meetings, meetings of students and meetings of women. Boycott of foreign cloth and adoption of khadi formed the chief theme in his speeches. He also collected donations for the Lalaji Memorial Fund.

There were, besides, internal squabbles of the Sind Congress to settle. The Sind Provincial Congress Committee was torn by factionalism. The rift between the factions headed by Swami Govindanand and Jairamdas Doulatram came out in the open at the P.C.C. meeting held on 15 February at Mirpurkhas in the presence of Gandhiji. Gandhiji advised the members to elect Govindanand as president and told Govindanand to give a fair representation to the other group in the Provincial Committee. Govindanand gave ten seats to his own men and five to the group of Jairamdas.

Gandhiji was saddened by the fact that there were no more than 400 members on the Sind Congress register and that the yarn franchise had not been working. There were as many as 15 members on the executive, where just five would have



been enough. The squabbles, he noted, were over sharing of power, when there was in reality no power to share.<sup>8</sup>

3

Domestic grief befell Gandhiji, for the second time in a span of ten months, when on 8 February 1929, Harilal's son Rasik died in Delhi where he had been sent to study in Jamia Millia. He probably had typhoid fever. He was only 17 and had impressed everyone as the brightest of Harilal's children. Gandhiji wrote to Devadas on 9 February from Sind:

The telegram arrived when food was being brought in for me. I took my meal as usual and kept on working as I ate.... Rasik's death certainly pains me, but that is only because of selfishness....<sup>9</sup>

Rasik had been put under Dr. Ansari's treatment and a sizeable part of the Gandhi household had assembled in Delhi to be by his bedside. Devadas of course was there, for he had been teaching spinning and Hindi at the Jamia Millia. Kasturba, Kanti, elder son of Harilal, Harilal and his sister- in-law Balibehn hurried to Delhi on hearing of Rasik's illness. Krishnadas and Navin, cousins of Rasik, also went. The family was heart-broken at Rasik's death.

Gandhiji expressed the view that perhaps both Maganlal and Rasik could have been saved if nature cure methods had been tried.<sup>10</sup> The personal loss and grief however did not interrupt his work for a single day.

4

During his tour in Sind Gandhiji had been in constant communication with Motilal Nehru, who had been pressing him to visit Delhi for the meeting of the Congress Working Committee to be held on 17-19 February to consider the scheme for the boycott of foreign cloth.



When Gandhiji arrived in Delhi on 17 February, he learnt that Vithalbhai Patel, President of the Central Assembly, had arranged a tea party for 19 February to which he had invited the Viceroy and leaders of political opinion and he was keen that Gandhiji should attend it. Judging from the way the situation had been developing, a collision between the Government and the Congress appeared to be on the cards and Patel thought that if he could bring the parties together at one place, parleys might result and the situation might be saved. Of course nothing came of the exercise. In Gandhiji's words the tea party merely "brought incompatibles together". The British would never bend so long as they were not forced, he said. British rule was not a matter of philanthropy. It was earnest business. Nothing much could be expected of "such occasional parties".<sup>11</sup>

Much more result-oriented was the meeting of the Congress Working Committee, which was really the only reason for Gandhiji having been summoned to Delhi. The Working Committee concerned itself chiefly with the scheme for the boycott of foreign cloth which Gandhiji had formulated at its request. The scheme that Gandhiji put up for the consideration of the Working Committee was as follows:

1. Congress organizations should call for volunteers, men and women, to go from door to door in every town and village having a Congress committee and collect foreign cloth in the possession of householders and deliver or collect orders for khadi required by such householders.
2. All khadi supplied should bear the stamp of the All-India Spinners' Association and price should be distinctly marked on khadi.
3. Voluntary preachers should be called for to popularize the use of khadi and to advocate boycott of foreign cloth.
4. Foreign cloth collected should be publicly burnt wherever possible.



5. Foreign cloth dealers should be individually visited with a view to enlisting their help and inducing them to stop further purchase of foreign cloth and to cancel all cancellable orders already placed.
6. Picketing foreign cloth shops should be undertaken wherever possible and where there is no danger of violence being committed by Congress pickets, who should be reliable and seasoned volunteers.
7. All units should regularly report to the Central Office details of the work done in terms of the foregoing and the latter should circulate to the Press for publication a weekly digest of the progress made.
8. Help and cooperation of all political, industrial labour and other organizations should be solicited in the boycott campaign.
9. The All-India Spinners' Association should be asked to furnish the Central Office with a list of places where genuine khadi is available and to open stores where there is demand for khadi.
10. A committee called Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee should be formed and entrusted with an initial fund with power to collect more funds. The Committee should be under obligation to publish duly audited statements of income and expenditure every quarter
11. The Committee proposed in paragraph 10 should publish, and distribute broadcast leaflets showing the necessity and possibility of boycott, giving full details as to the method of achieving it by individuals.
12. Resolutions should be moved in the Provincial Legislatures as well as the Central, calling upon their respective Governments to make all their cloth purchases in khadi irrespective of its so-called costliness. Resolutions should also be moved demanding a prohibitive duty on imports of foreign cloth.<sup>12</sup>



The Working Committee unanimously approved the scheme. A Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee was accordingly formed and Gandhiji was asked to be its Chairman. Gandhiji agreed. The other members of the Committee were Motilal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. M.A. Ansari and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Writing in *Navajivan*, Gandhiji appealed to the people to discard foreign cloth and take to khadi. He asked for foreign cloth to be burnt or to be sent to him for burning. He realized this might result in temporary shortage of cloth, but that it could be avoided by a more economical use of khadi.<sup>13</sup>

Soon afterwards Gandhiji wrote to Jairamdas Doulatram, who was a member of the Bombay Provincial Council, to resign his seat in the Council and take up work as Secretary of the Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee.<sup>14</sup>

This Jairamdas did, and took up the work in earnest. By April Gandhiji was writing:

The Secretary is issuing bulletins and leaflets and addressing letters to municipal bodies and others. An important leaflet gives the names and addresses of sale-and-production khadi depots throughout India.... It will interest the reader to know that there are in all 328 such centres, of which Bengal has 66 and Tamilnad 64. Next comes Andhra with 39 and Bihar with 33. Whilst by itself the list is encouraging, it is but a drop in the ocean compared with the foreign cloth shops in the country.... It is for the public to capture this trade which drains away crores of rupees annually from India.<sup>15</sup>

The Congress now had a programme and a slogan: take to khadi and burn foreign cloth. The call was clear and simple and easy to carry to every corner of the



country. The Congress as a whole was now rallied behind the programme. And while the Simon Commission still went on with its exercise in province after province and finally left the shores of India only on 13 April 1929 - the bonfires of foreign cloth had already become a common spectacle all over the country.

Returning to Sabarmati on 21 February, Gandhiji again left on 2 March for Calcutta on his way to Burma. On 4 March he addressed a large public meeting at Shradhdhanand Park. He appealed to the audience to take off their foreign clothing for burning. The police had in anticipation served a notice on the Secretary of the Provincial Congress Committee declaring that burning of foreign cloth "in or near any public street or thoroughfare" would be an offence under the Police Act. Gandhiji, speaking at the meeting in English for the benefit of the police, said he had received legal opinion that Shradhdhanand Park, where the meeting was being held, could not be described as a thoroughfare. He therefore proposed to go ahead with the burning of foreign cloth.

A bonfire of foreign cloth was duly arranged. The police put out the fire and in the process came into conflict with the audience. Some members of the audience as well as some policemen were "more or less seriously" hurt.

Later in the evening Gandhiji was informed by the police that he would be required to appear before the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate the following day and was asked to sign a bond of recognizance to that effect. Gandhiji said he could not sign such a bond for it had been arranged for him to leave for Burma on 5 March and he could not disappoint thousands who awaited him there. Of course if the police arrested him that would be a different matter.

The police agreed to let Gandhiji go if he undertook on return from Burma to stand trial on 26 March. Gandhiji accepted the condition and signed a bond of recognizance to this effect. He was then set free at 2.30 a.m. on the morning of





the 5th. Gandhiji also agreed that till the matter was settled by the court there would be no burning of foreign cloth in public places.

This of course did not mean, as Gandhiji explained in a Press statement, a stoppage of boycott demonstrations, or collection of foreign cloth or even burning of it. Indeed, Gandhiji said, the most effective answer to the unwarranted police interference would be for the "whole of the people" to discard foreign cloth and complete the boycott. Only, the burning would have to take place in private places.<sup>16</sup>

On 5 March Gandhiji sailed for Rangoon by *s.s. Aronda*. He had with him Pyarelal, Girdhari, nephew of Acharya Kripalani, Subbiah, Mahadev Desai and Purushottam, son of his nephew Narandas, besides Dr. Pranjivan Mehta's daughter-in-law -Champa with her two babies and a Tamil girl Rukmini, who was mentally deranged.<sup>17</sup>

On the very first day of his arrival in Rangoon on 8 March Gandhiji addressed two large meetings: One arranged by the Rangoon Corporation, at which Gandhiji was presented an address by the Corporation and a purse of Rs. 50,000 and the other a public meeting arranged by the All-Burmese Association. Public meetings, meetings of students and of Gujaratis were held during following days. At one of the meetings Gandhiji explained what he conceived as his mission. He said:

My mission is not merely freedom of India.... Through realization of freedom of India. I hope to realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man. My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or the exploitation of other nationalities.... I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such as crawl on earth...<sup>18</sup>



At a public meeting in Moulmein on 13 March Gandhiji expressed his great pain at the knowledge that in Burma the drink revenue amounted to one-third of the land revenue. It was a terrible thing to contemplate for any country in the world. He told the meeting that nothing but ruin could result from drunkenness.<sup>19</sup>

At a meeting of women in Rangoon on 14 March Gandhiji explained why the prohibition movement in India had not been a success, though it had come so near to succeeding in 1920-21. In many provinces liquor shops had closed down. Hundreds of opium dens in Assam were deserted. But there had been no support from the temperance organizations throughout the country, because they thought the movement was political, which in a way it certainly was. But the political motive should not have deterred temperance organizations from helping a movement which was essentially moral. The political movement in India was also a movement of self- purification. The Government had then let loose a reign of repression. Volunteers picketing liquor shops were arrested in increasingly large numbers and the movement had been crushed.

What was needed, Gandhiji said, was legislation, side by side with temperance education of the masses.<sup>20</sup>

Gandhiji was in Burma from 8 March to 22 March. He visited Rangoon, Moulmein, Pongde, Prome, Mandalay and Tongu and addressed numerous meetings. The collections came to Rs. 150,000. On 24 March he was back in Calcutta.

On 26 March Gandhiji presented himself at the Presidency Magistrate's court for trial. In his statement to the court he said that though the prohibition against lighting of fires in public places had been meant for protection of property from danger of fire, the police had taken the law into their own hands; they had used this to interfere with a peaceful and orderly demonstration and that therefore it was the police that should stand trial.



The Magistrate delivered his judgment the following day and sentenced Gandhiji to a fine of one rupee.

Commenting on the judgment in *Young India* Gandhiji wrote that it merely confirmed his opinion that in cases of a serious clash between the authorities and the public, the judges would, even if unconsciously, exonerate the former.<sup>21</sup>

6

Before embarking on an extensive tour of Andhra on 6 April, Gandhiji spent a short time in Ahmedabad. On 30 March he visited Morvi to attend the Kathiawar Political Conference. Speaking at the Conference he took the organizers to task for having timed the Conference to suit his convenience. If they could not do without his presence, then surely it was better that the Conference was not held at all. No one was to be considered indispensable.

Referring to the need for reforms in princely States Gandhiji said the effort should be to deal with the Princes with love. It should be remembered that the Princes were dependent on the British for their power and nothing should be done which would place them in an embarrassing situation.<sup>22</sup>

Writing in *Navajivan* some weeks later, Gandhiji gave expression to similar views in regard to the princely States. He wrote that if the princely rulers were decadent, their decadence was sustained only under the wing of the British. In any case, all princely States were not uniformly bad. Some were indeed very good. Not everything about feudalism was bad and democratic governments were not always paragons of purity. If there were no Empire which supported the autocracy of the Princes, their subjects would have been able to secure many rights for themselves. Many reforms could be tried in the States if the British would permit them: such as prohibition, revenue reform, reform of the Hindu Law, social reforms, small-scale banking, community-owned dairies, and so on. In



small States, especially, the interests of the rulers and their subjects were practically identical. As for the Empire, wherever one turned, one saw lies, fraud, arrogance, tyranny, drunkenness, gambling, lechery, plunder by day and by night and Dyerism.

Indian Princes, Gandhiji continued, would not reform themselves by being constantly criticized. They were like everyone else, products of the same soil. People should have the charity to grant that they might also have good qualities in the same measure as everyone else.<sup>23</sup>

## 7

A somewhat distressing episode associated with this brief sojourn of Gandhiji at Sabarmati concerned the harsh deal meted out by Gandhiji to his nephew Chhaganlal Gandhi and Kasturba. Writing in *Navajivan* under the title "My shame and sorrow", he gave details of the various irregularities in handling money that the two were, in different ways, guilty of. Chhaganlal, he wrote, had been "engaged in a series of petty larcenies over a number of years", though they appeared to have been "of a very trivial character involving very inconsiderable sums of money" and had "not meant any pecuniary loss to the Udyog Mandir".<sup>1\*</sup> When caught at the act Chhaganlal had been consumed with remorse and left the Ashram "of his own accord".

Chhaganlal, Gandhiji wrote, owned no property, having earlier, on Gandhiji's prompting, made over to the Ashram a sum of Rs. 10,000, which represented his savings. Chhaganlal had parted with the money not from any impulse of generosity" but because his being in possession of wealth had "jarred" on Gandhiji.

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<sup>1</sup> \* Satyagraha Ashram had been renamed Udyog Mandir in November 1928.



As for Kasturba, her offence had been to keep a sum of four rupees that a visitor to the Ashram had offered to her. True, she had made over the money to Chhaganlal Joshi, secretary of the Udyog Mandir, when the latter asked for it. Nevertheless, the transgression had been committed and she had to pay for it by being denounced by her husband in cold print in *Navajivan*. She had to promise never to repeat the offence, on pain of having to withdraw herself from the institution. Her penitence was accepted. She would remain at the Ashram just as before, Gandhiji decreed, and continue to accompany him on his tours.<sup>24</sup>

Chhaganlal Joshi, Narandas Gandhi and other Ashram inmates were much distressed. Chhaganlal Joshi suggested that some of the money given over to the Ashram by Chhaganlal Gandhi, the money that was made up of his savings, might be returned to him, to enable him to tide over the hardships he and his family might be facing. Gandhiji would not agree. He wrote:

I would consider it wrong to return this sum, nor has any of us the right to do so. The money should be taken to have been spent. As a trust we have a right to accept a donation. In order to return a donation, we should have some moral or legal basis. In this case we have neither.<sup>25</sup>

Gandhiji himself was not troubled by the action taken and did not want Joshi and others to be troubled. They were all in his view "soldiers fighting immorality" and had only done what was necessary. The evil had been brought out and that was the end of it.<sup>26</sup>

But the Ashram inmates even with the best of will, could not bring themselves to share this view: of Gandhiji and found it difficult to acquiesce in it. Both Chhaganlal Joshi and Narandas Gandhi came very near to leaving the Ashram. Narandas at one stage even sent his luggage to the station before he had second thoughts.<sup>27</sup> Gandhiji was away from the Ashram at the time.



To Chhaganlal Joshi Gandhiji wrote:

I don't wish to press Chi. Narandas or Ramniklal.... If they refuse to stay on, I will not blame you in the least for that. It would be good if they stayed till my return.

Chhaganlal Gandhi's ten thousand rupees, which he had made over to the Ashram, and which the Ashram inmates thought should, at least in part, be returned to him, was, Gandhiji explained, made up of sale proceeds of jewellery, his savings in Phoenix and the interest on the sum provided by Dr. Pranjivan Mehta to pay for Chhaganlal Gandhi's education in England. Since this last part had not been spent for the purpose intended, it ought to have been returned to Dr. Mehta. It had not been returned. It had therefore been theft. And since a part of the ten thousand had been theft, Chhaganlal had lost the right to the whole of the amount.<sup>28</sup>

8

The Andhra tour lasted 45 days, from 6 April to 21 May. It was one of the longest tours undertaken by Gandhiji in any province and was the most gruelling. He visited no less than 319 villages and collected about Rs. 2,64,000 in donations.

The tour was undertaken at the hottest time in the year and at the end of each day Gandhiji was washed out from continuous travelling, mostly by motor-car. The crowds were immense and frequently unmanageable. At Hyderabad, where Gandhiji arrived on 7 April, the walk from the railway carriage to the car took him a full 45 minutes.<sup>29</sup>

The message that Gandhiji delivered to the multitudes was everywhere the same: boycott foreign cloth; wear khadi manufactured in your own village; banish untouchability; promote unity between Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians and



others; banish drink, let the village elders go to the drinkers and reason with them to give up drinking; avoid internal quarrels, but when they do occur, settle them through voluntary village panchayats.<sup>30</sup>

The response of the people was most enthusiastic. At places there were poignant scenes of the people showing readiness to sacrifice their all for the cause. There was the case of a young widow, Satyavati, who donated her entire jewellery, valued at Rs. 1,400, for khadi work and offered to join the Ashram. Gandhiji was much moved.<sup>31</sup>

The tour and the heat were exacting but Gandhiji enjoyed it. The rigour of the tour, he wrote, had been softened by the willing and unremitting attention of the volunteers, especially of Subbaramiah and Konda Venkatapayya, prominent Andhra workers, who did their best to save Gandhiji from the noise and secure for him comfortable lodgings.<sup>32</sup>

From time to time Gandhiji published in *Young India* the details of his itinerary and the donations collected at each place he visited.

9

On 23 May, 1929, the Governor-General made an announcement postponing the dissolution of the Central Legislative Assembly which was due in September. The reason for this decision, he said, was the possibility of the Report of the Simon Commission being published towards the end of the year or the beginning of the following year and the resulting constitutional changes that Parliament might have to consider. He did not specify the length of time for which the life of the existing Assembly was being extended.

The Congress, and national opinion in general, did not take kindly to this arbitrary manoeuvre. Congress President Motilal Nehru protested against the action in



strong terms. The Working Committee of the Congress on 25 May passed a resolution, describing it as "a clear attempt on the part of the Government to prevent the electorates from expressing by their votes the declared opposition by the people to the Statutory Commission and the whole policy underlying its appointment and functioning". It resolved:

- (a) that all Congress members of the Central Legislature and any of the Provincial Councils, excepting Bengal and Assam, shall abstain from attending any meeting of the said Legislature or Councils or any of the committees appointed by them or by the Government till such time as the A.I.C.C. or the Working Committee decides otherwise;
- (b) that the Congress members of the Legislatures shall henceforth devote all their time to the carrying out of the Congress programme.<sup>33</sup>

The directive was not enforced. Congressmen, who were members of the legislatures were by and large opposed to the idea. Finally, at its meeting on 27 July held at Allahabad, the A.I.C.C., on a motion by Gandhiji, while agreeing with the Working Committee that all Congress members of the various legislatures, Central and provincial, should resign their seats, nevertheless resolved "that the question of withdrawal from the legislatures do stand over till the forthcoming Congress at Lahore". The A.I.C.C. desired the public in general and the members of the legislatures in particular to prepare for complete withdrawal from legislatures, "should such a course be necessary, on and from the 1<sup>st</sup> January next."<sup>34</sup>

At the Bombay meeting on 25 and 26 May, the A.I.C.C. also took stock of the internal organization of the Congress, which was far from satisfactory. According to the report of the Secretary, even the returns of the membership were not





complete. The following figures of the number of members were cited in regard to various provinces: Ajmer 14,594; Bihar 30,948; Bombay (3 districts) 1,210; Burma 800; Gujarat 500; Karnatak 800; Kerala 90; Maharashtra 1,410; Punjab 731; Sind 1,336 and U.P. 6,000.

The annual contributions received by the A.I.C.C. from the Provinces were: Bombay Rs. 1,000; Gujarat Rs. 500; U.P. Rs. 300; Bihar Rs. 250; Utkal Rs. 105; Karnatak, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and C.P. Hindustani Rs. 100 each; N.W.F.P., Maharashtra, Sind and Berar Rs. 50 each and Kerala Rs. 25. The defaulters were Andhra, Assam, Bengal, Burma, C.P. (Marathi) and Delhi.

The resolution of the Congress calling upon Congressmen to contribute a portion of their income passed in December 1928 had not met with a satisfactory response.<sup>35</sup>

It was clear that both the organization and the finances of the Congress were in disarray and drastic and urgent steps were called for if the party as to put up an effective fight in the struggle that was in the offing.

Gandhiji, in a resolution which he moved at the A.I.C.C., came out with a "summary procedure" to deal with the organizational ills that beset the Congress. The resolution asked for the fulfilment of the following requirements:

The Provincial Congress organization shall have not less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent of the total population of their province as original members, and not less than 50 per cent of the districts represented by it.

The District Organization shall have not less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent of its population as original members and not less than 50 per cent of the tehsils represented by it.



The Tehsil organization shall have not less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent of its population as original members, and not less than 10 per cent of the villages within the Tehsil represented by it.

The village organization shall have not less than 3 per cent of its population as original members....

No provincial organization will be recognized by the Committee that does not satisfy the foregoing test by 31<sup>st</sup> August next....

After considerable debate the resolution was carried by a majority.<sup>36</sup>

Another important resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. concerned discipline. It said:

The All-India Congress Committee shall have the power to take disciplinary action against:

- (a) any committee of the Congress which deliberately acts against the declared policy of the Congress;
- (b) any office-bearer of the Congress Committee who deliberately acts against the declared policy of the Congress;
- (c) any member of the Congress Committee who is shown to the satisfaction of the All India Congress Committee or its Working Committee to have been responsible for embezzlement or gross mismanagement of public funds....<sup>37</sup>

Another resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. concerned the Provincial Committees which had been remiss in paying their annual contributions to the Central Office.

The resolution said:

In the event of a P.C.C. not paying its annual contribution under Article IX of the Constitution to the A.I.C.C., members representing the defaulting



province may be debarred by the Working Committee from participating in meetings of the Committee [A.I.C.C.] till such contribution is paid.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the khadi propaganda and the movement for boycott of foreign cloth had been gaining momentum. After the formation of the Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee with Jairamdas Doulatram as its whole-time secretary the movement had shown significant results. By May 1929 Manchester had already begun feeling the "acute effect of the boycott". According to a statement of the President of the Cloth Dealers' Association of Delhi, an Englishman, almost a third of the cotton-textile mills in England had closed down. Gandhiji wrote in *Navajivan* that the pace of the movement had increased so much that many feared khadi would be in short supply.<sup>39</sup>

Goaded by Gandhiji and the Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee, municipalities all over the country where Congressmen were in charge made their own contribution to the movement by increasing local taxes on foreign cloth and exempting khadi from tax.<sup>40</sup>

There was however a good deal of organizational laxity. Even after six months of work the Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee was complaining that out of 172 District Congress Committees throughout India, only twenty-seven had been sending regular reports of work. And there were many provinces from which there had been no reports at all.

Gandhiji wrote:

Personally I should prefer to have only 16 swift-moving, cooperating committees instead of 169 indifferent, irresponsive and irresponsible committees. The 16 real committees can show work. The 169 inactive, "sleeping committees can only be a dead weight."<sup>41</sup>



Notwithstanding the strain of the continuous touring in the countryside in the scorching sun and numerous public engagements, Gandhiji was always prepared to take up new dietetic experiments. Thus on 9 May he ventured on yet another experiment in uncooked food. Writing about the matter in *Young India* he said:

I have been known as a crank, faddist, mad man. Evidently the reputation is well deserved. For wherever I go, I draw to myself cranks, faddists and mad men. Andhra has a fair share of these.

Among these was Sundaram Gopalrao of Rajahmundry, who ran a nature cure establishment and subsisted on what he called vital foods, that had not been brought into contact with fire. Would he advise Gandhiji to take to the diet? Gandhiji asked.

"Certainly," he answered.

"Do you take the risk?" Gandhiji asked. "If the cremation ceremony takes place in Andhra, the people will cremate your body with mine."

"I take the risk," Gopalrao said.

"Then send me your soaked wheat. I commence from today," Gandhiji told him.

And he started right away on the following menu: eight tolas of germinating wheat, eight tolas of almonds ground to a paste, eight tolas of green leaves, six sour lemons and two ounces of honey. Occasionally wheat was replaced by germinating gram and almond paste by coconut milk. This was taken twice a day at 11 a.m. and 6.15 p.m. Later Gandhiji supplemented the diet by green vegetables and raisins.<sup>42</sup>



Gandhiji persisted with the regimen of unfired food in the following months. Even though he had problems while touring in the mountainous Almora and Nainital districts, he did not slacken. In the last week of June, while at Kausani, he was laid up with fever for a couple of days. Nevertheless, he wrote to Mahadev Desai:

My experiment in diet continues. It has not failed totally. I cannot say it has been successful. I have no more doubt that such foods can be digested.... You may not worry about this. That I derive the greatest joy from this experiment should be enough for all friends.<sup>43</sup>

Then in August Gandhiji had a severe attack of dysentery and was compelled, from 15 August, to discontinue the experiment.<sup>44</sup>

## 12

Gandhiji's tour in the hill districts of Almora and Nainital commenced on 14 June and concluded on 4 July. Ten days out of those three weeks he spent at Kausani, giving his tired limbs a little rest.

Gandhiji was much impressed by the majesty and grandeur of the Himalayas as seen from Kausani - "wrapped in snow and shining brilliantly in sunlight". He wrote that though he had earlier visited Darjeeling and Simla, those hill stations had appeared to him as British colonies and had not given him any idea of the grandeur of the Himalayas. It was only in Almora that he had the view of the beauty and majesty of the Himalayan ranges. He imagined how different types of people would be struck as they gazed at the "row of snow-capped Himalayan heights glittering in the sunlight". Children, he thought, would see them as satarfeni (a Gujarati sweet). Parsis would see them as dasturs (Parsi clergymen) clad in milk white pugrees (headgear), Hindus would see in them "God Siva Himself". Gandhiji could hear Shankaracharya say: 'This is indeed a marvellous sight, but all this is an illusion created by God. The Himalayas do not really exist.



Brahman alone is real. It alone is the truth, while the world is illusory. Then Gandhiji reflected:

The true Himalayas exist within our hearts. True pilgrimage, or supreme effort, on the part of all human beings, consists in taking shelter in that cave and having darshan of Siva there.<sup>45</sup>

At Kausani Gandhiji gave himself up to the Gita and wrote the long- postponed introduction to his Gujarati translation which had been completed in September 1927.

Gandhiji's itinerary in Almora and Nainital took in nearly every place of importance. The chief problem faced was the milling crowds everywhere, which surged like tidal waves impelled by a desire to have Gandhiji's darshan. On 18 June, when Gandhiji was returning from a public meeting at Almora, a villager, Padam Singh, was knocked down by the car in which Gandhiji was travelling. He died of the injuries a couple of days later. Gandhiji was greatly shocked.<sup>46</sup>

Mira behn, who had joined Gandhiji just before he went to Kausani, gives in her autobiography an idea of the overwhelming response of the people at Gandhiji's meetings during this tour. Although she could not attend all the meetings, being primarily responsible for looking after the arrangements at the place where Gandhiji and the party camped, on the few occasions that she did, she helped in the collection of contributions in money and jewellery. Several workers with cloth bags, she says, would move among the audience, all sitting closely packed on the ground. Eager hands, outstretched would beckon to them from all sides. It was touching to see the peasantry parting with their copper and nickel coins. At Gandhiji's appeal women would pull off their rings, earrings, bracelets and anklets. Mira behn had to help occasionally in taking them off. Rich and poor,



young and old, vied with one another in donating their jewellery. Gandhiji treasured every pice.<sup>47</sup>

13

From all the indications it was becoming pretty obvious now that the British had no intention of conceding to India Dominion Status in terms of the Nehru Report as demanded by the Calcutta Congress. The Congress, and the country as a whole, began to see clearly that the only course now was a civil disobedience movement. It was also realized that a civil disobedience movement, if it became inevitable, could only be carried on under the leadership of Gandhiji and that therefore it would be a good idea for Gandhiji to take over the reins of the Indian National Congress as its president in the following year.

Pressing demands therefore began to be voiced by Congressmen everywhere that Gandhiji should agree to preside at the forty-fourth session of the Congress scheduled to be held at Lahore at the end of December 1929. In August the Reception Committee set up for the Lahore session of the Congress informed Gandhiji that it had by a majority of 83 elected him to preside at the Congress session and requested him to accept.<sup>48</sup>

Provincial Congress Committees by and large were similarly inclined. Of the eighteen P.C.C.s, no less than ten proposed Gandhiji for president, while five favoured Vallabhbhai Patel and three Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>49</sup>

But Gandhiji categorically refused to entertain the suggestion. He could not find time for the day-to-day work of the Congress, he said. Vallabhbhai also declined to accept the Presidentship. Moreover, Gandhiji said, older men had had their innings and the battle of the future had to be fought by younger men and women. Older men should read the signs of the times and gracefully yield what otherwise would be taken from them by force. He praised Jawaharlal Nehru for his



"bravery, determination, application, integrity and grit" and his "close acquaintance with European politics". Besides, the relations that subsisted between Gandhiji and Jawaharlal were such that Jawaharlal being in the chair was as good as Gandhiji being in it. Jawaharlal therefore was the one, insisted Gandhiji, who must wear the crown, which he wrote was "all thorns and no roses".<sup>50</sup>

Gandhiji also expressed himself against Vallabhbhai being made President. Writing to Mahadev Desai, who was among the many who suggested this, he said the suggestion did not appear to him proper. "To make him President now would be like swallowing a hair."<sup>51</sup> Gandhiji's open and insistent championing of Jawaharlal's name for the highest post in the Congress caused some embarrassment both to Jawaharlal and Motilal. Motilal told Gandhiji that "forcing Jawahar on the country against its will" would be unfair to both Jawahar and the country. When Jawaharlal expressed his unhappiness in the matter Gandhiji wrote to him:

I have simply pressed your name as of a principle. If the country is not ready to assert that principle, we can wait.

If you are not to be the helmsman, the only alternative I can think of at this juncture is re-election of Father, or failing that, of Dr. Ansari. Can you think of any other name?<sup>52</sup>

The All-India Congress Committee met in Lucknow on 28 September 1929 formally to elect the President for the coming Congress session. Madan Mohan Malaviya came to the A.I.C.C. solely with the intention of persuading Gandhiji to reconsider his decision and accept the presidentship. But Gandhiji remained adamant.





Jawaharlal Nehru's name was then proposed and seconded. Vallabhbhai Patel's name was also proposed, but Vallabhbhai too would not consent. Jawaharlal Nehru was therefore duly elected President of the Congress.<sup>53</sup>

But Jawaharlal was aware that he had been elected through the sheer weight of Gandhiji's influence and against the feelings of a majority of Congressmen. Dwelling on the incident later Nehru wrote:

It was not that I was not sensible of the honour, for it was a great honour, and I would have rejoiced if I had been elected in the ordinary way. But I did not come to it by the main entrance or even by a side entrance; I appeared suddenly by a trap door and bewildered the audience into acceptance.... My pride was hurt, and I almost felt like handing back the honour.<sup>54</sup>

14

After the election of President was over, Gandhiji justified the choice in Young India, 3 October 1929:

Some fear in the transference of power from the old to the young, the doom of the Congress. I do not. The doom was to be feared from the sceptre being held by paralytic hands as mine are at present.... In bravery he is not to be surpassed. Who can excel him in the love of the country? ... And if he has the dash and the rashness of a warrior, he has also the prudence of a statesman.... He is undoubtedly an extremist thinking far ahead of his surroundings. But he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point. He is pure as crystal; he is truthful beyond suspicion. He is a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*. The nation is safe in his hands.<sup>55</sup>



Jawaharlal Nehru no doubt deserved all the praise Gandhiji showered on him. But the fact remained that just then he did not happen to enjoy the confidence of the Congress organization as a whole, as the voting figures showed. He had not proved his qualities of leadership in a mass struggle as Vallabhbhai Patel had shortly before in the Bardoli satyagraha. Why then did Gandhiji go out of his way to lend his support to Nehru's candidature for presidentship?

As Gandhiji himself explained in his writings on the subject he thought that it was Nehru who represented the youth, who appeared to be radical in their view. This was clearly shown during the Madras Congress session of 1927 and the Calcutta session of 1928, where younger elements under Nehru so strenuously attempted to have resolutions passed in favour of complete independence as the goal. Sections among the youth of the country were moving towards communism or towards anarchist violence. During the year there had been increasing evidence of both these political tendencies.

In having the younger Nehru as Congress president it was Gandhiji's intention to divert the revolutionary youth away from communism and secure their allegiance to the Congress and at the same time to wean Nehru himself from moving too far to the left. Jawaharlal looked with disdain and impatience at the conservatism displayed by prominent Congress leaders and Gandhiji thought that with the responsibilities of office he would see the need for reconciling the various divergent views within the organization. That is also the point made by Nehru's biographer Brecher.<sup>56</sup>

Motilal Nehru was the happiest of men from this turn of events. Ever since 1927 it had been his wish to see his son installed as President of the Congress. But in 1927 Gandhiji had resisted the idea. Writing to Motilal, for instance on 13 May 1927, he had said that though the idea had an irresistible appeal for him, in the



prevailing atmosphere he did not think it proper to saddle the younger Nehru with the responsibility.<sup>57</sup> He repeated the same thing in another letter on 26 August.<sup>58</sup> In 1927 Gandhiji saw only Dr. Ansari as the "possible president", because he was seen as the only man who could steer the Hindu-Muslim pact through the Congress.<sup>59</sup>

Then in 1928 Motilal Nehru himself became the most favoured man, because he had headed the committee that drafted the Swaraj constitution and also because Bengal insisted on having him as President.

So Jawaharlal Nehru became President of the session in 1929, that would sanction the struggle for Poorna Swaraj. Motilal was very happy that he would be handing over the Presidency to his son and heir Jawaharlal. He loved his son so much that according to Pyarelal, 60 Gandhiji once said that Motilal loved India because it gave birth to Jawaharlal.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE LAHORE CONGRESS AND THE INDEPENDENCE PLEDGE

#### 1

In the general election held in England in May 1929 the Tories were ousted and the British Labour Party, headed by Ramsay MacDonald, took office on 4 June 1929. The Labour government, however, needed the support of the Liberals to stay in power.

On 29 June the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, sailed home from India for consultation with the new political authorities. He stayed in England for four months, returning only towards the end of October.

The result of his prolonged confabulations with His Majesty's Ministers was set out in a declaration which, on the authority of the British Government, the Viceroy issued on 31 October. Shorn of verbiage, the declaration made two points:

First, that the British Government, accepting the advice of Sir John Simon, proposed that, after the reports of the Simon Commission and the Indian Central Committee assisting it had been received, considered and published, but before the stage of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, "His Majesty's Government should meet representatives both of British India and of the States, for the purpose of seeking the greatest possible measure of agreement for the final proposals which it would be the duty of His Majesty's Government to submit to Parliament."

To this end the Government intended to "invite representatives of different parties and interests in British India and representatives of Indian States to meet them separately or together . . . for the purpose of a Conference and discussion



in regard both to the British Indian and the all- Indian problems" in the hope of being able to "submit proposals to Parliament which may command a wide measure of general assent".

The second point in the declaration was the reaffirmation of the goal of British policy in India, which was "the gradual development", "progressive realization", "in the fulness of time" of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. Dwelling on the theme the Viceroy stated:

I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgment it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of Indian constitutional progress as therein contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status."<sup>1</sup>

Of course nothing really was stated "clearly". Simply put the paragraph meant: 'We think that what we said in 1917 implied that India should ultimately get Dominion Status'. There was no promise of Dominion Status being conferred on India in any foreseeable future.

But the very fact that in an official declaration of policy the principle of Dominion Status for India had been mentioned for the first time was considered of profound significance and as marking a change of attitude on the part of the British government.

Indian political opinion generally was favourably impressed. The Liberals, the Muslim League and even the old guard of the Congress welcomed the declaration, reading into it a meaning which they were soon to learn it did not contain.

On 1 November a conference of leaders was convened at the residence ' of Vithalbai Patel in Delhi to work out a joint response to the Viceregal Declaration.



Gandhiji, then touring in U.P., happened to be in Meerut and came over for the conference. Among those attending were Motilal Nehru, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Maharaja of Mahmudabad, Tej Bahadur Sapru, C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbai Patel, T.A.K. Sherwani, M.S. Aney, Syed Mahmud, B.S. Moonje, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, A. Rangaswami Ayyangar and Jagat Narayan Lal.

Gandhiji, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Jawaharlal Nehru were asked by the conference to prepare a statement incorporating the terms upon which the Indian parties could accept the British Government's invitation.

Differences came up. Jawaharlal Nehru was not at all happy with the idea of Dominion Status, especially since it had not been immediately offered. A draft, however, was ultimately agreed upon and the following day, all those attending the conference signed it.

The statement, or the manifesto, as it came to be described, appreciated the sincerity of the British Government in making the declaration but asked that "certain acts should be done and certain points should be cleared" to inspire trust and ensure cooperation.

These were:

- a) a policy of general conciliation should be definitely adopted to induce a calmer atmosphere;
- b) political prisoners should be granted amnesty; and
- c) the representation of progressive political organizations should be effectively secured and that the Indian National Congress, as the largest among them, should have predominant representation.



As for the reference to Dominion Status in the declaration, the signatories to the manifesto understood it to mean that the Conference would be meeting "not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established but to frame a scheme for Dominion Constitution for India".

The statement asked for a more liberal spirit to be infused "in the government of the country so that the public could be made to "feel that a new era has commenced even from today and that the new Constitution is to be but a register of that fact".<sup>2</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru signed the statement under the persuasion of Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru and because he did not want to place obstacles in the way of all parties coming together to obtain Dominion- Status. But he remained unhappy at the thought that he had allowed himself to be talked into signing.

On 4 November he wrote to Gandhiji under much strain and talked of fever in the brain and of something having snapped inside him. He could not reconcile his signing a demand for Dominion Status simply because it was required of him as a disciplined Congressman. He was, after all, also President of the Indian Trade Union Congress and Secretary of the Independence for India League and was intimately connected with the youth movement.

It appeared to Jawaharlal that his position in the Congress would become daily more and more difficult. He did not want to have anything to do with "Leaders' Conferences". He told Gandhiji that he had sent a formal letter of resignation from secretaryship of the Congress to Motilal Nehru. As for presidentship of the next Congress, he was convinced that he was the wrong choice. He offered to withdraw if Gandhiji, even at that stage, would be willing to take up the presidency himself. In the alternative Jawaharlal could resign immediately after the Congress session.<sup>3</sup>



Gandhiji answered Jawaharlal the same day. He wrote:

How shall I console you? Hearing others describe your state, I said to myself, 'Have I been guilty of putting undue pressure on you?' I have always believed you to be above undue pressure. I have always honoured your resistance.

But why are you dejected?... The ideal of independence is not in conflict with greater freedom. As an executive officer now and President for the coming year, you could not keep yourself away from a collective act of the majority of your colleague. In my opinion your signature was logical, wise and otherwise correct.<sup>4</sup>

Subhas Bose, Dr. Kitchlew and Maulana Abdul Bari refused to sign the manifesto. They issued a statement to the Press saying they saw nothing in the Viceregal pronouncement to feel enthusiastic about and in any case they stood for Complete Independence.<sup>5</sup>

3

The debates on India in the British Parliament shortly afterwards brought home to Indian public opinion and political parties the realization that the Viceregal declaration of 31 October indeed offered much less than it had appeared to, and that it did not contain the meaning that Indian leaders had read in it.

In the House of Lords, where the question came up on 5 November, former Viceroy Lord Reading took exception to the use of the expression Dominion Status in the Viceregal pronouncement without the assent of the Simon Commission, especially as it had never been used in any official document before. He demanded that Government make it clear without ambiguity that the language used in the declaration was only the Government's interpretation of the ultimate goal to which India might attain.





It was stated on behalf of the Government that mention of Dominion Status in the declaration, which had been very carefully drafted, did not imply that the Declaration of 1917 and the Preamble to the Government of India Act of 1919 would not remain in full force. Dominion Status had been mentioned because the Viceroy thought it would be an advantage to do so "to remove the web of distrust". The Simon Commission had refused to associate itself in any manner with the mention of Dominion Status. Birkenhead, Peel and Crewe also voiced their objection on this score. But they found that the position of the Government was not very different from their own. Birkenhead found the Government's answer explicit, clear and unequivocal.<sup>6</sup>

The House of Commons debate came on 7 November. The opposition was led by Baldwin, former Conservative Prime Minister. He expressed "anxiety" about the employment of the expression Dominion Status. None could say when Responsible Government would be established in India or what shape it would take. Nobody knew what Dominion Status would be when India had Responsible Government, or whether the date would be near or distant.

Lloyd George, who was Prime Minister when the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Scheme came into force, asked the Secretary of State categorically to state that the interpretation the Indian leaders placed upon the Viceroy's declaration was not accurate and that they had misunderstood the Viceroy's intentions. The Liberal Party, he said, would never agree to deviate one single inch from the declarations made when the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were introduced. He reminded the House that till 1919 "never in the whole history of India had India or any part of it ever enjoyed the slightest measure of democratic self-government", that 95 per cent of the population was illiterate and that there were so many different races, nationalities and languages. These factors had to be taken into consideration.



Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State for India, replying for the Government, said what the Government proposed was "not to take a new step in the policy but to take in effect an administrative action, namely, to declare and interpret, in unmistakable terms, the existing policy". The Viceregal declaration, he said, was nothing more than a restatement and interpretation of the Montagu policy. Such restatement was necessary because doubts had existed in India as to the sincerity of British parties in the matter of the Montagu policy. A feeling had been growing that the British policy was altering, that the tone was altering, that sympathy was gone.<sup>7</sup>

The debate thus made it clear that there was no departure from policy and the Dominion Status was not on the agenda. And here were Indian political leaders labouring under the illusion that the Conference was to meet "not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established but to frame a scheme of Dominion Status for India".

The scales soon began to fall from the eyes of everyone as the true import of the declaration gradually revealed itself.

Writing to Fenner Brockway, who had appealed to Gandhiji to cooperate with the British Government, Gandhiji said:

The two Parliamentary debates contain nothing... that would give me assurance that I may approach the Conference with confidence and safety. I would far rather wait and watch and pray than run into what may after all be a dangerous trap.<sup>8</sup>

Against this background of growing suspicion of British intentions the signatories to the Delhi manifesto met again in Allahabad on 18 November to reconsider



their position with regard to the Government declaration. Before the meeting Gandhiji wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru asking him to take a full share in the discussion and not to suppress himself except when he felt that self-suppression was better than self-expression on particular occasions.<sup>9</sup>

Before the leaders' conference met, the Congress Working Committee deliberated upon a draft, prepared by Gandhiji, to be placed before the leaders' conference. The Working Committee, which sat till late in the night, passed a resolution confirming the action taken by Congressmen at Delhi, "it being clearly understood that this confirmation is constitutionally limited to the date of the holding of the forthcoming session of the Congress".<sup>10</sup>

The Leader's Conference was a fairly representative one. Besides nine members of the Working Committee there were 30 leaders of non-Congress parties and individuals. The following resolution was passed:

This Conference has viewed with misgiving and dissatisfaction the recent debates in Parliament in regard to the Viceroy's declaration. This Conference, however, decides to stand by the Delhi manifesto, and hopes that a full and early response will be made to it.<sup>11</sup>

There was no response from the Government to this statement. But towards the end of November there were feelers that if there was an interview with the Viceroy all the terms of the Delhi manifesto could be freely discussed with him. Only the Viceroy had to be sure of the leaders responding to his invitation. Such an invitation might be sent at the instance of Vithalbhai Patel or Jinnah. The Viceroy would be free to see the leaders on 22 December.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile Motilal Nehru had already received an invitation to see the Viceroy on 23 December. The invitation had not included Gandhiji because, according to Motilal, the Viceroy thought Gandhiji did not have the time. Motilal told Gandhiji



in a telegram that the Viceroy wished to discuss the Congress view and suggested that he himself and Gandhiji should meet the Viceroy. Gandhiji demurred, but Motilal insisted on his presence at the interview.<sup>13</sup>

By the time the interview materialized on 23 December, other names had come to be added to the deputation: Vithalbhai Patel, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Jinnah - the last two representing the Liberal and Muslim opinion..

As it happened 23 December 1929 was also the day on which Lord Irwin moved into the new Viceroy's House. He was the first Viceroy to do so, the great edifice having only just been completed and got ready for occupation.

It was also the day when a bomb exploded under the train in which Lord Irwin was returning to Delhi from his week-long stay in the South. The bomb exploded within a mile of New Delhi. Lord Irwin escaped, but the dining saloon was damaged and one of the servants was hurt.

But when the Viceroy received the deputation of leaders they found him cool and quite unruffled. He was also most cordial. Pattabhi Sitaramayya thus describes the meeting:

... For 45 minutes the bomb and its effects occupied their time. Then Lord Irwin took up the subject on hand. 'Where shall we begin?' enquired he. 'Here is your manifesto. Shall we begin with the political prisoners?' He was anxious to make a good beginning and 'political prisoners' would easily lend itself to a tangible proof of goodwill. But Gandhi wanted to take the Viceroy through the question of Dominion Status. The Viceroy's answer was that the Government view was explained in their communique and he could make no further promise. He was not in a position to extend an invitation to the Round Table Conference with any definite promise of Dominion Status.<sup>14</sup>



This was disappointing, but not unanticipated.

5

On 18 December Labour Member of Parliament Fenner Brockway moved in the House of Commons a resolution welcoming the evidence of cooperation of Indian representatives in the settlement of the constitutional question and calling upon the Government of India to encourage the goodwill by the sympathetic conduct of its administrative and executive functions, particularly in relation to the expression of political opinion. He was one of the few British politicians who sympathized with India's aspirations and wanted to seek a satisfactory solution for the Indian problem. He hoped that the Round Table Conference, if it could have participation of the Congress, might open the way for such a solution.

Speaking on his motion Brockway asked that:

- 1) Indian representation at the Round Table Conference should be really reflective of Indian opinion;
- 2) The Bill to be discussed at the Conference should embody the principle of Dominion Status; and
- 3) The political persecution being carried on should be definitely ended.

Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State for India, in a speech full of sweet reasonableness, pointed out that so far as Dominion Status was concerned, India was not far from enjoying it. He gave instances:

India was a separate entity and an original member of the League of Nations and plenipotentiaries on behalf of India had signed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

In the matter of tariff India had enjoyed autonomy for years. In this respect she was on the same footing as Australia, New Zealand, Canada or South Africa.



In the matter of purchase of stores, India enjoyed the freedom to go to the international market and buy at competitive prices, even if this should work against British interest.

The Secretary of State went on:

In a word the meaning of these things is this. They are not only Dominion Status in action ... but they show that the idea of exploitation of British India in British interest has gone. It is past and done with. <sup>15</sup>

Thus the Secretary of State tried to make out that there was nothing more needed to be done as India already had the substance of Dominion Status.

6

In the absence of any unequivocal declaration by the Government on the question of Dominion Status, the contemplated Round Table Conference promised to be no more than a barren exercise, especially because there was no possible chance of the Congress taking part in it. What threatened further to render any progress difficult was the fact that the British Government now proposed, for the first time, to bring in the Princes of the Native States as a party in any constitutional dialogue.

The new move was initiated through Sir John Simon. It was curious because the States were not included in the terms of reference-of the Simon Commission, which was to confine itself, and did confine itself, strictly to British India. Nevertheless, on 16 October 1928 even before the Commission had drafted its report, Sir John Simon wrote to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald:

... As our investigation has proceeded we have become more and more impressed, in considering the direction which the future constitutional development of India is likely to take, with the importance of bearing in



mind the relations which may develop between British India and the Indian States. It is ... evident to us that whatever may be the scheme which Parliament will ultimately approve for the future constitution and governance of British India it is essential that the methods by which the future relationship between the two constituent parts of Greater India may be adjusted should be fully examined....

In the course of his reply dated 25 October 1929 the Prime Minister stated:

His Majesty's Government have given full consideration to what you have said in your letter ... and I am glad to be able to inform you that they concur in the view you have expressed.... When, therefore, your Commission has submitted its Report and His Majesty's Government have been able, in consultation with the Government of India, to consider these matters in the light of all the material then available, they will propose to invite representatives of different parties and interests in British India and representatives of the Indian States to meet them, separately or together, as circumstances may demand, for the purpose of conference and discussion in regard both to the British Indian and All-Indian problems.<sup>16</sup>

The Princes were quick to take the hint. They started formulating and advancing their demands. Shortly after the Irwin declaration, on 2 November the Maharaja of Bikaner made a statement asking for "a just recognition of the correct position of the States and adequate guarantees and safeguards for the preservation and maintenance of the Princes' honourable position as 'perpetual allies and friends' and for their rights and privileges as such in any new policy devised for the governance of the country". The States, he said, could not be expected to agree to any proposals involving a violation of their treaties or infringement of their sovereign rights and internal autonomy and independence.



The Maharaja dismissed any idea of constitutional talks with Indian political parties in the absence of the British. He made it clear that the States stood solidly for the British connection.<sup>17</sup>

Gandhiji, answering a question, wrote in *Navajivan* of 8 December 1929:

I myself have scented some diplomacy in the bringing of the Indian States to the forefront at this juncture. The Empire has earlier used them as pawns in their game. It seems that these pawns have been used again this time. The Princes are dependent on the Empire for their very existence. Hence they have no alternative but to dance to the tune of the Empire.... We should realize their dependence, regard them as merely the limbs of the Empire and be on our guard.... I entertain no fears regarding the subjects of the Indian States.... I cannot visualize a form of swaraj in which the Swaraj Party would have bartered away the rights of the people of the Indian States.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of the year, therefore, the time by which, in terms of the Calcutta Congress resolution, Dominion Status should have been conceded to India, the British attitude on the question remained as negative as ever. Political prisoners continued to languish in prisons. To make matters worse the Princes were now sought to be made a party in any dialogue for constitutional reforms. The outlook was grim. It was obvious that the British Government had no intention of parting with power and India would have to wrest it from them if she had the strength. It was in this setting that the Congress met at Lahore under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru.

The forty-fourth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Lahore from 29 December 1929 to 1 January 1930. It was a momentous event in the history





of the Congress. It changed the temper and the tone of the organization. It brought to an end the confusion of objectives that had marked its deliberations in the immediately preceding period and brought together the constructive and the parliamentary wings on one common platform of mass organization and mass action under the unchallenged leadership of Gandhiji.

The venue of the Congress, Lajpat Nagar, was named after the departed Lion of the Punjab. It was in the outskirts of the city on the banks of the river Ravi. There were only tents for lodging the delegates and visitors, many of whom had arrived in Lahore many days before the Congress. Gandhiji himself had reached Lahore with his party on 24 December.

It was a particularly chilly winter and everyone shivered. During the meetings of the Working Committee, Pattabhi Sitaramayya records, the members had to warm their hands and feet every now and then.<sup>19</sup>

This writer, then a young school girl, had occasion to pay a visit to the Congress camp with her brother Pyarelal, who was in Gandhiji's party, and can still vividly remember the severity of the cold. Everything became frozen at night, - even the juice inside the oranges turned crystalline. It was interesting and amusing to see Mira behn warming the oranges to melt the crystals by holding them close to a charcoal burner.

But cold or no cold, the turn-out of delegates and visitors to the Congress was large. No less than 3,000 persons had assembled for the Congress. On 29 December, the opening day of the session President-elect Jawaharlal Nehru, then 40 years old, rode through the town on a white steed escorted by a detachment of the Youth League volunteers and followed by elephants. Huge throngs lining the streets acclaimed him with great enthusiasm.



The A.I.C.C. began its fourth and last meeting of the year on 27 December. It considered (1) the General Secretaries' 'Annual Report for 1929, (2) the Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee's Report, (3) The Anti-Untouchability Committee's Report, (4) The Prohibition Committee's Report, and (5) The All-India Spinners' Association's Report.

The General Secretaries' Report took note of the intensification of repression in the country and arrests, trials and convictions of Congressmen and labour leaders.

After referring to the work of the various committees, the General Secretaries' Report dealt with the Congress organization. It drew attention to the decision taken at the A.I.C.C. meeting held in Bombay in May that in view of the repression unleashed by the British Government the Provincial Committees should enroll at least one quarter per cent of the population as members of the Congress. This meant that in a population of

400 there should be at least one member of the Congress. Quotas were accordingly fixed for different provinces. Except in the case of a few provinces the achievement had fallen short of the target. Out of the recruitment target of 5,86,105 members fixed for the 21 Congress provinces, 5,10,276 could be recruited. In Assam, Kerala, Sind, Berar and N.W.F.P. virtually no organized work existed. Many provinces had not even sent their annual report. Among them were Assam, Ajmer, Berar, Burma, C.P. (Hindustani), C.P. (Marathi), Delhi, Sind and Utkal.

Provincial Committees had also fallen behind in paying their contributions to the A.I.C.C. as required under Article IX of the Congress constitution. The amounts to be paid were left to the provinces, but very small amounts had come.



Internal squabbles in the various Congress committees, confessed the General Secretaries' Report, had absorbed much time and energy during the year. These matters came up as election disputes. For instance, after the supersession of the Ajmer P.C.C. fresh elections were held in October, in which "false personation" and corrupt practices were used, with the result that the Working Committee had to set aside the election. Then there was the election dispute in which the Bengal P.C.C. and some of its district committees were involved. The matter still remained to be settled.<sup>20</sup> The Congress thus, it would appear, was hardly in a shape to serve as a vehicle for the great struggle that lay ahead.

## 8

On the constructive front, however, things were looking up.

The Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee, with Jairamdas Doulatram functioning as its secretary, had registered notable success. Associated with the Committee were not only important political leaders such as Motilal Nehru, Dr. Ansari, Jawaharlal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Maulana Azad, but also some of Gandhiji's closest co-workers in the field of constructive work, such as Jamnalal Bajaj, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajaji and Satis Chandra Das Gupta.

Jairamdas Doulatram and Jamnalal Bajaj toured extensively in Sind, Punjab and the Frontier Province. During the Sind tour they were also joined by Madan Mohan Malaviya. Jamnalal Bajaj afterwards also visited Ferozepur and Delhi. His tour produced a very good effect on the people and the workers. He was a friend of the workers and he attended to their problems everywhere, be they personal or related to their works.

Gangadharrao Deshpande and Jairamdas toured in Karnataka, where they covered nine towns. The programme everywhere consisted of public meetings, meetings of cloth merchants and talks with Congress workers.



While much good work was thus done by those engaged in constructive work, the Congress Committees as such did not distinguish themselves in constructive work either. Only about 27 per cent of the District Congress Committees addressed by the A.I.C.C. had sent any reports.

The Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee tried to persuade municipalities and other local bodies to exempt khadi from tax, to increase tax on foreign cloth and purchase only khadi for their use. About 50 municipalities in U.P., C.P., Berar, Bengal, Sind, Maharashtra and Karnataka took one or more of the desired steps.

As a result of the boycott propaganda the consumption of foreign cloth all over the country fell sharply. Its success was also reflected in the increased sale of khadi. According to the figures provided by the All-India Spinners' Association there was a marked upswing in the sale of khadi. Thus for the period October 1928 to September 1929 the sale was of the order of Rs. 49,84,170 as compared to Rs. 33,08,634 for the period October 1927 to September 1928, the percentage of increase thus being 50.6. The production figures of khadi also registered an increase. From Rs. 24 lakhs in all the preceding years from 1925 onwards it went up to Rs. 32 lakhs in the year 1929, an increase of 33 per cent in one year on the performance of the previous five years.<sup>21</sup>

The Anti-Untouchability Sub-Committee, formed by the Congress Working Committee on 29 March 1929 in Delhi, with Madan Mohan Malaviya and Jamnalal Bajaj as its members, also had done impressive work. The immediate programme formulated by the Committee was to have temples thrown open to the untouchables and to teach them sanitary living. Through the efforts of the Committee 15 temples were thrown open to the untouchables, seven of them being in Jubbalpur and two each in Elichpur (Berar), Akola, Wai (District Satara),



Bombay, Tumsar (C.P.), Kinai and Satara. At least five other temples were opened through the efforts of other anti-untouchability organizations, chiefly the Asprishyata Nivarak Mandal of Poona, with which the Congress Sub-Committee cooperated.

But these results, impressive in themselves, did not go far enough. The feeling of grievance was giving rise to widespread resentment among the untouchables and they were not satisfied with the pace of reform. In Poona they started a satyagraha for the opening of the Parvati temple. The satyagrahis were supported by the Asprishyata Nivarak Mandal, but the Congress Sub-Committee, though it praised the non-violence of the satyagrahis, did not feel that resort to satyagraha was the right course.

How volatile the situation was growing among the untouchables was brought out by the Sub-Committee in its report. It said:

With the broadcasting of moderate ideas of freedom and self-assertion in the matter of birthrights and as a result of years of earnest efforts of the reforming sections among the Hindus, a sudden self-consciousness has swept over the depressed classes during recent years. To their leaders the existing disabilities are too galling to be tolerated for a moment longer and they are naturally impatient with the pace of reform which even their accredited sympathizers among caste Hindus would deem acceptable for the moment. They attacked the caste Hindu leaders and workers, questioned their bona fides and attributed all their efforts for the uplift of the untouchables to sheer jealousy of Mussalmans or Christians. In Bombay they openly talked of equality of status not only in all outdoor dealings but in the matter of inter- dining and inter-marriage. They endorsed the action of those who gave up Hindu religion and embraced



Islam as the most effective method of teaching a lesson to the Hindus. The 'satyagraha' which the Bombay untouchable leaders proposed to resort to was naturally different from the well-known methods of Mahatma Gandhi inasmuch as they did not make too much of fetish of non-violence. All these upset the Hindu population in Bombay and Poona almost entirely and an atmosphere of increasing goodwill that had prevailed was completely marred for the time being. Acute tension prevailed both in Bombay and Poona for weeks and the news and the controversies raging in the city proved equally disastrous to the atmosphere in the districts.<sup>22</sup>

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in his person and programme, represented this temper amongst the untouchables. Intransigence of attitude not only towards the Congress but Hindu society as a whole, was now being sedulously fostered and organized by a section of the depressed classes leadership represented by Ambedkar.

## 10

The Prohibition Committee had been set up on 4 March 1929 in accordance with the decision of the Working Committee. The Committee consisted of M. A. Ansari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari. Rajagopalachari was appointed Secretary of the Committee and authorized to act for the Committee in all matters.

Rajagopalachari was also Honorary Secretary of the Prohibition League of India and brought out a monthly, Prohibition, from the Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengodu. Enforcing total prohibition was a daunting proposition. Both moral and economic arguments were advanced by opponents of prohibition against the demand for closure of liquor shops.



The moral argument advanced was that there could be no such thing as non-violent prohibition, for prohibition implied force. Gandhiji answered that there really was no force used against the drink addict and if any force was used it was "not of the body but of the spirit, not of the brute but of love". But even if there were violence in introducing prohibition, Gandhiji would still support it. He wrote:

I hold drinking spirituous liquors in India to be more criminal than the petty thefts which I see starving men and women committing and for which they are prosecuted and punished. I do tolerate very willingly ... a moderate system of penal code. And so long as I do, I must advocate the summary punishment of those who manufacture the fiery liquid and those even who will persist in drinking it notwithstanding repeated warnings.<sup>23</sup>

Another argument advanced was that if you stopped people from drinking legally they would drink illegally. Rajagopalachari gave figures about Madras. The estimated drink bill in that province in 1928-29 was about 17 crores, of which a little over five crores went to the Government as revenue. But it was also noticed that as the drink bill went on increasing, the crimes against excise laws also increased. The Madras Government accordingly came to the following conclusion:

The continued increase of crime against Abkari laws ... must give pause to any immediate drastic action in the way of cutting off the supply of licit liquor lest the result should prove more serious to the general morality than are the present conditions.

Gandhiji declared that this argument was fallacious. It was like saying that because the crime of thieving was on the increase there should be a progressive relaxation of the laws against thieving. The true method was forthwith to declare



total prohibition without counting the cost. If there was to be no licensed thieving there must also be no licensed drinking.<sup>24</sup>

Rajagopalachari set to work to further the cause of prohibition with single-minded devotion. He sent circulars to Provincial Congress Committees asking for setting up of Provincial Sub-committees for prohibition. Accordingly, in several provinces including Andhra, Assam, C.P. (Hindustani), Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, U.P. and Bihar special secretaries were appointed to take up prohibition work. In Bihar, Rajendra Prasad himself took up responsibility for this work.

Rajagopalachari toured intensively in Tamil Nadu, especially concentrating his efforts in North Arcot, Chingleput and Salem. Several thousand handbills were printed and distributed and a Tamil monthly journal *Vimochanam* was also started.

Rajaji also had pledge forms printed and sent to the various PCCs for being printed in the provincial languages and given to workers for collecting signatures from people. In Tamil Nadu 261 books of pledge forms were distributed. Such pledge forms were also sent to members of the Central Assembly and Provincial Councils. The results were not very encouraging. Only 64 legislators responded.

Circulars were sent to municipal committees and local bodies and a dozen such bodies passed resolutions advocating total prohibition and calling upon the Government to prohibit all intoxicating drinks and drugs.

Trustees of temples were prevailed upon not to lease out palm trees on temple properties for manufacture of liquor. This was considered an important step as a large number of temple trees in South India were being used for toddy tapping.

The report concluded:





The public agitation in regard to total prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs has considerably increased in volume and intensity.

The campaign has drawn international notice and sympathy. The Press as well as politicians devote considerable attention to the subject far more than they ever did before. The Government also exhibits increasing anxiety to satisfy the public in this matter and appears to feel that Prohibition is coming.<sup>25</sup>

11

At the Lahore Congress the open session on 29 December was taken up with the speeches of Chairman of the Reception Committee, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew, and the President, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the passing of two condolence resolutions. As the session started in the evening at 5; there was no time left to take up any other business. The President then announced that the session would be resumed on 31 December, after the meeting of the A.I.C.C. to be held on 30 December.

Gandhiji, who had been severely critical of a good many Presidential addresses before - for instance the address of Mohammed Ali at the Cocanada Congress, which he had considered prolix - was full of praise for the address delivered by Jawaharlal Nehru. In the address, Gandhiji wrote, lofty thoughts were "couched in sweet and courteous "language", several topics had been dealt with thoroughly and yet the address was short. The splendour of the soul shone in every sentence. He went on:

As was the address, so was his deportment. During the Congress session he did all his work independently and impartially. And since he worked incessantly and strenuously everything was completed on time and without any hitch.



If under the presidentship of such a brave and righteous young man we can achieve nothing it will greatly surprise me.<sup>26</sup>

Nehru began his Presidential address by acknowledging that he had come to occupy the Presidential chair by chance more than by the design of Congressmen, who had wanted to choose another, "who towers above all others". But fate and Gandhiji had conspired to thrust him against his will and the will of Congressmen into that terrible seat of responsibility. He expressed his gratitude to the Congress for having reposed confidence in one who strangely lacked confidence himself.

Everywhere, Nehru proceeded, there was doubt and restlessness and the foundations of the state and society were in the process of transformation. Old established ideas of liberty, justice, property and even family were being attacked. The European domination was coming to an end. The future belonged to America and Asia.

Few things in history were more amazing than "the wonderful stability of social structure of India which withstood the impact of numerous alien influences and thousands of years of change and conflict". But India had failed in a vital matter: no solution had been found for the problem of equality. India built up her social structure on inequality with the result that millions of her people had been suppressed and had little opportunity for growth.

Dwelling upon the disunity and differences at the national level, the Congress President referred to the efforts made by the All-Parties Conference in the preceding year - efforts that had not met with much success. Many Muslim and Sikh leaders had strenuously opposed the solutions suggested and "passions have been roused over mathematical figures and percentages". Fear and distrust had to be overcome. After all, no majority could crush a determined minority and no



minority could be sufficiently protected by a little addition to its seats in a legislature.

Nehru appealed to Hindus to show a spirit of generosity. Generosity was not only good morals but was often good politics and sound expediency. For his part he would gladly ask Muslims and Sikhs to take what they wanted.

The time had come when the All-Parties Report, that is, the Nehru Report, had to be put aside and the Congress had to march forward to its goal. The year of grace for the British Government to accept the Nehru Report was over and the natural issue of the decision taken at the Calcutta Congress was to declare in favour of Independence and devise sanctions to achieve it.

Coming to the Viceregal declaration of 31 October, Nehru said the Viceroy meant well and his language was the language of peace. But there was no commitment or promise of performance in the declaration. Only with the greatest stretch of imagination could it be interpreted as a possible response to the Calcutta resolution.

Nehru was not sure whether they had done the right thing in signing the Delhi manifesto of November 2. The conditions for cooperation with the British Government remained unfulfilled. Could Congress cooperate with the British without any guarantees that real freedom would come to India?

If the Calcutta resolution held, the Congress now had one goal, the goal of Independence. Independence was not a happy word. It might mean exclusiveness and isolation. It might mean narrow nationalism. That could not be the Congress idea of Independence. Independence for the Congress meant complete freedom from British domination and British Imperialism.



There had been a great deal of controversy about Independence and Dominion Status. It was largely a quarrel about words. The real thing was the conquest of power, by whatever name it might be called. Dominion Status was not likely to give power to India. A test of such power would be the total withdrawal of the alien army of occupation and economic control.

Nehru frankly confessed that he was a socialist and a republican and no believer in kings and princes or in the order that produced kings of industry. He recognized, however, that the Indian National Congress, as it was constituted, could not adopt a fully socialistic programme. But it must be realized that the philosophy of socialism had permeated the entire structure of society the world over and the only point of dispute was the pace and the methods of advance towards the socialist goal.

Nehru identified three major problems: the minorities, the Indian States and labour and peasantry.

Indian States were of course curious relics of a bygone age. They were puppets of the British. So much so that one of the rulers had said that in case of war between India and England he would side with England and fight his mother country. Naturally they wanted and the British wanted that they alone should represent the States at any conference and not their subjects. But the States could not live apart from the rest of India. Only the subjects of the States must determine the future of the States, not the rulers. The Congress, which claimed self-determination, could not deny it to the subjects of the States.

So far as the peasants and workers were concerned they represented the biggest problem of all. In this connection Nehru referred to a resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. in Bombay on the necessity of social and economic change. Nehru condemned paternalism both in industry and agriculture and doling out of charity



by employer or landlord. In this connection, he said, the theory of trusteeship "which some advocate"- meaning of course Gandhiji -was equally barren. Only the nation could be the trustee, not an individual or a group.

In industry Nehru advocated the necessity of fixing a minimum wage as recommended by the Nehru Committee.

In agriculture any improvement could come only by a change in the land laws and the basis of the existing system of land tenure. While the Congress was not against the landlords, they must realize that large landed estates were a disappearing phenomenon all over the world. They must be divided up and worked by peasants

Coming to the Congress organization, Nehru expressed his distress at the mutual squabbles and strife among Congressmen, which he hoped would be overcome with the adoption of a strong programme. So far as the programme was concerned the choice before the Congress was limited by facts and circumstances. Article I of the constitution laid down that the methods employed to reach the goal, must be legitimate and peaceful. He hoped that would remain so. But the question was not a moral one but a practical one. If at any time the Congress were to conclude that methods of violence would rid India of slavery, then he had no doubt it would adopt them. For though violence was bad, slavery was worse.

Any great liberation movement must of necessity be peaceful except at times of organized revolt.

What should be the shape of the movement to come? It had to be decided in detail by the Working Committee or the A.I.C.C. The old programme was one of three boycotts --Councils, law courts and schools - leading up to refusal of service



in the army and non-payment of taxes. Nehru thought that at that particular stage boycott of law courts and schools would not be wise.

Nehru called for reiteration of the resolve to repudiate the liability to pay foreign debts first expressed at the Gaya Congress in 1922.

Nehru ended his speech with "Long live Revolution!"<sup>27</sup>

12

The first resolution to come up before the Congress when it reassembled on 31 December, related to the bomb incident involving the Viceroy's train. The resolution, drafted by Gandhiji, had a rough passage at the Subjects Committee earlier. The resolution read:

This Congress deplores the bomb outrage perpetrated on the Viceroy's train and reiterates its own conviction that such action is not only contrary to the creed of the Congress but results in harm being done to the national cause. It congratulates the Viceroy and Lady Irwin and their party including the poor servant on their fortunate and narrow escape.

Gandhiji called upon the Congress to pass the resolution unanimously. Each bomb outrage had cost India dear. The Congress was responsible not only for the actions of its members but for the actions of all Indians. The Congress wanted the military burden to be removed from India. A corollary of this demand was that India must hold the lives of Englishmen as a sacred trust. It was only a matter of courtesy to tender congratulations to the Viceroy on his escape.

Govindanand, Dr. Alam, H. O. Raja and Baba Gurdit Singh spoke against the resolution. The debate was heated and when voting started a show of hands could not determine the issue. Tellers were then employed to do the counting. The voting was 897 for the resolution and 816 against it. According to another report the voting was 935 for and 897 against. It was a very narrow margin.<sup>28</sup>



Michael Brecher quotes Edward Thompson as having said:

Let us be sure that Lord Irwin's sense of humour will value the knowledge that 897 of the Congress gentlemen think it a pity he was not blown to bits, while 935 think otherwise.<sup>29</sup>

Gandhiji then moved the main political resolution of the Congress as adopted by the Subjects Committee. This resolution, too, was drafted by Gandhiji. It ran:

The Congress endorses the action of the Working Committee in connection with the manifesto signed by party leaders, including Congressmen, on the Viceregal pronouncement of 31st October relating to Dominion Status and appreciates the efforts of the Viceroy towards the settlement of the national movement for Swaraj. The Congress, however, having considered all that has since happened, and the result of the meeting between Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and other leaders and the Viceroy, is of opinion that nothing is to be gained in the existing circumstances by the Congress being represented at the proposed Round Table Conference. This Congress therefore in pursuance of the resolution passed at its session at Calcutta last year declares that the word "Swaraj" in Article I of the Congress Constitution shall mean Complete Independence and further declares the entire scheme of the Nehru Committee's report to have lapsed and hopes that all Congressmen will henceforth devote their exclusive attention to the attainment of Complete Independence for India. As a preliminary step towards organizing a campaign for Independence and in order to make the Congress policy as consistent as possible with the change of creed, this Congress resolves upon complete boycott of the Central and Provincial Legislatures and Committees constituted by the Government and calls upon the Congressmen and others taking part in the



national movement to abstain from participating, directly or indirectly, in future elections, and directs the present Congress members of the Legislatures and Committees to resign their seats.

This Congress appeals to the nation zealously to prosecute the constructive programme of the Congress and authorizes the All-India Congress Committee, wherever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise under such safeguards as it may consider necessary.

When the debate on the resolution began, it became apparent that different sections of delegates had varying views on different parts of the resolution.

The first part of the resolution, as Gandhiji pointed out, expressed the approval of the Congress of the action of the Working Committee regarding the Delhi manifesto of 2 November and registered its appreciation of the Viceroy's efforts towards a settlement.

Dr. Alam, H. O. Raja and Abhyankar opposed any appreciative reference to the Viceroy, calling it slavery, a symptom of hypocrisy and cowardice. The voting was later to show that they spoke for a large section of the delegates.

In reply Gandhiji said that courage did not mean arrogance. A truly courageous person would not hesitate to pay a compliment even to his enemy. Granted the Viceroy, as representative of the British Empire, was an enemy, nevertheless whatever good efforts he had made should be appreciated.

Then there was the matter of the change of creed. Madan Mohan Malaviya moved an amendment that the change of creed should be postponed till after an All-Parties Conference in March or April. He said the British had shown a definite desire for settlement and the Congress should not be hasty. T. Prakasam wanted to postpone the matter till after the Round Table Conference.





As for the boycott of Central and Provincial Legislatures, the expression of views was along expected lines. Motilal Nehru, speaking on the resolution, confessed that Council -entry had been a mistake. It had diverted the attention of Congressmen from their real goal. The Councils and the various Committees set up by the Government had been designed to entrap Congressmen. They had failed to achieve the objective hoped for.

N. C. Kelkar described the boycott of Legislatures as an unwise move. He maintained that much good work had been accomplished through the Councils. Another delegate, Afzul Beg was surprised at Motilal's change of attitude towards the Councils.

Satyamurti opposed not only the boycott of the Councils but also the change of creed to Complete Independence. What was wrong with Dominion Status? Countries like Ireland, Egypt and South Africa fought for independence and in the end settled for Dominion Status.

At the other end of the spectrum was Subhas Bose, who did not like any part of the official resolution. He moved an amendment which sought to replace the whole of the Working Committee's resolution. In his amendment he advocated a ceaseless campaign for independence "with a view to establishing parallel Government in India" and starting of civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes. He also wanted general strikes, wherever and whenever possible. He further called for complete boycott not only of the Legislatures, but also of local bodies and law courts. "Let us be consistent," he pleaded. "Let us be for complete boycott or none at all. I am an extremist and my principle is: all or none."

Gandhiji, replying to the debate, said the resolution had to be taken as a whole. The Working Committee had fashioned it with great skill and if a part of it was



destroyed, the whole would be destroyed. It had to be accepted or rejected in toto.

Coming to the amendment of Subhas Bose Gandhiji asked the Congress to reject it. Dealing with Bose's proposition of a parallel Government, Gandhiji said:

If you think that you can have a parallel Government today, then let me tell you that the Congress flag does not at present fly even in one thousand villages. All honour to those who favour this amendment but it is not bravery, it is not prudence, it is not wisdom. You cannot establish freedom by the mere passing of a resolution. You will establish freedom not by words but by deeds.... Parallel Government means our own law courts, our own schools and colleges, etc. If you think you have the ability to do today all the things enumerated in Subhas Babu's resolution you should pass it and reject my proposition....

The Congress rejected all the fourteen amendments, including the one moved by Subhas Bose, without a count being demanded. The only division that took place was on Dr. Alam's amendment for deleting the reference to the Viceroy's efforts for settlement. This was defeated by a rather narrow margin of 664 against 763 votes. Gandhiji's resolution was then passed by the Congress with an overwhelming majority, with only about a dozen out of some 1500 delegates voting against it.

The result was announced by the Congress President barely one minute after the hour of midnight, when the period of the ultimatum given to the Government by the Calcutta Congress resolution expired.<sup>30</sup>

On the banks of the river Ravi the Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru and the volunteers danced with joyful hearts to celebrate the New Year with India's resolve to work for complete independence.



On January 1, 1930 the third and last day of the Congress session, the Congress took some important decisions.

One related to the annual sessions of the Congress. It had become a custom to hold these sessions at the end of December each year during the Christmas holidays. Though there were various advantages in this arrangement, there was also a great disadvantage and that was the winter cold. Accordingly, the resolution moved in this connection on behalf of the Working Committee read:

Inasmuch as the Congress is intended to be representative of the poor masses and inasmuch as the holding of the Congress at the end of December involves very considerable expense to the poor people in providing for extra clothing for themselves to attend the session and is otherwise inconvenient to them, the date of holding Congress sessions is hereby altered to some date in February or March to be fixed by the Working Committee in consultation with the provincial committee of the province concerned.

There was some opposition to the resolution on the ground that in February or March there would not be student volunteers available to help in the arrangements and also that there would be no railway concession available as at Christmas time. But there would be considerably less illness, Gandhiji as well as Nehru pointed out. There was the medical officer's report that no less than 1700 delegates and visitors to the Congress had fallen ill in the preceding four days because of the cold.

The resolution was carried.<sup>31</sup>

Then there was the resolution on national debt. This, too, was drafted by Gandhiji. It read:



This Congress is of opinion that financial burdens directly or indirectly imposed on India by the foreign administration are such as free India cannot bear and cannot be expected to bear. This Congress while reaffirming the resolution passed at the Gaya Congress in 1922, therefore, records its opinion for the information of all concerned that every obligation and concession to be inherited by independent India will be strictly subject to investigation by an independent tribunal, and every obligation, every concession, no matter how incurred or given, will be repudiated if it is not found by such tribunal to be just and justifiable.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

The Congress also passed a resolution on Indian States, appealing to the ruling Princes of India to grant responsible government to their people and to enact laws safeguarding elementary and fundamental rights of the people."

The resolution on communal settlement read:

In view of the lapse of the Nehru Report it is unnecessary to declare the policy of the Congress regarding communal questions, the Congress believing that in an independent India communal questions can only be solved on strictly national lines. But as the Sikhs in particular and Muslims and other minorities in general, had expressed dissatisfaction over the solution of communal questions proposed in the Nehru Report, this Congress assures the Sikhs, the Muslims and other minorities, that no solution thereof in any future constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned.<sup>32</sup>

After the Congress dispersed, the A.I.C.C. met on the same day, 1 January 1930, to elect a new Working Committee. Motilal Nehru, in consultation with Gandhiji, prepared a list, while Jamnalal Bajaj prepared another list. Both lists tallied



except for one name. The list of ten names was then accepted by the President for the constitution of the Working Committee. Subhas Bose challenged the procedure adopted and asked that the members of the Working Committee be elected. Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that it would not be wise to elect members from the group which had voted against the official resolution at the Congress. Subhas Bose and Srinivasa Iyengar thereupon withdrew from the A.I.C.C. and announced the formation of a Congress Democratic Party. They charged that the step taken by Gandhiji in moving the list of ten members en bloc and the President's action in not allowing any amendments to the names proposed contravened Article 24 of the Congress constitution.<sup>33</sup> Article 24 of the Congress constitution read: "The All-India Congress Committee shall, at its first meeting after the annual session of the Congress, elect ten members who shall, with the President, General Secretaries and Treasurer, be the Working Committee of the Congress and the executive authority responsible to the All-India Congress Committee in all matters.... "

## 14

The very first act of the new Working Committee, meeting at Lahore on 2 January 1930, was to fix 26 January, a Sunday, as Independence Day "in order to carry the message of Purna Swarajya-Complete Independence- to the remotest villages of India".

The Working Committee also appealed to "all the members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures" forthwith to resign their seats and devote their attention to the prosecution of the Independence programme in terms of the resolution passed by the Congress.

Gandhiji advised that the programme for the 26th of January should not include any processions. "We do not want the people to hold processions under licences,



nor do we want them to hold them without licences," he said. The only programme would be for a declaration of Complete Independence to be read at meetings in the various provincial languages.

The declaration, drafted by Gandhiji, was as follows

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to 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 right 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 hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country. We recognize, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will therefore prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We therefore hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions, issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj.<sup>34</sup>



A number of Muslim leaders felt concerned at the turn the national politics was taking. They did not like the Congress passing the Independence resolution and declared their intention to distance themselves from programmes and activities in furtherance of it. On 18 January the U.P. Muslim League and Muslim members of the Council issued a statement expressing their "fundamental disagreement with the resolution of Independence passed by the Indian National Congress". They declared that they would take no part in any action by the Congress "to effectuate its demands". On 25 January Mohammed Ali, Shaukat Ali and Nawab Ismail Khan in a statement urged Mussalmans not to participate in the Independence Day demonstrations. The Congress, they charged, had not made any effort to arrive at any settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question.

Sections of Muslims in fact did everything to counter the Congress activities. In Dacca on 26 January there was a communal riot when a National Flag procession organized by the local Congress Committee went past a mosque. Muslims congregated in the mosque protested that their prayer was being disturbed. There were arguments and counter-arguments leading to blows and worse. Rioters entered the mosque, tore the Koran and set fire to some articles. A printing house belonging to a Muslim was also burnt. The riot spread further in the city and was quelled by the armed police.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding opposition from communal Muslim leaders, however, the Independence Day programme was a great success. According to a statement issued by Jawaharlal Nehru:

Reports from all over the country show how magnificently the Independence Day has been celebrated by all classes.... Towns and villages vied with each other showing their enthusiastic adherence to Independence. In the great cities led by Calcutta and Bombay scores of



thousands met and took the great resolve and in the countryside thousands of villagers assembled at numerous village meetings. In Lahore the Congress spoke on behalf of the nation and proclaimed Independence as our immediate objective. On the Independence Day it was the nation itself that spoke, India herself with million voices taking the pledge of Independence and the resolve to sever the British connection which had ruined her in so many ways.<sup>36</sup>

In an article in *Young India* Gandhiji noted that the demonstrations of the 26th were an unmistakable proof that the Congress still remained the one body to rule the hearts of the masses.<sup>37</sup>

## 15

The Independence resolution passed at the Lahore Congress also required Congress legislators to withdraw themselves from the Assembly and the Councils and devote themselves to constructive activities. To this end the President issued an appeal on 2 January 1930 requesting Congressmen to resign from the legislative bodies and from Committees appointed by the Government.

On 3 January Motilal Nehru, leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly addressed letters to individual legislators to resign their seats.

There was some muted opposition to the move at least from a section of Congress legislators. On 18 January Madan Mohan Malaviya convened a meeting of the members of the Central Assembly and the Council of State representing various parties including the Congress. The meeting passed a resolution saying that the boycott of legislatures at that juncture was "calculated to cause a great injury to the national interests" and appealing to all members of the Central as well as the Provincial Legislatures not elected on the Congress ticket not to resign





their seats. It made a special appeal to members elected on the Congress ticket not to resign their seats "till the end of the ensuing session".

Nevertheless, by the end of February some 172 Congress legislators had resigned from the Assembly and the Provincial Councils in obedience to the Congress call. Twenty-one resignations came from the Central Assembly and nine from the Council of State. From among the members of the Provincial Councils 34 were from Bengal, 31 from Bihar and Orissa, 20 from C.P., 20 from Madras, 16 from U.P., 12 from Assam, 6 from Bombay, 2 from Punjab and 1 from Burma.<sup>38</sup>

It was suggested to Vithalbhai Patel that as a Congressman he, too, should obey the Lahore Congress resolution and resign his office as President of the Central Assembly. He declined to do so. He pointed out that, first of all, he had not been elected on the Congress ticket. He had contested as an independent and was returned unopposed. Secondly, as President of the Assembly, he had been conducting himself strictly as a non-party man and was not bound to act on the mandate of any political party in or outside the House, though he was equally emphatic that a situation might arise when in the larger interests of the country the President of the Assembly might feel called upon to tender his resignation with a view to returning to a position of greater freedom. The Viceregal announcement, he felt, represented a genuine and honest attempt. Considering all things, Vithalbhai Patel said in his statement he had decided "to continue to serve the House and the country as best as I can from this Chair for the present".<sup>39</sup>

But a situation arose before long when he could not remain a silent spectator of brutal attacks on Satyagrahis and had to resign.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DIE IS CAST

1

The Viceroy's declaration of 31 October 1929, it appeared, had been taken at its face value by most sections of political opinion except the Congress. The non-Congress political groups seemed to feel that Dominion Status was almost knocking at the door and that all that remained to be done was for each sectional or communal interest to present its own special case at the Round Table Conference.

The National Liberal Federation, represented by such leaders as Srinivasa Sastri, Chimanlal Setalvad, Tej Bahadur Sapru, C. Y. Chintamani, Annie Besant, Sivaswami Iyer, Sankaran Nair and C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, had its annual session at Madras on 29, 30 and 31 December 1929. The Federation issued a statement expressing its firm belief that "the only rallying cry which can unite Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, the Europeans, the propertied classes and the labouring and depressed classes, can be Dominion Status for India, not as a distant goal or ideal but as an object capable of achievement within the shortest possible limit of time". The statement also expressed the hope that the "mutual relations of British India and Indian States can also be satisfactorily defined and provision made for their future regulation consistently ... with the autonomy of the Indian States".

The Liberals' statement came down heavily on the Congress and the policy it had been pursuing since the Madras session in 1927. It said:

Those of us who believe in the peaceful evolution of India cannot but deplore that any section of the people of this country should raise the cry



of Independence and involve our future in turmoil and confusion.... We realize that the task of those who believe in Dominion Status ... has become more difficult by reason of the attitude adopted by one leading political organization in India.

In the resolution on Indian States, the Liberals were anxious to underscore their commitment to the retention of the Princely order. The resolution recognized that "in any future constitution of India based upon Dominion Status, suitable guarantees should be provided to the Princes for continuance of their rights and their obligations regarding the internal autonomy of Indian States".<sup>1</sup>

Muslims on their part were now even more persistent in asserting their special claims. The Executive Board of the All-India Muslim Conference, at its meeting at Lahore on 30 and 31 December 1929 passed a resolution placing on record its emphatic condemnation of the system of electorates and the scheme of representation in the Central and Provincial Legislatures, as proposed by the Indian Central Committee. The Indian Central Committee had been set up as an auxiliary of the Simon Commission under the presidentship of Sir Sankaran Nair. In its report, which had been published on 23 December 1929, the Committee had recommended abolition of separate electorates for Muslims.

The All-India Muslim League led by Jinnah, at its meeting in Delhi on 9 February 1939, took up the same position with regard. to communal electorates and condemned the report of the Indian Central Committee as being detrimental to the interests of Mussalmans.<sup>2</sup>

Similar voices were being raised on behalf of the Depressed Classes, whose uplift and betterment had been an important plank in the Congress programme. At the Madras Depressed Classes Conference, held on 12 March 1930, demand was made for the grant of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. Depressed



Classes' leaders such as R. Srinivasan and E. Kannan, argued that joint electorates formed a cunning system through which the Depressed Classes could never hope to have any of their representatives returned in an election. The Conference asked the British Government to ensure that in the event of Dominion Status being granted to India their interests were adequately safeguarded.

The Conference condemned the passing of the Independence resolution by the Congress and called upon people to stand by the Government in resisting the civil disobedience movement.<sup>3</sup>

The British were succeeding in their policy of divide and rule beyond their own expectations.

The zemindars were not to be left behind. They ranged themselves solidly with the British rulers and against the Congress. The U.P. Zemindars' Conference at its meeting on 6 February 1930 condemned the spirit of communism and revolution that was creeping into the country and strongly criticized the adoption of the Independence resolution by the Congress. Another conclave of the U.P. zemindars on 9 March 1930 expressed similar views. A demand was also raised that the U.P. zemindars be given separate representation at the proposed Round Table Conference.<sup>4</sup>

2

On 25 January 1930, Lord Irwin, speaking in the Central Assembly, explained the aim of British policy. He said his statement of 31 October stood as he had made it. The intention of that statement had been to focus attention on three salient points, which the Viceroy elucidated as follows:

Firstly, while saying that, obviously, no British Government could prejudge the policy which it would recommend to Parliament after the Report of the



Statutory Commission had been considered, it restated in unequivocal terms the goal to which British policy in regard to India was directed. Secondly, it emphasized Sir John Simon's assertion that the facts of the situation compel us to make a constructive attempt to face the problem of Indian States with due regard to the treaties which regulated their relations with the British Crown, and lastly it intimated the intention of His Majesty's Government to convene a conference on these matters before they themselves prejudged them by the formulation of even draft conclusions.

The Viceroy went on:

I have never sought to delude Indian opinion into the belief that a definition of the purpose, however plainly stated, would of itself by the enunciation of a phrase provide a solution for problems which have to be solved before the purpose is fully realized. The assertion of a goal, however precise its terms, is of necessity a different thing from the goal's attainment.

On the scope of the Round Table Conference the Viceroy said:

The Conference ... is not indeed the conference that those who have demanded and claimed that its duty should be to proceed by way of majority vote to the fashioning of an Indian constitution which should thereafter be accepted unchanged by Parliament. It is evident that any such procedure would be impracticable. But though the Conference cannot assume the duty that appertains to His Majesty's Government, it will be convened for the purpose ... of elucidating and harmonizing opinion and so affording guidance to His Majesty's Government.



The Viceroy held out a warning against "resort to unconstitutional and unlawful methods of civil disobedience" with reckless disregard of the consequences.<sup>5</sup>

Commenting on the Viceroy's utterance, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* of 30 January:

The Viceroy would not mind waiting for the grant of Dominion Status till every millionaire was reduced to the level of a wage-earner getting seven pice per day.

The Viceroy's speech has cleared another thing. We now know why Sir John Simon has made the discovery that the question of Indian Princes should be made an integral part of his precious inquiry. A pure creation of the British Government, unlike those in British India, bereft even of speech, they are to be pawns in the game of exploitation to be played at the Conference.

Gandhiji was however still willing to reconsider the matter of civil disobedience and suggested that if the British Government would concede the following demands there would be no talk of civil disobedience and the Congress would heartily participate in the Round Table Conference:

1. Total prohibition,
2. Reduction of the rupee ratio to 1s. 4d,
3. Reduction of the land revenue to at least 50% and making it subject to legislative control,
4. Abolition of the salt tax,
5. Reduction of the military expenditure to at least 50% to begin with,
6. Reduction of the salaries of the higher grade service to one-half or less so as to suit the reduced revenue,



7. Protective tariff on foreign cloth,
8. The passage of the Coastal Traffic Reservation Bill,
9. Discharge of all political prisoners save those condemned for murder or the attempt thereof by the ordinary judicial tribunal, withdrawal of all political prosecutions, abrogation of Section 124A, the Regulation of 1818 and the like, and permission to all the Indian exiles to return,
10. Abolition of C.I.D, or its popular control,
11. Issue of licences to use firearms for self-defence subject to popular control.<sup>6</sup>

Gandhiji's eleven points caused some confusion among Congressmen. A short while later Jawaharlal Nehru wrote:

What was the point of making a list of some political and social reforms - good in themselves, no doubt - when we were talking in terms of Independence? Did Gandhiji mean the same thing when he used the term as we did, or did we speak a different language ?<sup>7</sup>

Gandhiji wrote to him:

I never thought you would miss the importance of the 11 points.... I hope to satisfy you that our case has been strengthened not weakened by the 11 points.<sup>8</sup>

The Lahore Congress resolution on the repudiation of foreign debts also became a cause of much heart-burning in India and abroad. The resolution was of course only a reiteration of a decision taken at the Gaya Congress in 1922 at which Gandhiji had not even been present.



What was the nature and extent of these foreign debts? Speaking at the third Annual Meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce on 14 February 1930, with Lord Irwin present at the gathering, G. D. Birla said:

The Associated Chambers of Commerce in their evidence before the Simon Commission have assumed 1,000 million sterling as the total of British investment in India.... A good portion of it is no doubt the ordinary business investment.... An equally good portion is invested in private loans, debentures, preference shares, etc. carrying a fixed interest; and for the payment of debt represented by such investment, the country is directly responsible or, to make it clearer, the payment has to be made out of the national wealth. Calculated at 6% the annual rate of interest ... comes to about 60 million sterling or about 80 crores of rupees.

There are other foreign liabilities, popularly known as Home Charges, to meet which there is an annual remittance to the Secretary of State of about 40 crores.

There are yet other payments against services such as transport, insurance, professional work, etc., which increases our liability to a much larger figure.

Birla then drew the attention of the meeting to the pace at which borrowings were multiplying. Citing figures, he pointed out that in 1900-01 Government's total foreign borrowing amounted to about 200 crores. In 1929 it stood at 470 crores. While the total British investments in India before 1910 had been about 365 million sterling, in 1929 it had risen to about 1,000 million sterling.

All this came about, Birla said, despite the fact that India generally had a favourable balance of trade with exports always in excess of the imports.<sup>9</sup>





Birla's speech provided enough justification for the Gaya resolution of the Congress regarding foreign debts.

The Government, however, did not take kindly the intention expressed in the Congress resolution that free India would examine all such liabilities and repudiate those not incurred in the country's interest. In his statement of 25 January, Irwin declared:

I am confident that the great preponderance of Indian opinion, which is both loyal and sane, will, when it understands its implications, condemn a programme which could only be accomplished through the subversion of the Government by law established and which would strike a fatal blow at India's economic life.<sup>10</sup>

Capitalist circles in India were equally worried. Purushottamdas Thakurdas wrote to Gandhiji:

The repudiation of debts as approved by the Indian National Congress ... has had considerable effect on the securities market both in England and in India as you are perhaps already aware. In the course of this week there has been published a letter addressed by the India Office to an investor in London, and I mention this to show what anxiety this resolution of the Congress has created in the minds of investors in London.... My principal motive in addressing this letter to you is to draw your attention to the serious depreciation of Indian sterling securities in London since December last.

Gandhiji remained unmoved. Answering on 2 February he wrote:

My own impression is that the depreciation is largely manipulated and the letter from the India Office is intended to frighten us.... I hope you are not among those who believe that by a mere change of the constitution the



starving ryots will find themselves in a position to pay a larger revenue than they are paying now. In my opinion the only meaning of swaraj to these people will be an appreciable reduction in the taxes that they are paying directly and indirectly and fixity of tenure. This cannot happen until we, who are partners with the British administrators in the game of exploitation of the masses are prepared to change the angle of our vision.<sup>11</sup>

In an article in *Young India* of 6 February, Gandhiji further dwelt on the theme:

It is not difficult to understand the resentment felt in England ... over the idea of repudiating debts in any circumstance whatsoever. Yet that is precisely what every ward, when he comes of age, has the right to do. If he finds the trustee having buttered his own bread at the ward's expense, he makes the trustee pay for his malpractices....

The greatest obstacle in the path of non-violence is the presence in our midst of the indigenous interests that have sprung up from British rule, the interests of monied men, speculators, scrip holders, land- holders, factory owners and the like. All these do not always realize that they are living on the blood of the masses, and when they do, they become as callous as the British principals whose tools and agents they are.<sup>12</sup>

4

Would Gandhiji launch the mass civil disobedience movement as authorized by the Lahore Congress? If so, when and in what form? The Congress waited. The country waited. There was some impatience in the ranks...But as week followed week Gandhiji was still cogitating. He refused to be hustled.

The leadership was not however altogether of one mind. Some thought that the conditions were not favourable for a successful campaign of civil disobedience.



Dr. Ansari, for instance, expressed his misgivings to Gandhiji in a letter dated 13 February. He said:

You are taking a great responsibility on yourself by declaring war against the Government today. The situation today is quite the reverse of what it was in 1920 when you started the campaign of non-cooperation.

He then proceeded to compare the situation in 1920 with that prevailing in 1930 in the following terms:

1920	1930
1 Great dissatisfaction against the Government owing to war- time promises not having been kept. Dissatisfaction against Rowlatt Act, Martial Law and Khilafat wrongs.	1 Large number of people believe in the goodwill of the Labour Government and sincerity of the Viceroy rightly or wrongly.
2 Highest water-mark reached in Hindu-Muslim unity.	2 Lowest water-mark reached in Hindu-Muslim unity.
3 Sikhs entirely with the Congress.	3 Sikhs almost entirely against the Congress.
4 Complete unity inside the Congress. Great enthusiasm amongst the workers and rank and file.	4 Disunity in the Congress (revolt against its mandate), diversity of purpose, complete lack of enthusiasm amongst the workers. Lukewarmness amongst the rank and file.



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>5 Complete non-violent atmosphere and yet breaking out of violence at Chauri Chaura.</p> | <p>5 Obvious existence of violence, even large number of leading Congressmen believing in it and the certainty of violence breaking out.</p> |
|---|--|

Ansari suggested that the Congress should concentrate on enrolment of members and volunteers, collection of funds and on the achievement of Hindu-Muslim unity and postpone the launching of civil disobedience movement.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Ansari was not alone in the apprehensions he voiced. The feeling was widespread that Lord Irwin meant well and ought to be given a chance. Purushottamdas Thakurdas also wrote to Gandhiji in similar terms. "I do not believe," he wrote, "that India will benefit either now or within a few decades by revolution as much as by a process of evolution .... I can understand your impatience. But to resort to civil disobedience during the brief intervening period does strike me as being a hasty step."<sup>14</sup>

But this sort of sage advice from critics was not likely to dissuade Gandhiji from his view that the Congress, in deciding to keep away from the Round Table Conference and in taking a stand on full Independence, including the right to secede from the British Empire, had taken the right decision. He had emphatically stated his view earlier:

The British people must realize that the Empire must come to an end. This they will not realize unless we in India have generated power within to enforce our will. The English have paid dearly for their freedom such as it is. They therefore only respect those who are prepared to pay an adequate price for their own liberty. The real conference therefore has to be among ourselves.



Instead therefore of looking at the Independence movement with hostility, the critics should bless it even when they cannot identify themselves with it.<sup>15</sup>

As regards the fear of violence breaking out in the course of the proposed mass civil disobedience, Gandhiji said that he knew definitely many had stayed their violent designs in 1921 because in 1921 the Congress had decided to offer civil disobedience. That school had been more active than before because of his repeated declarations that the country was not prepared for civil disobedience. He wrote: "I see now as clearly as daylight that my non-violence ... will shake the counter-violence of the patriot if taking courage in both my hands I set my non-violence actively in motion, i.e., civil disobedience."<sup>16</sup>

In a speech at the Gujarat Vidyapeeth on 11 January Gandhiji further clarified his position. He said that though he was a votary of non-violence, if he was given a choice between being a helpless witness to chaos and perpetual slavery, he should unhesitatingly say that he would far rather be witness to chaos in India. He would far rather be witness to Hindus and Mussalmans doing one another to death than that he should daily witness India's gilded slavery.

Should violence and incendiarism break out, Gandhiji called upon the students not to hide themselves in their houses but to rush into the conflagration to extinguish it.

"I do not know what form civil disobedience is to take," he informed the students, ' but I am desperately in search of an effective formula."<sup>17</sup>

The Congress Working Committee met at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad on 14, 15 and 16 February The meeting was attended by Jawaharlal Nehru (President),



Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jamnalal Bajaj, Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Dr. Satyapal, Jairamdas Doulatram, Syed Mahmud and Sri Prakasa. The Committee passed the following resolution on civil disobedience:

In the opinion of the Working Committee civil disobedience should be initiated and controlled by those who believe in non-violence for the purpose of achieving Purna Swaraj as an article of faith, and as the Congress contains in its organization not merely such men and women but also those who accept non-violence as a policy essential in the existing circumstances in the country, the Working Committee welcomes the proposal of Mahatma Gandhi and authorizes him and those working with him who believe in non-violence as an article of faith to the extent above indicated, to start civil disobedience as and when they desire and in the manner and to the extent they desire. The Working Committee trusts that when the campaign is actually in action all Congressmen and others will extend to the civil resistance their full cooperation in every way possible and that they will observe and preserve complete non-violence notwithstanding any provocation that may be offered. The Working Committee further hopes that in the event of a mass movement taking place all those who are rendering voluntary cooperation to the Government, such as lawyers; and those who are receiving so-called benefits from it, such as students, will withdraw their cooperation or renounce benefits as the case may be and throw themselves into the final struggle for freedom...<sup>18</sup>

This meant that the Congress as an organization would not be responsible for planning, initiating or conducting the movement, but would join it after Gandhiji



and those working with him "who believed in non-violence as an article of faith" had inaugurated it.

Speaking at the prayer meeting on 15 February Gandhiji told the Ashram inmates that people expected them to join in the fight with great preparedness on their part. The whole world was watching the Ashram with great expectancy.... They must now convert the Ashram into a lamp of sacrifice. Those who felt they were weak or were unable to join in fight must quit the Ashram.<sup>19</sup> In *Young India* of 20 February he wrote:

This resolution of the Working Committee gives me my charter of freedom.... My difficulty was fundamental. I saw that I could not work out ahimsa through an organization holding a variety of mentalities. It [ahimsa] could not be subject to the decision of majorities.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly afterwards Gandhiji published in *Young India* guidelines for the prospective satyagrahi, as an individual, as a prisoner, as a member of a unit and in a communal riot. As an individual a satyagrahi must harbour no anger while suffering the anger of his opponent; he must put up with assaults without retaliating and refuse to submit out of fear to any order given in anger; he must voluntarily submit to arrest or confiscation of property, except that if he happened to be trustee of someone else's property he must refuse to surrender it even though he should lose his life in doing so; he must never swear or curse and never insult his opponent; he must not salute the Union Jack.

As a prisoner he must be courteous towards the jail officials and observe prison discipline where it was not contrary to self-respect; he must not make any distinction between himself and an ordinary prisoner; he must not fast to secure conveniences deprivation of which did not involve any injury to self-respect.



As a member of a unit a civil resister must joyfully obey orders issued by the leader, even if they should appear to him insulting or foolish; having voluntarily joined a unit he must obey its discipline; he must not expect maintenance being provided for his dependents, who must be left to the care of God.

In communal riots, a civil resister must not take sides and must assist only that party which was demonstrably in the right; if he be a Hindu he must be generous towards Mussalmans and protect them even at the cost of his life and if an attack should come from the other side, he must not participate in any retaliation; he must be careful not to take part in any processions likely to wound religious susceptibilities.<sup>21</sup>

Thus in the latter half of February, and especially after the Congress Working Committee's resolution, civil disobedience came to occupy the mind of political India not only as something inevitable but as something imminent, even though Gandhiji was yet to decide the how and when of it.

Gandhiji, as well as 'the leadership of the Congress also began to entertain the likelihood of Gandhiji and the rest of the leadership of the civil disobedience movement being arrested right away to prevent the movement from developing. Gandhiji dealt with the eventuality in *Young India* of 27 February. He wrote that it could be taken for granted that, when civil disobedience was started, his arrest was a certainty...It was therefore necessary to consider what should be done when the event took place. On the eve of his arrest in 1922 he had warned co-workers against any demonstrations save that of mute and complete non-violence, and had instructed that constructive work should be prosecuted with the utmost zeal. The first part of the instructions was, thanks be to God, literally and completely carried out-so completely that it had enabled an English noble contemptuously to say, 'Not a dog barked'. This time, he said, on his arrest there





was to be no mute passive non-violence, but non-violence of the activist type should be set in motion, so that not a single believer in non-violence as an article of faith for the purpose of achieving India's goal should find himself free.... It would be the duty of everyone to take up such civil disobedience or civil resistance as may be advised and conducted by his successor, or as might be taken up by the Congress.

Gandhiji also made it known as to who would form the vanguard of the movement. The Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati was to play the role that Phoenix Settlement had done in the final phase of Satyagraha in South Africa. It might be recalled that seventeen inmates of Phoenix had started that Satyagraha under the leadership of Kasturba. This time Gandhiji was to be the leader of the first batch of Satyagrahis. He wrote:

So far as I am concerned, my intention is to start the movement only through the inmates of the Ashram and those who have submitted to its discipline and assimilated the spirit of its methods. Those therefore who will offer battle at the very commencement will be unknown to fame....

When the beginning is well and truly made I expect the response from all over the country. It will be the duty then of everyone who wants to make the movement a success to keep it non-violent and under discipline.... Whilst therefore every effort imaginable and possible should be made to restrain the forces of violence civil disobedience once begun this time cannot be stopped and must not be stopped so long as there is a single civil resister left free or alive.<sup>22</sup>

Vallabhbhai Patel went round in the villages of Gujarat explaining to the peasantry the meaning of Gandhiji's phrase "non-violence of the activist type", which must be brought into play if Gandhiji was arrested. The peasants must



show their protest not through rioting, not through removing fishplates from railway tracks, and not through attacking police personnel. On Gandhiji's arrest peasants must take the following measures:

1. All Patels and Talatis must resign from their posts.
2. Parents of young men in Government jobs must recall their sons from those jobs.
3. Everyone must adopt the policy of total non-cooperation with officials even to the extent of social boycott of them.
4. Even if peasants had to go to courts, they must under no circumstances seek the help of lawyers.
5. They must not allow a single liquor shop to function in the villages.
6. They must burn foreign cloth and take to wearing khadi.
7. Lastly, those who had the requisite strength should withhold the payment of land revenue.<sup>23</sup>

By the end of February, the form that the civil disobedience movement was likely to take was also emerging. In an article in Young India of 27 February Gandhiji referred to reports appearing in the Press suggesting that he might be contemplating some method of defying the salt laws. He did not deny the truth of the "garbled report", but said the salt law had been so designed that the tax was not amenable to easy non-payment. He described the salt tax as the most inhuman poll tax that human ingenuity could devise. While according to Government publications the wholesale price of salt was only 10 pies per maund the tax on it was 20 annas, or 240 pies, which worked out at 2400 per cent tax on sale price of salt.<sup>24</sup>



On 2 March 1930, a full two months after the Congress passed the Independence resolution and authorized Gandhiji to start civil disobedience, Gandhiji despatched a communication to Lord Irwin which gave intimation to the Viceroy of Gandhiji's intention to start civil disobedience. The letter was carried by a young Englishman, Reginald Reynolds, and was delivered to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy on the morning of 4 March. Reynolds from then on came to be called Angad, after the monkey messenger sent by Rama to Ravana.

Gandhiji in the letter described British rule as a curse in so far as it had "impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military- and civil administration" which the country could ill afford. The administration, Gandhiji said, was demonstrably the most expensive in the world. He wrote:

Take your own salary. It is over Rs. 21,000 per month, besides many other indirect additions. The British Prime Minister gets £ 5,000 per year, i.e., over Rs. 5,400 per month at the present rate of exchange. You are getting over Rs. 700 per day against India's average income of less than annas 2 per day. The Prime Minister gets Rs. 180 per day against Great Britain's average income of nearly Rs. 2 per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income. I know that you do not need the salary you get.... But a system that provides for such an arrangement deserves to be summarily scrapped.

Land revenue, Gandhiji wrote, needed to undergo considerable modification, the salt tax had to be abolished as also the revenue derived from drinks and drugs. But this would be possible only when the burden of the top heavy administration was reduced. That was impossible to bring about without Independence. That



explained the enthusiasm shown by the villagers on 26 January celebrated as Independence Day.

Referring to the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji said that he had hugged the hope that it might offer a solution, but the Viceroy had plainly said that he could give no assurance that either he or the British Government would support a scheme of full Dominion Status. That left open to Indians only the resort to non-violence to press their claim of self- government.

And the conviction is growing deeper and deeper in me that nothing but unadulterated non-violence can check the organized violence of the British Government.... Having an unquestioning and immovable faith in the efficacy of non-violence as I know it, it would be sinful on my part to wait any longer.

This non-violence will be expressed through civil disobedience for the moment confined to the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement with its obvious limitations....

. . . I respectfully invite you then to pave the way for immediate removal of these evils and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship.... But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the 11th day of this month, I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the Independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land the beginning will be made with this evil.



In the end Gandhiji informed the Viceroy that if on the receipt of the letter the Viceroy would like to discuss matters with him, he would be willing to postpone publication of the letter.

In his reply the Viceroy only regretted that Gandhiji should be “contemplating a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace.”<sup>25</sup>

The die was now cast and the way was clear for Gandhiji to start the civil disobedience movement that was to shake the foundations of the Empire.

7

Gandhiji consulted Vallabhbhai Patel as to the best place on Gujarat's coastline to break the salt law and the best route leading to it. Vallabhbhai in turn referred the matter to Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Vyas, the two stalwarts of the Bardoli Satyagraha. They suggested Dandi, in Jalalpur Taluka of Surat district. It would be a 241 miles' trek from Sabarmati Ashram, touching en route scores of villages in Kheda, Broach and Surat districts.<sup>26</sup>

On 6 March Gandhiji announced in letters to Jawaharlal Nehru and others that he intended to set out on his march to the seashore early in the morning on 12 March with sixty companions.<sup>27</sup>

On 7 March Vallabhbhai Patel was arrested for defying prohibitory orders served on him against speaking at public meetings in Kheda district. The arrest was made at Ras, while he was on his way to Kankapur. Alfred Master, District Magistrate of Kheda, tried and sentenced Patel to three months' simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 500. It appeared that Alfred Master had been nursing a personal grudge against Patel since 1917 when Patel had been associated with the Ahmedabad Municipality.<sup>28</sup>



Gandhiji declared:

The fight has now commenced and we have to carry it to its conclusion. People should celebrate the Sardar's arrest and the sentences passed on him by observing a general hartal. I request the mill-owners to close the mills, the students to absent themselves from their institutions and all shopkeepers to close their shops.<sup>29</sup>

On 8 March there was complete hartal in all major towns in Gujarat. In Ahmedabad a monster meeting was held, attended by 75,000 people and presided over by Gandhiji. The following resolution was passed:

We the citizens of Ahmedabad, men and women, hereby resolve to follow Sardar Vallabhbhai to jail, or win Complete Independence. We shall have no peace, nor will we let the Government have any, till we have won Complete Independence.<sup>30</sup>

In Young India of 9 March Gandhiji gave public intimation of his plan to set out from the Ashram on 12 March. He wrote:

God willing, I hope to start the march at daybreak on Wednesday.... When a great awakening takes place among a people, there is always the fear of violence breaking out. This non-violent war is not free from that fear.... But in this struggle we have a large number whose duty it would be to prevent, and not welcome, the outbreak of violence. Deterred by the fear of violence, I had been holding back civil disobedience and trying till now to dissuade the people from launching it. But I am now ready to take the ultimate step even at the risk of a violent outbreak because I find that there is no other way in which I might prepare the people for the struggle.

Referring to the rise of terroristic activities Gandhiji characterized it as an attempt to meet the growing Government violence by counter-violence and said he must



fight against both. He looked upon the coming struggle as the final test of non-violence.<sup>31</sup>

Gandhiji laid down the tentative programme for the first week of the march, during which thirteen places would be covered. It was expected that the food for the marchers would be provided by the village people and would be the simplest, without any spices and chillies. No rooms would be required for rest during the day, only shaded places with bamboo or grass covering.

Gandhiji asked for the following information to be kept ready in advance in regard to each village to be visited:

1. Population: number of women, men, Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, etc.
2. Number of untouchables.
3. If there is a school in the village, the number of boys and girls attending it.
4. Number of spinning-wheels.
5. The monthly sale of khadi.
6. Number of people wearing khadi exclusively.
7. Salt consumed per head; salt used for cattle, etc.
8. Number of cows and buffaloes in the village.
9. Amount of land revenue paid and the rate per acre.
10. Area of a common grazing ground, if any.
11. Do the people drink? How far is the liquor shop from the village?
12. Educational and other special facilities, if any, for the untouchables.<sup>32</sup>



As mass civil disobedience came nearer and nearer, Gandhiji's prayer meetings at the Ashram began to attract more and more people, so that they became almost public meetings.

Speaking at one such meeting on 10 March Gandhiji said:

Supposing ten men in each of the seven lakh villages in India come forward to manufacture salt and disobey the Salt Act, what do you think can this Government do? Even the worst autocrat, you can imagine, would not dare to blow regimens of peaceful civil resisters out of a cannon's mouth.... I want you to take your courage in both hands and contribute in men towards the struggle which promises to be fierce and prolonged.<sup>33</sup>

In an interview Gandhiji said:

This struggle must be continued to the successful end. Either we shall be effaced out of the earth or we shall spring up as an independent nation enjoying full freedom. We shall face the bullets with our backs to the wall ... there will be no retreat at any cost.

Gandhiji said he expected to be arrested at any moment, but said the fight would continue. The Congress Committees, Provincial, District or Taluka, should organize the campaign.<sup>34</sup>

Gandhiji expressed the same sentiment at a prayer meeting at the Ashram:

There can be no turning back for us hereafter. We will keep on our fight till swaraj is established in India. This will be the last fight. The soldiers who accompany me must note that there is to be no retreat. Those of them that are married should take leave of their wives, and the wives should congratulate their husbands on their being the first soldiers of the





country's freedom battle.... Only with complete victory can we return to this place.<sup>35</sup>

The atmosphere reminded one of the Rajput wars against the Mogul invaders when they donned orange robes, took leave of their wives and children and went to face and fight superior forces with far more lethal equipment than they possessed. The women did not shed tears. They tied the swords to their men's waists and made up their own minds to die rather than fall into the hands of victorious invaders.

I was a student in Delhi. Reginald Reynolds came to see me in my hostel. I was greatly excited and wanted to give up my studies to join the movement.

But my mother put her foot down. "You must complete your studies", she said. I had to wait for the "Quit India" movement to join the struggle. It was exhilarating to do so.



PART IV  
THE SALT SATYAGRAHA



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DANDI MARCH AND SALT SATYAGRAHA

#### 1

With the march to Dandi scheduled to start on the morning of 12 March, nearly ten thousand people had assembled at the Ashram on the evening of 11 March. Among them were Government servants, mill-owners and mill workers, educationists, intellectuals and political workers. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had already been placed behind the bars. Speaking to the gathering Gandhiji said:

God willing, we shall be starting out at 6.30 sharp tomorrow morning. Those wishing to join the march should make it a point to be present here at 6.30....

This is the final throw. This is not a make-believe.... I have not taken a pledge not to return to the Ashram. But you [and I] can return here only after winning swaraj, or you and I must die in the attempt. The struggle may last a month, a year or many years. But there is no question of returning to the Ashram while the struggle continues. You cannot run back home even if your kith and kin fall ill or die or your homes are burnt down.<sup>1</sup>

The morning of 12 March saw vast throngs of humanity moving towards the Ashram. By 6 a.m. the whole route to the Ashram and the Ellis Bridge was lined with people. Buntings and flags decorated the route.

At 6.30 a.m. sharp Gandhiji, followed by a batch of 78 Ashram inmates, marching in rows of three, issued out of the Ashram. Pyarelal was behind him with his own and his master's kits on his shoulder. A procession of people followed the party. Following is the province-wise break-up of the satyagrahis with their names:

GUJARAT - 31: (1) Chhaganlal Joshi, (2) Jayanti Parekh, (3) Rasik Desai, (4) Vithal, (5) Harakhji, (6) Tansukh Bhatt, (7) Kanti Gandhi, (8) Chhotubhai Patel, (9)



Valjibhai Desai, (10) Pannalal Jhaveri, (11) Abbas Sahib, (12) Punjabhai Shah, (13) Somanbhai, (14) Hasmukhram, (15) Ramjibhai Vankar, (16) Dinkarrao, (17) Bhanushankar, (18) Raojibhai Patel, (19) Shivabhai, (20) Shankarbhai, (21) Jashbhai, (22) Haridas Varjivandas Gandhi, (23) Chimanlal Shah, (24) Ramniklal Modi, (25) Haridas Majumdar, (26) Ambalal Patel, (27) Madhavlal, (28) Manilal Gandhi, (29) Lalji, (30) Ratanji, (31) Puratan Buch;

MAHARASHTRA - 13: (32) Pandit Khare, (33) Ganpatrao Godshe, (34) Bal Kalelkar, (35) Dwarkanath, (36) Gajanan, (37) Govind Harkare, (38) Pandurang, (39) Vinayakrao Apte, (40) Keshav Chitre, (41) Vishnu Pant, (42) Haribhau Mohani, (43) Vishnu Sharma, (44) Chitramani Shastri;

U.P.- 8: (45) Ramdihalray, (46) Munshilal, (47) Sumangal Prakash, (48) Jayanti Prasad, (49) Hari Prasad, (50) Jyoti Ram, (51) Bhairav Datt, (52) Surendraji;

CUTCH - 6: (53) Prithviraj Asar, (54) Madhavjibhai, (55) Naranjibhai, (56) Maganbhai Vora, (57) Dungarshibhai, (58) Jethalal;

KERALA - 4: (59) Raghavan, (60) Titus, (61) Krishna Nair, (62) Shankaran;

PUNJAB- 3: (63) Pyarelal, (64) Surajbhan, (65) Premraj;

RAJPUTANA- 3: (66) Sultansingh, (67) Madan Mohan Chaturvedi, (68) Narayan Datt;

BOMBAY - 2: (69) Daudbhai, (70) Harilal Mahimtura;

SIND - 1: (71) Anand Hingorani;

NEPAL - 1; (72) Mahavir;

TAMILNADU- 1: (73) Tapan Nair;

ANDHRA- 1: (74) Subrahmanyam;

UTKAL - 1: (75) Motibasdas;



KARNATAKA- 1: (76) Mahadev Martanda;

BIHAR - 1: (77) Girivardhari Chaudhari; and

BENGAL- 1: (78) Durgesh Chandra Das.<sup>2</sup>

As the party proceeded on its journey huge crowds gathered on the way right up to the Chandola lake, seven miles from the Ashram. They showered blessings on the satyagrahis.

On the first day the party halted at Aslali, more than eleven miles from Sabarmati. Gandhiji addressed the villagers and brought home to them the iniquitous nature of the tax on salt, an article which was needed both by human beings and their domestic animals. He exhorted them to defy the Salt Law. If every male were to defy the law the Government would not have enough room in jails to house them and the tax would have to be repealed.

On 13 March Gandhiji and party were at Bareja in the morning and Navagam in the evening. Gandhiji spoke to the villagers at both places. At Navagam he announced that the Headman had tendered his resignation and so had the Talatis. Gandhiji congratulated them, but emphasized that no one should be forced to resign.

On 14 March speaking at Vasana Gandhiji announced that the Headmen of Navagam, Vavdi, Agam, Mahelaj and other villages had tendered their resignations at his call. In fact, at every place Gandhiji halted the Headmen resigned from their posts, saying in their resignations that "when the Indian National Congress had declared war against the Government which exploited the economic, physical and moral conditions of the people it was a crime against the country to cooperate with such a Government".<sup>3</sup>



On 15 March the band of satyagrahis were at Dabban in the morning and at Nadiad in the afternoon. Speaking to the vast gathering of peasants Gandhiji said they must answer the Government's action in arresting Vallabhbhai Patel, who had done so much for the Kheda district, by following his path and winning freedom for the country. He called upon all Government servants to resign their jobs and join the struggle. As soon as the All-India Congress Committee gave the call, or as soon as Gandhiji himself was arrested, they should all be ready to go to jail.<sup>4</sup>

Even on the march Gandhiji insisted that the Satyagrahis must observe all the rules they observed at the Ashram. Daily spinning, morning and evening prayers and writing of diary were compulsory. After marching twelve or fifteen miles, spinning 212 rounds on the takli - there were not enough charkhas to go round- was no easy matter. It often took three hours. In addition, each satyagrahi had been assigned other work. Some helped in kneading flour, some gathered information with regard to the place visited, some nursed the sick, some kept account of the money collected in donations.

Gandhiji noticed remissness, especially in spinning, which in some cases showed inadequate output- less than 212 rounds- and in the writing of diary. He realized that physically the strain was too much for the satyagrahis to bear and decided that every Monday would be a day of weekly rest... Even so, the routine duties could not be shirked, such as that of spinning. So long as the country had not been freed, they could have no rest and allow the Government no rest. There could be no peace for the Ashram inmates- whether inside the Ashram or outside, in the jail or outside the jail.<sup>5</sup>

At Anand on 17 March Gandhiji said he would make no appeal for donations, since the struggle was not based on money. Even so, contributions had been



coming in. The Bombay yarn merchants and the Diamond Merchants Association had sent sizeable sums. He asked the students –all those who were over fifteen years of age - to follow the example of the students of Gujarat Vidyapeeth and suspend their studies for as long as the struggle might last. Everyone from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Karachi to Dibrugarh must practise non-cooperation individually and collectively.<sup>6</sup>

On 18 March the party touched Napa and camped at Borsad. Speaking at Borsad Gandhiji declared that the struggle the country had entered upon was a righteous struggle. Seditious had now become a dharma for everyone. Defying Salt Laws was only a beginning, to be followed by the defiance of other laws. No one had been able to defend the tax on salt, no one had been able to justify the expenditure on the army and the administration, no one could justify the policy governing collection of land revenue or extorting Rs. 20 to 25 crores by way of excise from drink and opium trade Gandhiji called upon students to come forward in large numbers to join the struggle.<sup>7</sup>

On 19 March Gandhiji spoke at Ras in the morning and at Kankapur in the evening. At Ras Gandhiji renewed his call to the Patels and Talatis to resign their posts and join the movement. He thanked the people for the purse presented to him but said money was of secondary importance at that juncture. What was required was for people to enroll themselves in the movement in large numbers. Gandhiji in all his speeches and writings at the time had been laying special emphasis on the role of youth. In *Young India* he wrote that while in 1920 he had asked for boycott of Government schools and colleges and the setting up of national institutions, this time he was asking students to leave schools and colleges and join the movement.<sup>8</sup> He said the same thing in an interview he gave to Yusuf Meherally.<sup>9</sup>



On 20 March Jawaharlal Nehru, "the chief servant of the nation", arrived in the small hours of the morning to see Gandhiji, who was camping at Kareli. Jawaharlal had to cross a channel at 2 a.m. "on the shoulders of tired fishermen". A Police Patel, 9 Mamlatdars and 12 *Ravaniyas* of the village resigned from their jobs.<sup>10</sup>

At Jambusar, where the party of satyagrahis arrived on the morning of 22 March, Gandhiji announced to the large gathering including 1,000 Muslims, assembled to hear him, that 30 Patels and 11 Mamlatdars had resigned. On the afternoon of 23rd the party was at Amod and Buwa, on the 24th at Samni, on the 25th at Trisla and on the 26th at Darol and then in Broach.

Speaking at Broach on 26 March, Gandhiji dealt with the possible role of Muslims in the movement. He said no swaraj was possible without the active assistance not only of Muslims but of Christians, Parsis and even of Englishmen. He expressed confidence that though, unfortunately, Shaukat Ali was not with the movement just then the time must come when he and others would capitulate and join him.<sup>11</sup>

As the march proceeded thousands upon thousands of villagers, men, women and children, rallied round the banner of Gandhiji. All India watched in wonder. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote:

Today the pilgrim marches onward on his long trek.... The fire of a great resolve is in him and surpassing love of his miserable countrymen. And love of truth that scorches and love of freedom that inspires. And none that passes him can escape the spell, and men of common clay feel the spark of life.

Nehru then addressed himself to the youth of India:





The field of battle lies before you, the flag of India beckons to you, and freedom herself awaits your coming.... Will you be mere lookers-on in this glorious struggle? . . . Who lives if India dies? Who dies if India lives?<sup>12</sup>

2

On 21 March the All-India Congress Committee met in Ahmedabad under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. The President explained that the meeting had been summoned at Ahmedabad in the expectation that Gandhiji might be able to attend it, but that in the circumstances it had not been possible for Gandhiji to attend.

The Committee unanimously passed a resolution approving the action of the Working Committee in authorizing Gandhiji to initiate and control the Civil Disobedience campaign and authorizing the Provincial Congress Committees "to organize and undertake such civil disobedience as to them may seem proper and in the manner that may appear to them most suitable".<sup>13</sup>

The Committee also drew up a Satyagraha Pledge to be signed by volunteers wishing to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The pledge ran:

1. I desire to join the civil resistance campaign for the Independence of India undertaken by the National Congress.
2. I accept the creed of the National Congress, that is, "the attainment of Purna Swaraj (Complete Independence) by the people of India by all peaceful and legitimate means".
3. I am ready and willing to go to jail and undergo all other sufferings and penalties that may be inflicted on me in this campaign...
4. In case I am sent to jail I shall not seek any monetary help for my family from the Congress funds.



5. I shall implicitly obey the orders of those who are in charge of the campaign.<sup>14</sup>

On 28 March Motilal Nehru in a letter addressed to Jawaharlal Nehru, President of the Congress, offered his old palatial house Anand Bhavan at Allahabad to the nation. Jawaharlal Nehru answering it expressed his grateful thanks for the offer and said the offer was being communicated to the members of the Working Committee. The place was then renamed Swaraj Bhavan.<sup>15</sup>

3

Meanwhile the Government had been watching the progress of Gandhiji's march with much anxiety and trepidation. Early in January, just after the conclusion of the Lahore Congress, the Government of India had written to the Provincial Governments advising them against any "dramatic departure" in the policy towards the Congress. It had explained that while on the one hand prohibition of meetings and processions might embitter public opinion and might incite defiance and even physical clashes with the police, on the other; if no action was taken the Congress was bound to gain in prestige, leading to demoralization among constitutionalists and loyalists.

The Collector of Kheda district, which lay on the route to Dandi, had expressed great apprehension and suggested to the Bombay Government that orders should be issued prohibiting the march. The Bombay Government answered that so long as the march was conducted peacefully there was no provision of law which permitted prohibition of the march.<sup>16</sup>

A close watch was kept on the march. Each day Gandhiji's speeches were taken down by the police and estimates of audiences at each place prepared and communicated to the Government.



As soon as the march started the Home Department, Bombay, approached the Southern Command for provision of "a small detachment of mobile troops to deal with the present situation created by Mr. Gandhi's march through Gujarat". The army authorities were informed that after Gandhiji's arrest, which might follow as soon as the Salt Laws were actually broken, disturbances might follow, whether on the spot or elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

The Commissioner, Northern Division, requested the Home Department, Bombay, for additional police force- 150 men for Ahmedabad city and 200 for Kheda and Surat districts. The force in Ahmedabad was required "against possible trouble arising out of the arrest of Gandhi in the fullness of time", while 100 men would be required to form a mobile column marching parallel to the party of satyagrahis and 100 would do duty at Jalalpur, that is Dandi.<sup>18</sup>

On 16 March, the Salt Collector informed the Commissioner, Northern Division, of the steps taken to deal with the situation. These included improving the guarding of certain salt works, erection of gates in Dadar and Ghatkopar Salt Works, and pasting of notices informing the public about provisions of the Salt Law. In addition, men had been posted in Borsad and Jalalpur talukas, with instructions "to destroy any natural formations of salt along the banks of the Mahi river".<sup>19</sup>

In anticipation of Gandhiji's arrival in the Jalalpur taluka, all the salt in the area had already been destroyed. But it was feared that tides might again wash in and large formations might appear round 20 March, some five days before Gandhiji's expected arrival. The authorities were of the view that all the salt must be destroyed, "at all cost" before Gandhiji arrived in the area. Parties of trusted *amaldars* were to be employed for the purpose.



It was also ordered that all salt around Kareli and Vedachi must also be destroyed.<sup>20</sup>

## 4

On 1 April Gandhiji was scheduled to be in Surat, having earlier covered Sajod, Rayma, Umrachhi, Bhatgam, Olpad, Sandhiyer, Delad and Chhaprabhata. The District Magistrate of Surat was anxious to keep Gandhiji out of the city if he could help it. It was discussed whether it would be advisable to prohibit Gandhiji's entering Surat and in the event of his defying the order, to arrest him. The Home Department, Bombay Government, however, did not think it advisable to resort to this stratagem to bring about Gandhiji's arrest. No doubt if it was thought that Gandhiji's entering the city would really be dangerous in view of the disturbed communal situation there resulting from the anti-Sarda Act agitation by the Muslims, the District Magistrate would be right in acting accordingly.

The District Magistrate however had second thoughts and decided not to interfere with the march.<sup>21</sup>

Gandhiji continued the march as per schedule after a day's halt at Surat on 1 April. He and the party passed through Dindoli on 2 April, Vanjh, Navsari and Dhaman on 3 April and Bijalpur on 4 April, finally reaching Dandi on 5 April.

The party had taken 25 days to cover the 241 miles' distance from Sabarmati to Dandi.

Dandi, as Gandhiji was to remark later in a speech, was not an easy place to visit. It had been chosen not by man but by God. Nothing grew there, no foodgrains were to be had, there was scarcity of water. The nearest railway station was ten miles walk through creeks and slush and mud.<sup>22</sup>



Nevertheless, a large number of leading workers had already made their way there to receive Gandhiji and confer with him. Among them were Dr. Sumant Mehta, Dayalji Nanubhai Desai, C. J. Ghia, Keshav Ganesh Deshpande, Sarojini Naidu, Abbas Tyabji and his daughter Rehana Tyabji.<sup>23</sup>

As soon as the party arrived at Dandi, Gandhiji issued a statement to the Press, complimenting the Government on the patience and forbearance it had shown in not interfering with the march and in not arresting him. It remained to be seen, he added, "whether the Government will tolerate ... the actual breach of the Salt Laws by countless people from tomorrow". He repeated the call to "all committees and organizations throughout the length and breadth of the land" to commence civil disobedience in respect of the Salt Laws. He announced that he himself, along with his companions, would commence actual civil disobedience at 6.30 a.m. the following day, 6 April. It was a sacred day, being the first day of the National Week which had culminated in the gruesome slaughter of the Jallianwala Bagh in 1919.<sup>24</sup>

Asked for a message by an American correspondent, Gandhiji scribbled on a piece of paper: "I want world sympathy in this battle of Right against Might".<sup>25</sup>

Speaking in the evening at a gathering, which included a sizeable section of women, Gandhiji said the movement was based on the faith that when a whole nation was roused and on the march no leader was necessary. He expressed the hope that of the hundreds and thousands who had blessed the satyagrahis on the march, there would be many who would take up the battle. He urged everyone to make salt and sell it from place to place. It was a struggle of millions, and millions must offer themselves as sacrifice to win swaraj.<sup>26</sup>



Would Gandhiji be arrested as soon as he committed violation of the Salt Laws on April 6? The satyagrahis and the public in general apprehended this and were prepared for it. But in the Government circles nobody seemed to know. The Commissioner, Northern Division, was in constant touch with the Home Department seeking instructions. Should action be considered necessary, the procedure was clarified in the correspondence between the District Magistrate, Surat, and the Home Department. The trying magistrate would be Jewell, a Sub-Divisional Magistrate. The place of trial would be the Mamlatdar's office at Jalalpur, about 10-12 miles from Dandi. Pending trial Gandhiji would be detained at the Police Sub-Inspector's office. The place of imprisonment would be Yeravda. Gandhiji would be taken by train from Navsari to Borivali and thence by motor car to Poona. It was decided to keep a railway saloon waiting at Navsari station from 5 April onwards. April 6 being a Sunday and April 7 a public holiday it had to be considered if the trial could be held on any of these days. It was thought that Gandhiji might have to be consulted on that point. But the go-ahead from the Government of India did not come and the District Magistrate, Surat, was informed by Bombay Home Department on 5 April that "the immediate arrest of Mr. Gandhi is not likely" but that he should maintain the arrangements for trial and his transport, etc.<sup>27</sup>

It would appear that just about that time word had come from the highest level in the Government of India that though the movement was to be dealt with sternly, Gandhiji himself was not to be touched for the time being. A secret telegram from Bombay Home Department (Special) dated 5 April addressed to the various Divisional Commissioners, District Magistrates, and the Police and, Army authorities in Bombay Presidency said:



- 1) Parties other than Gandhi to be dealt with according to law; leaders of importance to be arrested on commission of offence and prosecuted under Salt Laws, Section 117, I.P.C ... rank and file to be allowed to go after confiscation of salt... and implements and receptacles.... No action should be taken against women volunteers for the present.
- 2) .....Gandhi is not to be arrested nor any action taken against him or his party likely to lead to his arrest. This is of primary importance. Should developments occur pointing to necessity of Gandhi's arrest facts should be reported at once and orders awaited ... the District Magistrate may interfere with manufacture [of salt] ... if he thinks this can be done safely, by confiscating it at some places at a reasonable distance from where Gandhi is. Should however he think that, without risk of a situation developing which would necessarily involve Gandhi's arrest, it is not possible to interfere with manufacture or removal, such action should not be taken by him.<sup>28</sup>

There were no doubt any number of very cogent reasons why the Viceroy and India Office - thought it more discreet at the time to postpone Gandhiji's arrest. In the first place they still hoped the movement might peter out - they did not consider salt tax to provide enough ground for a mighty movement of defiance to develop around it. Then they were also anxious not to alienate non-Congress political opinion in India, especially the Moderates, whom they were trying to tempt to attend the Round Table Conference. Already there were strains developing. On 2 April Madan Mohan Malaviya and his Nationalist followers had resigned from the Central Legislative Assembly.



Other reasons have been adduced by some. The Earl of Birkenhead in his biography of Halifax quotes from a letter Halifax (then Irwin) wrote to the Secretary of State on 7 April:

The will of the man must have been enormous to get him through his march - I was always told that his blood-pressure is dangerous and his heart none too good, and I was told a few days ago that his horoscope predicts that he will die this year, and that is the explanation of this desperate throw. It would be a very happy solution.

This was cited as a reason for Irwin deferring the arrest of Gandhiji.<sup>29</sup>

6

On the morning of 6 April Gandhiji and his party, accompanied by some 2,000 persons, proceeded to the sea-shore, where they bathed. Gandhiji then picked up some salt deposit and announced that the Salt Law was now broken. This was a signal for volunteers in batches of not more than six at a time to proceed to the sea and carry back brass lotas full of sea water to their camps, where they boiled it in pans used for making jaggery from sugarcane juice to manufacture salt. Two batches of volunteers had arrived from Bardoli on 5 April. About 150 of them began collecting salt deposits at the Ant creek. Others operated similarly in the Karadi Matwad area. The whole operation was peaceful and orderly. The police confiscated the salt.<sup>30</sup>

Speaking to a Press representative afterwards, Gandhiji said:

Now that a technical or ceremonial breach of the Salt Law has been committed, it is now open to anyone who would take the risk of prosecution under the Salt Law to manufacture salt wherever he wishes





and wherever it is convenient. My advice is that a worker should everywhere manufacture salt ... and instruct villagers to do likewise.

... Thus the war against salt tax should be continued during the National Week up to the 13th instant. Those who are now engaged in this sacred work should devote themselves to vigorous propaganda for boycott of foreign cloth and use of khaddar....<sup>31</sup>

At Viramgam, on the same day, Manilal Kothari and a party of 55 volunteers, carrying 5 lb. of salt each, were arrested and sentenced to a fine of Rs. 500 or six weeks' simple imprisonment in default. The satyagrahis refused to pay the fine.

At Bhimrad, a party of 285 satyagrahis drawn from Bardoli and Surat and led by Ramdas Gandhi collected 55 maunds of contraband salt. The satyagrahis were arrested and the salt confiscated.

At Jalalpur about 30 maunds of salt prepared by the volunteers accompanying Gandhiji was confiscated.

In Bombay, Nariman, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, Avantikabai Gokhale and seven others broke the Salt Law, watched by a large crowd of people. Later in the evening Nariman was arrested from his residence.<sup>32</sup>

Others arrested were Amritlal Sheth and his companions, Dr. Chandulal Desai of Broach Sevashram and his companions, Darbar Gopaldas, Fulchand Shah, Ravishankar Keshavbhai Ganeshji, Chimanlal Pranshanker and others.

In a statement issued to the press on 7 April Gandhiji expressed satisfaction that things had gone well on the first day of civil disobedience. He noted that the Government had lost no time in taking action against the leaders of the movement. This, he said, was only to be expected and one could not object to trial and conviction according to established procedure.



Gandhiji repeated his plea to the students attending schools and colleges run or controlled by the Government to leave those institutions. He invited everyone to make salt or, alternatively, to collect salt accumulated in creeks and holes on the seashore.<sup>33</sup>

The police on the first day of the Civil Disobedience Movement had thus generally behaved reasonably according to procedure. But not everywhere. For instance, at Aat, about four miles from Dandi, on 7 April police had intercepted civil resisters carrying contraband salt and tried by force to snatch it from them. Gandhiji advised the civil resisters to cling to the salt but not to put up resistance in a way that would encourage violence on the part of the police. Gandhiji in his statement said the police had no right to lay hands on the civil resisters. He described the action as barbarous.<sup>34</sup>

Those arrested at Aat included Dr. Manubhai Makanji Desai and Kikabhai Ratanji Desai. One volunteer, Ukabhai, was beaten up by the police.

On 8 April Gandhiji went to Aat with his party. He spoke to the assembled volunteers, among whom were a large number of women. Gandhiji exhorted the satyagrahis to hold fast to the salt collected and not let it be taken away from them. He again broke the Salt Law.

On 9 April Gandhiji visited Bhimrad and Surat. On 10 April he was at Abrama, where he addressed a meeting of 5,000 satyagrahis, including 2,000 women. At Matwad, the following day, he called upon the people to boycott Government servants who had not resigned and boycott foreign cloth and make bonfires of it on 13 April.<sup>35</sup>

There were a large number of convictions. Among those sentenced were Nariman and Kikabhai Desai, both arrested on 7 April, Ali Bahadur Khan and Seth Jamnalal Bajaj - sentenced to two year' R.I. and a fine of Rs. 300 each - Gokuldas



Bhatt, Kishorelal Mashruwala, Gangadharrao Deshpande, N. R. Joshi and Jivan Rao- two years' R.I. and Rs. 300 fine.

In Borsad Durbar Gopaldas, G. Dwarkadas and Raojibhai Manibhai were each sentenced to two years' R.I. and Rs. 500 fine.

Ramdas Gandhi was awarded six months and Dr. Chandulal Desai two years. In Delhi on the same day Indra Vidyalankar, son of Swami Shraddhanand, was sentenced to nine months' R.I.

On 9 April there were strong rumours that Gandhiji's arrest was imminent. In anticipation Gandhiji issued a statement- his message to the nation. He said:

In the dead of night my colleagues and companions have roused me from deep slumber and requested me to give them a message. I am therefore dictating this message.... Information received until this midnight leads me to the belief that my message did not fall flat.... I have seen with my own eyes thousands of men and women at Aat and Bhimrad fearlessly breaking the Salt Act....

Swaraj won without sacrifice cannot last long. I would therefore like our people to get ready to make the highest sacrifice that they are capable of ....<sup>36</sup>

7

Years later Sarladevi Sarabhai told this author how women had been sorely disappointed because Gandhiji did not include any woman in the batch of satyagrahis who marched with him to Dandi. Mridula Sarabhai, her daughter and Khurshedbehn Naoroji, granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, accused Gandhiji of discrimination against women. But he did not change his resolve to exclude women from the march.

The author went to see Sarladevi during her last illness. Sarladevi was in a reminiscent mood. She was in poor health and the author had been given five



minutes to see her and enquire after her health. But she talked for nearly one hour. She told the author how Gandhiji sent for women workers and had a conference with them at Dandi.<sup>37</sup> He told them he valued women's contribution in satyagraha. He had not included them in the march because he did not wish the British to be able to say that they could not be as severe on the satyagrahis as they would have liked because there were women among them. He considered women to be embodiments of non-violence. He wanted them to work for prohibition and khadi and picket liquor shops and foreign-cloth shops. She described how she, Kasturba and other women went hawking khadi, and picketing foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops.

Women had been greatly attracted to the Civil Disobedience Movement, as witnessed by the large attendance of women at all gatherings addressed by Gandhiji. On 6 April he addressed an appeal to the women in *Navajivan*. Gandhiji drew attention in the appeal to the great role played by women in constructive work. He pointed out that at least five times as many women as men were working for khadi, and that the khadi movement might very well collapse if the women were to withdraw themselves from it. If the women wished to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement, if they wished to leave a stamp on the history of India and if they wanted to see a resurgence of Indian civilization, they should find an exclusive field for themselves.

Gandhiji said he was disinclined to invite the women to participate in the defiance of the Salt Laws. One simple reason was that Gandhiji thought the comparatively small number of women would be lost among the men.

Anti-liquor movement could be a special field for women. Gandhiji explained his idea thus: 1) Trained women should go to owners of liquor booths and request them to give up trade in liquor; 2) they should go to the homes of liquor addicts



and talk to them and their womenfolk to help them give up drinking and also start picketing liquor booths. If liquor booths were to close down, Gandhiji added, it would mean a saving of 25 crores to the people. The shortfall in revenue might even result in the cutting down of expenditure on the army. Gandhiji mentioned Mithubehn Petit's remarkable work in this field which led him to think that this work could be successfully organized in Gujarat.<sup>38</sup>

In *Young India* of 10 April Gandhiji again addressed women. If non-violence was the law of our being, he said, then the future rested with women. They were destined to do greater work than participating in the breaking of the Salt Laws. And what was that work?

The picketing of liquor shops and foreign-cloth shops by men, though it succeeded beyond expectations up to a point for a time in 1921, failed because violence crept in. If a real impression is to be made picketing must be resumed. If it remains peaceful to the end, it will be the quickest way of educating the people concerned. It must never be a matter of coercion but conversion, moral suasion...

Prohibition of intoxicating liquors and drugs and boycott of foreign cloth will have ultimately to be by law. But the law will not come till pressure from below is felt in no uncertain manner.

Let the women of India take up these two activities, specialize in them; they would contribute more than men to national freedom....

In this agitation thousands of women, literate and illiterate, can take part.<sup>39</sup>

In an article in *Young India* of 10 April Gandhiji denounced British rule in India as immoral and therefore as something deserving destruction. He wrote:



The Indian Empire was conceived in immorality, for it was to perpetuate the exploitation of India's resources that it was founded.... There is perhaps not an inch of ground lawfully acquired by or for the British crown in India....

The rule is nurtured by immoral means. English statesmen assure us that it is the British bayonet that keeps the Empire free from attack both from without and within.

It is supported by revenues derived from immoral sources. I have sufficiently demonstrated the hideous immorality, because inhumanity, of the salt tax. The immorality of the drink and drug revenue is self-demonstrated.

The same was the case with the land revenue. Gandhiji continued:

There is therefore no way open to the people save to end a system whose very foundations are immoral. Let us therefore pray and work for the destruction of this demonstrably immoral system and for ending it take the boldest risks consistently with... non-violence.<sup>40</sup>

Arrests and convictions of civil resisters continued all over the country. On 9 April in Ahmedabad Khurshedbehn Naoroji and Mridula Sarabhai were arrested for selling contraband salt. In Delhi Devadas Gandhi, Deshbandhu Gupta, Lala Shankarlal and a dozen others were arrested for the same offence. In Cuttack Gope Bandhu Chowdhari and fourteen others were picked up.

In Ahmedabad Dr. Hariprasad, Ravishankar Vyas, Chhotalal Vyas, Arjunlal Bhogilal and Rohit Mehta were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment and fine. In Bombay Amritlal Sheth was sentenced to two and a half years' simple imprisonment.



On 10 April in Allahabad a batch of volunteers led by Jawaharlal Nehru manufactured salt. In Bombay a 200-strong body of policemen, led by 30 officers armed with revolvers, raided the Congress House where salt was being manufactured. The police destroyed some of the pans. Other pans were protected by women volunteers, who made a ring round them, preventing the police from approaching. The volunteers included Perinbehn Captain, Jamnabehn; Ratanbehn and five other women. The police charged with their batons and belaboured the ladies, some of whom fell down and sustained injuries. Yusuf Meherally and Abidali Jafarbhoy, who were in the premises, were arrested and marched off.<sup>41</sup>

In Calcutta on 11 April, police made a lathi charge on a peaceful assembly mostly of students at College Square. Several sustained injuries. About 40 were arrested. Suresh Chandra Bannerji was arrested, tried and sentenced to two and a half years' R.I.

On 12 April J. M. Sen Gupta, Mayor of Calcutta, was arrested for reading aloud from a proscribed work. J. K. Kothari and Surendra Nath Das were similarly arrested and sent to jail for six months each.

In Bombay Mrs. Hansa Mehta on behalf of the Provisional Committee for Prevention of Liquor Consumption, issued an appeal for 2,500 women volunteers for picketing the 500 liquor shops in Bombay.<sup>42</sup>

On 13 April in Allahabad, while Jawaharlal Nehru was boarding a train he was arrested under the Salt Act. He was taken to Naini Central Jail, tried and sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment. There was a spontaneous hartal all over the country in protest against the arrest.<sup>43</sup>

Gandhiji commented that he had been hourly expecting Jawaharlal's arrest. He repeated his appeal to the youth of the country to leave their schools and colleges and work solely for India's freedom.<sup>44</sup>



At Gandhiji's request Motilal Nehru assumed charge as President of the Congress in place of his imprisoned son. On 17 April he wired to Gandhiji: " .... I gladly place my whole-time services such as they are at nation's disposal under your guidance. Assuming charge today."<sup>45</sup>

9

On 13 April at Dandi Gandhiji addressed a conference of women. He reiterated his appeal to them to take up the twin tasks of prohibition and boycott of foreign cloth. He asked them to picket foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops and to abstain from getting involved in breaking the Salt Law. He appealed to the women of Gujarat to rally round Mithubehn Petit and organize themselves for picketing.<sup>46</sup>

On 14 April at Umber, Chorasi Taluka, Gandhiji again broke the Salt Act and addressed a gathering of about 1000 volunteers. On 16 April Gandhiji was in Vejalpur, accompanied by 15 volunteers. He addressed a women's meeting at which Kasturba Gandhi was present. Mithubehn Petit started picketing of liquor shops at Surat.

For the rest of the week Gandhiji remained on the move. He visited Matwad (17 April), Bulsar (18 April), Vejalpur (19 April), Bardoli (19 April), and Matwad (20 April).

Everywhere there were audiences of volunteers, men and women, to be addressed. At Umber, in Bulsar Taluka, on 19 April, Gandhiji told them about the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru, "the greatest among us all" and exhorted them to guard the salt they picked up even with their lives. "When the police come and raid these pans," he said, "surround them and do not let the police touch them till they have overpowered you by sheer brute force.... Let them destroy pans but only after they have either arrested you or beaten you."





As to the role of women, Gandhiji said:

This is men's fight so long as the Government will confine their attention to men. There will be time enough for women to court assaults when the Government has crossed the limit. Let it not be said of us that men sought shelter behind women....<sup>47</sup>

Gandhiji took the police to task for snatching the salt from the civil resisters. He wrote that even from confirmed thieves stolen property was not taken away by force except after they had been placed under arrest and then too never if they were not to be brought to trial. The property remained the thief's until he was convicted and the court judged the property not to be his.<sup>48</sup>

Wholesale and indiscriminate arrests of leading workers and volunteers were steadily going on. Jawaharlal Nehru's arrest was soon followed by the arrest in Lucknow of Mohanlal Saxena, Imtiaz Ahmed, C. B. Gupta, Harish Chandra Bajpai and others. At Benares Sampurnanand and three others were arrested. There were arrests in Rai Bareli, Meerut and Muzaffarnagar.

This wave of repression caused widespread resentment among the people. In Poona on 15 April a crowd indulged in an orgy of burning foreign caps and distributing Gandhi caps and staged a demonstration outside the police headquarters. Some in the crowd of demonstrators showered stones on the police. The police made several baton charges before the crowd could be dispersed.

In Calcutta on the same day, 15 April, crowds protesting against the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru and J. M. Sen Gupta went on a rampage and burnt several tram-cars. The staff of the Fire Brigade was assaulted and several firemen were injured. Students in parts of the city even cut off the trolley ropes of the trams. There was some firing from the police side and Anglo-Indian and European police officers



were attacked. The city appeared to be in a state of siege. Thirty-five persons were arrested.

At Karachi, on 16 April, consequent upon the arrest of Choithram Gidwani and five others ugly scenes were witnessed. A crowd of 50,000 surrounded the court where they were being tried and threw stones at the court building, smashing all the windows. Pleaders were hit in the stone-throwing and the proceedings were stalled. The police resorted to firing. A bullet hit Jairamdas in the thigh.<sup>49</sup>

Commenting on the popular violence in Calcutta and Karachi Gandhiji said he had no doubt that such violence harmed the struggle. Even so, the struggle must go on. He had known and declared all along that there was possibility of violence breaking out. He blamed the Government for inciting the violence by prohibiting meetings and processions. He expressed his delight that it was Jairamdas who had received the gunshot wound and not some unknown person.<sup>50</sup>

## 10

On 18 April Bengal witnessed a sensational event that later came to be known as the Chittagong Armoury Raid. It was the most spectacular and daring action so far on the part of the Bengal revolutionaries. In Chittagong four batches of young men and women issued out early in the morning to execute four different plans: one was to capture the Police Armoury, one to capture the Auxiliary Force Armoury, one to assassinate European officers in the Club and one to destroy the Telephone Exchange and Telegraph Office. The batch deputed to kill the Europeans did not accomplish its mission and its members joined the two batches assigned to raid the Armouries.

About 50 youths carried out the raid on the Police Armoury. They shot down the sentry, broke open the Armoury and Magazine and, arming themselves with muskets and revolvers, drove the constables from the police lines.



The batch that raided the Auxiliary Force Armoury consisted of seven persons. Here too they walked up to the sentry and shot him and another sepoy. A European Sergeant-Major, coming out of his quarters nearby, was shot dead. The Armoury was forced open and pistols, revolvers and rifles were taken away. The building was then set on fire. The young men then joined the party raiding the Police Armoury. The party also fired on a railway guard, a taxi driver and a police constable.

The batch that was assigned the Telegraph Office job consisted of six persons. Here the telephone operator was chloroformed and the telephone board smashed. They could not destroy the Telegraph Office. This batch also joined up with the main group. At night the revolutionaries, now numbering sixty, had an encounter with the police, headed by three European officers.

Skirmishes with the police continued and nineteen of the young men were shot down by the police.

But this was not the end of the revolutionary action. At Dhoom 40 miles from Chittagong, another batch of revolutionaries cut the telegraph wires. Attempts were also made to derail a train.

On 23 April four young men, when challenged by the police, opened fire at the constables and made good their escape.<sup>51</sup>

Gandhiji, writing in *Young India*, condemned the outrage. He distinguished it from the violence that had erupted in Calcutta and Karachi earlier in so far as it showed deliberate planning. He appealed to the revolutionaries to eschew violence and not impede the free flow of non-violent demonstration. The civil resisters, he said, would have to face not only the Governmental violence but also popular violence.<sup>52</sup>



But however serious the situation, he made it clear, there could be no suspension of the movement. It must go on.<sup>53</sup>

The Government was quick to make use of the Chittagong incidents for reviving the infamous Bengal Ordinance. On the very next day, 19 April, the Viceroy signed an Ordinance reviving all those sections of the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925, which had been repealed only a few weeks earlier in March.<sup>54</sup>

Actually these periodic Ordinances were only used by the authorities to suppress legitimate political activity by the Congress which posed a challenge to their rule. They utterly failed in curbing revolutionary activity in Bengal, which had its whole organization underground. Only three days after the Ordinance was issued, there was further recrudescence of violence in Bengal which continued sporadically for months.

The mass civil disobedience of the Salt Laws in the meantime continued with full vigour. In Karachi on 21 April, thousands of men and women proceeded to Bath Island and collected about 10,000 maunds of salt, which they carried back with them to be sold in the city.

Arrests and convictions continued too. In Bombay important Congress leaders, such as Gharpure, S. K. Patil and G. N. Desai were arrested and convicted. K. M. Munshi, B. G. Kher and Swami Anand were also arrested. At Masulipatam Pattabhi Sitaramayya, member of the Congress Working committee and Kaleshwar Rao, Chairman of the Bezwada municipality, were arrested. They were sentenced to one year in prison.

On 23 April Mahadev Desai was arrested in Ahmedabad. He was later tried and sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment.



At Jabalpur on the same day Seth Govind Das and Dwarka Prasad Mishra, two local leaders, were arrested for reading aloud from Pandit Sundarlal's *Bharat Men Angrezi Raj*, a proscribed work.

11

The North-West Frontier Province too was in ferment. In the forefront of the struggle, carried on by way of defiance of the Salt Laws and peaceful picketing of foreign-cloth and liquor shops and law courts, were the Khudai Khidmatgars, a body of volunteers inspired and led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan soon became popular as the Frontier Gandhi, because of his total and unquestioning commitment to non-violence. In April 1919 during the anti-Rowlatt Act agitation the Pathans of the area had at a mammoth meeting declared that he was their king, "Badshah", and so he was lovingly called Badshah Khan by his compatriots.

.. Among the turbulent Pathans, ready to be swayed into violence at the slightest provocation, Ghaffar Khan was a unique phenomenon. The two most prominent characteristics of his nature, piety and non-violence, had come to him from his mother and father. A spirit of independence had made him spurn a commission in the army. He attended the Congress session held at Nagpur in 1920 and was jailed during the Khilafat movement. In 1921 he was again sentenced to a prison term of three years for the crime of organizing national schools. In jail he was treated extremely harshly, but he never complained.

The Khudai Khidmatgar movement was conceived by Abdul Ghaffar Khan primarily as a movement for social reform and economic uplift. But after he attended the Lahore Congress of 1929 and saw the Congress volunteers in action there, he decided to convert his body of volunteers into a full-fledged political organization. From the colour of the uniform they wore, the Khudai Khidmatgars



were also called Red Shirts. They were regularly drilled and made to march in formation. But each Khudai Khidmatgar had to pledge himself to non-violence even in the face of the gravest provocation and eschew carrying of arms, a normal way of life among the Pathans. He also bound himself to observe purity in personal life and abjure communalism. In 1930, at the height of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the number of volunteers was not large- they were fewer than 500.

Badshah Khan had been greatly distressed by the cult of revenge prevalent among the Pathans. Vendettas were carried from one generation to another. It saddened Badshah Khan to see the flower of young Pathan manhood being decimated as a result of the cult of revenge and he tried to wean them away from it. He taught them that forgiveness and not revenge was the mark of honour.

Things came to a head in April 1930 when the authorities banned the entry into Peshawar of an enquiry committee constituted by the Congress in connection with the Frontier Crimes Regulation. On 22 April, when the committee was due to arrive, a mammoth crowd collected at the railway station to receive the members of the committee. On learning about the ban the crowd formed itself in to a procession and marched through the city.

Early on 24 April six local leaders were arrested and warrants against many more were issued. Crowds again formed to cheer the leaders as they offered themselves for arrest. The army and police then set upon the crowd. Although the crowd was largely non-violent, a British motor-cycle rider was killed in the melee and an armoured car caught fire. The soldiers then without warning started firing into the crowd. The firing went on from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. One estimate put the number of dead at 70 and those wounded at 100.<sup>55</sup>

The Congress estimates later put the number of killed at 200.



A British army officer told the Indian Daily Mail, a British-owned newspaper:

You may take it from me that shooting went on for very much longer than has been stated in the newspapers. We taught the blighters a lesson which they won't forget.... Our fellows stood there shooting down the agitators and leaders who were pointed out to them by the police: It was not a case of a few volleys, it was a case of continuous shooting. <sup>56</sup>

This brutal killing of unarmed people caused much resentment among the soldiers, so much so that two platoons of the 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles, when ordered to fire on the crowd, refused to obey orders. The troops had to be withdrawn to cantonments. Later they were court martialed and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from 10 to 14 years.

The Home Department, Government of India, cabled to Peshawar:

Please put strict censorship on all news from Peshawar and in particular do not allow any news to be transmitted about the Garhwal Regiment.

But this was not the end of the disturbances. In the following days riotous situations developed in Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan and Hazara. In every case troops had to be called in to subdue the people. <sup>57</sup>

Madras was the arena of serious riots on 22 and 27 April. Meetings of satyagrahis and striking workers of a mill were repeatedly lathi-charged by the police. On 25 April a party of satyagrahis, about 100 strong and including two women were stopped by the police and ordered to disperse. The satyagrahis refused to do so. The Deputy Commissioner then ordered lathi-charge and calmly watched as lathis rained upon the unresisting heads of the satyagrahis. On 27 April crowds, incensed by police lathi-charge on a peaceful meeting, threw stones and



brickbats at the police. The authorities ordered firing. Many were killed including, on Government's own admission, persons who were in no way connected with the demonstration. One of them was E. K. Govindaswami Mudaliar.<sup>58</sup>

On 25 April Vithalbhai Patel tendered his resignation as President of the Central Assembly and as a member of the Assembly. In his letter of resignation addressed to the Viceroy he declared that with the boycott of the Assembly by the Congress Party following the Lahore resolution and the resignation of Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Nationalists, the Assembly had lost its representative character. He went on:

My people have been engaged in a life-and-death struggle for freedom. The movement of non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience initiated by Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest man of modern times, is in full swing. Hundreds of prominent countrymen of mine have already found their place in His Majesty's jails. Thousands are prepared to lay down their lives, if necessary, and hundreds of thousands are ready to court imprisonment.... At such a juncture ... my proper place is with my countrymen.<sup>59</sup>

13

On 26 April Gandhiji spoke at Bulsar and Chharwada. At Chharwada he expressed his intention to take possession of the salt beds at Dharasana. He said:

What is there in picking a seer or two of salt from here and there? Even the Government must be wondering what a childish game we are playing. If you mean to play the real game, come out and loot the salt beds of Dharasana, or Bhayander, or Kharaghoda.... I invite you all, brothers and sisters of Chharwada and Dharasana, to join me in the fun.<sup>60</sup>





Gandhiji admonished the people not to run away and not to abuse those who beat them, but to offer their very necks to be broken, if need be.

Ever since the start of mass civil disobedience of the Salt Laws the Press in India as a whole and certainly Gandhiji's weeklies *Young India* and *Navajivan* had become a thorn in the Government's flesh. For as much as the spoken word, the Press had been doing tremendous work in awakening the people to the issues involved and in educating public opinion.

Gandhiji, notwithstanding the innumerable meetings he indefatigably addressed day after day in the villages of Gujarat, never failed to communicate with the readers of his two journals. Week after week he wrote trenchant articles both in Gujarati and in English, educating the people and exposing the deeds of the rulers.

On 27 April, accordingly, the Viceroy took steps to gag the Press. He issued a Press Ordinance, the main provisions of which were almost the same as those of the infamous Press Act of 1910.

Under the Ordinance Registrars were given discretion to demand securities - of not less than Rs. 500 and not more than Rs. 2000 - from those who controlled printing presses or newspapers. The local Government was armed with power to declare forfeited the security of any press which by any words, signs, inference, suggestion, allusion, metaphor or implication might "bring into hatred or contempt His Majesty or the Government established by law", seduce any officer, sailor or airman from his allegiance or his duty, encourage or incite any person to interfere with the administration of the law or to defer payment of any land revenue, tax, rate, cess or other dues, etc. etc.



The Ordinance also empowered local Governments to seize newspapers and magazines and to search their premises. Transmission by post of certain categories of published material was also banned.<sup>61</sup>

Gandhiji described the Ordinance as veiled Martial Law. He wrote: The revival in the form of an Ordinance of the Press Act that was supposed to be dead was only to be expected.... The press men, if they are worthy representatives of public opinion, will not be frightened by this Ordinance. I would urge press men and publishers to refuse to furnish securities, and if they are called upon to do so, either to cease publication or to challenge the authorities to confiscate whatever they like. When freedom is actually knocking at our door and when for the sake of wooing it thousands have suffered tortures, let it not be said of the press representatives that they were weighed and found wanting. They may confiscate type and machinery.... But what they will never succeed in suppressing ... is the thought of the nation....<sup>62</sup>

The newspapers in Delhi, and also elsewhere, decided to suspend publication as a mark of protest. Gandhiji congratulated the journalists and expressed the hope that their refusal to conduct the newspapers under security would be permanent.<sup>63</sup>

Under the powers that the Press Ordinance gave them the local Governments came down on newspapers everywhere, and especially in Punjab and Bengal. In Peshawar the Press was subjected to censorship. In Calcutta the premises of *Advance* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* were raided because the papers had carried reports of a bonfire of foreign cloth. Various other newspapers and journals such as *Liberty*, *Bangabani* and *Swatantra* were served with notices to furnish security. All the newspapers with the exception of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* suspended publication.<sup>64</sup>



Gandhiji wrote:

Any press ... which is served with a notice to furnish security should refuse to do so and prefer to close down the paper instead. If all the presses act in this manner, the Government's Ordinance will remain unenforced.

In this struggle full advantage is being taken of the help which newspapers can give but it does not all depend on such help. People have realized their strength and know what they should do....

Newspapers can be brought out handwritten, and, if people now feel a burning desire to work for the welfare of the country, countless such newspapers can be brought out every day. If people really wish they can make thousands of copies of handwritten papers.<sup>65</sup>

14

Arrests and prosecutions under the Salt Act continued unabated. On 29 April Devadas Gandhi was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. L. B. Bhopatkar, a Maharashtra leader, was similarly sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment. Dr. Mohammed Alam and Dr. Satyapal of Lahore were arrested.

On 30 April it was the turn of Rajagopalachari, who was arrested at Vedaranyam and sentenced to undergo six months' simple imprisonment. Konda Venkatapayya, the Andhra leader, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.<sup>66</sup>

Raids on salt pans in Dharasana were beginning to feature as an important theme in Gandhiji's talks and speeches in the first week of May. Although he had not yet decided when and how the raid would be executed, he was very clear as regards the qualifications of the volunteers who were to participate in the operation. Every one of the volunteers must be clad in khadi, if enough khadi was not available the volunteers could go about only in a khadi langoti. And every one of



the volunteers must carry his takli and spin. And of course those who drank must give up liquor.<sup>67</sup>

On 4 May Gandhiji drafted a letter to the Viceroy giving notice of the proposed raid. In the draft Gandhiji left blank the space for the date decided for the operation. This indicated that he did not mean to send the letter right away but to keep it back till he had come to a final decision in the matter. He wrote:

It is possible for you to prevent this raid ...in three ways:

1. by removing the salt tax;
2. by arresting me and my party unless the country can ... replace everyone taken away;
3. by sheer goondaism unless every head broken is replaced, as I hope it will.

... I could have had nothing to say if in dealing with the civil resisters the Government had satisfied itself with applying the ordinary processes of law. Instead, while the known leaders have been dealt with more or less according to the legal formality, the rank and file has been often savagely and in some cases even indecently assaulted ... accounts have come to me from Bengal, Bihar, Utkal, U.P., Delhi and Bombay.... In Karachi, Peshawar and Madras the firing would appear to have been unprovoked and unnecessary. Bones have been broken, private parts have been squeezed.... Paddy fields are reported to have been burnt, eatables forcibly taken....

Gandhiji then mentioned the Press Ordinance and doing away with the ordinary procedure in the trial of Bhagat Singh and others asked if it was not a veiled form of Martial Law. He went on:



Before, then, the reign of terrorism that has begun overwhelms India, I feel, I must take a bolder step, and if possible divert your wrath in a cleaner if more drastic channel. ...

Anyway I feel it would be cowardly on my part not to invite you to disclose to the full the leonine paws of authority so that the people who are suffering tortures and destruction of their property may not feel that I ... had left any stone unturned to work out the satyagraha programme as fully as it was possible under given circumstances....

But I would fain avoid the further step. I would therefore ask you to remove the tax which many of your illustrious countrymen have condemned in unmeasured terms....

If ... you cannot see your way to remove the salt tax, and remove the prohibition on private salt-making, I must reluctantly commence the march adumbrated in the opening paragraph of my letter.<sup>68</sup>

15

During the march to Dandi and even afterwards in the first half of April there were often rumours of Gandhiji's arrest being imminent, which Gandhiji thought might be well founded. Later on, when the arrest did not come, everyone seemed to have become somewhat complacent on that score. Gandhiji himself appeared to feel that he had ample time to plan the march to Dharasana. In any case he did not see it as the immediate next step. On 4 May, the same day he drafted the letter to the Viceroy, he wired to Motilal Nehru telling him to fix 10 May or 13 May for the meeting of the Working Committee, 12 May being Gandhiji's silence day.<sup>69</sup>

But the decision to arrest Gandhiji had already been taken. On 3 May, 1930 the Home Department (Political), Bombay, had issued a Government resolution



declaring that the Civil Disobedience Movement directed and fostered by Gandhiji had resulted in grave danger to the security of the British Dominions and that it was necessary to place Gandhiji under restraint. It further directed that Gandhiji be restrained in the Yeravda Central Prison during the pleasure of the Government.

On the same day the necessary warrant was issued to the District Magistrate, Surat. It was decided to effect the arrest "on or about the evening of Sunday, May 4th".<sup>70</sup>

As it happened, the arrest of Gandhiji took place not on the evening of 4 May, as planned, but at 45 minutes past midnight the following morning. Gandhiji was asleep at Karadi, when the District Magistrate, Surat, accompanied by 20 armed constables, came to serve on him the arrest warrant. Gandhiji had the warrant read out to him. It said:

Whereas the Government view with alarm the activities of Mr. M. K. Gandhi, they direct that he should be placed under restraint under the Regulation 25 of 1827 and suffer imprisonment during the pleasure of the Government and be immediately removed to the Yeravda Central Jail.<sup>71</sup>

Gandhiji was taken first to Navsari by car; thence by train to Borivali where, at a level crossing he was again put in a car with shades drawn. He reached Yeravda jail at 10.30 a.m.<sup>72</sup>

An order of the Bombay Government dated 5 May sanctioned an allowance of Rs. 100 per mensem for the maintenance of Gandhiji. The order also directed the District Magistrate of Poona to visit Gandhiji at least twice a month and submit reports on his health.<sup>73</sup>



## CHAPTER XV

### SATYAGRAHIS RAID SALT WORKS

#### 1

Gandhiji's arrest, though long expected, electrified the country when it came. Indeed, it created ripples in the chanceries all over the world. Dr. John Haynes Holmes of New York sent to British Premier Ramsay Macdonald a message signed by 102 American clergymen pleading with him to seek an amicable settlement with Gandhiji. In Panama Nairobi and Sumatra Indian businessmen observed a 24-hour hartal, and sent messages to the Government and to the Congress expressing their regret over Gandhiji's arrest.

Textile exporters in Germany were advised by their agents in India to suspend exports to India.<sup>1</sup>

All over the country there were hartals and demonstrations. In Bombay 40 out of 80 mills closed down as the workers came out on streets protesting against Gandhiji's arrest. Workers of G.I.P and B.B. & C.I. Railways also downed tools and joined the protest hartal. In the evening a public meeting was held, so large that it had to be addressed by several speakers from several platforms at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

On 6 May police fired at demonstrators in Calcutta and Delhi. The trouble in Delhi continued on the following day when no fewer than six persons were reported to have been killed in police firing.<sup>3</sup>

In Sholapur there was a protest hartal by the textile workers on 6 May and again on 7 May. The atmosphere became so surcharged that it led to regrettable turbulence on the part of the crowds the following day, culminating in indiscriminate police firing and loss of life on a large scale.



According to the official version elements among the demonstrating workers stoned a railway train and set fire to a municipal chowki. Many policemen were hurt in stone-throwing. The mob, gradually increased to 10,000, then ransacked all the liquor shops in the city, emptied barrels of liquor on the streets and set fire to them. The police managed to disperse it after some time.

On the morning of 8 May a crowd of about 900 men armed with axes and ropes set about destroying toddy trees. They came into conflict with armed police and about half a dozen persons were arrested while the remainder dispersed. But when the posse of armed police made its way back it was faced with a large crowd armed with lathis which started stoning the police party.

The District Magistrate of Sholapur ordered firing and the road was cleared. The crowd demanded release of the arrested men. This was acceded to. But the stoning still continued. Firing was again ordered. The total number of rounds fired according to official estimate might have been forty.

The District Magistrate and some police officers were hurt in the stone throwing. In the city elsewhere some police persons were killed by the crowd and the district court was set on fire.

In view of the seriousness of the situation the administration collected families of people employed in railways and in the mills and evacuated them to Poona for safety.

Armed police patrolled the city during the day. At night troops also arrived to assist the police. Casualty figures by the evening of 8 May were two policemen killed, 8 reported missing, 5 rioters killed, 26 injured.

On 9 and 10 May patrolling continued, with Section 144 in force. But the situation was not fully in control, as crowds disregarded Section 144. On 11 May troop





reinforcements arrived. On 12 May further reinforcements arrived. Martial Law was then proclaimed in the city.

On 15 May the Viceroy signed yet another Ordinance third since the start of the Civil Disobedience Movement - the so-called Sholapur Martial Law Ordinance. This empowered military commander to make regulations for maintenance of order, set up martial law courts and authorized requisitioning of private property and labour.

According to the official statement the final tally of casualties in the disturbances was about 50, including 13 dead. The total number of rounds fired by police was 103.

The official statement refuted rumours of "hideous brutalities by the mob" as being without foundation. It was not true that policemen were tied together and burnt alive, nor that one had his eyes gouged out.<sup>4</sup>

Delhi was another scene of violence in the period following Gandhiji's arrest. News of the arrest reached the city by midday on 5 May. By the next day the tension and resentment in the populace had reached a feverish pitch. There was complete hartal in the whole city. According to the official version some Muslim shopkeepers who were unwilling to join the hartal were coerced into shutting their shops, or did so out of fear of their shops being looted. A procession then made its way to Kashmiri Gate where civil and criminal courts were located. Women volunteers picketed the offices. A European officer was assaulted by the crowd. A Deputy Commissioner, a D.S.P. and other officers were similarly assaulted with stones and sticks. The mobs were dispersed after a great deal of effort and lathi charge by the police.

In the afternoon detachments of police, travelling in lorries, were again attacked with sticks and stones. Seven policemen were severely injured. Afterwards



prohibitory orders under Section 144 were proclaimed and the city gradually returned to normal. According to the official account, the casualties among the public were 4 dead, 190 injured, among the police 18 injured.

The District Congress Committee challenged the Government version of the events and claimed that the processionists, estimated at about 60,000, were wholly peaceful and the lathi-charge made by the police was entirely unprovoked. The statement claimed that shopkeepers in the Chandni Chowk area, sitting quietly in front of their shops, were assaulted and beaten by the police. More than 300 persons were thus hurt in the police lathi-charge, said the statement. The firing similarly, it was claimed, was without any provocation.<sup>5</sup>

2

The Working Committee of the Congress met in Allahabad from 12 to 15 May to take stock of the situation following Gandhiji's arrest. The mood of the members was determined, as evidenced by the following resolution passed by the Committee:

1. The Working Committee congratulates the satyagrahi volunteers who accompanied Mahatma Gandhi at Karadi and trusts that fresh batches would take up raids and decides that Dharasana should henceforth be treated as an all-India centre for salt raids.
2. The Working Committee records its appreciation of the lead given by Gandhiji for the conduct of the great campaign, reiterates its abiding faith in Civil Disobedience and resolves to carry on the struggle during the incarceration of Mahatmaji with redoubled vigour.
3. In the opinion of the Committee the moment has arrived when the entire nation should make a supreme effort to achieve the goal, and it calls upon



students, lawyers and other professional men, workers and peasants, merchants, industrialists and Government servants and all others to contribute to the success of the fight for freedom....

4. The Committee holds that . . . it is essential to carry out a complete boycott of foreign cloth throughout the country without delay, and for that purpose to take effective steps to prevent sales of existing stock, to secure the cancellation of orders placed and to prevent the placing of further orders....
5. The Committee ... regrets that it cannot endorse any agreement or understanding that the sale of the existing stock is to be permitted in return for the promises by the dealers not to import or order foreign cloth for a specific period....
6. .... The Committee appeals to every individual to devote some part of his or her time to spinning.
7. The Committee is of opinion that the time has arrived for the inauguration of no-tax campaign by non-payment of special taxes in certain provinces, and that a beginning should be made by non- payment of the land tax in . . . Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Punjab, and non-payment of the chowkidari tax in ... Bengal, Bihar, Orissa.
8. It calls upon the Provincial Congress Committees to continue and extend the manufacture of contraband salt ....
9. The Committee approves and confirms the action of the Acting President in permitting the breach of the Forest Laws in the C.P. and resolves that in other provinces similar laws in force may be breached....



10. The Committee further appeals strongly to the public to boycott all the British banking, insurance, shipping and similar other institutions....
11. The Committee regrets the outbreak of mob violence in certain places and cannot too strongly condemn such violence....
12. The Committee strongly condemns the Press Ordinance and.... calls upon Indian newspapers which have not yet ceased publication.... to stop further issues. The Committee calls upon the people to boycott all the Anglo-Indian and Indian papers which continue publication hereafter.<sup>6</sup>

3

Abbas Tyabji, who had taken up the leadership of the satyagrahis after Gandhiji's arrest, was himself arrested on 12 May before the raid on Dharasana could be set going. Sarojini Naidu then stepped into the breach and set about organizing the raid.

Sarojini Naidu led the first raiding party to Dharasana Salt Works on 16 May. According to Pyarelal's eye-witness account narrated to this author, the raiders marched under Sarojini Naidu's lead to the Dharasana Salt works till they were stopped by the solid wall of the police. Sarojini Naidu and her companions then sat down in the scorching sun on the sand till she was arrested. After her arrest the police led a severe lathi-charge on the volunteers, many of whom were badly hurt. They were removed by women volunteers. Others took their places. This continued the whole day. The volunteers were beaten and chased. 220 of them were arrested. Sarojini Naidu was later released.

The second raid was led on 21 May. The leaders were Sarojini Naidu and Manilal Gandhi. The raiding party consisted of 2,500 satyagrahis. As batches of volunteers hurled themselves on the salt piles, a force of 400 policemen commanded by six



British officers rained lathi blows on them. 290 (according to another account 320) volunteers sustained injuries. Two - Bhailalbai Dajibhai and Babu Hule- died from the effects of police beating. The volunteers quietly submitted to the beatings, not even raising their arms to protect their heads. This went on for hours. Afterwards Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazeer, Pyarelal, Manilal Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu were arrested.<sup>7</sup>

The Government denied that excessive force had been used against the satyagrahis, but eye-witness accounts told a different tale. Hussain Tyabji, a Bombay Judge, K. Natarajan and G. K. Devdhar went to Dharasana to see things for themselves. In their statement subsequently they declared that they had seen with their own eyes how, after the satyagrahis had been driven out of the salt boundary, mounted European *sowars* rode at full gallop with lathis in their hands, beating the volunteers. They galloped through the village scattering men, women and children and making them scamper for safety.<sup>8</sup>

Webb Miller, correspondent of the New Freeman wrote:

In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of the volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi's non-violence creed.

The police also took possession of and demolished the camp the satyagrahis had set up at Untadi, a near-by village. Fifteen minutes' notice was given to the volunteers to disperse, at the end of which there was a lathi-charge, resulting in injuries to 20 volunteers.



Another salt works on the satyagrahis' list was Wadala in Bombay. This too was stormed on 21 May. The police swooped on the satyagrahis as at Dharasana with their batons, injuring several. 188 satyagrahis were taken in to custody.

In Bombay K. F. Nariman and Dr. Choksey were arrested and convicted for publishing the Congress Bulletin in defiance of the order of the Magistrate. They were sentenced to four months' simple imprisonment.

Meetings were organized in all the district and taluka centres in C.P. (Marathi) for reading aloud passages from Sundarlal's proscribed work *Bharat Men Angrezi Raj*.<sup>9</sup>

On 23 May various leading satyagrahis arrested at Dharasana were tried and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Sarojini Naidu was awarded nine months' simple imprisonment, Manilal Gandhi and Pyarelal were sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. Imam Saheb was given six months... Narhari Parikh was arrested from the volunteers' camp at Untadi.

On the same day in Bombay 28 commercial bodies organized a massive procession- with some two lakh people participating- in support of the Civil Disobedience Movement. At Bori Bunder the police stopped the procession from proceeding further, at which the processionists sat down on the road to offer satyagraha. The police relented after about four hours and let the procession pass.<sup>10</sup>

Wadala was subjected to a series of raids by the satyagrahis. After 21 May this salt works was raided again on 25 May and then on 1 June. The 25 May raid is best described in the words of Slocombe, a *Daily Herald* correspondent, who witnessed the whole action. Slocombe wrote:



After witnessing today's dramatic raid at Wadala, 5 miles outside Bombay, I am more than ever convinced that only two courses are open to the British authorities in India. Either they must frankly declare Martial Law all over the country and rely openly upon rifles and machine-guns to maintain respect for law, or they must make a supreme attempt to conciliate the various social forces which Mr. Gandhi's example has set in motion....

The total police force assembled included 250 Indian police, of whom a score were armed with rifles and the rest with lathis, 28 European officers and sergeants under the command of Superintendent Smith of the Bombay City Police....

The first raid occurred before 9 this morning and it was-carried out by only 100 volunteers.... When these volunteers were arrested or they retired hurt ... their places were taken by the members of the crowd of several thousands which excitedly watched.... It speedily became evident that the police force was totally inadequate to restrain the crowd.... The role of the European police sergeants was anything but enviable.... Some of them obviously avoided as far as possible striking Gandhi-ites on the vital parts and although a dozen of the raiders were belaboured in my presence on the head and shoulders, they were for the most part struck on the back....  
... Many isolated members of the crowd waded through the deep ditch and after filling the bag with coveted salt took flying leaps into the water to escape the pursuing police....

Nevertheless, at the end of two hours 17 persons were found to be seriously injured. 115 were arrested.<sup>11</sup>



Wadala came under another raid on 1 June. This time 15,000 volunteers and spectators participated in the action. They went in successive batches, broke the police cordon and splashing through slime and mud made to the pans to scoop up the salt. Several batches were driven back by lathi-wielding police. The raid lasted from 8 a.m. to 12 noon. The total number injured in the police lathi-charge was 35. Several were arrested, among them Mrs. Munshi and 8 Sikh ladies.<sup>12</sup>

Dharasana was raided for the last time on 6 June, when volunteers numbering 167 and drawn from Kheda, Panchmahals, Travancore, Karnataka and Karachi, formed themselves into a raiding party and proceeded towards the pans. When the police stopped them they sat down and refused to disperse. The police made a lathi-charge, which lasted for 15 minutes. Some volunteers withdrew but a large number received lathi blows and were taken on stretchers to Untadi where a camp hospital had been set up.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4

Elsewhere in the country, though there were no salt pans to be raided, manufacture and sale of contraband salt on a mass scale was relentlessly carried on in the face of police repression.

The other two satyagraha activities- picketing foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops- went on simultaneously, inviting similar response from the police. Thus on 14 May in Mymensing in Bengal a batch of satyagrahis clashed with a large detachment of police deputed to protect liquor vendors. The crowd became angry at the police maltreatment of the satyagrahis and, threw stones and brickbats. The Additional District Magistrate then ordered firing. According to the official version thirty-nine rounds of buck- shot and ten rounds of ball ammunition were fired, resulting in 53 wounded, five of them seriously.





On 15 May arrests and convictions of satyagrahi leaders in all parts of the country continued. Ghanshyam Jethanand, editor of The Hindu of Hyderabad (Sind) was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment.

Sardar Sardul Singh Kaveeshar was arrested while on his way to Lahore and Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was picked up in Bombay under the Salt Act and sentenced to 6 months' simple imprisonment.

On 18 May, the police made a lathi-charge on a procession of people in village Kala in Jhelum district in Punjab and ordered them to disperse. On their refusal to do so firing on the processionists was ordered. Twenty rounds of buckshot were fired, resulting in many injuries. Seventeen persons were arrested.

On 24 May at Multan a procession of satyagrahis clashed with police resulting in injury to one policeman and five members of the procession. On the same day there were arrests of Congressmen at Lucknow. In Kanpur Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi and N. P. Arora were sentenced to a year's imprisonment.

On 25 May Govind Ballabh Pant, ex-leader of the Swaraj Party in U.P., was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment under the Salt Act.

On 27 May Madan Mohan Malaviya was arrested at Campbellpur under Frontier Security Regulations, but was later released.

On 29 May in Bombay the Parsis organized a huge demonstration to express their support for the Civil Disobedience Movement. No less than 50,000, including 2,000 women, participated in the demonstration. The processionists shouted slogans: "No peace possible without cooperation of Gandhi" and "Gandhiji ki Jai".

On 30 May the Viceroy issued two more Ordinances to counteract picketing, non-payment of taxes and tampering with the loyalty of Government servants. These



were the so-called Unlawful Instigation Ordinance and the Anti-Intimidation Ordinance.<sup>14</sup>

## 5

The Government was making it clear that it intended to crush the Congress and the spirit of freedom by resort to lathis, bullets and imprisonments. On the other hand, it showed itself equally determined to continue with the charade of the Round Table Conference, without the participation of the Congress.

The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, on 12 May issued a statement on the political situation. He recalled in the statement his declaration of 31 October 1929, proposing, among other things, a Round Table Conference to discuss both British India and All-India problems. He regretted that the Congress at Lahore had rejected the British Government's offer; he regretted Gandhiji's decision to start civil disobedience, "a course of action which was clearly bound to involve a violation of law".

The Viceroy then mentioned the outbreak of violence "at Peshawar and Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, Chittagong and Karachi, Delhi and Sholapur" and how the Central and Provincial Governments had been compelled to arm themselves with "such further weapons as we judged necessary".

The Viceroy further said that the purpose of the British Government, however, remained unchanged and that "steps are being actively taken to arrange for assembling in London of representatives at the conference there contemplated on or about the 20th October next". The statement further said:

..... no settlement can be considered satisfactory which does not carry the consent of and give a sense of security to the important minority communities who will have to live under the new constitution. But so long



as those responsible for the Civil Disobedience Movement refuse to recognize the realities and proceed as if all that was necessary was to break the law ... so long will they be postponing the very things that they profess to desire for India and that others ... might by this time have gone far to achieve.

The Viceroy also enclosed with the statement copies of a letter to him addressed by the Prime Minister and his reply, agreeing on the proximate date of the conference in London and the procedure by which delegates were to be chosen. It was agreed that "fair distribution of representation cannot be assured by any process except that of invitation, in consultation where possible, with the interests concerned".<sup>15</sup>

Gandhiji, who had been permitted the use of newspapers by the jail authorities, wrote to Irwin on 18 May:

... I should fail in my duty if I did not express my opinion on your latest statement.

... The best constitution that can be devised will fail to bring real contentment and peace unless the grievances on which public attention is concentrated are immediately removed. The salt tax cannot remain. The liquor revenue must go. The foreign cloth importation which has produced a partial paralysis of the village life must be stopped. Have you not noted the strength of popular feeling in these matters?

No round table conference can therefore be of any avail unless you see things from our standpoint, and, leaving coercion, rely simply on, carrying conviction. Even those who you think are with you are with the Congressmen so far as wants are concerned.<sup>16</sup>



In an interview given to George Slocombe of the *Daily Herald* on 20 May in Yeravda jail, Gandhiji further elucidated the conditions for the participation of the Congress in the Round Table Conference. As summarized by Slocombe the points Gandhiji made were as follows:

1. The terms of reference of the Round Table Conference to include the framing of a Constitution giving India "the substance of independence".
2. Satisfaction to be granted to Gandhiji's demands for the repeal of the salt tax, prohibition of liquor and a ban on foreign cloth.
3. An amnesty for prisoners convicted of political offences to coincide with the end of the Civil Disobedience campaign.
4. The remaining seven points raised in Gandhiji's letter to the Viceroy to be left for future discussion.<sup>17</sup>

6

Boycott of foreign cloth and picketing of foreign-cloth shops represented a potent thrust of the Civil Disobedience Movement and achieved notable successes in the very first few months of the campaign. Traders in foreign cloth, displaying a spirit of rare self-sacrifice, lent their full support to the movement. In the second week of May, the Delhi Hindustani Mercantile Association, Delhi Piece-goods' Association and the Lahore Cloth Merchants' Association sent out cables cancelling earlier orders and warned their agents abroad not to send any more goods to destinations in North India. This created difficulties, since manufacture against the orders received had already proceeded far. But the Associated Chambers of Commerce advised and the Bengal and Punjab Chambers of Commerce agreed that no shipments should be made without previous consultations with the buyers.<sup>18</sup>



According to the report put out by the Government of India for the year 1930-31, impact of the boycott activities came to be felt most acutely during the last six months of the period. Says the report:

The total value of imports of cotton manufactures decreased by nearly  $3\frac{3}{4}$  crores during the year, of which Rs.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  crores came under piece-goods and  $\frac{1}{4}$  crore under yarn. There was a fall of 17 million yards in the quantity of piece-goods imported.... As regards indigenous manufacture, the production of yarn in Indian mills increased enormously during the year under review- reaching the record figure of 834 million lbs., as compared with 648 million lbs in 1928-29... the decrease in the quantity of piece-goods imported was only 17 million yards in comparison with the 1928-29 figure, but the fall in value was substantial and amounted to no less than Rs. 356 lakhs....<sup>19</sup>

A Free Press correspondent wrote:

Since the attack seems to be concentrated on the textile goods, it is here that the effectiveness of the movement is most visibly felt. But what worries the manufacturers is not so much the feeling that they would ultimately lose the Indian market as the fear that the existing contracts would either not be fulfilled or would be cancelled. The tendency to cancel the present orders seems to be on the increase.... 'The Daily Mail says, 'The latest news from India is likely to bring Lancashire's Indian trade to a complete standstill. Already spinning mills and weaving sheds are closing down indefinitely and thousands of operatives are joining the ranks of unemployed.'<sup>20</sup>

The Working Committee of the Congress, which met at Allahabad on 27 June 1930, was most enthused by the progress made in the boycott of foreign cloth in



a large number of cities, towns and villages and appreciated the patriotic spirit of the dealers who had not only stopped sale of foreign cloth but had also agreed to cancel orders already placed. The Committee directed Congress organizations to enforce strict and vigorous picketing of shops still selling foreign cloth. The Committee expressed the hope that the sale of foreign cloth would be stopped everywhere in India by 15 July 1930.<sup>21</sup>

## 7

Defiance of salt laws continued all over the country with unmitigated vigour throughout June and so did the police repression.

On 6 June a police force of 600 armed with lathis and led by European officers laid a siege round the Congress House in Bombay and carried out a search of the premises for about two hours. They arrested Jinabhai Joshi, President of the Congress Committee, and Manibhai Desai, its Secretary.

On 7 June, in Chechuhat in Bengal, police fired on demonstrators, killing six of them and injuring 25. The demonstrators were demanding the release of some satyagrahis arrested earlier. A force of 100 armed police was deployed to deal with the demonstrators.<sup>22</sup>

On the same day at Balisai in Midnapore district police fired on a crowd; causing injuries to twenty-five persons.

On 8 June, at Vellore in Madras two persons were killed and six seriously injured in police firing.

On 9 June at Bihpur Ashram in Bhagalpur district in Bihar, the police made a severe lathi-charge on a crowd of demonstrators injuring more than a hundred persons. For some days previously manufacture of contraband salt had been going on at Bihpur and arrests had been taking place of leading Congressmen of



the area. Picketing of liquor and ganja shops had also started and the police began to belabour satyagrahis wherever they found them. Babu Rajendra Prasad, who was present on the occasion, and was hurt in the lathi-charge, in a statement declared that the police charge on the crowd of volunteers on 9 June had been wholly unprovoked. Other leaders injured were Baldev Sahay, Murli Manohar Prasad and Prof. Jnan Saha. The blows were delivered on the eyes, on the back and on the head.<sup>23</sup>

On 10 June Satis Chandra Das Gupta, who had been functioning as President of the Bengal Council of Civil Disobedience, was arrested along with 85 volunteers. Satis Babu was later sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment.<sup>24</sup>

On 12 June in Bombay hundreds of processions were taken out in observance of the "Sholapur Day". The processions had been banned and the police had to resort to severe lathi-charge in many places to disperse the crowds. About 30 persons were injured and had to be taken to the Congress hospital.

In Calcutta on 15 June, the police raided the premises of the Civil Disobedience Council and arrested about 120 Congressmen. The North Calcutta Congress Committee, the Abhoy Ashram and the office of the B.P.C.C. were also raided.

On 15 June mass picketing of liquor shops started in Bombay. More than three hundred volunteers went out from the Congress House to undertake picketing. Large gatherings of Parsis supported the picketers. The police, in attempting to disperse them knocked down some Parsi pedestrians. To control the disturbance that ensued, 60 policemen with 12 sergeants arrived on the scene. In the lathi-charges that followed numerous persons were injured. A police sergeant was assaulted by the crowd.

On 21 June the Bombay Congress Committee held a rally of the National Militia for inspection by Motilal Nehru, acting President of the Congress, then on a visit



to the city. Batches of volunteers carrying the Congress flag converged on the Maidan. The police pounced upon them with lathis. About 20 women volunteers and 25 Sikhs sustained serious injuries. The volunteers regrouped and the police again made lathi-charges. About 250 were injured.

In Andhra on the same day a Gazette Extraordinary of the Madras Government declared the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee an unlawful association. The Guntur, West Krishna, East Krishna, West Godavari and Bezwada "war councils" were also declared illegal.

A Guntur Magistrate issued an order prohibiting the wearing of Gandhi caps "in any place frequented by the public within the limits of Guntur municipality".

On 25 June in Karachi A. T. Gidwani, Lalji Mehrotra and Swami Govindanand were arrested, tried and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment.

In Punjab the Governor declared illegal (1) the Punjab Provincial War Council, (2) the Amritsar District War Council, (3) the Punjab Provincial Satyagraha Committee, (4) the Punjab Provincial Naujawan Bharat Sabha, (5) all Naujawan Bharat Sabhas throughout Punjab; and (6) the Workers' Training College, Lahore.

8

On 28 June Vallabhbhai Patel was released from jail and was immediately called upon to intervene in the situation that had developed at the Gujarat College as a result of picketing being resorted to by satyagrahis to persuade students not to attend college. At his intervention the police were withdrawn and the satyagrahis agreed to picket the college at a distance of thirty feet from the college gate.

On 30 June, the acting President of the Congress, Motilal Nehru, and Secretary, Dr. Syed Mehmud, were arrested and the Congress Working Committee was declared an unlawful body.<sup>25</sup>





In the three months since the launching of civil disobedience by Gandhiji, defiance of law throughout the length and breadth of India was seen on a scale that was unprecedented in the history of the country. The response from the people was beyond the wildest hopes of the most optimist of Congress leaders. As the Government's own publication, *India in 1930-31*, admitted:

The amount of popular support which the Congress obtained for its activities was greater than many competent authorities - on its own side as well as that of the Government - had supposed beforehand to be probable. By the beginning of July there was no province in British India which had been altogether immune from the effects of the movement, and in all except two - Assam and the Central Provinces - the local Governments had at one time or another experienced considerable difficulty in dealing with the incidents to which it gave rise.

The Civil Disobedience Movement saw also an upsurge among women never before witnessed in the country's history or imagined possible before. The same Government publication had this to say on the subject:

Thousands of them - many being of good family and high educational attainments- suddenly emerged from the seclusion of their homes, and in some instances actually from purdah, in order to join Congress demonstrations and assist in picketing; and their presence on these occasions made the work the police were required to perform particularly unpleasant. Thus by the end of the first three months the Civil Disobedience Movement had proved in many ways surprisingly successful, and the energy and resources of the Government were fully engaged in combatting it.<sup>26</sup>



In the days and weeks to come women were to assume a much more important role in the Civil Disobedience Movement, making picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops almost a mass movement in all parts of India. Recalling those days later in 1942-44; in the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp during the half-hour walk in the garden (which he insisted on taking every day in the morning and evening unless it was raining, when he would walk on the verandah) Gandhiji told us that Irwin was a religious man. The repression he had to resort to made him sick at heart. He wrote to the India Office in London that the British Government would have to reduce India to a graveyard to continue to rule over it. "I cannot do it. We have to come to terms with Mr. Gandhi."



## CHAPTER XVI

### GANDHIJI IN YERAVDA PRISON

#### 1

In the course of the Salt Satyagraha, the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement, prior to the truce and the second R.T.C., Gandhiji spent a period of eight months and twenty days from 5 May 1930 to 26 January 1931 in jail. As during 1922-24, this time too he was kept at Yeravda.

Gandhiji was classified as a State Prisoner, that is to say, he was deemed to have been confined for reasons of State under Regulation XXV of 1827. He occupied almost the same accommodation as during his earlier imprisonment. According to a report of the Inspector General of Prisons:

Mr. Gandhi is confined in what was the old European yard. Two roomy cells have been placed at his disposal - one he uses as living room, the other as a sanitary annexe. There are wide verandahs in front and rear of the cells. The verandah in front has been screened off from the remainder of the yard.<sup>1</sup>

By way of furnishings Gandhiji had been provided with a bed, bedding, mosquito curtain, chairs and tables, a couple of book-shelves, a safe, a commode and chinks for the doors. He slept in the open and was not locked in for the night.<sup>2</sup>

Some convicts were detailed to help Gandhiji with his food and render other services. The Inspector General's report to the Home Department listed them as follows:

The jail steward, a Prabhu by caste, purchased fruit, etc., for Gandhiji, a Maratha convict milked the goat in Gandhiji's presence twice daily, a Brahmin convict cleaned his feeding utensils, a Maratha convict was detailed as a personal



attendant, a sweeper convict cleaned the latrine and two European convicts put out and brought in his cot.<sup>3</sup>

A sum of Rs. 100/- per month was sanctioned for his maintenance.

The special facilities, such as they were, irked Gandhiji. It pained him to avail himself of them. On 10 May he wrote to the Inspector General of Prisons:

The Government have suggested Rs. 100/- as monthly allowance. I hope I shall need nothing near it....

Neither you nor the Government will, I hope, consider me ungrateful for not accepting all the facilities offered to me. It is an obsession (if it be so called) with me that we are all living at the expense of the toiling semi-starved millions....

I have never taken kindly to the classification recently made. I hold that a murderer is just as much entitled to have his needs supplied as any other prisoner.<sup>4</sup>

2

Immediately on his arrival in jail on 5 May Gandhiji was examined by a Medical Board comprising R. F. Steel, A. A. Thomas and R. V. Martin, all I.M.S. officers and the last named also Superintendent of the Yeravda Prison.

The Board found Gandhiji "in a good state of health for a man of his age". Gandhiji mentioned the attack of apoplexy he had had three years earlier, which had resulted in "some paralysis of the left leg and arm with the tongue and eye also affected". The Board did not attach any great importance to this statement.

Dr. Jivraj Mehta, who read the medical bulletin in the Press, took exception to this. How could the Board dismiss the earlier medical history as related by Gandhiji? He wrote to the Jail Superintendent asking that the Board issue a fresh statement. The request was turned down.<sup>5</sup>



The Board continued to examine Gandhiji periodically and the reports it sent to the Government provide a record of the fluctuations in Gandhiji's health, and especially his weight, over the months in jail. He was examined on 10 June, 28 July, 21 August, 31 August, 3 September, 19 September, 30 September, 14 October, 30 October, 12 November, 25 November, 16 December, 7 January, 1931 and 20 January. His blood pressure and other systems remained throughout satisfactory. There was however a steady decrease in weight. By the end of August, he had lost 5 lb., which the doctors attributed partly to "digestive disturbances" and partly to the work and worry during the peace negotiations that were carried on through Sapru and Jayakar. By the end of October Gandhiji had regained the lost weight, but it again registered a decline, going down by 5 lb. This time one of the causes was Gandhiji's cutting down the quantity of food.<sup>6</sup>

## 3

Gandhiji believed that to a satyagrahi imprisonment amounted to civil death. He held that civil resisters ceased to be civil resisters as soon as they entered prison. The disobedience ended as soon as a satyagrahi was convicted by a court. He must then accept jail discipline.<sup>7</sup>

Gandhiji therefore conscientiously avoided any interference with the Civil Disobedience Movement going on outside, though he tried to keep himself informed of all that was going on outside the prison walls.

As during his previous imprisonment in Yeravda, Gandhiji had to carry on a sustained tussle with the jail authorities and the Bombay Government over his rights as a prisoner, especially in the matter of receiving and writing letters and of interviews.

Gandhiji made it clear to the jail authorities that he did not wish to have any newspapers and journals through the Government, for he did not want any



special privileges. Were they not all living at the expense of the toiling semi-starved millions? But he would like to have he said, *The Bombay Chronicle, The Times of India, Indian Social Reformer, Modern Review, Young India* and *Navajivan* (Hindi and Gujarati). He was permitted to have these.<sup>8</sup>

It was made clear at a very early stage that all newspapers and journals and for that matter any reading matter, including letters received, would be subject to censorship. All matter in English would be censored by the Jail Superintendent. All matter in any Indian language would be submitted by him to the District Magistrate, Poona, who would, when required, employ the services of the Oriental Translator. Doubtful cases would be reported to Government.<sup>9</sup>

In practice the system, as it operated, resulted in unnecessary delays both in receipt and in despatch. Everything received or despatched was sent by the Jail Superintendent to the Inspector General of Prisons, who sent it on for orders to the Secretary, Home Department, who occasionally, though not always, consulted the Home Member. Orders for necessary action were conveyed down the same line.

Gandhiji had to complain again and again to the jail authorities on this score. Thus, on 11 June he wrote to the Superintendent:

Although it is now a fortnight, I do not know what has happened to the Ashram letters that were received and those that I wrote. You told me you had sent them to the I.G.<sup>10</sup>

The letters - 23 of them - had indeed been sent to the Inspector General of Prisons, who had on 6 June sent them on to the Home Department. The Home Secretary returned them to I.G. Prisons on 27 June. Only after this were the letters delivered to Gandhiji.



Similarly, some letters and postcards addressed to Gandhiji were sent to the Home Department on 4 June. They were returned by the Home Department on 2nd July.<sup>11</sup>

As to the number of letters Gandhiji would be permitted to receive and write, the authorities were not very particular. At one stage the idea of 10 letters received and written per week was mooted, but then the Home Secretary suggested fifteen, with the Superintendent having the discretion to allow the number to be exceeded.<sup>12</sup>

On the question of interviews there was a good deal of disagreement between the authorities and Gandhiji. Gandhiji did not consider it right that the number of people coming to see him should be limited. In the end he agreed to (a) one interview per week, (b) time allowed about 20 minutes, (c) maximum number of persons allowed at an interview, four. Permission of the authorities would have to be secured by those coming for interview.<sup>13</sup>

The Government of Bombay later decided that Gandhiji should be allowed two more interviews a week with members of his family. Any number of persons up to seven might be allowed at an interview. Members of the family would be held to include blood relations only, though as an exception Mirabehn would be treated as a blood relation. Other interviews would be confined to one per week.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhiji objected. Surely if only blood relations were to be allowed, Kasturba Gandhi would have to be excluded, for she was not a blood relative. Her brothers and other relatives would also have to be excluded. Gandhiji pointed out that at the Ashram and outside there were many widows, girls, boys and men who were perhaps more to him than many a blood relative. If they could not see him on the same terms as relatives, he would rather not see the latter.<sup>15</sup>



The matter was not resolved and on 8 July Gandhiji submitted to the jail authorities a "trial list" of persons whom he considered like blood relations. The list contained 68 names. It did not contain names of persons who were relatives. Gandhiji said if the list was approved he reserved the right to submit a further list.<sup>16</sup>

The Home Department, Bombay, to which the matter was referred, found the length of the list unreasonable and had it conveyed to Gandhiji that Government were unable to vary the orders already passed in this regard. In the first three months of his imprisonment Gandhiji had had only one interview, when Kasturba, Mirabehn and Mathuradas Trikumji saw him. He had refused to avail himself of another interview, on 30 May, on the ground that the authorities had prevented Perinbehn Captain and Reginald Reynolds from seeing him, saying that they were not blood relations. He had particular objection to Perinbehn not being allowed in.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4

There was one issue however over which things came very near to a breaking-point. In his very first approach to the jail authorities soon after his imprisonment Gandhiji had let it be known that he felt the necessity of contact with the satyagrahi prisoners in Yeravda.

This was no special privilege that Gandhiji wanted. He believed that if an ordinary prisoner was permitted to have the company of his fellows in the same prison, it as legitimate for him too to entertain such a desire.<sup>18</sup>

The prison authorities, "for various administrative reasons", did not agree, but said Gandhiji could have a companion of his choice in the same yard. On their own they thought of Kaka Kalelkar, who had been serving a two-year term in Sabarmati jail. They opted for Kalelkar because, having been an associate of





Gandhiji for over ten years he was already as "good" or as "bad" as Gandhiji could make him and further association with Gandhiji was not likely to have any material effect. Gandhiji thought it would not be right for Kalelkar to be deprived of the company of his fellow prisoners at Sabarmati on his account, but finally acquiesced. On 19 June Kalelkar was transferred to Yeravda from Sabarmati and lodged in the same yard with Gandhiji.

On 21 September Gandhiji wrote peremptorily to the jail authorities to be allowed to see the civil disobedience prisoners lodged in Yeravda at least occasionally. He had been reading reports in the Press about ill-treatment of prisoners in jail. Gandhiji said he was sure some of the statements were gross exaggerations. He hoped that most were and he would like to believe that all were false. Even so his mind was disturbed.

Gandhiji was particularly anxious about Pyarelal, for he had heard from the Ashram sources that he had not been well. Pyarelal, Gandhiji wrote, was like a son to him. He would like to establish contact with him and other prisoners and reassure himself. He added:

I am aware as a prisoner I have no rights and no choice as to the disposal of my body. But I know also that the upkeep of my body requires my cooperation. I should no longer be interested in the preservation of a body that cannot be used for the service that the dweller within yearns after.<sup>19</sup>

About Pyarelal Gandhiji had also approached the prison authorities earlier. A couple of days before, on 19 September he had written to R. V Martin, the Jail Superintendent:

Pyarelal has been with me for the past fourteen years and is as a son to me. He is a silent scholar and worker. His extremely shy nature makes him look often awkward. His being in the hospital renders it necessary for me



to see him. If I may not be taken to the hospital, he may be brought to the yard where I am placed. Nothing would please me better than to nurse him.... would like you to enter into the feelings of a parent and appreciate how he would feel on hearing of a sick boy who is within a calling distance.<sup>20</sup>

The Home Secretary to the Government of Bombay, G. F. S. Collins, was for rejecting out of hand Gandhiji's demand for unrestricted liberty to see prisoners and asked the Home Member if he did not see reason for Gandhiji to be moved outside the Presidency even if this required a fresh ordinance. But Home Member Hotson (who was later to be appointed Acting Governor of Bombay took a different view. He said if it could be shown that there was any specially close connection between Gandhiji and Pyarelal the request should be granted, in which case Pyarelal might be allowed in the same room or yard with Gandhiji for a short time. Access to other prisoners must be definitely refused.

The Inspector General of Prisons was accordingly informed on 1 October by the Home Department that Pyarelal had been "a constant companion of Mr. Gandhi both at the Ashram and when he went on tour throughout 1929" and should be allowed one, and one only, interview with Gandhiji.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, having had no response to his communications of 19 and 21 September from the authorities, who were still in the process of making up their minds, Gandhiji was getting desperate. On 30 September he wrote to the Jail Superintendent:

... the request I have made is a peremptory call of my fundamental being. I can no longer restrain myself now. The deprivation of touch with these fellow prisoners is unbearable for me. Unless therefore I get satisfaction by Saturday noon next, I must begin to withdraw my cooperation as to the



upkeep of my body. ... The commencement will be made with my refusing all food except the ordinary convict diet.... I can take only five natural ingredients in addition to salt. Therefore, so far as I can take only kanji and bajri and jowari chapati. I may not take dal or vegetables as they contain more than five ingredients.... I would like the Government not to regard this letter as a threat but consider it as an act of courtesy and consideration.<sup>22</sup>

On 4 October 1930 the Home Department wrote to the Inspector General of Prisons that Gandhiji should be permitted to have interviews "with such of his friends undergoing imprisonment in Yeravda Prison who may be ill or who may have been reported as having been unlawfully treated". It was at the same time made clear that "ordinarily there should not be more than one such interview per week".<sup>23</sup>

The immediate possibility of fast, or of a change of diet to ordinary prison fare, was thus averted. Nevertheless, Gandhiji's way of abruptly cutting down on some item of diet or other caused concern in the country and anxiety also in official circles. *The Bombay Chronicle* of 13 November published a story that Gandhiji had stopped taking fresh fruit on hearing of police lathi-charge against satyagrahi volunteers outside. The Government asked the jail authorities what truth there was in the story. On enquiry it was discovered that Gandhiji earlier used to have some oranges, which he had discontinued from 16 May. But the Jail Superintendent R. V Martin also wrote on 25 November that Gandhiji had continued to take raisins and dates and had not stopped taking these.<sup>24</sup>

This was far from the truth. In fact, beginning with the end of August Gandhiji had wholly given up raisins and dates as he was taking vegetables as a substitute for them, chiefly tomatoes.<sup>25</sup>



In December Gandhiji curtailed his diet even more drastically. He gave up the goat's milk he had been having. The idea was to see whether he could do without protein foods. The immediate effect was a reduction in weight. He also added bhakhris of jowar or bajri. He was sure he was feeling better and his constipation too was under control.<sup>26</sup>

On 19 December R. V. Martin, Jail Superintendent, sent to the Government of Bombay Home Department the following list of the articles of diet then being taken by Gandhiji: (1) one chapati bajri or jowari bread; (2) 2 lb. vegetables (any two from among cabbage, cauliflower, beetroot, pumpkin, nolkhol, spinach, sweet potato; (3) 3 days in the week, 60 dates per day when one vegetable was omitted; (4) over one ounce shelled almonds reduced to a paste; (5) 3 sour lemons. This quantity of food was divided into three meals. The jail authorities further informed the Government that Gandhiji was "a very difficult person to deal with as far as food is concerned" and would eat only what he wanted and nothing else.<sup>27</sup>

## 5

Gandhiji was first allowed a seven-minute interview with Pyarelal, then just recovering from an attack of dysentery. He looked pulled down, Gandhiji told the jailors.<sup>23</sup>

On 29 November, following the discharge from prison of Kaka Kalelkar, Pyarelal was transferred to Gandhiji's yard as companion to Gandhiji.

Kaka Kalelkar shared Gandhiji's yard for a little over five months.<sup>29</sup>

Gandhiji relished the company of Kaka Saheb but accepted it somewhat grudgingly, for it necessitated his having to alter his daily routine to a certain extent. For instance, Gandhiji had been trying to learn the Gita verses by heart before Kaka Saheb's coming and had made considerable progress, having finished



memorizing the first twelve chapters and half of Ch. XIII. After Kaka Saheb came, this routine fell behind. Instead Gandhiji started learning Marathi from Kaka Saheb.<sup>30</sup>

On Gandhiji's interaction with Kaka Kalelkar during this period we do not learn much from his letters, in which there are references chiefly to Kalelkar's attempts to master the charkha sent to Gandhiji by Mirabehn. Apparently there was not much progress and Kalelkar had to revert to the other charkha, which was far easier for him to operate. There are also references to Kaka Saheb continuing to gain weight while in jail- this went up from 109 lb. when he first came to 117 lb during his last days in jail.<sup>31</sup>

Within two hours of Kaka Saheb's departure Pyarelal was transferred to Gandhiji's yard. Within a week Gandhiji was writing to Narandas:

Pyarelal is improving quite well in health. I hope it will not go down while he is with me. His being with me is like a goat being near a wolf. A goat tied in front of a wolf will grow thinner every day even if you feed it on the finest grass. Something of that sort used to happen to Pyarelal...<sup>32</sup>

The bulk of Pyarelal's working time was taken up by spinning 100 rounds on the takli and 375 rounds on the spinning-wheel. He also had to make the required slivers. All this left Pyarelal very little time to read.<sup>33</sup>

Gandhiji also devoted a large part of his time to spinning. Where Pyarelal span 375 rounds on the spinning-wheel, Gandhiji span 275. On the takli he was able to spin as much as Pyarelal, that is to say 100 rounds. Spinning on the takli alone took him two hours and he did this standing up.

The next activity on the priority list was of course writing letters. There are some 782 items- all treated as letters- published in the Collected Works volumes covering the period of Gandhiji's imprisonment.



To whom were all these letters written and on what topics? It appears that of the 782 communications listed as letters, some 443, or nearly 57 per cent of the total number, were sent to women addressees. These included women of immediate family circle, daughters-in-law, granddaughters and grand nieces, such as Sushila Gandhi, Nirmala Gandhi, Rukmini Bajaj, Radha Gandhi, Manu Gandhi, Jamna Gandhi, Rami Gandhi, and of course Mirabehn, who even the jail authorities treated as being among the "blood relations" of Gandhiji. Then there were the women who had made the Ashram their home and had been devoting themselves to activities pursued at the Ashram, and those who were conducting constructive work or work of education independently away from the Ashram. These together made up a long list and included ladies such as Premabehn Katak, Gangabehn Vaidya, Gangabehn Jhaveri, Kusum Desai, Ramabehn Joshi, Premlila Thackersey, Prabhavati, Saralabehn Sarabhai, Janakidevi Bajaj, Maitri Giri, Durga Giri, Gomati Mashruwala, Motibehn Choksi, Mithubehn Petit, Amina Qureshi, Kalavati Trivedi, Raihana Tyabji, Lilavati Asar, Vasumati Pandit, Lakshmi Khare, Nani behn Jhaveri, Sharda C. Shah, Dudhibehn Desai, Hari-ichchha Desai, Hem Prabha Das Gupta, Taramati Mathuradas Trijumji, Mahalakshmi Thakkar, Manibehn Patel and others.

The letters contained guidance on personal matters, on problems of relationships with other workers and on spiritual problems. The most important thing was that each addressee could find comfort in the thought that Gandhiji had her troubles at heart and could spare the time to write to her individually.

Then there were letters meant to be read by the Ashram as a whole. These were addressed to Narandas Gandhi, manager of the Ashram. These mostly concerned affairs of the Ashram. However, from 22 July 1930, Gandhiji started the practice



of appending to his letters to Narandas Gandhi, a discourse on the Ashram vows, to be read out after the prayer in the morning. Gandhiji undertook the task at the suggestion of an Ashram inmate, Vishwanath. The intention, as Gandhiji explained to Narmada Gandhi, was that it might help those who read the discourses to understand the meaning of the Ashram vows as Gandhiji himself understood it. Gandhiji wrote the discourses every Tuesday morning regularly from 22 July to the end of October. He covered the vows of Truth, Non-violence, Brahmacharya (celibacy), Control of the Palate, Non-stealing, Non-possession, Fearlessness, Removal of Untouchability, Body Labour and Humility.

Truth and Ahimsa, in Gandhiji's view, were closely related. Truth was the end, ahimsa the means. He wrote:

Ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which is the reverse? Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means and Truth is the end.... If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.<sup>34</sup>

On the ideal of non-possession Gandhiji wrote:

Perfect fulfilment of the ideal of non-possession requires that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only very few, if any at all, can reach this ideal.... But we must keep the ideal constantly before us, and in the light thereof critically examine our possessions and try to reduce them. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants.<sup>35</sup>



As for removal of untouchability, which had been assigned a place in the Ashram vows, it was not merely a matter of individual observance but required active participation of everyone to make it successful. Untouchability was an evil that had very deep roots in society.

Gandhiji wrote:

This evil has now assailed all departments of life. We practise untouchability against followers of other religions than our own, against those who belong to other sects than our own within the Hindu fold and even against members of our own sect.... We have hardly enough time even to look after ourselves, thanks to the never-ending ablutions and exclusive preparation of food necessitated by false notions of untouchability. While pretending to pray to God, we offer worship not to God but to ourselves.... Removal of untouchability spells the breaking down of barriers between man and man, and between the various orders of beings.<sup>36</sup>

Gandhiji had always been insistent on equality of religions, implying by it equal respect for all religious paths and viewpoints. Underlying equal respect for all religions was the assumption that one's own religion might lack perfection, for it after all emanated from human consciousness. It was inevitable that there should be many religions. Said he:

Even as a tree has a single trunk but many branches and leaves; so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium.<sup>37</sup>

All religions were divinely inspired, but all were imperfect, in so far as they were products of human mind and were taught by human beings. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which did not mean indifference towards one's own faith.





Gandhiji always felt that one of the tests of ahimsa was humility. Humility did not form part of the Ashram vows, having been excluded on the ground that it did not lend itself to being deliberately practised. While many virtues could be cultivated, a conscious cultivation of humility amounted to hypocrisy. It was an inborn quality, not easy to measure.

At the same time one could not be truly nonviolent if one lacked humility. But how would humility be defined? Gandhiji wrote:

Humility should make the possessor realize that he is nothing. Directly we imagine ourselves to be something, there is egotism. If a man who keeps observances is proud of keeping them, they will lose much, if not all, of their value. And a man who is proud of his virtue often becomes a curse to society.... Even a little thought will suffice to convince us that all creatures are nothing more than a mere atom in this universe. Our existence as embodied beings is purely momentary. What are a hundred years in eternity? But if we shatter the chains of egotism and melt into the ocean of humanity, we share its dignity.... A drop in the ocean partakes of the greatness of its parent, although it is unconscious of it. But it is dried up as soon as it enters upon an existence independent of the ocean.<sup>38</sup>

These discourses on the Ashram vows were later published in the form of a booklet under the title *Mangal Prabhat*.

Though the theme of the vows had been exhausted Gandhiji continued the Tuesday morning discourses in his letters addressed to Narandas Gandhi a while longer. He wrote on *yajna*, on *bhakti* and on various other concepts developed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Gandhiji also began and completed during this term at Yeravda a translation of the Ashram Bhajanavali (compendium of 253 hymns sung



at the morning and evening prayers at the Ashram). He began the work on 7 May and finished it on 20 December, taking altogether a little over seven months over it.

Gandhiji took up the enterprise, in the first place, for the benefit of Mirabehn. In a letter to her dated 28 July, he said:

In translating the hymns for you I am giving myself much joy. Have I not expressed my love oftener in storms than in gentle soothing showers of affection? The memory of these storms adds to the pleasure of this exclusive translation for you. But it is a long affair.<sup>39</sup>

While engaged in the task Gandhiji kept admitting to Mirabehn that his pace was slow, that he was doing about one hymn a day. This was hardly surprising, considering that the selection consisted of hymns and verses taken from many sources and from many Indian languages: Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, etc.

John S. Hoyland later made an adaptation of Gandhiji's translation. This was brought out by George Allen & Unwin. But it was a bit too free, so that at places it was not even recognizable as Gandhiji's translation.<sup>40</sup>



## CHAPTER XVII

### CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE SPREADS

#### 1

From July 1930 onwards, approximately, the defiance of Salt Laws did not remain the predominant mode of civil disobedience. The command of civil disobedience, with Gandhiji now in jail, had passed into the hands of the Congress and the Movement was de facto and de jure being organized and led by the Working Committee. Resolution No.2 of the Working Committee, passed at Allahabad at its meeting held between 4 and 7 June 1930, laid down the guidelines for the further development of the Movement. The resolution said:

Whereas the Government has indulged in a regular orgy of relentless repression to stifle the Satyagraha Movement and has established a reign of terror throughout the country....

And whereas the Governor-General has recently promulgated three ordinances, namely, the Press Ordinance, the Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance and the Unlawful Instigation Ordinance....

Now therefore this Committee calls upon the country to meet the situation thus created, by publicly disobeying the three ordinances aforesaid with calm and unflinching courage and strict observance of non-violence under the gravest provocation as heretofore....

In particular the Committee advises the people to carry on with redoubled vigour the peaceful picketing of liquor and foreign-cloth shops, social boycott of Government officers known to have participated in unjustifiable assaults on satyagrahis and others and to extend the campaign for non-payment of land tax to parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra



and Tamil Nadu where it has not yet been started and also to intensify and extend the campaign of non-payment of chowkidari tax in Bengal and start it in Bihar and Orissa.<sup>1</sup>

On 1 July Motilal Nehru, acting President of the Congress, and Syed Mahmud, arrested earlier in the week, were tried by the District Magistrate, Allahabad, for being members of an unlawful association, namely the Working Committee, and for abetting an offence, namely the violation of the three ordinances, by passing resolution No.2, summarized above. The accused refused to answer questions. They were sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment each. Motilal Nehru was taken to Naini Jail, where Jawaharlal Nehru was imprisoned.

The boycott week observed in Bombay from 1 to 7 July, saw some brisk activity on the part of the satyagrahis. Not only were liquor and foreign-cloth shops picketed, but also colleges, so that except for two colleges, namely Elphinston College and Sydenham College, all the rest had to be closed down. On 3 July there were huge demonstrations in the city, which the police tried to disperse with lathi-charges in which there were several casualties. Perinbehn Captain, President of the Bombay P.C.C., was arrested.<sup>2</sup>

In Calcutta women formed a "Nari Satyagraha Committee" to carry on all-day long picketing of liquor shops and foreign-cloth shops. Men also joined in this task. In the first week of July the programme was carried out with great intensity all over Bengal. At some places the picketers were not entirely peaceful and there were reports of their having assaulted people near the shops.

On 4 July Perinbehn Captain was tried along with Lilavati Munshi. Both were sentenced to three months' simple imprisonment.

In the whole of Maharashtra, the movement had gathered great momentum. Men and women, old and young, boys and girls, rich and poor had all joined the



fight. Arrests were made for picketing, for holding demonstrations, and for distributing pamphlets containing resolutions of the Working Committee. In certain areas there was also civil disobedience of the Forest Laws and stoppage of land revenue payment. In the first week of July in Thana district, landholders were issued notices that those withholding a part of revenue were liable to have their lands and property forfeited.

In Guntur, in Andhra Pradesh, the District Magistrate threatened the Municipality with action under the Act of 1908 if they persisted in flying the Congress flag in the Municipal premises. On 7 July the flag was removed from the Municipal building.

On 8 July the Government struck at the Navajivan Press for continuing to print *Young India* and *Navajivan* without furnishing security. The press was forfeited. The property was valued at Rs. 40,000.

On 6 July Rajendra Prasad was arrested at Chhapra under the Intimidation Ordinance. On 10 July at Pusad M. S. Aney was apprehended along with ten other satyagrahis for breaking Forest Laws. He was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment. On the following day it was the turn of Dr. B. S. Moonje with 30 volunteers to be arrested on the same charge. They cut grass and wood from the forest and were arrested under Section 379.

On 11 July the Bombay Congress organized a Garhwal day to acclaim the courage of the soldiers of the Garhwali platoon posted at Peshawar who had disobeyed orders to fire on the populace earlier in April, the news of which had been suppressed by the Government. As many as 25 lathi-charges were made on the peaceful volunteers. 520 were injured. About 250 volunteers were arrested. The lathi-charges presented a shocking scene. Lathis rained on the heads of absolutely peaceful and unresisting volunteers. Public conscience was outraged.



The Western India National Liberal Association passed a resolution deploring "that at this juncture when it is essential that a favourable atmosphere should be created for a peaceful solution of the Indian problem by negotiation, events should be allowed to happen which must create further bitterness between the Government and the people." The resolution proceeded:

The sight of beatings of the Congress volunteers who are non-violent and who submit themselves to the beating and are then removed to hospitals necessarily invites sympathy in the minds of thousands of spectators who carry away feelings of resentment and hatred against Government.<sup>3</sup>

On 17 July the police fired at a group of satyagrahis picketing a liquor shop at Madurai in the Madras Presidency. Three persons were killed and several injured. Seven volunteers were arrested. The police then resorted to lathi-charge to disperse the crowd that had gathered on the scene.

In Calcutta picketing of colleges picked up further momentum, with girls participating in large numbers. The Bethune College and Presidency College were among the colleges picketed.

The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee also increased the tempo of picketing at shop selling foreign cloth. The police continued to arrest the picketers and also repeatedly raided the offices of the B.P.C.C., picking up the office bearers. Lalit Mohan Sanyal and Satindranath Sen were among those arrested.<sup>4</sup>

In Bombay on 1 and 2 August large processions were taken out in connection with the anniversary of Lokmanya Tilak. On 1 August the procession as led by Madan Mohan Malaviya and Hansa Mehta and gradually swelled to a strength of one lakh. At several places the police tried to stop it. The leaders simply squatted on the road and refused to disperse for hours together.



On 2 August the pattern was the same. The police then arrested all the members of the Working Committee participating in the procession. They included Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sherwani, Jairamdas Doulatram and Hardikar. Vallabhbhai Patel, it may be remembered, had been released from prison only on 26 June. The crowd thinned after the arrests but did not disperse and the police resorted to a lathi-charge, in which about 350 processionists received serious injuries. The news of the arrest of the members of the Working Committee provoked a spontaneous hartal in the city.<sup>5</sup> Patel was sent to Yeravda prison, where Gandhiji was incarcerated.

## 2

Refusal of the peasantry to pay land revenue added an important dimension to the Civil Disobedience Movement. The movement began in the villages of Gujarat. First it was Ras in Borsad taluka that took up the non-payment of land revenue as an item in the satyagraha programme. After Gandhiji's arrest on 5 May it spread to other areas. Among these were Bardoli Taluka in Surat and some areas in Kheda district. Although payment of revenue was due only towards the end of the year, so that immediate non-payment was not involved, yet in some cases, as in Ras and some villages of Nadiad taluka, the previous year's revenue was in arrears. The Government viewed this new development as a grave threat. The Home Secretary, Government of India, wrote to the Bombay Government that it would cause "more embarrassment than any other feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement".<sup>6</sup>

The Government advanced the date of payment of land revenue to 5 October, making it impossible for the peasantry to gather their harvest before the land revenue had been paid. Mamlatdars went round villages with lorryloads of policemen, beating and intimidating villagers, breaking open houses, snatching



ornaments from the persons of peasant women and carrying off to prison anyone suspected of being a local leader.

The zoolum (atrocities) of the officials, particularly of one Mamlatdar, Mohanlal Shah, led to the villagers migrating to the territory of the neighbouring princely state of Baroda. Peasants from Borsad and from Nadiad talukas of Kheda, from Bardoli and Jalalpur talukas of Surat, and from Jambusar Taluka of Broach fled their homes to escape the reign of terror. According to the estimate of Baroda officials some 28,000. *Hijrat*is from the three Gujarat districts had set up colonies inside the Baroda territory, composed of huts built from leaves and branches of trees.

But the Mamlatdars of the Government were not satisfied with having driven the peasants from their hearths and homes. They incited the non-Patidar peasants to grab the Patidar houses even to burn them and harvest their crops and occupy their lands. About fifty houses in seventeen different villages were burnt down. But most villagers thus approached (they belonged to the poor Baraiya and Patanvadia communities) refused to avail themselves of the confiscated Patidar property. They said even if they were given the land free of cost they would not have it.<sup>7</sup>

In Bengal Civil Disobedience activities, and especially the picketing of liquor and foreign-cloth shops and colleges, showed no slackening and there was no let up in the police terror let loose on the volunteers. According to a review of the movement brought out by the Congress, ever since 22 'June when women first took out a procession, they remained in the thick of the fight. Towards the end of July when a procession of women was stopped by the police they squatted in front of the police till 2 a.m. singing national songs. Almost every town in Bengal had its share of repression. In Barisal 500 persons were injured in a lathi charge





on a single day. According to an estimate of the Congress the average number of arrests during this period came to 200 persons a day.<sup>8</sup>

A statement compiled by the Government for the Central Assembly showed that under the Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance alone, till 30 June, there were no less than 3,750 prosecutions: in Bihar and Orissa, 1757, in Bengal 886, in Bombay 736 and in Punjab 123.<sup>9</sup>

Arrests of Congress leaders went on apace. On 27 August members of the Working Committee, still remaining outside, were arrested. They included Dr. Ansari, Madan Mohan Malaviya (who had been nominated on the Working Committee by the acting President Sardar Patel before his arrest, Vithalbhai Patel, Mathuradas Trikumji, Lala Dunichand of Ambala, Deep Narayan Singh, Dr. B. C. Roy, Sardar Mangal Singh, Afzal Haq and Raja Rao. They were all sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment.

On 28 August in Delhi 14 women and 21 men volunteers were sentenced to undergo three months' imprisonment each and a fine of Rs. 50. They were tried under the Anti-Intimidation Ordinance.

In Madras and Bombay, the Working Committee was declared an unlawful association.

3

A short interlude, outside the Civil Disobedience Movement and not affecting its rhythm and tempo in any manner, was the effort made by Sapru and Jayakar to bring about a reconciliation between the Government of India and the Congress. The exercise was started by George Slocombe of the Daily Herald, who had earlier had an interview with Gandhiji in the Yeravda prison on 20 May. On 20 and 25 June he sounded Motilal Nehru for his views on the possibility of the Congress



calling off the Civil Disobedience Movement and agreeing to participate in the Round Table Conference. The statement put up to Motilal Nehru was that privately His Majesty's Government should give an assurance to the Congress that though at the Round Table Conference they could not commit the British Parliament, they would support the demand for responsible Government for India; that Motilal Nehru would undertake to carry such an assurance from the Government to Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. If the assurance was accepted, it was thought, the door might be opened for a reconciliation. Slocombe also forwarded a copy of this statement to Sapru.

In July Sapru and Jayakar saw the Viceroy in Simla a number of times and on 13 July wrote to him a letter. They referred to the Viceroy's desire to "explore every possibility in finding an agreed solution of the constitutional problem", and sought his permission to interview Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and Motilal Nehru in jail in furtherance of it.

The Viceroy again refused to commit the Government of India to anything but said if they believed that they might be able to assist in the restoration of normal conditions in the country, he would not interpose any obstacles.

On 23 and 24 July Sapru and Jayakar met Gandhiji in the Yeravda prison. Gandhiji gave them a note to be shown to the Nehrus, imprisoned in Naini Jail, and to Vallabhbhai Patel. He wrote that if the Round Table Conference limited itself to a discussion of safeguards, etc. he would have no objection. If the required assurance would be forthcoming from the Government he would be willing to withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement, except that picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops would have to be continued. So too the manufacture of salt by the people.



The Government for its part should order (1) the release of all satyagrahi prisoners, convicted or under-trial, who were not guilty of violence, (2) restoration of properties confiscated under the Salt Act, the Press Act and the Revenue Act, (3) refund of fines, and (4) reinstatement of village officers who had resigned in the course of the movement. The Viceregal ordinances should be repealed.

In a separate letter to Motilal Nehru Gandhiji said the note represented the roughest draft of what would satisfy him personally but that Jawaharlal's must be the final voice.<sup>10</sup>

Sapru and Jayakar then interviewed the Nehrus in Naini Jail on 27 and 28 July. The Nehrus on their part gave the mediators their own note, marked confidential.

In the note they said that being prisoners they had not been in touch with the happenings outside and had no opportunity to discuss things with the members of the Working Committee who were all in jail, the Working Committee itself having been declared an unlawful association, or with members of the A.I.C.C.- nearly three quarters of the 360 membership of which was also in different jails, or with Gandhiji. But any terms agreed upon between the Government and the Congress should be definite and there must be no room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

In a separate letter addressed to Gandhiji Jawaharlal expressed himself against "a false or weak move on our part". He further wrote:

For myself I delight in warfare. It makes me feel that I am alive. Events of the last four months in India have gladdened my heart and have made me prouder of Indian men, women and even children than I had ever been.... May I congratulate you on the new India you have created by your magic touch!<sup>11</sup>



On 31 July, and 1 and 2 August Jayakar saw Gandhiji and Gandhiji gave him another note:

(1) No constitutional scheme would be acceptable to Mr. Gandhi which did not contain a clause allowing India the right to secede from the Empire at her desire and another clause which gave the right and power to India to deal satisfactorily with his eleven points.

(2) The Viceroy should be made aware of this position of Mr. Gandhi. ... The Viceroy should also be made aware that Mr. Gandhi would insist at the Round Table Conference on a clause giving India the right to have examined by an independent tribunal all the British claims and concessions given to Britishers in the past.

The two peacemakers suggested to the Government that the Nehrus be taken to Yeravda prison to enable them to discuss things with Gandhiji. The Viceroy had no objection and accordingly Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Syed Mahmud were put in a special train and taken to Poona on 10 August. The three leaders had prolonged deliberations with Gandhiji on 12, 13, 14 and 15 August. Vallabhbhai Patel, Jairamdas Doulatram and Sarojini Naidu were also summoned for short durations for consultations. So were Sapru and Jayakar.

On 15 August the leaders handed a letter to Sapru and Jayakar. In the letter they expressed their gratitude to the two Liberals for trying to effect a settlement between the Government and the Congress but expressed the view that the time was not yet ripe for securing a settlement honourable for the country. They expressed distrust of British intentions and British declarations and denied that the British Government had been converted. No solution, they said, would be acceptable to the Congress unless the British Government (a) recognized the right of India to secede at will from the Empire, (b) gave to India complete



National Government including the control of defence forces and economic control and covered Gandhiji's eleven points and (c) gave to India the right to refer to an independent tribunal such British claims and concessions as the National Government might consider unjust.

On the Government making a satisfactory declaration in regard to the above points the leaders undertook to recommend to the Working Committee the advisability of calling off the Civil Disobedience Movement, except that the picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops would be continued as also the manufacture of salt by the people.

The Government on its part would be required to release all satyagrahi prisoners, convicted or under-trial, restore confiscated properties, refund fines and reinstate village officials who had resigned during the Civil Disobedience Movement. All Viceregal ordinances must also be repealed.

Only then would the Congress consider the question of participating in the Round Table Conference.

The letter was signed by Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jairamdas Doulatram and Syed Mahmud.<sup>12</sup>

On 19 August the Nehrus were taken back from Yeravda to Allahabad. Copies of this letter were immediately sent by Sapru and Jayakar to the Viceroy in Simla and they themselves went up to Simla and had prolonged conferences with the Viceroy on 26 and 27 August. The Viceroy then wrote them a letter putting forth the Government's view on the points contained in the letter of the Congress leaders. The Viceroy rejected the letter, both on grounds of its tone and its contents and declared that any discussion of the problem on the basis of the proposals contained in it was impossible. He repeated the Government's position on the functions of the Round Table Conference. He could give no guarantee that



upon Civil Disobedience being withdrawn all the political prisoners not involved in violent acts would be released, for it was a matter for the local Governments to decide.

In his discussions with Sapru and Jayakar the Viceroy made the following points: The Government would not agree to Gandhiji raising the question of secession at the Round Table Conference. If he decided to do so the Government would have to inform the Secretary of State of the fact. The Government would not like to remove the salt tax, as it would amount to loss of revenue.

As for picketing, the Ordinance against it would be withdrawn, but molestation or intimidation would be tackled through existing laws.

As for reinstatement of dismissed officials it was a matter for the local Governments to decide.

Confiscated printing presses could be returned.

The Nehrus were not encouraged by the letter of the Viceroy and the points made by him in discussions. They wrote to Gandhiji accordingly.

On 5 September Gandhiji addressed a final letter to Sapru and Jayakar, which was also signed by Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu and Jairamdas Doulatram. The letter regretted that the Viceroy had only repeated the original position of the Government of India on all questions. He was not willing even to repeal the Government's monopoly of salt and he was not willing to treat as an open question Gandhiji's right to raise the question of secession from the Empire at the Round Table Conference. There appeared to be an unbridgeable gulf between the Government and the Congress. It was not surprising that a few months' suffering had not converted the British.<sup>13</sup>

Thus ended the efforts to bring about reconciliation between the Government and the Congress. And the Civil Disobedience Movement continued.



In the meantime, the report of the Statutory Commission (Simon Commission) had also been published. It was in two volumes: Volume I was published on 7 June 1930 and Vol. II on 24 June.

Vol. I - called "Summary" - contained a survey of Indian situation. It was a 409-page document, divided into seven parts dealing, in that order, with "conditions of the problem", the existing constitutional structure, the working of the reformed constitution, the administrative system as existing, public finance, growth of education, and impressions about the public opinion in India.

Discussing the communal question, the Report said the conflict that marked Hindu-Muslim relations could not be attributed to communal representation and that there was no ground for believing that if communal representation were done away with communal strife would disappear. The cause of the conflict, in the Commission's view, was the struggle for political power and for opportunities which political power conferred.

Discussing the demand for withdrawal of British troops and for Indianization of the armed forces, the Commission held that the presence of British troops and the leadership of British officers was a guarantee that the soldiery would not be a menace to the millions who were conducting their civil occupations without any thought of the consequences which might ensue if the British troops were withdrawn and the Indian army were composed entirely of representatives of the Indian fighting races. If a self-governing India were to rely solely upon Indian troops for maintaining and restoring internal order she would be exposing herself to great risk.

There were a great many rather ponderous observations on the constitutional powers of the Centre and the Provinces, on the question of franchise and the



need to broaden it, tasks of legislatures, the unwieldy nature of Indian constituencies, reform of the administrative services, local self-government and education.

Coming to the demand for self-government voiced by Indian political parties, the Report said:

The British people so long accustomed to self-government are bound to sympathize with the movement even though they may deplore some of its manifestations.... In our view the most formidable of the evils from which India is suffering have their roots in the social and economic customs of long standing which can only be remedied by the action of the Indian people themselves. They are much less likely to be remedied if blame for their continuance can be put, however unreasonably, on others.

5

The pith of the Report was of course in Vol. II – Recommendations. They were as a whole retrograde, in that they took things backwards instead of taking them forward. They only proved that the distrust shown in the integrity of the Commission by the Congress and nationalist opinion in general was fully justified.

This part of the Report consisted of 316 printed pages and was signed by the Commissioners on 27 May, when the Civil Disobedience Movement had been going on for over a month and a half. But, the Commissioners say: "We have not altered a line of our report on that account."

The central idea of the recommendations of the Commission was the evolution towards an All-India Federation, including British India and the Indian States. The constitution, the report said, should be such as to provide an open door to the Princes individually or in groups, to enter when it seemed good to them. The





federal structure would be more suited to Indian conditions than a unitary constitution. The constitutional structure suitable for 45 million British people would not do for 250 million Indians spread over a sub-continent and living in half a million villages.

Though the demand for greater provincial autonomy, the report said, was understandable, the provinces as constituted were not ideal areas for self-government. The report recommended reconstitution of the provinces and the setting up of a boundary commission to delimit and demarcate areas.

The report recommended doing away with Dyarchy in the provinces, for it either ranged Ministers against the reserved half of the Government or exposed them to the charge of being subservient tools of the bureaucracy.

In the view of the Commissioners, the provincial constitution should be unitary, with a provincial cabinet chosen by the Governor, not necessarily from the elected membership of the house. The Governor would have overriding powers over the decisions of the cabinet, because it was necessary "to prevent serious prejudice to one or more sections of the community as compared with other sections". Then there were the questions of the financial safeguards and the powers the Governor must possess in respect of certain classes of legislation.

About the minority representation in the Government the report said in certain provinces it was impossible to form stable governments without minority participation. In others it would be desirable to do so.

Provincial Legislative Councils, the Report recommended, should consist of between 200 and 250 members.

So far as communal representation was concerned, the Report noted that the Muslim community as a whole was not prepared to give up communal representation. It would amount to withdrawal of security which it prized and



cancellation of assurances on which it relied. In granting separate electorates to Muslims the Montagu-Chelmsford report had been helped and influenced by the Lucknow Congress-League Pact on the subject. Communal representation must therefore continue. Mere reservation of seats would not ensure the return to elected bodies of Muslims who were truly representatives of their community.

The Sikhs could not be conceded thirty per cent representation in the Punjab without harm being done to other communal interests.

As for the Depressed Classes the Commission rejected the plea of separate electorates for them, "as such segregation would militate against the process, already beginning, of helping them to rise in the social and economic scale". The Commission recommended that, instead, there should be some reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes in all the provinces in non-Muslim constituencies. The proportion of such reserved seats should be three-quarters of the proportion of the Depressed Classes population of the electoral area of the province.

As for the Europeans, it was necessary for them to have separate electorates. The Commissioners attached great importance to this.

About the Muslim demand for being given majority status in Punjab and Bengal, the Report said:

It would be unfair that Mohammedans should retain the very considerable weightage they now enjoy in six provinces and that there should at the same time be imposed, in the face of Hindu and Sikh opposition, a definite Muslim majority in the Punjab and Bengal, unalterable by any appeal to the electorates.

As regards the demand that reforms be extended to the Frontier Province, the Report did not find it 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." So the existing dual position of the Chief Commissioner must remain.

The Federal Assembly, which would take the place of the Central Assembly, would have members not directly elected, but indirectly chosen on the basis of representation of provinces and other areas in British India, according to population. Provincial Councils would elect these Federal representatives by the method proportional representation. The Federal Assembly would have a fixed life of five years. Members of the Governor- General's Executive Council would be ex-officio members of the Federal Assembly. In addition, the Governor-General would nominate 12 other departmental officials as members.

The control of the India Office and the Secretary of State of the Government of India would remain as before.<sup>14</sup>

These recommendations were obviously meant to perpetuate status quo and could not be acceptable to Gandhiji and the Congress.

6

The Civil Disobedience Movement in the meanwhile went on at a steady pace. In the cities it manifested itself in the picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops, with women picketers playing a conspicuous part. On 2 September in Bombay Hansa Mehta and P.R. Lele were tried and sentenced to five months in jail. How significant had been the effect of picketing could be seen from a Bombay Government statement issued on 3 September, which said:

There has been a fall in revenues in almost all departments, the greatest being in excise which shows a reduction of Rs. 60 lakhs in the budget estimated for the current year, chiefly due to the picketing movement. Stamps are expected to show a loss of 11 lakhs, forests 16 lakhs and other



scheduled taxes 7 lakhs. In addition to these there will be increased expenditure due to the Disobedience Movement.<sup>15</sup>

Outside the cities, over wide areas in Maharashtra, the Central Provinces and Andhra, satyagraha against forest laws had also been proceeding apace. On 6 September at Bilashi, in Satara district, Maharashtra, tribesmen carrying on forest satyagraha came into conflict with the police and were subjected to firing. Two satyagrahis lost their lives and several were injured. Many persons were arrested. The national flag which the satyagrahis had hoisted on a teak pole was confiscated.

In C.P. on 7 September there was mass disobedience of forest laws in Kelzar village, Wardha district and about 100 satyagrahis were arrested. In U.P., too, public defiance of laws was widespread. On 12 September at Gulaothi in Bulandshahar district of U.P., when the police forbade a meeting, a large crowd of 8,000 marched to the police station and attacked the police. The police opened fire and a number of people were killed.<sup>16</sup>

Elections to the Provincial Legislative Councils, held in September, were also boycotted and there was at places picketing of polling booths. This invited lathi-charges from the police and even firing. On 26 September, at Moradabad in U.P., a large crowd of civil resisters picketed the polling-booth. On their refusal to disperse, the police opened fire and there were several casualties. 46 persons had to be admitted to hospitals, of whom one later died.

In Orissa too there were many arrests in connection with the picketing of polling booths.<sup>17</sup>

In Delhi in September local Congress bodies were declared illegal. On 19 September, 72 Congress volunteers were tried and sentenced to three months' rigorous imprisonment.



In Bengal, notwithstanding the activities carried on under the flag of the Civil Disobedience Movement, which elicited participation of the masses on a large scale, violent activities by the revolutionaries also continued throughout this period. The Bengal Ordinance, issued by the Viceroy following the Chittagong armoury raid on 18 April, had been quite ineffective in dealing with revolutionary violence that found expression in bomb and bullet. On 25 August an attempt was made to assassinate Police Commissioner Charles Tegart. Two bombs were thrown at his car but he escaped. One of the young men involved died on the spot. The other was caught. Live bombs and revolvers were recovered from both. The following day, 26 August, a bomb was thrown at some court buildings in Calcutta, resulting in injuries to five persons. On 27 August a bomb was thrown at the Eden Garden outpost in Calcutta, resulting in injuries to four persons. On 29 August, Lowman and Hodson, two Dacca police officers, were shot by one Binoy Krishna Bose. Lowman subsequently succumbed to the injuries. On the 30th again a bomb was thrown at a police officer's house in Mymensing.

In September and October such revolutionary violence continued. It also took the form of dacoities. On 8 September there was a successful dacoity carried out in the Ichapur post office in Dacca. On 17 October four youths entered the premises of a Marwari businessman and took away money and papers. The durban was shot dead.

On 1 December at Chandpur railway station Tarini Chandra Mukerjee of the Railway Police was shot dead by two young men. On 8 December three revolutionaries dressed in European clothes entered the office of Col. Simpson, Inspector General of Prisons, at Writers' Building, Calcutta, and shot him dead. One of the young men swallowed poison and died while the two others shot



themselves. One of the two died in the hospital, while the other recovered and was tried and executed.<sup>18</sup>

## 7

In October 1930 Congress committees at Tehsil, District and Provincial levels continued to be banned in an attempt to suppress the mass movement. What further inflamed popular feeling against the Government was the judgment in the Lahore Conspiracy Case delivered on 7 October by the Special Tribunal. Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru were awarded capital punishment; Kishorilal, Mahavir Singh, Bijaya Kumar Singh, Shiv Varma, Gaya Prasad, Jaidev Kapoor and Kamal Nath Tewari were sentenced to transportation for life; Kundanlal was sentenced to seven years' and Prem Datt to three years' rigorous imprisonment; Ajaya Ghosh, Jatindranath Sanyal and Des Raj were acquitted.

Immediately the judgment was delivered there was spontaneous hartal and protest demonstrations in Lahore, Bombay, Delhi, Allahabad, Amritsar and other places in North and West India. Students in Lahore, both boys and girls, started picketing colleges. Seven women students were arrested on 7 October and 17 on 9 October.

On 10 October the Viceroy promulgated yet another Ordinance, ninth since the beginning of the year. This was called the Unlawful Associations Ordinance and empowered local Governments to take possession of immovable and movable property being used by any association declared illegal. The lists of such organizations in all the provinces were long. In Bombay the Gazette contained the schedule of 74 such organizations in Ahmedabad, Broach, Surat and Kheda districts. To escape the penal clauses of the Ordinance, Congress Committees in Gujarat, U.P. and elsewhere started running their offices in open streets and under trees.



On 15 October a police party of about a hundred raided the Bombay Congress House, arrested those found in the premises, numbering 61, and occupied the building. Premises of several other voluntary organizations were similarly raided and volunteers arrested.<sup>19</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been in jail since 14 April 1930, was released on 11 October on completion of his six-month term. Motilal Nehru had been released earlier, in September, soon after the unsuccessful conclusion of the compromise talks carried on through Sapru and Jayakar. But Jawaharlal was not allowed to remain at liberty. The decision to rearrest him had been taken beforehand. In the last week of September, a couple of weeks before his actual release, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau had said in a note: "I suggest that the Home Department should at once consult the U.P. Government as to the desirability of allowing this irreconcilable at large to stir up mischief all over again." The Home Department agreed that a letter be written to the U.P. Governor "expressing the hope that the first opportunity will be taken to put Jawahar Lal out of harm's way".<sup>20</sup>

On 12 October Jawaharlal addressed a public meeting at Allahabad, urging the people to violate the Salt Law and not to pay land revenue. He summoned a meeting of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee and took steps to convene a peasants' conference at Allahabad on 19 October. The conference duly met on 19 October and gave a call for a no-tax campaign. In the evening Jawaharlal was taken into custody. He was tried and sentenced to a total of two years and four months in prison - eighteen months for sedition, six months for abetting violation of the Salt Act and four months in default of payment of fines. He was again taken to Naini jail.<sup>21</sup>



Arrests of other prominent Congressmen still left outside went on from day to day. Govind Malaviya, General Secretary of the Congress, was arrested on 24 October. J. M. Sen Gupta, Acting President of the Congress, was arrested on the 25th.

On 26 October at Bombay police repeatedly lathi-charged a public meeting organized by the Congress to salute the national flag. Two hundred and thirty-five persons were injured in the lathi-charges. Twenty-two women were arrested.<sup>8</sup>

While in the cities and villages of India Civil Disobedience movement raged and the leadership of nationalist India was confined in jails, the Round Table Conference opened in London on 12 November 1930. Participation in the Conference was by invitation, that is to say, nomination, so that the delegates by and large had no credentials to represent Indian people. There were altogether 89 delegates; 16 representing the Princely States- they were all either Maharajas and Nawabs or Ministers employed by them-, and 57 were drawn from British India, including 2 from Burma. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was elected chairman of the Conference.

The Conference right away set up a Federal Relations Committee "to consider the structure of a federal system of Government of India as regards relations between Indian States and British India, and relations between Provinces of British India and the Centre.

The Federal Relations Committee in its turn set up nine sub-committees. These were on: (1) Federal Structure, (2) Provincial Constitution, (3) Minorities, (4) Burma, (5) North-West Frontier Province, (6) Franchise, (7) Defence, (8) Services, and (9) Sind.





The reports of these sub-committees were received and considered by the Conference, which declared that they represented "material of the highest value for use in the framing of a constitution for India". The Conference ended its labours on 19 January 1931.

The Federal Structure Sub-Committee generally proposed that the Federation would be made up of the federating Provinces of British India and such Indian States or groups of States as might choose to enter the Federation. The Federal Legislature would be bicameral, containing representatives of both British India and the States. Each State would decide how its representatives in the Federal Legislature would be chosen. As for the representation of British India, Jinnah and other Muslim leaders made it clear that they could not commit themselves in any way unless the Hindu-Muslim question had been settled.

The executive authority of the Federation would vest in the Crown, that is to say, the Governor-General, assisted by a Council of Ministers appointed by him on the recommendation of one Minister. The Ministers would hold office as long as they enjoyed the confidence of the Legislature. The Governor-General would be responsible for defence and external relations, but in other areas also he would have the liberty to act on his own. He would also have powers to ensure supply of funds for the reserved subjects.

As for the Legislature, the Princes claimed that they should have equal representation with British India in the Upper Chamber. There was no agreement. As for the Lower Chamber, the Princes would object to the idea of representation according to population, which would not give the States more than 24 per cent of the seats. The Sub-Committee could not agree on the method of election to the Lower House. While delegates representing British India were for direct election, the Princes opposed the idea.



The most important recommendation contained in the report of the Provincial Constitution Sub-Committee was that Dyarchy should be abolished and Provincial executives made unitary. This was very much on the lines of the recommendation of the Simon Commission. As for the Council of Ministers, though it was laid down that the Governor should invite the member enjoying the largest following in the Legislature to form a Council of Ministers, who would be collectively responsible to the Legislature, the reserved powers of the Governor were not touched. Thus, no legislation could be introduced without the previous sanction of the Governor; he could withhold assent to any legislation; and he could dissolve the Legislature.

The Minorities Sub-Committee had been set up to consider the claims of minorities "other than those incidental to the subjects referred to other committees" - that is to say, minorities other than Muslims and Sikhs. On the question of representation of these minorities, while it was generally admitted "that a system of joint free electorates was in the abstract the most consistent with democratic principles as generally understood, and would be acceptable to the Depressed Classes after a short transitional period provided the franchise was based on adult suffrage," the opinion was expressed that "in view of the distribution of communities in India and of their unequal economic, social and political effectiveness, there was a real danger that under such a system the representation secured by minorities would be totally inadequate". Even if seats were reserved, the view was expressed that the representation thus secured might not be genuine. Ambedkar, who was on the Committee, demanded that the Depressed Classes "should be deducted from the Hindu population and be regarded, for electoral purposes, as a separate community".

The rest of the Sub-Committees, by and large, only repeated platitudes without in any way making any departure from the known positions of the Government.



The Conference was closed by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on 19 January 1931. He dilated largely on the necessity and desirability of safeguards and expressed the hope that Indians would be able to arrive at a settlement in regard to the issues raised in the deliberations of the Sub- Committees. He then said:

The view of His Majesty's Government is 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. In such statutory safeguards as may be made for meeting the needs of the transitional period, it will be a primary concern of His Majesty's Government to see that the reserved powers are so framed and exercised as not to prejudice the advance of India through the new constitution to full responsibility for her own Government.... His Majesty's Government have taken note of the fact that the deliberations of the Conference have proceeded on the basis, accepted by all parties, that the Central Government should be a federation of all India, embracing both the Indian States and British India in a bicameral Legislature.... With the Legislature constituted on a federal basis, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to recognize the principle of responsibility of the Executive to the Legislature...

His Majesty's Government, however, in view of the character of the Conference and of the limited time at its disposal in London, has deemed it advisable to suspend its work at this point, so that Indian opinion may be consulted upon the work done, and expedients considered for overcoming



the difficulties which have been raised.... If in the meantime there is a response to the Viceroy's appeal to those engaged at present in civil disobedience, and others wish to cooperate on the general lines of this declaration, steps will be taken to enlist their services.<sup>22</sup>

9

The Congress of course took little notice of the proceedings of the Round Table Conference. All the Congress Committees, left now only with second or third rung leadership, concentrated their attention on carrying on the Civil Disobedience Movement which in the last quarter of the year no longer had Salt Laws at its centre. The programmes that lent themselves to methodical organization and execution were of course the picketing activities against foreign cloth, against liquor and against colleges, and these were vigorously pursued everywhere, inviting lathi-charges, firings, arrests, convictions and imprisonments. The scale and intensity of repression may be judged by the list of casualties in police firings tabled in the Central Assembly on behalf of the Government on 14 July 1930. It was as under:

Place	Date	Killed	Wounded	Remarks
Madras City	27 April	2	6	1 died later
Karachi	16 April	1	6	do
Calcutta	1 April	7	59	do
Bengal	15 April	-	3	do
Chittagong, Bengal	18,19,20 April	10	2	Both died later
24 Parganas, Bengal	24 April	1	3	
N.W.F.P., Peshawar	23 April	30	33	



Chittagong, Bengal	24 April.	1	-	
Madras	30May	2		
Sholapur, Bombay	8May	12	28	
Wadala Salt Pans	24May	-	1	
Bhendy Bazar	26,27 May	5	67	
Howrah, Bengal	6May	-	5	
Chittagong, Bengal	7May	4	6	3 died later
Mymensing, Bengal	14 May	1	30-40	
Midnapur	31 May	2	2	
Lucknow, U.P.	26 May	1	42	2 died later
Kalu-Jhelum Districts, Punjab	18 May	-	1	
Rangoon, Burma	Last week of May	5	37	
N.W.F.P.		17	37	
Delhi	6 May	4	40	

In Sholapur, in the wake of the disturbances on 8 May and subsequent promulgation of Martial Law four persons were hanged and a number of others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.<sup>23</sup>

We have seen how peasant families from Bardoli chose to leave their hearths and homes and take shelter in the Baroda territory rather than pay land revenue. The no-tax campaign in time spread to Karnataka. More than 800 families refused to pay land revenue in Kanara district. Eight hundred were convicted, including a hundred ladies. Lands were forfeited, movable property was attached.



In Akola and Siddapur, 330 families had their lands forfeited. The population involved was over 2,000. The lands forfeited measured about 2,000 acres and were valued at Rs. 8 lakhs. One hundred and sixty-six houses were also forfeited. The movable property attached was valued at Rs. 20,000. People were ejected from their homes, which were then used as camps by the police. Confiscated properties were sold by the authorities to third parties and satyagrahis had to resort to fasting at the doors of the buyers. Thirty-seven lady satyagrahis resorted to such fasts, the longest period of fasting was 31 days. Punitive police was posted in the area.<sup>24</sup>

## 10

That the British Government seriously intended to mend fences with the Congress and lure it into constitutional negotiations without accepting the demand for independence of India, had become clear even before the Prime Minister's declaration of 19 January at the Round Table Conference in London. Speaking in the Central Legislative Assembly on 17 January, Lord Irwin, while roundly condemning the Civil Disobedience Movement and justifying the repression let loose by his regime, at the same time paid a tribute to Gandhiji. He said:

Many times during the last twelve months' thoughtful men and women must have pondered deeply over what has been their most poignant and perplexing feature. However, mistaken any man may think him to be, and however deplorable may appear the results of the policy associated with his name, no one can 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 that he loves. And I fancy that, though he on his side too thinks those who differ from him to be the victims of a false philosophy, Mr. Gandhi



would not be unwilling to say that men of my race, who are today responsible for Government in India, were sincere in their attempt to serve her. It has been one of the tragedies of this time that where ultimate purposes have perhaps differed little, if at all, the methods employed by some should have been, as I conceive, far more calculated to impede than to assist the accomplishment of that largely common end.... Is it now possible, I would ask, for those responsible for this policy to try another course...?<sup>25</sup>

The Congress of course, or those who represented it in the absence of the jailed leadership, was not in a conciliatory mood. The Working Committee, which met in Allahabad on 21 January 1931; in a resolution refused to give "any recognition to the proceedings of the so-called R.T.C. between certain members of the British Parliament, the Indian Princes and individual Indians selected by the Government from among its supporters".

The resolution referred to the declaration of British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald of 19 January and rejected it as not being "an adequate response to the position taken by Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders". In the absence of such a response, and while thousands of men and women, including almost all the original members of the Working Committee and a great many members of the All-India Congress Committee, were locked in jail and while the Government repression was in full swing, no general enunciation of policy could be helpful in bringing to a successful issue the struggle that the nation had entered upon. The resolution advised the country to carry on the struggle with unabated vigour.<sup>26</sup>

The movement of course continued but not "with unabated vigour". The new year had started with a general slackening of the tempo of the struggle though



picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops continued in some major towns. Commenting on this last phase of the movement *India* in 1930-31 wrote:

During the next nine weeks - that is to say the period between the 1st of January and the 5th of March- the situation definitely improved. Riots and disturbances were generally speaking not of a very serious nature, and the agrarian unrest which the Congress had fostered in the United Provinces did not appear to develop further. In many parts of the country, particularly the Madras Presidency and the Punjab, the Civil Disobedience Movement had by this time ceased to be a factor affecting the daily life of the people or causing any particular inconvenience to the ordinary district administration.<sup>27</sup>

On 25 January 1931 the Viceroy Lord Irwin made a statement ordering the release of Gandhiji and the Working Committee and lifting the ban on the various Congress committees. In his statement he said:

In order to provide an opportunity for considering the statement made by the Premier on 19 January, the Government... have thought it right that the members of the Working Committee of the All-India Congress should have full liberty of discussing between themselves.... In accordance with this decision... and in order that there may be no legal bar to any meeting they may wish to hold, the notification declaring the committee to be an unlawful association under the Criminal Law Amendment Act will be withdrawn ... and action will be taken for the release of Mr. Gandhi and others who are now members of the Working Committee or who have acted as such since 1 January 1930....

Pursuant to the announcement by the Viceroy the following were ordered to be released: Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jamnalal Bajaj, Shiv Prasad Gupta, Maulana





Azad, Jairamdas Doulatram, Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, J. M. Sen Gupta, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Dr. Satyapal, Hanumantharao, S. V. Kaulaji, Sardar Mangal Singh, Lala Dunichand, Dr. Ansari, Mathuradas Trikumji, Mufti Kifayatulla, S. A. Brelvi, Hansa Mehta, Govind Kant Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Sen Gupta, and Mrs. Kamala Nehru.<sup>28</sup>

The Home Department, Government of India, wrote to the Home Department, Bombay, to give effect to the decision to release Gandhiji and others. The Bombay Government the same day conveyed the order to the Inspector General of Prisons, emphasizing at the same time that the prisoners should be released "after the evening of January 26th but not before", so that the prisoners could be prevented from taking part, after their release, in the celebrations of the Independence Day.

The I.G. Prisons informed the Home Department, Bombay, on 26 January of the arrangements made to handle the release of Gandhiji. He reported that at a meeting, appropriate army, police and jail officials had decided that Gandhiji, Mrs. Naidu and Pyarelal should be taken to Bombay by the train leaving Poona at 11.15 p.m.<sup>29</sup>

They would be made to board the train at Kirkee, or if there were demonstrations, at Chinchvad. As it turned out they had to be taken to Chinchvad.

At Chinchvad station Gandhiji was met by the Press and asked for a message. Gandhiji said:

I have come out of jail with an absolutely open mind, unfettered by enmity, unbiased in argument and prepared to study the whole situation from every point of view....



I have no plan and no policy mapped out....

Answering a question, he said he sincerely believed that every political prisoner in jail for being connected with the Civil Disobedience Movement should be released immediately.<sup>30</sup>



PART V

ARMISTICE AND SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT

#### 1

The release on 26 January 1931 of Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee did not in any way imply that the Government had changed its disposition towards the Civil Disobedience Movement or modified its stand in regard to the constitutional question in conformity with the national demand. The Civil Disobedience Movement continued and so did the police ruthlessness in suppressing it. Indeed, even as Gandhiji and the Congress leaders were packing up their things preparatory to their release on 26 January, serious incidents of violence were occurring outside.

In Begusarai in Bihar police interfered with a procession being taken out in celebration of the Independence Day and arrested the leaders. Thereupon the infuriated crowd of nearly ten thousand that made up the procession attacked the police with sticks and stones causing injuries to many. According to a Government communique a sub-divisional officer, two sub-inspectors and six constables received serious head injuries while twenty-six others were also injured. The police opened fire, killing five processionists and injuring eight, one of them fatally.

In Calcutta on the same day a number of processions were taken out to celebrate the Independence Day, all converging at the Calcutta maidan. One procession was made up entirely of women, another was led by Subhas Bose, Mayor of Calcutta, and Kshitish Prosad Chatterjee, education officer of the Calcutta Corporation. The police swung into action to disperse the processions. About 50 ladies and some men volunteers were taken into custody. (They were later



released.) The police then made a lathi-charge on the crowd injuring nearly fifty volunteers, including Subhas Bose.

On the following day, 27 January; the Bengal Congress Council of Action, the Nari Satyagraha Samiti and the Bengal Council of Civil Disobedience were declared unlawful associations. Subhas Bose was sentenced to a prison term of six months.<sup>1</sup> If the Government wanted a reconciliation with the Congress, this certainly was not the way of going about it. In a cable to *Daily Herald* of London on 30 January Gandhiji protested:

This continued repression robs said release (of the Congress leaders) of all grace and makes it valueless for purpose intended.<sup>2</sup>

On 27 January at a Press conference in Bombay he had made his position quite clear. He said:

I personally feel that the mere release of the Working Committee members makes a difficult situation infinitely more difficult and makes any action on the part of the members, if not altogether impossible, almost impossible.

The authorities evidently have not yet perceived that the movement has so much affected the mass mind that the leaders ... will be utterly unable to dictate to the masses a particular course of action....

In my opinion, therefore, if the release of leaders is to be effective, the release of all satyagrahi prisoners a necessary condition and this release will, in its turn, be ineffective if repression is not stopped altogether.<sup>3</sup>

Among the vast numbers imprisoned, Gandhiji drew a distinction between those imprisoned for civil disobedience of laws and those - much larger in number - who had not resisted any non-moral law or common law. He said the satyagrahis had not resisted any natural or moral laws, nor had they resisted the common



law of the country, nor yet the statute law of the country; but they had been forced to resist autocratic ordinances which were designed to interfere with common law rights such as the right of persuading addicts to the drink or drug habit to give it up, or of persuading the drink and drug dealers to give up that calling or of persuading the dealers in, or purchasers of, foreign cloth to give up the sale and purchase of such cloth.

Even making of salt was not defiance of the Salt Laws, said Gandhiji, but merely the exercise of a natural right. The only instances of civil resistance against Government laws that he could recall were the raids on salt depots and disobedience of Forest Laws.<sup>4</sup>

The implication was that the picketing activity against buying and selling of drinks and drugs and foreign cloth was not intended as defiance of laws framed by the Government of India. Even if the very best relations were established between Britain and India, the effort to discourage drinks and drugs and foreign cloth would continue. India wanted to achieve boycott of these things "for all time".

2

On 28 January Gandhiji proceeded to Allahabad to see Motilal Nehru, who had been ailing. There he attended the meeting of the Congress Working Committee held on 31 January and 1 February. The attendance was large, for along with the original members, interim members, appointed to the Committee from time to time in the course of the movement were also present.

In its resolution the Working Committee confirmed what Gandhiji had said with regard to picketing of foreign-cloth and drink and drug shops. The resolution ran:

This meeting reminds the public that picketing of foreign-cloth and drink and drug shops in itself is no part of the civil disobedience campaign, but



that it is the exercise of the ordinary right of a citizen so long as it remains strictly peaceful and causes no obstruction to the public.

This meeting further reminds the sellers of foreign cloth including foreign yarn... that the boycott of foreign cloth, being a vital necessity in the interest of the masses, is a permanent feature of national activity and will remain so till the nation has acquired the power to exclude foreign cloth and foreign yarn from India, whether by total prohibition or prohibitive tariff.

Since the bulk of the membership of the Congress and most members of the A.I.C.C. were still in prison, the usual procedure for the election of President for the coming session could not be gone through. The Working Committee, therefore, on its own took the decision that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel should be the President for the next session of the Congress to be held at Karachi at the end of March 1931.<sup>5</sup>

Speaking at a public meeting at Allahabad on 31 January Gandhiji, dwelling on the terms to be offered to the Government for a possible truce, mentioned the matter of police atrocities. He referred especially to the lathi-charge made on a peaceful procession of women at Borsad in Kheda district on 21 January in which many ladies associated with the activities of the Ashram had been badly injured. Police had mercilessly belaboured Gangabehn Vaidya, Shakaribehn, Kalavati Trivedi, Padma, Lakshmi, Madhu, Lalita, Maitri Giri and Vasumati Pandit. Gangabehn Vaidya and Vasumati Pandit were taken into custody. Gandhiji said:

We are... justified in demanding that a tribunal should be set up for an independent inquiry into such incidents, that a report of the inquiry be published and the officers found guilty be removed.... History offers no parallel to the atrocities committed on women in the Kheda district.



About the general release of all prisoners, Gandhiji said that though he stood for the release of all prisoners, even of those who had been sentenced to be hanged, he could not make it a condition for settlement. He could in justice demand only the release of those who had been imprisoned in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>6</sup>

3

On 1 February 1931 Gandhiji made the first move by approaching the Viceroy with a letter. He referred to the Viceroy's remarks about him made in the Assembly on 17 January and said that he was simply waiting for a sign in order to enable him to respond to the Viceroy's appeal. But he regretted that some of the signs he was getting were ominous. He then listed instances of continuing police brutalities. He mentioned first the assault on the women at Borsad. He wrote:

Neither the procession nor the meeting was prohibited. The injuries were severe in several cases. Some of those who were assaulted belong to the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati. One of them, an old widow... was drenched in blood.... At the time of writing this, I cannot recall anything in modern history to parallel this official inhumanity against wholly defenceless and innocent women.

Gandhiji then mentioned the police lathi-charge on the Independence Day procession at Calcutta and the police firing at Begusarai and assault in Madras on workers picketing foreign-cloth shops with the concurrence of the shop-owners. It was not possible, Gandhiji continued, for those like him in such a situation to tender cooperation with any confidence, much less enthusiasm.

Gandhiji invited the Viceroy to appoint an impartial and representative committee of enquiry acceptable to the Congress to investigate the allegations





of excesses by the officials in different parts of India since the inauguration of the Civil Disobedience campaign. If such a committee was appointed, he said:

I am sure that the Congress will lead evidence before it to show that in very many cases the conduct of officials has been contrary to the expectations raised in the preambles to your ordinances and in your repeated declarations.

On 4 February Gandhiji was informed by the Viceroy's office that His Excellency was unable to accept the suggestion for an enquiry. He saw no profit in the general exploration of charges and counter-charges that would be made.<sup>7</sup>

There was another kind of hardship that the peasants in Gujarat and Karnataka had had to suffer. It distressed Gandhiji. He said to a Press representative:

Many have lost their homes. The sufferers may have been guilty of non-payment of taxes or not, but property worth, say Rs. 50 lakhs, has been appropriated for dues, say, of about a lakh. It must be restored.

This, he said, must not be left to the local Government. An impartial tribunal should decide the matter.<sup>8</sup>

4

On 6 February, the country suffered a grievous loss in the death of Motilal Nehru. He had been ailing for a long time and had been taken to Lucknow for deep X-Ray treatment, where he expired.

As the news spread, crowds gathered in Lucknow to pay their homage to the departed leader. The funeral route was lined with huge throngs of humanity. In Calcutta there was a vast gathering of people at Shradhanand Park to mourn the death of the great leader. Gandhiji was inconsolable. In a message sent to *Liberty* of Calcutta, he said:



My position is worse than a widow's. By a faithful life she can appropriate the merits of her husband. I can appropriate nothing. What I have lost through Motilal's death is a loss for ever.

'Rock of all Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.'<sup>9</sup>

On the same day, 6 February, Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar returned to India after their labours at the Round Table Conference in London. They appeared to be tremendously impressed by the Prime Minister's Declaration and thought that it practically conceded the national demand. Immediately on their arrival in India they issued an appeal to the Congress:

The scheme represents a bare outline; the details- some of which are of a substantial and far-reaching character- have yet to be worked out. We earnestly hope that the leaders of the Congress and of other parties will now come forward to make a solid contribution to the completion of the scheme. It is our hope that an atmosphere of complete peace will be created for the consideration of these questions of high import and that the release of other political prisoners who have suffered incarceration for their convictions will follow.<sup>10</sup>

The three Liberal leaders then made their way to Allahabad and started discussions with the members of the Working Committee and Gandhiji, trying to persuade them to call off the movement and accept the hand of cooperation extended by the British Government.

They prevailed upon Gandhiji to seek an interview with the Viceroy assuring him of a positive response. On 14 February Gandhiji wrote to Lord Irwin:

I have received a suggestion from friends whose advice I value that I should seek an interview with you before coming to any decision. I can no longer



resist this advice. I am aware of the responsibility resting upon my shoulders. It is heightened by the death of Pandit Motilal Nehru. I feel that without personal contact and heart-to-heart talk with you, the advice I may give my co-workers may not be right. The friends I have referred to read into the proceedings of the London Conference a meaning and a hope I would like to share. There are other difficulties to be overcome before I can advise suspension of civil disobedience and cooperation in the remaining work of the Conference.... I therefore ask you, if you are willing, to send me an appointment as early as may be possible.

On the same day Gandhiji also cabled to *Daily Herald* of London, in answer to a query from that journal, expressing his misgivings in the matter of Defence and Finance, control over which the British wanted to retain in any future set-up.<sup>11</sup>

Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, a member of the Congress Working Committee, personally took Gandhiji's letter to Delhi and delivered it to the Viceroy the following day. The Viceregal response was prompt. Lord Irwin asked Gandhiji to call on him on Tuesday, 17 February.

Gandhiji left Allahabad for Delhi on the 16th, accompanied by Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal and Mirabehn. Detraining at Ghaziabad, Gandhiji, after a short walk at Shahdara, drove to the house of Dr. M. A. Ansari, where he was to stay for the duration of the talks.<sup>12</sup>

Congressmen were confused by the move. The left-wing section represented by Jawaharlal Nehru put no faith in a personal meeting, since Lord Irwin was not a free agent. The die-hard opinion in England had of course throughout been against any sort of accommodation with the Congress. Their attitude was summed up by Winston Churchill, who, speaking in the House of Commons debate on India on 26 January was forthright in his condemnation of the policy



shift represented by the shelving of the report of the Simon Commission and the summoning of the Round Table Conference. This had been accompanied in India, he said, "by a steady development of unrest, disorder, disloyalty and assassination".

A few days later, after the talks had got off to a promising start Churchill again gave vent to the frustration he and other Tories felt at the development. On 23 February, speaking at Epping, Churchill thundered:

It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.<sup>13</sup>

5

The talks between Gandhiji and the Viceroy nevertheless got off to a fairly satisfactory start. The session on the very first day, 17 February, brought out the positions of the two sides on the constitutional question. The Viceroy emphasized the three main principles in the structure of the Round Table Conference: Federation, Indian responsibility and reservations and safeguards. Gandhiji on his part sought the Government's Views on the right of the Congress to raise the matter of "dissolution of partnership" with the British Empire, the question of debts and the question of the representation of the States' subjects.

The question of the size of the Congress delegation at the Round Table Conference also came up and the Viceroy expressed the Government's view that the Congress might have a delegation of 12 or 15 or 20 persons.



Coming down to the issues where the decisions had to be taken by the Government of India, the Viceroy was less accommodating.

On the question of the release of satyagrahi prisoners, including those sentenced under Martial Law in Sholapur, the Viceroy insisted on a distinction being made between those sentenced for violent acts and the non-violent satyagrahis.

As to the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners, the Viceroy pointed out that they had nothing to do with the Civil Disobedience Movement. He however promised to see that the progress of the case was accelerated.

As for the lands of satyagrahis attached, the Viceroy said lands would be returned if still in possession of the Government. However, in cases where land had been sold to third parties, nothing could be done. Similarly fines imposed but still not realized would be remitted, but where they had been already paid, they could not be returned.

Gandhiji asked for reinstatement of village officials who had resigned or who had been dismissed. Again the Viceroy could not provide any definite assurance beyond saying that he would ask the local Governments concerned to look into the matter. Repressive ordinances, issued since the beginning of the movement, would be withdrawn.

One question on which Gandhiji felt deeply and on which the Viceroy was wholly unbending was that of enquiry into police excesses. He would not agree to it.

On returning after meeting the Viceroy, Gandhiji asked for Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal to be summoned to Delhi. Contacted telephonically both agreed to come the following day. Jawaharlal said he first wanted to visit Pratapgarh where police had fired on a procession of farmers without any provocation, injuring four



persons.<sup>14</sup> It showed that even as the talks proceeded, there was no let up in repression.

Gandhiji met the Viceroy again on the following day, 18 February. Questions of withdrawal of punitive police posted in certain areas, suspension of revenue collection in certain other areas, where coercive processes had been used in tax collection, etc., came up. The Viceroy was non-committal.

Then there was the question of manufacture of salt by individuals.

Gandhiji suggested that the Government should either alter the Salt Law or acquiesce in its breach. The Viceroy said that while the authorities could show a certain amount of discretion in administering a particular law, it could not announce to the world that it would acquiesce in its breach. Gandhiji asked for a private assurance that breaches of the Salt Law would be condoned.

The question of peaceful picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops was also raised by Gandhiji. Would the Government permit continuance of picketing? The Viceroy refused to concede that there was such a thing as peaceful picketing. It had always been accompanied by violence, he said, citing cases.

At one point the Viceroy suggested that the talks between them might be widened to include some more people, such as Sastri, Sapru, Jayakar, Shafi, Chhatari, Malaviya, Ansari, the rulers of Bikaner and Bhopal, a non-official European, etc. Gandhiji welcomed the idea and thought Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Sen Gupta and perhaps even Subhas Bose, then in jail, could also be included.

Gandhiji brought up the question of the death sentence passed on Bhagat Singh and suggested that the Viceroy might use his powers to commute the sentence.



The Viceroy said he did not feel that it was a fit case for the exercise of the Viceregal powers of commutation.

According to an account of the talk as related to some members of the Working Committee and recorded by Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji told the Viceroy:

He (Bhagat Singh) is undoubtedly a brave man but I would certainly say that he is not in his right mind. However, this is the evil of capital punishment that it gives no opportunity to such a man to reform himself. I am putting this matter before you as a humanitarian issue and desire suspension of sentence in order that there may not be unnecessary turmoil in the country.

I myself would release him, but I cannot expect any Government to do so. I would not take it ill even if you do not give any reply on this issue.<sup>15</sup>

Gandhiji disapproved of violence on the part of Bhagat Singh and his companions, but he admired their patriotism and wanted them to live. He was sure he would be able to reform them, so that they would give up the path of violence, as had happened in several other cases.

On 19 February, when the two next met, the Viceroy referred to the idea of an enlarged conference discussed earlier, and said he would have to consult the Secretary of State and the local Governments on the matter before taking a decision.

They met again on 27 February, when the Viceroy repeated more definitively the British Government's position on the constitutional question and on the repudiation of debts. The Viceroy also made it clear to Gandhiji that "any reciprocal action by Government depended on the effective discontinuance of the Civil Disobedience Movement".



On 28 February, at the Viceroy's desire, Gandhiji sent him a note on picketing. This said that in the event of peace being established picketing of foreign-cloth and drink shops would be "unaggressive" and "predominantly for social and moral ends" and would therefore be largely confined to villages and even in cities attention would be directed not so much to the sellers as to the buyers. There would be "no cordons, and no crowds, such as now are the special features of picketing". Picketing would not be in defiance of the common law.

This note was preceded by a thorough discussion of the question by members of the Working Committee. The rules for peaceful picketing, on which the Working Committee was agreed, were summarized by Gandhiji in an article in *Navajivan*. He wrote:

We should not abuse either the seller or the buyer and should never be discourteous in our behaviour.

1. We should not cry out 'shame! shame!'
2. We should not lie down before a shop or a vehicle.
3. We should not take out effigies for burning or burying.
4. Even while criticizing people, we should not obstruct their obtaining food or any other service.
5. We should not fast in protest against them in any circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

By the time they next met, on 1 March, the Viceroy had clarified his own ideas in respect of three matters, on which he thought there could be no accommodation. These were picketing and boycott, enquiries into police excesses, and salt.





Gandhiji, according to the report of the Viceroy, agreed at this interview that there would be no boycott of British goods and British cloth as such but that emphasis would be on substitution of Indian cloth and Indian goods for foreign products. Boycott as a political weapon would be given up.

On picketing nothing could be decided, the Viceroy maintaining that the transition from violent to non-violent picketing was just not possible and that therefore there was no possibility of picketing remaining peaceful and Gandhiji maintaining that it would and could be kept peaceful.

On enquiries into police excesses the Viceroy remained adamant in his refusal to concede the demand. Gandhiji dropped it, when the Viceroy said that Gandhiji had a point, but that he, the Viceroy had his compulsions.

They met for a second time the same day in the evening. At this meeting a sort of agreement on picketing was reached. The Government conceded the common-law right of peaceful picketing, while Gandhiji said that if picketing did not remain peaceful the authorities could take action against it.

On the afternoon of 3 March they went over the issues of the confiscated land, and levies on the villagers to recover expenditure on the additional police posted in certain areas, as also the issue of salt. The Viceroy reiterated the Government's position on the question of return of confiscated land sold to third parties, saying he could not put any pressure on the local Governments and that it was they who must decide the issue. But it was an issue on which Gandhiji felt that grave injustice had been done to some villagers. On 4 March he wrote to the Viceroy:

... it is distressful to me to have to write to you on a matter which may appear to be trivial. But I fear that on it hangs the successful working of the settlement just made.... Sardar Vallabhbhai tells me that he will find it utterly impossible to implement the Congress obligation of the settlement



unless the lands can be restored to the rightful holders.... Shrimati Gangabehn ... tells me that the land in Ras.... was sold to the Dharalas for a song, and that it was bought by them at the instigation of the previous Mamlatdar and in collusion with him. If there was proper enquiry I should undertake to prove the allegations.

The Viceroy refused to budge, and instead sought the help of Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar "to put their full pressure on Gandhi to save the settlement from being wrecked". He nevertheless noted

that there may be a real grievance in the methods adopted for the sale of some land and ... the position of the Dharalas owning coveted land in the midst of Patidar villages is not going to be a very happy one.<sup>17</sup>

At their meeting on 4 March this was the main question discussed. The Viceroy said that the utmost he could do was to write to Sir Frederick Sykes "drawing his attention to any statement that Mr. Gandhi cared to make". He was of course not sanguine of Frederick Sykes being able to do anything that would meet the case, and in any case nothing could be done at once. Gandhiji said it did not matter how much time it took, but that without some settlement of the question, the thing would remain an open sore in the Kheda district. Sapru, Sastri and Jayakar came forward to suggest formulas to the Viceroy which the latter found impossible to accept.

The author was then a student in Delhi and often went to join Gandhiji at the evening prayers at Dr. Ansari's place. The uncertainty regarding the provisional agreement made the atmosphere heavy. But it seemed the Viceroy was determined that the talks should not break down.



On 5 March 1931 the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was formally signed at Delhi and issued under the signature of the Home Secretary. \*2

It took sixteen days to be put into shape. Gandhiji and Irwin met eight times during this period. There was nothing hush-hush about the parleys. It was a coming together of the two top persons of the two parties, the Congress and the Government. Irwin, throughout the talks, kept in touch with the members of his Council, with the Governors of the Provinces and with the Secretary of State in London. Gandhiji remained in constant touch with Nehru, Patel, Rajagopalachari, Dr. Ansari and other members of the Working Committee, to whom he reported after each meeting with the Viceroy. Then of course there were the three Liberals - Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar - who remained close to the scene, advising both the Viceroy and Gandhiji. Gandhiji' called them "Sub-Viceroy".<sup>18</sup>

On substantive issues the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement yielded few gains to the Congress. The demand for enquiry into police excesses was summarily rejected, the salt tax was not abolished, even though it was agreed to allow certain villages to manufacture salt for their own use, or for sale within such villages. And, most important, the Congress finally accepted the British Government's position on the constitutional issue, namely, Federation, Indian Responsibility and Safeguards - the tripod on which it was intended to rest the constitution that might emerge as a result of the labours of the Round Table Conference.

Political prisoners would be released but not those involved in acts of violence or soldiers disobeying orders, such as those of the Garhwal Regiment in Peshawar, nor the Bengal detenus nor the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners. Ordinances

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\*2 For the text, see Appendix III



issued since the commencement of the Civil Disobedience Movement would of course be withdrawn.

The Congress on its part agreed to discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement, to take part in the Round Table Conference, to give up picketing and boycott of British goods.

No one was entirely happy with the Agreement. Particularly Gandhiji's agreeing to Safeguards, on which it would appear he had committed the Congress on his own, irked many. When Gandhiji told the Working Committee about it Jawaharlal Nehru shouted: "We should not have agreed."

"What would you have me do?" Gandhiji asked. "If you wish I will phone the Viceroy and ask him to nullify my acceptance."

"No, we cannot do that," Nehru said.<sup>19</sup>

The very next day Nehru expressed his unhappiness in regard to the Settlement in a note. He wrote:

In consequence of the provisional settlement between the Working Committee and the Government of India, a period of truce has been proclaimed. It is with regret that, on the morrow of this agreement, I have to strike a note of discord... Safeguards and reservations are referred to and, although these are said to be in the interests of India, they may be, and I fear will be, interpreted to mean a limitation on our freedom in regard to defence, external affairs, finances and the public debt.... I am unable to accept or reconcile myself to any reference to safeguards and reservations.<sup>20</sup>

There was of course one distinct and important gain. The very fact that the British Government was forced to negotiate with Gandhiji was a testimony to the fact



that the British, and their allies in India, could not any more pretend that the Congress did not represent the people of India. However shocked Churchill and the likes of him in England and India might have been by "the nauseating and humiliating spectacle" of Gandhiji negotiating on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor, they had to come to terms with the reality of the situation, which was that the Indian National Congress, and Gandhiji, its supreme leader, were the only authentic voice of the people of India and that no constitutional scheme could be imposed upon the country against the wishes of the Congress.

In the evening, after the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement, also described as the Provisional Settlement, had been made public, Gandhiji made a statement to a number of American and Indian Pressmen. Gandhiji was at his evening meal and he spoke as he ate. He spoke uninterruptedly for an hour and a half, never once fumbling for words.<sup>21</sup>

Gandhiji began by paying a glowing tribute to Lord Irwin, without whose "inexhaustible industry and unfailing courtesy" the settlement would have been impossible. He had been frank throughout the negotiations and determined, if it was at all possible to have a settlement.

Gandhiji was thankful that a settlement had been reached and the country had been spared, at least for the time being, the sufferings which in the event of a breakdown would have been intensified a hundredfold.

Gandhiji reminded the country that the Congress had a goal to reach, that all must work to reach it "whether it is by way of suffering or by way of patient negotiation, consultation and conference".

Gandhiji knew some would be disappointed by the settlement. Those were the people who rejoiced in heroic suffering, who willingly endured unendurable



sufferings, however prolonged. But when suffering ceased they felt their occupation gone and the goal further receded from view. Gandhiji told such people to wait, watch and pray.

The goal of the Congress was purna swaraj (complete independence) and the country could not be satisfied with anything less. The Settlement did not have that word. The words used in it were Federation, Responsibility and Safeguards. These expressions were capable of being interpreted differently by different parties. The Congress would seek to make Federation, Responsibility and Safeguards instruments to promote the real growth of the country along political, social, economic and moral lines.

Gandhiji expressed surprise that the Princes had accepted the idea of Federation. But if they really wanted to be equal partners in a Federated India, they must remember that an undiluted autocracy, however benevolent it might be, and an undiluted democracy were an incompatible mixture bound to result in an explosion. He appealed to the Princes not to shut their ears to the Congress appeal on behalf of the people of the States.

Gandhiji was distressed that it had not been possible to secure the release of political prisoners, that is to say, political prisoners other than Civil Disobedience prisoners. If he could have justly secured their liberty in preference to his own or that of fellow satyagrahis, he would truthfully have secured it. But he could not in justice ask for the discharge of all political prisoners.

Gandhiji called upon Congressmen honourably and fully to implement the conditions of the Settlement.<sup>22</sup>

How the Settlement was to be implemented was explained in a telegram despatched to all Provincial Congress Committees by the General Secretary of the Congress:



Civil disobedience and no-tax campaigns to be discontinued and no further defiance of laws or regulations. Boycott of British goods as such to be discontinued and complete freedom regarding them given.... No organized disobedience of Salt Laws and no raids but villagers residing in areas where salt was collected or made are permitted to continue to collect or make salt for their domestic consumption or sale in neighbourhood. Unauthorized news-sheets should be stopped. Taxpayers should prepare payment land revenue and return [to] villages where vacated.

As for picketing of foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops, it was to be "permitted" provided it was unaggressive and did not "involve coercion, intimidation, restraint, hostile demonstration, obstruction to public or any offence under ordinary law". Where these conditions could not be enforced picketing was to be suspended.<sup>23</sup>

The icing on the cake was provided by an exchange of short letters which reveal how Irwin and Gandhiji came to feel about each other at the end of the talks. On 6 March Irwin wrote to Gandhiji:

I want to write you a personal note of my own. Very great thanks to you for all you have done, while we have been working together during these last difficult days. It has been a great privilege to me to be given this opportunity of meeting and knowing you; and I hope that either before I leave India (Irwin's term as Viceroy was shortly ending) or in England, you will give me the pleasure of seeing you again. I do pray ... that history may say you and I were permitted to be instruments in doing something big for India and for humanity.

Gandhiji answered on 7 March:



Your very affectionate letter has touched me very deeply. It will always be a joy to me to renew the heart-to-heart talks, only now, let us hope, under less trying circumstances. Your kindly nature made the trial itself a pleasing work to which I had learnt to look forward. I heartily join in your prayer May God answer it.<sup>24</sup>

## 8

On 8 March Gandhiji and party left for Ahmedabad by train, travelling third-class. The journey was not comfortable, with huge shouting crowds besieging railway stations all along the way. But Gandhiji was unperturbed and worked all night long on the draft of the presidential speech Vallabhbhai Patel would be delivering at the forthcoming session of the Congress at Karachi.<sup>25</sup>

Arriving at Ahmedabad Gandhiji was taken to the bungalow of Sheth Ranchhodlal Amritlal where he was to stay, for pursuant to the vow he had taken on 12 March 1930 while setting out on the Dandi march not to return to the Ashram till freedom was won, he could not go to Sabarmati Ashram.

Then began the routine of public meetings. On 11 March there was a women's meeting which was so crowded and so lacking in any kind of order that when it dispersed after Gandhiji had spoken seven ladies got crushed in the stampede, one of whom, Prasannabehn, wife of Moolchand Shah, died a few hours later. It was a sign Gandhiji wrote sorrowfully in *Navajivan* (which had now resumed publication following the withdrawal of the Press Ordinance), that the awakening among the people had been going out of control. He laid down detailed rules that the organizers of public meetings must follow if such mishaps were to be avoided.<sup>26</sup>





On 12 March Gandhiji addressed the farmers at Borsad, Ras and Sunav. He congratulated them on the heroic part they had played in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

At Borsad he was told that the taluka had suffered a loss of Rs. 13 lakhs by way of land confiscated and sold. But the Settlement did not mean that the loss would be made good. Gandhiji said he had given them no promise that the loss incurred from participation in civil disobedience would be made good. It had been a do-or-die struggle and the farmers had been told that their homes would be robbed and they would be made destitute.

But while they could not ask for compensation for any loss incurred they would have to fight for the land which had been taken away from them. It must be recovered. Gandhiji promised the farmers that their land would be restored to them, though he could not say when and how that would be done.

At the Ras meeting Gandhiji roundly condemned the expropriation of the farmers' land and its sale to Dharalas. He told the audience:

Not only have the Dharalas not joined you, they have taken away your land as well. In appropriating your ancestral land, they have defiled our tradition and dishonoured our country.

Gandhiji urged those who had appropriated the land to return it to those from whom it was taken. Under swaraj there would be no such divisions as Dharalas, Patidars and others.

At Sunav Gandhiji was told that for the recovery of revenue amounting to Rs. 69,000 the village had been made to incur a loss of Rs. 3,00,000. Gandhiji told the villagers that if they could not pay the revenue, as he knew many of them could



not, there was provision in the Settlement for suspension of recovery. Only, they must not give the impression that they did not want to pay.<sup>27</sup>

From the peasants to the workers- from the villages of Gujarat Gandhiji proceeded to Bombay to explain the terms of the Settlement to mill workers. On 16 March there was a mammoth meeting held in the mill area. When Gandhiji arrived for the meeting he was greeted by a hostile demonstration staged by members of the Girni Kamgar Union, a Communist-controlled trade union organization. B.T. Ranadive, then a leading local Communist, addressing the gathering, vehemently attacked Gandhiji and the Congress for having betrayed the cause of the workers. Gandhiji came in for special attack inasmuch as he had failed to secure the release of the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners. Gandhiji reminded the fiery Communist workers that he had been championing the cause of the working class since the days when they had not even been born. He defended the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement. There was nothing in it of which he needed to be ashamed. Gandhiji expressed his regret that the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners continued to be in jail, but said he could not have made their release a condition for the settlement.<sup>28</sup>

9

Muslims, as has been noted earlier, did not actively participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Indeed by and large they displayed an attitude of antipathy towards the movement.

When the Round Table Conference was convened in London in 1930, finding that the Congress would not be represented at the deliberations, Muslim leadership had thought it would be able to make the British agree to their communal demands. This did not happen. The Round Table Conference merely postponed the settlement of the communal question. This not only greatly demoralized the



Muslim leadership but further increased its antipathy towards the Congress - to such an extent that it began to voice its opposition to the idea of any transfer of power to the Congress. Muslim conferences were held on 7 February, 1 March, 15 March and in the first week of April 1931. The speeches made and resolutions passed at those conferences were a testimony to this stiffening of the communal posture among Muslims.

It was only natural that this kind of hostility should result in the heightening of communal tension, leading to friction and communal riots. Such riots broke out in U.P. in February and March and were of a serious character.

The first riot of the series came on 11 February in Benares. The precipitating cause, it was said, was the shooting of a Muslim foreign cloth dealer by Civil Disobedience workers. The crowd of infuriated Muslims following the funeral procession of their slain co-religionist indiscriminately looted Hindu shops and houses and attacked Hindus on the way. Stray cases of stabbing continued for days. Considering the tension that was in the air, the casualties fortunately, were not large - two persons lost their lives and 77 were injured.<sup>29</sup>

Later in March Mirzapur and Agra were the scenes of riots.

It had been announced that the death sentences passed on Bhagat Singh and his comrades Sukh Dev and Rajguru, would be carried out on 23 March. This created much consternation in the country and demands were voiced for the commutation of the death sentences. Gandhiji, having failed in the course of his talks to move the Viceroy in the matter, made one last attempt. On 23 March, the day the executions were scheduled to be carried out, he wrote to Lord Irwin:



Though you were frank enough to tell me that there was little hope of your commuting the sentence of death on Bhagat Singh and two others.... Dr. Sapru met me yesterday and said that you were troubled over the matter and taxing your brain as to the proper course to adopt....

Popular opinion rightly or wrongly demands commutation. When there is no principle at stake, it is often a duty to respect it.

In the present case the chances are that, if commutation is granted, internal peace is most likely to be promoted. In the event of execution, peace is undoubtedly in danger....

Political murders have been condoned before now. It is worthwhile saving these lives, if thereby many other innocent lives are likely to be saved and may be even revolutionary crime almost stamped out...

The Viceroy replied that for reasons already explained to Gandhiji he could not see his way to feel that it would be right to take the action Gandhiji suggested.<sup>30</sup>

On 23 March 1931, the administration, in utter disregard of the national sentiment and mercy appeals, carried out the death sentences on Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru. They were hanged at night in the Lahore jail and their bodies were cremated according to Sikh and Hindu rites on the banks of the Sutlej.

This callous action of the British, at a time when the country was looking forward to the cessation of political hostilities between Britain and India and ushering in of an era of peace, shocked nearly all sections of the people. Excitement in Lahore, Calcutta and other cities mounted. In Calcutta in particular, armed flying squads were deployed to patrol the city.

When the Central Assembly met on 24 March, the members were in an agitated mood. Rangachariar, leader of the Nationalist group, in a statement he read out,



expressed grief and resentment at the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his comrades and declared:

For reasons which it is unnecessary to recapitulate it was a trial behind the back of the accused, under a special procedure sanctioned by an Ordinance which this House always protested against. The vast majority of the public firmly believe that Bhagat Singh at least was not concerned with the particular crime for which he was convicted and sentenced to death. The volume of public feeling in the matter has been made manifest in manifold ways to the Government.... The Government have flouted public opinion and have done the thing which we fear will lead to more serious consequences.

The members of the Nationalist group then walked out of the Assembly, declaring that they would not take part in the day's proceedings. Some Independents also joined them.<sup>31</sup>

In a statement Gandhiji said:

Bhagat Singh and his companions have been executed and have become martyrs. Their death seems to have been a personal loss to many. I join in the tributes paid to the memory of these young men. And yet I must warn the youth of the country against following their example. We should not utilize our energy, our spirit of sacrifice, our labours and our indomitable courage in the way they have utilized theirs. This country must not be liberated through bloodshed.<sup>32</sup>

In Kanpur, on 24 March, when news of the execution of Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru reached the city, rioting broke out. The rioting followed the refusal of Muslim traders to obey the strike call given by Congress workers. The Kanpur riot was the most horrendous ever witnessed anywhere. Incendiarism, barbarous



assaults on women, massacre of children and other acts of horror were resorted to on a large scale. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, President of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee and editor of the local nationalist journal Pratap and a fearless crusader in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity; went round the city rescuing Muslims from Hindu majority areas and Hindus from Muslim majority areas and taking them to places of safety. His voice carried conviction and many lives were thus saved. But he was done to death on 25 March in a Muslim quarter where he had gone to provide relief to the wounded and to pacify tempers. The fact of the murder only came to light on 27 March when the body of this martyr was identified.<sup>33</sup>

Casualties in the riot numbered 166 killed and 480 wounded.<sup>34</sup> It sent shock waves all over the country.

## 11

Thus, as the Congress moved towards its forty-fifth session to begin at Karachi on 29 March, and towards ratification of the Provisional Settlement arrived at between the Viceroy and Gandhiji, the picture presented was not all rosy. The dominant note was no doubt one of hope and the talk of Dominion Status being practically within reach was in the air. But there were various shades of grey. There were doubts and uncertainties and mistrust of the British born of long experience. They could scuttle the settlement in two ways; by putting their own interpretation on the terms and by sabotaging the working of it at various levels. For instance, on the question of safeguards, on which Jawaharlal Nehru held such strong views, Secretary of State, Wedgwood Benn, speaking in the House of Commons on 12 March had said:



The safeguards referred to by the Federal Structure committee including the powers of the Governor-General in relation to currency legislation, are essential and cannot be abated if we are to set up a new constitution with success. I may add that here I am specifically referring to the considered view of the Government which indeed is well known.<sup>35</sup>

Gandhiji protested. Meeting the Viceroy on 19 March he told him that if the attitude of the British Government was unalterable on the particular proposals in this field "as distinct from the broad necessity of ensuring the general purpose of safeguarding India's credit", he was very doubtful whether it would be useful for Congress to participate in the Round Table Conference.

The Viceroy explained to Gandhiji that the British Government had a position in the matter and the Secretary of State had given expression to it, just as the Congress had a position in the matter and Congress leaders had been giving expression to it. He drew Gandhiji's attention to a remark of Jawaharlal Nehru that the Congress could agree to nothing till the last British soldier had departed from India. He assured Gandhiji that the British Government meant well by India and would be willing to consider any proposal on which agreement appeared possible.<sup>36</sup>

Difficulties with regard to the Government carrying out its own obligations under the Settlement however started at once. A certain number of prisoners, 14,000 to be exact, were freed within a few days of the Settlement. But there were others who, Gandhiji held, could not be included in the category of prisoners guilty of violence, and had not been released: Many of them had been convicted under Section 124 A, for sedition. Gandhiji pressed for their release. The Home Secretary resisted.<sup>37</sup>



Return of property was also proving a harrowing undertaking. Gandhiji mentioned the case of the Raja of Kalakankar, whose elephants, motor-cars, etc., had been attached for non-payment of revenue.<sup>38</sup>

In U.P. the agrarian situation had been worsening. Jawaharlal Nehru had asked the peasants that though they could not withhold payment of land revenue as a part of the Civil Disobedience Movement, they should do so on economic grounds.<sup>39</sup>

In Gujarat, the Home Secretary informed Gandhiji, a similar appeal was being addressed to the peasants by Vallabhbhai Patel.

Then there was tension building up in the rural areas of Gujarat over non-return of confiscated property to the villagers.

What direction would the Congress give to the country, besides ratifying the Settlement and how would it deal with all the problems that now confronted it, wondered the friends as well as the opponents of the Congress.





## CHAPTER XIX

### THE KARACHI CONGRESS AND AFTER

#### 1

The forty-fifth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Karachi from 29 to 31 March 1931. If the historical importance of the Lahore Congress of the preceding year lay in that it authorized the first ever countrywide non-violent Civil Disobedience Movement under the leadership of Gandhiji for the attainment of complete independence for India, the Karachi Congress session stands out for having formally brought the movement to a close and authorizing the leadership to participate in negotiations with the British Government for attaining the goal. The goal of independence, as defined in the Lahore Congress resolution, remained: What the Karachi Congress did was to put away one tool, namely mass civil disobedience, and try another, that of negotiations, for the achievement of the goal.

The Lahore Congress had decided, for reasons purely of convenience, that its annual sessions should be held, not at Christmas time as hitherto but in late March. As it turned out, the session could not have been held in December in any case, for the Civil Disobedience Movement was just then at white heat, and the bulk of the Congress cadres were in jail. Indeed, when the Working Committee, at its meeting at Allahabad held on 13 February, considered the question of electing delegates for the Congress, it "resolved that owing to the abnormal conditions existing in the country" the President should issue instructions for the election of delegates before the end of February. Then at the Delhi meetings which continued between 21 February and 6 March the Working Committee decided that in view of the abnormal conditions prevailing in the country and in order to "give every facility to the large numbers of men and women who have



suffered imprisonment in the national campaign to exercise their franchise and to get elected as delegates for the Congress", the quota of delegates allotted to each district should be divided into two halves, "one-half being elected by those who have suffered imprisonment in the Civil Disobedience campaign and the other half in the normal manner". Thus, of the 3,200 delegates attending the session, more than half were satyagrahis who had served prison terms in the course of the movement.<sup>1</sup>

2

Gandhiji left New Delhi for Karachi on the evening of 23 March. There were crowds at the railway stations but their shouts this time did not proclaim adulation. They were angry crowds, angry because Gandhiji had not been able to save the lives of Bhagat Singh and his two comrades and yet had entered in to a co pact with the Viceroy. Some climbed in to Gandhiji's compartment and asked: "Where have you left Bhagat Singh?" Mirabeen had a tough time pushing them out.

At Malir station Gandhiji was greeted by members of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, sporting red shirts. They wore black badges and shouted: "Who is responsible for the hanging of Bhagat Singh? The Agreement signed by Gandhi." They surrounded Gandhiji and when Devadas tried to break the cordon, he was pushed around. They also shouted: "Gandhi go back."

As the train approached Karachi, at every station, on every platform there were crows shouting: "Bhagat Singh Zindabad!", "Gandhi, Go Back!"<sup>2</sup>

Gandhiji understood the resentment shown by the protesting young men of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. In a statement issued on 26 March he said:



I was quite prepared for it [the hostile demonstration]. Although they were incensed against me, they gave vent to their wrath in what I would call a most dignified manner.... Of course they shouted 'Down with Gandhism', 'Go back Gandhi' .... I was unruffled and took these insults as only a mild expression of their deep grief and consequent anger.

Gandhiji made it clear that the executions would not come in the way of the truce, for “staying of these executions was no part of the truce”.<sup>3</sup>

At a public meeting organized in the Congress pandal on 26 March he again dealt with the hostile demonstration. The young men, he said, had shouted, "Down with Gandhism." What did that mean? They could kill him, but they could not kill Gandhism. If truth could be killed, Gandhism could be killed. For what was Gandhism but winning swaraj through truth and non-violence?<sup>4</sup>

In an article in *Navajivan* of 29 March Gandhiji paid tribute to the bravery and self-sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and others but condemned the cult of the gun for achieving the goal. In words that had a prophetic ring he wrote:

I am not prepared to believe that the country has benefited by their action. I can see only the harm that has been done ... no one can deny the fact that if the practice of seeking justice through murders is established amongst us, we shall start murdering one another for what we believe to be justice. In a land of crores of destitute and crippled persons this will be a terrifying situation. These poor people are bound to become victims of our atrocities.<sup>5</sup>

Gandhiji expressed his grief at the communal carnage perpetrated in Kanpur the previous day, in which Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi had been killed. It had been gruesome. Women insulted; children done to death. What did it matter whether those women and children were Hindus or Muslims? He declared:



With carnage going on about me I cannot bear to live unconcerned. Let me declare that as soon as I feel that life is unbearable, I should hope to have courage to fast myself to death rather than witness these blood feuds.<sup>6</sup>

Paying a tribute to Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi at the Subjects Committee meeting on 27 March, Gandhiji said:

Let his great example be an inspiration to us all, let it awaken us to our sense of duty.... Let the shame of Kanpur teach us a lesson so that we may feel that even the loss of 300 men and women was not too high a price to be paid for permanent peace.<sup>7</sup>

3

The proceedings of the Congress opened on 29 March in an open air stadium named Motilal Pandal. The address of Choithram Gidwani, Chairman of the Reception Committee, was short and to the point. So was the presidential address delivered by Vallabhbhai Patel.

The President's address dwelt briefly upon the execution of Bhagat Singh, on the just concluded Civil Disobedience campaign, on the Delhi Settlement, the constitutional issues, Hindu-Muslim unity, boycott of foreign cloth and drinks and drugs, the question of salt and Gandhiji's eleven points.

On Bhagat Singh and others, the President set the tone for the discussion that was to follow. He said:

I cannot identify myself with their methods. I have no doubt that political murder is no less reprehensible than any other, but the patriotism, daring and sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and his comrades commands my admiration.

The President defended and justified the Delhi Settlement though, he said, it was open to the Congress to refuse to endorse it. He informed the Congress that "the



clear demand on the part of the British Indian delegation at the Round Table Conference for full responsibility" and "the British parties having accepted the position" and with the British Premier and the Viceroy appealing to the Congress for cooperation, a situation had been brought about where a peaceful settlement of the constitutional question appeared possible.

As for the safeguards, Motilal Nehru had called them adjustments conceived in India's own interests. The safeguard on defence might mean retention of British officers or even privates. But that would not mean control of defence by the British.

So far as repudiation of debts was concerned, the Congress had never asked for it. What the Congress had always sought was an impartial investigation into the debts where they were not in the interests of the country.

The President asserted that the Settlement did not mean any going back upon the Lahore Congress resolution on complete independence. But independence did not mean "a churlish refusal to associate with Britain or any other power" ... Independence did not exclude the possibility of equal partnership with Britain for mutual benefit, to be dissolved at the will of either party.

The President welcomed the idea of Federation, which he found fascinating. But the Princes must not take an uncompromising position on the question of reforms in their States. They must see that the fundamental rights of their subjects were guaranteed. The subjects should also have direct representation in the Federal Legislature.

On the question of communal settlement and Hindu-Muslim unity Vallabhbhai repeated the Lahore Congress position that, with the lapse of the Nehru Report, the Congress was committed to the position. that in any future constitution no



communal solution would be acceptable to the Congress which did not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned.

As regards boycott of foreign cloth it was an economic necessity for India. Without it the impoverished millions of India must continue to starve, for the charkha and khaddar provided livelihood to millions. The Congress had always used boycott of British goods as a political weapon. With the coming of Gandhiji the boycott of British goods had been replaced by the boycott of foreign - not only British - cloth. This went hand in hand with the development of swadeshi. The principle was that whatever was produced in India should be encouraged to the exclusion of foreign products, whether they were British or other. That was a condition of national growth. It was misleading to talk about equality of treatment in this regard. What could equality of treatment between an elephant and an ant mean? The protection of Indian industries and enterprises to the exclusion of British or foreign ones was a condition of India's national existence even in a situation of partnership.<sup>8</sup>

After the conclusion of the President's address the Congress in short course passed a condolence resolution, a resolution deploring communal violence in Kanpur and another demanding the release of political prisoners not covered by the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement. The session then got down to debating the resolution on Bhagat Singh, which had been drafted by Gandhiji but was moved by Jawaharlal Nehru. The resolution ran:

This Congress, while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades Syts. Sukhdev and Rajguru, and mourns with the bereaved families the loss of these lives. The Congress is of opinion that ... Government have lost the



golden opportunity of promoting goodwill between the two nations ... and winning over to the method of peace the party which, being driven to despair, resorts to political violence.<sup>9</sup>

Jawaharlal's speech introducing the resolution, which he did less than willingly, synchronized little with the tone, temper and spirit of the resolution. He was not inclined to condemn in a wholesale manner political violence as such. He was not ashamed of the cult of violence, he said. Only at that particular juncture it could not be practised in the best interests of the country and there was the fear of communal strife being intensified when once the sword was unsheathed. The Congress therefore must dissociate itself from violence.

Madan Mohan Malaviya, supporting the resolution, blamed the situation in the country in which the youth were taking to violence in desperation. Much of the responsibility for this lay with the Government.

V. L. Sastri moved an amendment to the resolution seeking deletion of the words disapproving violence. Dr. Tarachand Lalwani also expressed the view that since the Congress was wedded to non-violence it was unnecessary for it to go on reiterating belief in non-violence year after year. Though the amendment was lost, it was clear that there was a sizeable section of delegates, especially the younger elements, who were not happy with the opening part of the resolution expressing the disapproval of the Congress "of political violence in any shape or form". In fact, the Volunteers' Conference, held separately, passed the resolution with the phrase omitted. And while the Congress was debating the resolution, members of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha caused tumult and uproar outside.<sup>10</sup>

The resolution on the Provisional Settlement came the following day, 30 March. The text of the resolution ran:



This Congress, having considered the Provisional Settlement between the Working Committee and the Government of India, endorses it, and desires to make it clear that the Congress goal of Purna Swaraj (Complete Independence) remains intact. In the event of the way being otherwise open to the Congress to be represented at any conference with the representatives of the British Government, the Congress delegation will work for this goal and, in particular, so as to give the nation control over the army, external affairs, finance and fiscal and economic policy, and to have a scrutiny, by an impartial tribunal, of the financial transactions of the British Government in India and to examine and assess the obligations to be undertaken by India or England, and the right to either party to end the partnership at will; provided, however, that the Congress delegation will be free to accept such adjustments as may be demonstrably necessary in the interest of India.

The Congress appoints and authorizes Mahatma Gandhi to represent it at the Conference with the addition of such other delegates as the Working Committee may appoint to act under his leadership.<sup>11</sup>

The resolution managed to sum up the position of the Congress on almost all major constitutional issues within a short space.

It ratified the Settlement. It reiterated the goal of Complete Independence. It expressed willingness of the Congress to attend the Round Table Conference. It expressed the Congress position on the question of safeguards and foreign debt and yet left enough room for compromise. Finally, it appointed Gandhiji as the Congress spokesman at the R.T.C.

Notwithstanding the reiteration of the goal of Purna Swaraj as adopted at Lahore, a large section of delegates saw in the Delhi Settlement a retreat from that goal.





Jawaharlal Nehru, who moved the -resolution, was aware of this feeling among the delegates and sought to allay it. Severance of connection with the Empire after all was not everything, he said. People's ideas as to what was independence varied. The important thing was whether the country had real power in its hands.

Dr. Ansari, seconding the resolution, also asserted that the resolution did not signify any going back upon the Lahore resolution. What the resolution sought to do was to define Purna Swaraj in terms of control over defence, fiscal and economic powers and so on.

Jamnadas Mehta was the first to raise the voice of dissent. He had given notice of an amendment which repudiated the "personal settlement arrived at between Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Irwin" as it was inconsistent with the Independence resolution passed at Lahore. The official resolution, he asserted, attempted to water down independence. You could not go to the Round Table Conference hedged in with conditions and still say you were sticking to independence. In the Provisional Settlement safeguards had been agreed to. Independence with safeguards could not be called independence. What was the meaning of the assertion that the Congress would only accept those safeguards which were in the interest of India? How could any safeguards be in the interest of India? If there were to be any safeguards they could only be in the interest of England.

Swami Govindanand, claiming to speak for the youth of the country, was equally vehement in his opposition to the resolution which, he asserted, would put the clock back. India would never gain swaraj through the Round Table Conference. He expressed himself in favour of continuing the Civil Disobedience campaign. He said he, and those of his way of thought, would not take part in the debate on the resolution and would abstain from voting.<sup>12</sup>



Gandhiji then rose to speak, and spoke for forty minutes, first in Hindi and then in English. Throughout the speech there was pin drop silence.

At the very outset Gandhiji expressed his own misgivings as to the usefulness of attending the Round Table Conference. There was such a sea of difference between the demands that the Congress was making and the demands that had been put forward at the Round Table Conference that there appeared little hope of the Conference yielding anything. Nevertheless, a satyagrahi could not spurn an opportunity for talks with the opponent. The Congress had been invited to the Conference. It had been asked to state at the Conference what it wanted. The Working Committee had not accepted the Settlement because the country had grown weary of the struggle. The country could continue the struggle even for twenty years. But one could not go on fighting simply because one had the strength to fight.

Gandhiji mentioned the question of Federation, which meant federation of the provinces of British India on the one hand and the States on the other. The Princes had expressed willingness to join such a federation but had laid down the condition that there should be no interference in the internal affairs of States. Gandhiji said he had made the suggestion that the Princes should acknowledge the fundamental rights of the people of the States, which ought to be the same as those to be enjoyed by the people of British India and that there ought to be a federal institution, such as a Federal Court, to enforce those rights. Gandhiji hoped the Princes would agree on these two points.

Gandhiji again reminded the delegates that in agreeing to participate in the Round Table Conference the Congress held forth no assurance that the delegates to the Conference would bring back Purna Swaraj from there. But if they did not bring back Purna Swaraj it did not mean they would be returning humiliated. They



would return to receive not curses but compliments from their countrymen. They will have explained to the British people and British Ministers what India wanted. Gandhiji concluded:

All that I promise faithfully to you on my own behalf and on behalf of any delegation that you might wish to send with me, is that we shall not be disloyal to the Congress in any shape or form.<sup>13</sup>

The resolution was then put to the vote and was more or less unanimously carried.<sup>14</sup>

## 5

One of the most important resolutions taken up by the Congress on 31 March, the last day of the session, related to Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes.

The resolution, Pattabhi Sitaramayya comments, "was somewhat sudden in its appearance before the Working Committee". There would seem to be no doubt that it was intended partly to correct the impression, created by the political resolution, that the Congress was again "drifting with the old current of Dominion Status, British Imperialism and a Brown Bureaucracy" and had thrown overboard its socialist ideals and the interests of the workers and peasants.<sup>15</sup>

The resolution certainly differed sharply in tone from all previous resolutions of the Congress dealing with volatile issues involving conflicting interests of different strata of society. Jawaharlal Nehru played a decisive role in framing the resolution, though it was certainly revised by Gandhiji. Some believe that M. N. Roy, a prominent Marxist revolutionary, who was then in Karachi incognito at the invitation of Jawaharlal Nehru, was the original author of the resolution. Similarities were noted between the programme chalked out in the resolution and the minimum programme M. N. Roy had advocated only a few weeks earlier



in Bombay. Though Nehru was at the time considerably influenced by the views of M. N. Roy, and though Roy may have been present in Karachi, this does not necessarily make him the author of the Congress resolution. In fact, according to Jawaharlal Nehru the resolution took shape during one of his morning walks with Gandhiji in Delhi during the Gandhi-Irwin talks. Gandhiji asked him to make a draft. He made several. A final version was put into shape, which was presented to the Working Committee at Karachi.<sup>16</sup>

Following is the full text of the resolution as moved by Gandhiji.

This Congress is of opinion that to enable the masses to appreciate what swaraj, as conceived by the Congress, will mean to them, it is desirable to state the position of the Congress in a manner easily understood by them. In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions. The Congress, therefore, declares that any constitution which may be agreed to on its behalf should provide, or enable the Swaraj Government to provide, for the following:

- 1) Fundamental rights of the people including:
  - a) freedom of association and combination;
  - b) freedom of speech and of the press;
  - c) freedom of conscience and the freedom of profession and practice of religion, subject to public order and morality;
  - d) protection of the culture, language and scripts of the minorities;
  - e) equal rights and obligations of all citizens, without any bar on account of sex;
  - f) no disability to attach to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste or creed or sex in regard to public employment, office of power or honour and in the exercise of any trade or calling;



- g) equal rights to all citizens in regard to public roads, wells, schools, and other places of public resort;
  - h) right to keep and bear arms in accordance with relations and reservations made in that behalf;
  - i) no person shall be deprived of his liberty nor shall his dwelling or property be entered, sequestered or confiscated, save in accordance with law.
- 2) Religious neutrality on the part of the State.
  - 3) Adult suffrage
  - 4) Free primary education.
  - 5) A living wage for industrial workers, limited hours of labour, healthy conditions of work, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment.
  - 6) Labour to be freed from serfdom or conditions bordering on serfdom.
  - 7) Protection of women workers, and especially adequate provision for leave during maternity period.
  - 8) Prohibition against employment of children of school-going age in factories.
  - 9) Rights of labour to form unions to protect their interests with suitable machinery for settlement of disputes by arbitration.
  - 10) Substantial reduction in agricultural rent or revenue paid by the peasantry, and in case of uneconomic holdings exemption from rent for such period as may be necessary, relief being given to small zemindars wherever necessary by reason of such reduction.
  - 11) Imposition of a progressive income tax on agricultural incomes above a fixed minimum.



- 12) A graduated inheritance tax.
- 13) Military expenditure to be reduced by at least one half of the present scale.
- 14) Expenditure and salaries in civil departments to be largely reduced. No servant of the State, other than specially employed experts and the like, to be paid above a certain fixed figure which should not ordinarily exceed Rs. 500 per month.
- 15) Protection of indigenous cloth by exclusion of foreign cloth and foreign yarn from the country.
- 16) Total prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs.
- 17) No duty on salt manufactured in India.
- 18) Control over exchange and currency policy so as to help Indian industries and bring relief to the masses.
- 19) Control by the state of key industries and ownership of mineral resources.
- 20) Control of usury - direct or indirect.

It shall be open to the A.I.C.C. to revise, amend, or add to the foregoing so far as such revision, amendment or addition is not inconsistent with the policy and principle thereof.<sup>17</sup>

Speaking on the resolution Gandhiji commended the 20-point programme for acceptance by leaders and workers. They must clearly understand that in Swaraj no one would or should be paid a salary higher than Rs. 500 per month- not even the Viceroy. Then there was the clause dealing with the protection of the culture, language and scripts of the minorities. Since Mussalmans looked upon Islamic culture as something distinct, it was necessary to cultivate tolerance. The policy of the State should be one of "religious, neutrality", favouring neither Hinduism



nor Islam. As for clause 10, he assured the zemindars and the Maharajas that the Congress did not seek to destroy them. It only wanted to destroy "all wrong and injustice"<sup>18</sup>

The resolution is available 'in more than one version. An earlier draft, included by Pattabhi Sitaramayya in *The History of the Indian National Congress* at places uses more sweeping language, going to the extent of exempting uneconomic holdings from rent. The A.I.C.C. on the basis of suggestions from Provincial Congress Committees, did amend the resolution in certain parts, with the object of assuring landlords that wholesale expropriation of property was not intended by the Congress.<sup>19</sup>

The Karachi resolution, in a way, put the Congress firmly on the road to socialism.

## 6

Although the Congress had formally agreed to attend and participate in the deliberations of the Second Round Table Conference if invited to do so and had appointed Gandhiji to act as its delegate, in the months that immediately followed, the issue remained very much in doubt. There were a number of problems which, unless successfully handled, could block the way. The problems had to do with the carrying out of the terms of the Settlement by Government officials in the provinces and districts and with the working out of a formula for the settlement- at least provisional - of the communal question that would be acceptable to the Muslim leadership.

This latter presented no end of difficulties, for the intransigent attitude that the dominant Muslim leadership had adopted during the Civil Disobedience movement had only been stiffened following the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement.



The All-India Muslim Conference held in Delhi on 5 and 6 April under the presidentship of Shaukat Ali, was marked by speeches and resolutions full of hostility against Gandhiji and the Congress in particular and the Hindus in general. Shaukat Ali in his presidential address warned that India was on the brink of a civil war. The increasing range and intensity of communal riots were an indication that the Hindus and the Muslims could not any more trust each other. He called upon Muslims to organize themselves.

One of the resolutions unanimously adopted by the Conference read:

This Conference deplores the wanton aggressiveness of the Hindus, culminating in the riots at Benares, Agra, Mirzapur, Kanpur and elsewhere, accompanied with brutal and callous murders of innocent and defenceless Muslims including women and children.

This Conference is convinced that the so-called non-violence of the Congress satyagrahis ... is mere sham, little short of an unclean political stratagem adopted in the face of the superior organized force of the State....

This Conference is of opinion that a continuance of this attitude of the majority community will lead to a state of civil war in India and warns the Government ... that their spineless handling of the situation due to their continued pandering to the Congress ... will spell complete ruin of this unfortunate country.

One Zahur Ahmed, who moved the resolution, took the Government to task for coming in the way of the Muslims when they took up arms in self- defence. If Gandhi wanted civil war, said the speaker, "why not test our mettle today?"





Malik Feroz Khan Noon then moved the political resolution which reiterated the Muslim demands contained in Mohammed Ali Jinnah's 14 points, chiefly retention of separate electorates for Muslims,  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent representation in the Federal Legislature, retention of weightage in provinces where the Muslims were in minorities and protecting their majorities in Punjab and Bengal, separation of Sind from Bombay and introduction of Reforms in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan. The resolution also called for safeguards for the cultural and other rights of Muslims. In his speech moving the resolution Noon asked Muslims to understand the importance of the coming constitutional reforms. The Congress, for instance, had asked for control over defence. He warned that if the demand was conceded, Muslims would be reduced to the status of grass-cutters.<sup>20</sup>

Gandhiji in a statement said his position on the communal question was quite clear: it was that of full surrender to any unanimously expressed wish of the Mussalmans and the Sikhs. But the Muslim demands were not unanimous. The Nationalist Muslims were firmly of the view that the country should proceed only on the basis of joint electorates and adult franchise. The Mussalman masses, he was assured, did not want separate electorates. He himself, he said, could not identify himself with any solution which was frankly based on communalism and yet did not have the unanimous support of the Muslim community.<sup>21</sup>

In the days and months that followed, the dominant section of Muslim leadership continued to harp on the demands contained in Jinnah's 14 points and reiterated at the Muslim Conference at Delhi on 5 and 6 April. At the All-India Khilafat Conference held in Bombay on 30 May 1931, Maulana Abdul Majid Badauni, who presided, expressed complete agreement with the demands voiced at the Delhi Conference and poured scorn on the Congress and Gandhiji for the way they had treated the Muslim demand for safeguards. He warned the Hindus that Muslims



would rather sacrifice their lives than surrender any of their rights, including, above all, the right of separate electorates.

The Conference passed a resolution warning the British Government that if it did not concede the Muslim demands as spelt out at the Delhi Conference, Muslims would not accept any constitution for India.<sup>22</sup>

That the dominant section among the Muslims had now veered away from the national mainstream and rather than make a united front with the Congress for the attainment of a common national goal was in fact pitted against the Congress on almost every issue was now becoming palpably clear. So much was this the case that the more extreme among the Muslim leadership were now voicing their opposition to the national demand of independence, saying that independence would mean rule by the Hindu's. For instance, at the meeting of the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim Conference held at Delhi on 1 March 1931, Hasrat Mohani had moved a resolution to the following effect:

Whereas the Muslim community is now convinced that the Hindus are bent upon establishing a Hindu Raj in India and whereas the Hindus and the British Cabinet have joined hands to ignore most of the important Muslim demands contained in the Delhi resolution of this Conference, this Committee believes that the establishment of Dominion Status in India and the vesting of responsibility in the legislatures is detrimental to Muslim interests and will, therefore, not be acceptable to them.

The resolution was not then passed, but even so it claimed a full six hours of discussion, at the end of which consideration of it was deferred to a future date.<sup>23</sup>

Needless to say all this was not calculated to render any easier the difficult task Gandhiji faced at the forthcoming Round Table Conference. So worried did Gandhiji appear on this score that he even expressed his doubt as to the



usefulness of the Congress attending the Round Table Conference in the absence of a communal settlement.<sup>24</sup>

At the meeting of the Working Committee, held in Bombay from 9 to 11 June 1931, Gandhiji even informally moved a resolution, which he “thought was far more consistent and desirable in the national interest”, suggesting that he should not attend the Round Table Conference in the absence of any settlement of the communal question, since the absence of unity would deprive the national demand of the strength required to secure its acceptance. But Gandhiji could not carry with him the majority of the Working Committee, which felt that “not to attend the Conference by reason of failure of a communal settlement would be to play into the hands of the enemy”. The Committee passed a resolution, saying that even if efforts that were being made to secure an honourable settlement of the communal question should unfortunately fail, other conditions being favourable, Gandhiji should represent the Congress at the R.T.C.<sup>25</sup>

## 7

The politically conscious youth of the country, who had participated in sizeable strength in the Civil Disobedience movement, had, by and large, not been happy with the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement. They looked upon it as a surrender to the British. Execution of Bhagat Singh and his two companions further exacerbated their anger for they felt that if Gandhiji had taken a stand on the issue the executions could have been averted. The result was a further spurt in revolutionary violence.

On 7 April James Peddie, District Magistrate of Midnapur in Bengal, was shot dead while he was on a visit to a local school. No less than six bullets were fired, which hit him on the back and in the stomach.<sup>26</sup>



Gandhiji was shocked and did not mince words in denouncing such acts and those who perpetrated them. He wrote in *Young India*:

The extolling of murderers is being overdone. If we are to sing the praises of every murderer because the murder has a political motive behind it, we should proceed from praising the deed to the deed itself.

Gandhiji also took exception to the Sikh League having praised as a hero one Sajjan Singh, who had in January murdered the wife of a British official.

He said:

This raises a doubt in my mind about the wisdom of my having been the author of the Congress resolution about Bhagat Singh.... The hope behind [that resolution] was that we would thereby be able to distinguish between the deed and the motive.... But the effect of the Congress resolution has been perhaps quite the contrary. It seems to have given a passport for extolling murder itself.<sup>27</sup>

Another terrorist outrage occurred in Bombay when a student of Fergusson College made an attempt on the life of the Acting Governor Sir Earnest Hotson, when he was on a visit to the College. 'The attempt failed by sheer chance when the bullet that hit Hotson was stopped by a metal stud of a note-book he carried in his pocket. Gandhiji was aghast. He wrote in *Navajivan*:

Are we to believe that the terrorists respect no limites? ... A great and ancient country like ours will not win swaraj through treacherous murders.... Suppose that one or two thousand terrorists, or even more, succeed in killing every Englishman in India. Will that enable them to run the Government of the country?<sup>28</sup>

A few days later he again returned to the theme:



The Bhagat Singh worship has done and is doing incalculable harm to the country. Bhagat Singh's character about which I had heard so much from reliable sources ... carried me away and identified me with the cautious and balanced resolution passed at Karachi. I regret to observe that the caution has been thrown to the winds. The deed itself is being worshipped.... The result is goondaism and degradation wherever this mad worship is being performed.... I warn Congressmen that it [the Congress] will soon lose all its charm if they betray their trust and encourage the Bhagat Singh cult whether in thought, word or deed.... Let this fortunate failure of attempted assassination open our eyes.<sup>29</sup>

Terrorist activities continued. On 23 July two British army officers travelling to Poona by the Punjab Mail were attacked with knives and were badly hurt while their dog was killed. On 27 July R.R. Garlic, District and Sessions Judge, 24 Parganas in Bengal, was shot dead in the court room. On 21 August the Commissioner of Dacca, Alexander Cassells, was shot at and hurt in the thigh.<sup>30</sup>

Then on 30 August Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla, a police inspector of Chittagong, who had been involved in the investigation of the Chittagong Armoury Raid, was shot dead. The terrorist youth who did the deed having been a Hindu, the matter immediately assumed a communal colour and the following day Muslim mobs went on a rampage in Chittagong, burning and looting Hindu shopkeepers. It was discovered later that the whole thing had been instigated and organized by the local police and magistracy and that European hooligans had taken part in the violence.<sup>31</sup>

Such senseless acts of violence, while they did not bring the freedom of India nearer even by an inch, provided the rulers with the pretext they were constantly seeking for further intensification of police brutalities against the people at large, besides giving the rulers a handy tool for their propaganda against the Congress.



The major problem that arose, and over which things came almost to the breaking-point, was one of non-implementation of the terms of the Settlement by the Government.

Immediately after the signing of the Delhi Pact, Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai had proceeded to Gujarat to be among the peasantry and to explain to them the discontinuation of the Civil Disobedience Movement and advise them to pay the land revenue they had withheld on account of the movement. The peasantry did as they were told. By 26 April land revenue dues mounting to Rs. 1,54,407 had been paid up in Bardoli and Rs. 83,528 in Valod. This in spite the fact that forfeited lands had not still been returned, as required under the Settlement.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhiji gave similar advice to the peasants of U.P. where widespread distress conditions prevailed owing to the slump and consequential steep fall in prices of agricultural produce. Gandhiji advised the peasants of Agra, Mathura, Allahabad, Rai Bareli, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Lucknow, Pratapgarh and Etawah to pay the rents to the zemindars, who had to pay the revenue to Government after such remission as the Government might grant. He warned the peasants against listening to those who said that they need not pay any rent to the zemindars.<sup>33</sup>

Gandhiji similarly reiterated his warning to picketers that they should be wholly non-violent, that there should be no coercion of any kind, no fines levied from foreign-cloth dealers for breach of promises, no hooting of purchasers of foreign cloth and no cordons formed round shops.<sup>34</sup>

But the Government officials, at provincial and district levels, were not being very sincere in implementing their part of the settlement.

There were continuous complaints about peaceful picketing being interfered with. In Madras for instance the police insisted that the volunteers should stand



at a distance of 100 yards from the liquor shops being picketed. Picketers were assaulted and prosecuted, as for instance in Bombay, where liquor sale was being permitted at unlicensed places and outside the permissible hours. In Bengal liquor sellers assaulted volunteers with the connivance of the police.

The Settlement required the Government to release all Civil Disobedience prisoners not charged with violence. But there were large numbers of prisoners in every province still awaiting discharge. There were long lists of such prisoners being received by Gandhiji from various provinces. The Government in each case insisted that the prisoners were guilty of violence or incitement to violence. Gandhiji took up with the Government individual cases brought to his notice. There was the case of Gopal Anant Ogale of the Central Provinces, and that of Pandit Jagat Ram of the Punjab, where Gandhiji tried personal intervention.<sup>35</sup>

The Government were further required under Article 14 of the Settlement to remit fines not realized. But Gandhiji cited cases of persons in Bulsar in Surat district having been asked to pay up the fines.

Then the punitive police posted in certain areas was required to be withdrawn following the discontinuation of the Civil Disobedience Movement. But this was in many cases not done. Chautala in Hissar district, and Naushera and Panuam in Amritsar were instances. Firearm licences in many cases were not returned.

About the return of confiscated lands, it was the same story. An Ashram confiscated in Bihar had not been returned. In Bardoli many persons who had purchased such lands were willing to return the same to the owners, some of them even without wanting their money back. But they were being dissuaded by the police from doing so.

Article 19 of the Settlement required that except where the posts of Mukhis and Patels who had resigned or been dismissed during the movement, had been



permanently filled, Government would reinstate them. What was being done was that Mukhis, Patels and Talatis, appointed temporarily were being made permanent.

Then, in spite of the fact that on the advice of Gandhiji and Sardar Patel most peasants had paid up their land revenue (in Surat district, for instance, a sum of Rs. 19 lakhs out of the Rs. 20 lakhs due had been paid) the officials were now demanding, in contravention of the terms of the Settlement, that even those who were unable to pay the revenue dues should pay up.

In U.P. the administration was trying to make it impossible for the Congress to function. Meetings were being forcibly dispersed. Officials were openly inciting zemindars and taluqdars to help the police in suppressing the Congress and the Kisan Sabha. In this connection two confidential circulars issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Rai Bareli to various zemindars had come to light asking them to instruct their agents and employees to help the police in every way they could. It clearly amounted to a breach of the Settlement, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*.<sup>36</sup>

In Bengal, Punjab and the N.W.F.P. arrests were being effected of Congress workers carrying on peaceful political work. In N.W.F.P. the repression was particularly severe.

Government, as was only to be expected, denied the charges.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly the Delhi Settlement appeared to be crumbling. Gandhiji wondered whether in view of all that was happening in the villages, a way would still be open for him to participate in the Round Table Conference. He wrote expressing his misgivings to Governor Hotson of Bombay and followed it up with a wire to





Willingdon, the new Viceroy, on 9 July. He informed the Viceroy that the Working Committee was considering a resolution to the effect that if relief could not be obtained, Congress should give up the hope of being represented at the Round Table Conference.<sup>38</sup>

The Viceroy was scared. He wired back to say he would be willing to help in any way he could. By another wire he invited Gandhiji over to Simla for talks. He said:

I suggest that, as on previous occasions when difficulties have arisen, the best course is a personal discussion of mutual complaints. I should be very glad to see you if you could visit Simla....<sup>39</sup>

Gandhiji was in Simla for a week, from 15 to 22 July. In the course of his stay he had prolonged talks with Home Secretary H. W. Emerson, Home Member James Crerar and the Viceroy. The talks were not either particularly pleasant or particularly successful and on 21 July Gandhiji was still not certain whether he could intimate his acceptance of the Premier's invitation to him, received through the Viceroy, to be a member of the Federal Structure Committee. "I must watch events," Gandhiji wrote, "and if I find that things have not taken a better turn I must reluctantly come to the conclusion that I must not go."

In an interview to the Press Gandhiji stressed the same point. It was not his intention, he said, to humiliate the Government of India and he did not wish to set up a parallel Government, but he did want district authorities to allow responsible Congressmen to assist in assessing the ability of the peasants to pay the revenue.<sup>40</sup>

But while the top officials in Simla were trying to iron out things with Gandhiji, in the districts the officials, quite impervious to any commitments of the Government of India, were carrying on with their high-handed ways. When Gandhiji returned to Gujarat after his Simla visit, he was told that in Surat the



District Magistrate and his subordinates had used not only coercive but repressive measures against the poor villagers and forced them to make revenue payments. It was a breach of faith, Gandhiji told the official. He further asked him to refund the monies thus collected, withdraw all attachment notices and stop further repression. In the alternative he demanded an independent tribunal to enquire into the matter. Unless satisfaction was obtained, Gandhiji said, he would regard the Settlement as having been broken.

Gandhiji informed the Viceroy about the state of things, which he said he found unbearable and which might result in reducing to naught the incessant labour of four months.<sup>41</sup>

Gandhiji also sent copies of his letter to the Collector, to the Commissioner of Gujarat and to the Home Secretary. He wrote to Tej Bahadur Sapru that "almost the breaking-point has been reached". To Mirabeau also he wrote:

If there is a satisfactory reply, there may be some chance of going to London. If the reply is unsatisfactory, as it is most likely to be, you may dismiss the London visit altogether out of your mind.<sup>42</sup>

The Bombay Government's reply came on 11 August. It dismissed the allegation of coercion in the collection of revenue against the Collector, saying it was for the Collector to determine whether anyone claiming inability to pay was really unable to pay. Gandhiji promptly informed the Viceroy that since the Government had chosen to be "both prosecutor and judge with reference to matters arising out of a contract to which they and complainants are parties", his going to London had been rendered impossible.

In an interview to the press Gandhiji made known the latest position, which was that he would not be attending the Round Table Conference, but that the Delhi Pact continued to be in force.



The Congress Working Committee, in a resolution passed on 13 August, confirmed the decision.<sup>43</sup>

In a letter to Romain Rolland, dated 15 August, Gandhiji wrote:

How I would have loved to see you if I had gone to England, but it was not to be. I feel that it was God's will that I should not go.<sup>44</sup>

In a last-minute bid to patch up matter the Viceroy once again invited Gandhiji to Simla for discussions. Gandhiji went, taking along with him Vallabhbhai Patel, Prabhashankar Pattani, M. A. Ansari and Jawaharlal Nehru. They arrived in Simla on 25 August and carried on discussions with H. W. Emerson and the Viceroy. The parleys ended in what came to be termed as the Second Settlement.

According to the Settlement, Gandhiji agreed to attend the Round Table Conference on behalf of the Congress. The Settlement of 5 March 1931 remained operative, with the Government agreeing to secure the observance of the provisions of the Settlement in those cases where a breach was established and further agreeing to give careful consideration to representations that might be made in that respect.

As for the complaint of coercive methods having been used by officials in collecting revenue in Bardoli, the Government of India, in consultation with the Government of Bombay decided that an enquiry would be held in the matter with the following terms of reference : "To enquire in to the allegations that Khatedars in the villages in question were compelled by means of coercion exercised through the police to pay revenue in excess of what would have been demanded if the standard had been applied which was adopted in other villages of Bardoli Taluka where collections were effected after 5 March 1931, without the assistance of the police, and to ascertain what sum, if any, was so paid." Nasik Collector R. G. Gordon was appointed to conduct the enquiry.<sup>45</sup>



To be sure, things were not entirely satisfactory from the Congress point of view. But Gandhiji did not want the Congress to be blamed for backing out at the very last moment. And he wrote to the Viceroy on 27 August:

I have not come to the decision to go to London without fear, trembling and serious misgivings. Things from the Congress standpoint do not appear to be at all happy but I am relying upon your repeated assurance that you will give personal attention to everything that is brought to your notice. Do please trust Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the other members of the Working Committee.<sup>46</sup>

The advice fell on deaf ears. As we shall see, notwithstanding the enquiry, things went from bad to worse both in Gujarat and U.P. But for the time being Gandhiji was enabled to sail for England.

10

The Karachi Congress had appointed Gandhiji as the sole delegate to represent it at the Round Table Conference. A resolution of the Working Committee passed on 9 June 1931 confirmed this decision.

Suggestions, however, continued to be made that Gandhiji should take with him some other leaders - Jawaharlal Nehru's name came up in particular - to assist and advise him. Gandhiji rejected the suggestion. He wrote:

All the considerations were with the Working Committee, when, after a full and prolonged debate, it came to the conclusion that there should be sole [one man] delegation on behalf of the Congress. I fully share the unanimous view expressed by the members of the Working Committee.



The place of Jawaharlal and others, either as delegates or counsellors, he wrote, was not in London but at their respective posts of duty in India. Sole [one man] delegation was the best thing.

Gandhiji did try to secure the nomination of Dr. M.A. Ansari as delegate to represent the Nationalist Muslims. He wrote to Willingdon saying that Lord Irwin had in effect agreed. But Willingdon remained unbending in the matter and Nationalist Muslims were not represented at the Round Table Conference.<sup>47</sup>

The Federal Structure Committee of the Round Table Conference had been scheduled to meet on 7 September, and if he was to reach London in time for the Committee meeting, *s.s. Rajputana*, sailing from Bombay on 29 August, was the very last steamer he would have to take. He therefore rushed post haste from Simla, in a special train arranged by the Viceroy that took him to Delhi barely in time to catch the Frontier Mail to Bombay.<sup>48</sup>

Gandhiji arrived in Bombay on 29 August and after addressing a public meeting, made for the port. He was accompanied on the journey by Mirabehn, Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal and Devadas Gandhi.

The author had been sent to Sabarmati Ashram during her summer vacation that year by her brother and stayed in Mahila Hostel under the care of Premabehn Kantak, a highly educated Maharashtrian lady, who was a very strict disciplinarian warden of the hostel. Everyone was terrified of her.

Gandhiji came to Ahmedabad more than once and stayed at Gujarat Vidyapeeth. He came up to the Ashram every day during his evening walk. We loved to walk with him, but in those days girls and women could not stay at the Vidyapeeth. Coming back alone at night was not very pleasant. So I decided to go to the Vidyapeeth and walk back with Bapu to the Ashram. Premabehn insisted that I must have dinner. If I stayed for dinner, I would be late for the Vidyapeeth. So I



brought a little rice and- milk at lunch time to my room, gulped it after completing the day's duties and ran to the Vidyapeeth. When Premabehn enquired I could truthfully say I had had my dinner.

My brother brought me to Bombay. He had not gone with Bapu to Simla on Bapu's last visit there. He packed the whole night and did not have a wink of sleep. That was the first time that I also kept awake the whole night. He and Devadas were not ready when Bapu and Mirabehn left for the embarkation port. Shri Pyarelal Gupta, a businessman at Bombay, who was my brother's school and college friend and treated him as his younger brother, was to have me taken to Delhi after my brother left. Pyarelal Gupta took me and my brother to the ship. By the time Pyarelal and Devadas arrived, the gangway had been lifted. They were taken to the ship in a small boat and we saw them go up and join Bapu and his party. My eyes were heavy with sleep as I waved them good-bye. I was not aware then that my next meeting with my brother was to be in Yeravda prison.



## CHAPTER XX

## THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

## 1

On 29 August, cheered by the multitudes that had followed him to the Ballard Pier, Gandhiji and party boarded the *s.s. Rajputana* bound for Marseilles. Sailing by the same ship were a few other delegates to the Round Table Conference: Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, Madan Mohan Malaviya, the Nawab of Bhopal and the Raja of Korea.<sup>1</sup> Gandhiji and party travelled by second class.

Gandhiji insisted that those accompanying him should carry the minimum possible luggage. When he discovered that more luggage was being carried than was strictly necessary, he severely told his people to sort out as much as they could do without. As a result, fourteen trunks and cases of material had to be offloaded and deposited at Aden, when the ship reached that port to be shipped back to India.<sup>2</sup>

As for Gandhiji's dress, as in India so on the journey to England, his wardrobe consisted of his loin-cloth and his shawl. He had long before made up his mind in the matter. As far back as on 9 July he had written in *Young India*:

As to the dress I have many advisers. But here too my position is simple. If I go to England I shall go as a representative and nothing more, nothing less. I must therefore appear not as the English would have me but as my representative character demands. I represent the Congress because and in so far as it represents Daridranarayana, the semi-starved, almost naked villager.... My duty, as I conceive it, will then be, if I succeed in reaching London, to add nothing more to the loin-cloth than the climate peremptorily demands.<sup>3</sup>



In a message sent from the ship through the Associated Press, Gandhiji said that though he saw nothing on the horizon to warrant hope, being a born optimist, he was hoping against hope. At the Round Table Conference, he would endeavour to represent every interest that was not in conflict with the interests of the country as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

In another message Gandhiji appealed to the people to preserve a non-violent atmosphere in his absence and to continue to pursue the constructive programme and fight against the curse of drinks and drugs, foreign cloth and untouchability.<sup>5</sup>

2

The first port of call was Aden where the ship docked on 3 September. Answering a Press representative's question, Gandhiji told him about the India of his dreams. He said in England he would strive for a constitution that would release India from her thralldom and give her, if need be, the right to sin. In such an India woman would have equal rights with men. There would be no untouchability, no curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Since such an India would neither exploit nor be exploited, she would have the smallest army imaginable. All interests, whether Indian or foreign, not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions, would be respected.<sup>6</sup>

A vast throng of people, Indians and Arabs, was present to welcome Gandhiji when the ship touched port at 4.50 a.m. He was presented a purse of 328 guineas on behalf of the people of Aden.

Speaking to the gathering Gandhiji said those who desired peace must work together to perpetuate peace. He had no doubt that the Arabian Peninsula, which was the birthplace of Prophet Mohammed, would make its contribution in bringing Hindus and Muslims together in peace and brotherhood. He also





appealed to the Arabs to take up spinning. Some of the Caliphs, he reminded them, were models of simplicity.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the proceedings some unpleasantness had been threatened when the Resident tried to stop the hoisting of the National Flag. Gandhiji then had to intervene, reminding the Agent that there was a truce subsisting between the Government of India and the Congress and that he must not resent the flying of Congress flag at a ceremony to welcome Gandhiji. The Resident relented.<sup>8</sup>

After Aden came Suez, 6 September, and Port Said.

At Suez Gandhiji was interviewed by a representative of the Egyptian nationalist journal *Al-Ahram*. Gandhiji told the correspondent that he did not hope for much from the Round Table Conference, and that if the Conference ended in failure, as it might, the only course open for the Congress would be revival of mass civil disobedience and the consequent suffering for the people which was likely to be much more bitter than in the preceding year. He counselled Egyptian nationalists to pursue their struggle non-violently, which would make them secure their goal much quicker.

To the Daily Telegraph too he expressed views with regard to the usefulness of the Round Table Conference. He said:

On the horizon I see nothing but impenetrable darkness.... I am an optimist. There is nothing to warrant hope, but still I do not lose hope.<sup>9</sup>

At Suez Gandhiji also received a telegram from Egyptian nationalist leader Mustafa Nahas Pasha. Nahas Pasha prayed for the success of Gandhiji's mission and requested Gandhiji to pay a visit to Egypt on his homeward journey. He intimated that representatives of the Wafd, the party fighting for the independence of Egypt, would call on Gandhiji both at Suez and at Port Said.



There were also similar telegraphic messages from Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha, leader of the Constitutional Liberal Party of Egypt and Safia Zaghloul Pasha, the widow of the founder of the Wafd Party.<sup>10</sup>

In response to the invitation from Egyptian nationalists Gandhiji did attempt to visit Cairo on his homeward voyage after the Round Table Conference. But the British Captain of the ship so manipulated things that the attempt was frustrated. Gandhiji was first told that he could disembark at Port Said and after visiting Cairo board the ship again at Suez. But when the ship approached Port Said he was told that the ship regrettably would not be stopping at Suez. Ultimately of course the ship did stop at Suez. But the stratagem was effective in preventing Gandhiji from visiting Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

Both at Suez and at Port Said a large number of Egyptians came to welcome and to meet Gandhiji. But the British authorities, who ruled Egypt, did not allow any of them on board. Gandhiji was disappointed.<sup>12</sup>

### 3

Gandhiji's ship reached Marseilles on the early morning of Friday 11 September. Gandhiji had been greatly looking forward to the prospect of meeting Romain Rolland in the course of his European visit. The opportunity had been a long way coming and on 31 August he cabled to Rolland from the ship telling him that the *s.s. Rajputana* by which he was sailing would be reaching Marseilles on the morning of 11 September and asking him, health permitting, to meet him there and travel with him as far as Calais from there. Rolland suggested Dijon for their meeting, but Gandhiji, by another cable dated 6 September, informed him that the special train by which he and his party would be travelling, would be reaching Dijon only after midnight, and that Marseilles would be more convenient where the ship would be docking in the early morning. But Romain Rolland was not well



enough to make the journey to Marseilles and Gandhiji was received on his behalf by his sister Madeleine Rolland and two Swiss friends Edmond and Yvonne Privat, with a written message from the savant.<sup>13</sup>

Romain Rolland thus describes the event in his diary:

My sister and the Privats are there on Friday 11 September at 6 o'clock in the morning, on the mole at Marseilles.... Despite the unprecedented swarm of journalists and photographers, my sister is immediately introduced to Gandhi's presence, thanks to Andrews and Miss Slade, and he shows himself extremely affectionate. They are privileged to stay with him in his narrow 2nd class cabin, seated on the same bunk, for four hours, from 7 to 11 a.m., while he receives journalists and official delegates.... Gandhi seems to be in marvellous physical and moral form; calm, attentive, smiling or laughing through the gaps in his teeth, always simple, honest, spontaneous and reflective at the same time, in control of himself, his very sharp and precise gaze going right through people and penetrating all their deviousness at first glance.<sup>14</sup>

Another entry in Romain Rolland's diary reads:

He firmly, clearly and severely refused to be present at the banquet prepared for him ... it later transpired from an eye-witness account that he went in search of some of the Marseilles dockers on the ship. They conversed by gestures and grimaces. After that he was in a delighted mood. . . they for their part slapped their chests and said: 'Now there's a man with his heart in the right place, a real Communist'.

During the three or four hours he spent sitting in his cabin - my sister on his left - receiving the interviewers or official delegates, the door occasionally opened slightly and some Hindu Lascar from the ship slipped



in to feast his eyes on him in silence, then came closer, took his hand in his own without a word and withdraw.... More than twenty people came and went in this way.<sup>15</sup>

The schedule at Marseilles was crowded. Gandhiji gave interviews to *The Yorkshire Post*, *The Daily Herald*, *The New York Times*, *The Bombay Chronicle*, *The Daily Mail*, *The News Chronicle* and to Reuter and the Associated Press.

Gandhiji explained to the Press corps that his mandate was to work for securing the acceptance of the Karachi Congress resolution, which demanded control by India of finance, the army and foreign relations, subject to safeguards "demonstrably in the interests of India". If the Round Table Conference failed, he warned civil disobedience might have to be renewed, in which case "the consequences will be infinitely more terrible than the last struggle. It will mean, I fear, that not only Indians would be shot down but Britishers would be killed. You cannot hold 360,000,000 people without liberty on the leash of non-violence forever."<sup>16</sup>

Gandhiji also addressed a meeting of students, "past and present", of Marseilles, who had gathered to honour "the spiritual ambassador of India".<sup>17</sup>

From Marseilles Gandhiji travelled to Boulogne by train and there crossed the English Channel to Folkstone. The day was 12 September. It was wet and windy. Present at Folkstone to receive him were a group of eminent personalities: Laurence Housman, Fenner Brockway, the Labour leader, Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, Reginald Reynolds, who had carried to Irwin Gandhiji's letter to him of 2 March 1931, and John Haynes Holmes of New York.<sup>18</sup>

From Folkstone Gandhiji was driven to London by car while the rest of the party followed by train. Gandhiji was taken straight to Friends' House at Euston Road,



where a reception had been arranged in his honour. In London too it had been raining. Nevertheless, the rush of the people to see Gandhiji was so great that police had to be deployed.

Speaking at the reception Gandhiji said:

I am here with my friends on a mission of peace. I am, and my friends are, guests of the great English nation. I hope by the time we have finished our work; you will not consider that we have in any way abused your hospitality.

Gandhiji explained that at the Round Table Conference he would be bound by the mandate of the Congress, which stood for the freedom of "the dumb and starving millions". The Congress was wedded to non-violence, even though many Congressmen might not have lived up to its tenets. Indian nationalism was not in conflict with internationalism, for India believed not in the greatest good of the greatest number but in the greatest good of all.<sup>19</sup>

From the Friends' House reception Gandhiji went straight to Kingsley Hall in the East End of London. He had accepted the invitation of Muriel Lester to stay there for the duration of his London sojourn. Kingsley Hall was a centre of fellowship in an industrial district of East London presided over by Muriel Lester and run for the most part by people of the neighbourhood working as part-time or whole-time volunteers, the latter receiving food and seven shillings a week. Gandhiji had accepted Muriel Lester's invitation because he thought he would be happier staying among the poor and the destitute, even though it would entail every day eight miles of commuting to and back from St. James' Palace, the venue of the Round Table Conference. Later Andrews and Polak, who managed the practical side of Gandhiji's London stay, also rented a house at 88 Knightsbridge, where



Devadas Gandhi, Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal put up and which Gandhiji also used as an office.<sup>20</sup>

During the entire period of his London sojourn Gandhiji kept an extremely tight schedule. Each night he returned to Kingsley Hall only to snatch a little sleep - never more than three or four hours and sometimes even less. Mirabehn would wake him up at 3 a.m. for a pre-dawn walk which he took with Mirabehn and Muriel Laster along the streets and canals of Bow. A few others joined from time to time. The canals, it would appear, were the open drainage channels. If Gandhiji happened to be there on a weekend he went for his walk when it was daylight. He would then also visit homes and the women would proudly show him round. Later in the morning he would be driven to 88 Knightsbridge. Agatha Harrison, then working as Andrews' secretary, records:

... the early mornings when Mr. Gandhi arrived, and you felt as though a torch-like 'something' had come into the house. He would spring out of his car and be up in his room sitting by the fire spinning, in a flash. In every corner of the room there were famous sculptors and artists trying to get a model or a picture of this elusive man. Strewn around were letters and cables needing immediate attention; members of the Conference seated on the floor, anxious to get his opinion before the Conference session; men and women from all over the world waiting for a word from him. C. F. Andrews and Horace Alexander quietly working in the midst of it all; Mrs. Cheesman patiently waiting to take some important letter. And in the centre of all this the imperturbable Mahatma. Then finding it was time for the Conference, he would dart out to his car, followed by panting detectives, and some of his staff clutching the famous spinning-wheel and the green rush basket containing his food.<sup>21</sup>



Lord Sankey, who presided over the deliberations of the Federal Structure Committee of the Round Table Conference, marvelled at Gandhiji's stamina:

How Mr. Gandhi managed to stand the physical and mental strain of that Conference has always been a marvel to me.... [His] real task only began when the Conference adjourned. Hour after hour till late in the night, and early in the morning, he was engaged in conversations and interviews with the different interests, doing his best to get them into line and to bring them to his own way of thinking.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, though the Round Table Conference ended in failure, Gandhiji's personal impact was enormous. C. F. Andrews wrote:

His unique personality gripped the best English minds, and his originality of thought set those whom he met thinking as they had never done before. They were not always in agreement with him; but they all immensely respected the greatness of soul which they found in him. England is a very small country and impressions like these go round very fast indeed. No serious-minded man or woman could any longer take the view, which had been very widely held before, that Mahatma Gandhi was only an impossible fanatic after all.<sup>23</sup>

Speaking to the Press later in the day on 12 September, Gandhiji again declared that he would be working to carry out the mandate of the Congress, which was to try and achieve for India Complete Independence, which was defined as control over the army, external affairs, finance and economic policy and have the British Government to agree to scrutiny by an impartial tribunal of the financial transactions of the Government of India. Gandhiji said he was prepared to accept the Muslim demands in toto provided those demands had the backing of all Muslims including the Nationalist Muslims.



Gandhiji said he looked forward to a visit to Manchester, where he would try to remove any misunderstanding in regard to the policy of boycott of foreign cloth pursued by the Congress.<sup>24</sup>

On 13 September Gandhiji made a broadcast to America on the Columbia Broadcasting Service network. He spoke extempore, without notes. Gandhiji told the Americans that the importance of the Indian struggle lay not in the fact that it was a struggle for freedom but that "the means adopted by us for attaining that liberty are unique and, as far as history shows us, have not been adopted by any other people of whom we have any record". He said personally he would rather wait for ages than seek to attain freedom for India through bloody means.

He was, Gandhiji said, painfully conscious of the weaknesses of India. Chief among these were Hindu-Muslim disunity, untouchability and addiction to drinks and drugs, which a foreign Government had made into a source of revenue amounting to 25 crore rupees.<sup>25</sup>

5

Between the time the dates of the Second Round Table Conference were announced and the time the Conference convened, the political situation in Britain had undergone a sea change. Britain had been in the throes of a severe financial crisis that had come as a consequence of the world-wide depression. It proved too much for the Labour Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald to withstand. It collapsed. On 26 August Ramsay MacDonald dismissed most of the Ministers and constituted a National Government under his leadership, with Ministers drawn from all the three major British parties: the Conservatives, the Labour and the Liberals. Wedgwood Benn, the Labour Secretary of State for India, was replaced by the Tory Sir Samuel Hoare. Though it was officially denied that there had been any shift in the Government's policy in regard to India as a result





of the change of character of the Government, it was an open secret that the new Government did not consider itself bound by the programme formulated by the Labour Government, even though Ramsay MacDonald still continued to be Prime Minister.<sup>26</sup>

The Round Table Conference duly opened on 7 September, as scheduled. There were 112 delegates listed: 20 representing the British Government and British parties, 23 representing Indian States and 69 representing British India.\*<sup>3</sup>

Only two of the Committees of the Round Table Conference met between 7 September and 1 December 1931, when the session concluded: the Federal Structure Committee, presided over by Lord Chancellor Lord John Sankey, and the Minorities Committee, presided over by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.

The agenda for the Federal Structure Committee's deliberations had been divided under eight heads. These were: (1) Structure and composition of the Federal Legislature, including the proportions in each Chamber to be assigned to the States and to British India respectively, (2) Direct and indirect methods of election, (3) Relations between the two Chambers, (4) Distribution of financial resources between the Federation and its units, (5) The Ministry, and its relations with the Legislature, (6) Distribution of legislative powers between the Federal and Provincial Legislatures; effect in the States of legislation relating to Federal Subjects, (7) Administrative relations between the Federal Government, the States and the Provinces, and (8) The Federal Court.<sup>27</sup>

The Federal Structure Committee, at its first day's session, held under the presidentship of Lord Sankey in Queen Anne's drawing-room in St. James' Palace, did not take up any business, for Gandhiji was still on his way to London on 7 September and expected to arrive only on 12 September. Further meetings of

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\*<sup>3</sup> For the full list of delegates, see Appendix IV



the Committee were therefore postponed to start from Monday, 14 September. But even 14 September did not suit Gandhiji, it being his day of weekly silence. He however said he would attend if it was not thought inconvenient that he should be there and remain silent. He would follow the proceedings.<sup>28</sup>

He did just that.

Gandhiji presented the Congress case at the Federal Structure Committee on the following day, 15 September.

The Congress, Gandhiji said, was a truly national organization. It had been variously headed at various times by Englishmen, Parsis, Christians and Muslims. It had, during its 50 years' existence, held its sessions every year without fail.

The Congress had taken up the cause of the untouchables and since 1920 removal of untouchability had been an important plank in its programme. The Congress had also served the Princes, in that it had refrained from interfering in the internal affairs of the States. Above all, the Congress stood for the dumb, semi-starved millions scattered in India's seven lakh villages. The Congress was committed to protecting all interests that were not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions.

The Congress stood for Complete Independence. But it was not from a sense of arrogance. Complete Independence did not necessarily imply severance of the British connection. But association with Britain could be only on equal terms. Why should the Congress demand for a scrutiny of financial transactions of the British Government in India raise any eyebrows? After all, there had to be a stock-taking between incoming and outgoing partners, their transactions had to be subject to audit and adjustment. British people, he knew, would not want to saddle India with a single burden which would not be legitimate for it to bear.<sup>29</sup>



B. R. Ambedkar, a delegate to the Round Table Conference as a representative of the untouchables could not swallow Gandhiji's claim that the Congress also represented the Untouchables. He was later to write:

Anyone who has perused how the Congress failed to carry out the 1922 programme for the uplift of the untouchables which was included in the Bardoli programme and how it left it to the Hindu Mahasabha, could have no hesitation in saying that what Mr. Gandhi said was untrue.<sup>30</sup>

Gandhiji spoke for 45 minutes, sitting down, and in low tones, without varying the pitch. His clear and forceful exposition of the Congress stand was by and large well received in Britain, even though the response from the Indian delegation, packed as it was with men who in Gandhiji's view did not really represent those they were supposed to represent, was somewhat mixed.

6

On 16 September Gandhiji addressed a meeting of Labour M.P.s held in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons. After he had spoken he was severely questioned, especially with regard to the movement to boycott foreign cloth. Gandhiji explained that the movement was not directed against the British people or against Lancashire. The idea merely was that the villagers should produce their own cloth and save themselves the financial drain that import of foreign cloth entailed. After all the people of India were under no moral obligation to buy Lancashire piece-goods in order to sustain the Lancashire labourers. Lancashire, he reminded them, had risen on the ruins of the Indian village industry.

Giving figures, Gandhiji said that the khadi movement had been supporting 100,000 spinners in 2,000 villages and that one-third of the piece- goods



produced in India came from handlooms, though the yarn used was not hand-spun.

It was mentioned that the boycott movement was being subsidized by Indian mill-owners. Gandhiji agreed that mill owners had donated generously towards the movement, but the movement had received assistance from the villagers as well.<sup>31</sup>

In an interview to *Textile Mercury* on 17 September Gandhiji said that the reasons for decline of the Lancashire trade with India were many, the chief being the defeat of Lancashire in the competition with Japan. Japan had made tremendous headway in spite of the boycott movement. Another reason was the declining capacity of people to buy cloth. A third reason was the growing volume of production by Indian mills. Khadi industry thus was not the main reason.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhiji was struck by the fact that in London there was not the same glaring difference between the rich and the poor as before. As he drove down in his car from St. James' Palace to Bow every night he noticed how gradual was the change from the riches of the West End to the poverty of the East End. The poor in London, he remarked, appeared to have as high a standard of living as the rich in India.<sup>33</sup>

## 7

On 17 September the Federal Structure Committee continued the discussion it had taken up earlier under Heads 1 and 2: Strength and composition of the Federal Legislature and direct and indirect methods of election.

Taking part in the debate Gandhiji first of all gave expression to his feeling of oppression that the delegates from India were not the chosen ones of the nation



but were the chosen ones of the Government. Then there were very noticeable gaps also: people who should have been chosen had not been chosen.

With regard to the procedure to be adopted for the representation of the States in the Federal Legislature, there had been fundamental differences voiced as to whether States' representatives should be elected by the subjects of States or nominated by the rulers. Gandhiji was against any coercion being used against the Princes on this score. He could only appeal to the Princes and urge upon them the advisability of finding a place for their subjects in any scheme that might be evolved. But no conditions should be set which would make it difficult for the Princes to come into the Federation.

As for the method of election to the Legislature, considering the vast size of the constituencies and the near impossibility of a candidate being able to come in touch with all his voters, Gandhiji agreed with those who stood for indirect elections.

One way would be for each of India's 7 lakh villages- or 5 lakh villages if one considered only British India - to directly elect one representative who would vote for that village in the election to the Legislature. Thus there would be 5 lakh voters casting their; ballot to elect the roughly 200 members of the Federal Legislature. Gandhiji expressed himself against the other method of indirect election to the Federal Lower House that had been advocated by some, namely, election by Provincial Legislatures.

Other methods might be considered, such as the method of a number of village committees electing a taluka committee, taluka committee electing a district council, district councils electing a Provincial Council and so on. This was the procedure, he said, that the Congress followed.



Pleas for special representation had been voiced for special interests: labour, landlords, women, and so on. Gandhiji was opposed to the idea, as he was against extending the idea of reservations and separate electorates. Said he:

I here speak for the Congress. The Congress has reconciled itself to special treatment of the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh tangle. There are sound historical reasons for it, but the Congress will not extend that doctrine in any shape or form. . . . So far as the untouchables are concerned, 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.

Gandhiji similarly rejected the plea for special representation being conceded to Europeans and Indian Christians.

Of course Gandhiji wanted Europeans, Indian Christians and certainly women in the Legislature. And if none were elected, then it would be the duty of the Legislature to co-opt them.<sup>34</sup>

Ambedkar took this as a declaration of war by Gandhiji and the Congress against the untouchables. Gandhiji, he declared, was making plans to bypass the untouchables and to close the communal problem by bringing about a settlement among the three parties, the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs.<sup>35</sup>

Gandhiji was told that Charlie Chaplin was anxious to meet him. Gandhiji had not heard of the great comedian, having had no sort of contact with the world of cinema. Gandhiji was told that Chaplin was a friend of the poor; that he lived in East End and mingled with the common folk and made them laugh. Charlie Chaplin accordingly called on Gandhiji on 22 September at the house of Dr.



Katiyal, an Indian who had put his car at the disposal of Gandhiji throughout the period he was in London.

Gandhiji might not have heard of Chaplin but Chaplin had heard a good deal of Gandhiji and his charkha, and the very first question he asked Gandhiji was why he was opposed to machinery.

Gandhiji patiently explained how in India the peasants had to remain idle for six months every year. The charkha provided them occupation and enabled them to produce cloth for their own needs. All should produce food and clothing for their own needs. England resorted to mass production of goods and then had to look for market outside England. It was plunder and an England engaged in plunder was a danger to the world. If India should take to mass production of cloth and produce textiles several time more than it needed for its own requirements how much greater a danger it would pose to the world?

"But supposing," Chaplin asked, "India were today a free country like Russia and you could provide your unemployed villagers alternative work, would you still be opposed to machines? Would you not want that the hours of work should be reduced and the wages of workers should be increased?"

"I certainly would," Gandhiji answered.<sup>36</sup>

One of the most important utterances - in the sense that it enabled Gandhiji to define and explain the spiritual presuppositions that shaped his ideas in regard to public work - was the speech he delivered on 23 September at Guildhouse Church at a meeting held under the auspices of the Franciscan Society with Maude Royden in the chair.



Gandhiji dealt with the theme of voluntary poverty. He explained that though he was engaged in a political mission, the roots of his mission were essentially spiritual in that his politics were not divorced from morality. Since politics were concerned with the lot of the lowest strata of society, they became to him the means of serving those strata. In order effectively to serve, it was necessary that one identified oneself with those one served.

In order to serve the poor one must make oneself poor. In his struggle to embrace voluntary poverty, Gandhiji told his audience, he had, in the early stages, to contend with his wife and his children. But having once realized the paramount need for it, Gandhiji decided that he must discard all wealth, all possessions. The progress at first had been slow and painful, but as days had gone by he had been able to discard one after another many things that he had considered as his. Things thus had slipped from him with almost geometric progression. It had brought him positive joy as he had realized that he could now walk with ease with a great burden having been thrown off his shoulders.

Gradually, Gandhiji said, he had come to the view that possession was a crime. One could possess certain things only when everyone else could possess those things; which was an impossibility. The only thing one could therefore possess was non-possession.

So long as one had the body, which itself was a possession, one had to have the wherewithal to keep it fed and clothed and in working order. But one must see to it that one allowed for the body the barest minimum.

The less one possessed the better one was - not better for enjoyment of the good things of life but better for personal service to one's fellow men.

Gandhiji confessed that he was far from having realized the ideal fully. In order to realize that ideal, he must have the conviction that he must not possess





anything, even the body, because the body was also a possession and must be surrendered to the will of God.

Gandhiji said after he had dispossessed himself of everything he had found that he was never in want. He was able to have as much money as he needed for service. At one time he had collected a crore of rupees without any difficulty.

At this the Franciscans raised an objection. How could he justify collecting large sums of money when Jesus and the Buddha, who had practised voluntary poverty, had never asked for or received money?

Gandhiji said taking money for service did not conflict with the ideal of voluntary poverty. The Buddha had set up institutions in his own lifetime and you could not set up institutions without money. In fact, those who went to the Buddha gave their all -body, mind and wealth and the Buddha accepted their wealth also, not for himself but for his mission.

Answering another question Gandhiji said service of one's fellow beings and complete identification with them was a necessary condition if one wanted to see God.<sup>37</sup>

After the 1929 depression the British textile industry had found itself in the doldrums. Manufacturing units in Manchester and Lancashire were closing down one after another and there had been a steep rise in the level of unemployment. Several factors had been at work to bring about this result, not the least of them being the foreign cloth boycott organized by the Congress as part of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

There had been moral difficulties expressed and representations made to Gandhiji by a good many well-meaning people and especially by C. F. Andrews,



who did not see the justification of the boycott of British cloth. It may be mentioned that even under the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement boycott of foreign cloth had been allowed as a legitimate activity if carried on as an economic, as distinct from political, programme.

Gandhiji did not share the reservations of Andrews. In the first place he did not agree that the foreign cloth boycott movement had been responsible, except to a limited extent, for the slump in Britain's textile trade. He pointed out that even before boycott had come into stride British export of piece-goods to India had fallen sharply to only 12 per cent of her output. It was the ever-growing competition from Japan that had been responsible for this state of affairs. He had written to Andrews on 24 June:

I can say with perfect detachment ... that the way -you suggest is not the way to help Lancashire. If it was wrong [at] any time for Lancashire to impose its cloth upon India by hook or by crook, it is wrong also today.... That the labourers were not conscious of the wrong that was being done is no justification for the wrong itself being sustained by the party wronged.

Gandhiji had suggested that the unemployed textile workers might take up handicrafts.<sup>38</sup>

He had however assured Andrews that if the London visit came off, he would gladly go to Lancashire as early as possible.<sup>39</sup>

Now that he was in London, Gandhiji took the first opportunity that came to him to make a visit to industrial centres in Lancashire.

Gandhiji left London on Friday, 25 September, arriving at a small industrial town called Darwen, which was about 12 miles north of Manchester, the centre of textile industry, at 11 p.m. Charles Hawthorn, a Quaker and welfare secretary of



the Green Field Mill in Darwen, received him. He took Gandhiji to his home, 3 Springvale Garden Village, as his guest. Springvale Garden Village was built by the Davies family who owned the mill, as a model community. In the morning Gandhiji walked up to the moors edge to get a view of the industrial valley. He then descended to visit the mill, met the Mayor and began his discussions with the employers and the workers of Darwen. There was a free and frank exchange of views and keen discussions. He was eager to present his case to the workers and hear their point of view. He was received in a friendly spirit everywhere. <sup>40</sup>

Late in the afternoon on 26 September he drove north to Edgeworth three miles away, and stayed with T. D. Barlow, President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. There he met a delegation of mill-owners. The police had lined the streets fearing hostile demonstrations against Gandhiji. Their fears proved baseless. They were confounded to see everywhere Gandhiji being warmly welcomed by the workers and the poor.

In a statement Gandhiji expressed his distress at the prevailing unemployment among the textile workers, but assured the workers that his part in this had been "wholly unintended", that it had been a result of steps taken by him as a duty "towards the largest army of unemployed to be found in the world, namely, the starving millions of India".

Later at Edgeworth he met representatives of the cotton trade. Gandhiji explained that while in 1930 boycott had been intended to punish Britain it was now being carried on solely on economic grounds.

It was suggested that the foreign cloth boycott was being carried on at the behest of Indian mills and for their protection. Gandhiji pointed out that though the mills were supporting the movement, they did not control the policy and in fact the boycott movement had been undertaken in promotion of khadi and spinning.



Gandhiji also met the unemployed workers' representatives and assured them that the boycott of foreign cloth did not mean boycott only of British cloth, especially after the truce of 5 March. He also expressed the hope that a constitutional settlement would materialize between England and India leading to permanent peace, in which case India would not hesitate to give preference to Lancashire cloth over all other foreign cloth on agreed terms.<sup>41</sup>

In the evening Gandhiji drove 15 miles north to Heys Farm Guest House, a Quaker hostel, near West Bradford above the industrial town of Clitheroe. He was guest of Percy Davies, founder of the adult school at Heys Farm and a prospective Labour candidate for the coming election. Next morning, 27 September, he had a pleasant walk along the river. During the day there were meetings, especially with delegations of the unemployed from Great Harwood, Rishton, Clayton-Le-Moors, Blackburn and Clitheroe. In the afternoon he walked up to Bowl and Moor. Looking across the valley he could see Pendle Hill, where Quaker faith was born as a result of a vision experienced by the founder of the faith George Fox. Heys Farm "is really my first breath of peace", he remarked. He spent a quiet evening till it was time to go to Manchester to take the train to London.<sup>42</sup>

There were further deputations of unemployed workers. Speaking to one such at West Bradford on 27 September, Gandhiji said:

You have three million unemployed, but we have nearly three hundred million unemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is 70 shillings. Our average income is 7 shillings and six pence a month. Imagine ... what a calamity it must be to have 300 million unemployed.... I dare not take before them the message of God... I can take before them the message of God only by taking the message of sacred work before them.... To them God can only appear as bread and butter.... While we may



devise means for tiding over the present crisis, I must tell you that you should cherish no hope of reviving the old Lancashire trade.... Do not attribute your misery to India. Think of the world forces that are powerfully working against you. See things in the daylight of reason.<sup>43</sup>

Harsh words. And yet the workers, who had reason to nurse a grouse against Gandhiji, were full of jubilation at seeing him and full of warmth towards him. At one of the mills, where the manager took him round, the bell was rung for work to be stopped to enable the workers to see Gandhiji. The scene was boisterous and full of cheer. Mirabehn who was accompanying Gandhiji, has thus described it:

Immediately the machinery was stopped and the building was filled with the sound of running feet. Across the rooms, along the passages, down the stairs they went; patter patter patter, and by the time we ourselves got outside, there was a large crowd of workers waiting. Bapu said a few words, then two of the women workers suddenly hooked him by the arms, one on each side, and throwing up their unengaged arms shouted: 'Three cheers for Mr. Gandeye, hip, hip-'

'Hurrah!' shouted the whole crowd, and then again, and once more, for the third and loudest time.<sup>44</sup>

As regard official business, in the debate taking place in the Federal Structure Committee and the Minorities Committee, the question of the representation of minorities had got tied up in knots, with the Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Europeans and, worst from the point of view of Gandhiji, even untouchables insisting upon having their share and more.



In regard to the largest claim that of the Muslims, Gandhiji had made the offer that he was prepared to sign a blank cheque, provided the demand was made by the Muslim community as a whole and not merely by a section of it. At the Round Table Conference. This had been made difficult because Nationalist Muslims had not been represented except in the person of Sir Ali Imam. Gandhiji had not been able to induce the Government of India to include Dr Ansari in the delegation.

Nevertheless, he had been keeping in close touch with the Aga Khan and other Muslim leaders in order to find a formula that would be satisfactory to all.

On 28 September, when the Minorities Committee met, Gandhiji suggested that rather than continue infructuous discussions in the Committee it might be better to adjourn the proceedings for a short period while he tried to arrive at a settlement with the Muslims and Sikhs through informal consultations.

Madan Mohan Malaviya, the Aga Khan and Sir Ali Imam, supported the motion for adjournment. Ambedkar, however, saw in Gandhiji's efforts to arrive at a solution of the Minorities question an attempt to bypass him. He opposed the motion and said any settlement Gandhiji might come to with representatives of other Minorities would not bind the Depressed Classes.

On 1 October, no settlement by that date having materialized, Gandhiji asked for a further adjournment for a week. When the setting up of an informal committee was suggested for consultations on the Minorities question, Dr. Ambedkar, who had himself made the proposal earlier, refused to cooperate, advancing as the reason for his action the views that Gandhiji had expressed on the question of separate representation for the Depressed Classes.

Gandhiji's efforts to arrive at a settlement of the communal question through informal conference with Muslim and Sikh delegates did not succeed. When the



Minorities Committee met again on 8 October, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, Gandhiji stood up to report failure. He said:

Causes of failure were inherent in the composition of the Indian delegation. We are almost all not elected representatives of parties or groups whom we are presumed to represent; we are here by nomination of the Government.... Further, you will allow me to say that this was hardly the time to summon the Minorities Committee.... We do not know what it is that we are going to get. If we knew in a definite manner that we were going to get the thing we want, we should hesitate fifty times before we threw it away in a sinful wrangle ... I have not a shadow of doubt that the iceberg of communal differences will melt under the warmth of the sun of freedom.

Gandhiji suggested that the Minorities Committee be adjourned *sine die* and the fundamentals of a constitution be hammered into shape as quickly as possible.

Gandhiji again explained to the Committee the Congress position on the communal question. Quoting from the resolution of the Working Committee he said the Congress was committed to adult franchise and could not support any alternative franchise. It stood for joint electorates as the basis for any future constitution, with reservation of seats for minorities in Sind, Assam, Punjab, N.W.F.P. and wherever else there were minorities forming less than 25 per cent of the population. The Congress supported the Muslim demand that the form of Government in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan should be the same as in other provinces and that Sind should be constituted into a separate province.

Speaking at Friends' House on 31 October, Gandhiji said:

(1) I have put before the R.T.C. the Congress Scheme framed by a committee of Hindus, Mussalmans and Sikhs. They met all leading



Mussalmans and leading Sikhs. (2) Otherwise private arbitration. (3) Failing that, a judicial tribunal. The fourth thing is one with which I cannot associate myself, viz., asking Government to suggest a solution. It would be selling the country. For no Government in the nature of things would suggest a solution unfavourable to themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Having explained the Congress position, Gandhiji assured the Committee that if the Congress position was not found acceptable, the Congress would be prepared to endorse any other reasonable scheme which might be acceptable to the other parties.

As far as the untouchables were concerned, Gandhiji said it was a travesty of truth to say that he did not want them to be represented in the Legislature. What he would not support was their special representation, since they were a part of the Hindu society.<sup>46</sup>

Ramsay MacDonald regretted the failure of Indians to come to a settlement on the communal question and suggested that the "representatives of the small minorities" might also try their hand and come to some agreement.<sup>47</sup>

The Muslims, the Anglo-Indians and the Ambedkar group accordingly got together and, bypassing Gandhiji, bargained and squabbled for days over what each should ask for. By the time the Minorities Committee met again on 13 November, they had arrived at a broad agreement amongst themselves and set out their demands in the form of a memorandum.

The memorandum, submitted "on behalf of the Mohammedans, the Depressed Classes, the Anglo-Indians, the Europeans and a considerable section of Indian Christian groups", demanded, *inter alia*, that these communities "shall have representation in all legislatures through separate electorates ... provided that, after a lapse of ten years, it will be open to Muslims in Punjab and Bengal and any





minority communities in any other province to accept joint electorates.... With regard to the Depressed Classes, no change to joint electorates ... shall be made until after twenty years...." The memorandum was signed by the Aga Khan, B. R. Ambedkar, Rao Bahadur Pannirselvam, Sir Henry Gidney and Sir Hubert Carr.<sup>48</sup>

Speaking at the meeting of the Minorities Committee when it met again on 13 November, Gandhiji took the Government to task for having egged on the minority groups to press their demands. He reminded the British Government that it had not convened the Round Table Conference for settling the communal question but for starting a process of constitution-building.

As for the document produced by the self-proclaimed leaders of the minorities, Gandhiji said it was designed not to achieve responsible government but to share power with the bureaucracy. If that was the intention, the Congress was well out of it. He said:

The Congress will wander no matter how many years in the wilderness rather than lend itself to a proposal under which the hardy tree of freedom and responsible government can never grow.

Gandhiji then referred to a remark of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald that the scheme contained in the memorandum could be taken as being acceptable to well over one hundred and fifteen millions of people, or about 46 per cent of the population of India. Gandhiji pointed out that there had been a complete repudiation of special representation on behalf of the women of India who formed one half of the population. As for the Congress, it claimed to represent 85 per cent of India's population.

Gandhiji reiterated the Congress position that while it would accept any solution acceptable to the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, it would have nothing to do with special electorates or special representation for any other minorities.



As for the Depressed Classes, the claim advanced on their behalf was "the unkindest cut of all". He would not stand for the Depressed Classes being classified as a separate class. Would the untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity? Separate electorates for the Depressed Classes would divide Hinduism, would divide villages. Gandhiji concluded:

I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that, if I was the only person to resist this thing, I would resist it with my life.<sup>49</sup>

Gandhiji did not know at that time that he would be doing just that barely a year later.

12

Though the Federal Structure Committee continued to meet and discuss the agenda it had set before itself, it was clear that the British Government were not prepared to proceed further in the absence of a settlement of the communal question. The Round Table Conference then met on 30 November/1 December under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister to set the seal on its failure.

Ramsay MacDonald reiterated the British Government's adherence to the idea 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".

But, he continued:

I regret that owing to the absence of the settlement of the key question of how to safeguard the minorities under a responsible Central Government,



the Conference has been unable to discuss effectively the nature of the Federal Executive and its relationship with the Legislature.

After dilating upon the administrative and other problems that would have to be tackled before Federation became a reality, MacDonald continued:

But time passes. We shall soon find that our endeavours to proceed with our plans are held up (indeed they have been held up already) if you cannot present us with a settlement acceptable to all parties as the foundations upon which to build.

In that event His Majesty's Government would be compelled to apply a provisional scheme, for they are determined that even this disability shall not be permitted to be a bar to progress. This would mean that His Majesty's Government would have to settle for you ... what checks and balances the constitution is to contain to protect the minorities from an unrestricted and tyrannical use of the democratic principle expressing itself solely through the majority power.

He announced the setting up of a Franchise Committee, and a Finance Sub-Committee to work in India in pursuance of the decisions taken by the Federal Structure Committee.<sup>50</sup>

The Conference had failed, and Gandhiji was sad. Speaking at the Plenary Session he put in "the last word for the Congress".

Matters of liberty of a whole nation could hardly have been decided by argumentation, Gandhiji said. He pointed out that except for the Congress, which claimed to speak for 85 per cent of the population of India, that is, "the dumb, toiling, semi-starved millions", no other delegates could claim to speak for the whole of India. And yet the Congress had been treated as just one of the parties among many. The Congress represented the spirit of rebellion. The Congress did



not believe that India's liberty was to be had only through talks. There were other ways open to her. There was no instance in history when a nation had achieved its liberty without having to go through an incredible measure of travail. The pages of history were soiled red with the blood of those who had fought for freedom.

It appeared that the Congress and the British Government had come to the parting of the ways, Gandhiji said, and that a revival of civil disobedience might be forced upon the Congress. And then, regrettable as might be the sufferings that India might have to go through, no ordinances, no lathis, no repression would be able to stem the onrushing tide, the onrushing passion of the men and women of India thirsting for liberty.

Gandhiji recognized that there was the problem of minorities, that had to be solved. He himself was of the view that without the solution of that problem there could be no freedom for India. But he knew also that so long as the wedge in the shape of foreign rule divided community from community and class from class, the problem could not be solved.<sup>51</sup>

The failure of the Round Table Conference exercise represented the unwillingness of the British Government to settle with India and to part with power. The failure had been a foregone conclusion. Gandhiji had expected it; the Congress had feared it. Lee Smith, Post Master General in the Labour Cabinet earlier, confessed as much to Gandhiji, even before the Conference ended. "You can't have more at present", he said. "This represents the measure of your power today according to our assessment." Ex-Prime Minister Lloyd George had been equally frank. "If you want more," he told Gandhiji, "you have to make good your claim by civil disobedience and non-cooperation in which, on my part, I promise full sympathy and support."<sup>52</sup>



Moving a vote of thanks to the chair Gandhiji paid profuse tributes to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald's untiring industry and unfailing courtesy. The Prime Minister; he observed, had worked for almost twenty- four hours at a stretch! He added:

So far as I am concerned, we have come to the parting of the ways ... our ways take different directions ... I do not know in what direction my path will lie.... Even then, although I may have to go in an exactly opposite direction, you are still entitled to a vote of thanks from me from the bottom of my heart.<sup>53</sup>

Ramsay MacDonald offered his services for the settlement of the communal question. He asked the Indian parties to send him a signed request seeking his help. Gandhiji refused to sign such a request. His objection was that MacDonald would be arbitrating not in his personal capacity, but as Prime Minister of the Government. And since the Congress could not ask for or accept any arbitration by the British Government in the solution of the question, it would be inappropriate for him to sign such a request. He wrote to MacDonald:

I should have no hesitation in putting my signature to a letter appointing you sole arbitrator in your individual capacity to settle the communal question, so far as the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are concerned, but you will appreciate my hesitation in consenting to your appointment as arbitrator in your capacity as Prime Minister.... But my reluctance does not mean that the Congress will in any way resist your award ... that is acceptable to the three parties concerned....

The position regarding the other minorities is different.... As I reiterated at the last meeting of the Minorities Committee, in my opinion they should



be satisfied with complete protection of their civic and religious rights and of all their legitimate interests....

In any case the Congress will never be reconciled to any further extension of the principle of separate electorate or special statutory reservation.<sup>54</sup>

This letter makes it clear that any award that MacDonald gave would be acceptable to the Congress in so far as it concerned Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, but not others, and certainly not the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar was later to twist the whole thing and suggest that Gandhiji had signed the requisition, while he, Ambedkar himself, had not, because he thought the demands of the untouchables were so reasonable that no arbitration was necessary.<sup>55</sup>

Gandhiji told us during one of his morning walks in the Aga Khan Palace detention camp that when he was asked to propose a vote of thanks for Sir Sammuel Hoare, he was hard put to it. Hoare's whole approach had been so negative and anti-India, that he did not know what he could compliment him for without being untruthful. In the end he found the solution. In his vote of thanks, he praised the Secretary of State for India for his punctuality, a virtue to which Gandhiji had always attached great importance.

14

One of Gandhiji's engagements in London was the tea party at Buckingham Palace to which he had been invited along with other delegates to the Round Table Conference. The invitation placed Gandhiji in a dilemma. When the tea party came on 5 November, the fate of the Conference had been all but sealed and letters and telegrams that poured in from India spoke of a wave of repression let loose by Willingdon's administration. Gandhiji had half a mind to refuse. Speaking at a meeting of Quakers on 31 October he said:



I have a tremendous moral problem before me. I have an invitation to attend the King's party. I am feeling so heart-sick and sore upon happenings in India that I should not like to go.... Here is a function which is social but has a political nature, but I am doing nothing hastily. I put myself in touch with Whitehall. I am a man who every moment considers the morality of the thing, not its legality.<sup>56</sup>

King George V himself, it appeared, had been outraged at the thought of Gandhiji being invited: "What!" he had exclaimed, "Have this rebel fakir in the Palace after he has been behind all these attacks on my loyal officers? And with no proper clothes on, and bare knees?" Then the monarch had acquiesced.

Gandhiji had of course made it clear to Whitehall that he could not make any concession as regards his apparel and after a flurry of consultations he was informed by Clive Wigam, Private Secretary to the King that his dhoti and shawl would be in order.

It had been decided that Gandhiji should be one of the 14 guests to whom the King would speak. It was suggested that the King's remarks should make a mention of Gandhiji's "loyal services" to the Empire between 1899 and 1918 and an appreciative reference to the fact that Gandhiji had always discountenanced terrorism coupled with the hope that the Government's efforts to put down terrorism would find support from Gandhiji.

But when the occasion came for the King to speak to Gandhiji he said to him brusquely: "Remember, Mr. Gandhi, I won't have any attacks on my Empire." Gandhiji made a gracious reply: "I must not be drawn into a political argument in Your Majesty's Palace after receiving Your Majesty's hospitality."

The Tory Secretary of State for India Sir Sammuel Hoare, who had been present, recorded: "What exquisite worldly manners the unworldly possess."<sup>57</sup>



On 6 November, the day following the Buckingham Palace tea party, George Bernard Shaw and his wife called on Gandhiji. Shaw was apologetic, but Gandhiji assured him that he would think nothing of cancelling half a dozen other engagements in order to have a meeting with Shaw. The visitors stayed with Gandhiji for an hour and a half.

In the course of the conversation Shaw mentioned Russia, which had shown an unusual degree of maturity and wisdom, and asked Gandhiji if there was any likelihood of India following the example of Russia. Gandhiji informed Shaw that though the Communists in India did talk about the Russian way, there was little likelihood of India following in the footsteps of Russia.

Did not the Round Table Conference try Gandhiji's patience? –Shaw asked. Certainly, Gandhiji replied, the R.T.C. made great demands on one's patience. The whole thing was no more than a put-up show and the rhetoric of the speeches was intended merely to fill the time. What he would like to ask the British Government, Gandhiji said, was why they did not speak out what was in their minds and state what policy they intended to pursue and why they would not let India go its own way. But the British were too diplomatic to be candid. They could only proceed by resort to prolix and long-winded jargon.

Shaw said from what little he had known about Gandhiji he knew that they both belonged to the same tribe [of dissenters]. They constituted a minority in the world. Shaw further told Gandhiji that his ahimsa was a noble gift to mankind.

Gandhiji mentioned Hindus' reverence for the cow and said in Western societies animals did not have the right to be protected. He himself, said Gandhiji, was the President of the Cow-protection Association. It was the duty of a householder to leave the world a happier and more beautiful place. Only he who had soiled his hands working in the fields deserved to eat well.<sup>58</sup>





## CHAPTER XXI

### DISAPPOINTED BUT NOT DEFEATED

#### 1

The Round Table Conference was a failure. Gandhiji had anticipated this turn of events. But in other ways Gandhiji's visit to England, and later to other parts of the Continent, turned out to be an unqualified success. The warm and generous response from all strata of people in all walks of life more than made up for the pain caused to Gandhiji by official shenanigans. He said at a meeting of the Friends of India:

No honest genuine effort has ever failed. But if I am experiencing these chilly and chilling difficulties so far as my work is concerned, I am having nothing but perennial joy outside the Conference and committees. People seem instinctively to understand the thing.<sup>1</sup>

There were a number of groups in Britain, composed of Englishmen and Indians resident there, who were active in the cause of India's freedom. There was the group that called itself Friends of India and was composed largely of pacifists. Laurence Housman was the President and Reginald Reynolds, Vice-President of the group. They saw in Gandhiji's non-violence an alternative to war. Their headquarters were Friends' House at Euston Road, where Gandhiji was first accorded reception on his arrival in England on 12 September. Gandhiji there addressed not only meetings organized by the friends of India but also by various other groups, such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation and kindred Christian groups.

There was the Commonwealth of India League, which had been an offshoot of Annie Besant's Home Rule League's British Auxiliary. V. K. Krishna Menon was



then its secretary and it included on its rolls such names as Wilfred Wellock, a Quaker and pacifist, Ellen Wilkinson, Peter Freeman and J. F. Horrabin, all committed supporters of Indian freedom. H. S. L. Polak and Muriel Lester were also active. The Chairman of the League then was the eminent British philosopher Bertrand Russell, though during the Round Table Conference he had been away on a visit to the USA.

Other groups were Friends' Indian Affairs Committee, set up in 1930, the Indian National Congress League, set up in 1920 and the Gandhi Society. Some people were active in all the organizations. The chief consideration that bound them was the commitment to the freedom of India. Fenner Brockway, Chairman of the Independent Labour Party, was thus active in both the National Congress League and the Gandhi Society. At the same time, he had links with the extreme left-wingers in the British Labour Party and the Communist Party of Britain. The Communist Party of Britain was of course an outspoken champion of India's freedom, but it was in the same measure an out-and-out critic of Gandhiji and the Congress, considering them agents of Indian landlords and capitalists. They had indeed on Gandhiji's arrival in Britain held demonstrations denouncing him.

The British Communist Party tried to provoke Gandhiji into taking up positions that would identify him in public eyes as a stooge of the British or as an agent of Indian landlords and capitalists. They raised a canard, based on an interview Gandhiji gave to the mother of a Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoner, that Gandhiji did not want to do anything to secure the release of the Meerut prisoners. Then they used Fenner Brockway to organize signatures on a petition seeking the release of these prisoners and get Gandhiji also to sign it. Gandhiji did not oblige, first, because, he said, doing so might damage the cause which the petitioners espoused, and, secondly, Gandhiji could not subscribe to all 'the statements



made in the petition. The petition had used fulsome terms to glorify the arrested men calling them "heroic standard-bearers of the working class" and saying they had been arrested because they had "led the revolt of the Indian workers against the intolerable conditions of employment" and so on. Gandhiji naturally could not join in leftist slogan-shouting.<sup>2</sup>

With so many groups and splinter groups around, all dedicated to the cause of India's freedom, there was still no central organization. During Gandhiji's visit to London, more precisely in October 1931, the Friends' Indian Affairs Committee took the initiative to bring the various groups supporting the cause of Indian freedom on one platform. A letter was sent round to various persons active on behalf of India. Among them were Agatha Harrison, Maude Royden, Muriel Lester and churchmen including Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury. Thus was born the India Conciliation Group.

Gandhiji was associated with the move and he suggested sending to India deputation of observers to see the conditions in India and to promote conciliation. Most members of the Conciliation Group were drawn from the Society of Friends. But there were also representatives of other organizations, such as Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Peace Council and the Friends of India. Important personalities involved in the work of the group were Agatha Harrison, Carl Heath, H. S. L. Polak and Emmaline Pethick-Lawrence.<sup>3</sup>

Gandhiji remained in constant touch with all these various groups and people associated with them throughout his stay in England, and through them he was able to communicate with various sections of British society and remove their misunderstanding with regard to the Civil Disobedience Movement, and also with regard to the larger question of India's freedom.



Gandhiji addressed several meetings organized by the Quakers and the Commonwealth of India League at Friends' House and answered questions. The questions concerned the contemplated relationship of free India with the British Commonwealth, his attitude towards freedom movements in various British colonies, etc.

Gandhiji declared that in so far as the British Empire represented a system of exploitation, independence for India meant complete severance from the Empire. The Empire was Empire because there were Princes, vassal States, who had been subjugated by Great Britain. He said:

I do not want India to be an engine of oppression, I am dreaming of a time when India would be a check on aggrandizement by other nations. But I should not immediately sever the connection, though I know that Zulus and Swazis are being corrupted and exploited. It is a policy which is radically wrong.

Gandhiji also clarified the position of the Congress in regard to the much debated issue of safeguards. It meant, so far as the Congress was concerned, that such British I.C.S. officers and military officers, who chose to stay in free India and were allowed to do so by the British Government, would continue in service under the Government of free India. Safeguards certainly did not cover British trade in India. It was preposterous for the rulers to ask for protection from three hundred million slaves, he said. British trade would be protected in so far as it was not inimical to India's interest.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhiji gave his impressions of the attitude in Britain towards India in an interview to the editor of *Spectator*, Evelyn Wrench. He told Wrench of the vast change- he had found in the attitude of the man in the street. He had received,



he said, wonderful signs of affection and friendliness on the part of ordinary folk, whether it was in East London, where he stayed, or Lancashire. But so far as the official classes were concerned, their attitude was just the reverse. They were not ready to concede that India could manage her own affairs; they were not ready to grant that India had the same right to freedom as Great Britain possessed. What India claimed was - the right to manage her own affairs, including defence. British officers and soldiers could be retained, but they would have to work under the National Government.<sup>5</sup>

Gandhiji also visited Oxford and Cambridge and had meetings with university dons who arranged groups of eminent scholars of arts and sciences to meet him at both Universities. After his talk he was closely questioned by them. The Oxford visit was on the weekend of November 1-2.

On the first of his visits to Oxford Gandhiji took the opportunity to call on Col. Maddock, who had performed the appendicitis operation on Gandhiji way back in 1924, and also visited Mirabehn's uncle, Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders. On 24 October Gandhiji spoke at meetings of the Oxford fellows and the Indian Majlis. On the 25th he met the dons at the residence of Edward Thompson, a friend of India and author of several works on India.

Thompson later wrote about the meeting:

For three hours he was sifted and cross-questioned by a group which included the Master of Balliol, Gilbert Murray, Sir Michael Sadler, P. C. Lyon. It was a reasonably exacting ordeal, yet for not one moment was he rattled or at loss. The conviction came to me that not since Socrates has the world seen his equal for absolute self-control and composure; and once or twice, putting myself in place of men who had to confront that



invincible calm and imperturbability, I thought I understood why the Athenians made 'the martyr-sophist' drink the hemlock.<sup>6</sup>

All these academic men, Gandhiji discovered, suffered from misconceptions as regards the aims of the Congress and the Civil Disobedience Movement. Gilbert Murray, for instance, showed himself greatly perturbed over what he described as the most dangerous manifestations of non-violent revolution and nationalism. "I find myself today in greater disagreement with you than even Mr. Winston Churchill," he told Gandhiji. Nationalism, Gilbert Murray thought, could be a menace to world peace and cooperation between nations.

Gandhiji said he was as much a votary of peace and cooperation between nations as Dr. Murray. But cooperation presupposed free nations. As for peace, he said:

If I want to bring peace to the world and consolidate it and oppose any breaches thereof, I must have the strength to do so. So long as my country is not free it can make no contribution to peace. An India in servitude is as much a danger to peace as England which exploits her. As for free India herself becoming a menace to other nations, we shall assume that India will follow the path of non-violence and secure her freedom through non-violence.

Murray did not agree. The transition from dependence to freedom, he said, was a long drawn-out process. Gandhiji's attempt to hasten it by appeal to nationalism- as was, for instance, expressed in the foreign cloth boycott- was bound to prove as disastrous as any violent movement.

Gandhiji said India was not bound to buy English cloth. If buying foreign cloth should prove injurious to India's national interest, she could refuse to buy it. It might result in the increase of unemployment in England, but that would be the consequence of England's sins, not of the boycott.



A. D. Lindsay expressed the fear that ruling India through a democratic system might be a difficult undertaking. Even in England, which was a small and homogeneous country, working of democratic institutions was attended with problems. Indians must learn to trust the British, as the British must learn to trust the Indians. Things would have to proceed slowly.

Gandhiji said it was not for the British to decide the pace. Knowingly or unknowingly they usurped for themselves the place of God. They must get off the high horse. If India could not be kept together as one entity without the use of force, let it disintegrate. In any case nothing worse could happen than what was already happening.

Thompson asserted that the Muslims did not want responsibility at the Centre and Murray said the British were ready to concede any demand on which all sections of Indians were united.

Gandhiji said that as for Muslims opposing responsibility at the Centre, it must be remembered that the Round Table Conference was a packed body and a packed body could not make a united demand. The Congress represented the largest part of India's population, and the British knew it. And they must learn to trust the, Congress.

Gilbert Murray asked Gandhiji to give an outline of the kind of set-up he visualized for India. Gandhiji said he was not frightened of universal adult suffrage with indirect election. There should be one representative elected from each village. These seven lakh representatives elected by seven lakh villages should form an electoral college. If this system were put into effect a great deal of electoral malpractices could be done away with. There would be no gerrymandering. Gandhiji said he would leave landlords, universities and other interests to the mercy of the villagers.



The army should be reduced to a much smaller size. It would be required not for defence from external aggression but to deal with internal disorder. The expenditure on defence should be reduced to a half or even to a quarter if possible. Gandhiji said he favoured Gokhale's idea of the revival of village panchayats.

Would not setting up of democratic rule in India mean overthrow of princely rule in the States? - Gandhiji was asked.

If the States joined the Federation, Gandhiji answered, the Princes would voluntarily surrender much of their power, as the Samurai had done in Japan. True, the Princes had not shown any inclination to surrender any of their powers. But that was because they were the creatures of the British and said only what they were taught to say by their masters.<sup>7</sup>

At the meeting of the Indian Students' Majlis, Gandhiji was asked questions on separate electorates for the untouchables, on industrialism, on the position of the I.C.S. in free India and on partnership with the Empire.

Gandhiji said giving separate electorates to untouchables would be throwing an apple of discord in the midst of the untouchables and the caste Hindus. It would be injurious to the untouchables. The only thing needed was to put them on the voters' list and provide them fundamental rights in the constitution. Mussalmans would never cease to be Mussalmans by having separate electorates. Was it the intention that the untouchables should remain untouchables in perpetuity? Separate electorates would perpetuate their stigma.

On industrialism Gandhiji said:

Industrialism, I am afraid, is going to be a curse for mankind. Exploitation of one nation by another cannot go on for all time. Industrialism depends





entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors. It is because these factors are getting less and less every day for England that its number of unemployed is mounting up daily. The Indian boycott was but a flea-bite. And if that is the state of England, a vast country like India cannot expect to benefit by industrialization. In fact, India, when it begins to exploit other nations - as it must if it becomes industrialized - will be a curse for other nations, a menace to the world.... If the future of industrialism is dark for the West, would it not be darker still for India?

At Oxford Gandhiji and party were the guests of the Master of Balliol, Dr. Lindsay, who had during one of his visits to India invited Gandhiji to be his guest at Oxford. Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay were most solicitous as hosts and would have liked Gandhiji to extend his stay. But he could not do so.

Gandhiji had been eagerly looking forward to visiting Cambridge where Jawaharlal and Andrews had had their education. He went there on the evening of 31 October and stayed two nights; one night at Pembroke College and another as guest of Professor Ernest Barker. Andrews took him on the tour of Trinity College, which counted among its alumni not only Jawaharlal, but also Bacon, Newton and Tennyson.

At a gathering of the dons at Pembroke College, which included Ernest Barker, G. Lowes Dickenson, John Murray, Evelyn Wrench and Norman Bethune Baker, Gandhiji explained the position of India.

Gandhiji said the Congress stood for complete independence, but the resolution demanding complete independence did not exclude partnership based on equality of status. That meant that while the basis of that relationship should be completely transformed, India by herself did not have the power to exploit other



nations. With the help of Britain, she could. Therefore, the meaning of the partnership should be that there would be no exploitation and if Great Britain did not agree to this, India must sever her relations with Britain.

Referring to South Africa, Gandhiji said:

I should certainly strive to work for the deliverance of those South African races which, I can say from experience, are ground down under exploitation. Our deliverance must mean their deliverance. But if that cannot come about I should have no interest in a partnership with Britain, even if it were of benefit to India.

About the army, Gandhiji said it must be under Indian control - not only the Indian units, but also British units. If British army officers should refuse to serve under Indian control, there could not be any partnership with Britain.

Afterwards Gandhiji also addressed the Indian Majlis.<sup>8</sup> Gandhiji had earlier addressed the Cambridge Indian Majlis on 7 November 1909. Jawaharlal Nehru, then a student at Cambridge, had been a member of the Majlis, but had missed a meeting with Gandhiji, although Motilal Nehru had attended a farewell meeting for Gandhiji five days later.<sup>9</sup>

3

There were various other fringe groups, such as Christian Pacifists, Internationalists, war-resisters and so on. While broadly sympathetic towards the Indian cause these groups were unable to extend whole-hearted support to civil disobedience for it appeared to them that it involved conflict.

Speaking to one such group on 1 December, Gandhiji explained his views on ahimsa, suffering and Western civilization. He said:

Peace may arise out of strife, for all strife is not anti-pacific....



I have been told that by suffering myself I hurt the feelings of those who are opposed to me. Yes, certainly I do. That is what I want to do.... Of course the suffering must not be wanton and not merely for the sake of suffering. That would be terrible. I only suffer if I must suffer...

It has been said to me: ... Why cannot the object be obtained by way of negotiation? I reply: Argument has never convinced any man, but, on the contrary, conviction precedes argument. If that were not so, all books would appeal to all men alike. I have been touched by books which made no appeal to millions, because I already had the conviction within me.

On the comparative merits of Western and Eastern civilization Gandhiji reiterated the views he had expounded in *Hind Swaraj* more than twenty years earlier. He said:

Western civilization is material, frankly material. It measures progress by the progress of matter - railways, conquest of disease, conquest of the air.... I judge it by my own test and I use the word 'Satanic' in describing it.... Your idea is the more you want the better you are, and you don't fall far short in your belief. Your civilization has gone from one stage to another. There is no end to it.<sup>10</sup>

Then there were the intellectuals, economists and political theorists with incisive minds, such as Harold Laski, who had been actively involved in the business of the Round Table Conference. Gandhiji met Laski, Horrabin, Kingsley Martin, the editor of *New Statesmen*, and Wrench, editor of *The Spectator*, on 3 December; after the R.T.C. had been adjourned. They expressed the view that the Premier's declaration incorporating the British Government's proposals, that the British Government intended to go ahead with the scheme of Federation with reserved subjects and safeguards was a plausible one.



Gandhiji told them that he found the proposals no advance on those of the First Round Table Conference. They were in fact worse, because they had a finality about them. For Defence and Finance to remain Crown subjects would be humiliating to India. At the Centre, he pointed out, 80 per cent subjects were to be reserved. Provinces were in a pitiable condition with a top-heavy administration under the existing scheme. After all the Central revenue was derived from the Provinces- 47 crores. With all these burdens there was no scope for improvement in Provinces. "Not until you give me scope for expansion," Gandhiji said, "can I accept this thing."<sup>11</sup>

## 4

But apart from the unacceptability of British proposals on merit, what made it even more difficult to consider them was that there appeared to be no intention to part with power. Repression in India had been further intensified while the R.T.C. carried on its deliberations. Police brutalities in Bengal, U.P. and North-West Frontier Province had scaled new heights. There were no less than fifteen ordinances in force in India, ten of them promulgated during the four months' that the R.T.C. had been in session.

Bad as the situation had continued to be even after the signing of the Delhi agreement between Gandhiji and Irwin, it had deteriorated further after Gandhiji's departure for England.

Incidents of revolutionary violence had continued to be on the rise. Even after the rioting in Chittagong that had followed as a consequence of the assassination of a Muslim police inspector, Ahsanulla, by revolutionaries, the terrorists had learnt no lesson. On 28 October Durno, the District Magistrate of Dacca, was shot at and wounded, on 29 October Villiers, President of the Calcutta European Association, was similarly wounded. On 14 December Stevens, District Magistrate



of Tippera was shot dead by two Bengali girls. Gandhiji in his Press statements and speeches in London condemned these terrorist acts.<sup>12</sup>

An incident that aroused much indignation all over the country arose from an altercation at the Hijli detention camp in Midnapore between detenus and sentries on 16 September 1931. Some detenus had got into a scrape with two or three sentries who had then raised an alarm. Armed sentries had rushed into the camp and fired at the building housing the detenus. According to the report of an enquiry committee which was set up by the Bengal Government, the firing had been indiscriminate - some 29 rounds having been fired, resulting in the death of two detenus, Santosh Kumar Mitter and Tarakeshwar Sen Gupta, the former on the ground floor of the building and the latter upstairs. Twenty others were seriously wounded; one of them had to have his arm amputated.<sup>13</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore was sufficiently roused to address a protest meeting later held in Calcutta. Calling the outrage "both tragic and cowardly in its brutality", he said:

Our people may not have the physical capacity to resist injustice but no power can obstruct them from passing moral judgment.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhiji saw the incidents at Chittagong and Hijli as "beacon lights", as pointers, inviting him to rush back to India. At a meeting sponsored by the Commonwealth of India League he said:

The only way of preventing Chittagong and Hijli is to let India manage her own affairs.... Today India is one vast prison-house. We are prisoners. You Englishmen and Englishwomen are our jailors.... I must tell you that this unnatural relationship must be ended soon. We Indians have to do nothing but obtain our freedom. God willing, we shall take our freedom from unwilling hands....



I shall be content to go away to India to invite my countrymen to go through the fiery ordeal once again.<sup>15</sup>

The repression in Bengal meanwhile continued, going from bad to worse with each passing day. On 29 October came Ordinance No. IX of 1931, which amended the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1930 and placed yet more powers in the hands of the police. On 30 November was promulgated Ordinance No. XI of 1931, which conferred special powers on the Government of Bengal and its officers to suppress the terrorist movement and provided for speedier trials for terrorist offences.<sup>16</sup>

Gandhiji reacted quickly. In a Press statement on 1 December, the very day the Premier was spelling out the British scheme of a future self- government for India in a Federation, Gandhiji said:

Coming events cast their shadow before. Well, the situation in India, especially in Bengal, is very ugly, leaving little room for hope that anything big will come out of the Conference.... This Ordinance and the other things that, I know, are happening in India, fill me with the greatest misgivings and may leave the Congress no choice in the matter of tendering further cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

In his talks with people Gandhiji came back again and again to the Bengal Ordinance. He told Laski and others that it was worse than the Rowlatt Act. In Martial Law decisions were liable to be revised, not those under the Ordinance. Gandhiji was informed that the whole Cabinet did not support the Ordinance. In that event, Gandhiji said, the Cabinet should have resigned. For the Ordinance was a "sickening thing", a "horrid thing".<sup>18</sup>



Then there was U.P. Here it was the peasantry at large that was pitted against the formidable combination of the officials, the police and the zemindars.

The province being under the Permanent Settlement, the peasantry were tenant farmers. They did not pay revenue to the Government direct, as in ryotwari provinces such as Gujarat. They paid rentals to the landlords who paid a portion of it to the Government as revenue.

The world economic depression had hit the peasants hard. The U.P. Governor, Malcolm Hailey, admitted in the U.P. Council on 20 July 1933 that there were "masses of tenants who could not at the present rates pay rents which they could pay two years ago. The accepted foundation for existing rentals had more or less collapsed."<sup>19</sup>

The distress was compounded by the fact that there had been failure of crops continuously for several years due to excessive rains, or drought, and the havoc caused by locusts, frost and hailstones.

The fall in prices of agricultural products, as brought out by the Congress Enquiry Committee, had been precipitous. Taking 1898-99 as the base year and 100 as the index number, in 1930-31 the price index had gone down to 80, while land revenue had gone up to 113 and rent to 160. Thus while the prices went down by 20 per cent, rents went up by 60 per cent.

The distress was intensified by ejections and coercive processes on a large scale used by zemindars in the collection of rent. In many areas the zemindars had unleashed a reign of terror.<sup>20</sup>

The United Provinces Congress Committee carried on prolonged but inconclusive correspondence with the U.P. administration. Jawaharlal Nehru and Govind



Ballabh Pant met the officials at various levels. But the relief that the Government were prepared to grant in the matter of rentals- Rs. 40 lakhs- was too meagre to be acceptable. The Congress demanded a reduction of about 10 crores.

Meanwhile the situation in the countryside continued to worsen. Attachments and forcible collections continued. Many ejected tenants were prosecuted for criminal trespass. As had happened earlier in Bardoli, many peasants had to borrow money at heavy interest and sell their livestock to raise the money for rentals, now being collected not by the zemindars but by Government officials with the aid of the police.

The Allahabad District Congress Committee then sought the permission of the U.P.C.C. for the starting of a no-rent campaign. In mid-October 1931 Jawaharlal Nehru sought Gandhiji's advice by cable. Gandhiji cabled back:

You should unhesitatingly take necessary steps meet every situation. Expect nothing here.<sup>21</sup>

The Congress in U.P. with the permission of Vallabhbhai Patel, President of the A.I.C.C., then advised the peasantry not to pay rent. On 19 November the Allahabad District Congress Committee by a resolution started a no-rent campaign. But the Congress adhered to the position that it was prepared to explore all avenues for a settlement of the question and would be willing to withdraw its advice to the peasantry not to pay rent if forcible collections were stopped or adequate relief was granted.<sup>22</sup> But the Government chose to crush the movement.

On 14 December the Governor promulgated the United Provinces Special Powers Ordinance. The Ordinance armed district officials and the police with sweeping powers to control and confine suspected persons, to take possession of buildings and transport facilities belonging to private persons and to impose collective





finer. It further sought to control the Press by making it an offence under the Press Act to instigate non-payment of rent. Long prison terms were specified under the Ordinance for various offences.<sup>23</sup>

Searches, seizures and arrests under the Ordinance immediately started. On 15 October Anand Bhavan, Swaraj Bhavan and the *Abhyudaya Press* were searched. On 21 October Purushottam Das Tandon was arrested and tried under the Ordinance and sentenced to six months' imprisonment the same day. On 23 October offices of the District Congress Committee, Allahabad, were raided and its records confiscated and taken away by the police. On 26 December Jawaharlal Nehru and Sherwani were arrested while on their way to Bombay to receive Gandhiji, who was scheduled to land two days later.<sup>24</sup>

## 6

Yet another area which came under police terror during the months Gandhiji was away in England was the North-West Frontier Province.

Peaceful conditions had never wholly been restored in the province even after the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement in March, with the police and the army always looking for pretexts to indulge in heavy-handed repression against the Pathans. According to reports filed by Devadas Gandhi, who had been sent by Gandhiji to study the conditions in the province, people were continuously harassed for attending meetings of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, certain elements among the Maliks were encouraged to shoot Khudai Khidmatgars and were promised firearms as a reward.

Under the salt concession allowed under the Delhi Agreement of March, some Pathans helped themselves to more salt than they would normally require for their consumption and it was found difficult to check the tendency, because rich veins of rock salt ran all along between Bannu and Kohat. Large quantities of salt,



it was said, were carried away in carts and on mules. The authorities ordered that under the concession no digging for salt would be permitted. Later the concession was entirely withdrawn and prosecutions were launched against a large number of people for helping themselves to the salt in the belief that they were permitted to do so.

Carrying of firearms had always been part of the way of life of the Frontier Pathans. But during the Civil Disobedience Movement the authorities went about confiscating firearms under little or no pretext. Now firearms were not being returned nor were licences being renewed. As a consequence, much insecurity prevailed among the people, who feared brigandage, attacks from private enemies and so on.

Devadas Gandhi, who covered Peshawar, Bannu and Kohat during a six-day tour, also sent harrowing accounts of tortures inflicted on the people in the process of revenue collection. Old men were locked up, to be stung by hornets and scorpions, women were made to stand in the sun for hours and subjected to various other cruelties and indignities. Attachments of moveable property was a common feature.<sup>25</sup>

This exercise of official severity was aimed primarily at crushing the Khudai Khidmatgars, members of the non-violent voluntary organization set up by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The Khudai Khidmatgars held meetings and demonstrations to express the people's anger. These meetings created a wave of enthusiasm among the people. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan drew large crowds wherever he went. His route was frequently lined by the Khudai Khidmatgars in their red shirts. The authorities prohibited the meetings and processions under Section 144. The Khudai Khidmatgars merely shifted the venues of the meetings to mosques. At



the end of the meetings Red Shirt volunteers marched away in columns with banners flying and drums beating. They were of course wholly non-violent.<sup>26</sup>

To curb the Khudai Khidmatgar activities finally the Governor-General promulgated on 24 December no less than three Ordinances, Nos. 13, 14 and 15 of 1931.

By Ordinance No. 13 local authorities were given powers to arrest and detain, for up to two months, anyone on suspicion, to requisition any building or any other private property for the use of troops, take away any arms, ammunition or any tools or implements. The authorities could also withhold letters and telegrams of private persons. Special judges, special magistrates and summary courts were constituted to try offences under the Ordinance.

Ordinance No. 14 was intended to deal with instigation of illegal refusal to pay certain liabilities, such as land revenue.

Ordinance No. 15 was intended to deal with associations dangerous to public peace. It gave powers to magistrates to take possession of any buildings or any other premises being used for unlawful purposes.<sup>27</sup>

On 25 December all volunteer organizations connected with the Red Shirts were declared unlawful assemblies under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. However Red Shirt volunteers in large numbers continued to parade around in the cities and were promptly arrested. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan having been arrested on 24 December, the administration thought it would be easy to deal with the leaderless Khudai Khidmatgars. But the resistance they offered was strong. Peshawar district had to be occupied by six mobile columns of British troops.

On 26 December at Kohat the Khudai Khidmatgar procession was sought to be dispersed and its leaders were arrested. When the procession refused to



disperse, troops opened fire, killing 14 persons and inflicting wounds on 30 more. The situation was then brought "under control".<sup>28</sup>

7

In Gujarat the Magisterial enquiry that had been ordered into charges of excesses against officials in collecting revenue in Bardoli Taluka and Valod Mahal in Surat district, did not make any headway.

The enquiry had been entrusted to R. G. Gordon, Collector of Nasik. His terms of reference were:

1. Whether there was police coercion to make the people pay.
2. If so, how much of the payment was in excess of an agreed standard.

The enquiry was started on 5 October, with the Khatedars being represented by Bhulabhai Desai. By 12 November 63 Khatedars and 71 witnesses had been called. A dispute arose as regards the standard that should determine the paying capacity of the Khatedars. Gandhiji had said it had been understood that Khatedars should pay only as much as they could without borrowing. In this connection the official side was asked by Bhulabhai Desai to produce certain documents, especially receipts of revenue paid by the Khatedars. The Government refused. The Magistrate upheld the Government's refusal. There were also attempts to keep off the Congress from the Enquiry.

On 13 November Vallabhbhai Patel issued a statement withdrawing the Congress from the enquiry. The trend of the enquiry, he said, was hostile and one-sided. Gandhiji was informed accordingly.<sup>29</sup>

The report of the enquiry, which relied wholly on the evidence of officials, came in December. It absolved officials of all charges of coercion, asserting that no excessive demands had been made in regard to the revenue.<sup>30</sup>



Gandhiji was made most uncomfortable by the reports he had been constantly receiving from India about the situation in Bengal, U.P., N.W.F.P. and Gujarat. The constitutional impasse at the Round Table Conference was made worse by the activities of the Aga Khan, Jinnah and the communal Muslim leadership in general and of Ambedkar, aided and abetted by British politicians. Even so it was the situation in India that convinced Gandhiji that the British really had no plans for early transfer of responsibility to India. He could sense the need for a further mass struggle before India could validate its claim for freedom.

Ever since 1927-28 Gandhiji had been seized with a desire to respond to the various invitations he had been receiving from all over Europe and he had been hoping to visit some parts of the Continent on a lecture tour after his labours in connection with the Round Table Conference. Gandhiji had been in touch since early in July with Konzert-Direktion of Berlin and various itineraries had been mooted. One was Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt, Dresden, Leipzig, Breslau, Vienna, Zurich, Prague, Budapest, Hague, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen. Another was Bremen, Munich, Dusseldorf, Elberfeld, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Basle, Nurenberg, Danzig, Koenigsberg. Gandhiji had been offered DM 1000 for each lecture and expenses for a party of six. There were invitations also from Holland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, Switzerland, Austria and other countries. There were also invitations from the USA.<sup>31</sup>

Gandhiji had been keeping Congress leaders at home informed about the declining hopes of anything being achieved through the R.T.C. The Working Committee of the Congress accordingly met in Bombay on 7 and 8 November 1931 and resolved that Gandhiji's "further continuance in the Round Table Conference appeared to them unnecessary", but that the final decision in this



regard should be left to him. The resolution also drew Gandhiji's attention to the rapidly worsening situation in Bengal, the Frontier Province, the United Province and elsewhere and expressed the opinion that Gandhiji's early return to India was desirable and a long Continental tour would be inadvisable.<sup>32</sup>

On 9 November Gandhiji in a statement announced that he had cancelled all his Continental engagements. But he said it would be wrong on his part to leave England while the R.T.C. was in session.<sup>33</sup>

9

The R.T.C. concluded on 1 December 1931. It had been an ordeal for Gandhiji lasting a little less than eleven weeks. The premises at 88 Knightsbridge, which had been rented for the duration of the Round Table Conference, were given up, not without a severe reprimand being delivered to Polak by Gandhiji for not having been more careful with money. He wrote to Polak on 2 December:

I was distressed to find that without waiting to discuss with me you paid the landlady two days' extra rent.... And now without even caring to know the facts you have insisted upon payment of damages for the wear and tear of the carpet.... You should know that I am not operating on my own property. I am trustee for the poor and I have no right to squander away the moneys belonging to the poor.... I am deeply hurt.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, Polak should have realized that he had asked for it. For Gandhiji counted every penny he and his party spent in London. Pyarelal records that when he rashly bought a phial of honey for Gandhiji that cost no more than six pence Gandhiji severely reprimanded him for the extravagance. "You should have realized that you were purchasing on behalf of a representative of the poor," Gandhiji told him, and reminded him of the condition of the skeletons of Orissa, which haunted him in his waking hours and in his sleep.<sup>35</sup>



According to the diary that Gandhiji had started keeping while in London beginning 14 October and which he continued in jail till 1 January 1933, he was feverish on 2 December, probably the result of accumulated fatigue of the past several weeks. He certainly also had a cold. On 3 December he had talks with Horrabin, Laski and others. On the evening of 4 December he met MacDonald and Hoare and on 5 December, Saturday, at 9 a.m. boarded the train that took him to Folkstone. At Folkstone Gandhiji took the *Maid of Kent* to cross the Channel to France. His parting words to English people were:

The English people should believe me when I say that, if it falls to my lot to fight them, I will be engaged in the fight, never out of hatred but most surely out of love.

At Paris, where he arrived in the evening, he told the *Bristol Evening News*:

My last words to England must be: Farewell and beware! I came a seeker after peace. I return fearful of war.<sup>36</sup>



## CHAPTER XXII

### RETURN HOME AND BACK TO PRISON

1

Gandhiji and his entourage, augmented by the two British detectives who had been posted to guard him in London plus Muriel Lester and Maude Polak, arrived in Paris in the evening on 5 December. Here two engagements awaited him. The first was a reception arranged by the Indians living in Paris. They presented to Gandhiji a purse of £ 500 and Gandhiji spoke to them in Hindi. Gandhiji told them that he did not regret the failure of the Round Table Conference. He was returning home stronger and wiser, convinced that the people would have to undergo much more suffering than before to vindicate India's position.<sup>1</sup>

The public meeting of the citizens of Paris was held in the hall of Magic City, the largest cinema house of Paris, and it was filled to capacity with the audience. Gandhiji spoke for an hour and then answered questions.

Gandhiji told the Parisians that on his return to India he intended to continue the battle for India's freedom with greater zest and determination. He expected the people to be ready to put up a fierce fight. Freedom implied the control by the country of her defence and finance and to obtain such freedom the country would have to undergo great suffering.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhiji had cancelled all his European engagements, but there was one engagement he would not dream of cancelling and that was a meeting with Romain Rolland, the ageing and ailing French man of letters, who had been living in a kind of voluntary exile in Villeneuve in Switzerland. The two men had long been drawn to each other and Gandhiji had twice before made plans to visit Europe in order to meet Romain Rolland. The plans had not then materialized.





But now that the opportunity was there he must take advantage of it. As Mahadev Desai wrote in his Letter from Europe, the call from India was peremptory, but the call from Villeneuve was equally peremptory.<sup>3</sup>

When news of Gandhiji's projected visit to Villeneuve reached Lausanne, the nearest city, excitement rose to fever pitch, with everybody responding to the event. Romain Rolland has described the mood in his diary:

We also have to defend ourselves against a shower of letters, telephone calls and requests of all sorts provoked by Gandhi's announced arrival. Some of them are strange, some absurd, some completely crazy. (An Italian lady writes to Gandhi through me to ask him the ten winning numbers in the next Lotto...) The Swiss-German 'nudists' (Werner Zimmermann) want to corner Gandhi, and he has to be protected. Disturbed minds and "Sons of God" emerge from the earth like snails. Nice young people offer to come at night and play little tunes on the flute or the violin under the Mahatma's window. The local dairymen's union telephoned officiously to say that they hope to be 'purveyors to the king of India' during his stay. The Press agencies set up camp around the villa, the Lausanne police authorities get worried, and the Villeneuve hotels are full of 'undesirables' coming to look at the strange guest. I offer the young Japanese sculptor Takata the wherewithal to come from Paris to see and sketch Gandhi.<sup>4</sup>

On the morning of 6 December Gandhiji and party (without Muriel Lester, who stayed back in Paris) left Paris by train and arrived at Villeneuve in the evening. The scene of arrival in Romain Rolland's words again:

Waiting on the threshold of the Villa Lionnette, in the dark, the rain and the poor light of our electric lamps, I finally see the little man arriving in his white burnous,



bare-headed under the drizzling rain, his bare legs skinny and stilt-like, bespectacled, toothless and laughing- he always laughs nervously each time he comes to see me; it's like a welcome greeting- as he makes the Indian gesture of reverence: hands joined and raised to the height of the mouth. He rests his cheek against my shoulder and puts his right arm around me; I feel against my cheek his grey head with its shaven pate and its rough, moist skin - the kiss of St. Dominic and St. Francis.<sup>5</sup>

## 2

Gandhiji and party were guests of Romain Rolland from 6 December to 11 December. The two men met for several hours each day and acquainted themselves with each other's ideas on matters that concerned humanity. Romain Rolland was quite worried about the European situation - rise of Fascism, rearmament, threat of war and so on, but deeply interested in the technique and style of leadership Gandhiji had developed for carrying on India's struggle for freedom.

At their first session on 7 December, when they were together for two and a half hours, Gandhiji did not do any talking, for it was his day of silence. But he listened, Madeleine Rolland, Romain Rolland's sister, interpreting, as the French author expounded his views on the situation in Europe and the West generally. He thought the money power of the rising cartels was at the bottom of the whole trouble, nationalism and fascism being merely its tools. The only power that could pose a challenge to this class were the workers in the factories. What would achieve the purpose- violence or non-violence? Well, whichever was most effective. In Europe, he thought, non-violence would not work, for there was no tradition of non-violence in Europe as there was in India. Even religion in Europe was not non-violent. He advocated action in defence of Soviet Russia threatened



by armed capitalist powers. The ideal, he said, was the divinity of social justice. To call it materialism was to debase it.

Gandhiji had an invitation to visit Italy and consulted Rolland about it. Gandhiji said he wanted to see Mussolini and also the Pope. Rolland was against the visit. Gandhiji would be made use of by the Fascists, he said. "Think of what you represent for thousands of oppressed Italians reduced to silence! Do you not fear that your apparent consent to the regime which crushes them will complete their demoralization?" He asked. But Gandhiji was not inclined to reject the invitation out of hand, which had come from Scarpa, the Italian consul in India.

In any event, Romain Rolland counselled, Gandhiji must demand that foreign reporters should be present to take down what he said, because his utterance could be covered up or deformed, as had happened in the case of Tagore earlier. Romain Rolland insisted that Gandhiji should not accept hospitality from the Fascist regime, but should stay with General Moris, a friend of Rolland. Gandhiji agreed to this.

Returning to the subject of their conversation on 8 December, when they were together again for two and a half hours, Gandhiji explained to Rolland that his understanding of men and matters was intuitive and empirical rather than historical. He might well be mistaken. He only hoped he was not. Ahimsa, he believed, had universal application and would be effective in the European situation too. Only, Gandhiji himself could not deliver the message of ahimsa to Europe. As for Soviet Russia, it was an enigma. Indians who came under Russian influence turned to terrorism, and there were various views as to whether the Russian experiment could remodel society.<sup>6</sup>

On 8 December Gandhiji also visited Lausanne and addressed no less than three meetings in the city, one of them being a public meeting, which was broadcast live on the Swiss radio.



At one of the meetings Gandhiji, responding to the questions that had been addressed to him, explained his position on such metaphysical questions as God, Truth, Non-violence, Non-resistance, and so on.

What led Gandhiji to say that God is Truth? Gandhiji said he had come to the belief after a continuous, relentless quest for Truth which had begun many years earlier. Gandhiji found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. Unfortunately, the word "love" was open to various interpretations and so the proposition "God is love" was open to objections.

Not so the proposition "God is Truth". Not even atheists denied the power of Truth, who, in their passion for discovering Truth went so far as to deny even the existence of God. Therefore, since the previous two years Gandhiji had started saying "Truth is God", rather than "God is Truth". If the proposition "Truth is God" was valid then not even Charles Bradlaugh could call himself an atheist, for he passionately believed in Truth. This Truth, which is God, had to be discovered through love, which was non-violence. Since ultimately means and ends were convertible terms, Truth was the same thing as Love and so one could also say "God is Love".

And what was Truth, Gandhiji was asked. It was a difficult question, he said. But he had solved it for himself: it was what the inner voice told one. Of course the inner voice said different things to different people, so that each person would have a different notion of truth. Therefore, one who sought Truth must take certain vows: the vow to speak and think truth, the vows of *brahmacharya*, non-violence, poverty and non-possession. Also the seeker after Truth must have an abundant sense of humility.

Answering a question about non-resistance and resistance without violence Gandhiji explained that he had built upon Tolstoy's idea of non-resistance, so that



instead of passive resistance, what he had elaborated in the struggle in South Africa and in India was something very different. He called it satyagraha. Unlike passive resistance satyagraha was not a weapon of the weak but of the strong.<sup>7</sup>

During their stay at Villeneuve, Pyarelalji told this author once: "The gracious host, Romain Rolland, played the piano for Gandhiji. It was heavenly music. To hear him play Beethoven- it was the andante from the Fifth Symphony - was a spiritual experience."

On 10 December Gandhiji paid a visit to Geneva and at a lunch-hour meeting answered numerous questions on the relations of capital and labour, on disarmament, on neutrality in war and on the role of the Red Cross.<sup>8</sup>

On 11 December Gandhiji and party left Villeneuve on their journey home via Italy.

3

Arriving in Milan on the evening of 11 December, Gandhiji found a huge crowd waiting to greet him. A first-class carriage was placed at Gandhiji's disposal for his journey through Italy and Gandhiji and party got into it. On 12 December the party were in Rome. Gandhiji, Mahadev Desai and Mirabehn were put up by General Moris, while the rest went to a hotel.

In the afternoon they went to see the Vatican and were much impressed by the innumerable frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and the sculpture galleries in the Vatican. Gandhiji was greatly moved by a pieta. He stood before it for some minutes and remarked: "One can't help being moved to tears." He was later to write:

It was not without a wrench that I could tear myself away from that scene of living tragedy. I saw there at once that nations like individuals could only



be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others, but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself.<sup>9</sup>

One of his favourite hymns was "When I survey the Wondrous Cross". He liked it so much that he made this author learn it from Mirabehn in the Aga Khan Palace detention camp and sing it for him. The lines:

See from His head, His hands, His feet  
Sorrow and love flow mingling down  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown  
Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were an offering far too small  
Love so amazing, so divine  
Demands my life, my soul, my all

used so deeply to move him that his eyes became moist.

Gandhiji's party were also shown some achievements of Mussolini's Rome: schools, with gymnasia where two and a half million boys were given physical and military training. They were also shown maternity homes and free houses for the poor sheltering 40,000 people.<sup>10</sup>

In the evening at 6 p.m. Gandhiji went to see Mussolini. He was accompanied by Mahadev Desai, Mirabehn and General Moris. As they entered Mussolini's large office the Fascist dictator advanced to meet the party and shook hands with everyone.



Then he took his seat and invited Gandhiji and Mirabehn to seat themselves in the only two chairs that were placed before his table. Mahadev Desai and General Moris, having nowhere to sit, kept standing, but Mussolini did not appear to notice.

Mussolini then started asking Gandhiji questions - straight single sentence questions. Throughout the interview his eyes kept darting to and fro. The following is Mahadev Desai's record of the interview:

Question: Did you like Italy?

Answer: I like your beautiful country.

Q. Did you meet the Pope?

A. I regret he was not able to give me an appointment. He sees no one on Sunday and this morning, he has been too busy.

This brought an amused twinkle to the eyes of Mussolini, as if to say he knew the Pope's ways.

Q. The Round Table Conference is over?

A. Yes, though some work still remains to be done. One understands it is postponed for the moment. A working committee has been set up and its work will be continued.

Q. Have you got anything out of it?

A. No indeed. But I had not hoped I would get anything out of it.

Q. How does India stand economically?

A. India's economic condition is bad.... There is the exploitation going on day after day and a large proportion of the country's revenue is spent on maintaining an army.



Q. What is your programme?

A. It seems I shall have to start a campaign of civil disobedience.

Q. What about the Hindu-Muslim question?

A. With perseverance we shall be able to find a solution to it. Then we have a number of Muslim leaders who truly represent Islam and who are working for the Congress. There is Dr. Ansari.... When the Prophet had to flee from Mecca it was the Ansar family that helped him. Dr. Ansari comes from that family.

Q. Do you believe you can unite?

A. I have not the slightest doubt in that regard.

Q. Do you seek complete independence for India?

A. Yes, but it does not exclude partnership with England on equal terms. Today England is exploiting India. When she stops the exploitation there will be no obstacle to our entering into a partnership with Britain.

Q. You are thinking of a democratic constitution for your country?

A. Yes, definitely. We want a democratic set-up.

Q. Have you ever considered having one person ruling over all the constituent units?

A. No, the ruling body must have representation of all the interests.

Q. Do you believe communism can succeed in India?

A. No, I do not.

Q. How long were you in England- how many months?





Bapu said two months. Mirabehn, correcting him, said three.....Mussolini looked towards her.

Q. What do you think of the situation in Europe?

A. Now you ask the question that I have been waiting for you to ask.

Europe cannot go on the way it has been going on. The only alternative is for it to change the whole basis of its economic life, its whole value system. The edifice it has raised cannot be kept standing for long, however hard anyone may try.

Q. Can East and West not meet?

A. Why not? West has been exploiting East. The moment it stops the exploitation; the door will be opened for cooperation between the two.

Mussolini said that was his view too. Then he said he hoped Gandhiji had been favourably impressed by Italy and Rome.

A. Oh yes. Italy is a beautiful country and Rome is a beautiful city. I thank you for putting a first-class saloon at my disposal.

Mussolini: Please think nothing of it.

Gandhiji told Mussolini he would have liked to see some of the institutions of Italy but it was hardly possible to do so in one day.

Later Bapu commented to Mahadev: "His eyes are like those of a cat, did you notice?" "More like the eyes of Satan," Mahadev replied. Bapu did not object to this judgment. Bapu said that if he had gone alone to see Mussolini, the latter might have talked longer. As it was he thought Mirabehn might be a spy of the British.<sup>11</sup>

On 13 December Gandhiji left Rome on his way to Brindisi. The Swiss couple, Edmond and *Yvonne* Privat, accompanied the party. On the 14th they boarded



s.s. *Pilsna* bound for India. Evans and Rogers, the two British detectives, who, at their own request and on Gandhiji's intercession with the Secretary of State on their behalf, had travelled all the way from England to be with Gandhiji during his travels in Europe, returned to England. Bidding them farewell, Gandhiji promised to send them as a token of his friendship two British-made silver watches.

Upon his arrival in Bombay Gandhiji asked Pyarelal to get the watches. Pyarelal scoured the whole of Bombay for the watches and brought a selection for Gandhiji to choose from. But they were all Swiss-made. Gandhiji insisted that they must be British-made. That very morning the Working Committee had discussed the new political resolution, drafted by Gandhiji himself, recommending "boycott of British goods and concerns". In the face of the resolution, which was certain to be passed, what would be the point of insisting on British-made watches? - Pyarelal asked. "All the more reason," said Gandhiji, "why I should give expression to my love for the British while I may." With great difficulty Pyarelal managed to find two British-made watches and they were duly despatched to the two detectives in England.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji mentions in his diary under the date 21 December that he wrote on that day a letter to Mussolini. This letter is not to be found in the Collected Works. But there is another, dated 20 December, addressed to Romain Rolland, not mentioned in the diary, which invited a rather sharp reaction from Roman Rolland. In his letter Gandhiji wrote:

Mussolini is a riddle to me. Many of his reforms attract me. He seems to have done much for the peasant class. I admit an iron hand is there. But as violence is the basis of Western society, Mussolini's reforms deserve an impartial study. His care of the poor, his opposition to super-urbanization, his efforts to bring about coordination between capital and labour, seem



to me to demand special attention.... What strikes me is that behind Mussolini's implacability is a desire to serve his people. It also seems to me that the majority of Italian people love, the iron government of Mussolini.<sup>13</sup>

Romain Rolland drafted a reply on 2 January, when Gandhiji was in the thick of the Indian problem and just two days to go before he would be thrust into jail by Willingdon's administration. Romain Rolland wrote:

I shall leave until later the explanation you want on Italian Fascism. Today I merely want to put you on your guard against the much too hasty and (if I may say so) mainly erroneous impressions you give in your letter.

You spent three or four days in Italy at the most - two of them in a first-class carriage.... How can you possibly have formed even the most approximate idea of the feelings of the 'mass' of the population (as you put it) about the regime imposed on them?

Romain Rolland then proceeded to protest against Gandhiji's remark that force was the basis of Western society. There could be no parallel between Mussolini's Italy and the great European democracies such as France; England, Scandinavia and Switzerland. Though he had often written against their hypocrisy, he had not been murdered for it, like others were on the orders of Mussolini, he wrote, citing names. He went on:

Do you know that the first thing done by the Fascists when in power was to destroy, burn, pillage and ruin the labour exchanges, popular libraries and socialist communes..... This man who you say is so attached to the 'peasantry', has exposed whole stretches of country to the brutality of Fascist expeditions.<sup>14</sup>



Before the letter could be despatched news reached Romain Rolland that Gandhiji had been put behind the bars. It was never sent.

Romain Rolland had expressed the fear that in Italy Gandhiji's words might be suppressed or distorted. Something even worse happened. A newspaper, *Giornale d'Italia* published an interview it said Gandhiji had given to Gayda, its correspondent. In the statement Gandhiji was said to have made to Gayda on embarkation, there were expressions such as the following:

- 1) Round Table Conference marked definite rupture of relations between Indian nation and British Government.
- 2) Gandhiji was returning to India in order .to start at once struggle against England.
- 3) Boycott would now prove powerful means of rendering more acute British crisis.
- 4) We will not pay taxes, we will not work for England in any way, we will completely isolate British authorities, their politics and their institutions, and we will totally boycott all British goods.

British politicians were "horrified and amazed" and asked Gandhiji to clarify. Gandhiji declared that the statement published by the journal was wholly false. He had never given any interview to any Press man in Rome. He assured the British that he would take no precipitate action on his arrival in India, and he would make "ample previous entreaty" to the authorities should a struggle become necessary.<sup>15</sup>

The ship reached Port Said on 17 December at 11 a.m. Gandhiji noted in his diary that Sindhis and Egyptians came to fetch him, but he was given to understand by the Captain that the ship would not be stopping at Suez, so he could not leave



the ship. As it was, the ship did stop at Suez, leaving that port in the afternoon at 5.30.<sup>16</sup> On 28 December in the early hours of the morning Gandhiji landed in Bombay to a tumultuous welcome by the citizens. Vallabhbhai Patel and other leaders went to the ship to receive him.

4

Gandhiji summed up the result of his mission to London in these words:

I admit that I have come back empty-handed, but I have the satisfaction that I have not lowered or in any way compromised the honour of the flag that was entrusted to me.

Writing in *Young India* he said:

Though I approached the visit in fear and trembling, I am not sorry for having gone there. It brought me in touch with the responsible Englishmen and women as also with the man in the street. This experience will be of inestimable value in future, whether we have to put up a fight again or not....

I am therefore returning home not filled with disappointment but with hope enriched. This hope is based on the fact that what I saw in England and on the Continent not only did not shake my faith in truth and non-violence, but, on the contrary, strongly confirmed it.<sup>17</sup>

Lord Sankey regretted that during his stay in England Gandhiji had surrounded himself with "churchmen, cranks and faddists", instead of cultivating the friendship of "leading figures in British politics". But Gandhiji had not gone to England to make a political deal; his purpose had all along been to bring about a change of heart among the British people, so that Britain would voluntarily undo the wrong it had done to India. Gandhiji therefore lived among the poor, visited



their homes and mingled with them. He lived and dressed as a representative of the poor, semi-starved dumb millions of India. And, as his visit to Lancashire demonstrated, the poor did understand him.

His companions joined the hosts in their chores: cutting vegetables and helping in cleaning and washing. Gandhiji, whenever he could, joined the Saturday night entertainment of the East End mill-hands. On one such occasion he was asked to join their folk dance. He agreed, pointing to his walking-stick. "This will be my partner," he said, and they all had a hearty laugh.

Gandhiji visited homes in the slums and encouraged his companions to mix with the common people in street corners, six-penny luncheon restaurants, milk bars, play houses and places of recreation, make friends with British bobbies, visit museums, libraries and art galleries, to study British institutions and British national habits, their punctuality, corporate and individual discipline and their way of life in general.

He spun for half an hour every day without fail as a link with the poor in India, however late he might have returned from his public engagements. All this made a deep impact. The poor in East End instinctively recognized Gandhiji as one of themselves and realized that he symbolized the struggle of the common man, which was as much theirs as India's.

Churchmen saw in Gandhiji's non-violence the gospel of Jesus Christ being put into action. They organized silent prayer meetings every week to which they invited men of all religions from among the delegates to the Round Table Conference. Several of them did attend.

Thus Gandhiji left behind in England seeds which sprouted and led the British people in due course to recognize that they must move out of India as rulers. In this men of religion played their part as also the intellectuals whom Gandhiji had



met at Oxford and Cambridge. When Gandhiji left they could see that he had a point and was not an impossible crank with whom no one could negotiate.

Soon after landing Gandhiji was called upon to address a public meeting held at Azad Maidan. The meeting was the largest Bombay had ever seen. Late at night, at 10 p.m., he addressed another meeting held under the auspices of the 'Welfare of India League'. At both meetings, Gandhiji, while paying tribute to the British statesmen in London, including the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, for their goodwill and their desire to understand the problems of India, expressed his dismay that things in India were so different; He denounced the Ordinance raj in the Frontier Province, U.P. and Bengal, and said it would not be possible for the Congress to lend its cooperation to the work of the committees set up by the Round Table Conference. The Ordinances could not be tolerated. If the Government did not bend, if a fight became necessary, everyone would have to do their best. Gandhiji went on:

Last year we faced lathis, but this time we must be prepared to face bullets. I do not wish that Pathans in the Frontier alone should court bullets. If bullets are to be faced, Gujarat and Bombay also must take their share.... I believe that we must get rid of the fear of death, and when we have to court death we must embrace it as we embrace a friend. But... we must see to it that not even a hair of an Englishman is hurt.<sup>18</sup>

Gandhiji said the Congress in U.P. had been charged with trying to run a parallel government and asked what was so wrong about running a parallel government, so long as it was run on non-violent lines and for the good of the people. What was wrong in running hospitals and even law courts and arbitration courts where justice could be had at less cost to the people? The Congress had every right to run a peasants' organization to provide relief to the peasantry. He appealed to



the Government to trust the Congress, which was not a secret organization and stood for the welfare of the country.

Gandhiji expressed his willingness to go to Bengal or the Frontier Province to see conditions for himself. Indeed, he had sought permission earlier from Lord Irwin and then from Lord Willingdon to visit the Frontier Province. Both had declined to permit him to go, for fear that his going "would create ferment there". Of course if he went he would do so on his own terms, to serve the people, not on the Government's terms. He could not go and tell Abdul Ghaffar Khan that it was wrong to long for independence. If you wanted a bird to fly, you could not clip its wings.<sup>19</sup>

5

On 29 December Gandhiji sent out a feeler to the Viceroy in the shape of a telegram. It was clear that if he could at all help it he wanted to avoid a resumption of mass Civil Disobedience Movement and avert further sufferings for the people. Referring to the Frontier and U.P. Ordinances in the telegram Gandhiji asked the Viceroy whether the friendly relations between the Congress and the Government were closed or whether the Viceroy would still want Gandhiji to see him and receive guidance as to course he should pursue in advising the Congress.<sup>20</sup>

Gandhiji received the reply to this telegram on 31 December from the Private Secretary to the Viceroy. The Viceroy justified the Bengal, U.P. and Frontier Ordinances and roundly denounced the activities of the Congress organization in U.P., which had been carrying on a no-rent campaign, and of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his volunteers who, according to the Viceroy, had been spreading racial hatred and demanding full independence. The telegram then went on to declare that the Viceroy would not "have any dealing with persons or organizations upon





whom rests the responsibility for activities above outlined". Since Gandhiji himself had been away the Viceroy magnanimously absolved him of any responsibility for the activities of the Congress in U.P. or the Frontier Province. The Viceroy therefore would be willing to see Gandhiji and give him his views as to how he could ensure cooperation between the Government and the Congress. But, the telegram warned:

His Excellency feels bound to emphasize that he will not be prepared to discuss with you measures which Government of India with the full approval of His Majesty's Government have found it necessary to adopt in Bengal, United Provinces and North-West Frontier Province.<sup>21</sup>

This was, to say the least, an insolent communication. The Congress Working Committee, which remained in session in Bombay from 29 December 1931 to 1 January 1932, considered the text and approved a rejoinder Gandhiji had prepared. Dated 1 January 1932, this rejoinder expressed Gandhiji's grief at the way the Viceroy had rejected an advance made in the friendliest spirit. Instead, the Viceroy had asked him to repudiate his colleagues in advance and further told him that, even if he became guilty of such dishonourable conduct and sought an interview he could not even discuss those issues, which were of such vital importance to the nation. Gandhiji's rejoinder continued:

Constitutional issue dwindles into insignificance in face of Ordinances and acts which must, if not met with stubborn resistance, result in utter demoralization of nation. I hope no self-respecting Indian will run risk of killing national spirit for a doubtful contingency of securing a constitution to work which no nation with stamina may be left.

Gandhiji rejected the reasons advanced by the Viceroy for the repression in the Frontier Province and for the arrest of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his co-workers.



Asserting the right of complete independence, as Ghaffar Khan had done, was a natural claim for which the Congress stood and which he himself had put before the Round Table Conference. And if Ghaffar Khan had been preaching racial hatred, he should have been openly tried. As regards U.P., the Congress had not started a no-rent campaign, as claimed 'by the Viceroy. Negotiations had been going on about the quantum of relief to which the peasantry was entitled and the Congress had merely wanted the recovery of rent to be suspended for the duration of the negotiations. In any case the peasants were justified in withholding payment or rent in the meanwhile. Gandhiji declared:

I regard the withholding of payment of taxes as an inalienable ancient and natural right of a people who have exhausted all other means of seeking freedom from an unbeatable economic burden.

As regards Bengal, the Congress, Gandhiji said, was at one with the Government in condemning assassinations and would cooperate with Government in measures calculated to check such crimes. But it could not associate itself with Government terrorism as betrayed by the Bengal Ordinances.

Gandhiji again asked the Viceroy to reconsider his position and see Gandhiji as a friend and without any preconditions. It was not yet too late. Gandhiji would be willing to go to the respective provinces and study both sides of the question and if he found that people had been in the wrong he would have no hesitation in openly making such confession.

Since it was feared that Gandhiji might not have another opportunity to guide the public, Gandhiji told the Viceroy, the Working Committee accepted his advice and passed a resolution tentatively sketching a plan of civil disobedience. Gandhiji telegraphed the text of the resolution also to the Viceroy.<sup>22</sup>



The Working Committee's resolution was passed after Gandhiji had sent the telegram to the Viceroy. According to his diary entry under 31 December it would have been well before 1.30 a.m. when he completed drafting the resolution for the Working Committee.

The Working Committee in this resolution referred to the Ordinances in Bengal, U.P. and N.W.F.P., the shootings in the N.W.F.P. and the arrests of Jawaharlal Nehru, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Sherwani, and expressed the view that in the light of these acts of the Government, seen along with the Viceroy's negative response to Gandhiji's advances, further cooperation with the Government had been rendered impossible. The acts of the Government and the Viceroy's telegram made it clear that the bureaucracy did not want to part with power. The Working Committee demanded that a public and impartial enquiry be instituted into the events that had led to the promulgation of the various ordinances.

The Working Committee referred to the declaration made by the Prime Minister at the Round Table Conference and the debates in the British Parliament and expressed the view that the declaration was "wholly unsatisfactory and inadequate in terms of the Congress demand". Nothing short of Complete Independence with full control over defence, external affairs and finance with such safeguards as were in the interests of the country would be regarded as satisfactory by the Congress.

The Working Committee offered cooperation to the Viceroy, on the lines of Gandhiji's telegram, if relief was granted in the matter of the Ordinances and full scope was left for the Congress in any future negotiations to pursue its claim for Complete Independence. The resolution then said:



In the event of a satisfactory response not forthcoming, the Working Committee calls upon the nation to resume civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes under the following conditions and illustrative heads: (1) No province or district or tehsil or village is bound to take up civil disobedience unless the people thereof understand the non-violent nature of the struggle with all its implications.... (2) Non-violence must be observed in thought, word and deed in the face of the gravest provocation, it being understood that the campaign is not one of seeking revenge or inflicting injuries on the oppressor, but it is one of converting him through self-suffering and self-purification. (3) Social boycott with the intention of inflicting injury on Government officers, police or anti-nationalists should not be undertaken and is wholly inconsistent with the spirit of non-violence. (4) It should be borne in mind that non-violent campaigns are independent of pecuniary assistance; therefore, there should be no hired volunteers, but their bare maintenance and maintenance of the dependents of poor men and women who might have been imprisoned or killed is permissible.... (5) Boycott of all foreign cloth whether British or of other countries is obligatory under all circumstances.

Picketing of liquor and foreign-cloth shops, unlicensed collection of salt, facing of lathi-charges and bullets without moving, boycott of all British goods and civil breach of non-moral laws and orders issued under the Ordinances were the other points to be borne in mind by the satyagrahis.<sup>23</sup>

The Private Secretary to the Viceroy in a telegram dated 2 January rejected on behalf of the Viceroy the demands contained in Gandhiji's telegram and the resolution of the Working Committee. The Government of India and the Viceroy, he said, could not invite Gandhiji with the hope of any advantage to an interview



held under the threat of resumption of civil disobedience. The Congress and Gandhiji, the telegram said, would be held responsible for all the consequences that might ensue from the action contemplated by the Congress, which the Government intended to meet with all necessary measures.

Gandhiji answered this on the following day. He assured the Government that every endeavour would be made on the part of the Congress to carry on the struggle without malice and in a strictly non-violent manner.<sup>24</sup>

## 7

The Government of India under Willingdon thus remained unbending, asking for total surrender by Gandhiji and the Congress. It appeared as though the bureaucracy was out to provoke a conflict, which Gandhiji would far rather have avoided, if at all it could be avoided.

But the fat was now in the fire, with the two opposing sides having taken positions and dug themselves in.

Mani Bhuwan in Bombay where Gandhiji had been staying, was a busy place those days, with all kinds of people coming and going. The Liberals and other leaders came and went, and so did representatives of business, Indian and foreign. In fact, it appeared that business interests, more than any other sections of the people, were alarmed at the prospect of a mass Civil Disobedience Movement, in which, this time, boycott of all British goods and foreign cloth of all origin was slated to play the most prominent part. Visitors listed by Gandhiji in his diary for the first three days of January, when the prospect of civil disobedience loomed large on the horizon, included cloth and bullion merchants, Benthall, Modi and Ness Wadia.



Members of the Chamber of Commerce met Gandhiji on 3 January and persuaded him to cancel his proposed visit to Ahmedabad, while they made one last effort to bring the Viceroy round to a conciliatory position.<sup>25</sup>

Benthall, who represented European commercial interests and had been a delegate to the Round Table Conference in that capacity, was naturally nervous, especially because he and his like had pitted themselves against the inexorable advance of India's freedom struggle. In a circular issued by them after their return from London they could be seen in their true colours. The circular read:

We went to London determined to achieve some settlement if we could, but our determination in that regard was tempered with an equal determination that there should be no giving way on any essential part of the policy agreed to by the Associated Chambers of Commerce in regard to financial and commercial safeguards, and by the European Association on general policy....

If you look at the result of this last session, you will see that Gandhi and the (Indian) Federated Chambers are unable to point to a single concession wrung from the British Government as a result of their visit to St. James' Palace. He landed in India with empty hands....

On the whole there was one policy of the British nation and the British community in India, and that was to make up our minds- on a national policy and to stick to it. *But after the general elections the right wing of the Government made up its mind to fight the Congress.* [Emphasis in the source.] The Muslims, who do not want responsibility at the Centre, were delighted. Government undoubtedly changed their policy and tried to get away with Provincial Autonomy.... We had made up our minds that the



fight with the Congress was inevitable; we felt and said that the sooner it came the better....

The Muslims have become firm allies of the Europeans. They are very satisfied with their own position and are prepared to work with us.<sup>26</sup>

This was then what all the high-sounding jargon in the MacDonald declaration really meant. And this was the policy being worked by Willingdon in India. Fight the Congress and sabotage any scheme of responsibility at the Centre!

8

The sacrificial fire, then, was about to be lighted, as Gandhiji put it in his letter to Tagore on 3 January.<sup>27</sup>

In an interview to *Bombay Chronicle*, Gandhiji told the people what to do after he was arrested. He told them that they must discard all drugs, narcotics and intoxicating drinks; they must shed every trace of violence and give absolute protection to every Englishman, woman or child; they must withdraw from Government every form of cooperation possible; and they must study and carry out in letter and spirit the resolution of the Working Committee.

As to the form that civil disobedience of specific laws should take Gandhiji directed that the struggle might be started with a hartal and fasting. There were several areas for the defiance of laws. Some of these were: (a) unlicensed manufacture of salt, (b) picketing of liquor and foreign-cloth shops, (c) breach of orders under Section 144, where such orders had been issued for the sake of crushing the Congress.<sup>28</sup>

In a message to America Gandhiji said:

On the eve of embarking on what promises to be a deadly struggle, I would expect numerous American friends to watch its career and use the influence of the great nation for the sake of oppressed humanity.<sup>29</sup>



All day long the air buzzed with rumours of impending arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders. Sir Purushottamdas, Sir Cowasji Jehangir, M. R. Jayakar and Pheroze Sethna were around all day, frantically trying to approach the Viceroy in order to avert the coming conflict. It was all in vain, as they might have, known.

This author's mother had gone to Bombay to receive Gandhiji and Pyarelal on their return from England. On 2 or 3 January 1932, she went to take leave of Gandhiji to return home. He told her "why think of going home? You should send us to jail and follow us there" She took it as an order and stayed on.

They took away Gandhiji, coming like thieves in the night. The entry under 4 January 1932 in Gandhiji's diary reads:

Spun 190 rounds. The police came and arrested me at 3 o'clock in the morning. Left after reciting a bhajan. Elwin, Privat, Mills and others were present. Vallabhbhai also arrested at the same time....<sup>30</sup>

In his book *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin*, Elwin has described the scene of arrest. He writes:

Gandhi was staying in a house called Mani Bhuwan and he invited us to stay with him there. There was great excitement in the city.... But when we reached Mani Bhuwan and climbed to the roof, we found a great serenity in striking contrast to the crowds and turmoil outside.... Low tents had been erected.... At least 300 people could gather. It was cool and you could see the stars....

At last I lay down ... and fell into a deep sleep, when suddenly, like the coming of a dream there was a stir and a whisper: 'The police have come.'

We started up and I saw what I shall never forget - a fully uniformed Commissioner of Police at the foot of Bapu's bed, and Bapu just waking, a





little bewildered, looking old, fragile and rather pathetic with the mists of sleep still on his face.

'Mr. Gandhi, it is my duty to arrest you.'

A beautiful smile of welcome broke out on Bapu's face and now he looked young, strong and confident. He made signs to show that he was keeping silence.

The Commissioner smiled and with great courtesy said: 'I should like you to be ready in half an hour's time.'

It was five minutes past three. Bapu looked at his watch and the Commissioner said: 'Ah, the famous watch', and they both laughed heartily. Bapu took a pencil and wrote: 'I shall be ready to come with you in half an hour....'

When he was ready Bapu sat in the midst of us for the prayers and we sang together the song of the true Vaishnava. Then Bapu took pencil and paper and wrote a few messages....

Then Bapu stood up to take farewell. It was a strange sight: the police at the door, Mirabehn and Devdas bustling to and fro with the baggage which was already packed, Bapu surrounded by his friends, many of them weeping....

The tiny figure got into the car and the crowd surged round it .... And then the crowd scattered as the car bearing the very soul of India drove away through the dark and deserted streets.<sup>31</sup>

Among the few messages Gandhiji was able to scribble before being taken to jail were to Ahmedabad workers, to America and to Vallabhbhai Patel. He called



upon mill workers of Ahmedabad to give up liquor, wear only khaddar, live harmoniously, educate their children and work righteously. To America his message was that even like America India too would win her freedom by suffering, sacrifice and non-violence. To Vallabhbhai Patel he said:

Please tell the people never to swerve from truth and non-violence. Never to flinch, but to give their lives and all to win swaraj.<sup>32</sup>

Vallabhbhai Patel never had the opportunity to convey the message to the people. He was himself arrested at the same time as Gandhiji.

Following the arrest of Gandhiji and the Congress President, the scenes that were witnessed in Bombay were reminiscent of the days of civil disobedience of the preceding year. There was complete hartal in the bazaars and a huge procession paraded the streets waving national flags.

Rajendra Prasad, who had been nominated President by Sardar Patel to take his place was also arrested at Sadaqat Ashram in Patna. Jawaharlal Nehru and Sherwani, arrested earlier, were sentenced to prison terms of two years and six months respectively and to fines of Rs. 500 and Rs.150.

The Congress Working Committee was declared an unlawful association constituting a danger to the public peace.

On the same day, 4 January 1932, four new Ordinances were promulgated: (1) The Emergency Powers Ordinance, (2) The Unlawful Instigation Ordinance, (3) The Unlawful Association Ordinance, and (4) The Prevention of Molestation and Boycotting Ordinance.

These Ordinances placed in the hands of officials and police at various levels, sweeping powers ruthlessly to deal with any situation. As in the case of the earlier Ordinances in force in U.P. and N.W.F.P., as a result of these Ordinances all



fundamental rights of the people became subject to the whims of the lowest constable, opening the floodgates of searches, seizures, arrests and convictions by summary courts.<sup>33</sup>

Soon the entire leadership of the Congress was again in jail, while outside ruthless repression was unleashed to control a nation that was unarmed and defiant. This story must form the subject of the next volume.



**:: APPENDICES : NOTES ::**



## APPENDIX I

### TRUST DEED OF SATYAGRAHA ASHRAM, SABARMATI .

[This Trust Deed was drafted by Gandhiji on February 2, 1926, and presented for registration at the office of the Sub-Registrar, Ahmedabad, on February 12, 1926. G. V. Mavalankar and Vinoba Bhave signed as witnesses.]

Declaration of Trust, Rs. 2,75,000.

We, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Maganlal Khushalchand Gandhi, both Vaniyas by caste, aged about 55 and 43 years respectively, by profession weavers and cultivators, both residing in Satyagraha Ashram, Vadaj, Taluka North Daskroi, District Ahmedabad, hereby declare as follows:

After our return to India from South Africa in 1915, we and our co-workers established on 25-5-1915 an institution named Satyagraha Ashram with the aim of carrying on activities of public service. The land and buildings shown in the accompanying schedule, of the value of about Rs. 2,75,000 (rupees two lac and seventy-five thousand only), which are the property of that institution, were purchased on its behalf in our names and they have been and are being used and managed under the direction of the heads of the institution in accordance with its aims and objects. We hereby declare these aims and also declare that the said properties are held in our names in our capacities as trustees of the institution and that we and our heirs and successors did not and do not have any personal right or share in them.

The aims for which the property of the "Satyagraha Ashram", mentioned in the schedule to this document, is being used are as under:

1. *Antyaja* uplift;



2. cultivation of cotton and development of the crafts connected with it, hand-ginning, carding, spinning and weaving;
3. to train workers for activities necessary for the moral, economic and political uplift of India.
4. to establish and run schools to impart education in letters and other training; and
5. to undertake other activities for public welfare such as cow-protection, improvement in the breed of cows, etc.

We hereby declare that the following persons have been appointed trustees for the management of the property mentioned in the accompanying Schedule A for the purposes stated above:

1. Shri Jamnalal Bajaj
2. Shri Revashankar Jagjivan Jhaveri
3. Shri Mahadev Haribhai Desai
4. Shri Imamsaheb Abdul Kadir Bawazeer
5. Shri Chhaganlal Khushalchand Gandhi

We declare that the said trustees have the following rights and powers in respect of the aforementioned property:

1. To do anything or take any steps which may appear necessary from time to time in furtherance of the objects and aims of the Trust and to manage and use the property which is the subject of the Trust in any manner they may deem fit;
2. To sell or mortgage the property which is the subject of the Trust for furthering its aims;



3. To appoint, by majority vote, new trustees to fill up vacancies among themselves;
4. To act with the concurrence of not less than three from among themselves;
5. To raise, by majority vote, the number of trustees by two if it appears necessary for them to do so.

The property described in Schedule A is situated within the limits of villages in the registration District of Ahmedabad, Taluka Daskroi. It was previously in the names of the persons who sold it to us and has remained in our possession from the time that we purchased it on behalf of the afore-mentioned institution up to date. Particulars of the property.

[Schedule A, listing particulars of 18 separate pieces of land, is not reproduced.]

We have made the above declaration of our own free will, knowingly and in sound mind and it binds our heirs, successors, executors and assignees.

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

MAGANLAL KHUSHALCHAND GANDHI

C.W.M.G., XXIX, PP. 434-36



## APPENDIX II

### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SATYAGRAHA ASHRAM SABARMATI

This Ashram was opened on 25th May 1915. A constitution was drawn up when it was founded. It underwent a revision during my incarceration. The copies were exhausted long ago. My colleagues and I found it desirable to recast the constitution in view of the many changes and ups and downs that the Ashram had undergone. Its unexpected expansion too made the old constitution out of date. The burden of preparing the first draft fell on my shoulders. Though pressure of work was ample excuse for the delay, I know that my subconscious self shirked the task. I was not clear as to the changes that were to be made. But my colleagues would give me no peace and Maganlal's death hastened the completion. The following constitution is the result of the joint labours of the main workers. It is published purely as a draft, though pending revision it is to be accepted as a binding constitution by the Managing Committee. It is published in order to secure the opinion of friends and critics known and unknown of the Ashram. Any criticism or suggestions that may be sent will be thankfully received. I may be permitted to mention that the Ashram represents a prayerful and scientific experiment. The observances are many but they have been tested for the past 13 years of the existence of the Ashram. Whilst it is impossible to claim their perfect fulfilment by anyone of us, the workers have in all humility tried to enforce them in their lives to the best of their ability and with more or less success. The curious will find that the new draft bears very close resemblance to the original constitution as it was drawn up in 1915.

*Founded on Vaishakh Sud 11th, Samvat 1971, - May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1915. – at Kochrab, and since removed to Sabarmati.*





## OBJECT

The object of this Ashram is that its members should qualify themselves for, and make a constant endeavour towards, the service of the country, not inconsistent with the universal welfare.

## OBSERVANCES

The following observances are essential for the fulfilment of the above object:

### I Truth

Truth is not fulfilled by mere abstinence from telling or practising an untruth in ordinary relations with fellow-men. But Truth is God, the one and only Reality. All other observances take their rise from the quest for and the worship of Truth. Worshippers of Truth must not resort to untruth, even for what they may believe to be the good of the country and they may be required, like Prahlad, civilly to disobey even the orders of parents and elders in virtue of their paramount loyalty to Truth.

### II. Non-Violence or Love

Mere non-killing is not enough. The active part of Non-violence is love. The law of Love requires equal consideration for all life from the tiniest insect to the highest man. One who follows this law must not be angry even with the perpetrator of the greatest imaginable wrong, but must love him, wish him well and serve him. Although he must thus love the wrongdoer, he must never submit to his wrong or his injustice, but must oppose it with all his might, and must patiently and without resentment suffer all the hardships to which the wrongdoer may subject him in punishment for his opposition.

### III. Chastity (*Brahmacharya*)

Observance of the foregoing principles is impossible without the observance of celibacy. It is not enough that one should not look upon any woman or man with



a lustful eye; animal passion must be so controlled as to be excluded even from the mind. If married, one must not have a carnal mind - regarding one's wife or husband, but must consider her or him as one's lifelong friend, and establish relationship of perfect purity. A sinful touch, gesture or word is a direct breach of this principle.

#### **IV. Control of the Palate**

The observance of brahmacharya has been found, from experience, to be extremely difficult so long as one has not acquired mastery over taste. Control of the palate has, therefore, been placed as a principle by itself. Eating is necessary only for sustaining the body and keeping it a fit instrument for service, and must never be practised for self-indulgence. Food must, therefore, be taken, like medicine, under proper restraint. In pursuance of this principle one must eschew exciting foods, such as spices and condiments. Meat, liquor, tobacco, bhang, etc., are excluded from the Ashram. This principle requires abstinence from feasts or dinners which have pleasure as their object.

#### **V. Non-Stealing**

It is not enough not to take another's property without his permission. One becomes guilty of theft even by using differently anything which one has received in trust for use in a particular way, as well as by using a thing longer than the period for which it has been lent. It is also theft if one receives anything which one does not really need. The fine truth at the bottom of this principle is that Nature provides just enough, and no more, for our daily need.

#### **VI. Non-Possession or Poverty**

This principle is really a part of No. V. Just as one must not receive, so must one not possess anything which one does not really need. It would be a breach of this



principle to possess unnecessary food-stuffs, clothing or furniture. For instance," one must not keep a chair if one can do without it. In observing this principle one is led to a progressive simplification of one's own life.

### **VII. Physical Labour**

Physical labour is essential for the observance of non-stealing and non-possession. Man can be saved from injuring society, as well as himself, only if he sustains his physical existence by physical labour. Able-bodied adults must do all their personal work themselves, and must not be served by others, except for proper reasons. But they must, at the same time, remember that service of children, as well as of the disabled, the old and the sick is a duty incumbent on every person who has the required strength.

### **VIII. Swadeshi**

Man is not omnipotent. He therefore serves the world best by first serving his neighbour. This is swadeshi, a principle which is broken when one professes to serve those who are more remote in preference to those who are near. Observance of swadeshi makes for order in the world; the breach of it leads to chaos. Following this principle, one must as far as possible purchase one's requirements locally and not buy things imported from foreign lands, which can easily be manufactured in the country. There is no place for self-interest in swadeshi, which enjoins the sacrifice of oneself for the family, of the family for the village, of the village for the country, and of the country for humanity.

### **IX. Fearlessness**

One cannot follow Truth or Love so long as one is subject to fear. As there is at present a reign of fear in the country, meditation on and cultivation of fearlessness have a particular importance. Hence its separate mention as an



observance. A seeker after Truth must give up the fear of parents, caste, Government, robbers, etc., and he must not be frightened by poverty or death.

### **X. Removal of Untouchability**

Untouchability, which has taken such deep roots in Hinduism, is altogether irreligious. Its removal has therefore been treated as an independent principle. The so-called untouchables have an equal place in the Ashram with other classes. The Ashram does not believe in caste which, it considers, has injured Hinduism, because its implications of superior and inferior status, and of pollution by contact are contrary to the law of Love. The Ashram however believes in *varnashrama dharma*. The division of *varnas* is based upon occupation, and therefore a person should maintain himself by following the hereditary occupation, not inconsistent with fundamental morals, and should devote all his spare time and energy to the acquisition and advancement of true knowledge. The *ashramas* (the four stages) spoken in the *Smritis* are conducive to the welfare of mankind. Though, therefore, the Ashram believes in *varnashrama dharma*, there is no place in it for distinction of *varnas*, as the Ashram life is conceived in the light of the comprehensive and non-formal *sannyasa* of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

### **XI. Tolerance**

The Ashram believes that the principal faiths of the world constitute a revelation of Truth, but as they have all been outlined by imperfect man they have been affected by imperfections and alloyed with untruth. One must therefore entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as one accords to one's own. Where such tolerance becomes a law of life, conflict between different faiths becomes impossible, and so does all effort to convert other people to one's own faith. One can only pray that the defects in the various faiths may be overcome, and that they may advance, side by side, towards perfection.



## ACTIVITIES

As a result of and in order to help fulfilment of these observances, the following activities are carried on in the Ashram:

### **I. Worship**

The social (as distinguished from the individual) activities of the Ashram commence every day with the congregational morning worship at 4.15 to 4.45 and close with the evening prayer at 7 to 7.30. All inmates are expected to attend the worship. This worship has been conceived as an aid to self-purification and dedication of one's all to God.

### **II. Sanitary Service**

This is an essential and sacred service and yet it is looked down upon in society, with the result that it is generally neglected and affords considerable scope for improvement. The Ashram, therefore, lays special stress upon engaging no outside labour for this work. The members themselves attend to the whole of the sanitation in turns. New entrants are generally first of all attached to this department. Trenches are sunk to the depth of nine inches and the nightsoil is buried in them and covered with the excavated earth. It thus becomes converted into valuable manure. Calls of nature are attended to only at places assigned for the purpose. Care is taken that the roads and paths should not be spoilt by spitting or otherwise.

### **III. Sacrificial Spinning**

Today India's most urgent problem is the growing starvation of her millions, which is chiefly due to the deliberate destruction by alien rule of her principal auxiliary industry of hand-spinning. With a view to its rehabilitation in national life, spinning has been made the central activity of the Ashram, and is compulsory



for all members, as a national sacrifice. The following are the various branches of work in this department:

1. cotton cultivation;
2. workshop for making and repairing spinning-wheels, spindles, carding-bows, etc.
3. ginning;
4. carding;
5. spinning;
6. weaving cloth, carpets, tape, rope, etc.
7. dyeing and printing.

#### **IV. Agriculture**

Cotton for the khadi work and fodder crops for the cattle are the chief activities of this department. Vegetables and fruit are also grown in order to make the Ashram as far as possible self-contained.

#### **V. Dairy**

An attempt is being made to convert into a model dairy the Ashram dairy which supplies milk to the inmates. Since last year this dairy is being carried on in consonance with the principles of and with the pecuniary help of the All-India Cow-protection Association, but as an integral part of the Ashram itself. There are at present 27 cows, 47 calves, 10 bullocks, and 4 bulls. The average daily output of milk is 200 pounds.

#### **VI. Tannery**

At the instance of and with the help of the All-India Cow-protection Association, a tannery has been established for the tanning of dead-cattle hides. There is



attached to it a sandal and shoe-making department. The dairy and tannery have been established because the Ashram believes, in spite of the claim Hindus make to the protection of the cow, that Indian cattle will further and further deteriorate and ultimately die out, carrying man along with them, unless vigorous attention is paid to cattle-breeding, cattle-feeding and the utilization in the country of dead-cattle hides.

## VII. National Education

An attempt is made in the Ashram to impart such education as is conducive to national welfare. In order that spiritual, intellectual and physical development may proceed side by side, an atmosphere of industry has been created, and letters are not given more than their due importance. 'Untouchable' children are freely admitted. Women are given special attention with a view to improving their status, and they are accorded the same opportunities for self-culture as the men. The Ashram accepts the following principles of the Gujarat Vidyapith:

1. The principal object of the Vidyapith shall be to prepare workers of character, ability, education and conscientiousness, necessary for the conduct of the movements connected with the attainment of swaraj.
2. All the institutions conducted by and affiliated to the Vidyapith shall be fully non-cooperating and shall therefore have nothing to do with any help from Government.
3. Whereas the Vidyapith has come into being in connection with the swaraj movement, and Non-violent Non-cooperation as a means thereof, its teachers and trustees shall restrict themselves to those means only which are not inconsistent with truth and non-violence and shall consciously strive to carry them out.



4. The teachers and the trustees of the Vidyapith, as also all the institutions affiliated to it, shall regard untouchability as a blot on Hinduism, shall not exclude a boy or a girl for reason of his or her untouchability nor shall give him or her differential treatment having once accorded admission to him or her.
5. The teachers and the trustees of and all the institutions affiliated to the Vidyapith shall regard hand-spinning as an essential part of the swaraj movement and shall therefore spin regularly, except when disabled, and shall habitually wear khadi.
6. The language of the province shall have the principal place in the Vidyapith and shall be the medium of instruction. Explanation: Languages other than Gujarati may be taught by direct method.
7. The teaching of Hindi-Hindustani shall be compulsory in the curricula of the Vidyapith.
8. Manual training shall receive the same importance as intellectual training and only such occupations as are useful for the life of the nation shall be taught.
9. Whereas the growth of the nation depends not on cities but its villages, the bulk of the funds of the Vidyapith and a majority of the teachers of the Vidyapith shall be employed in the propagation of education conducive to the welfare of the villagers.
10. In laying down the curricula, the needs of the village dwellers shall have principal consideration.
11. There shall be complete toleration of all established religions in all institutions conducted by and affiliated to the Vidyapith, and for the





spiritual development of the pupils, religious instruction shall be imparted in consonance with truth and non-violence.

12. For the physical development of the nation physical exercise and physical training shall be compulsory in all the institutions conducted by and affiliated to the Vidyapith.

**Note:** Hindi-Hindustani means the language commonly spoken by the masses of the North- both Hindu and Mussalman-and written in the Devanagari or the Arabic script.

The Ashram school has so far sent forth 15 boys and 2 girls.

### VIII. Khadi Technical School

A separate technical school is conducted which prepares candidates for the Khadi Service on behalf of the All-India Spinners' Association. There are at present 33 students from various provinces under training. 205 students have so far availed themselves of this school. The curriculum is as follows:

#### SYLLABUS OF STUDIES

##### I. 21 Weeks' Spinning

1. To learn to spin with fingers only.
2. To learn the principles of twist.
3. To learn spinning sufficiently to be able to spin strong and even yarn as follows:

Time	Count	Yards	Strength	Evenness	Quality of Cotton
1 hour	6	250	50	80	Inferior
"	9	250	50	80	Inferior
"	12	300	60	90	Fair



”	16	300	70	90	Good
”	20	300	70	90	Good

and to finish the following quantities within the period set apart:

1 week, preparation and practice.

4 weeks, 6 counts 5 lb.

3 weeks, 9 counts  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lb.

4 weeks, 12 counts  $4\frac{1}{4}$  lb.

4 weeks, 16 counts  $2\frac{3}{4}$  lb.

4 weeks, 20 counts  $2\frac{3}{4}$  lb.

1 week extra.

—

21 [Total]

4. Testing correctness of spindle and its correction.
5. Spinning on takli.
6. To learn to guess approximately the count of any yarn.
7. To learn to find out by calculation counts of yarn.
8. To learn to reel properly the yarn spun on the spindle.
9. To know the names and measurements of all the parts of a spinning-wheel.
10. To learn to twist a strong *ma* out of one's own yarn.
11. To learn the principles of examining cotton.
12. To study Charkha Shastra and Takli Teacher.



13. To learn to spin on one's own provincial charkha.

## II. 7 Weeks' Carding

To go through the whole carding course:

- a) To learn to equip a carding-bow.
- b) To learn to adjust cushion.
- c) To learn to make the carding mat.
- d) To learn to distinguish various qualities of guts.
- e) To finish carding and rolling in following quantities within the specified period:

Large bow, 18 lb. in 2 weeks.

Medium bow, 22 ½ lb. in 3 weeks.

Bardoli and ordinary small bow, 8 lb. in 2 weeks.

- f) To be able to card and sliver as under:

Large bow, 3 lb, in a day of 8 hours.

Medium bow, 2 lb, in a day of 8 hours.

Bardoli and ordinary bow, 1 ¼ lb. in a day of 8 hours.

Practise with crude bows also.

## III. 2 Weeks' Ginning

To learn ginning to be able to gin 32 lb. of seed cotton in a day of 8 hours.

To gin 100 lb. of seed cotton after threshing seed cotton.

Foot gin to be taught.

Andhra process to be taught.



Process of untouchable spinners.

#### IV. Handloom Weaving

	Days
1 Piecing thread	2
2 Tape-making 20 yards including twisting yarn for warp and opening yarn for weft.	10
3 Bed-tape-making 75 yds. including all the processes as above.	15
4 Carpet-making.	45
Three <i>asans</i> without design 24" x 24" each including twisting yarn for warp and opening yarn for weft.	
Three <i>asans</i> with designs including all the processes.	
Two carpets on handloom 2 yds. x 30" each including all the processes as above.	

#### V. Pit-Loom

5 Weaving 6 count double thread coarse texture 20 yds. x 30" reed 5 dents per inch including soaking and drying yarn, winding bobbins, warping, sizing, piecing, etc. (doubling also).	20
6 Weaving 6 count double thread close texture 10 yds. x 30" reed 8 or 9 dents per inch including all the above processes (doubling also).	20
7 Weaving 9 count double thread close texture 10 yds. x 30" reed 12 dents per inch including all the processes.	10
8 Weaving 6 count single thread close texture 10 yds. x 30" reed 18 or 19 dents per inch including all the processes.	12
9 Weaving 9 count single thread close texture 10 yds. x 30" reed 18 or 19 dents per inch including all the processes.	12
10 Weaving 12 count single thread close texture 10 yds. x 30" reed 21 dents per inch including all the processes.	14



- 11 Weaving 16 count single thread close texture 10 yds. x 30" 15  
reed 24 dents' per inch including all the processes.

## VI. Fly-Shuttle

- 12 Weaving 12 count single thread ordinary texture 10 yds. x 42" reed 17 dents per inch. 72

Weaving 16 counts single thread ordinary texture 20 yds. x 45" reed 20 dents per inch.

Weaving 20 counts single thread ordinary' texture 10 yds. x 50" and 10 yds. x 54" reed 22 dents per inch including all the processes.

- 13 Weaving design cloth (yarn to be used of 1 to 6 counts).  
Drill 10 yds. x 30" 16 dents per inch 8

Honeycomb 10 yds. x 30" 12 dents per inch 8

Twill 10 yds. x 30" 16 dents per inch 8

- 14 Heald-making and reed-repairing.  
Twisting yarn 4 lb. 3

Heald-making from the beginning. 15

Reed-repairing 5

- 15 Colours  
Dyeing and printing in accordance with the publications of Dr. P.C. Ray and Sjt. Bansidhar Jain. Prominent foreign colours in printing and colouring to be included. 24

## VII. Carpentry

- 1 Making *aterans* of 3 varieties and tool-sharpening 30

- 2 Making *takli* cases and spindle-holders. 30

- 3 Making middle-size carding-bow, Bardoli and ordinary spindle and takli. 30



**Note:** Side by side with the course as above, classes are conducted in Hindi, accountancy, and the khadi essay and bulletins, and there are arranged besides lectures by members of the Working Committee of the A.I.S.A. as well as other leaders.

The average monthly food bill per student amounts to about 12 rupees.

#### MANAGING COMMITTEE

Since Ashadha Sud 14th, Samvat 1982 (24th July 1926) the Ashram has been managed by a Committee. This Committee is at present constituted as follows:

Sjt. Mahadev Haribhai Desai (Chairman)

” Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazeer (Vice-Chairman)

” Vinoba Bhave

” Chhaganlal Khushalchand Gandhi

” Narhari Dwarkadas Parikh

” Lakshmidas Purushottam Asar

” Ramniklal Maganlal Modi

” Chimanlal Narsinhdas Shah

” Narandas Khushalchand Gandhi

” Surendranath

” Chhaganlal. Nathubhai Joshi (Secretary)

The Committee is empowered to fill up any vacancy caused in it by resignation, death or otherwise.

Election shall be by a majority of at least three-fourths of the existing members.



The Committee shall have the right to elect two more members to it. The quorum shall be composed of at least three members.

The Committee shall have charge of the entire administration of the Ashram.

**Note:** In accordance with their express wishes Gandhiji and Kakasaheb are not on the Committee.

### **Members of the Ashram**

Members of the Ashram shall be such persons as believe in the object and obey the rules and regulations of the Ashram, and who shall be constantly endeavouring to observe its principles and be faithfully performing the duties assigned to them by the Managing Committee or by the Secretary on its behalf.

### **Members of the Committee**

Only such persons shall be eligible for membership of the Managing Committee, who are over 21 years of age, who have lived in the Ashram for not less than five years and who have pledged themselves to lifelong service through the activities of the Ashram.

## IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS

The Managing Committee has passed the following important resolutions:

1. Responsible workers of the Ashram, and also residents in the Ashram, whether temporary or permanent, shall all observe *brahmacharya*.
2. Persons desirous of admission to the Ashram shall have observed the rules of the Ashram in their own homes for the period of one year. The Chairman shall have the power of granting exemption from this rule in special cases.
3. It being undesirable that any further kitchens should be started in the Ashram, newcomers, whether single or married, shall dine in the common kitchen.



## To Guests

The number of visitors and guests has steadily increased. Such arrangements as are possible are made for showing visitors round the various activities of the Ashram.

Persons wishing to stay in the Ashram are requested to write to the Secretary for permission before coming, and not to arrive without having received an affirmative answer to their enquiries.

The Ashram does not keep a large stock of bedding and eating-utensils. Those intending to stay in the Ashram are therefore requested to bring their own bedding, mosquito-net, napkins, plate, bowl and drinking-pot.

No special arrangements are made for visitors from the West. But for those who cannot dine comfortably on the floor, an attempt is made to provide them with a raised seat. A commode is always supplied to them.

Guests are requested to observe the following rules:

1. Attend the worship.
2. Keep the dining hours shown in the daily routine given below.

### BRANCH

The Ashram has a branch at Wardha, which observes nearly the same rules, but which is independent of the Ashram in respect of management and finance. Sjt. Vinoba Bhave is the Manager of the branch.

### EXPENDITURE

The average monthly expenditure of the Ashram is Rs. 3,000 and is met by friends.





## PROPERTY

The Ashram possesses land, 132 acres 38 gunthas in area, of the value of Rs. 26,972-5-6, and buildings worth Rs. 2,95,121-15-6, which are held by the following Board of Trustees:

1. Sheth Jamanlal Bajaj
2. Sjt. Revashankar Jagjivan Jhaveri
3. " Mahadev Haribhai Desai
4. " Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazeer
5. " Chhaganlal Khushalchand Gandhi

The present population of the Ashram is as follows:

### Men

55	workers in the Ashram
43	teachers and students of the A.I.S.A. Technical School
5	professional weavers
<u>30</u>	agricultural labourers
130	Total

### Women

49	sisters in the Asrham
10	professional labourers
<u>7</u>	weavers
66	Total



Children

35 boys

36 girls

7 babies

78 Total

Grand Total: 277

DAILY ROUTINE

a.m. 4	Rising from bed
" 4.15 to 4.45	Morning prayer
" 5.00 to 6.10	Bath, exercise, study
" 6.10 to 6.30	Breakfast
" 6.30 to 7.00	Women's prayer class
" 7.00 to 10.30	Body labour, education and sanitation
" 10.45 to 11.15	Dinner
" 11.15 to 12.00	Rest
" 12.00 to 4.30	Body labour including classes
p.m.	
p.m. 4.30 to 5.30	Recreation
" 5.30 to 6.00	Supper
" 6.00 to 7.00	Recreation



- ” 7.00 to 7.30 Common Worship
- ” 7.30 to 9.00 Recreation
- ” 9.00 Retiring Bell

**Note:** These hours are subject to change whenever necessary.

C.W.M.G., XXXVI, pp. 398- 410



## APPENDIX III

### PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT

#### NOTIFICATION

New Delhi, the 5th March, 1931

The following statement by the Governor-General-in-Council is published for general information:

1. Consequent on the conversations that have taken place between His Excellency the Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi, it has been arranged that the Civil Disobedience Movement be discontinued, and that, with the approval of His Majesty's Government, certain action be taken by the Government of India and local Governments.
2. As regards constitutional questions, the scope of future discussion is stated, with the assent of His Majesty's Government, to be with the object of considering further the scheme for the constitutional Government of India discussed at the Round Table Conference. Of the scheme there outlined, Federation is an essential part. So also are Indian responsibility and reservations or safeguards in the interests of India, for such matters as, for instance, Defence, External Affairs, the position of Minorities, the financial credit of India, and the discharge of obligations.
3. In pursuance of the statement made by the Prime Minister in his announcement of the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 1931, steps will be taken for the participation of the representatives of the Congress in the further discussions that are to take place on the scheme of constitutional reform.
4. The settlement relates to activities directly connected with the Civil Disobedience Movement.



5. Civil Disobedience will be effectively discontinued and reciprocal action will be taken by Government. The effective discontinuance of the Civil Disobedience Movement means the effective discontinuance of all activities in furtherance thereof, by whatever methods pursued, and in particular the following: -
- 1) The organized defiance of the provisions of any law.
  - 2) The movement for the non-payment of land revenue and other legal dues.
  - 3) The publication of news-sheets in support of the Civil Disobedience Movement.
  - 4) Attempts to influence civil and military servants or village officials against Government or to persuade them to resign their posts.
6. As regards the boycott of foreign goods, there are two issues involved; firstly, the character of the boycott, and secondly, the methods employed in giving effect to it. The position of Government is as follows. They approve of the encouragement of Indian industries as part of the economic and industrial movement designed to improve the material condition of India, and they have no desire to discourage methods of propaganda, persuasion or advertisement pursued with this object in view, which do not interfere with the freedom of action of individuals, or are not prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order. But the boycott of non-Indian goods (except of cloth, which has been applied to all foreign cloth) has been directed during the Civil Disobedience Movement chiefly, if not exclusively, against British goods, and in regard to these it has been admittedly employed in order to exert pressure for political ends.



It is accepted that a boycott of this character and organized for this purpose will not be consistent with the participation of representatives of the Congress in a frank and friendly discussion of constitutional questions between representatives of British India, of the Indian States, and of His Majesty's Government and political parties in England, which the Settlement is intended to secure. It is, therefore, agreed that the discontinuance of the Civil Disobedience Movement connotes the definite discontinuance of the employment of the boycott of British commodities as a political weapon and that, in consequence, those who have given up, during a time of political excitement, the sale or purchase of British goods must be left free without any form of restraint to change their attitude if they so desire.

7. In regard to the methods employed in furtherance of the replacement of non-Indian by Indian goods or against the consumption of intoxicating liquor and drugs, resort will not be had to methods coming within the category of picketing, except within the limits permitted by the ordinary law. Such picketing shall be unaggressive and it shall not involve coercion, intimidation, restraint, hostile demonstration, obstruction to the public, or any offence under the ordinary law. If and when any of these methods is employed in any place, the practice of picketing in that place will be suspended.
8. Mr. Gandhi has drawn the attention of Government to specific allegations against the conduct of the Police, and represented the desirability of a public enquiry into them. In the present circumstances, Government see great difficulty in this course and feel that it must inevitably lead to charges and counter-charges, and so militate against the re-establishment of



peace. Having regard to these considerations, Mr. Gandhi agreed not to press the matter.

9. The action that Government will take on the discontinuance of the Civil Disobedience Movement is stated in the following paragraphs: -

10. Ordinances promulgated in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement will be withdrawn.

Ordinance No. 1 of 1931 relating to the terrorist movement does not come within the scope of the provision.

11. Notifications declaring associations unlawful under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 will be withdrawn, provided that the Notifications were made in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The notifications recently issued by the Burma Government under the Criminal Law Amendment Act do not come within the scope of the provision.

12.(i) Pending prosecutions will be withdrawn if they have been filed in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement and relate to offences which do not involve violence other than technical violence, or incitement to such violence.

(ii) The same principles will apply to proceedings under the security provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code.

(iii) Where a local Government has moved any High Court or has initiated proceedings under the Legal Practitioners' Act in regard to the conduct of legal practitioners in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement, it will make application to the Court concerned for permission to withdraw



such proceedings, provided that the alleged conduct of the person concerned does not relate to violence or incitement to violence.

(iv) Prosecutions, if any, against soldiers and police involving disobedience of orders will not come within the scope of this provision.

13.(i) Those prisoners will be released who are undergoing imprisonment in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement for offences which did not involve violence, other than technical violence, or incitement to such violence.

(ii) If any prisoner who comes within the scope of (i) above has been also sentenced for a jail offence, not involving violence, other than technical violence or incitement to such violence, the latter sentence also will be remitted, or if a prosecution relating to an offence of this character is pending against such a prisoner, it will be withdrawn.

(iii) Soldiers and police convicted of offences involving disobedience of orders - in the very few cases that have occurred- will not come within the scope of the amnesty.

14. Fines which have not been realized will be remitted. Where an order for the forfeiture of security has been made under the security provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code, and the security has not been realized, it will be similarly remitted.

Fines which have been realized and securities forfeited and realized under any law will not be returned.

15. Additional police imposed in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement at the expense of the inhabitants of a particular area will be withdrawn at the discretion of local Governments. Local Governments will





not refund any money, not in excess of the actual cost, that has been realized, but they will remit any sum that has not been realized.

16.(a) Moveable property, which is not an illegal possession and which has been seized in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement under the Ordinances or the provisions of the Criminal Law, will be returned, if it is still in the possession of Government.

(b) Moveable property forfeited or attached in connection with the realization of land revenue or other dues will be returned, unless the Collector of the District has reason to believe that the defaulter will contumaciously refuse to pay the dues recoverable from him within a reasonable period. In deciding what is a reasonable period, special regard will be paid to cases in which the defaulters, while willing to pay, genuinely require time for the purpose, and if necessary, the revenue will be suspended in accordance with the ordinary principles of land revenue administration.

(c) Compensation will not be given for deterioration.

(d) Where moveable property has been sold or otherwise finally disposed of by Government, compensation will not be given and the sale proceeds will not be returned, except in so far as they are in excess of the legal dues for which the property may have been sold.

(e) It will be open to any person to seek any legal remedy he may have on the ground that the attachment or seizure of property was not in accordance with the law.

17.(a) Immoveable property of which possession has been taken under Ordinance IX of 1930 will be returned in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance.



(b) Land and other immoveable property in the possession of Government, which has been forfeited or attached in connection with the realization of land revenue or other dues, will be returned unless the Collector of the District has reason to believe that the defaulter will contumaciously refuse to pay the dues recoverable from him within a reasonable period. In deciding what is a reasonable period special regard will be paid to cases in which the defaulter, while willing to pay, genuinely requires time for the purpose, and if necessary the revenues will be suspended in accordance with the ordinary principles of land revenue administration.

(c) Where immoveable property has been sold to third parties, the transaction must be regarded as final, so far as Government are concerned. Note: Mr. Gandhi has represented to Government that according to his information and belief some at least of these sales have been unlawful and unjust. Government, on the information before them, cannot accept this contention.

(d) It will be open to any person to seek any legal remedy on the ground that the seizure or attachment of property was not in accordance with the law.

18. Government believe that there have been very few cases in which the realization of dues has not been made in accordance with the provisions of the law. In order to meet such cases, if any, local Governments will issue instructions to District Officers to have prompt enquiry made into any specific complaint of this nature, and to give redress without delay if illegality is established.



19. Where the posts rendered vacant by resignations have been permanently filled, Government will not be able to reinstate the late incumbents. Other cases of resignation will be considered on their merits by local Governments who will pursue a liberal policy in regard to the reappointment of Government servants and village officials who apply for reinstatement.

20. Government are unable to condone breaches of the existing law relating to the salt administration, nor are they able in the present financial conditions of the country to make substantial modifications in the Salt Acts.

For the sake, however, of giving relief to certain of the poorer classes, they are prepared to extend their administrative provisions, on lines already prevailing in certain places, in order to permit local residents in villages immediately adjoining areas where salt can be collected or made, to collect or make salt for domestic consumption or sale within such villages, but not for sale to, or trading with, individuals living outside them.

21. In the event of Congress failing to give full effect to the obligations of this settlement, Government will take such action as may in consequence become necessary for the protection of the public and individuals and the due observance of law and order.

(Sd.) H. W Emerson.

Secretary to the Government of India.

*Young India*, 12-3-1931



## APPENDIX IV

### THE SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

#### LIST OF DELEGATES

##### British Representatives

The Right Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P.

(Chairman of the Conference)

The Right Hon. Wedgwood Benn, D.S.O., D.F.C., M.P.

<sup>1</sup> Major W.E. Elliot, M.C., M.P.

Mr. Isaac Foot, M.P.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. H. Graham-White, M.P.

<sup>1,2</sup> The Right Hon. Viscount Hailsham

Sir Robert Hamilton, M.P.

<sup>2</sup> The Right Hon. Arthur Henderson, M.P.

The Right Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, Bart., G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P.

The Right Hon. Sir William Jowitt, K.C., M.P.

The Right Hon. H. B. Less-Smith, M.P.

The Most Hon. The Marquess of Lothian, C.H.

The Right Hon. Earl Peel, G.B.E.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, M.P.

The Most Hon. The Marquess of Reading, G.C.B. G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E, G.C.V.O.

The Right Hon. Lord Sankey, G.B.E.

<sup>1</sup>The Lord Snell.



Major the Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P.

<sup>2</sup> The Right Hon. J. H. Thomas, M.P.

The Most Hon. the Marquess of Zetland, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.

### Indian States' Representatives

<sup>2</sup> Colonel His Highness the Maharaja of Alwar, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.

Lieutenant, Colonel His Highness the Nawab of Bhopal, G.C.I.E., C.S.I., C.V.O.

Lieutenant-General His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., G.B.E., K.C.B., A.D.C.

<sup>1</sup> His Highness the Maharao of Cutch, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.

Lieutenant-Colonel His Highness the Maharaj Rana of Dholpur, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., K.C.V.O.

<sup>1</sup> His Highness the Maharaja of Indore

<sup>2</sup> Colonel His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, G.C.I.E., K.C.V.O.

<sup>1</sup> Colonel His Highness the Maharaja of Kapurthala, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.B.E.

His Highness the Maharaja of Rewa, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I.

His Highness the Chief Sahib of Sangli, K.C.I.E.

<sup>1</sup> The Raja of Korea

<sup>1</sup> The Raja of Sarila

<sup>1</sup> Diwan Bahadur T. Raghaviah, C.S.I.

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel His Highness the Maharaja of Nawanagar, G.C.S.I., G.B.E.



<sup>7</sup> Major-General His Highness the Maharaja of Patiala, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., G.B.E., A.D.C.

Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, K.C.I.E.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Manubhai Nandshankar Mehta, C.S.I.

Nawab Sir Muhammad Akbar Hydari

<sup>3</sup> Sir Mirza M. Ismail, C.I.E., O.B.E.

<sup>4</sup> Colonel K. N. Haksar, C.I.E.

<sup>5,1</sup> Nawab Liaqat Hayat Khan

### **British-Indian Representatives**

His Highness the Aga Khan, G.C.S.I.

<sup>7</sup> Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, K.C.I.E.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Saiyed Ali Imam, K.C.S.I.

<sup>1</sup> Maulana Shaukat Ali

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Srijut Chandradhar Barooah

Mr. J. N. Basu

<sup>1</sup>Mr. E. C. Benthall

Sir Shah Nawaz Khan Gulam Murtaza Khan Bhutto, C.I.E., O.B.E.

<sup>1</sup>Mr. G. D. Birla

<sup>1,2</sup> Raja of Bobbili

Sir Hubert Carr

<sup>2</sup> Mr. C. Y. Chintamani



Captain Nawab Sir Muhammad Ahmed Said Khan of Chhatari, K.C.I.E., M.B.E.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Maneckjee Dadabhoy, D.C.I.E.

<sup>1</sup> Maulvi Muhammad Shafi Daoodi

Maharajadhiraja Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga

<sup>1</sup> Dr. S. K. Datta

Captain Raja Sher Muhammad Khan of Domell

Mr. Fazl-Ul-Huq

<sup>1</sup>Mr. M. K. Gandhi

Mr. A. H. Ghuznavi

Lieut.-Col. Sir Henry Gidney, I.M.S. (Retired)

<sup>1</sup> Sir Padamji Ginwala

<sup>1</sup>Mr. V.V. Giri

Sir Gulam Hussain Hidayatullah

Khan Bahadur Hafiz Hidayat Husain

<sup>1</sup> Sir Muhammad Iqbal

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. Rangaswami Iyengar

Mr. Bhaskarrao Vithojirao Jadhav

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Jamal Muhammad

Mr. M. R. Jayakar

Sir Cowasji Jehangir, K.C.I.E., O.B.E.

Mr. M. A. Jinnah

Mr. T. F. Gavin Jones



Mr. N. M. Joshi

Dr. Narendra Nath Law

<sup>1</sup> Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya

<sup>1</sup> Nawab Sahibzada Sir Sayed Muhammad Mehr Shah

Sir Provash Chunder Mitter, C.I.E.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. H. P. Mody

Dr. B. S. Moonje

Diwan Bahadur A. Ramaswami Mudaliyar

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Sarojini Naidu

Diwan Bahadur Raja Narendra Nath

<sup>1</sup> Sayed Muhammad Padshah Sahem Bahadur

Rao Bahadur A. T. Pannir Selvam

<sup>2</sup> Raja of Parlakimedi

Rao Bahadur Sir Annepu Parasuramdas Patro

Nawab Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum Khan, K.C.I.E.

Diwan Bahadur M. Ramachandra Rao

Mr. B. Shiva Rao

Sir Sayed Sultan Ahmed

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, K.C.S.I.

Sir Muhammad Shafi, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.

Sardar Sampuran Singh .

The Right Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, C.H.





Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, K.C.I.E.

<sup>2</sup> Rai Bahadur Kunwar Bisheshwar Dayal Seth

Sir Phiroze Sethna, O.B.E.

Dr. Shafaat Ahmad Khan

Begum Shah Nawaz

M. R. RY. Rao Bahadur Srinivasan

Mrs. Subbarayan

Mr. Shripad Balwant Tambe

Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, C.I.E.

Sardar Sahib Sardar Ujjal Singh

Sir C. E. Wood

Mr. Zafrullah Khan

In addition, U Aung Thin, U Ba Pe, Sir O. de Glanville and Mr. M. M. Ohn Ghine, who represented Burma at the First Session of the Conference, remained formally members of the Conference but did not attend owing to the formation of a separate Burma Round Table Conference.

*The Indian Annual Register*, 1931, Vol II, pp. 429-32

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Additional Delegate appointed for Second Session.

<sup>2</sup> Did not attend the Second Session.

<sup>3</sup> Also represents Jaipur and Jodhpur States.



<sup>4</sup> Represented H.H. the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir at the Second Session.

<sup>5</sup> Substitute Delegate for His Highness the Maharaja of Patiala.

<sup>6</sup> Did not attend the Second Session, but was represented by Mr. L. F. Rushbrook Williams.

<sup>7</sup> Did not attend the Second Session, but was represented by Nawab Liaqat Hayat Khan.

<sup>8</sup> Also represented H.H. the Maharaja of Bikaner after latter's departure.



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(Continued from front flap)

If you met Pyarelal, you would know at once here was a scholar and thinker at the highest level. Pyarelal's great volumes of Gandhiji's biography will for all time give him a place among the great biographers in any country or language. It is interesting to contemplate that a biographer and the person whose biography he wrote will live together for all time. Every thought and every word spoken or written by Pyarelal was in the service of Gandhiji.

I personally knew Pyarelal. He was to me a very lovable person. If you could succeed in getting him to open his heart, you would see nothing there but devotion and love for Gandhiji. I am happy that there is a "Pyarelal Foundation for Gandhian Studies and Research". Nothing could be a better memorial to him. It would also be a sister's homage to her brother who was everything to her. Brother and sister will go down the pathways of centuries in every book or writing on Gandhiji. May their names not fade from our minds as long as we live.

From *Foreword* by G. Ramachandran

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