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# INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

I now imagine that from the columns of Hercules  
to the Indian Ocean, I behold the nations of the earth  
recovering that liberty which they so long had lost.

MILTON



# INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

By

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## PREFACE

I have attempted in these pages to tell the story of India's struggle for freedom. It is an inspiring story, and I hope that some at least of the inspiration is communicated in the telling of it.

For more than a hundred and fifty years now, our people have fought, in varying ways and with varying fortune, against British imperialism. Britain imposed on India the first indisputably foreign domination, the first ineluctable mechanism of exploitation. Imperialism, however, breeds its own contradiction and is enmeshed ultimately in coils of its own making. Today we are witnesses, therefore, to imperialism's last-ditch battle for self-preservation. It is an effort that is doomed, and our people, along with others who bear its foul yoke, are preparing for the day when its death-knell will be rung.

India never submitted supinely to the alien intruder. Before even we had a bourgeoisie, and therefore also the wherewithal for a full-fledged national movement, we fought with whatever crude weapons were at hand. To this fight all contributed, Hindus as well as Muslims, though from time to time, as I have tried to show, there were in this effort distinguishable strands, predominantly Muslim or Hindu in coloration. To bring these strands together, to combine elements whose variegation was not and could not be eliminated even in the later and recognisably nationalist phases of our struggle for freedom, is the lesson of Indian history.

The foundation of the Congress sixty years ago is generally considered to mark the beginnings of our national movement. I have striven to draw special attention to its grand prolegomena. There is so much to be proud of in the story of our People's untutored and untiring insurgence against the foreign conqueror, a story which is only too sparsely told in books on the subject. And that story is rich in lessons for the later and militant phases of our national movement when it shed the early Congress's inhibited habit of praying devoutly for the

not very gilded lollipops from Britain's parliamentary confectionery.

I have appended bibliographical notes which will indicate the extent of my debt to writers on the subject. I must also acknowledge my debt to some at least among my friends who have given me assistance and encouragement in the preparation of this volume.

I wanted once to inscribe it to three friends—Syed Sajjad Zaheer, Bishnu Dey and Radharaman Mitra. Perhaps, however, a dedication will be invidious, and I propose to be content with offering them my deep appreciation of the help they have given me. I do not think I would have overcome my initial inertia if Anil de Silva and Phiroze Mistry had not insisted that I had simply got to write. I must also add a word of gratitude to Muzaffar Ahmad who gave me valuable advice, and to my wife who at every stage of my writing this book helped greatly by her understanding and her forbearance.

H. M.

*Calcutta,*  
*November 17, 1945.*

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In about eight weeks after publication, the first edition of this book sold out. It is pleasant to feel that my effort has found such appreciation. Kind friends have sent me suggestions and criticisms, of which I would certainly have liked to take advantage by preparing in a revised and enlarged form a proper second edition. Unfortunately, however, what happened was that in order to bring out as quickly as possible a second impression which was urgently called for, I decided to add a special postscript to cover more recent happenings, but breakdowns in the press and communal trouble in the city where the printing was being done caused such delay that yet another postscript had to be further incorporated. If I could have anticipated this delay in publication, I would have revised portions of the story and perhaps modified certain judg-

ments. Even as it is, however, I feel the book will continue to be helpful towards understanding the essentials of the great theme which I have presumed to expound. India's struggle is by no means over yet and history has its lessons which we must not ignore.

H. M.

*January 15, 1948.*

### *PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION*

The two earlier editions of this book, under the caption "India Struggles for Freedom", evoked a most gratifying response, and the demand for a reprint has persisted in spite of the book having been out of print for many years. It is to meet this demand that the present edition, with the title slightly altered, is being offered.

Not many changes have been made in the body of the book. The story of 1857 and its relevance to the national movement has been expounded with additional material and a re-arrangement of chapters. Towards the end, a concise resume' of post-independence happenings has been added in order to place the entire story of our freedom struggle in the perspectives of today.

As these lines are being written India passes through a period of great stress and strain. We are being, as it were, reminded that, no less than in the old days, we need the inspiration which has animated our struggle for freedom at its best. If something of that inspiration can be communicated by the pages that follow, I shall be more than content.

I am acutely aware of the shortcomings of this book. It falls far short of what I have wanted it to be, I have never had time for the thorough-going research needed for a model study. I wish I could recollect patriotic emotion in some tranquillity and so achieve an aesthetically satisfying essay. I seem fated, however, to write in the intervals of pre-occupation, and signs of hurry, and therefore of slackness, in the shape of printing and other errors, must mar some of its pages. Perhaps, however, I shall have

from my readers the generous indulgence I have had so far.

I wanted not to mention the names of friends who have helped me in this work. But I must express my gratitude to at least two of them. If Suren Dutt of National Book Agency had not insisted, this book would not have come out. And Tushar Chatterjee, who has sat with me in Parliament, has put in a lot of sheer hard work, including the drudgery involved in the preparation of the index.

H. M.

*New Delhi,  
November 4, 1962.*

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "THIS DEAR, DEAR LAND" .. ..	1
II. 'IN CLOUDS OF BLOOD AND RUIN ROLLED" ..	10
III. "WHY IN THE NAME OF GLORY WERE THEY PROUD?"	21
IV. "WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?" .. ..	35
V. "THE REVOLT OF HINDOSTAN" .. ..	50
VI. INDIA UNRECONCILED .. ..	63
VII. FIRST PHASE OF CONGRESS .. ..	81
VIII. "POWERS FROM HOME" .. ..	95
IX. "BLISS IN THAT DAWN" .. ..	108
X. "THESE PERJUR'D KINGS" .. ..	125
XI. "HINDU-MUSALMAN-KI-JAI" .. ..	142
XII. "THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT" .. ..	162
XIII. "ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH" .. ..	176
XIV. "I DESPISE YOUR FEAST DAYS" ....	194
XV. "THE FENCED CITIES AND THE HIGH TOWERS" ..	210
XVI. "THOU HAST GREAT ALLIES" .. ..	223
XVII. "THE WHEAT AND THE TARES" .. ..	254
XVIII. DARKNESS AND DAWN .. ..	270
XIX. JOURNEY'S END? .. ..	283
<i>Suggested Reading</i> .. ..	301
<i>Index</i> .. ..	306





This land of such dear souls, this  
dear, dear land,  
Dear for her reputation through  
the world,  
Is now leased out.

SHAKESPEARE, HENRY V

## CHAPTER I

### “THIS DEAR, DEAR LAND”

“TO the land of glory and of servility, to the land of impermanent empires and of eternally glorious thoughts, to the peoples who bid defiance to Time, to renovated India.” Such were the words with which Romain Rolland dedicated one of his books to our country and our people.

Someone once said that this country of ours has never in reality been loved. The Hindus, India's majority community, hug, in fond desperation, a philosophy which cares more for life hereafter than on this weary planet, and think little, if anything, of puny patriotic emotions. The Musalmans, for their part, look abroad for inspiration, to Muslim countries of the Near East, and reconcile themselves painfully to life in a country unhallowed by Islamic law and institutions. Between the two communities, India aches for her children's love and aches, it is said, in vain.

There is some truth, unhappily, in this diagnosis, but it does not contain the whole truth.

India, it goes without saying, could do with a lot more love and devotion and service from her children than has been her portion. And yet, in all fairness, it must be remembered that since the days of the *Ramayana*, where a famous couplet places the mother and the motherland high above the heavens in the son's estimation, love of country has never been in India an alien emotion. When, therefore,

in the nineteenth century, the impact of the West brought to India an atmosphere of dynamic change, there emerged a national movement of which we are and can well be proud.

India's storied past is an incomparable incentive to patriotism. Our history goes back to at least three millennia before Christ, a history of work and achievement and glory. It is thus the most natural thing in the world when an eloquent nationalist,<sup>1</sup> stung by the reproach of Western superiority, bursts into flaming rhetoric: "Great in the greatness of her adversity, splendid even in the misery and desolation of her age, radiant with a light which is not of this world, what cares she for the ephemeral dominance which the mushroom nations of yesterday perk and flaunt before her face?"

Even a hostile critic will admit that there must be something worthwhile in India's uncanny power of survival, which she has shared only with her neighbour China. Nowhere else in the world does one see a similar continuity in civilisation from times immemorial to the present day, a capability of adjustment to ever newer situations and a refusal to step out of the spotlights of history, as did Egypt and Achaemenia and Babylon and Assyria, and Greece with all her glory, and Rome with her legions, her cohorts, her eagles, her world-empire.

India's life, besides, has not been a mere longevity. It is not that India has eked out a sort of existence from period to period, a ready prey to whoever chose to grab her soil and lord it over her languorous people. And in spite of many of her champions emphasizing that "the gift of India is the gift of religion and philosophy and wisdom and spirituality", she has not always sought to lay her treasures only in heaven, fearful of the earth where moth and rust corrupt. Side by side with the predilection of her sages to try and see into the heart of things by methods of contemplation and introspection, there has been in India, from age to age, a vivid secular life, a spirit of objective curiosity. What we know of

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<sup>1</sup> Jitendralal Banerjee, *Western Civilisation*, in "Modern Review" (Calcutta), Jan. 1910.

Mohenjodaro and Harappa, of the *Brahmavarta* of the Vedic Aryans, of the heroic Age of the Epics when Indian manhood sought to stand foursquare to all the winds that blow, of the pulsating activity in every aspect of life, social, economic, political and religious, that followed in the wake of that great revolutionary figure in our history, the Buddha—fortifies the conviction that India did not, in her palmiest days, ignore and neglect the things that are of the earth, earthy.

It is not our purpose here to condense an outline of India's history, in the Hindu and the Musalman periods as they are called, as a preface to the record of India's struggle for freedom and self-expression in a more recent age. It will be pertinent, however, to recall some of the salient features of that history, in so far as they enkindle pride in our land and a desire to serve her and break her chains.

Ancient Hindus produced no historians in the proper sense of the term, but we have available the valuable testimony not only of a few indigenous chronicles but of Greek and Chinese and Arab writers and travellers, as well as the authoritative evidence supplied by epigraphy and numismatics. For many centuries, besides, we have the record of the precious remains of ancient monuments. These latter are not, unfortunately, found in the expected profusion in the north, partly because of the unpropitiousness of Nature, unlike in the regions of ancient civilisation in the Near East, and partly because of successive waves of iconoclastic invasions. In the south, where conditions were more favourable and the construction more recent, there remain stupendous memorials of artistic achievement. Ajanta and Ellora, Gangaikonda-Cholapuram and Mahamallapuram, Badami and Konarak and so many other centres continue to summon pilgrims of art to study and wonder at the work of anonymous masters who knew at one end the stars and the sunbeams and knew also the life and hopes of the folk.

"All men are my children, and just as I desire for my children that they may enjoy every kind of prosperity and happiness in both this world and the next, so I desire the same for all men." Thus spoke, in the third century B.C.,

Asoka, the Maurya, one of the noblest figures in the history of humanity, heir to an empire that extended from Peshawar to Mysore and from Gujrat to Bengal, his capital Pataliputra, larger by far than Imperial Rome in its heyday and run by a municipality which twenty-three hundred years ago even collected vital statistics.

India did not succeed in achieving in those days a permanent form of political unity or stability, and the Maurya Empire, like its successors afterwards, went the way of all flesh. It is unhistorical, however, to expect the kind of stability that can only come in a different socio-economic context. No great imperial system arose in India till the fourth century A.D.—except for the interlude of the Indo-Scythian hegemony which shed, especially in Kanishka's time, a transient gleam of glory over the decline of Buddhism—when the whole of Northern India was again united under the Gupta dynasty and southern kings were also compelled to do homage. In this period came Chinese travellers like the great Fa-Hien, who spoke of the "wealth, prosperity, virtue and happiness" they observed in the country. The Gupta dynasty, however, in spite of the gracious Hindu renaissance which developed under its beneficent auspices, did not last much longer than the Maurya had done, and its downfall was hastened by the cataclysm which India went through during the invasion of the Huns. The domination of these invaders from the Eastern Asiatic steppes did not long outlive Mihiragula, who was to India what Attila was to Europe, but there was chaos enough in the country, which was relieved, for a time, by another great figure in Indian history, Harshavardhana of Kanauj (606-48 A.D.). Hiou-entsiang, model of piety and scholarship, visited India in his time, spent fifteen years in the country and left an invaluable record of what he saw.

After Harsha, a pall seems to fall on north Indian history, except for the Palas, the Rashtrakutas and the Gurjara-Pratihars, dynasties with euphonious names and not a few brilliant, though short-lived, achievements to their credit. Notable also is the emergence, generally speaking, of the Rajput States, militantly Hindu but of dubious racial origin, and too rent by fierce clan jealousies

and a senseless competition in personal prowess to be able to set up a single paramount political organisation. Not before long would a brave new element enter significantly into Indian life, for in the first flush of ardent advance, the Arabs, metamorphosed by the evangel of Islam, went far and wide, and before the eighth century was out, had conquered Sind. The wealthy cities of Hindustan attracted, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, bands of Turkish, Arab and Afghan adventurers, shaken out of their torpor and their homes by the upheavals caused in the Near East by the rise of Islam. At last, in 1206, an independent Muslim State was founded in India, the Delhi Sultanate,<sup>2</sup> with which opens a new and significant chapter in our annals.

Hindu history, properly so called, continued in South India, where the culture, which we might call Dravidian for want of a better and scientifically more tenable name, remained, with its own literature and art and music, unaffected by the changes occurring beyond the Vindhyas. There, tribal organisation had been superseded at an early date, and when the first intrepid travellers from the so-called Aryan north negotiated the great barrier of Central India and reached the south, they found flourishing and well-organised communities in existence. The south had an enormous sea frontier, the waters girdling it on three elongated sides, and its economic life naturally reflected the phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> In the Indian Ocean its sea-farers were what the Phoenicians were in the Mediterranean. They carried on an extensive commerce, in pearls, pepper and spices, particularly with Egypt and Rome, and took active part, along with enterprising groups from north-eastern India, in the colonisation of regions like Java, Bali, Cambodia, Cochin-China. Southern dynasties, like the Pallavas, the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas, played a great role, and as patrons of architecture and sculpture have left a legacy that can never be forgotten.

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<sup>2</sup> An invaluable book on the period 1200-1550 A.D. is "Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan", by K. M. Ashraf. (Reprinted from the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. 1, 1935).

<sup>3</sup> E. B. Havell, "A Short History of India", p. 70.

Did kings and emperors alone, clothed in brief but strident authority, make up the stuff of Indian history? Is the story of our people in the far-off days only of principalities and powers? Is, in that case, the charge of "Oriental despotism", unbridled personal authority being the norm of government, that is, a charge against our people's civic character, founded on indubitable fact? Monarchy, of course, was the normal form of government, not only in India but everywhere else in the corresponding period. But there is evidence in plenty, pointing to the existence from early Buddhistic days, of free clans like the Kambhojas and Surashtras or the Lichchavis, Vrijjians, Mallas, Kurus and Panchalas, who had evolved something like a mechanism even of representative and responsible government.<sup>4</sup> The voluminous Indian literature on political science, of which Kautiliya's "Arthashastra" is the best known, makes it clear also that the king, however sacrosanct his authority, was in practice limited in his power by checks and balances, the injunctions of the sages, and the obligation of beneficent administration.<sup>5</sup>

In a communication to the *New York Daily Tribune*, dated July 22, 1853, Karl Marx discussed "the future results of British rule in India", and towards the conclusion of an amazingly brilliant diagnosis, remarked: "At all events, we may safely expect to see, at a more or less remote period, the regeneration of that great and interesting country, whose gentle natives are, to use the expression of Prince Saltykov, '*plus fins et plus adroits que les Italiens*', whose submission even is counterbalanced by a certain calm dignity, who, notwithstanding their natural languor, have astonished the British officers by their bravery, whose country has been the source of our languages, our religions, and who represent the type of the ancient German in the *Jat* and the type of the ancient Greek in the Brahmin."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See on this topic K. P. Jayaswal, "Hindu Polity", K. V. Ramaswamy Aiyangar, "Ancient Indian Polity."

<sup>5</sup> See Kautilya's "Arthashastra" (translated by R. Sharma Shastri), U. N. Ghosal, "Hindu Political Theories", B. K. Sarkar, "Positive Background of Hindu Sociology."

<sup>6</sup> Marx, *Historical Writings*, Vol. I, (People's Publishing House, Bombay, 1944) p. 603.

Our "great and interesting country" experienced a striking new phase with the Muslim conquest. From 1206 onward, a succession of Muslim rulers set up in Delhi, whence their hegemony radiated all over north India. In areas as scattered as Gujarat and Bengal, and in the Deccan also, Muslim dynasties were established. Apart from local and isolated resistance in many regions, it was the empire of Vijayanagar, the last stronghold of Hinduism, which carried on till the sixteenth century when it was overwhelmed by a powerful Muslim coalition.

Under Muslim rule, the country did not enter on an entirely new era in its history, but only on a stage in the great social development which had been going on since the first dawn of Indian history, and remains yet to be completed.<sup>7</sup> The new regime gave us new languages—Arabic and Persian, and in a little while, what was more important in the Indian context, Urdu; Muslim law, a *corpus* distinguished by great insight and acumen, was introduced, and a new ruling class emerged. The latter, whether Arab or Turk, did not appear too repulsive to the masses who had seen Huns, Scythians, Kushans, Greeks, Persians and Rajputs ruling over them. In Sind, for example, the Hindu *Jat* offered to help the Arabs, who were welcomed also by other outcastes. Islam, with its militant affirmations and suspicious of the sophisticated subtleties of the Hindu mind, made a big advance, sometimes with the sword but often without it; many a Hindu, beyond the pale and denuded of elementary social rights, must have found emancipation even in forced conversion. A new element was entering Indian life, which resisted absorption, or re-absorption, into the infinitely eclectic and elastic social system of Hinduism.<sup>8</sup>

Except, perhaps, for the first flush of invasion, when the infidel and the believer measured swords and shrank from no extremity of pious barbarity, Hindu and Muslim settled down quietly to live together, and as K. M. Ashraf points out, the iconolastic Muslims soon learned to admire and assimilate Hinduism and Indian customs to such a

<sup>7</sup> K. M. Ashraf, *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> K. S. Shelvankar, "The Problem of India" (Penguin) p. 15.

degree that Timur made it a religious justification for attacking the territory of the Muslim Kingdom of Delhi. After a generation or two, the Muslim ruling class ceased, indeed, to be foreign in any real sense. They were born in India, lived there all their lives and knew no other homeland. Babar who, in the intervals of founding the Moghul Empire, wrote his delicious "Memoirs", pined nostalgically for his native Khurasan, but he was the exception rather than the rule. The Muslim in India, unlike the British of a later day, was not a bird of passage, intent only on getting the maximum out of the country in the minimum possible time. An Akbar or a Sher Shah has, therefore, been hero to Hindu and Muslim alike. Indo-Muslim music, architecture, sculpture, painting are cherished by Hindu and Muslim alike. It is even a fact that an average educated Hindu to-day, when on travel bent, goes rather to Agra and Delhi with their many noble memorials of Indo-Muslim civilisation than to Amber and Udaipur, not too far away, where choice specimens of mediaeval Hindu art are extant. Islam has, indeed, been acclimatised, though not entirely absorbed, in hospitable India.

The land we love belongs thus to Hindu and Muslim alike. It is not the Hindu alone who has his shrines, his monuments and his sacred rivers strewn from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and cherishes his conception of a Bharatvarsha.<sup>9</sup> The Muslim also has made his contribution to Indian life, for the impact of Islam heightened the quality of Indian culture and did not, unlike the impact of the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, violate its integrity. It is no wonder, therefore, when a Muslim politician,<sup>10</sup> vehemently advocating a partition of India into Muslim and Hindu zones, claimed at the same time that he belonged to India in life as well as in death. It was a picturesque argument which this spokesman

<sup>9</sup> See Radhakumud Mookerjee, "Fundamental Unity of India" (London 1931); Bipin Chandra Pal, "The Soul of India" (Calcutta, 1934).

<sup>10</sup> Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, Muslim League M.L.A., at a Calcutta meeting, April 1941; it is interesting to recall Mr. Jinnah's statement that pan-Islamism was "a mere bogey".



made: when a Hindu dies, he said, his body is burnt and the ashes are thrown into the river to be carried by the current, Heaven knows where, but when a Muslim dies, he needs six feet by three of good Indian soil!

To this, our land, came as obsequious traders and then as stealthy conquerors, denizens of a distant island in North-Western Europe. They brought us misery and humiliation; they broke down the historic framework of Indian society; but in the process, unwittingly and in spite of themselves, they released forces that have forged, slowly but surely, a mighty weapon of people's liberation in our long-suffering country.

Spectre of Albion! Warlike  
Fiend!  
In clouds of blood and ruin  
rolled,  
I here reclaim thee as my own,  
My selfhood! Satan! Armed in  
gold.

BLAKE

## CHAPTER II

### “IN CLOUDS OF BLOOD AND RUIN ROLLED”

**T**O generations of Europeans, India was an *El Dorado*, a land over-flowing with milk and honey, and for centuries they dreamt and laboured, in order first to find the easiest and quickest route to the country and then to exploit its fabled treasures. And so they came in shoals, one race after another, Portuguese, Spaniard, Dutch, French and British, till by the middle of the eighteenth century the handwriting was fairly on the wall, and those who ran could see that fortune's crown was going to be worn by the last-named. Whatever hopes or misgivings remained were dispelled definitely in 1803, when the defeat of the Marathas left the British, as a matter of fact as much as of potentiality, the supreme power in India.

The acquisition of the “brightest jewel” in Britain's imperial diadem was not, however, the result of brilliant military and political operations. India on the eve of the British conquest was in an even more divided and dispirited state than was England on the eve of the Norman conquest. A country divided not only between pathetic potentates, Muhammadan and Hindu, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste, India was, as it were, the historically predetermined prey to subjugation. Britain chanced to be in the most promising position for profiting out of it all, and by a sequence of seamy proceedings,

spread her tentacles successfully over the length and breadth of an unhappy country.

There was a worm in the staff of Indian social organisation which put the seal on India's decline and fall. None can cavil at Indians boasting of their country's achievements in ages long past and seeking thereby to sustain their pride and self-respect. And achievement there had been in remarkable measure, as we have seen in a hurried summary in the last chapter. But the life of the people had remained practically unchanged from the days of antiquity to the end of the Moghul period. Trade and commerce had flourished; merchant-princes had prospered as early as the days of the Buddha; craft guilds had appeared in various places. But the village community, little self-enclosed republics of inertia, remained the norm of social organisation, right up to the days of the British conquest.

There was no lack of towns in pre-British India. Clive reported in 1757 that Murshidabad was "as extensive, populous and rich as the City of London." Murshidabad was not an exception; it was in the line of succession from Purushapura and Pataliputra, a line that the British impact ruthlessly extinguished. Beyond controversy and universally recognised is the high industrial development of India, relative to contemporary world standards, before British rule. The Indian Industrial Commission of 1916-18, certainly not inclined towards patriotic prejudice, opened its report with the statement: "At a time when the West of Europe, the birthplace of the modern industrial system, was inhabited by uncivilised tribes, India was famous for the wealth of her rulers, and for the high artistic skill of her craftsmen. And even, at a much later period, when merchant adventurers from the West made their first appearance in India, the industrial development of this country was at any rate not inferior to that of the more advanced European nations."

It remains a fact, however, that unlike in Europe, the cities in India did not develop to be the homes of a new bourgeoisie. Most of the trade and crafts were confined to the production and exchange of weapons of war and luxury goods for the nobility. The village community,

isolated and self-sufficient, continued to be the central feature of Indian life, and the cities were parasitic, hollow, inorganic agglomerations. If a section of the nobility and the small but wealthy class of traders who catered to the needs of princes and courtiers had undertaken to collect together groups of craftsmen in the towns and set up a large and organised form even of cottage industry, we might have seen in India prototypes of the "free towns" of Europe; we might have seen something like the social revolution which the European bourgeoisie brought about in their own interest; we might have been spared the sight in our country of a tragically immobile society. That, however, was not to be. The wheels of production in the myriad villages moved with uncanny monotony from age to age. Whatever was surplus was enjoyed only by the small and exacting class of exploiters. The State normally spent a minute proportion of its revenues on irrigation and public works, and devoted the rest to the maintenance of a cumbrous and expensive apparatus of administration, and to the refinements of luxury in which the few elect indulged. The majority of India's people lived at a low enough level of subsistence; the wick was ablaze at the top and the lamp of civilisation was said to be burning! Real, decisive progress was thus at a discount, for while spectacular prosperity was not unoften visible, society in general became derelict and for the overwhelming majority economic processes remained anti-diluvian.

"Every pearl in the royal crown is but the crystallised drop of blood fallen from the tearful eyes of the poor peasant." This was what Amir Khusrau wrote in the fourteenth century, in spite of his being a court poet.<sup>1</sup> Such, indeed, has been the common man's portion in all class society, in India as everywhere else, and in every age. In India, besides, the common man had lived for untold centuries under a regime which crumbled at the cruel touch of the stranger from Europe. Earlier invaders could not bring with them that basic transformation which now came with the British advent. As Karl Marx wrote

<sup>1</sup> Ashraf, *op. cit.* p. 205 n.

in one of his famous letters (June 10, 1853) on India: "All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. The loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu and separates Hindustan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history."<sup>2</sup>

The English merchants in India encountered a people whose military organisation was weaker and weapons more antique. More important, they knew at home a more advanced productive system and were therefore very much better equipped for the contest. Feudalism had virtually made its exit in Britain, and her economic structure was correspondingly stronger. The British, as Marx points out, were the first conquerors superior in essential respects and therefore above the lures of absorption or semi-absorption into the receptive texture of Indian society.

The British intruders, therefore, "broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning wheel", dissolved the foundations of Indian life by wrecking the village communities, and "by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society." They set up a new and avid landlordism, and "uprooted...the union between agricultural and manufacturing industry."

The point bears repetition that Indian technology, when the British encountered it, was by no means primitive, but it was unprogressive, and was bound up with a social order hostile to its development. Industrial skill in India, in the sense of a knowledge of the properties of minerals, metals and vegetables and of the technique of using them, was very far from being rudimentary. One thinks at once of textiles—calicoes and silks and muslins, numerous

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 592. It should be remembered that "Hindu" and "Hindustan" in Marx's sentence are synonymous with "Indian" and "India".

varieties of them, and some so amazingly fine that "a piece twenty yards long and one yard wide could be made to pass through a finger ring." Indian steel was the material used for the famous Damascus blades. Huge iron columns at Delhi and Dhar, and the beams in the Konarak temple prove the ability of Indian craftsmen to forge the metal into larger masses than European foundries could negotiate before the nineteenth century. A sixteenth century Italian noted that some of the ships built in the Deccan ports were larger than any in Europe, and ship-building continued a major industry till the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The British traders in India got an unexampled opportunity when disorder and unsettlement followed the fall of the Moghuls, and with alacrity they seized it. They were supported by their own government who saw in them the instrument for realising the bourgeois ambitions which the Industrial Revolution in England had opened up before their eyes. On Indian soil, they had extra-territorial rights, they had their own system of forts, had learnt all there was to be learnt about intrigue and coercion, and for over a century they had waged by hook and by crook a struggle for concessions and monopolies. They now increased their intervention in local tangles, especially in Bengal and Madras, came to control and bleed white one of India's richest regions, the Gangetic Delta, and by theft, bribery, confiscation and merciless taxation squeezed money and goods out of the people with a ferocious rapacity that has hardly a parallel in history. They came soon to discover how much more profitable sovereignty was than mere trade, "and like a tiger that had tasted blood pursued the hunt for territory with a new zest until, in the end, the whole continent lay under its dominion."<sup>3</sup>

The British conquest shattered the traditional basis of Indian economy and remained a foreign force, operating from abroad and drawing an enormous tribute. Its work

<sup>3</sup> K. S. Shelvankar, *op. cit.* pp. 146 *et seqq.*; this valuable book has been used so often that a special word of acknowledgment should be added here.

was, in the beginning and for quite some time, only a work of destruction. India was directly exploited by the foreigner and colossal fortunes were transmitted overseas. Irrigation and public works were allowed, with tragic callousness, to fall into utter disrepair. A mongrel variation of the English land system and the bad old criminal code of England were introduced. And the British manufacturer, to quote H. H. Wilson's words, "employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not have contended on equal terms", though the competitor had already been struck down and bled in a thousand wounds.

The decisive wrecking of the Indian economic structure took place with even more drastic effect from 1813. Between 1780 and 1859 British exports to India rose from £386,152 to £8,024,000, or from one-thirty-second part to one-eighth of the total export trade. "From 1818 to 1836 the export of twist from Great Britain to India rose in the proportion of 1 to 5,200. In 1824, the export of British muslins to India hardly amounted to 6,000,000 yards, while in 1837 it surpassed 64,000,000 yards. But at the same time, the population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants to 20,000." The Governor-General reported in 1834-35: "The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India."<sup>4</sup>

India's village system, built on "the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits", was demolished by methods which were predatory and by agents who had, as Marx said, "the vilest interests". Britain's "moneyocracy" adopted unspeakable methods to extend its territory on the foundation of Indian misery. "Has the bourgeoisie", Marx once asked in a flaming passage, "ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?" But it would be idle at the same time to shed tears over the throwing "into a sea of woes" of these

<sup>4</sup> For these and other quotations from Marx, and illuminating commentaries thereon, see R. P. Dutt's classic study, "India Today" (Gollancz, 1940) *passim*.

"idyllic" village communities. We must not forget that these communities "restrained the human mind within the smallest compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies." We must not forget their "stagnatory, undignified and vegetative life", and "the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed on them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all."

The "village community" system was a deadweight on all progress, and was in the last analysis responsible for India's downfall before the foreigner, in spite of the phenomenal advance she had registered in civilisation. Its dissolution, in spite of the cost in human suffering, was, as far as it went, a progressive event. And so, in the words of Marx, "whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution" in the social state of Asia.

So in a hundred years of protracted warfare after the battle of Plassey (1757), Britain reduced India to submission. Bloody and brutal wars of aggression were fought—in Bengal, on the plains of Northern India, in the Punjab, in the Carnatic and against the Marathas. There never was a time, till 1857, when some region or other in India was not clinging stubbornly to its independence and ready to fight for it. Indian armies showed conspicuous gallantry, in spite of the effete leadership that hampered them. The British could win few battles outright, but they won campaigns. The welter of anarchy into which India was plunged by Moghul decay facilitated the conquest, but the might and the guile of the wily foreigner could not itself have achieved victory if the structure of Indian society had not been such as virtually invited dissolution. In the war of all against all, the British, representing the most advanced bourgeois power, was successful.



"There is no end", wrote Lenin in 1908, "to the violence and plunder which is called British rule in India."<sup>5</sup> The original British "adventurers" combined trade and piracy, and the margin between trade and plunder in India, never very sharply drawn, grew from the middle of the eighteenth century conspicuously thin. "They forcibly take away the goods and commodities of the *Ryots* (peasants)," the Nawab of Bengal complained to the English Governor in May 1762, and contemporary English annalists like William Bolts give sordid details of exaction and injustice. Sir George Cornwall Lewis said in the House of Commons on February 12, 1858: "No civilised government ever existed on the face of this earth which was more corrupt, more perfidious and more rapacious than the government of the East India Company from 1765 to 1784." A House of Commons Select Committee reported in 1783 that "the whole exported produce of the country (Bengal), so far as the Company is concerned, . . . is taken away without any payment whatever." The Company which, in its sanctimonious Petition to Parliament in 1858, described its government as "not only one of the purest in intention, but one of the most beneficent in act ever known among mankind," reaped the fruits of its virtuous exercise of power in 1770 when a famine broke out in Bengal which "exceeds all description" and swept away at least one-third of the population of a lately prosperous province—a fact which, as Warren Hastings himself reports, did not deter the Company from collecting a larger revenue in 1771 than even in 1768. There was good reason for the rhetorician's exaggeration when Burke declared at Hastings' impeachment: "Were we to be driven out of India this day, nothing would remain to tell that it had been possessed, during this inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the orang-outang or the tiger."

Very soon after Plassey, the Bengal plunder began to pour into England, and the Industrial Revolution could now get well under way. In 1760 the flying shuttle appeared, and coal replaced wood in smelting. In 1764

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<sup>5</sup> Lenin, "Selected Works", Vol. IV (ed. 1943), pp. 297 et seqq.; "Inflammable Material in World Politics."

Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, in 1776 Crompton contrived the mule, in 1785 Cartwright patented the power loom, and foremost of all, Watt developed the steam engine. From 1694 to Plassey (1757), the progress had been relatively slow; between 1760 and 1815 it was very rapid and prodigious. Had Watt lived 50 years earlier, he and his invention might have perished together, might never have had the necessary incentive. The spoliation of India was the hidden source of accumulation which played an essential role in inducing the Industrial Revolution in England.

"I do not agree that India is an agricultural country; India is as much a manufacturing country as an agricultural." This is from the evidence at a parliamentary enquiry in 1840 by Montgomery Martin. With this can be compared the Governor-General Lord William Bentinck's Minute of May 30, 1829, where reference was made to "the gloomy picture of the effects of a commercial revolution productive of so much present suffering to numerous classes in India, and hardly to be paralleled in the history of commerce." The industrial devastation of India, by means especially of scandalously prohibitive duty and "the arm of political injustice", drove the Indian people to the pathetic expedient of primitive and overcrowded agriculture and to distress that no belated amelioration could possibly cure.<sup>6</sup>

It is in the context of these happenings that Karl Marx writing in 1853 on "the subject of India" gave prophetic vent to his indignation: "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked. They are the defenders of property, but did any revolutionary party ever originate agrarian revolutions like those in Bengal, in Madras and in Bombay? Did they not in India, to borrow an expression of that great robber Clive himself, resort to atrocious extortion, when simple corruption could not keep pace with their rapacity?

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<sup>6</sup> For the last three paragraphs I have drawn heavily from R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, and quotations given therein.

While they prated in Europe about the inviolable sanctity of the national debt, did they not confiscate in India the dividends of the *rajahs*, who had invested their private savings in the Company's own funds? While they combated the French Revolution under the pretext of defending 'our holy religion', did they not forbid, at the same time, Christianity to be propagated in India, and did they not, in order to make money out of the pilgrims streaming to the temples of Orissa and Bengal, take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the Temple of Juggernaut? These are the men of 'Property, Order, Family and Religion'!"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *op. cit.* pp. 603-04.

Why were they proud ? Because  
red-lined accounts  
Were richer than the songs of  
Grecian years ?  
Why were they proud ? again  
we ask aloud,  
Why in the name of Glory were  
they proud ?

KEATS

### CHAPTER III

#### "WHY IN THE NAME OF GLORY WERE THEY PROUD?"

**T**HERE is a myth, most sedulously circulated that British rule in India had been a pioneer of civilisation, that the White Man's Burden had been borne there by strong, silent, Kiplingesque heroes whose sole concern was to bring light to "lesser breeds without the law", and that the ignorant and backward Indian peoples, rent by racial rivalries and steeped in superstition, got whatever access they have to the fruits of civilisation, under the gentle tuition of these self-denying worthies.

It is against the background of this myth that mass movements in India have been pictured as the artificial handiwork of a few extremist agitators. British ideals of liberalism and democracy, one is told, were beneficently, though with all due caution, implanted in our ungrateful soil, but the "agitator", wholly unrepresentative of the "voiceless millions" (who, of course, were meant by Nature to be the perennial wards of the British ruling class), whipped up an unnatural and imagined discontent. "What is called the 'Indian Nationalist Movement'," the Simon Commission averred in an insolent passage, "directly affects the hopes of a very small fraction of the teeming peoples of India."

There is no such thing, however, as a "beneficent" imperialism. The real driving force which sends capitalist invaders to the four corners of the globe is neither love of alien peoples nor abstract missions of civilisation, but the very concrete hunger for super-profits.

Alongside their work of destruction and spoliation, the British in India accomplished, it is true, an objectively progressive role. It shattered the old economy, built railways, established a unified system of administration-cum-exploitation, and in the process, unwittingly, laid the foundations of a new stage.

Anglophilism was a major characteristic of our early nationalists, and they proclaimed from the housetops their debt to British ideas and institutions. Even Lala Lajpat Rai, considered in his time a firebrand "agitator", said in reference to the foundation of the Indian National Movement, that "the methods of the English Government in India, their educational system, their press, their laws, their courts, their railways, their telegraphs, their post-offices, their steamers, had as much to do with it as the native love of country."<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that in its early stages Indian nationalism drew copiously from English sources. Clauses from Magna Carta, extracts from Hampden's speeches, quotations from Denman's judgments, are found in Indian orations. English education gave the intelligentsia a common language for provincial intercourse, a common borrowed and half-assimilated culture, and a spirit of nationality through examples culled from Western history; it gave a strong impetus to attempts at reform not only in government but also in society, attempts which created in their turn a disillusionment with British rule, a sense that radical change, when change was badly needed, was incompatible with foreign domination.<sup>2</sup>

Lala Lajpat Rai's summary of the more notable unifying factors is important for the realisation that the material basis of Indian nationalism was laid, unconsciously, by

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<sup>1</sup> Lala Laipat Rai, "Young India" (New York 1916), pp. 114 ff.

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Pradhan, "India's Struggle for Swaraj" (Madras, 1930), pp. 12-17; K. M. Panikkar, "Indian Nationalism: its origin, history & ideals" (London, 1920).

British agency. None has written with greater insight on this point than Karl Marx who, in the articles quoted earlier, spoke of Britain's "double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating", and under the latter head pointed out that in order to develop the Indian market, which was very much in the British interest, it was essential to see that India functioned as a source of raw materials to export in exchange for manufactured goods forced down her throat as imports. This, in its turn, implied the development of railways, roads and at least some little irrigation. Wrote Marx:

"I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expense the cotton and other raw materials for their manufactures. But when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coal, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with the railways. The railway system will therefore become in India truly the forerunner of modern industry . . . Modern industry resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power."<sup>3</sup>

Marx, however, was by no means giving a testimonial to British imperialism as being a progressive force. He made it very clear that the "regenerating" role of British capitalist rule in India was confined only to its role in laying down the material conditions for the new advance. That new advance could only be achieved by the Indian people themselves. "The Indians" Marx wrote, "will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie till in Great Britain

<sup>3</sup> Marx, *op. cit.*

itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether."<sup>4</sup>

In a letter to Kautsky, dated September 12, 1882, Engels, Marx's dearest friend and collaborator, wrote: "India will perhaps, indeed very probably, produce a revolution . . . (which) would certainly be the best thing for us."<sup>5</sup> The question of imperialism had, indeed, been constantly in the minds of the fathers of Scientific Socialism, as Marx's articles of 1853 so eloquently testify. Marx and Engels knew the interrelation of freedom movements in every country, progressive or backward, knew that revolution in Europe—"this small corner"—would be "inevitably crushed . . . since the movement of bourgeois society is still ascendant on a far wider area", in happy hunting-grounds of empire in Asia and elsewhere. To recall their lessons is to bear in mind the incessant interrelation between the freedom of colonial countries and the freedom of the world, and vividly to feel that the Indian struggle has been part of the world movement of peoples' freedom.

It is important, at this point, to remember that India would not, of course, have remained in a perpetual wilderness if Britain did not play its "regenerating" role. The ruthless destruction of the foundations of the old order of society in India was the necessary precedent to a new advance. But it does not necessarily follow that without the British conquest such a process would just have been impossible. As a matter of fact, it should be thought equally likely that the old Indian society in decomposition, on the eve of the British conquest, was also on the verge of an elementary form of native bourgeois revolution, when the British bourgeoisie, already comparatively matured, overtook the scene and by characteristically ruthless methods set up its own domination. In actual historical record, the British were the agents of the necessary

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, R. P. Dutt, op. 92-105.

<sup>5</sup> "Correspondence of Marx and Engels" (London, 1934), p. 399.

destruction, but if the British had not turned up, history surely would not have stood still.

The second achievement—the laying of the material basis for the new order by the political unification of the country, the building of ports, railways, telegraphs etc., with the resultant emergence of modern industry—was less completely carried out, and catered primarily to the needs of British commercial and financial penetration. It was done on the basis of the most extreme exploitation and pauperisation of the Indian peasantry, and in unholy alliance with the most reactionary feudal elements who, but for British protection, would have long ago been swept away by the people's wrath. Imperialism combined the most archaic forms of feudal exploitation with the most advanced finance-capitalist exploitation, and thus necessarily retarded India's economic progress.

"Has the bourgeoisie ever done more?" Marx bade us remember, and also called upon us to achieve the third step, namely, to take possession of the new forces unleashed by Britain, "to throw off the English yoke altogether" either on our own resources or in alliance with Britain's "industrial proletariat", and to reach our goal of liberation.<sup>6</sup>

A crushing retort to the imperialist boast of being the beneficent instrument of Providence was given from the presidential chair of the Indian National Congress in 1903. The president that year was Lal Mohan Ghose, perhaps the country's greatest orator, who was no respecter of persons and no specialist in discretion, which was perhaps the reason for his being described at the Congress session by Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, with a subtle taunt, as "a political *yogee*". Lal Mohan Ghose spoke scathingly of the "Curzonoration *Durbar*", "a pompous pageantry to a perishing people" at the bidding of a paladin of Empire, and vigorously opposed the saddling on India of the expenses of the South African War and of wars, in which India was uninterested, against Tibet and Persia. He proceeded: "Lord Curzon said the other day that he saw the hand of Providence in the extension of British rule over distant and different

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<sup>6</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 272-73.



peoples, and went on to add that there was not a single man amongst his hearers who would not admit that it was for his good. Unfortunately, gentlemen, Providence is only too often appealed to.....Although there is not a man amongst us who is not sincerely loyal to the British Government, yet claiming the undoubted right of British subjects to criticise the acts of the Government, may we not respectfully ask our rulers—and in this connection I make no distinction between the different English political parties—may we not ask whether we are to believe that the policy which many years ago killed our indigenous industries, which even only the other day and under a liberal administration unblushingly imposed excise duties on our cotton manufactures, which steadily drains our national resources to the extent of something like 20 million sterling per annum, and which by imposing heavy burdens on an agricultural population increases the frequency and intensity of our famines to an extent unknown in former times—are we to believe that the various administrative acts which have led to these results were directly inspired by the beneficent Providence?"

Romesh Chunder Dutt, historian, administrator, Congress President, who held to the end of his days a sturdy belief in British justice and a hope that "Englishmen will see it fit and desirable to allow to the people of India some voice and some power, duly guarded, in improving their circumstances in life", could not help stating emphatically that "India's economic history proves the truth of J. S. Mill's dictum: 'The government of a people by itself has a meaning and a reality, but such a thing as government of one people by another does not and cannot exist. One people may keep another for its own use, a place to make money in, a human cattle farm for the profits of its own inhabitants' ". He once made a sober catalogue of the more spectacular Indian calamities over a sixty-year stretch and mildly suggested the remedy of political reform: "The year of the accession of the Queen (1837) was marked by a severe famine which desolated Northern

<sup>7</sup> "Congress Presidential Addresses, 1885-1916" (Natesan, Madras, 1918), *passim*.

India, and counted its victims by the million. The year of the Indian Mutiny (1857) was the commencement of the next twenty years marked by three great famines—the famines of the North-West, of Orissa and of Behar. The year in which the Queen assumed the title of Empress of India (1877) was the year of a more terrible famine in Madras, which swept away five millions of the people of Southern India. And the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee (1897) has, unfortunately, been marked in India by another widespread famine which embraces the greater part of India within its sphere, and which, in spite of relief operations, is likely to count its victims by the million. The years 1837, 1857, 1877 and 1897, are sad landmarks in the modern history of India—landmarks not of progress and prosperity but of desolation and disasters.”<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting also to recall some excerpts from the speeches and writings of Dadabhai Naoroji, commonly called the Father of the Congress. Presiding over its second session at Calcutta in 1886, he described the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 as “our Magna Carta, greater even than the charter of 1833”, and “engraven on our hearts”. ‘Loud cheers’ are reported, in the collection of Congress Presidential Addresses, to have greeted the statement, and were repeated when he added: “Every child, as it begins to gather intelligence and to lisp its mother tongue, ought to be made to commit it to memory”. In 1893, presiding over the Congress session at Lahore, he spoke in a different vein: “The greatest question before you, the question of questions, is the Poverty of India”. This great Indian who nursed all his life a pathetic belief in British fairplay, wrote also a classic of its time: “Poverty and Un-British Rule in India.” “The former rulers,” he wrote, “were like butchers hacking here and there, but the English with their scientific scalpel cut to the very heart, and yet there is no wound to be seen, and soon the plaster of the high talk of civilisation, progress, and what not, conceals

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<sup>8</sup> Romesh C. Dutt, “England and India” (London, 1897), pp. vii, viii, xi; “India in the Victorian Age” (London, 1903), Preface; “Economic History of India under early British Rule” (London, 1901). The two latter studies remain the best on the subject till the end of the 19th century.

the wound. The English rulers stand sentinel at the front door of India, challenging the whole world, that they do and shall protect India against all comers, and themselves carry away by the backdoor the very treasures they stand sentinel to protect.... It is useless and absurd to remind us constantly that once the British brought order out of chaos in India and to make that an everlasting excuse for subsequent shortcomings and the material and moral impoverishment of the country."<sup>9</sup>

Apologists of imperialism latterly did not speak in the flamboyant vein of a Winston Churchill with his impudent slogan of "We hold what we have", or a Joynson-Hicks who had said: "We conquered India by the sword and by the sword we shall hold it. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods." They took, as a rule, a subtler line, and wanted our people to regard imperialism as their guide and tutor in a gentle movement towards a vague and undefined self-government. English history, they told us, "taught the lesson of the gradual acquisition of popular liberties, English political thought as expressed by Burke and Mill reinforced that lesson."<sup>10</sup> Here, indeed, was a patronising claim to take Indian nationalism under the wing of imperialism as its own foster-child, and a pernicious and utterly unfounded theory of the beneficent mission of imperialism. These sanctimonious spokesmen of an ugly ideology hid such facts as that the democratic evolution of the modern age is not Britain's patented secret; that the great French Revolution, the American War of Independence, freedom movements on the Continent of Europe and not least of all in Britain's neighbour Ireland, and the twentieth century Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, have played a great role in generating and sustaining the militant consciousness of all colonial peoples; that the Indian renaissance in the early nineteenth century took no little note of the world current, as Ram Mohan Roy's enthusiasm for the principles of the French

<sup>9</sup> "Congress Presidential Addresses", *passim*; "Changing India", an anthology, edited by Raja Rao and Iqbal Singh (London, 1939), pp. 57-59.

<sup>10</sup> Rushbrook Williams, "What about India?" (1938), quoted in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 269.

Revolution testifies; that the notion that India's resurgence was impossible without benevolent British interposition is fatuous and false, as the example of China, never so completely cowed as India has been by foreign imperialism, proves to the hilt; and that the Indian National Movement arose, as it only could, from India's social conditions, from the social and economic forces generated in Indian life under the conditions of imperialism and its many-fanged system of exploitation.<sup>11</sup>

Indian nationalism has been no offspring of British rule, though certainly it emerged out of conditions established thereby. Tsarist autocracy set in motion forces which ultimately brought about the victory of the working class in Russia. Fascist Japan helped by its aggression to weld a firmer national unity of China's people. British rule in India, similarly, if it wishes to claim any "credit" for Indian nationalism, is entitled to what Tsarism can claim in relation to the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

Not only Conservatives, but Liberal spokesmen in the early days of British rule in India, never dared the view that they were training Indian people for self-government. "We know that India cannot have a free government. But she may have the next best thing—a firm and impartial despotism." "In India, you cannot have representative institutions." These are words of Macaulay, alleged "mentor" of Indian nationalists! John Stuart Mill, famed champion of representative government, was reported by Macaulay to have said before a House of Commons Committee that his recipe was "utterly out of the question" in India. That "liberal and 'radical' scoundrel", as Lenin described him,—John Morley—said in the House of Lords as late as 1908 *a propos* of the Minto-Morley Reforms: "If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I for one would have nothing at all to do with it." Lord Cromer, Anglo-Saxon authority on "Ancient

<sup>11</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 269-70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 269.

and Modern Imperialism" wrote in that fatuous volume (1910): "The idea (self-government for India) is not only absurd; it is not only impracticable. I would go further and say that to entertain it would be a crime against civilisation, and especially against the voiceless millions in India whose interests are committed to our charge." Cromer was a conservative, but he and Morley played variations of the same theme.<sup>13</sup>

Broken British pledges, as India knows too well, are strewn all over recent Indian history. In the early sixties of the last century, Sir John (afterwards Lord) Lawrence wrote in a letter to Sir Erskine Perry: "If anything is done, or attempted to be done to help the natives, a general howl is raised, which reverberates in England, and finds sympathy and support there. Everyone is, in the abstract, for justice, moderation and such excellent qualities; but when one comes to apply such principles so as to affect anybody's interests, then a change comes over them."<sup>14</sup> Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India, 1876-80, in a famous "confidential" letter to the then Secretary of State, wrote: "We all know that these claims and expectations (of complete equality and admission to offices, as promised by the Proclamation of 1858) never can or will be fulfilled. We had the choice between prohibiting them, and cheating them, and we have chosen the least straightforward course..... The Government of England and of India appear to me....unable to answer satisfactorily the charge of having taken every means in their power of breaking to the heart the words of promise they have uttered to the ear." Lord Salisbury in his downright fashion characterised British pledges to India as "political hypocrisy", and he was perfectly right.

Many examples can be given of this perfidy which not all the paid publicists of imperialism can whitewash. "I can see no period when India can dispense with the guidance and assistance of this small nucleus of the British Civil Service....the steel frame of the whole structure":

<sup>13</sup> Quotations in *Ibid.*, pp. 424-30.

<sup>14</sup> C. Y. Chintamani, "Indian Politics since the Mutiny" (London, 1939) p. 31.

this was what Lloyd George, the Liberal, said in a notorious 1922 speech. "No one had the right to tell the people of India that they were likely in any near period to attain Dominion Status": this was what Birkenhead, former Secretary of State for India, said in November 1929, a month after the Viceroy Lord Irwin's declaration that "the natural issue of India's constitutional progress" was "Dominion Status"! In December 1934, Stanley Baldwin boasted: "You have a good chance of keeping the whole of that sub-continent of India in the Empire for ever", and in 1935, broadcasting on the latest Government of India "Reforms", said categorically that the British in India "will have the duty and the means to ensure, if need be, that political power is exercised by Indian Ministers and Legislatures *for the purposes that we intend*".<sup>15</sup> The enforced participation of India in the imperialist war which broke out in September 1939, and the unprecedented and savage repression let loose on India in August 1942, and succeeding months, were all in line with imperialist Britain's policy. Its latest mouthpiece who, proved also to be nearly the last—the redoubtable Winston Churchill, had the audacity to boast that he had not become the King's First Minister "to preside over the liquidation of the Empire".

Defenders of imperialism in Britain had support also from certain "socialist" circles which Lenin once called "swinish". In this category can be placed Ramsay MacDonald, whose ghost hovered over Labour's colonial policy, and even "advanced" thinkers like the group represented by the *Glasgow Forward*. The line taken by the latter was subtler and had, therefore, to be resisted all the more. As a sample of its propaganda, can be quoted *Forward's* comments on June 9, 1928: "Hassan and Chandra are not robbed and starved because a British Viceroy sits in a lodge at Calcutta: were he supplanted to-morrow by the Maharajah of Burdwan or a Tata billionaire from Jamshedpur, the ryot would know no difference". The effrontery of this "socialist" sophistry is just too contemptible. The "socialist" is so "un-

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<sup>15</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 431-40.

compromising in his hostility to the Indian exploiters, and so concerned to warn the Indian masses against a united front with their own bourgeoisie for national liberation, that he forms a united front with his own exploiting class to maintain the subjection". (R. P. Dutt)

Let there be no mistake about it: Britain performed in India a service of destruction, but the construction, except in haphazard, unwilling, irritating patches, has been and will have to be the work of Indians themselves.

Like the theorists of the Austrian Empire, who proved to their own satisfaction that Italy was "a geographical expression", the worthy ideologues of British imperialism like Sir John Seeley have opined that "India is not a political name but only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa". In the guise of an objective presentation of facts, as in the "Survey Volume" of the Simon Report, which even Left-wing publicists in England praised to the skies, they sought to terrorise the well intentioned with the "immensity and difficulty" of the Indian "problem", (Rabindranath Tagore saw for himself in 1930 how "difficulties" many times more enormous were solved in the Soviet country and wrote caustically on self-satisfied British insistence *ad nauseam* on "difficulties" in India); they prated about the "complication of language" with as many as "222 vernaculars", the "basic opposition" of Hindus and Muslims, the "conglomeration of races and religions", "the rigid complication of innumerable castes", "congeries of heterogeneous masses", etc. etc. Their object of course, was crystal clear.

It is difficult to resist the temptation of quoting from an article on the Simon Commission Report, which appeared in the "Labour Monthly" (a periodical long banned in pre-independence India) in July 1930. The writer, R. Page Arnot, pointed out how, on the analogy of the Simon Report, an "impartial" survey of the United States might read somewhat as follows :

"The sub-continent of the United States is characterised by the greatest diversity of climate and geographical features, while its inhabitants exhibit a similar diversity of race and religion. The customary talk of the United

States as a single entity tends to obscure, to the casual British observer, the variegated assemblage of races and creeds which make up the whole. 'In the City of New York alone there are to be found nearly a hundred different nationalities, some of which are in such great numbers that New York is at once the largest Italian city, the largest Jewish city and the largest Negro city in the world. The contiguity of such diverse elements has been a fruitful cause of the most bitter communal conflicts. In the Southern States especially, this has led to inter-racial riots and murders which are only prevented from recurring by the presence of an external impartial power able to enforce law and order. The notoriety of rival gangs of Chicago gunmen and of the Chinese *hongs* in New York have diverted attention from the not less pressing problems presented to the Paramount Power by the separate existence of the Mormons in Utah, the Finns in Minnesota, the Mexican immigration up the Mississippi and the Japanese on the West Coast; not to speak of the survival in considerable numbers of the aboriginal inhabitants."

Luckily, the United States not being ruled by Britain, were spared the tragedy which Page Arnot's admirable parody of the Simon Report brings home to every Indian reader.

India, undoubtedly, has had to overcome a heavy heritage of burdens—survivals from the past, divisions, inequalities. But the British, pursuing unashamedly the policy of "Divide and Rule", have not helped her. And, as we shall see in the course of this volume, Hindus and Muslims, in spite of whatever divergences separate them, have fought, for they have had to fight, against British imperialism. The so-called "untouchables", figures about whom have been varied from time to time to suit the exigencies of imperialist propaganda, came also to know very well the nature of British solicitude for their real interests. In his presidential address to the All India Depressed Classes Congress in 1930, Dr. Ambedkar, most moderate of politicians, remarked: "I am afraid the British choose to advertise our unfortunate conditions, not



with the object of removing them, but only because such a course serves well as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India".

R. Palme Dutt, whose magnificent study, "India Today" (ed. 1940) has been copiously used in the preceding paragraphs, pricks the bubble of "this heroic mythology" of the "222 separate languages" which have so impressed non-Indian opinion. The 1901 Census gave a total of 147 languages, but in 1921 it increased to 222, though in the meantime there was no influx of new foreign populations and no addition of new or polyglot territory. 134 out of the 222 were said to belong, not really to India, but to the "Tibeto-Burman sub-family". It included such languages as Kabui, spoken only by four precious people, Nora by two, and Andro, in defiance of all philosophical conceptions of language, spoken by one individual, presumably to himself. These figures were culled from no less an authority than the Imperial Gazetteer of India (ed. 1909) ! Out of such material, which could easily be amplified, is constructed the imposing (1921) total of 222 languages. The 1931 Census reduced the total, however, to 203. "It is evident", writes Dutt, "that some of the speakers of the languages spoken by one, two or four persons, have unfortunately died in the interval, thus weakening by their thoughtless action the imperialist case against Indian self-government." The separation of Burma from India (1937) must have caused "a still heavier mortality", for some 128 languages were alleged to belong to Burma. When it suited imperialist policy to exploit more thoroughly a separated Burma, statistics had to give way and one heard homilies on the essential unity of language in Burma ! Imperialist ethics and statistics have indeed an equal elasticity.<sup>16</sup>

There were many and serious obstacles in the way of India's march towards freedom. But if obstacles existed, they were meant to be overcome, not by the dubious goodwill of the benevolent alien ruler, but by India's own resources of unity and understanding. Even the best of

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 253-67.

British administrators, like Sir Thomas Munro, who as early as 1824, had envisaged a time when "British control over India should be gradually withdrawn", believed, however, that India should be "maintained permanently until the natives shall in some future age have abandoned most of their superstitions and prejudices and become sufficiently enlightened to frame a regular government for themselves and to conduct and preserve it". He did not know, and could not in his time, that imperialism is a blight that bodes no good to subject populations. India knows it only too well; it has been burnt into her consciousness, and she has fought, and fights even today, as well as she can, for the realisation of her destiny outside the ambit of empire and exploitation.

Woe to the multitude of many  
people,  
Which make a noise like the  
noise of the seas;  
And to the rushing of nations—  
Watchman, what of the night?  
*From the PROPHETIC BOOKS*

## CHAPTER IV

### “WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?”

**I**N the one hundred years between 1757 and 1857, thousands of square miles were added to British possessions and millions of Indians subjected to British rule. It was not the first time that India had been conquered, but all her former invaders settled on her soil and ceased for all practical purposes to be alien. India had been conquered before, but it was in the way that the Normans conquered England and the Manchus overran China. She had never known a ruling class so permanently alien in origin and character; she had never known shackles of the sort that were now clamped down tight and hard upon her.

A nationalist movement could not, obviously, start in this country on the morrow of the battle of Plassey. Every student of history knows that a nation, in the modern sense of the word, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Lord Acton dated its origin in Europe from the time of the Partition of Poland (1772-93). England's insular situation and her peculiar economic exigencies and opportunities gave her a kind of priority in nationhood which she may be said to have attained in the age of Elizabeth, or at any rate not later than the time of the Stuarts. It was only, however, towards the latter part of the eighteenth century that the challenge of nationalism began

really to be insistent. France before 1789 was little more than a congeries of Gascons and Provençals and Bretons and Normans and others; the conception of "la patrie" was born during the feverish tumult of the Great Revolution. German nationalism was, in a sense, the product of the Napoleonic overturning; Fichte's famous "Addresses to the German Nation" followed the battle of Jena and preceded the War of Liberation. It was not very long before Italians and Slavs started, too, in quest of their national being. The nineteenth century was, thus, the century of nationalism, and soon the East began to feel the infectious glamour of the new idea.

In its broad sense, as we have seen before, nationalism in India was the product of the Western impact. Involuntarily, in the pursuit of its own interests, imperialism created the conditions out of which modern nationalism in India has emerged. There is, thus, a difference in quality between the way India fought her British invaders till 1857 or even two or three decades later, and the way she has fought since, when nationalism was a concrete and conscious emotion. It is essential, however, for us to recall that early struggle, for it left, inevitably, certain birthmarks on the later movements, and it disproves the thesis of the syrupy sentimentalists of Empire like Valentine Chirol, glibly mouthing adulation of empire builders who built "British greatness on Indian happiness".<sup>1</sup>

It is only fair to say that among the pre-Mutiny administrators were a few able and humane men like Bentinck and Munro and Metcalfe and Elphinstone. It is fair also to admit that, to a point, as mentioned before, British rule played then a progressive role and combated the conservative and feudal forces of Indian society. Unlike in the post-Mutiny period, the British were pursuing a policy of courageous reform, for example, in the ruthless annexation of decaying princedoms, the abolition of *Suttee* (in which progressive India, represented best of all by Ram Mohan Roy, vigorously collaborated), the abolition, though only in formal law, of slavery, the war

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine Chirol, "India Old and New" (London, 1921), p. 82.

on infanticide, the introduction (again with Indian collaboration) of Western education, and the freedom of the Press (which was later to be drastically truncated). There were a few administrators like Sir Henry Lawrence who by reason of his personal contact, won the people's respect and affection. Indian Reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and early reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj, naturally looked to the British with enthusiastic admiration as the standard-bearers of progress.

It is much too tall an order, however, to expect "Indian happiness" in those years. The background to British-sponsored progress was agrarian misery and industrial devastation.

In Bengal, the land revenue in 1764-65, the last year of administration by the Mogul's agents, totalled £818,000. In the first year of the Company's Dewani, 1765-66, the figure was promptly raised to £1,470,000. At the time of the establishment of the Permanent Settlement for Bengal (1793), the figure leaped to £3,091,000, and that "caricature of English landed property" largely brought in a new class of sharks and rapacious businessmen in place of the older, and usually more considerate *Zemindars*, most of whom were reduced to "distress and beggary".<sup>2</sup>

Bishop Heber wrote in 1826: "The fact is that no native prince demands the rent which we do". Dr. Francis Buchanan, who was responsible for the first careful "Statistical Survey", covering Southern India in 1800 and ensuing years, and Northern India from 1807 to 1814, noted the extremely onerous character of the new exactions which, he gathered from the "natives", were more than double the pre-British impositions. Even in the Punjab, where the British assessments reduced the former Sikh demands, the advantage to the cultivator was largely set off by the insistence on cash payment and the rigidity of collection. Dr. Harold Mann, surveying a typical Deccan village found a striking contrast between the land revenue in pre-British days and after British rule; the total revenue

<sup>2</sup> R. P. Dutt, *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 209-10, quoting from a report (1802) of the Collector of Midnapore.

for the village rose, he noted, from Rs. 889 in 1829-30 to Rs. 1,115 in 1849-50 and Rs. 1,660 in 1914-15.<sup>3</sup>

The East India Company's trade in those halcyon days was, of course, a euphemism for plunder. On March 30, 1772, Clive, hero of Plassey and of Anglo-Indian dreams, said in the House of Commons: "The Company had acquired an empire more extensive than any Kingdom in Europe, France and Russia excepted..... They treated it rather as a South Sea Bubble than as anything solid and substantial. They thought of nothing but the present time, regardless of the future: they said, let us get what we can today, let tomorrow take care of itself; they thought of nothing but the immediate division of the loaves and fishes". Lest Clive be considered an interested partisan, a quotation might be given from a House of Commons resolution (1784) which, in spite of lively jealousy in British mercantile and manufacturing circles of the Company's merry prerogative of spoliation, cannot possibly be brushed aside: "The result of the Parliamentary enquiries has been that the East India Company was found totally corrupted and totally perverted from the purposes of its institution, whether political or commercial;.....that countries, once the most flourishing, are reduced to a state of impotence, decay and depopulation". It is of course notorious that public works—roads and tanks and canals—which all former Indian administration carefully looked after, were allowed "to fall in dilapidation", and Sir Arthur Cotton, pioneer of modern irrigation in India, wrote in 1854: "The motto hitherto has been: 'Do nothing, have nothing done, let nobody do anything. Bear any loss, let the people die of famine, let hundreds of lakhs be lost in revenue for want of water, or roads, rather than do anything'".<sup>4</sup>

The "filthy witness" of Macbeth's crime could not be washed clean from his hand by "all great Neptune's ocean". All the special pleading of the Valentine Chirols and Rushbrook Williamses cannot deny the role of the

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 203-05, and references therein.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 111-12, 194.

Company—"holding a truncheon with one hand and picking a pocket with the other".

The early resistance to British administration often took forms that are not easily recognisable. For an instance could be mentioned the *dacoits*, glibly described as professional, hereditary robbers. Official records admit the formidable character of their organisation, which was reinforced by disbanded soldiers and homeless peasants. There is no doubt that these latter, in particular, had been forced by sheer want into a life of crime, (in the winter of 1772 "bodies of 50,000 men descended on the rice fields of Bengal"), but the way these *dacoits* moved suggest very strongly that they represented a real, though crude, urge of resistance to alien rule. We hear, from official sources, of *dacoits* devastating the huge district of Rangpur in 1772 "in bodies of 50,000"—probably an overestimate, but the figures are eloquent of large numbers. In 1773, four battalions had to be employed against them, after Captain Thomas, the leader of one detachment, had been cut off. Drastic penalties were prescribed for *dacoits* in 1772, every *dacoit* being condemned to death and his family to slavery, but it did not bring the end of the menace. In 1780, they started a fire which burnt down 15,000 houses in Calcutta. In 1783, a band of 3,000 strong attacked an escort conveying treasure in Jessore and carried it off; another leader of *dacoits* in the same district held out with 1,500 men and defeated the *sepoys* sent to arrest him. Throughout the whole of Cornwallis' administration, there were disorders in Birbhum and Bankura, described in detail in Hunter's "Annals of Rural Bengal". The town of Vishnupur was sacked in 1787 and was again taken a few years later by a robber band 1,000 strong. Lord Minto, Governor-General from 1807 to 1813, wrote a note (1810) on the subject of *dacoits* which is extremely significant and suggests that they were not mere robber bands: "They had established a terrorism as perfect as that which was the foundation of the French Republican power, and in truth the "Sirdars" or captains of the band, were esteemed and even called the "Hakim" or ruling power, while the government did

not possess either authority or influence enough to obtain from the people the smallest aid towards their own protection".<sup>5</sup>

When the history of India comes to be re-written, as it must be, a different verdict, very probably, will be given on the Pindaris, for example, alleged to have been professional freebooters who had risen to power with the decline of the great hereditary houses of India, and ravaged the country from the Jumna to the Coromandel Coast. It is significant that Lord Hastings, who has got the plaudits of historians for subjugating the Pindaris, had to make military preparations on a scale hitherto unknown in India. Against the redoubtable Tipu Sultan of Mysore, Cornwallis had assembled 30,000 men; against the still more redoubtable Marathas, Wellesley had brought together 60,000. But against the Pindaris, who were crushed in 1818, Lord Hastings summoned the armies of the three Presidencies, which, together with contingent and irregular troops, numbered 120,000.<sup>6</sup> Even the *Thugs*, universally reprobated as perfidious murderers, did not perhaps deserve the black paint with which they have been mercilessly daubed. An Allahabad scholar, O. P. Bhatnagar, read an important paper at the session (Calcutta, 1939) of the Indian Historical Records Commission, in which he pointed out, with a wealth of evidence, that the *Thugs* were expropriated peasants, not always given to the pleasant job of strangulation, and were suppressed with great ferocity on account, mainly, of the danger they represented to the ruling power. Except on such a hypothesis, it is difficult to understand the reasons why only one part of India, namely, the Konkan region in Bombay, was free from the "thugs" who, in the words of Colonel Sleeman who extirpated them, "swept unsparingly over the whole face of India, from the Sutlej to the sea coast and from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin".<sup>7</sup>

A rather bizzare phenomenon in the early days of

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<sup>5</sup> L.S.S. O'Malley, C.I.E., I.C.S., "Bengal, Bihar & Orissa under British Rule" (Calcutta, 1925), pp. 208-09, 237, 287-88, 303-308.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Dutt, "England and India", p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 346-50.



British rule was "a peculiar visitation"—the *Sannyasis*. Warren Hastings called them "the gipsies of Hindustan", "hardy, bold and enthusiastic to a degree surpassing credit", "the stoutest and most active men in India", who "inhabit or rather possess the country lying south of the hills of Tibet from Cabul to China". They are said to have wandered continually from place to place, "mostly naked", stealing the healthiest children and so replenishing their number, many of them merchants, and all held by Hindus in great veneration as pilgrims. They are known to have appeared in Eastern Bengal in 1763, when a large body infested the country round Bakarganj, and took possession of the English factory at Dacca. Five thousand of them are said to have been employed by Shuja-ud-Daula in his campaign against the British in 1764. It seems that they were driven out of Bengal by 1774, but scattered bands would appear from time to time, especially in the northern districts. In 1776, Major Rennell, the great surveyor and geographer, was seriously injured in a pitched battle with 800 *Sannyasis*.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult, when one reads the records, to believe that these people were just queer, semi-ascetic, kidnappers. Tradition in Bengal ascribes to them a Xenophobic role, and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great Bengali novelist, drew inspiration from their doings when he wrote "Ananda Math", (1883), in which figures the celebrated patriotic hymn, "*Bande Mataram*".

These popular upheavals were certainly no mere symptoms of a congenital anarchy. They imperilled British domination, and the government left no stone unturned to take steps accordingly. As Lord William Bentinck, the best perhaps of Britain's pre-Mutiny Governors-General (1828-35), described in an official speech with exemplary clearness, the purpose of Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement was to set up a bulwark against revolution:

"If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many other respects and

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 210-12.

in its most important essentials, has this great advantage at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British domination, and having complete control over the mass of the people".<sup>9</sup>

The most strident challenge that the British administration had to encounter in those days was the Wahabi movement, so called after its founder Abdul Wahab, an Arab who died in 1787. The creed which he preached aimed at restoring the early puritanical faith of Islam, which, he averred, had got an accretion of superstitious innovations. In preference to the four orthodox schools of Muslim theology and jurisprudence, Wahab advocated a return to the Holy Quran itself for constant guidance, and proclaimed *jihad* or holy war against the infidel as a solemn duty. This cult which had for some time considerable vogue in Mecca and provoked a controversy which raged with all the fire and passion of theological disputations, naturally caught the attention of Indian pilgrims to Mecca. One of these pilgrims, Saiyid Ahmad Shah, of Rai Bareli, is reported to have become a Wahabi while at Mecca, and proclaimed himself an *Imam*, that is, one of the periodic messengers sent by God to reform the faith. An Indian scholar, however, has pointed out<sup>10</sup> that his main doctrines were promulgated by Saiyid Ahmad even before he set out for Mecca, and there seems to be little evidence that before he left India, he had come in contact with Arabian Wahabis. More important, the Arab and the Indian movements are said to have differed greatly in important respects, for the Indian movement originated in the teachings of Maulana Shah Waliullah of Delhi and his school. Waliullah was a remarkable figure who preached a kind of vague anti-capitalism, championed the cause of the Muslims' material uplift and was largely responsible for the radicalism which has come to be the tradition of that great seminary of Muslim theology, the *Dar-ul-Alam* at Deoband.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in R. P. Dutt, *Ibid.*, pp. 211-12.

<sup>10</sup> M. Husain, "Origins of Indian Wahabism", in "Proceedings of Indian History Congress" (Calcutta, 1939), p. 1460.

In 1826, Saiyid Ahmad announced that the time had come for a holy war against the Sikhs with whom the Muslims had many a score to wipe off. Concomitantly there began various uprisings against the British also in Punjab and particularly in Bengal. The appeal was not only to the oppressed to unite against their exploiters, but also to the Muslims to unite for the defence of their religion. Saiyid Ahmad's amazing influence among the descendants of the Rohillas whom, fifty years earlier, the British under Warren Hastings had venally sought to exterminate, gave the British rulers a persistent headache. He had an enormous number of followers in Patna, and his journey towards Calcutta, along the course of the Ganges, was a veritable triumph. "In Calcutta, the masses flocked to him in such numbers, that he was unable even to go through the ceremony of initiation by the separate laying of hands". When he returned from Mecca in 1822, Bombay gave him a right royal reception. In his native Bareilly, he enlisted a "vast turbulent following", and among the mountaineers of the Frontier his call for a holy war produced phenomenal effect. A fanatical war followed, in which the Wahabis, supplied with recruits and money from Bihar and Bengal by a remarkable organisation, as well as from the frontier, overran the Sikh border and in 1830 captured Peshawar.

This success was one of the reasons which emboldened peasants in south Bengal to rise under a leader in 24 pergunas district, named Titu Miyan. It was a natural enough movement, for the exactions of government and the petty oppressions of the landholders, usually Hindu, had infuriated the peasantry. The insurgents entrenched themselves in a fortified camp, and beat back the English authorities. The whole of the country north and east of Calcutta, including three entire districts—24 Perganas, Nadia and Faridpur—lay at the mercy of the insurgents who wandered about in bands, three to four thousand strong (1831-32). Inevitably, excesses happened; a certain number of Hindus were forcibly converted; orthodox Muslims who disapproved of Wahabism were maltreated; and proclamations were issued declaring the end of British

rule. A village in 24 Perganas—Narikelbaria—was the fortified headquarters of Titu's movement. They could not resist, however, the superior might of the government, and when a powerful force was sent against them, they disdained the protection of the stockade and met the troops in the open plain. Titu himself was killed, at least 350 of his followers were taken prisoner and 140 of them sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. One of Titu's leading lieutenants was sentenced to death.

Saiyid Ahmad was killed in a battle against the Sikhs in 1831, but the spirit of his followers was kept up by the fiction that he was not dead and would re-appear to destroy all infidels. His successors, known as the Patna Caliphs, Wilayat Ali and Inayat Ali, then became leaders of the movement. The Wahabis held a stretch of territory along the Indus and established the so-called Rebel Colony at Sittana. When the British annexed the Punjab, they had to carry on the fight with the "fanatics", who continued to be supplied with reinforcements from the region of the Gangetic Delta. The movement's Central Propaganda office at Patna produced a very copious and very seditious crop of literature which had wide currency all over northern India. For a time, the Patna organisation defied the British authorities in that city, and though to a certain extent broken up by a succession of State Trials, continued to exert considerable influence all over Bengal.<sup>11</sup>

The Wahabi spirit continued to be alive for a long time afterwards in certain puritanical sects, such as "Ahl-i-Hadis" in Bihar and the more important "Farazis" in Bengal. The latter name is given compendiously to various sects in the first half of the nineteenth century, which were led by reformers deriving inspiration from the Wahabi creed. Chief among the reformers were Karamat Ali of Jaunpur, and in Bengal, Haji Shariat Ullah, son of a Faridpur weaver, who is said to have preached

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<sup>11</sup> Information regarding the Wahabi movement and its offshoot has been gathered mainly from W. W. Hunter's important book, "The Indian Musalmans" (London, 1871); see also in this connection, O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 709 ff., and W. C. Smith, "Modern Islam in India" (Lahore, 1943) *passim*.

in Dacca as early as 1828 and came to be considered, in preference to Titu Miyan, as the founder of the Bengal "Farazis". A little later, Shariat Ullah's son, Dudhu Miyan, gave an agrarian character to his propaganda and took a strong stand against the levy of illegal cesses by landlords. The "Farazis" were so called either because they dubbed themselves men of exalted faith (from "faraz"—"above"), or because they claimed to observe the "faraiz" or divine ordinances without the glosses of scholiasts and were to that extent non-conformists among Muslims. Apart from religion, they seemed to have some unusual views. Some of them, somewhat in the spirit of Winstanley's "Diggers" in 17th century England, argued that the earth was the gift of God, for whose service man had been created, and that true believers should not be in personal service of others but live by agriculture alone. Whatever the details of their faith, these "New Musalmans" as they called themselves, mustered in vast numbers in the districts east of Calcutta. In 1843, the sect had attained such dangerous proportions that it formed a subject of special enquiry by the government. Hunter quotes letters written by the head of the Bengal police, dated 1843 and 1847, in which it was reported that a single one of their preachers had collected some 80,000 followers.<sup>12</sup>

Somewhat like the later Khilafat movement, which was exuberantly and aggressively Muslim, the Wahabi movement was not exactly anti-Hindu. Sir Saiyid Ahmad who was later to devote his talents to the task of converting Muslims from their proud hostility to whatever the British represented, actually wrote articles specially pleading that the Wahabis were not anti-British, but anti-Sikh.<sup>13</sup> A few extracts from Hunter's book should be enough to establish their real character: "The presence of Wahabis in a district is a standing menace to all classes... possessed of property or vested rights... Indian Wahabis are extreme dissenters... Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchy men, so to speak, touching matters of faith; Communists and Red Republicans in politics... In 1827-30 it was against an

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, *op. cit.* pp. 45-46, 99; O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 716-717.

<sup>13</sup> W. C. Smith, *op. cit.* p. 9.

obdurate Musalman governor of Peshawar, quite as much as against the Hindu Sikhs, that their divine leader turned their arms. In the peasant rising around Calcutta in 1831, they broke into the houses of Musalman and Hindu landholders with perfect impartiality....The official description of the sect, fifteen years afterwards, "as a gathering of 80,000 men asserting complete equality among themselves, and drawn from the lower classes", would make any landed gentry in the world indignantly uncomfortable: "...Every Musalman priest with a dozen acres attached to his mosque or wayside shrine has been shrieking against the Wahabis during the past half century....The well-to-do Musalmans...had the whole vested interests of the Musalman clergy to back them, and by degrees drew out a learned array to defend their position...." A class struggle, necessarily anti-British, was going on as a matter of fact. It used a religious ideology, natural enough in pre-industrialist society: it did, inevitably, encourage communal attitudes, but it did not set lower-class Muslims against lower-class Hindus, it did not ask Muslims to think of their Muslim class enemies as friends.

The political "jihad" of the Wahabis emphasised the role of the Muslim community of India as a religio-political unit. This was to happen again in the time of the "Mutiny" of 1857 and the post-"Mutiny" phase of the Wahabi movement. At the same time, however, as W. Cantwell Smith significantly points out, the necessity of co-operation between Muslims and Hindus in face of a common enemy was emphasised equally strongly.<sup>14</sup>

"All India", Metcalfe wrote in 1824, "is at all times looking out for our downfall. The people everywhere would rejoice, or fancy they would rejoice at our destruction." In another State document he declared in 1814: "Our situation in India has always been precarious....We might now be swept away in a single whirlwind. We are without root...." In 1820, after the final victory over the Marathas and the Pindaris, he asked despondently: "Shall we ever contrive to attach the native population to our

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

Government? And can this be done by identifying the interests of the upper classes with our own? Is it possible in any way to identify their interests with ours? To all the questions, if put to me, I should answer No!"<sup>15</sup>

The Muslim insurgence was so marked, that in 1843, a Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, sent a warning to London and advised adoption of the "Divide and Rule" policy: "I cannot close my eyes to the belief that that race (Mahommedans) is fundamentally hostile to us and our true policy is to reconcile the Hindus." The peasants, Muslim or Hindu, had of course been always impartially repressed, but even the Muslim upper classes and the sections from which a middle class could emerge, came to be under a cloud. Indeed, Indian Islam in the nineteenth century had proclaimed a sort of war against Britain. The *mullas* even forbade, on religious grounds, the learning of the English language. A religious conservatism, accentuated by the fact that even in their heyday Muslims rarely engaged in trade or in the non-military professions, delayed the appearance of a real Muslim bourgeoisie in India. Meanwhile, the Muslims nursed with passion their injured pride at being ousted from the position of ruler, and with their hatred of the alien embittered by socio-economic grievances, fought gallantly but with pre-bourgeois weapons. They were defeated, but in the history of India's national movement, the spectacle of Muslims in those early days courageously trying to break the British fetters needs to be gratefully recorded.<sup>16</sup>

This militant defiance was one important result of the western impact, but another, and also important, result, in the context of our national movement, was the emergence of a gentler, but gradually more insistent demand, for Indian participation in British constitutional liberties. The commencement of the process is seen in the decades after 1813, when a rough-hewn peace and some little educational progress, chiefly in Bengal, focussed the Indian "grievance of being excluded from a larger share in the executive

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<sup>15</sup> W. W. Hunter, "The India of the Queen and other Essays" (London, 1908), pp. 54-55.

<sup>16</sup> W. C. Smith, *op. cit.* pp. 190-95.

government". So, in 1833, when the Company's Charter was renewed, Parliament laid down that "no native of the said Indian territories . . . shall by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the Company". There was no question yet of Indians getting an active share in the government of their country, but "this was the first substantial promise given to India that British rule was not to spell merely the unqualified dominion, however beneficent, of alien rulers."<sup>17</sup>

There followed a period of co-operation between British authorities who, for all the vileness of their motives, were pulling down the feudal and obscurantist forces in Indian life, and the rising Indian progressives like Ram Mohan Roy and the pioneers of the Brahmo Samaj. Himself a versatile Orientalist, Ram Mohan fought earnestly for the introduction of "a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, with other useful sciences". But the object of Macaulay and the other champions of an Anglicised education was "to train up a stratum of docile executants of the English will, cut off from every line of contact with their people",<sup>18</sup> and must have been anathema to Ram Mohan who was our first internationalist and progressive modern thinker. Ram Mohan gave a public dinner in Calcutta when the Spanish people got a constitution, and when on his way to Europe he saw in a port a French ship flying revolutionary flags, he insisted on visiting the ship to honour the people who preached the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. He must have noticed the contradiction in British policy—ruling tyrannically and yet opening before Indians the avenues to the stream of English inspiration and struggle, the golden stream of English writing, of the Miltons and Shelleys and Byrons.

The India of the common people, Muslim as well as Hindu, seethed with terrible unrest; they just could not take kindly to the foreign invader and his bizarre ways.

<sup>17</sup> Valentine Chirol, *op. cit.* pp. 75-78.

<sup>18</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 271-74, "Changing India," *op. cit.* pp. 16, 27.



The India of the rising *litterati* suffered on account of the frustration of their aspirations. It was to such an India that Canning was coming in 1856 as Governor-General. His immediate predecessor Dalhousie had pulled effete kingdoms down like ninepins, and had launched a programme of material progress. He did not know, however, the wound in the Indian heart; he could not heal it. Canning, before he left England, had a premonition of big movements germinating in India's troubled bosom. "I wish", said Canning, "for a peaceful term of office. But I cannot forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud may arise, no larger than a man's hand, but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst and overwhelm us with ruin." In less than a year of this speech the cloud arose and burst, when the great rebellion which British publicists have tenaciously called the Indian Mutiny,<sup>19</sup> a climacteric in our history, broke out in 1857.

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<sup>19</sup> In his edition (1958) of Smith's "Oxford History of India", Sir Percival Spear even distorts the title of Surendranath Sen's "Eighteen Fifty-seven" (New Delhi, 1957) and calls it "The Indian Mutiny"!

Not one, not one, nor thousands  
must they slay,  
But one and all if they would  
dusk the day.

WILLIAM MORRIS

## CHAPTER V

### "THE REVOLT OF HINDOSTAN"<sup>1</sup>

More stridently than the Boxer Rebellion in China (1900) which came on the heels of a conservative reaction and was a blind, but heroic, popular attempt to oust the "foreign devil" once and for all, or the earlier and rather vaguer manifestation of Chinese discontent with the Western impact in the T'ai Ping rebellion (1864-65), the Indian Revolt of 1857 was the country's desperate bid for freedom. It brought together an alliance of more diverse forces than had ever united in India against a foreign conqueror. This alliance had to be put down with implacable violence before British power could recover itself. In its nature, it was a massive, and often ferocious, upheaval against not only the political supremacy of Britain but also against the whole new order of things she had been importing into India. It was infinitely more than a military, and even mainly Muslim, insurrection which, on certain kinds of evidence, it might appear to be. Its seminal importance lies in the fact that it was the first, really large-scale popular outbreak against British rule, the first expression, indeed, howsoever crude in many respects, of India's urge for independence.

<sup>1</sup> This is the title of a poem, published contemporaneously with the 1857 rising, by the British Chartist leader, Ernest Jones. An edition was brought out in Calcutta (1957) by S. K. Acharyya and Mahadev Saha.

In the fifty years or more preceding 1857, there had been many untoward military incidents, and the British were beginning to feel with some trepidation that the sepoy's habitual faithfulness to his employer—loyalty to his "salt" as he put it colourfully—could not, in certain circumstances, be taken for granted. As early as 1764, it was found necessary to quell mutiny by what Sir George MacMunn described as the "usual" punishment, when thirty sepoys paid with their lives by being blown away from the guns. In 1806, a serious mutiny was brewing in the Madras army, partly, one learns, on account of the over-introduction of European-pattern clothes and accoutrements. In 1824, the 47th Bengal Native Infantry refused to march when it was ordered to go on active service in Burma, and after being severely punished by European artillery, had to be entirely disbanded. In 1844, no less than seven battalions of the Bengal Army broke into open mutiny over the question of allowances when garrisoning newly acquired provinces. The worthy Sir George, a typical imperialist war-lord, seems to regret, in his "Encyclopaedia Britannica" article on the Indian Mutiny, that "the sterner measures of the earlier days were not taken" in the instances just mentioned. Those "sterner measures" became common enough in 1857-58.

On the eve of 1857, there were in the Bengal Army some 23,000 British soldiers to 129,000 Indians. Lord Dalhousie had warned that the strength of British troops fell far short of what was necessary for the safety of British rule—a refreshing commentary on the theory of the White Man's Burden! Sir Henry Lawrence, farther-sighted than his compatriots, had pointed out that there would always be danger so long as the Army offered no career to satisfy the ambition of able Indians. This Army, wrote Sir Frederick Halliday, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in 1858, was "more or less mutinous, always on the verge of revolt, and certain to have mutinied at one time or another as soon as provocation might combine with opportunity."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 385-92.

Provocation came with the issue of what are known as greased cartridges. The cartridge used for the latterly adopted Enfield rifle had a greased paper cover and its end was bitten off before loading. The composition of the grease was, in the words of the "Imperial Gazetteer of India", a disastrous blunder which, though quickly remedied, was remedied too late. Muslim sepoys were persuaded that the cartridge paper was greased with pork lard, while Hindu sepoys believed that the obnoxious grease was made from beef fat. Both imagined that Government had insidious designs on their religion, a fear which Government's other activities, generally, did nothing to relieve. A recent order had required all fresh recruits to the Bengal Army to give an undertaking to serve overseas if required, and it was strongly resented on religious grounds. Oudh, the home of many of these sepoys, had recently been annexed without scruple. The railway and the telegraph were innovations suspected of having a mysterious and sinister object; there is no doubt that Government's purpose was not so much the progress in the condition of the people as facilitating the processes of civil and military administration. In such circumstances, the issue of the greased cartridges was a pretty incendiary proceeding.

At this time, too, half India was agape and looking for a portent. Prophecy, vague but persuasive had hinted that British rule, which dated in the Indian mind from the battle of Plassey in 1757, was doomed not to outlive its centenary. And in that tense atmosphere there took place the strange phenomenon of the *chapatis*. By some undetected but considerably organized agency the ordinary unleavened cakes of household use seemed to be passing round. A village watchman would arrive at a village and distribute a cake, saying, "To the north, the south, the east and the west", with injunctions to make four more and increase the snowball. No one knew why they came. The watchman only knew that someone had brought them. But everyone knew that in the past there had been similar appearances as a token of stormy events brewing somewhere. Recent research has cast doubts on the importance of this event; it has been suggested that perhaps it was a

primitive antidote against the outbreak of an epidemic.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt, however, that the *chapatis* making a tour of the country connoted to contemporaries the rumblings somewhere of a tempest.

Beginning at Barrackpore in the early months of 1857, the "Mutiny" properly got started on May 10, 1857, when the troops at Meerut rose and marched towards Delhi. With the proclamation of the ex-King of Delhi, Bahadur Shah, held prisoner by the British, as the successor of his fathers on the Mughal throne, the whole of the Bengal Army, from Calcutta to Delhi, had risen in revolt. A variety of factors enabled the British to crush the mutineers and their supporters in the civil population, but it was not before the first half of 1858 that the decisive Central India campaign could be completed. In this campaign, while the Scindia of Gwalior and the Holkar of Indore remained obdurately on the British side, there figured brave, picturesque leaders of the Marathas like the famous Tantia Topi, and the Rani of Jhansi, described by Britishers as "the best *man* upon the side of the enemy", her memory still fondly cherished by patriotic India.

It is beyond question that political reasons helped a mere mutiny of soldiers to spread among large sections of the people in northern and central India and converted it into a genuine political insurrection. Discontent and unrest were widely prevalent among the civil population, and Vincent Smith, Anglo-India's "official" historian, himself records that in several places the populace rose before the sepoys at those stations mutinied. The minds of the people everywhere were unsettled, and leaders of the insurrection issued proclamations dwelling on the bad faith and earth-hunger of the alien rulers. Lord Dalhousie's vast and rapid annexations seemed to prove that the East India Company disregarded treaties and the laws of the country in order to compass their selfish object of universal conquest. Deep-seated agrarian discontent all over

<sup>3</sup> "Encyclopædia Britannica" (14th edition), Article on the "Indian Mutiny" by Sir George MacMunn; cf. S. N. Sen, *op. cit.*

northern India, and specially in the Varanasi region, added fuel to the fire.<sup>4</sup>

"Eighteen Fifty-seven" was, indeed, the contemporary summation of the people's discontents, in the army and elsewhere. Some one has called sepoys "peasants in uniform", and when they rose, the country, by and large, rose too.<sup>5</sup> That, indeed was its strength, but its weakness lay in the lack of "sustained premeditation", of organised preparation on the scale that was needed. Outram has put on record his view that the affair of the greased cartridge "precipitated the mutiny before it had been thoroughly organized, before adequate arrangements had been made for making the mutiny a first step to a popular insurrection." P. E. Roberts, usually regarded as a sober student, thought that the mutineers tried "alike to revive the vanished glories of the Mughal Empire.... and to re-establish the power of the Maratha Peshwa," but that, for lack of proper preparation, the summoning back of such ghosts proved a failure. The fact, however, is clear that political reasons helped a mutiny of soldiers to spread among large masses of the people. It was not before June 1858 that in his Calcutta paper, "Hindoo Patriot", Harish Chandra Mukerjee wrote of "*the great revolution in India now in subsidence*"; the intrepid journalist's use of the italicized words was courageously deliberate and significant. Victory, however, was not cheaply won. "If Scindia joins the mutiny", Canning once wrote, "I shall have to pack off tomorrow." Apart from Britain's helpers, drawn almost entirely from the self-seeking autocracy and their hangers-on, reinforcements arrived from England, from Persia, from Singapore, to crush the rebellion. Organization and technical superiority naturally made itself felt,

<sup>4</sup> V. A. Smith, "Oxford History of India", p. 722; R. C. Dutt, "India in the Victorian Age", p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> S. B. Chaudhuri, in his important study, "Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies, 1857-59" (Calcutta, 1957), pp. 274-76, takes a "sample survey" of the "vast and sombre scene of rebellion" and concludes that "the so-called mutiny of 1857 has an internal consistency, only if we regard it as both a rebellion and a mutiny unmistakably combined...."

and the curse of feudality which lay heavy on India brought about the foreigner's triumph.<sup>6</sup>

At its height the rebellion gave the British power a real fright. The rebels then controlled no less than 100,000 square miles where lived some 38 million people.<sup>7</sup> August 25, 1857, when Emperor Bahadur Shah addressed his proclamation to the people—"as an Asiatic state paper", commented *Hindoo Patriot*, "its merits are of a high order"—saw the high watermark, as it were, of the revolt. "The nation", wrote the same remarkable journal, "had been roused and thoroughly prepared for a revolution", and Bahadur Shah's proclamation appealed to all sections of the people and set forth "political grievances" while it invoked also the Muslim *Shariat* and the Hindu *Shastras*. Disparagement of the role of Bahadur Shah, and even of the Rani of Jhansi, not to speak of other heroes of the revolt like the Maulvi of Fyzabad, Kunwar Singh and Nana Sahib, has been attempted by some plausible recent research.<sup>8</sup> Such disparagement, however, does not detract from the significance of their role. It is nobody's case that Bahadur Shah or the Rani of Jhansi had, on their own, with prior thought and subsequent consultation with mutinous sepoys, timed and organized their leadership of the revolt. If that was so, England could not have won. They had their own limitations, their own little worries and hopes and calculations. They were deeply mortified by growing British truculence which hit their interest and their self-esteem, but they could not, in the circumstances in which they were placed, proceed on their own to raising the standard of rebellion. They were overtaken by events that were rather overwhelming in their impact, and being psychologically prepared with

<sup>6</sup> S. R. Sharma, "The Making of Modern India" (Calcutta, 1951) pp. 45-47; Harish Chandra Mukerjee's writings in *Hindoo Patriot* are quoted from a selection of his articles edited by N. C. Sengupta (Calcutta, 1910).

<sup>7</sup> cf. A. Mehta, "1857: the Great Rebellion", pp. 26-31.

<sup>8</sup> Most notable among such denigrating work is R. C. Majumdar's "The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857" (Calcutta 1957), an important book in spite of certain perverse argumentations.

their injured animus towards the alien, they did not long hesitate to make up their minds, and once they did, Bahadur Shah, old and infirm as he was, wavered only fitfully, and the Rani never. Rightly, thus, they remain enshrined in India's memory.

As in all great upheavals, there was in 1857-58 a mixture of good and bad human material, but in any case it threw up not a few figures that command genuine respect like Ahmad Ullah and Tantia Topi, to name only two. The British did not underrate either the men or the movement; they took a political view of the happenings, *pace* their ugly treatment of the Emperor exiled to his death in distant Burma, the shooting, without any but purely *political* reason, of his two sons and a grandson, and the hounding to death of another scion of the Mughals, the worthy Firuz Shah. All this would not have happened if the British were dealing merely with mutineers who just for a while kept under duress a Bahadur Shah who was not really anti-British.

A perverse fit of mensuration has led a noted scholar to deny the all-India character of the "mutiny", the point stressed being that it did not involve more than a fourth of India's land surface and a minute proportion of the people. Such measurements are, in crucial moments of history, often rather irrelevant. Sen's sedate study tells us that the chief venue of the war "extended roughly from western Bihar to the eastern confines of the Punjab", but that areas like Bengal and Assam, Bombay and the Madras Presidency were by no means without "signs of restlessness". Further, Sen writes: "Nowhere did a revolt command universal support. There was a strong party of loyalists in the United States of America.....There was no lack of royalists in revolutionary France. In '15 and '45 the Stuart cause found no inconsiderable support in the British Isles. So long as a substantial majority sympathises with the main object of a movement it can claim a national status though universal active support may be wanting.... The mutiny became a revolt and assumed a political character when the mutineers of Meerut placed themselves under the king of Delhi and a



section of the landed aristocracy and civil population declared in his favour...."<sup>9</sup>

Sen, however, does not see the whole picture, though it seems he is well aware of it. Like Canning himself, who in his official despatches had described the struggle in Oudh as in a real sense a national uprising, Sen reaches the same view and does not hesitate to add that the rebels all over the country came from every section of the population, the only exception being the Parsis who formed a microscopic minority and lived far away from the scene of the revolt. He notes also that at all stages Hindus and Muslims were well represented in the rebellion. As a matter of fact, as Maulana Azad emphasised, Hindu-Muslim fraternisation was a feature of the rising, and "before the days of British rule, there was no such thing as the Hindu-Muslim problem in India."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it was not a mere rhetorical outburst when Disraeli said in the British House of Commons (July, 1857) that "the sepoys were not so much the avengers of professional grievances as the exponents of general discontent" in "a great and formidable rebellion".<sup>11</sup> There can be little doubt that the people in general were in sympathy with the rebels, that official papers clearly indicate the vastness of the upsurge, that even where agitation was not violent, there was deep unrest in the minds of the people, that rebel leaders like the Fyzabad Maulvi, Firuz Shah, Tantia Topi, the Rani of Jhansi, Rao Sahib and Kunwar Singh did not confine their activities only to their respective regions but moved to neighbouring areas to conduct the general war against the British. It was not without reason that Forrest, the historian of the mutiny, noted: "Among the many lessons which the Indian Mutiny conveys to the historian and administrator none is of greater importance than the warning that it is possible to have a revolution in which Brahmin and Sudra, Mahomedan and Hindu, were united against us."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sen, "Eighteen Fiftyseven" (Delhi, 1957), pp. 407-11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xvii-xix.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Chaudhuri, *op. cit.* pp. 259, 283, and references therein.

<sup>12</sup> G. W. Forrest, "Selections", ii. 150, quoted by Chaudhuri, *op. cit.* p. 282, also pp. 261-62, 267, 277, 279-81, 283.

Bengal is referred to by Surendranath Sen as "an undisturbed province", though he concedes that there, and even in Madras, "there was a feeling of impotent disaffection which delighted in every news of British reverse." Bengal, however, can hardly be termed "undisturbed", and in spite of the panegyrics of British rule which have emanated from our educated classes since 1857, it would be wronging our ancestors if we really think they welcomed servitude to Britain. In 1857-58, objectively, the situation was unripe for a full-fledged nationalist revolt. A bourgeoisie was then only in embryo and the landed gentry, whose interests Britain had by such instruments as the Permanent Settlement clasped closely to herself, supplied and sustained the new "literati". These latter were no doubt exhilarated by the winds that blew in 1857 but, since ruthless repression was practised by Government, generally preferred discretion to valour. It is of interest to find the Rev. Alexander Duff, greatly respected by educated Indians, observing that in Bengal "discontent lurks deeply in the hearts of millions", and that while "many, it cannot be doubted, are at the same time well enough disposed towards our rule, to talk of *attachment* would only tend to mislead."<sup>13</sup>

The "mutiny" began on the soil of Bengal, several months before Meerut emblazoned it. Even before Barrackpore, also in Bengal, where Mangal Pandey, the rising's first martyr, gave his life, Berhampore had, on 26 February, witnessed the first big stir in the army. Murshidabad, home of the humbled Nawabs, was nearby, and "there were thousands in the city," wrote Kaye, "who would have risen at the signal of one who, weak himself, was yet strong in the prestige of a great name". Kaye even adds: "All Bengal would have been in flames"<sup>14</sup>—but Nawab Mansoor Ali Khan sat cowed and cowardly, and the hour of opportunity flitted away. Then in March 1857, Mangal Pandey electrified not only the Barrackpore camp but the entire province. Britishers and Anglo-

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<sup>13</sup> Sen, *op. cit.* p. 411.

<sup>14</sup> Kaye, J. W., "A History of the Sepoy War in India", Vol. I. pp. 498-99.

Indians in Calcutta were caught in a terrible panic, not surely for purely subjective reasons. It was on 21 May, 1857 that the intrepid Harish Chandra Mukherjee wrote in *Hindoo Patriot*:

"How slight the hold the British Government has acquired upon the affection of its Indian subjects has been made painfully evident by the events of the past few weeks.... It is no longer a mutiny but a rebellion.... But the recent mutinies of the Bengal army have one peculiar feature—they have from the beginning drawn the sympathy of the country.. There is not a single native of India who does not feel the full weight of the grievances imposed upon him by the very existence of British rule in India—grievances inseparable from subjection to foreign rule."<sup>15</sup>

This is very important as it comes from a paper which had perforce to be on the right side of a very rigid press law (more timorous journals like *Hindu Intelligence* just wound up), and to say such things as that "any great disaster befalling the British would be a disastrous check to national prosperity". Support to the British Government, willing or no, was compulsory if the paper was to come out, but its comments indicate the mood of Bengal.

A British civil servant has left it on record that there was not a district of Bengal where, during the days of 1857, the administration was not directly in danger or in grave fear of it.<sup>16</sup> Whether it was Dacca or Chittagong or Comilla or Noakhali or Nadia or Jessore or Birbhum or Burdwan, panic prevailed among white men and officials. This is testified by the district gazetteers and the columns of newspapers like the "Englishman". If it was not for the massive help which, for instance, the Maharaja of Burdwan, like so many of his peers elsewhere, rendered to the British (as this same individual had done against the Santal insurrection of 1855), the situation in Bengal might very well have turned very different.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> cf. observations in Chaudhuri, *op. cit.* p. 259.

<sup>16</sup> Buckland, C. E., "Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors", Vol. I. p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> "Bengal District Gazetteers", ed. L.S.S. O'Malley (*Bankura*, p. 41; *Burdwan*, p. 38; *Nadia*, p. 32; and *passim*.)

It is this factor, indeed, the alliance of Britain with native vested interests, which saved her from within an ace of losing India. Certain landowners in Oudh or in parts of Bihar (like the famous brothers Kunwar Singh and Amar Singh) had made common cause with the rebels, but by and large, landlords and their magnified prototypes, the native Princes, stood by the British. If this was not the case, the Punjab also would have been in flames and the British expelled from upper India, in which case, no doubt, the south would not have taken too long in giving the foreign intruder the *coup de grace*. Canning openly admitted that "these patches of native government (as in Rewa, Chirkari, Rampur, Patiala, Kashmir, etc.) served as breakwater to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in a great wave". Lawrence, appreciating the services rendered by Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir and his successor, writes: "In 1857, it is no exaggeration to say that our position in the Punjab was to a great extent at the Maharaja's mercy.... Had Maharaja Gulab Singh turned against us, his ability, his prestige, his experience, would have produced a great reaction against us, to say nothing of the material means at his disposal."<sup>18</sup> No wonder, thus, that Karl Marx had written in 1853: "The native princes are the stronghold of the present abominable English system, and the greatest obstacle to Indian progress."<sup>19</sup>

When all this, and more, is realised it should be agreed that though nationalism, properly so-called, was yet to grip our people, the "mutiny" was as nearly a national revolt against slavery as was possible in the circumstances. Muslim and Hindu had joined in a mighty effort to break their chains. In the only way then open to her, India had registered her detestation of dependence. And so, in spite of years of indoctrination of Indian minds with the idea of Britain's regenerating

<sup>18</sup> cf. Dharm Pal, "Administration of Sir John Lawrence" (ed. 1952), p. 26, and references therein.

<sup>19</sup> Dutt, R. P. "India Today" (London, 1939), pp. 392-94.

work in India, the memory of 1857 has remained green with our people.

In the course of the struggle, where neither side gave or asked for quarter, vile excesses were committed by both. It is not necessary to draw a veil over them. It is history's responsibility, as Surendranath Sen has said impressively, "to record how war debases human character, how thin is the mask of civilization we wear, how readily the dormant passions are awakened, and Hindu, Muslim and Christian alike relapse into primitive savagery."<sup>20</sup> For us, besides, it is a duty to remember that the "retributive excesses" of imperialism were many times worse, as *Hindoo Patriot* courageously wrote on 6 May, 1858, than the "atrocities" of the rebels. It was on this account, above all, that the iron entered the Indian soul after 1857, and the agonies of subjection came to be more acutely, if too helplessly, felt. The partisanship of imperialist historiography is nowhere more clearly seen than here. Most British historians highlight the rebel's atrocities and shut their eyes to "the other side of the medal".<sup>21</sup> It is significant, for example, to recall that Lord Canning, then Governor-General, was taunted by European residents (who often enough in that period figured in humiliating "panic" scenes) and nicknamed "Clemency Canning". To his credit it must be said that the savage frenzy of his fellow-Europeans left him unmoved. "There is a rabid and indiscriminating vindictiveness abroad," he wrote to Queen Victoria in September 1857: "Not one man in ten seems to think that the hanging or shooting of forty or fifty thousand men can be otherwise than practicable and right." Once, when the outcry against him was especially bitter and vehement, he showed the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal some papers illustrating the brutality of some of the Special Tribunals. When pressed to publish them in answer to his calumniators, he is reported to have said: "No, I had rather submit to any obloquy than publish to the world what would so terribly disgrace my country-

<sup>20</sup> Sen, *op. cit.* p. 414.

<sup>21</sup> This is the title of a remarkably honest book by Edward Thompson (New York, 1926) which deserves to be carefully read.

men.”<sup>22</sup> All this, of course, is prudently omitted from what is served to the average reader of “mutiny” histories, and in Britain every child duly reads of the Kanpur massacre (and not the enormities which Neill perpetrated earlier) and is taught to be convinced of Oriental depravity.

There is a link, which to Indian eyes is plain, between 1857 and subsequent stages of our national struggle. “The Revolt of Hindostan”, as Ernest Jones, the British Chartist leader, termed the rising of 1857 was a trumpet-call which, transcending time and space, echoed whenever our people mustered their roll for a fight, whether in the last quarter of the 19th century or in the days of *Swadeshi* and revolutionary terrorism, or in 1920-22 and the grand sequence of movements culminating in 1946. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, once a staunch revolutionary and always a militant Hindu, called this upsurge, where Muslim and Hindu had joined together, the “War of Independence” of 1857. Much recondite obloquy has been poured on Savarkar for the book he wrote in his own image,<sup>23</sup> in the first fine careless rapture of near-mystic nationalism; this is not perhaps good history, but it is a good job Savarkar wrote it, for in spite of many faults it lay bare the ache in the Indian heart, and also the sense of glory, which 1857 represents. When in 1944-45 Subhas Chandra Bose’s “Indian National Army” adopted the 1857 rebel’s slogan of *Chalo Delhi* (“On to Delhi”), it was a stroke of nationalist insight, redolent of history, howsoever textbook pedantry and palefaced scholarship might cavil at it. Purged of its dross, the legacy of “eighteen fiftyseven” remains “a heap of treasure” which as a great English writer once said in quite another context, “neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and even our traitorship, if we are to become traitors to it, cannot sully.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Dutt, R. C., “England and India”, pp. 85-88.

<sup>23</sup> “The Indian War of Independence, 1857” (London, 1909; Indian reprint, 1947).

<sup>24</sup> “Rebellion 1857” (ed. P. C. Joshi, Delhi, 1957), and the special 1857 centenary number of “New Age monthly” (New Delhi, August 1957) might be consulted with profit.

Those who are loudest in our  
praise cannot forgive our victory.  
*HENRY LAWRENCE in 1853*

## CHAPTER VI

### INDIA UNRECONCILED

**T**HERE is a fairy tale that what happened in 1857-58 were the dying groans of obsolete Indian feudalism, that the better elements in India welcomed Britain's victory over the rebels, and that direct assumption by the Crown of Government conducted so long by the East India Company and the publication of Queen Victoria's Proclamation (1858) began a new and happy regime.<sup>1</sup> India however, was very far from being reconciled to Britain's yoke. In 1858 the noted Bengali poet Rangalal Banerjee wrote his hymn to freedom:

Who cares to live in the lowliness of subjection ?  
Who will wear on his feet the shackles of slavery ?  
It is hell, my friends, to be slaves for ages,  
For even a day of freedom gives taste of Heaven !

To evade censorship this had to be spoken by a 14th century Rajput, but it was unmistakably the voice of contemporary India. Thanks to the shake-up of 1857, developments in a recognisably more nationalist direction had begun steadily to flow. In everything significant that then happened in the country, even in the mood of religious revivalist movement, there was writ large in the post-1857 years a genuine ache for national self-assertion. And there was no lack of struggle, pretty nearly tooth-and-claw, to match this ache. Such were the peasant uprisings in

<sup>1</sup> A glib Statement of this view can be seen in the liberal H. A. L. Fisher's "A History of Europe" pp. 1018-23 (Chapter on British Rule in India).

the Deccan which started in the 1850's and led up to a widespread upsurge in 1874-75, the revolt of indigo workers in Bengal (1859-60) which for a time seriously threatened the administration, the *Wahabi* (and *Farazi*) movements which grim repression could not daunt and which, while originating in Muslim puritanism, did not fail to make the nationalist leader of a later day, Bepin Chandra Pal, feel the first baptism in freedom's fire when reading its account. To such matters our attention should now be turned.

In 1857, a *fatwa* or a decision of the doctors of Islam, in favour of "holy war" against the British was promulgated with solemn pomp. It was one of the many such decisions published during the long course of Wahabi disaffection.<sup>2</sup> For long, the Muslims felt, they were bearing the cross. Macaulay's Penal Code had displaced the Muslim criminal law. This was followed by the abridgement of the field of application of the *Shariat* or Muslim civil law to matters concerning personal relations such as marriage and inheritance, and then only to the extent permitted by the British. In 1837, Persian had been demoted from its position as the official language of the Courts and of general administration. Then came the abolition of the *Qazis* who, during Muslim rule, administered the *Shariat*. The Muslims thus found their prestige gone, their laws replaced, their cherished Persian shelved and their education shorn of its market value. The annexation of Sind and Oudh came to many of them as further palpable blows. And what seemed to be the culminating point of their distress was reached when upper-class Muslims suffered enormously by the extensive confiscation of property imposed upon them by the British as punishment for their suspected complicity in the Mutiny. Their pride was humbled, their prospects were nil, and their condition was one of great penury. They "suffered most at the hands of the British when the Mutiny was quelled." As a British official said later, "During and for long after the Mutiny, the Mohammedans were under a cloud. To them were

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Hunter, "India of the Queen", pp. 37-38.



attributed all the horrors and calamities of that terrible time." In the last section of his book on "The Indian Musalmans", Hunter quotes facts and figures to show that the Muslim educational system was ruined by the British who shut Muslims out "from official employ and from the recognised professions." This repression affected the upper and the "potentially middle classes" among the Muslims, but it meant, naturally, that the discontent of the Muslim masses, which the Hindu masses also shared, would not lack the leadership available at that time.<sup>3</sup>

During the troubles of 1857, the Wahabis were joined by a number of mutineers and tried, without success, to bring about a general frontier attack. At Patna, headquarters of the movement, the Commissioner promptly arrested the leaders of the sect, got some of them hanged, and disarmed all the citizens. This was an important step, for the neighbouring district of Shahabad was in the occupation of the rebels and Gaya district was overrun by bands of roving mutineers who were mostly Hindu but would gladly have joined hands with the Wahabis. The latter became active along the frontier again in 1858, but a punitive expedition ended in the destruction of Sitana and the expulsion of the "fanatics" from their villages.

Another Wahabi outbreak followed in 1863, supported by a coalition of frontier tribes which could be put down only after an arduous campaign which Hunter calls "retributive" and leaves us to imagine its horrors. That very year, at the conclusion of the Mulka and Sitana campaign, it was discovered that supplies both of men and money had been regularly forwarded to the "fanatics" from within British territory. Inquiries set on foot by the Punjab Government revealed that there existed an extensive conspiracy among a Muhammadan sect in Lower Bengal formed for the purpose of "aiding what was held to be a religious war against the British Government". This sect, it was found, had persistently and liberally supplied the hostile frontier tribes and communities with the means of

<sup>3</sup> W. C. Smith, *op. cit.* pp. 188-93, and references therein; Hunter, "The Indian Musalmans", *passim*; B. R. Ambedkar, "Pakistan or the Partition of India" (Bombay, 1943) pp. 31-32.

carrying on the war. The discovery was followed by the arrest of eleven persons, implicated in the conspiracy, who were tried at Ambala. Of these, five were residents of that district, five of the city of Patna, and the eleventh of Kumarkhali in the district of Pabna (now Nadia) in Bengal. They represented every rank of Muslim society; priests of the highest lineage, an army contractor and wholesale butcher, a scrivener, a soldier, an itinerant preacher, a house-steward and husbandman. Eight of them were condemned to transportation for life, and the rest to the last penalty of the law, which was modified on appeal to life transportation.

"The State Trial of 1864", Hunter writes, "proved as little effective as the retributive campaign of 1863 to check the zeal of the traitors." In 1865, the prime mover in the conspiracy, Ahmad Ulla, was sentenced to transportation for life. The authorities had been so incautious that the Wahabis had been described by high officials as "innocent and inoffensive bookmen", and Ahmad Ulla himself was in respectable government employment. Incidentally, the trials proved of some value to Patna, for a good deal of real and personal property belonging to convicted persons was escheated to government and was largely used for the city's amenities. Sir Herbert Edwards who was Commissioner at Ambala in 1864 said in reference to the trials at that place and at Patna, that they "disclosed or rather brought to judicial proof in courts of law, what had only been imperfectly known previously and most unaccountably pooh-poohed by the Bengal Government, viz., that for years the Wahabi followers of Saiyid Ahmad had spread a network of propaganda over the Bengal Province first to restore the purity of Islam in India; second, as a logical consequence, to undermine and subvert the infidel power of the English."

The removal of Ahmad Ulla did not put an end to Wahabi activities, for a few years later it was found that fresh preparations for a *jihad* were being made. In 1868, further trials were instituted at Patna, Malda and Raj Mahal. The head of the Bengal Police's detective department, J. H. Reilly, had been deputed to investigate the

matter and journeyed from Bengal to Peshawar. Many arrests were made, but the course which seemed wisest was to detain, under Regulation III of 1818, the leading preachers of sedition and principal emissaries from the frontier. The total number of detentions without trial under Regulation III is said to have been twenty-two. At the trials held in 1868, on charges of waging war against the Queen and similar grave counts, the usual punishment was transportation for life and forfeiture of property, the best known among the convicted being a rich banker and money-lender called Amir Khan, whose name has come to be associated with a leading case in Anglo-Indian jurisprudence.

After 1870, there is little to record about the political aspect of the Wahabi movement. Incidents would happen from time to time, with which the dread name of Wahabi would come to be linked by apprehensive officials. There was much suspicion, for example, that the murderer of Lord Mayo, Viceroy and Governor-General (Feb. 8, 1872), and earlier, of Chief Justice Norman (Sept. 20, 1871), belonged to that sect. A rich legacy of revolt was left, however, by the so-called Wahabi to Indian Musalmans.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main reasons why the Muslim wave of unrest appeared to recede about this time (only to come back in another form later on), was that the British Government changed its policy in regard to Muslims. Throughout, its "principle of Indian government" was *divide et impera*, and, generally speaking, it had encouraged the Hindu and repressed the Muslim in the period when the latter, injured in his vanity, had been driven to sullen resistance. Signs of calling a halt to that policy appeared about fifteen years after the Mutiny. In 1871, W. W. Hunter published, with government sanction, an important book on Indian Musalmans, often quoted before. He showed that Muslim discontent had been and was a dangerous proposition, criticised Government's earlier policy as mistaken and pleaded for a more lenient attitude to be

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, "The Indian Musalmans", pp. 84-100; O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 712-14; C. E. Buckland, "Bengal Under the Lieutenant-Governors", Vol. I, pp. 317-18, 432-35.

adopted towards them, especially in the matter of educational facilities. It is significant that he refers, with approval, to efforts by men like Moulvi Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur, Secretary of the Muhammadan Literary Society of Calcutta, who represented that section of upper class Muslims who had made their peace with the British Government, and secured the services of law doctors like Moulvi Karamat Ali of Jaunpur for laying down that Muslims were not bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen. It was just about this time also that official encouragement was given to Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan's endeavours towards a reconciliation of the British Government with the Muslim upper and middle classes. In 1875 he founded the Mahommedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, under the profuse patronage of the Government. "The better class of Mohammedans", Sir John Strachey wrote in 1894, "are a source to us of strength and not of weakness. They constitute a comparatively small but energetic minority of population, whose political interests are identical with ours, and who, under no conceivable circumstances, would prefer Hindu dominion to our own." Interested British patronage of Muslims, for as long as imperialist interest required it, now comes to be an unconcealed phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

In 1876, the British Parliament passed a Royal Titles Act, under the terms of which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in the following year. Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, declared at the time that it represented "a new policy by virtue of which the Crown of England should henceforth be identified with the hopes, the aspirations, the sympathies and interests of a powerful native aristocracy." Progressive Indians who had earlier applauded the British Raj making war on effete feudal principalities saw that the wheel of government policy, now turned full circle, was unashamedly reactionary. The strategy now took shape of using the "native princes", parasitic and corrupt, and hopeless tools of their British masters, as

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<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *op. cit.*; W. C. Smith, *op. cit.* pp. 195-96; Quotations: in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 407.

makeweights against the forces of freedom and progress. Government no longer encouraged social reform; rather, in the specious name of "non-interference with religious belief", zealously protected every reactionary survival and custom. Playing off Hindu and Muslim against one another, propping up decaying aristocracies and superstitions, British rule increasingly alienated progressive elements who had once rallied under its banner.

Government could not, in the very nature of things, contemplate anything but an alliance with "a powerful native aristocracy", for in the period after the Mutiny, there were in Indian Society, high or low, few so poor in spirit as to forbear from criticism, mild or strong, of the British administration. G. W. Russel, correspondent of the London "Times", reported soon after the Mutiny that there was "too much hatred and ill-feeling" between Indians and Englishmen, and feared that "perhaps confidence will never be restored." The only remedy that Government offered for military grievances was to make British surveillance tighter and Indian subordination more irksome. The proportion of Europeans and Indians in the Army was increased to be two to five. Artillery was to be rigidly in European hands. Indian troops were recruited largely from among the Sikhs and the Gurkhas who were on the British side in 1857-58; Central and Southern Indian recruitment was drastically diminished; a fictitious theory of the so-called "martial races" was engineered after the Mutiny.<sup>6</sup> The result was that the miscalled Indian Army became a mercenary body, devoid generally of loyalty to the country, in which no Indian could rise, till 1914-18, higher than *Risaldar* or *Subedar*, and was subordinate to the merest British subaltern. Obviously it did not leave India serenely happy with what imperialist scribes describe, with unspeakable presumption, as "the charter of India's life and liberties", the Queen's Proclamation of 1858.

From time to time our common people demonstrated how the coals of defiance glowed in their heart against the

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<sup>6</sup> On this topic, there is a lot of valuable information in Nirad C. Choudhuri's articles on "The Martial Races", in "Modern Review", July and Sept. 1930, January-February 1931.

invader. Even before the Mutiny, the Santals in 1855, like the Kol rebels in Chota Nagpur in 1831, rose in a body "to kill all money-lenders and policemen, expel traders and landlords, and fight to the death all who resisted them." It took the government nearly a year's time and the most obstinate fighting to pacify the tribe. In spite of special provisions made for the administration of Santal areas, landlords and money-lenders wormed their way into their ingenuous society and provoked a tumultuous outbreak again in 1871. On this occasion, there appeared among them a leader called Bhagrit, preaching a return to simple faith and abstemious living, but demanding—what was more important—that the land belonged to the Santals and they should pay no rent for it. Government adopted drastic steps, but it did not prevent recurrent revolt, the most notable instance of it being the Birsait outbreak of 1898-1900 when Birsa, a Munda leader, convulsed all Chota Nagpur by urging the tribes to assert their ancient rights over the land and the jungle, and expel all foreigners and rule themselves.<sup>7</sup>

It was not, of course, the aboriginals of India who alone fought to break their chains. From 1859 to 1861, for example, much of lower Bengal was in tumult on account of what is called the Indigo disturbances. Acts of violence which occasioned deaths, illegal detention of people, especially in stocks, with a view to recovery of balances alleged to be due from them, rioting and unlawful infliction of punishment, were some of the charges proved against the European planters as early as 1830. Most of the indigo production came from the holdings of peasants who contracted, too often under duress, to grow it on the lands they held from the zemindar. Hired labour was employed in the plantations themselves, but it was more profitable for the planter to get peasants to work on their own holdings and in the terms of a contract which they did not understand, to sell the indigo plant to the factories at a price even below the cost of production. In the 'fifties, the planters began to acquire zemindaries, and the same

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<sup>7</sup> K. K. Datta, "Santal Rebellion of 1855"; O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 690-702.

person now being both indigo manufacturer and zemindar could practise a double tyranny.

The peasant lost heavily if he had to cultivate indigo instead of rice. On top of this the system of advances paid by the planter enchained peasants in debt from one generation to another and was more or less a variation of slavery as House of Commons debates on the subject emphasise. The peasant, always at the mercy of the planter and his hirelings, never knew how much of his debt had been paid off by his labours, and his debt remained perennial. "Like Tantalus he always seems to be within reach of his object, yet he never secures it." The woes of peasants found vent in early Indian journals like the redoubtable "Hindoo Patriot", and in a powerful Bengali play, "Nil Darpan" ("Mirror of Indigo"). In 1860, the planters shamelessly secured some legislation guaranteeing their rights under their "free" contract with the peasants. Disturbances broke out; the appointment of an Indigo Commission did not assuage the people's anger, and an Anglo-Indian Journal, "Calcutta Review", wrote in June 1860 "The *ryot*, whom we are accustomed to class with the enduring helot or the Russian serf, whom we regarded as part and parcel of the land upon which he lived, the unresisting instrument of zemindars and planters, had at length been roused to action and has resolved to wear his chains no longer."

The Indigo disturbances did not burst without premonition in 1860. In the Indigo Commission Report (1860), there is a statement by the Rev. James Long, translator of "Nil Darpan", who was persecuted by fellow-Britishers for his championship of "native" interests, which bears quoting in full: "I myself, at the beginning of the Mutiny, read a pamphlet published by one of the courtiers of the King of Oude, in which he argues that the indigo planting oppression is as great in Bengal, as any system of oppression that has been alleged to be practised by the King of Oude; and that if the King of Oude is to be deprived of his kingdom on account of the oppression practised in his territories, the English government ought also to be deprived of Bengal on account of the indigo and other oppressions

they wink at.”<sup>8</sup> Some Christian missionaries had, indeed, anticipated the disturbances as early as 1856.

At last the cultivators struck against being required to grow a crop which meant a dead loss to them and irremediable oppression besides. The planters engaged mercenaries to fight for them, mostly discharged soldiers and sailors from Calcutta. One of their spokesmen in Parliament said that the very existence of Europeans was at stake, and the *ryots* were threatening to withhold payment both to the Government and the landlords. The Government soon sent troops and gunboats to terrorise the countryside. None could deny the justice of the peasants' claims, and yet the State, true to its role as the executive committee of the capitalist class, mobilised its resources against them.

In the autumn of 1860, things looked pretty critical. “I assure you”, wrote Lord Canning to the Secretary of State, “that for about a week it caused me more anxiety than I have had since the days of Delhi . . . I felt that a shot fired in anger or fear by one foolish planter might put every factory in Lower Bengal in flames.” The rebellion, however, was not a mere unorganised jacquerie, and it is good to note the impression of fear which “their organisation and capacity for combined and simultaneous action” produced on the mind of Sir J. P. Grant, then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Passing through Nadia, Jessore and south Pabna, for some 30 or 40 miles down the rivers Kumar and Kaliganga, he found on both banks, as on two sides of a street, tens of thousands of men, women and children, asking for justice. He added, significantly that there was an organisation about them which led him to apprehend that if justice were not granted, it would be taken.

The peasantry in one part alone of the country could not hold out indefinitely, and the Government and capitalists working together crushed their revolt. Its echoes, however, continued to be heard till late in the century. And in any case, a death-blow had been dealt to the evil

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Abhay Charan Das, “The Indian Ryott” (Howrah, 1881) p. 295; this rare and invaluable book badly needs reprinting.



system of indigo cultivation in Bengal, which the later German invention of synthetic dye further rendered unprofitable. The Bengal peasant braved tyranny and death during those scarcely recorded years and left to posterity a splendid revolutionary legacy.<sup>9</sup>

It is in the context of such happenings that we can understand the British Government's cherished policy of using the Indian States as a shield against the people's uprising. So Canning wrote on April 30, 1860: "It was long ago said by Sir John Malcolm that if we made All India into zillahs (British districts), it was not in the nature of things that our Empire should last fifty years; but that if we could keep up a number of Native States without political power, but as royal instruments, we should exist in India as long as our naval supremacy was maintained. Of the substantial truth of this opinion I have no doubt; and the recent events have made it more deserving of our attention than ever." Seventy years later, Professor Rushbrook Williams wrote in the London "Evening Standard" (May 28, 1930): "The rulers of the Native States are very loyal to their British connection. Many of them owe their very existence to British justice and arms. Many of them would not be in existence today, had not British power supported them during the struggles of the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century. . . . The situation of these feudatory States, checker-boarding all India as they do, are a great safeguard. . . . It would be difficult for a general rebellion against the British to sweep India because of this network of powerful, loyal Native States." The polished professor, of course, scrupulously omitted to add, what Karl Marx had said with great truth in 1853: "The native princes are the stronghold of the present abominable English system and the greatest obstacle to Indian progress."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> C. F. Buckland, "Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors", *passim*; Hiren Mukherjee, "Under Marx's Banner" (Calcutta, 1944) pp. 92-101; Hansard, "Parliamentary Debates", 1856-61; "Calcutta Review", 1859-61.

<sup>10</sup> References in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 392-94.

Mass unrest was the inevitable result of the growing impoverishment and desperation of the Indian peasantry, which proceeded apace in the second half of the nineteenth century. Incredible it may sound, there were seven famines with an estimated total of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million deaths in the first half of the nineteenth century, but there were twenty-four famines with an estimated total of  $28\frac{1}{2}$  million deaths in the second half. Warning signals of the growing unrest came from regions so widely separated as Bengal and the Deccan.

The zemindars, beneficiaries of the Permanent Settlement, exacted heavy and unauthorised cesses of various sorts with virtual impunity for they felt assured of the Government's patronage and knew all the wiles that paid in the new-fangled law-courts. In Pabna district in 1872-73, the tenants banded themselves together in opposition to these attempts, called themselves *bidrohis* or rebels, and the movement acquired the character of a no-rent campaign. Some "excesses" were, of course, committed, and a few houses burnt and pillaged, but Government reports show that serious outrages were rare. Additional police were sent to the disturbed area, but even after many arrests were made and 147 convicted, there was no abatement of the movement which spread through most of the Pabna district and into Bogra. The connection between this movement and the Muslim insurgence under the name of Wahabi or Ferazee is seen from the Bengal Administration Report of 1871-72: "In the south-eastern districts of the Delta, where, as in most districts of Bengal proper, the agricultural ryots are chiefly Mohamedans, it is the fashion, whenever a landlord quarrels with his tenants, to stigmatise the latter as 'Ferazees', a sect professing reformed tenets and doctrines of equality, and to attribute to their conduct a political character.... Although there is, the Lieutenant-Governor believes, no serious element of disaffection in their religion 'per se', still the Ferazee doctrines, which so many of them profess, might, in the event of serious agrarian questions, form a bond and a rallying cry

among them, and this part of the country is thus not without some elements of political anxiety."<sup>11</sup>

Sir George Campbell's report, just quoted, mentioned specifically the districts of Dacca and Backergunj. The report for the next year, 1872-73, records that those were days "when the ryots of Eastern Bengal have learnt to unite for common action." As late as 1875, the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Richard Temple, wrote in a Minute: "In parts of Eastern Bengal there seems to be a disposition among the ryots to combine in something like leagues and unions. The object of such combinations may be various. If any success were obtained by these means, there is always a chance that the ryots might begin to combine in refusing to pay rent, whereon the zemindars might try to collect by force. The consequences of a combination with this object would be serious in the present state of Bengal. We should guard against the possibility of such contingencies arising...." The peasant was fighting, not so much in the complicated Civil Courts, but in the open with the weapon of combination. Their method was anathema even to the liberal administrator, but they set in motion the discussions which culminated in the amendment of the Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885 and had a lot to do with agrarian legislation in Oudh and the Punjab.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1852, Sir George Wingate reported to the Bombay Government a serious state of peasant discontent, with "dire oppression on the one hand and suffering on the other", and mentioned two typical cases of village moneylenders being murdered by their debtors. The widespread riots in the Deccan (1874-75) led to the appointment of a Commission to investigate the situation and its report was the forerunner of the Deccan Agricultural Relief Act (1879) which abolished imprisonment as a sentence for debt and empowered the Courts to reduce the revenue to a reasonable rate. It is important to remember that the Deccan Riots happened in spite of the

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in A. C. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 564-66.

<sup>12</sup> Buckland, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. pp. 544-48, II. p. 631; O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 727.

fact that the peak of agricultural prosperity was supposed to have been reached in the time of Sir Bartle Frere (1862-67), when the European demand for cotton from India grew enormously on account of the American Civil War. The Famine Commission of 1880 recommended the extension of the Deccan Agricultural Relief Act to other provinces, but the Government did not care to act accordingly.

While the common people of India, Hindu and Muslim, resented oppression and struggled against it whenever they could, and with whatever weapons they could muster, the Western-educated classes, for all their Anglophilism, could not help feeling the humiliation of subjection. Exclusion from a military career has been described by British apologists as a "sentimental grievance", implying that it was nothing to be excited about. There was no dearth, however, of other grievances. When the years passed, and educated Indians still waited for that larger share in the government of their country to which their claim had been recognised as far back as 1833, their faith in British professions began to waver. India's poverty which a sedate economist and administrator like R. C. Dutt refused to attribute to the Indian proclivity towards reckless procreation, was a perpetually tragic reminder of the condition of the people and an urgent summons to patriotic agitation. The cruel contrast between the death of five to six million people in the famine of 1877 and the enormous expenditure of India's money for the proclamation the same year of the Queen's title of Empress of India was, to many, a poignant eyeopener. The most cautious Anglophil could not fail to see the utter injustice of India being saddled with a mounting National Debt, for India had to give of her blood and her money to augment Britain's imperial interests in Burma and Tibet, in Afghanistan and China, and even in far away Africa. None could fail to see that Indian industry was discouraged and the peasantry rackrented. It was difficult, indeed, to find sustenance for Anglophilism from the facts of life all around.

The truculence of Europeans was also a factor in

Indian unrest. There were many instances when an angry Briton kicked an Indian servant who gracelessly died on the spot, and in Court the miscreant got away with nominal punishment, for the plea was accepted that the deceased, as was the Indians' wont, possessed an inflated spleen which, rather than the master's gentle jerk, was the cause of death. A typical instance was the Fuller case (1876) when an Agra Magistrate, Leeds by name, sentenced to a fine of thirty rupees, in default 15 days' simple imprisonment, for "causing hurt". The fact of the matter was that Fuller, intent on his Christian duty of driving to church one fine Sunday morning, found fault with his *syce* and gave him a kick which put an end to all his earthly torment. Some noise was caused by this incident, however, and the Government of India wrote to the Government of the North-Western Provinces, within whose jurisdiction Agra was situated, reprimanding the worthy Leeds: "...The class of misconduct of which this crime has arisen is believed to be dying out but the Governor-General in Council would take this opportunity of expressing his abhorrence of the practice, instances of which occasionally come to light, of European masters treating their native servants in a manner in which they would not treat men of their own race..." It needed, however, a lot more than a mild admonition to efface the effects of such incidents from the Indian mind. It is difficult even to be amused by the Government of India's resolution on the "Shoe Question" (1868), which laid down that "native gentlemen who wore boots and shoes of European fashion" could appear "thus habited" before all Government officials at Durbar and other ceremonial occasions, but that those who wore shoes of Indian fashion must take them off within customary limits!<sup>13</sup>

Those who had learnt, admiringly, that in the British dispensation, freedom broadens from precedent to precedent, received a shock when in 1873, freedom of the Press decreed by Metcalfe, got short shrift, and in 1878

<sup>13</sup> Buckland, *op. cit.*, I. pp. 428-29, II, pp. 668 *et. seqq.*; E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, "Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India", *passim*.

was passed a drastic Press Act in order to gag the "vernacular" Press. The intrepid directors of the Bengali "Amrita Bazar Patrika" changed their paper overnight into an English garb to avoid the operation of the Act. Four years later, Lord Ripon, champion of lost causes, repealed the nefarious Act, but in 1898, on the plea of checking sedition, for which the notorious Section 124A of the Penal Code had proved inadequate, newspapers were fairly manacled. The Arms Act had made its entry into the statute-book in 1879, and the policy of bending the Indian's backbone went merrily ahead.

All the greater was Indian disillusionment when a measure, introduced for the purpose of abolishing "judicial disqualifications based on race distinctions", not only provoked fierce opposition amongst the entire European community and even the majority of the Civil Service, but was ultimately whittled down so that the very principle at issue was virtually given up. This was the famous Ilbert Bill whose original object was to take away from Europeans the fantastic privilege of being entitled, in criminal cases, to be tried only by white men. "A number of men in Calcutta had bound themselves, in the event of Government adhering to their projected legislation, to overpower the sentries at Government House, put the Viceroy (Lord Ripon) on board a steamer at Chandpal Ghat, and send him to England *via* the Cape. The existence of this conspiracy was known to the Lieutenant-Governor..."<sup>14</sup> India saw in the proceeding another sample of European hauteur and hatred of the sort that was seen in 1857-58. "No Indian has ever forgotten the lesson of the Ilbert Bill." We learnt one great practical lesson—the potency of agitation. And we learnt never again to rely implicitly on the benevolence of the ruler. "The fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge."

Apart from the professional classes who dominated the political scene, new forces were growing up within Indian society. An Indian bourgeoisie was now emerging, mills and factories were being set up, and a clash with British

<sup>14</sup> Buckland, *op. cit.*, II. pp. 787 ff.

interests impended. In 1853, the first cotton mill was established in Bombay. About 1880, there were 158 mills where 44,000 workers were employed. Twenty years later, the number of mills increased to 193, and of workers to 161,000. From the start, Indian capital worked these enterprises, and it had to fight against heavy odds. India's subservience to Britain was placarded when, under pressure from Lancashire, all duties on cotton imports into India were removed in 1882. Under the specious plea of helping the poor Indian consumer, the British Government in India sought to strangle India's rising industry.

It was becoming clearer that India's political status was not only a wound in our heart, it touched also the pockets of the Indian bourgeoisie. Self-esteem and self-interest was pretty equally hurt. This explains the new emphasis which came to be placed by politicians and publicists, apparently reconciled to British rule, on the exorbitant cost of foreign rule. So Dadabhai Naoroji, a great figure but no militant rebel, wrote a passionate indictment, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. William Digby's remarkable study, *Prosperous British India*, and such of his findings as that the average Indian earned 2d. a day in 1850, 1½d. a day in 1880, and only ¼d a day in 1900, became widely known. Stalwarts like M. G. Ranade pioneered Indian economic studies, and Romesh Chandra Dutt, versatile as scholar, efficient as civil servant and studiously sedate in politics, wrote massive exposures of British economic practice in India. As late as 1931, a committee appointed by Congress reported that 728.7 crores of rupees had been unjustly debited against India as "public debt". In that report it is seen that the "mutiny" itself cost 50 crores, for which, like the other items, payment had to be made by the Indian people.<sup>15</sup> British rule was indeed too costly to us, and when to cautious bourgeois calculation it seemed too heavy, the wherewithal of a national movement, less elemental and more practical-minded than the fury of 1857, also appeared. The birth of the Congress in 1885 was,

<sup>15</sup> K. M. Munshi, "The Ruin that Britain Wrought" (1946), pp. 19, 36.

thus, a fitting event. A national movement, with the bourgeoisie taking necessarily a leading part, could appear now with all its familiar habiliments. The emergence of the Congress in 1885 was, therefore, a most appropriate phenomenon.

About the same time, it is notable, signs of the awakening of labour were visible. The labour movement had still, of course, a long way to go before it could really be on the map. But it is necessary to recall that the first labour strike happened in Nagpur in 1877; between 1882 and 1890, some twenty-five strikes are reported from Bombay and Madras. In 1884, a Bombay editor, N. M. Lokhande, started the first working-class organisation called the Mill-hands' Association, a sickly acorn which was to grow later into a mighty oak.



I will never say that there is no  
' out for us but to approach  
our masters in sackcloth and  
ashes. I believe in my country,  
I pay homage to the strength that  
is in all of us.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

## CHAPTER VII

### FIRST PHASE OF CONGRESS

**A**LAN OCTAVIAN HUME was the "father of the Indian National Congress" and the Viceroy Lord Dufferin had given his blessing when the Congress was founded; *ergo*, the British are the foster-parents of Indian Nationalism.<sup>1</sup> This fairy tale has had considerable currency, many even of our own spokesmen vouching for its validity. There is no denying, of course, that Hume was the principal organiser of the Congress session in 1885, and also that, behind doors, Lord Dufferin had more than a hand in the business. But the Congress was the natural and inevitable product of developments related earlier, and would have emerged soon enough, Hume or no Hume. Besides, it was the purpose of the British government to stem the tide of national forces in India and to control all its locks. Ingeniously, the government sought to pose as the benevolent patron of an all-India awakening, for otherwise the current threatened badly to get out of hand.

The pose, however, could not long be maintained. Whatever the government's intentions, nothing could prevent the Congress becoming the platform of anti-imperialism. In a few years, therefore, the Congress came

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<sup>1</sup> Amvika Charan Mazumdar, "Indian National Evolution" (Madras 1917) pp. 5-6; C. Y. Chintamani, "Indian Politics Since the Mutiny" (London 1940), pp. 21-23; R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 278.

to be known in official circles as the "factory of sedition", and Lord Dufferin, who was Hume's mentor when the latter set out on his job of building a safe Indian organisation, tried to twit it as a body representative of a "microscopic minority" of India's population.

Bengal was in those days in the vanguard of Indian progress, and it was there that in 1843 was founded the British India Society whose objective was "to secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow-subjects." About the year 1851, it was merged into the British Indian Association, which, the next year, petitioned Parliament, setting forth grievances in regard to the revenue system, the discouragement of manufactures, education and admission to administrative services, demanding a Legislative Council "possessing a popular character so as in some respects to represent the sentiments of the people", and declaring that "they cannot but feel that they have not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to expect." Among the stalwarts of the Association were the orientalist Rajendralal Mitra, the orator Ramgopal Ghosh, the writer Peary Chand Mitter, and Harish Chandra Mukherjee, the pioneer of fearless journalism. About the same time was founded in the Western Presidency the Bombay Association, with Jugganath Sankersett, V. N. Mandlik, Dadabhai Naoroji and Nowrosjee Furdunjee as its leading lights.

The British Indian Association tended to be primarily an organisation of landlords who, in spite of undoubted patriotism, could not forget their class interests. The need was felt of a more popular body, and after a short-lived Bengal National League, founded, principally, by Sisir Kumar Ghosh of "Amrita Bazar Patrika" fame, the Indian Association, still in harness, was started by Surendranath Banerjee in 1875. About this time was founded the "Sarvajanic Sabha" in Poona, with Mahadev Govind Ranade as its moving spirit, and in Madras functioned weakly a "Native Association" which merged, in 1884, into the "Mahajan Sabha".

These were precursors of the Congress, and their

work was popularised by no less than 478 newspapers which circulated in India in 1875, the bulk of them conducted in Indian languages. Among them may be specially mentioned "Hindu Patriot", "Indian Mirror", "Amrita Bazar Patrika", "Bengalee", "Reis and Rayat", "Somprakash", "Nababibhakar", "Sulabh Samachar" (first pice paper in India) "Sadharani", and many others in Bengal; "Rast Goftar", "Voice of India", "Native Opinion", "Bombay Samachar", "Indu Prakash", "Jam-e-Jamshed", "Mahratta", later "Kesari" in Bombay; "Hindu", "Swadeshmitram" and a few others in Madras; and among the later appearances, "Tribune" in Lahore, "Herald" in Behar, and "Advocate" in Lucknow.<sup>2</sup>

Amvika Charan Mazumdar, who was a "moderate" and was Congress president in 1916, records in his book on "Indian National Evolution" that an intrepid Calcutta journalist openly declared in 1877, when with the terrific famine as background, a costly and gigantic farce was being enacted at the Delhi Durbar, that "Nero was fiddling while Rome was burning." He catalogues grievances which educated India smarted under in the late seventies; "the wanton invasion of Cabul... the large increase of the army under the hallucination of the Russian bugbear; the costly establishment of a "scientific frontier" which afterwards did not stand the test of even a tribal disturbance, the complete disarming of an inoffensive and helpless population, although the Eurasians were left untouched; the gagging of the vernacular Press... the sacrifice of the import cotton duties as a conservative sop to Lancashire, and the unmerited and undignified rebuff administered by the Viceroy personally to a leading association in the country which had the temerity to raise its voice against this iniquitous measure... a reckless bureaucratic government which sat trembling upon the crumbling fragments of a 'mendacious budget' on one side and the seething and surging discontent of a multitudinous population on the other."<sup>3</sup> Something like the Congress was bound, in the circumstances, to emerge.

<sup>2</sup> Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22; Chintamani, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>3</sup> Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.; see also articles by H. P.

In 1877, Surendranath Banerjee went on a lecture tour of northern India from Benares to Rawalpindi, to campaign on behalf of the Indian Association for simultaneous Civil Service examinations in England and in India, and for raising the age-limit for the examination which Lord Salisbury's government, wishing to keep out Indians, had reduced to nineteen. This was the first instance of all-India campaigning on what was then thought to be a big political issue. Mr. Banerjee attended the Delhi celebrations that year, and there the idea seems to have been bruited among the few public men present that "if the princes and nobles in the land could be forced to form a pageant for the glorification of an autocratic Viceroy, why could not the people be gathered together to unite themselves to restrain, by constitutional means and methods, the spirit of autocratic rule?" In 1878 Mr. Banerjee made a second tour through western and southern India, and the result of the campaign was the presentation to Parliament of an all-India memorial on the Civil Service question. The importance of political agitation came to be felt even more intensely, when the Ilbert Bill imbroglio sent the iron into India's soul.

In 1884, a new institution was started in Bengal—the National League—with the question of representative institutions in the forefront of its programme. Much more important, however, was a National Conference held in Calcutta in 1883, at the instance of the Indian Association, and attended by representatives from Bengal, Bombay, Madras and the United Provinces. It sat for three days, and its President, Ananda Mohan Bose, called it the first stage to a National Parliament. It should have held its second session in 1884, but seems to have been elbowed out by the International Exhibition held in Calcutta, which also, some report, gave a strong impulse to the idea of an all-India political meeting. That year, again, Surendranath Banerjee went on his third long-distance tour, this time all over the Punjab. In December 1884, there met in

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Ghosh and others in the Independence Commemoration Number of "Calcutta Municipal Gazette", (December 1947), ed. Amal Home.

Madras, after the conclusion of the annual Convention of the Theosophical Society, seventeen representative public men from all over India who discussed and supported the idea of a national movement for the whole country.<sup>4</sup>

The ground was thus well prepared when the Government intervened to put its finger in the pie. Official benevolence did not suddenly whisk into existence the National Congress. The movement was in any case coming into its own, and the Government wanted ingeniously to make sure that it did not go out of its control.

So the official founder of the Congress, Alan Hume, worried over India's future and got to work. He was Secretary to the Government of India in the Home Department in 1870, and then in the newly set up Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce, 1871-79. He had watched the clouds gathering in the Indian sky, and when he retired in 1882, reflected on the need of some sort of definite action to counteract the growing unrest. "I could not then, and do not now, entertain a shadow of doubt", he wrote, "that we were then truly in extreme danger of a most terrible revolution." Hume's biographer, Sir William Wedderburn, another friend of India who was later to preside over the Congress, wrote about Government policy of this time: "These ill-starred measures of reaction, combined with Russian methods of police repression, brought India under Lord Lytton within measurable distance of a revolutionary outbreak, and it was only in time that Mr. Hume and his Indian advisers were inspired to intervene."

Many Indians would give a great deal to have access to the official papers which gave Hume such a shock at the imminence of a "terrible revolution". R. P. Dutt quotes from Sir William Wedderburn's biography passages out of a memorandum prepared by Hume: "I was shown seven large volumes containing a vast number of entries. . . all arranged according to districts, sub-districts, sub-divisions, and the cities, towns and villages included in these. The number of these entries was enormous; there

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33, 40-45.

were said at the time to be communications from over thirty thousand different reporters. Many of the entries reported conversations between men of the lowest classes, all going to show that these poor men were pervaded with a sense of the hopelessness of the existing state of affairs, that they were convinced that they would starve and die, and that they wanted to do *something*. They were going to do something, and stand by each other, *and that something meant violence*. Innumerable entries referred to the secretion of old swords, spears and matchlocks, which would be ready when required. . . . In the existing state of the lowest half-starving classes, it was considered that the first few crimes would be the signal for hundreds of similar ones, and for a general development of lawlessness, paralysing the authorities and the respectable classes. It was considered also that everywhere the small bands would begin to coalesce into large ones, like drops of water on a leaf; that all the bad characters in the country would join, and that very soon after the bands obtained formidable proportions, a certain small number of the educated classes, at the time desperately, perhaps unreasonably, bitter against the Government, would join the movement, assume here and there the lead, give the out-break cohesion and direct it as a national revolt.”<sup>5</sup>

Allowing even for some exaggeration in the fears of Hume, there is no doubt that apart from the constant readiness of our common people to fight with whatever weapons were handy in order to lessen their misery, some of their betters also were not disinclined to help them. Till the papers made available to Hume, if not already destroyed in our archives, are sifted and examined, we shall not know the full story. But certain suggestive indications are already at hand. When Indian industry was discouraged and the peasantry rackrented, when five to six million people died in the famine of 1877 at the same time as Queen Victoria was, at enormous expense, proclaimed Empress of India, when India had to give of her

<sup>5</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-81, quoting from Sir W. Wedderburn, “Alan Octavian Hume” (1913), pp. 80-81, 101. cf. article by G. R. G. Hambly in “Bengal Past and Present” vol. LXXX, Pt. II, Serial No. 150 (July-December 1961).

blood and her treasure to augment Britain's imperial interests in Burma and Tibet, in Afghanistan and China, even in far-away Africa, it was difficult to find sustenance for Anglophilism from the stark facts of life.

It was not strange, therefore, for thoughtful Indians in the early 'eighties like Sasipada Banerjee in Bengal and Sorabji Shapurji Bengalee and N. M. Lokhande in Bombay to work for the amelioration of labouring people, or for Shivanath Shastri and Dwarkanath Ganguly to strive to help indentured labourers at the mercy of Assam tea plantation owners. It was no mere gesture for Rajnarayan Bose and Dwijendranath Tagore to think of forming secret societies of the *Italian Carbonari* model and enjoining that oaths be taken and signatures made with the blood of one's body for dedication to the tasks that freedom entailed. It is more than important that in 1874 in *Mookerjee's Magazine*, a noted writer, Bholanath Chunder, proposed boycott of British goods and something like passive resistance ("moral hostility" was the expression used). This context, which requires badly to be probed,<sup>6</sup> alone helps to appreciate Hume's apparently inflated fears of "a most terrible revolution" in India.

In 1882, Hume resigned from service and settled in Simla. His task was to find out ways and means of directing the popular impulse—of which he had such alarming evidence—into an innocuous channel. So, in an open letter to "graduates of Calcutta University", on March 1, 1883, he sang paeans of praise for constitutional agitation. Towards the close of 1884, there was formed, in response to his summons, and after a lot of correspondence between Calcutta and Bombay, the "Indian National Union" whose only notable act was the decision, in March 1885, to hold a meeting of representatives from all over India next Christmas in Poona. Hume, clearing the decks for the kind of action he contemplated, saw the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, and told him of the scheme of an all-India meeting every year to discuss social matters, whereupon the Viceroy

<sup>6</sup> See "Calcutta Municipal Gazette" (December, 1947), and Jogesh Chandra Bagal's book (in Bengali), "Muktir Sandhaney Bharat" (Calcutta 1945) and references therein.

unexpectedly expressed himself in favour of the projected meeting discussing problems of administration also. Hume went to all the important centres of public opinion in India on the Viceroy's suggestion, made a trip to England where he canvassed support for the scheme among members of Parliament, and returned in November 1885. Poona was getting ready to hold the all-India meeting—the name of Congress was decided upon after some debate—when several cases of cholera broke out in the city, and as a precaution the venue was changed to Bombay. There was still a great deal of organisational leeway to make up, for in Calcutta, on December 25, 26 and 27, the same year, the second National Conference, called jointly by the British Indian Association, the Indian Association and the newly started National Mahomedan Association, was attended by many who should have journeyed to Bombay. There was no rivalry, however, between the two assemblies, and it is reported that the National Conference rapturously acclaimed the news that the first Indian National Congress was going to meet in Bombay and sent an enthusiastic message.<sup>7</sup>

So on December 28, 1885, and the two succeeding days, seventy-two representatives from different provinces met at the premises of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, Bombay, under the presidentship of a leading Calcutta barrister, W. C. Bonnerjee. The proceedings were marked by great sobriety, the president emphasising that their “desire to be governed according to the ideas of government prevalent in Europe was in no way incompatible with their thorough loyalty to the British Government.” “All that they desired was that the basis of the government should be widened and that the people should have their proper and legitimate share in it”. When the session concluded, “three cheers” were given to Hume, who replied by calling for “three times three cheers, and if possible thrice that” for the Queen Empress. It was a demonstration of loyalty, but it is significant that it was Mr. Hume, describing himself “unworthy to loose the latchet of the

<sup>7</sup> Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-56.



Queen's shoes," who touched the lowest depths of happy servility.

Such was the manner in which was launched the "good ship" of the Congress. It was a far cry from the time when the Congress would be the stormy petrel, proscribed by Government, hunted down by the police, but ensconced in the people's affection.

Hume himself gave his idea of the Congress as "a safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces, generated by our own action." Lord Dufferin was very clear about what he wanted. In a speech in 1886, he said: "India is not a country in which the machinery of European democratic agitation can be applied with impunity." He did not mind allowing some concessions, but they should be accepted as final for the next ten or fifteen years, and "mass meetings and incendiary speechifying" forbidden. "Extremists" apart, he found a "considerable number of natives both able and sensible", and that "the fact of their supporting the government would popularise many of its acts which now have the appearance of being driven through the legislature by force". It was this keen-witted Viceroy who disapproved of the idea of having Lord Reay, Governor of Bombay, as the Congress' first President. That would not have suited his calculations. As it was, the first Congress was to the Government a great satisfaction. Among the resolutions it adopted, the nearest approach to a national democratic demand was the request for the admission of some elected members to the Legislative Councils. "Mr. Hume had successfully conducted his flock".<sup>8</sup>

For nearly two decades after its inauguration, the Congress developed along the lines laid down by its founders. It was not till 1908, and then only in deference to a growing section which wanted to go very much farther, that "the attainment of a system of government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire" was declared to be the objective of the

<sup>8</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, 283-84 and references given therein.

Congress, "to be achieved by constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration . . . ." In 1885, the National Union which called the Congress into existence laid down very clearly that "unswerving loyalty to the British Crown shall be the keynote of the institution", and that it "shall be prepared, when necessary, to oppose by all constitutional methods all authorities, high or low, here or in England, whose acts and omissions are opposed to those principles of the Government of India as laid down from time to time by the British Parliament and endorsed by the British Sovereign".<sup>9</sup> For some twenty years, therefore, the Congress in its resolutions made no basic national claim, but only the demand for a greater degree of Indian representation within the ambit of British rule. Representative institutions, rather than unfettered self-government, were asked for by the early pioneers of the Congress movement.

There was no doubt, however, of the growth of the Congress as a movement. In the first three sessions (1885-87)—Bombay, Calcutta and Madras—the Congress point of view was formulated and submitted to the judgment of India's educated classes. From 1888 to 1896, that point of view was actively propagated both in India and in England a British Committee was established, which at one time included as many as 200 members of Parliament, almost all Irish Home Rulers among them, and its London organ "India" started. In India, provincial committees were set up and a network of district organisations, all working under the direction of a central body known as the All India Congress Committee. The period roughly from 1897 to 1908 saw growing discontent of the people and the stubborn repression practised by a reactionary administration, which naturally had its repercussions on the Congress.

The early moderation of the demands of the Congress reflected correctly the position of the rising bourgeoisie in India of those days. The educated middle-class responded eagerly to the national call which the Congress, however weakly and hesitantly, sent out, and there was such a rush

<sup>9</sup> Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-275 and Appendix A.

for the honour of participating in Congress sessions that measures had to be taken to restrict the number of delegates. At Bombay, in 1885, seventy-two delegates attended. The second session in Calcutta (1886), when Rabindranath Tagore, then a young man of twenty-five, gave an opening song of his own composition, witnessed enthusiastic scenes, and was attended by 434 delegates and many times that number of visitors. At Madras, the next year, the number of delegates was 607. Allahabad and Bombay, where the fourth and fifth sessions were held, saw 1,248 and 1,889 delegates respectively. Surendranath Banerjee, presiding over the Congress in 1895, referred to an English newspaper which tauntingly stated that in Bengal women had idolised the Congress and made it part of the Hindu pantheon, and then went on to say in his characteristic vein: "God or no God, whether the Congress has found a place in the Hindu pantheon or not, it is enshrined in the hearts of the educated community of India—it excites their deepest reverence, stirs their most earnest enthusiasm—it is the God of their idolatry". The phrase "educated" is significant. The sedate Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, presiding in 1890, said unequivocally that the Congress was "not the voice of the masses, but it was the duty of their educated compatriots to interpret their grievances and offer suggestions for their redress."

The "educated community" alone could not, obviously be in a position to challenge British rule in India, nor indeed did they have the desire to do so. They admired the British, applauded British principles of government, wanted India to emulate British virtues, and expected British rule to be their ally in the good work. To them the main enemy was not British rule, but India's backwardness. So Ananda Mohan Bose, Congress President in 1898, stated: "The educated classes are the friends and not the foes of England—her natural and necessary allies in the great work that lies before her." "We are loyal to the backbone", Dadabhai Naoroji said in 1886, and appealed to the rulers "not to drive this force (Congress) into opposition, instead of drawing it to your side." Lavish encomia of British institutions, which occasionally sound

almost unwittingly ironic, were customary with the first generation of Congress leaders and many even of their successors.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to suggest, however, for a moment that they were reactionary and anti-national tools of foreign authority. As a matter of fact, they were at the time the most progressive section of our people. It is imperative to remember that in those days the working class, still in its swaddling clothes, had neither a real organisation, nor opportunities for it. The Indian peasant had no reason to be grateful for British rule; he had fought, with whatever crude weapons came handy, against the stranger. But nationalism, properly so-called, was still to him an unfamiliar emotion; he was bewildered and dumb. The bourgeoisie was, therefore, in the circumstances, the most progressive, and in some respects even revolutionary, force in India. They worked honestly, according to their lights, for social reform, for education, for economic progress and technical development, for inter-provincial understanding, in one word, for modernisation. They had the courage also of their convictions, for often enough, they encountered the bitter opposition of orthodoxy and obscurantism. They deserve to be remembered with respect.

It did not take our early leaders very long to experience disillusionment, whether they fully admitted it to themselves or not, with Britain's imperial role. They fought shy of "enthusiasm", of vehement condemnation even of undoubted wrongs. They avoided stinging phrases, as a rule, but they did not forbear from temperate criticism. For an example may be mentioned Romesh C. Dutt, Congress president in 1899, who said about that niggardly piece of "reforms", the Councils Act of 1892, that the elective principle introduced in the Act was welcome, but that "a province with thirty districts and a population of thirty millions may fairly have thirty elected members on its Legislative Council"—which, it goes without saying, it did not. The demand is couched in the most moderate terms, and yet, it appears, Government disapproved of it.

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpts from Congress presidential addresses are taken from Natesan's collection, *op. cit.*

Much more clearly than the Indian leaders did British imperialism realise and fear the progressive potentialities of the Congress. The stirring response of the "educated community" "to the call of the Congress, the periodic assemblage of representatives from one end of India to another, the exchange of views, the ventilation of grievances and the propounding of demands, howsoever mild and sedately phrased, proved to be a bugbear to Government. After all, it could not easily be forgotten that in the early 'eighties, the country was on the brink of what Hume and his friends conceived to be "violent revolution", and a broad-based organisation, however honestly Anglophil, could not fail to come under obloquy.

The tone of Government spokesmen in regard to the Congress changed, thus, sharply for the worse.. The Anglo-Indian press, led by the demi-official "Pioneer", had denounced the Congress from the beginning as a seditious and unrepresentative organisation modelled on Irish Fenianism. Lord Dufferin, who helped and encouraged Hume in his efforts and received a Congress deputation in 1886, described it in 1888 as a "microscopic minority" and its goal as a "big jump into the unknown". Mrs. Besant records in her book "How India Wrought for Freedom", that in 1887 a delegate attended the Congress "in defiance of his district officer and was called on to give a security of Rs. 20,000 to keep the peace". In 1888, the government of the United Provinces refused to permit the Congress Reception Committee to procure a suitable site at Allahabad, the problem being solved at last by the Maharaja of Darbhanga purchasing a castle with grounds and placing it at the committee's disposal. In 1890, a circular was issued, forbidding Government officials to attend Congress sessions even as visitors, and the private secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal returned the invitation cards sent to Government House. It is pathetic to read that Mr. George Yule, a leading Calcutta merchant who presided over the Congress in 1888, took it "as an insinuation that we are unworthy to be visited by Government officials", and a reference was made to the Viceroy who replied that the Congress was "perfectly legitimate in itself", that the

Government's attitude towards it was one of "neutrality", and that "pensioners and others who have quitted the service of the Government for good" were not barred from attendance at Congress sessions. That the Congress was far from being a subversive body of radicals is seen from the fact that in the first twenty-five years of its life, it had as many as five times a British president, and in 1892, there was a serious suggestion to hold a session in London. That did not prevent Lord Curzon writing exultantly to the Secretary of State in 1900: "The Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions, while in India, is to assist it to a peaceful demise."<sup>11</sup>

Like most of his "great ambitions", this one also was not going to bring solace to Curzon's heart. Far from the Congress meeting with its "peaceful demise", the last decade of the nineteenth century saw a mighty resurgence of the people's spirit and on the tumult of those days, in ideas as in facts, was the shadow of coming events.

<sup>11</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 289, quoting from Ronaldshay, "Life of Lord Curzon", Vol. II, p. 151; Mazumdar, *op. cit.* pp. 80-82; B. Pattabhi Seetharamayya, "History of the Indian National Congress", p. 109.

Now powers from home and  
discontents at home  
Meet in one line.

SHAKESPEAR, KING JOHN

## CHAPTER VIII

### "POWERS FROM HOME"

**A**S the Congress rapidly shed its earlier apologetic note, as even the gentle Gokhale, most lovable of moderates noted that "the bureaucracy was growing frankly selfish and openly hostile to national aspirations", the ground was being prepared for a clear-cut and defiant stand for freedom, claimed and fought for as a right, not a reward humbly requested for good conduct. And the last decade of the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a movement with many facets, the picturesque and often misguided assertiveness of a people's long-maimed self-respect—a movement which was to bring about in the ensuing decade the first great wave of unmistakable national unrest.

There was no end to the woes of our people when the last century was getting ready for its exit. In 1896, bubonic plague appeared all over India in a most virulent form. From 1896 to 1900, prolonged and disastrous famines were a regularly recurrent visitation. Fully one quarter of the total population of the country suffered from the great famine of 1899-1900. These events threw a lurid light on the social and economic consequences of imperialism. As ever wider strata of the middle classes were drawn into the vortex of national movements, their eyes were also being opened. A Dadabhai Naoroji was constrained to say that the British had "with the best intentions" "reduced India to material and moral wretchedness". A Romesh C. Dutt grieved that "in spite of a civilized administration

... India is still periodically desolated by calamities such as are unknown in Europe."

Lansdowne, who followed Dufferin as Viceroy, was manifestly out of sympathy with Indian aspirations. "He was responsible", says C. Y. Chintamani, "for what was known as 'the crime of June 26, 1893'", when at a single sitting of his Legislative Council, and in the absence of every elected member, a measure was passed closing the Indian mints to the free coinage of silver. India's currency and exchange troubles, considered too sacrosanct for Indian management, began about that time. The Lahore Congress (1893) registered a strong protest, for, it said, the people were subjected thereby to additional indirect taxation and some of the most important trades and industries in the country were seriously injured. On the same day, June 26, 1893, what was called "exchange compensation allowance" was given to British officers in India—the "Heaven-born"—already in enjoyment of salaries which India could ill afford.<sup>1</sup> Next year, the Madras Congress protested unavailingly against the imposition, at Lancashire's bidding, of an excise duty on Indian cotton manufactures, and the levy of collective fines as costs of punitive police quartered in disturbed areas. In 1895, the Congress resisted with success an effort made to subordinate legal practitioners, who were the backbone of the Congress, to District Judges and Revenue Commissioners. In 1897, the people were apprised of the existence of three rusty but deadly weapons in the armoury of the government which gave short shrift to the vaunted liberty of the British subject. The occasion was the resurrection of Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827, one of an unholy trinity with Bengal Regulation III of 1818 (used against the Wahabis) and Madras Regulation II of 1819—the purpose being to deport, without trial and without the charge being made public, whoever incurred the bureaucracy's displeasure.

The representative of the British Crown in India at the time was the priceless Lord Elgin who made a State

<sup>1</sup> C. Y. Chintamani, "Indian Politics since the Mutiny", pp. 46-47; Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 85.



visit to Jubbulpore in 1896 when, in the words of the Famine Commission, "people died like flies" on account of the famine, but congratulated the people on the prosperity of the province! Two years later, he gave one of his last Indian speeches at the United Services Club in Simla, and bragged that "India was conquered by the sword, and by the sword it shall be held." It was in his regime—in 1897—that the seven plagues were, as it were, let loose on India—famine, pestilence, earthquake, war and repression. The administration of plague prevention measures was carried out with a callous rigour that infuriated a susceptible people, and at Poona, headquarters of a militant nationalism that was raising its head, the feeling was so intense that on the night of celebrations in Government House of the Queen's birthday—unseemly in view of the distress all around—the I.C.S. officer in charge of plague measures, one Mr. Rand, and his companion Lieut. Ayers, were murdered on their way back from the revelry. A terrible repression followed, and four Mahrattas, including the Chapekar brothers, were hanged and many others sentenced. Two brothers, the Sardars Natu, were deported under Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827, now taken out of the mothballs. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the great Mahratta leader, and a number of other publicists were prosecuted for sedition and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The Congress, at its Amraoti session in 1897, upbraided the Bombay Government's panicky policy. The president, Sir C. Sankaran Nair, in a speech, which otherwise was pretty sickeningly "moderate", defended the Natu brothers, and condemned Tilak's imprisonment. Referring to the plague operations in Poona, he quoted, with approval, from Tilak's paper, the "Mahratta": "Plague is more merciful to us than its human prototypes reigning in the city."

The same year, again, bills were introduced in the Viceroy's Legislative Council to stiffen the already wide language in which section 121A was drawn, and to insert a new section, 153A, so that convictions for sedition could be more easily obtained. The Post Office Act was amended

so as to empower postmasters to detain in transit postal articles which, they might suspect, contained matter of a seditious character. These bills were passed into law in spite of countrywide agitation. The Government also turned a deaf ear to the Congress protest in 1901 against its "melancholy meanness" in postponing the meagre relief which Sir Henry Cotton had struggled hard to grant to those virtual slaves about whom the country's conscience had begun to stir—the indentured labourers in Assam tea gardens, owned mainly by intrepid Scotsmen.<sup>2</sup>

Events in Poona focus attention on the aggressive nationalism which Tilak in Maharashtra was building on the foundation of Hindu orthodoxy. The first indications of a revolutionary movement were observed in Western India in connection with two classes of annual festivals, those in honour of the god Ganapati, and those in honour of the Maharatta leader Shivaji who led the Deccan against Muslim rule in the seventeenth century. In 1894 was started a *Sarvajanik* Ganapati celebration, the public worship of a god who was so long the object only of a domestic ceremony, the holding of *melas* or fairs, the parading of streets with songs and declamations, and the training of young men in the art of fencing with sticks and other physical exercises. The Sedition Committee appointed in 1918, reported that at the time of the celebrations leaflets were distributed, "urging the Mahrattas to rebel as Shivaji did, declaring that the danger of subjection to foreign rule penetrated the bosom of all, and urging that a religious outbreak should be made the first step towards the overthrow of the foreign power." Festivals were also held, from 1895 onwards, in celebration of Shivaji's birth and coronation, when stirring speeches were made and the moral was derived from Shivaji's successful struggle against Muslim power and applied to the conditions of India under British rule.<sup>3</sup>

The agrarian revolt had been very marked in the

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-89; Chintamani, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-51.

<sup>3</sup> "Sedition Committee (Rowlatt) Report, 1918", pp. 1-2.

'seventies in the Maharashtra, and Tilak had a good base for his dynamic activity. He was undoubtedly, a great and strong-willed leader who wanted to make a clean break with the usual policy of conciliation with imperialism and to launch on a path of decisive struggle for freedom which he called in a celebrated speech his "birthright". He represented, to that extent, a force of advance. But as he did not—could not, in the existing stage of social development—look up to the masses as the greatest factor in his movement, he did not give his mind to the organisation of the working class and the mass of the peasantry on the basis of their social, economic, and political struggle for liberation. His call enthused mainly the lower middle class, whose economic prospects had worsened, and who had little patience with the "inevitability of gradualness" which was preached complacently by upper-class leaders. There was, of course, the lack of a scientific, social and political outlook, but a lot of unrest and will to action was there for whatever use it could be put to.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the view, obviously facile, gained ground that the reason for the ineffectiveness of the older leadership lay in their "denationalised" and "Westernising" tendencies. As a matter of fact, the older leaders were progressive exactly to the extent that they sought to emulate Western virtues and shed Eastern failings, and to influence their people accordingly. The new school of militant nationalists, in their rightful exasperation with foreign rule, needed, however, sustenance from the past, from traditions, customs and institutions, and in the absence of a scientific, social and political theory which would have enabled them to sift the tares from the corn and to link up lower middle class discontent with the movement of the common people, they sought to function on the defiant affirmation of the imagined superiority of "Aryan" civilisation over every variety of modern "Western" civilisation. Political radicalism and social conservatism tended therefore, to go hand in hand, and as Jawaharlal Nehru noted in his *Autobiography*: "socially speaking, the

revival of Indian nationalism in 1907"—when it was at its peak—"was definitely reactionary."<sup>4</sup>

This unworthy alliance is illustrated most clearly of all, in the activities of Tilak who in 1890 opened a campaign against the Age of Consent Bill, which sought to raise the age of consummation of marriage for girls from ten to twelve years. Progressive national leaders, naturally, supported the bill, but Tilak, raising what might be thought the outmoded banner of religion, led a raging campaign against it. The organisation of "Cow Protection Societies", innocent as it may appear, was another way of asserting the orthodox Hindu's ways of life and the values he, rightly or wrongly, cherished. Reference has already been made to celebrations in Maharashtra, in honour of the rebel-hero Shivaji. In Bengal, where the same militant movement was also at work, ardent souls sought to fortify their patriotism by developing the cult of Kali, the goddess of strength and of destruction.

For quite some time, and in Bengal particularly, a spirit of reaction against European influences had been gaining ground. In the first half of the nineteenth century there was a general enthusiasm, sometimes crudely exaggerated, among the educated classes for European civilisation and culture. At one time, young writers in Bengal tried to express themselves in English prose and verse rather than in their own language. For instance, the earlier works of the great Bengali poet, Madhu Sudan Dutt, were all composed in English, and it was not till he was thirty-four that he saw his mistake. In the second half of the nineteenth century a reaction set in, and one notices a renaissance of Hinduism, a revived pride in Indian philosophy, literature and art, and a growing aversion to Western ideals now stigmatised as materialistic. A conviction grew that India, aping the West, was selling her soul for a mess of pottage. "We shall discard the idol from abroad, and worship even the dog we rear at home"—that was how Iswar Gupta, the Bengali poet, expressed his preference.

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<sup>4</sup> pp. 23-4; Note, in this connection, a revealing book by Harbilas Sarda, "Hindu Superiority".

The social and religious reform movement, which owed much to Western influences and produced a fine flower in the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and the corresponding Prarthana Samaj in Bombay, no longer made so many or such fervent recruits. New societies sprang up in defence of the old faiths, glorifying the past, recognising, of course, the need of cleansing them of grosser accretions, but displaying a vehement reaction against the West. In Northern India the working of this new spirit was marked by the foundation by Dayanand Saraswati of the Arya Samaj, whose watchwords were "Back to the Vedas" and "Aryasthan for Aryans". The latter, Sir Valentine Chirol remarked, "has sometimes barely disguised more than a merely platonic desire to see the British quit India." The Arya Samaj played a big role in preaching the purer doctrines of early Hinduism, discouraging idolatry and relaxing the bondage of caste. Its influence on the movement for throwing off the shackles from India's limbs was also very considerable.

Of the Hindu revival in Bengal, the greatest apostle was Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), founder in 1897 of a body known as the Ramakrishna Mission to propagate the principles pronounced by his master, the mystic Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1834-86). The keynote of Vivekananda's teaching was that the identity of the soul with the Supreme Being can be attained not only by passive contemplation, but by active selfless service. Vivekananda was the most impressive and picturesque figure at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893, where in a historic speech he referred to the unity of all religions and swept the audience into unprecedented enthusiasm. He stood out as the champion of the spirituality of India against the materialism of the West, and he was acclaimed as the organ voice of India's national aspirations. "We must," he proclaimed, "conquer the world through our spirituality and philosophy. We must do it or die. The only condition of Indian national life, of unashamed and vigorous national life, is the conquest of the world by Indian thought". He was, however, a stern critic of his own country and said that no country could boast of spirituality with millions of people dying of hunger, with the curse

of untouchability and the oppression of women. "Oh India," he apostrophised, "wouldst thou, with these provisions only, scale the highest pinnacles of civilisation and greatness? Wouldst thou attain, by means of thy disgraceful cowardice, that freedom observed only by the brave and heroic.... Oh Thou Mother of strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and make me a man!" His message to India may be summed up in his famous utterance: "Above all, be strong! Be manly! I have respect even for one who is wicked, so long as he is manly and strong; for his strength will one day make him give up his wickedness and bring him into the truth."<sup>5</sup>

This evangelist of India's long-lost glory, "himself a true poem", has left an indelible impression. Never bogged up in mystic ecstasies to which his master had initiated him, this great-hearted *Sannyasi* is still to many people in India the harbinger of a new hope, the proud apostle of Indian freedom. No wonder he is mentioned by the Sedition Committee appointed by Government in 1918, as an important influence on those who caused a big tumult in Bengal and elsewhere in the first decade of the present century.

As early as 1867, Rajnarain Bose, Nabagopal Mitra and several members of the well-known Tagore family had taken the initiative in organising what was called the *Hindu Mela* (Fair) in Calcutta. Even before the foundation of the Congress, a Bengal anthology of national songs was brought out by Dwarkanath Ganguly. Many a religious organisation and physical culture centre proved to be instruments of patriotic propaganda. The advanced group who not only criticised but vehemently opposed the Government were forging ahead in the decade 1895-1905 at a rapid pace. They were predominantly Hindu, not only in composition but also in ideology. A fervent nationalism now emerged, bitterly anti-Western, drawing

<sup>5</sup> "Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda", 8 vols. deserve careful study; there are some interesting extracts in "Changing India", *op. cit.* pp. 106-16; See, in this connection, Valentine Chirol, "Indian Unrest", and J. N. Farquhar, "Modern Religious Movements in India."

inspiration from a romanticised past, tinged with mysticism and revelling in religious enthusiasm. Whatever was recent and savoured of Western innovations was anathema, and whatever was hallowed by age and uncontaminated by Western contact, was sacrosanct—such was the new mentality, pictured unforgettably in Rabindranath Tagore's novel of the period, "Gora".

This movement was by no means necessarily anti-Muslim, as imperialist propagandists try to make out. "None the less the intensity of Hinduism involved distinguished it effectively along communal lines."<sup>6</sup> Muslim militancy, gone to rest some time after the eighteen-seventies, was hibernating, to come out puissant and wrathful a little later. Sir Saiyid Ahmad (1817-98) applied his great talents, with considerable success, to the task of erasing the impression of intransigent Muslim disloyalty to the British Raj. Like the earlier Brahmos he attempted an assimilation into Islam of contemporary European culture, which he genuinely admired. The British Government encouraged, after 1870, his endeavours towards a reconciliation between it and the Muslim upper and middle classes, and its strategy was successful because Sir Saiyid catered for a Muslim middle class which was just emerging on account of the expansion of the commercial and bureaucratic framework of imperialism to northern India and was still economically dependent upon it. In a famous Lucknow speech (Dec. 28, 1887), he emphasised his plan of prospering the Muslim professional classes by loyalty and official favour, and warned against the alternative of the Congress. "On the whole, Sir Saiyid may be taken as a man who devoted himself to the welfare of the Indian Muslim community in their new bourgeois adventure, working out for them a religion and a morality, and a loyalty to their rulers, thinking of that community not at all as one unit over against any other; until to safeguard his achievement, he opposed that other group, predominantly Hindu as it happened, which had outgrown it." One hears that towards the end of his life Sir Saiyid

<sup>6</sup> W. C. Smith, "Modern Islam in India", p. 200.

felt the justice of the Congress demands, especially with regard to the unequal treatment of Indians and Europeans. It meant that the class, of which he was the mentor, had begun to feel that there were not enough jobs to go around and that political agitation had important merits.<sup>7</sup>

The majority of middle class Muslims were still, however, in the early pro-British stage, which most Hindus of the same category had already crossed. This is not to say that Muslims went nowhere near the Congress which Sir Saiyid opposed vigorously. At the first Congress in 1885, Rahimtullah Sayani was the only Muslim present, a fact of which the hostile Anglo-Indian press made much play. In the second Congress, however, the number of Muslims was thirty-three, while at Madras the next year, their number rose to 81. At the fourth Congress at Allahabad, Muslim delegates numbered 221 out of a total of 1,248. Since then, however, their number decreased, though in the fifth session held at Bombay (1889), there were 254 Muslims out of 1,889 delegates, but the reason was, partly, the fact that the famous Charles Bradlaugh, who spoke at the session, was a big draw, and Bombay Muslims, more prosperous than in the rest of India, were generally also more progressive. The two distinguished Mussalmans, Budruddin Tyabji and Rahimtullah Sayani, who presided over the Congress in 1887 and 1896 respectively, belonged both to Bombay. The bulk of the Muslim community, however, for a long time held themselves aloof from the Congress. This is admitted by Amvika Charan Mazumdar, himself a Congress president, in the chapter of his book entitled "The Congress: A National movement."<sup>8</sup>

Budruddin Tyabji and Rahimtullah Sayani, particularly the latter, pleaded in their Congress speeches long and earnestly for Muslim participation in its work. "It is undoubtedly true", Tyabji noted, "that each one of our great Indian communities has its own peculiar social, moral, educational and even political difficulties to surmount—

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.



but so far as general political questions affecting the whole of India—such as those which alone are discussed by this Congress—are concerned, I for one am utterly at a loss to understand why Mussalmans should not work shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-countrymen of other races and creeds, for the common benefit of all”. Sayani referred to the sullen discontent of Muslims in the early period of British rule and their political indifferentism which followed, and remarked: “The Indian Mussalmans are a brave and generous race, and it is natural that they should smart under the misfortunes that have overtaken them and resent the treatment that has been and is extended to them. But certainly apathy and lethargy are not the means calculated to reinstate them in anything like their former greatness.” There was to be no other Muslim president of the Congress till the Karachi session of 1913, by which time the Muslim middle classes had begun to turn anti-British and the ground was being prepared for a communal rapprochement that shook imperialism to its foundations.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the motive and inspiration of the struggle in the first decade of the twentieth century was coloured, largely, by a renascent Hindu ideology. It was “romantic, mystical, aggressive, riddled with fallacies but sound enough to restore the self-respect of the middle classes which had been trampled on so pitilessly by their rulers.” In place of the “servile genuflection before the alien ideals and idols of the West”, there was now “a self-confident militancy fortified by all that was heroic and splendid in India’s past.”<sup>10</sup> A “purified” Hindu idealism was held up as the shield against the steady flood of “Westernising” influences. Wish-fulfilling panegyrics on India’s ancient culture sought to prove its intrinsic superiority to all that came from the West. Even intellectuals of high calibre, Tilak being indubitably one, believed that “mystical” quasi-religious appeals would bring the most grist to the

<sup>9</sup> Extracts from Congress Presidential Addresses are taken from Natesan’s collection.

<sup>10</sup> Shelvankar, *The Problem of India*, pp. 200-201; See also the observations of R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-295.

nationalist mill. The explosion that followed the Partition of Bengal was due, of course, to many and more mundane causes, but it revealed a new India emerging out of the reaction of new and old forces which could not be kept in leash.

The situation became ripe for a new stage of struggle from 1905 onwards, and the main weapon employed—the weapon of economic boycott—bore an essentially modern character, in spite of a good deal of revivalist propaganda which sustained it. Individual terrorism, the universal weapon of petit-bourgeois desperation, was sought to be justified by scriptural standards, but a more vivid inspiration, perhaps, was the European literature of revolt. Events, besides, had been happening recurrently which gave a fatal blow to whatever belief Indians may have had in the superiority of the West even in its material aspects. The disaster that overtook an Italian Army at Adowa in 1894 at the hands of the obscure Abyssinians was perhaps the first of these incidents. Two small South African republics, strong chiefly in their indomitable pride of nationhood, strained nearly to breaking point the resources of the British Empire. The defeat of Russia at the hands of Japan (1904-05), seemed like the overthrow of a European Goliath by an Asiatic David, all the more impressive on account of the formidable reputation Russia enjoyed as Britain's bugbear. C. F. Andrews in "The Renaissance in India", gives the typical instance of a young man, pre-occupied with his private problems, shaken out of his groove by the Russo-Japanese war. "He began to have a wider outlook. Day after day the news of fresh victories came from the Far East. At last he read of the complete overthrow of the Russian fleet in the Straits of Tsushima. That night, he told me, he was quite unable to sleep. The vision of his own country came to him in an almost objective form. She seemed to rise in front of him like a sad and desolate mother, claiming his love... With overwhelming force he heard the call to give himself up for his motherland. He could think of nothing else."

Questions that exhilarated now began to arise in the mind of our people. Could it not be that Britain, like the

Tsar of all the Russias, had feet of clay ? Was it not a fact that Britain had to rely largely on Indian troops, whom she still treated shabbily, to fight her battles as far away as in China and the Soudan, and on Indians in every branch of the civil administration ? If the Russian revolutionaries could challenge the mighty Tsar, why could not Indians try to paralyse the British machinery ? Was it not the lesson of the nationalist upsurge in Europe from France to the Balkans ? Interpretations of contemporary events and a reverent resurrection of vanished glory combined to intensify a widespread desire to seek escape from foreign domination that had bound India, body and soul.

Bliss was it in that  
                                dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was  
                                very Heaven !  
WORDSWORTH

## CHAPTER IX

### "BLISS IN THAT DAWN"

THE defeat of the Tsar and the first Russian Revolution, in spite of its suppression, opened the flood-gates of the people's movement, and the East began really to awake. In Persia in 1906, in the Ottoman Empire of the Turks in 1908, in China in 1907, and then on a greater scale in 1912, revolution made its appearance. In India there began in 1905 a movement towards liberation of a kind never known before. The Marquess Curzon, then Viceroy of India, even wrote "a State Paper in which he drew a parallel between the dangers confronting Tsardom and the similar dangers that confronted the similar despotism" in India.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of various discontents in the country was what is known as the Partition of Bengal. Lord Curzon, who had been gleefully welcomed by Congress orators who admired his Ciceronian periods, made himself, in the two ill-fated terms of his office, the most hated man in India. His costly *Durbars* mocking the misery of our people who were dying of sheer hunger by the hundred thousand, his attack on the elected element in the Calcutta Corporation, his expensive Tibetan expedition, his attempt to officialise the Universities and curtail higher education, his shameless homily on Oriental character and its lack of veracity, tried the patience even of the most stoic among our

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<sup>1</sup> R. Page Arnot, "A Short History of the Russian Revolution", (London, 1937), Vol. I. p. 64.

Anglophil leaders. And in vulgar parlance, he put the tin-hat on everything, when he ordered the dismemberment of the most advanced province in India and drove to desperation a sensitive people.

The Government of Bengal covered, no doubt, an extensive area, and suggestions were put forward as early as 1873 for its reduction. As usual with them, however, bureaucrats approached the problem purely from the point of view of easier administration. By Lord Curzon's ukase of December 1903, the area inhabited by Bengalis, hitherto known as Bengal proper, was brought under two different governments. One of the two new provinces retained the name of Bengal with its capital at Calcutta; the other was called Eastern Bengal and Assam and had its capital at Dacca. For nearly two years after this announcement there was a great deal of agitation against it; over 2,000 public meetings broadcast their protest, hundreds of memorials were submitted to the Government, particularly one sent to the Secretary of State over the signature of 70,000 people from Eastern Bengal. The Government maintained a mysterious silence until July, 1905, when a notification suddenly announced that the Partition was to take effect from October 16, 1905, and the new province would also take over the six districts of northern Bengal. It was a slap in the face of Bengali public opinion.

Bengal did not groan in agony; she roared. And from all over India came offers of succour to the stricken people. "My Lord, conciliate Bengal!", Gokhale pleaded before the Viceroy in the Legislative Council, and, when he went to England in 1905 and 1906 as representative of the Congress, sought to convince British public men of the wrong that was being done to Bengal. Speeches and petitions, however, were neither effective nor in consonance with the temper of Bengal. Leaders of the province took counsel together and resolved to boycott all foreign goods as a protest against the Partition. And on August 7, 1905, was held a memorable meeting which inaugurated what is called the *Swadeshi* movement. Bengal's pent-up patriotism was pouring itself out, not least in the form of a

stream of stirring songs that have never been matched, before or since.

October 16, 1905, the day when the Partition was to become effective, saw in Bengal popular demonstrations unparalleled in India's history. It was a day of mourning, and in Calcutta and other places a large part of the population fasted and went about barefooted; shops were shut; a ceremony called *rakhibandhan* was observed, that is, yellow threads were bound round the wrists of the demonstrators as a symbol of brotherhood, and a vow was taken that Bengalis would do everything in their power to maintain their integrity. The idea of the boycott may have been borrowed from the Irish or from the Chinese, who in May 1905 boycotted American imports as a protest against the exclusion treaty proposed by the United States. Bankimchandra's *Vande Mataram* became a kind of national anthem, a lyric of passionate patriotism, acclaiming Bengal as the mother, extolling her beauty—her never-failing rivers, her flowering trees, her fields green unto harvest—proclaiming her power and her greatness, with seventy million throats to shout defiance against her foes, and twice seventy million arms to defend her.

On November 1, 1905, a great meeting was held in Calcutta, where Surendranath Banerjea, on behalf of the province, read a famous manifesto. "Whereas the Government has thought fit", it said, "to effectuate the Partition of Bengal in spite of the universal protest of the Bengali nation, we hereby pledge and proclaim that, as a people, we shall do everything in our power to counteract the evil effects of the dismemberment of our province and to maintain the integrity of our race. So help us God."<sup>2</sup> The moderate elements expected help also from the Liberal Cabinet which came to power in England in December, 1905, with Mr. (afterwards Lord) Morley—"honest John" as his admirers called him—as Secretary of State for India. Morley admitted that the partition had gone "wholly and decisively against the wishes of the majority of the people concerned", but dismissed the question as being a "settled

<sup>2</sup> H. P. Ghosh, "Congress" (in Bengali), pp. 122-23.

fact". To unsettle it became now the determination of Bengal.

It was, thus, in an atmosphere of excitement that the Congress met in session at Benares during Christmas week, 1905. In the chair was Gokhale, who never failed to command respect, but the tempo of the Bengal movement, hailed by Tilak and Lajpat Rai, was a little too militant for his taste. One hears of "extremists" who scandalised the Old Guard by opposing in the Subjects Committee a resolution of welcome to the Prince and Princess of Wales. All that Gokhale could say was that "he (Curzon) owed it to the royal visitors not to plunge the largest province of India into violent agitation and grief on the eve of their visit to it", and the adamant "extremists" walked out when the resolution of welcome to the royal visitors was put before the house. The main topic of contention at the Congress was, however, the question of boycott. In the end a compromise was reached; conditional support was given to the boycott, for *Swadeshi* or the promotion of indigenous industries was acclaimed while mention of the more bellicose expression was omitted in the resolution.

The voice of "extremism" held, however, the ear of the people. As early as 1901, the Maharaja of Natore, as Chairman of the Congress Reception Committee in Calcutta, had characterised constitutional agitation as "political mendicancy". In 1903, Bepin Chandra Pal began writing a series of articles disapproving of the current methods of political agitation. "A subject race has no politics" was Asutosh Chaudhuri's epigrammatic formulation at the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1904. Men like Surendranath Banerjea could not keep pace with events as they happened from 1905 onwards. Agitation and repression grew in volume and intensity. All Barisal would flock at the summons of an Aswini Kumar Datta, while Sir Bampfylde Fuller, Lieutenant-Governor of the province, had the mortifying experience of seeing the steamer station deserted even by porters on his arrival. In April, 1906, the annual session of the Bengal Provincial Conference was held at Barisal with a Muslim patriot, A. Rasul, in the chair. It was dispersed by the police who beat up young men in

the audience and even arrested Surendranath Banerjea who was tried and fined. "This is the beginning of the end of British rule", said Bhupendranath Basu, another front-rank politician who never came within miles of "extremism".

The link-up between Bengali and Marathi "extremists" became clearer in 1906. For some time before then, Shivaji festivals had begun to be celebrated in Bengal. To the festival of 1906 and the *Swadeshi Mela* (exhibition) held along with it, were invited Tilak with his leading lieutenants, and Lajpat Rai, "Lion of Punjab". Tilak inaugurated the exhibition, and characteristically gave the movement a religious stamp by persuading the organisers to arrange public worship and a demonstrative procession one morning, led by himself, to bathe in the holy Ganges. Hindu revivalism was tincturing the movement, but its rising militancy was beyond question.

The division of opinion between "moderates" and "extremists" grew steadily apace, however, and the situation so developed by the autumn of 1906 that a successful session of the Congress would only be possible, it was felt, if Dadabhai Naoroji, then in England and eighty-one years of age, could be persuaded to come to Calcutta as president. In Bengal the cleavage was very clear; on the one hand were men like Surendranath Banerjea, Rashbihari Ghose and Amvikacharan Mazumdar, representing the Right, and on the other Brahmbandhab Upadhyay, Bepin Chandra Pal and Aravinda Ghosh representing the Left. On an all-India plane, the "moderates" were led by Gokhale and Phirozeshah Mehta, and "extremists" by Tilak and Lajpat Rai. The maximum that the former could be cajoled to demand was a system of government similar to that enjoyed by self-governing members of the British Empire, and that, too, not necessarily as an immediate and pressing objective. The "extremists" believed that India must work out her own political salvation, bring about the speedy destruction, by methods which they could not lay down with any consistency, of the existing system and attain independence. A split was avoided at the Calcutta Congress (1906) only because of the respect which



Dadabhai's personality commanded. C. Y. Chintamani, a notable adherent of the "moderate" creed, noted about this session: "In Committee it was easily the most uproarious and almost rebellious session that I witnessed. The discourtesy with which all the older leaders were greeted was painful. Intolerance was the order of the day, and the most honoured of veterans either managed to get a hearing by sheer persistence or failed to get any. Again salvation was sought in compromise, which was rendered possible only by the presence in the chair of the Grand Old Man. The compromise saved that session from breaking up but proved unhappy in the sequel, as it was interpreted in a different way by either section and an embittered campaign against the older leaders was kept up throughout the following year, chiefly under the leadership of Mr. Tilak."<sup>3</sup>

At the Calcutta session, the Congress proclaimed for the first time the aim of *Swaraj* ("the system of government obtaining in the self-governing British Colonies"), supported the boycott movement and *Swadeshi*, and called on the people to promote National Education. *Swaraj*, the historic expression which Dadabhai Naoroji used in his address, was taken up as the watchword of nationalists—"the absolute right of self-taxation, self-legislation and self-administration for the people of India", as a left-wing paper explained it in 1906. It is interesting to recall that in 1908, the Calcutta High Court, in certain seditious proceedings, took judicial notice of this word, and Mitra, J., in an *obiter* laid down that it might mean either of two things—Home Rule within the British Empire, or complete independence.

The split that was averted by Dadabhai's soothing presence inevitably occurred at the next Congress session (1907) at Surat. It is unnecessary to detail the melancholy happenings on that occasion, the skirmish between the Right and the Left, the uproar which stopped the session when it had just started, the incident of a shoe being hurled from the audience which struck Phirozeshah Mehta and Surendranath Banerjea, and the hectic controversy

<sup>3</sup> "Indian Politics Since the Mutiny", pp. 80-81.

that ensued. It does seem certain however, that the "moderate" leaders, among whom the domineering Phiroze-shah was perhaps the most notable, manoeuvred in a high-handed fashion to force the split, especially because they knew they were in the ascendant in all provinces, apart from Bengal, Maharashtra, and to some extent, the Punjab. The two sections parted company thereafter and only came together in 1916. History was moving, however, at a pace with which the "moderates" could not keep up, and in 1918 they left the Congress to form their own cosy Liberal Federation.

Meanwhile, the agitation for which the Partition of Bengal gave the signal, had out-distanced the purview of those who wanted redress of a serious grievance by constitutional methods. There were many who were not concerned merely with a local question and were associated with like-minded people in other provinces. "With them", wrote a retired Anglo-Indian member of the Indian Civil Service, "the Partition was the occasion rather than the cause of a movement which was both anti-British and revolutionary in character."<sup>4</sup> This movement continued vigorously till 1912, most of all in Bengal, but with serious repercussions on many other provinces.

It is perhaps best to let an imperialist spokesman, Valentine Chirol, describe in his own way this great wave of Indian unrest: "What happened in the Congress (1907) was but a pale reflection of what was happening outside . . . . . The cry of *Swaraj* was caught up and re-echoed in every province of British India. In Calcutta the vow of *Swadeshi* was administered at mass meetings in the famous temple of Kali . . . Hindu ascetics appealed to the credulity of the masses and every Bar Association became the centre of an active political propaganda on a Western democratic model. Schoolboys and students were exhorted to abandon their studies and go out into the streets, where they qualified as patriots by marching in the van of national demonstrations for *Swaraj* or by furnishing picketing parties for the *Swadeshi* boycott . . . . . When

<sup>4</sup> O'Malley, *op. cit.*, pp. 528-29.

passions were wrought up to a white heat by fiery orators and still more fiery newspaper writers, who knew how to draw equally effectively on the ancient legends of Hindu mythology and on the contemporary records of Russian anarchism, the cult of the bomb was easily grafted on to the cult of Shiva, the Destroyer, and murders, of which the victims were as often Indians in government service as British-born officials, were invested with a halo of religious and patriotic heroism. Youths even of the better classes banded themselves together to collect patriotic funds by plunder and violence....."<sup>5</sup>

Introducing in the Viceroy's Council the drastic Press Act of 1910, Sir Herbert Risley argued: "Everyday the press proclaims, openly or by suggestion or allusion, that the only cure for the ills of India is independence from foreign rule, independence to be won by heroic deeds, self-sacrifice, martyrdom on the part of the young—in any case by some form of violence. Hindu mythology, ancient and modern history, and more specially the European literature of revolution, are ransacked to furnish examples that justify revolt and proclaim its inevitable success. The methods of guerrilla warfare as practised in Circassia, Spain and South Africa; Mazzini's gospel of political assassination; Kossuth's most violent doctrines; the doings of Russian Nihilists; the murder of the Marquis Ito; the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna in the *Gita*, a book that is to Hindus what the *Imitation of Christ* is to emotional Christians—all these are pressed into the service of inflaming impressionable minds.... We are at the present moment confronted with a murderous conspiracy whose aim it is to subvert the government of the country and to make British rule impossible by establishing general terrorism. Their organisation is effective and far-reaching; their numbers are believed to be considerable; the leaders work in secret and are blindly obeyed by their youthful followers. The method they favour at present is political assassination—the method of Mazzini in his worst moods."<sup>6</sup> Frenzied by fear, this Olympian "trustee" of India's "voiceless millions",

<sup>5</sup> "India Old and New", pp. 118-19.

<sup>6</sup> O'Malley, *op. cit.* pp. 535-36.

was thus delivering himself of precious observations on history, politics, ethics and religion.

After the Surat imbroglio, "moderates" alone remained in the Congress till the rapprochement in 1916. The British Government pursued a policy of stern repression but tried at the same time to "rally the moderates". The result was the very limited Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 which extended, in niggardly fashion, the elective principle first nominally introduced in 1892. The Central Legislative Council was henceforth to include a minority of indirectly elected members, and in the Provincial Councils indirectly elected members were to hold the majority of seats, the whole scheme being rendered innocuous by the fact that the Councils were advisory bodies and had no effective powers. The "moderates" accepted it as "a genuine if not generous instalment of reform", while "extremists" would not touch it with a pair of tongs. How the former were ready to be content with crumbs from the British table was seen from Morley's insistence that his reform was the last word for as long as he cared to foresee and he would have no lot or part in establishing any form of parliamentary government in India. His successor, Lord Crewe, clarified the position in 1912: "There is a certain section in India which looks forward to a measure of self-government approaching that which has been granted in the Dominions. I see no future for India on those lines." This kind of hauteur did not prevent the Congress presenting a loyal address of welcome to the Viceroy in 1910, and when in 1911 the revision of the Partition of Bengal—unsettling Morley's "settled fact"—was announced in a Royal Proclamation, the Congress President, Pandit Bishan Narayan Dar, complimented Bengal on her "great victory" in "the most momentous constitutional struggle of modern India", and added that "every heart is beating in unison with reverence and devotion to the British Throne, overflowing with revived confidence in and gratitude towards British statesmanship". The Congress, of course, would register its protest against repression, and Rashbihari Ghose, president in 1907-08, in spite of his innate anti-extremism, characterised Morley's defence of the resurrection of rusty

weapons like Regulation III of 1818 "as the most outrageous and indefensible answer ever given since Simon de Montfort invented Parliament." It was clear, however, that the Congress' sedate leadership could no longer keep pace with the march of events.<sup>7</sup>

From 1906 to 1909, no less than 550 political cases came up before courts in Bengal. Dailies like *Yugantar* which, Valentine Chirol records, had an enormous circulation and sold often at fancy prices in Calcutta, Upadhyay's racy *Sandhya*, and Aravinda Ghosh's *Vande Mataram*, in spite of continuous repression, preached an unbending nationalism that the bureaucracy dreaded. Mammoth meetings were held in town and village. In 1907 was passed a Seditious Meetings Act, first for a three year term and then consolidated in an Act of 1911; there were stringent Press Acts in 1908 and in 1910, an expansive Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1913, and an Explosive Substances Act in 1908. In the Punjab in 1907, Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Ajit Singh were deported without trial. "The hour for speeches and fine writing is past," wrote *Vande Mataram*. "The bureaucracy has thrown down the gauntlet. We take it up. Men of the Punjab! Race of the Lion! Show these men who would stamp you into the dust that for one Lajpat they have taken away hundred Lajpats will arise in his place. Let them hear a hundred times louder your war-cry "Jai Hindustan!". In 1908, Krishna Kumar Mitra, Aswini Kumar Datta, Shyamsudar Chakravarti, Subodh Chandra Mullick and five others, were chosen for the honour of detention without trial. For two articles in the "Kesari," in connection with a bomb incident at Muzaffarpur in Bihar, Tilak was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Chidambaram Pillai in Madras, and Harisarvottam Rao and others in Andhra were arrested. There was ferment in more than one province, most of all in Bengal. In 1909, Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief, even advised the proclamation of Martial Law.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. pp. 549-56; Chintamani, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96; R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup> H. P. Ghose, *op. cit.*, p. 201; Thompson & Garratt, "Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India," p. 577.

Terrorism in Bengal reared its head in 1905, and by 1907, got going energetically. There were many organisations of young men called *Samitis*, described by O'Malley as "seminaries of sedition". The "Report of the Sedition Committee (Rowlatt), 1918", gives the following account of them: "The associates formed a body called the Anushilan Samiti (society for the promotion of culture and training). One of these societies was soon in working order at Calcutta, the capital of Western, and another at Dacca, the capital of Eastern Bengal. They extended their ramifications in all directions. At one time, the Dacca society had 500 branches in towns and villages. Besides these societies other less formal groups collected, but all were inspired by the same seditious principles and united in creating an atmosphere which would swell their ranks and facilitate their operations. The atmosphere was to be created by "building up" public opinion by means of newspapers, songs and literature, preaching, secret meetings and associations. 'Unrest' must be created. Welcome therefore unrest, 'whose historical name is revolt'."

In November 1907, the Viceroy told the Legislative Council that from Eastern Bengal came "a daily story of assault, of looting, of boycotting and general lawlessness encouraged by agitators, who with an utter disregard for consequences, no matter how terrible, have by public addresses, by seditious newspapers, by seditious leaflets, by itinerant secret agents, lost no opportunity in inflaming the worst racial feeling." Before 1907 was out, there was an attempt on the life of the Lieutenant-Governor; the same month, the district Magistrate at Dacca was shot in the back; in April 1908, an attempt was made to murder the French *maire* at Chandernagore; the same month two English ladies were killed by a bomb intended for the District Judge who as Chief Presidency Magistrate at Calcutta, had convicted many who were sent up for sedition; in May 1908, a secret manufactory of bombs and explosives was discovered in the outskirts of Calcutta, suspicions of contact with Maratha and Punjabi terrorists were roused, and a number of persons were put on trial in the famous Alipore conspiracy case; in August, two under-trial prisoners in

Alipur jail shot dead a comrade who had turned approver; retaliatory murders of police officers began to take place outside. The Rowlatt Report gives an exhaustive account of terrorist activities from year to year and records, in a summary, that since 1906 "revolutionary outrages have numbered 210 and attempts at committing such outrages have amounted to 101. Definite information is in the hands of the police of the complicity of no less than 1,038 persons in these offences."<sup>9</sup>

Proscribed in 1908, the *Dacca Samiti* set up headquarters in Calcutta, and extended its activities to the Punjab, Maharashtra, United Provinces, Central Provinces, Orissa, Assam and Bihar. The Rowlatt Committee reports that in spite of divisions, there was one movement, promoting one general policy and working very largely in concert. Copies of a manual for making bombs were found, we hear, in Calcutta, at Savarkar's house in Nasik, and at Bhai Parmanand's house in Lahore. Reports of terrorist activities came from Nasik, Gwalior, Ahmedabad, Satara and Poona; Sir Denzil Ibbetson, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, wrote early in 1907 that a "new air" was blowing through men's minds and in Lahore and other towns there was "a more or less general state of serious unrest." "Elaborate, persistent and ingenious" was the Rowlatt Committee's verdict on the ramified revolutionary movement. The report notes that one of the centres of the movement was in London, and another in Paris, where men like Krishnavarma, editor of "Indian Sociologist", and Savarkar, Tilak's fiery disciple, were prominent. One of Savarkar's group, Dhingra, murdered Sir W. Curzon-Wylie, political A.D.C. at India Office, during a crowded reception in London in 1909. The report also mentions over and over again the Indian revolutionaries' careful study of the methods and experiences of the Russian revolutionaries.

Till World War I began, when there was some little chance of obtaining modern arms and ammunition, the activity of the revolutionaries was necessarily restricted.

<sup>9</sup> "Sedition Committee Report", 1918, *passim*; O'Malley, *op. cit.*, pp. 536-43.

The movement, however, continued, and its most spectacular effort before 1914-18 was made in 1912, when the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, was riding on an elephant in a State procession through Delhi and a bomb was thrown, which wounded him and killed the attendant just behind him. The total number of "outrages" committed by the terrorists, against whom imperialism and its allies have virtuously thundered, would be insignificant, if compared on the basis of population, with those which have occurred in Ireland or in some other countries of Europe. At Jallianwalla Bagh in 1919, General Dyer butchered, without provocation and without warning, many more helpless and unarmed men, women and children than the terrorists killed in the thirty years of their history. That terrorists have had so much popular sympathy is due to the methods of ruthless repression that the government have never hesitated to employ. When meetings were broken up, agrarian disturbances cruelly put down, and school children arrested and whipped for singing national songs, when the iron entered every sensitive soul and evoked the agonies of subjection, terrorism became an inevitable growth as the definition of patriotic desperation. Most terrorists have realized, of course, that they were pursuing an outmoded ideology that could not bring freedom to the country, but no Indian will ever pour obloquy on their name. They gave us back the pride of our manhood; they were the salt of the Indian earth.

Detractors of Indian nationalism have made much of the fact that Muslims largely held aloof from the *Swadeshi* movement and all concomitant activities. There can be no denying that ideologically the movement was Hindu, often effusively so. If it was hoped that Muslims could be drawn in by celebrations like the Shivaji festival or demonstrative ablution in the Ganges, or the worship of Ganesh and Bhawani, the ceremony of *Virashtami* and taking terrorist vows before Kali's image, then, surely, it was a vain hope. In most people's minds, there was not any conscious antagonism towards the Muslim; as a matter of fact, a small minority of advanced Muslims joined the movement and a larger number, while aloof, felt admiration for all



that was happening in those days. But the very intensity of Hinduism involved gave the movement a certain communal colouring. And clever imperialist strategy sought to turn the anti-Partition agitation into an inter-communal contest by dangling before Muslims in Eastern Bengal the bait of professional advancement. It succeeded for a time, and in Mymensingh, particularly, there were fierce communal collisions. In 1910, Valentine Chirol wrote exultantly in his "Indian Unrest": "It may be confidently asserted that never before have the Muhammadans of India as a whole identified their interests and their aspirations so closely as at the present day with the consolidation and permanence of British rule." Here, indeed, is a characteristic gem of imperialist prescience. Hardly two years elapsed after 1910, when Muslim resurgence began. It was not for love of the alien that the Indian Musalman had, generally, stayed out of the Swadeshi movement.

National movements, properly so-called do not emerge fullblown till there has emerged also a fairly powerful middle class, conscious of the peril to its interests involved in the status of subjection. The Muslim middle class, compared to the Hindu, suffered from a significant time-lag. Till the 1870's, Muslims resented and struggled against British rule however they could. Then followed a period when, at Sir Saiyid Ahmad's bidding, most of their nascent middle class settled down deliberately to a policy of friendship with the British Government in order to consolidate their stricken interests. The Hindu middle class, older and larger, had come into inevitable collision with the British earlier than did its Muslim counterpart. There were always a few Muslims in the Congress; there were men like Rasul in the *Swadeshi* movement. Generally, however, the Muslim middle class was not advanced enough in the first decade of this century to produce a militant movement and the ideology to inspire it.

A new generation of young Muslims had nevertheless been growing up, who knew not Saiyid Ahmad and regarded his teachings as obsolete. The lessons they had learnt, Chirol himself admits in "India Old and New", were "much more nearly those that the more ardent spirit among the

Hindus had imbibed, and they were ready to share with them the new creed of Indian nationalism in its most extreme form." They came into the picture more definitely from after 1911, but it is noteworthy that they are referred to in the famous address presented to the Viceroy, Lord Minto, on October 1, 1906, by the Muslim deputation which waited on him by previous arrangement—Maulana Muhamad Ali, presiding over the Congress in 1923, called it "a command performance". Here one finds the genesis of the demand, at British insistence probably, for communal electorates which were introduced into the Morley-Minto Reforms. In the course of the address, which was couched in the most loyal terms, it is said, quite in defiance of history, that "the Mahomedans of India have always placed implicit reliance on the sense of justice and love of fair dealing that have characterised their rulers, and have in consequence abstained from pressing their claims by methods that might prove at all embarrassing," but, it is added very significantly, "recent events have stirred up feelings, especially among the younger generation of Mahomedans, which might in certain circumstances and under certain contingencies easily pass beyond the control of temperate counsel and sober guidance."<sup>10</sup>

As Dufferin, seeking to distract attention from the growing discontent in the country, had engineered the inauguration in 1885 of the National Congress, so Minto, twenty-one years later, fearful of the consequences of ever accentuating discontent, lent his support to moves culminating in the organisation of the Muslim League. It met first at Dacca, at the end of 1906. Like the Congress in 1885, it was thoroughly loyal; its first activities were an almost literal repetition, along communal lines, of those of the early Congress. The resolutions passed related to adequate Muslim representation in the new Councils, to

<sup>10</sup> Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has done a public service by unearthing the full text of the Muslim deputation's address to Lord Minto, and the latter's reply, as well as the names of the deputationists. This appears in his "Pakistan or the Partition of India" (Bombay, 1945), App. XII. In spite of his occasional perversity, Dr. Ambedkar has written a powerful and important book. "India—Minto and Morley, 1905-1910" should also be consulted in this connection.

Muslim places in the public service, and to Muslim loyalty. As W. C. Smith remarks in his acute and sympathetic study of "Modern Islam in India.": "Thus have all middle classes in India cautiously expressed their slight discontent."

A few of the most advanced among the Muslim bourgeoisie did not join the League, but even at its session, two staunch nationalists, Hasan Imam and Mazharul Huq, attended. It is necessary also to remember that in the deputation to Lord Minto was one who was a few years later to be regarded as a great all-India leader of Hindus and Muslims—Hakim Ajmal Khan of Delhi. It was no surprise when by 1912, almost the entire Muslim middle class turned anti-British, and a great new phase of the united struggle for freedom followed.

Parallel to the militant national wave in the years after 1905, the working class registered also a notable advance. A strike in the Bombay mills against an extension of hours, serious strikes on the railways, especially the East Indian Railway, in the railway shops, in jute mills and in the Government Press at Calcutta, happened in this period. O'Malley writes, in the manner of the I.C.S. official, that "professional agitators appeared, often impecunious Bengali lawyers, who made it their business to found and preside over unions and foment strikes." In 1910, workers' welfare association was formed by certain philanthropists in Bombay. The highest point was reached with the six-day political strike in Bombay against the sentence of six years' imprisonment of Tilak in 1908.

We might very well conclude this chapter, therefore, with a quotation from what Lenin wrote about India in 1908:

"In India the native slaves of the "civilised" British capitalists have recently been causing their "masters" a lot of unpleasantness and disquietude... The most liberal and radical statesmen in free Britain, like John Morley... are, as rulers of India, becoming transformed into Genghis Khans, capable of sanctioning all measures for "pacifying" the population in their charge, even the *flogging* of political protestants. The little British Social-Democratic Weekly "Justice" is prohibited in India by liberal and "radical"

scoundrels like John Morley. And when Keir Hardie, the leader of the Independent Labour Party and member of Parliament, had the presumption to go to India and talk to the natives about elementary demands of democracy, the whole of the English bourgeois press raised a howl against the 'rebel'.... But the Indian masses are beginning to come out into the streets in defence of their native writers and political leaders. The despicable sentence that the English jackals passed on the Indian democrat Tilak.... this act of vengeance against a democrat on the part of the lackeys of the moneybags, gave rise to street demonstrations and a strike in Bombay. And the Indian proletariat too has already matured sufficiently to wage a class-conscious and political mass struggle—and that being the case, Anglo-Russian methods in India are played out.... The class conscious workers of Europe now have Asiatic comrades and their number will grow by leaps and bounds."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Inflammable Material in World Politics", (August 1908), "Selected Works", Vol. IV. (ed. 1943).

Arm, arm, you heavens, against  
these perjur'd Kings!  
A widow cries: be husband to  
me, heavens!  
Let not the hours of this ungodly  
day  
Wear out the day in peace;  
but, ere sunset,  
Set armed discord, 'twixt  
these perjur'd Kings!

SHAKESPEARE, KING JOHN

## CHAPTER X

## “THESE PERJUR'D KINGS”

**W**HEN World War I (1914-18) broke out, nationalism in India was no longer a matter of turgid oratory, "alternately denouncing and blessing their foreign masters". It was shorn now of the deferential spirit which had afflicted it during the nineteenth century. The masses had not, indeed, come forward yet to take the centre of the stage, but the lower middle classes, students and others, had conducted a struggle with the boycott and occasional acts of terrorism and conspiracy as their main weapons, and the Government had retaliated by ever intenser repression. In this convulsive situation, World War I injected new and disturbing influences.

In October 1911 was published Bernhardt's book "Germany and the Next War", which indicated "the German hope that the Hindu population of Bengal, in which a pronounced revolutionary and nationalist tendency showed itself, might unite with the Muhammadans of India and that the co-operation of these elements might create a very grave danger capable of shaking the foundations of England's high position in the world."<sup>1</sup>

**1. Sedition Committee Report, 1918, p. 119.**

In defiance of imperialist calculations, the idea of self-government for India made an irresistible appeal to politically-minded Muslims. After the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911, Britain could no longer even pose as the fond guardian of especially Muslim interests. Conservatives among Muslim politicians found it hard to counter the argument that active agitation, rather than passive acquiescence, could alone make the Government see sense.

Sympathy for their co-religionists elsewhere had always been there among Indian Muslims, who felt themselves, as they do even now, as part of something like an international freemasonry. As early as 1877, when the Russo-Turkish War broke out, religious services were held in some of the mosques in Calcutta and subscriptions were raised for the relief of the Turkish sick and wounded. The British agreement with Russia regarding Persia in 1907 was much resented, and British inaction during the Balkan War was contrasted with Britain's championship—hypocritical as it was—of Turkey in former years. When Italy took Tripoli in 1912, the last of the Turkish dominions in Africa, the resentment intensified. The Balkan War of 1912, in which the Turks were driven back almost to the walls of Constantinople further heightened Muslim consternation at Christian aggression. When Turkey joined in the war against Britain and her allies, excitement ran high.

During the Balkan War, subscriptions were raised by Indian Muslims for a medical mission—with Dr. Ansari, later to be Congress President, as leader—and for the Turkish Red Crescent Funds. In 1912, Zafar Ali Khan, that "born rebel" in Indian politics, visited Constantinople to present to the Grand Vizier some of the money collected. His Lahore paper the *Zamindar*, "profoundly anti-British" with "an unheard of circulation for the vernacular press", had its security deposit forfeited in 1913 on account, says the Rowlatt Committee, of "disloyal and inflammatory articles". Early in 1914, the Turkish Consul-General came to Lahore to present to the Badshahi mosque a carpet sent by the Sultan as a token of gratitude to Muslims in

India. He was followed a fortnight later by two Turkish doctors of the Red Crescent Society. When the war broke out (1914), quite a considerable section of Muslims was, to quote the Rowlatt Committee's regretful admission, "out of humour with the British Government."

It is idle to raise the bogey of pan-Islamism and to say that all this discontent had a purely religious motivation. Abdul Hamid, Turkey's reactionary Sultan, had launched at the end of the nineteenth century a pan-Islamic programme in an effort to save his tottering regime from external attack. The idea attracted little attention in India; even Jamal-uddin Afghani had only a few isolated disciples. In 1908, the old *Khalifa* and his regime were overthrown by the Young Turks, and pan-Islam lapsed completely. Four years later, it was revived in Muslim India, but to serve quite a new purpose. Its content was being changed in essentials. A feeling grew that Western imperialism, especially British, was destroying Muslim culture and oppressing Muslims. Shibli, Iqbal and other literary figures gave vivid expression to Muslim discontent. More particularly political was the work done by four important periodicals—*Al Hilal*, started in Calcutta in 1912 by Abul Kalam Azad, youthful but encyclopaedic divine, politically and religiously radical, who wrote a moving and forceful style; the *Zamindar* of Lahore, mentioned earlier; *Comrade* in English, and *Hamdard* in Urdu, edited by Muhammad Ali, later leader of the Khilafat movement and a top-ranker among Indian patriots.<sup>2</sup>

By 1912, things had moved so fast that the conservative but influential section represented by the Muslim League called a meeting of its council to consider re-organisation on more progressive lines. To this meeting notable Muslim members of the Congress were invited for instance, the brilliant young lawyer M. A. Jinnah. In January 1913, the council proposed, and two months later the League adopted a new constitution defining the objects of the Muslim League as: "The promotion among Indians of loyalty to the British Crown, the protection of the rights

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*; W. C. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-27.

of Mohammadans and...the attainment of the system of self-government suitable to India." This modest decision was too much for men like the Aga Khan and Ameer Ali who resigned in alarm. Lest it be thought, however, that the League's formulation smacked dolorously of servility, it is necessary to recall that even in 1915, S. P. Sinha, presiding over the Congress, stated: "My first duty is again to lay at the feet of our august and beloved sovereign, our unswerving fealty, our unshaken allegiance and our enthusiastic homage." What is more important is the new spirit of hope and harmony which prevailed at the Congress session of 1913 immediately after the Muslim League had made its gesture. The president that year was a Muslim, Nawab Syed Mohammed, who referred, naturally to the defeat of Turkey in the Balkan War, which, he said, "has caused intense grief and depression to the Islamic world, but has also brought Muslims closer together in a way that nothing else was capable of doing." He welcomed the League's definition of the objective of "self-government suitable to India", the "increased rapprochement between Hindus and Mussalmans", and the League resolution for a periodical meeting together of leaders of both sides "to find a *modus operandi* for joint and concerted action in questions of public good."<sup>3</sup>

The Congress and the League began presently to hold their annual session at the same time and place. In December 1915, the meetings were held in Bombay. Mrs. Annie Besant's "Home Rule" scheme was discussed and the League appointed a commission to examine it. Throughout 1916, Congress and League representatives worked strenuously and arrived at a solution of the vexed question of communal representation. In Christmas week 1916, the Lucknow Pact of the two bodies reached agreement on a common scheme of reforms—elected majorities in the Councils, extended power of the Councils, half the Viceroy's Executive Council to be Indians—which came to be known as the Congress-League Scheme. It conceded separate electorates for Muslims, and representational

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 284-85; "Congress Presidential Addresses", *passim*.



weightage for minorities in the legislatures. In the central government and in those provinces where Muslims were in a minority, the number of Muslim seats would be somewhat greater than their percentage in the population concerned, while in Muslim-majority provinces like Bengal and the Punjab, they would get less than numerically due proportion of seats. At the historic Lucknow Congress (1916), not only did Hindus and Muslims for the first time openly join hands, but the reunion between "moderates" and "extremists" who had parted company after Surat (1907) also came about. A new epoch of Hindu-Muslim collaboration now opened; Bepin Chandra Pal spoke before enthusiastic crowds at the Muslim League session.

Neither Congress nor League yet fully reflected the militant temper which was growing unmistakably in the country. The myth of the invincibility of Western imperialism had gone from Asia's mind, never to return. The sight of imperialist powers flying desperately at each other's throats aroused hopes in the hearts of millions of subject peoples who felt that their hour of liberation could not long be delayed.

Imperialism was surely not unmindful of its peril and took firm measures to maintain its grip. Special legislation was passed, notably the so-called Defence of India Act and rules made thereunder; the most irreconcilable representatives of radical or revolutionary groups were jailed or interned. Among Muslim leaders, Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Hasrat Mohani and Abul Kalam Azad were kept in internment. Mazharul Huq, later a revered collaborator of Mahatma Gandhi, presiding over the League session in 1915, regretted that "the government of our Caliph should be at war with the government of our King-Emperor", but there was about all League pronouncements a certain note of timidity. The Congress, on its part, also passed at each of its four sessions during the war resolutions of loyalty and in 1918 congratulated the British Government on "the successful termination of the war." In return, the Government, keen on "rallying the moderates", treated the Congress with considerable favour. In 1914, Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, attended the

Congress session; next year, Lord Willingdon, Governor of Bombay and in 1916, Sir James Meston, Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, followed his example. A laughable incident happened at the Madras session, for Pentland's delay in arriving had caused the proceedings to begin, but the moment he came in, the debate was interrupted and the loyalty resolution was passed in the presence of the august visitor who then ceremoniously took his leave! Representative Indian leaders who were in London when the war broke out, hastened to offer their support to the Government. The Congress deputation then in London, including Lajpat Rai, Jinnah, Sinha and others, wrote to the Secretary of State, promising the co-operation of "the Princes and people of India" for "a speedy victory for the Empire". Gandhiji, just arrived from South Africa, asked London Indians "to think imperially" and raised an Indian volunteer ambulance corps. Back home, he attended the Delhi War Conference called by the Viceroy in 1917, and as late as July 1918, even after that notable interlude in his eventful career, the 'satyagraha' in Champaran against rapacious indigo planters, he was asking Gujarati peasants to help win *Swaraj* by joining the army. Our leaders clung to their illusions even after the war was over, for Tilak, who was deputed to represent the Congress before the Peace Conference at Versailles and was promptly refused his passport, wrote a letter to Clemenceau, Chairman at Versailles, in which he stated: "... (India) could be a powerful steward of the League of Nations in the East for maintaining the peace of the world and the stability of the British Empire against all aggressors and disturbers of the peace, whether in Asia or elsewhere".<sup>4</sup> All illusions vanished, however, as the mass unrest intensified, as developing world conditions impinged on the Indian movement, and the diabolic role of imperialism became unmasked.

"A Muhammadan current" is the title given to one of the later chapters of the Sedition Committee Report, and

<sup>4</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-300, 486; W. C. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

records significant happenings that are usually forgotten. The "Hindustani fanatics", representatives of the Wahabi movement that many thought was dead and buried seemed to be resurrected, and in 1915 engineered a rising on the north-west frontier. That year, fifteen Lahore students escaped from the country to join the fight against oppression. In January 1917, it was discovered that a party of Bengal Muslims from Rangpur and Dacca had joined the "fanatics" to whom they were also conveying money. Earlier, in August 1916, the Government discovered the plot known as the "Silk Letters" case, a project for destroying British rule by an attack on the frontier and a simultaneous Muslim rising in the country. Obedullah Sindhi, trained at the great seminary of Deoband, proceeded to Kabul in August 1915 with several others in pursuance of this object, and met the members of a Turko-German mission. Next month, Maulana Mahmud Hasan, Shaikh-ul-Hind, principal at Deoband and friend, philosopher and guide to Abul Kalam Azad, left for the Hedjaz tract of Arabia. From the latter, Obeidullah received in 1916 the "Ghalibnama", a declaration of holy war on the British in India and on the frontier, signed by the governor of Hedjaz. A provisional government of India after the overthrow of British power was also planned. Mahendra Pratap, who had gone to Europe in 1914, met the well-known revolutionary Hardayal and had been contacted by the German government, was to be president of the Indian republic, and Barkatullah, a leading member of the *Ghadr* party was to be premier. The Government got scent of the conspiracy, however, and it was nipped in the bud. The Shaikh-ul-Hind fell into British hands and became a prisoner of war.<sup>5</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries had spread their net all over northern India and besides their usual weapon of individual terrorism, they worked now with a view to a general rising with German help. The government was seriously perturbed, and in 1917 resorted to repression unbridled by the normal processes of the law. By 1918, one hundred State prisoners in Bengal were locked up under

<sup>5</sup> Sedition Committee Report, 1918, pp. 173-79.

the anti-diluvian Regulation III of 1818, and seven hundred were interned. One reason for official panic was the attempt at insurrection in 1915. The Bengal revolutionaries were in touch with the *Ghadr* ('Rebellion') party established in America, and with the German consul-general at Shanghai who was acting under orders from the German embassy at Washington (the U.S.A. did not enter the war till 1917). Funds were expected from the Indian revolutionaries in America and from the Germans, and Bengali emissaries went to Batavia in Java to arrange details with German representatives there.

A German steamer left California for Batavia, the idea being to sail thence for a place called Rai Mangal in the Sundarbans. Arms were to be landed there and then sent to Calcutta, to Balasore on the Orissa coast and to Hatia, an island off Noakhali in south-east Bengal. German officers who were expected by the steamer were to go to east Bengal and there raise and train armies. Calcutta was to be isolated by blowing up bridges on the Madras, Bengal-Nagpur and East Indian Railways. One body was to concentrate on Hatia, and after securing eastern Bengal, march on Calcutta. Another group in Calcutta was to seize arms and arsenals in Fort William and control the city.

The conspiracy miscarried. A schooner which was to tranship its cargo of arms to S. S. Maverick was seized by the United States authorities. The Germans failed in another attempt to send two more ships with arms to Rai Mangal and Balasore. Information about the plot leaked out and arrests took place, not only in Bengal, but in such distant places as Shanghai, Singapore and America. Two Bengali leaders, among them the famous Jatin Mukherjee, died in an armed encounter with the police and military at Balasore.

A year before had occurred what is known as the *Komagata Maru* incident. Baba Gurdit Singh, a member of the *Ghadr*—Hardayal had started the *Ghadr* newspaper in San Francisco in 1911—chartered a steamer with the idea of taking some 400 passengers, mostly Sikhs but with a good sprinkling of Punjabi Muslims, to Canada. They were not permitted, on account of prohibitive immigration

laws, to land at Vancouver, or on the return journey at Hongkong, though the passengers had been taken on board at Hongkong, Shanghai and Japanese ports. The steamer then left for Calcutta, filled with angry and disappointed men who listened avidly to *Ghadr* propaganda. They landed at Budge-Budge, and found that under the recently passed Ingress into India Ordinance, the Government, fearing their temper, restricted their liberty of movement and proposed to transport them immediately by special train to their homes in the Punjab. The men refused to enter the train and tried to march towards Calcutta. A scuffle ensued, when eighteen Sikhs were killed, twenty-nine including Gurdit, disappeared, a large number were arrested and thirty-one were imprisoned. Another steamer, the *Tosa Maru*, reached Calcutta in October 1914, with some 173 Sikhs, of whom 100 were imprisoned straightaway, but a number of revolutionaries emerged later out of the remaining 73. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab wrote in a revealing Note: "...the war has created a situation which the enemies of Government consider favourable for the propaganda of lawlessness and defiance of constituted authority.... With these influences at work, while famine conditions are prevailing, there is danger of organised attacks on property on a large scale leading to a general feeling of insecurity and alarm...." Against the country's famishing and restless people, the Government thus sought to cement the alliance with the prosperous purchasers of War Loans and friends of the Empire. A long chain of Lahore Conspiracy cases now ensued: Tilak and Bepinchandra Pal were refused entry into the Punjab, and Zafar Ali Khan's *Zamindar*, though permitted to start again, had to submit to precensorship.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-61; O'Malley, *op. cit.*, pp. 563-68. In pp. 568-74, O'Malley refers also to another notable outbreak in Shahabad and Gaya (Bihar) in 1917, when an organised attempt was made to eject the Government with "help from Germans and Bengalis" and to set up as ruler a descendant of the famous old hero of Mutiny days, Kuar Singh. O'Malley says it would not have happened if it had not been believed that British rule was coming to an end. Characteristically, however, he ignores the general discontent of the Bihar peasantry at the time.

Very much more important than isolated terrorist activities—which only emphasised India's desperation with British rule—and the close contact between the German Foreign Office, intent on its own game, and many Indian nationalists, Hindu as well as Muslim, was the great unrest that was stirring up even the rural people, the readiness of the poorer classes, crippled by war taxation, soaring prices and reckless profiteering, to join in any radical move. How low the condition of the people had sunk is seen from the fact that, as the war ended, influenza epidemic took a toll of nearly twelve million Indian lives. The Congress and the League, rather timorously, and the *Ghadr* and Bengal terrorism defiantly reflected this growing unrest.

The situation went through a rapid transformation as 1917 wrote with a sunbeam on the rolls of history. It was the year of the Russian Revolution which brought to the forefront, irresistibly, the issue of national self-determination. The chain of imperialism was found to be breaking at its weakest link, Tsarism. When was it to be their turn, many Indians wondered, to snap the cords of slavery? If 1905 could set in train people's movements in many countries, how much more would follow 1917? The British government, not to be caught napping, hastened to issue what was known as the Montagu Declaration, in which the Secretary of State proclaimed the aim of British rule in India to be "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire." It included cajolment and threat at the same time, for the government was to be "judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the co-operation received from those upon whom new opportunities for service will thus be conferred and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility." That this statement was hurriedly issued is proved by the fact that work on the so-called Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms began after its publication, and Mr. Montagu, intent on "rallying the moderates", came on a visit to India.

Like the Morley-Minto recipe a decade earlier, the Reforms partly succeeded in creating a division in the ranks of the upper-class nationalists. The Congress, in 1917, adopted a resolution "to stand by the British Empire at all hazards and at all costs", but when the Montagu-Chelmsford Report came out in the summer of 1918, a special session of the Congress at Bombay, with Hasan Imam as president, condemned the proposals as "inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing." Throughout 1917 and 1918, tension grew in the country, the vibrant hope that the end of the war would bring freedom was being painfully deferred, and all Mr. Montagu's fine words did not abate the severity of the repression with which the government pursued every form of political activity. Repressive policy was to continue even after the war was over and in 1919 a law was passed (the Rowlatt Act) on the basis of the Sedition Committee's recommendations, "embodying provisions the most drastic against the liberty of the subject", and in spite of the opposition of every single Indian member of the Legislative Council, elected as well as nominated. The former "moderates" who were still, uncomfortably, in the Congress, and left after the Bombay special session, to form their Liberal Federation, decided in spite of the Reforms' drawbacks to work the proposed constitution. The Congress also could not make up its mind till a special session in 1920, and even at the Amritsar Congress in 1919, both Tilak and Gandhiji were on the side of co-operation. Meanwhile, however, the people were forging ahead to make history in their own image and leaders worth their salt could not lag behind.

In 1919 there was a wave of mass unrest all over India. The closing months of 1918 saw the opening of a strike movement on a scale unprecedented in India. The Bombay mill strike came to involve 125,000 workers. The Rowlatt Bill which became Law in March 1919, dispensed with ordinary court procedure and authorised imprisonment without trial, even when the war emergency was over, roused widespread indignation. For the first time, Gandhiji appeared with all his glory on the arena of Indian politics; in spite of a congenital aversion to extremism and

an enthusiasm for what he called "the beauty of compromise", his ear was affixed to India's soil, and the sound of ominous rumblings made him take up, in his own way, the people's cause. On the analogy of his South African experience, he sought to organise a passive resistance movement against the Rowlatt legislation and formed a *Satyagraha* League in February, 1919. March and April witnessed mighty demonstrations, strikes, unrest, sometimes riotings, and heroic resistance to violent repression in the face of heavy casualties. Hindus and Muslims were at a high pitch of excitement and fraternised marvellously. Hindus publicly accepted water from the hands of Muslims and *vice versa*. Slogans and banners preached Hindu-Muslim unity. Swami Shraddhananda, the great Hindu leader, was allowed to preach from the pulpit of India's greatest mosque, the Jumma Masjid at Delhi. Desperately, the police took recourse to firing on unarmed demonstrators—at Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Ahmedabad and other places. But the people's spirit refused to bend.<sup>7</sup>

April 6, 1919, is a red-letter day in India's history. On that day was observed at Gandhiji's summons a *hartal*, or general suspension of business. The response of the masses startled and overwhelmed even the initiators of the movement. The Government lost its head and replied with frenzied repression. So came the horror of brutality at Amritsar and throughout the Punjab. Amritsar became a turning point in Indo-British relations almost as important as the Mutiny.<sup>8</sup> An unarmed crowd, trapped in a public square, bounded on three sides by high walls, was mercilessly shot down; on government admission, 379 were killed and 1200 left wounded on the spot. News of it was suppressed at first; then it filtered through, incredible and stupefying; and finally, Indian excitement changed to fury and the country was roused to a bitter determination.

For eight months the Government made an ugly effort to draw a veil over the Punjab massacre. Then, for diplomatic reasons and in face of agitation and a Congress

<sup>7</sup> See the official publication "India in 1919", *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson and Garratt, *op. cit.*, p. 609.



inquiry by Gandhiji, C. R. Das, Abbas Tyabji and Jayakar, the Government set up a committee under Lord Hunter, which in spite of the most horrid finding, tried shamelessly to let off the perpetrators of the crime with not too severe a reprobation. Even the British government, which permitted the butcher Dyer to resign his appointment as Brigade Commander, had to admit that the Hunter Committee “had failed to express themselves in terms which, unfortunately, the facts not only justify, but necessitate.” This sanctimonious expression of imperialist regret did not prevent the House of Lords glorifying the unspeakable Dyer, and public subscription being raised by white men in England and in India to honour him. The real face of imperialism was now unmasked for all Indians to see, and we could never efface from our mind its horror and its diabolism.

A liberal jurist, Sir P. S. Sivaswamy Aiyer, “moderate” to a fault, wrote as follows on the Punjab atrocities:—

“The wholesale slaughter of hundreds of unarmed men at Jallianwala Bagh without giving the crowd an opportunity to disperse, the indifference of General Dyer to the condition of hundreds of people who were wounded in the firing, the firing of machine guns into crowds who had dispersed and taken to their heels, the flogging of men in public, the order compelling thousands of students to walk 16 miles a day for roll calls, the arrest and detention of 500 students and professors, the compelling of school children of 5 to 7 to attend on parade to salute the flag, the order imposing on owners of property the responsibility for the safety of the martial law posters stuck on their property, the flogging of a marriage party, the censorship of mails, the closure of the Badshahi mosque for six weeks, the arrest and detention of people without any substantial reason and especially of people who had rendered services to the state in connection with the war fund or otherwise, the flogging of six of the biggest boys in Islamiyah School simply because they happened to be schoolboys and big boys, the construction of an open cage for the confinement of arrested persons, the invention of novel punishments like the crawling order, the skipping order and others

unknown to any system of law, civil or military, the handcuffing and roping together of persons and keeping them in open trucks for fifteen hours, the use of aeroplanes and Lewis guns and the latest paraphernalia of scientific warfare against unarmed citizens, the taking of hostages and the confiscation and destruction of property for the purpose of securing the attendance of absentees, the handcuffing of Hindus and Mohammedans in pairs with the object of demonstrating the consequences of Hindu-Muslim unity, the cutting off of electric and water supply pipes from Indians' houses, the removal of fans from Indian houses and giving them for use by Europeans, the commandeering of all vehicles owned by Indians and giving them to Europeans for use, the feverish disposal of cases with the object of forestalling the termination of martial law, are some of the many incidents of the administration of martial law, which created a reign of terror in the Punjab and have shocked the public".<sup>9</sup>

"The time has come," declared Rabindranath Tagore, renouncing his knighthood, "when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and, I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings." Two years earlier, Subrahmania Iyer, a former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, had pleaded for Indian self-government in a letter to Woodrow Wilson, President of the U.S.A., and on reprimand from the Secretary of State, had renounced his K.C.S.I. Even Sir Sankaran Nair, inveterate in his "moderate-ness", resigned his membership of the Viceroy's Executive Council when Chelmsford sanctioned martial law in the Punjab and backed O'Dwyer's scheme to "strike terror into the whole" of that brave province. Imperialism appeared in such ugly colours that honour from its hands was coming to be felt a contamination.

India surged in a rebellious temper, but her leadership was not ready yet to carry forward a movement which

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Chintamani, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-22.

Valentine Chirol described as "an organised revolt". In view of sporadic cases of violence of the masses against their rulers, which had appeared in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad and elsewhere, Gandhiji called off passive resistance in the middle of April and declared that in trusting to the good sense of untrained resisters he had committed "a blunder of Himalayan dimensions". "A civil resister never seeks to embarrass the government", he explained in a letter to the Press on July 21, while his countrymen rubbed their eyes and knew not what to do. In December, when the Congress held its session at hallowed Amritsar, the Congress, in spite of C. R. Das's opposition, voted for working the reforms. Gandhiji was urging the country "to settle down quietly to work."

The tide of mass unrest was in flood, however, and it was intensified by the economic crisis which began to develop in 1920. The first six months of that year saw no less than 200 strikes involving one and a half million workers. "Settling down quietly" seemed a difficult proposition which not even Gandhiji's advice could make sense to the people.<sup>10</sup>

All sections of the people shared the general unrest, though different sections gave different reasons for their sentiment. Most Muslims, of whatever class, resented the British share of the spoils out of Turkey's truncated empire and their encroachments on the *Khalifa's* powers. At the end of 1919, Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali came out of jail after four years internment, and with dynamic energy plunged at once into agitation and propaganda. They were already leading figures in Indian politics; in 1917, the government had offered to release them if they signed an undertaking that they would do nothing helpful to the King-Emperor's enemies, but had not released them when they were ready to sign it with the qualification: "without prejudice to our allegiance to Islam." The Khilafat Committee, under Muhammad Ali's leadership, became a powerful, representative and decidedly aggressive body. Muslim theologians lent their weight to the anti-British

<sup>10</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-05.

movement, and there was great excitement when in January, 1920, the Khilafat manifesto was issued, and soon afterwards Muhammad Ali went to England with a deputation to impress on Britain the danger of estranging Muslims by indifference and even hostility to Muslim interests and ideals.

The Khilafat Committee was not functioning in an exclusively Muslim context. Hindu patriots shared the agonies of their Muslim brethren, and Gandhiji came more and more to be recognised as the leader of Muslims as much as of Hindus. He saw, in his own words, "an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammadans as would not arise in a hundred years", and early in 1920, he issued a manifesto announcing the justice of Muslim claims and asking Hindus to realise that the Khilafat question overshadowed the reforms and everything else. The same year, Abul Kalam Azad was released from internment and at once vigorously devoted himself and his remarkable talents to the Khilafat and nationalist cause. Four months before the Congress did so, the All India Khilafat Committee in May 1920, adopted Gandhiji's non-co-operation programme in the formulation of which Maulana Azad was perhaps no less responsible than Gandhiji himself. In June, a conference of Muslim and Hindu leaders met at Allahabad and jointly approved the programme. In August, the treaty of Sevres completed the humiliation foreshadowed at Versailles. Next month, a historic special session of the Congress met at Calcutta when a resolution was carried, not without opposition, proclaiming the policy of "progressive non-violent non-co-operation, inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi, until the said wrongs (Khilafat and the Punjab) are righted and Swaraj established". Nationalism and Khilafatism were "now organically related, as the avowed twin objects of the entire country". In October 1920, Mohammad Ali returned from England to report the failure of his mission and urged Muslims to join hands with Hindus in freeing India, for without that no Khilafat freedom was possible.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See, especially, W. C. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-31.

A magnificent struggle followed, a struggle which has remained engraven in India's mind and heart. Eighteen thousand Muslim patriots had left the country in 1920 as *Muhajirins*, unable to bear the torments of subjection. They had a ghastly collision with the military; the Afghan government soon forbade their entry; some managed to trek across to Soviet territory, to breathe the new air of socialist freedom. The majority returned, for India's fight for freedom was to be fought, necessarily, on India's soil.

The government established by law in British India is carried on for the exploitation of the masses.....I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers in India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history.....

MAHATMA GANDHI

## CHAPTER XI

### “HINDU-MUSALMAN-KI-JAI”

**I**N his memorable weekly *Young India*, under date September 8, 1920, Gandhiji wrote :

“During the Madras tour, at Bezwada, I had occasion to remark upon the national crises and suggested that it would be better to have cries about ideals than about men. I asked the audience to replace ‘Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai’ and ‘Muhammad Ali Shaukat Ali-ki-Jai’ by ‘Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai’. Brother Shaukat Ali, who followed, positively laid down the law. In spite of the Hindu-Muslim unity, he had observed that, if Hindus shouted ‘Bande Mataram’, the Muslims rang out with ‘Allaho Akbar’ and vice versa. This, he rightly said, jarred on the ear and still showed that the people did not act with one mind. There should be, therefore, only three cries recognised, ‘Allaho Akbar’ to be joyously sung out by Hindus and Muslims, showing God alone was great, and no other. The second should be ‘Bande Mataram’ (Hail Motherland) or ‘Bharat-Mata-Ki-Jai’ (Victory to Mother Hind). The third should be ‘Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai’, without which there was no victory for India, and no true demonstration of the greatness of God. I do wish that newspapers and public men would

take up the Maulana's suggestion and lead the people only to use the three cries. They are full of meaning. The first is a prayer and confession of our littleness and therefore a sign of humility. It is a cry in which all Hindus and Muslims join in reverence and prayerfulness. Hindus may not fight shy of Arabic words, when their meaning is not only totally inoffensive but even ennobling. God is no respecter of any particular tongue. 'Bande Mataram', apart from its wonderful associations, expresses the one national wish, the rise of India to her full height. and I should prefer 'Bande Mataram' to 'Bharat Mata-ki-Jai', as it would be a graceful recognition of the intellectual and emotional superiority of Bengal. Since India can be nothing without the union of the Hindu and the Muslim heart, 'Hindu Musalman-ki-Jai' is a cry which we may never forget."<sup>1</sup>

Those were great days which followed Gandhiji's full-throated and whole-hearted espousal of the Khilafat cause. In the Khilafat movement which began in 1919, he was the Muslims' guide, philosopher and friend. On June 22, 1920, the Muslims sent a message to the Viceroy from their Khilafat Committee that they would start non-co-operation if Turkish grievances were not redressed before the 1st of August. The same day, Gandhiji also sent a letter to the Viceroy, explaining the justice of the Khilafat cause and the reasons why he had taken it up. The further ultimatum sent to the Viceroy on the 1st July was given by Gandhiji on behalf of Muslims and Hindus, and when on August 31, 1920, the programme of non-co-operation was launched symbolically by Khilafatists—before the Calcutta special session of the Congress—Gandhiji was the first to give it a concrete shape by returning his Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal. Some people even thought there was a dichotomy of interest between those to whom the plight of the Khilafat was the central fact and those to whom *Swaraj*

<sup>1</sup> See, generally, the bound volume, "Young India, 1919-22" with introduction by Rajendra Prasad. This is a book which is worth a lot more than the many books, often puerile, written on Gandhi and Gandhism, Gandhiji's articles in Young India are among our most cherished treasures of political literature.

was the paramount object in view. Gandhiji vehemently denied the dichotomy, and at Calcutta, in September 1920, he carried the Congress with him in support of the Khilafat cause. He moved the non-co-operation resolution and was seconded by Dr. Kitchlew; it averred that for the redress of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs, and the establishment of Swarajya, the Congress must take over the non-co-operation formula evolved by the Khilafat Committee. It called upon the people to begin with renunciation of titles bestowed by the Government, the triple boycott—of the legislatures, law courts and official educational institutions—and the revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving to consolidate *Swadeshi*. An amendment sought to defer the movement by proposing a last-effort deputation to the Prime Minister and a demand for immediate self-government, but was defeated by 1852 against 883 votes. Lajpat Rai, winding up the session, expressed certain misgivings about the resolution, but everyone could feel that the people's ire had been roused and there could be no easy assuagement for it. The decks were being cleared for action by the people—"non-violent" action under its unique apostle—in the fight against a government that Gandhiji had described as "satanic".

Twenty-two thousand delegates met at the annual session of the Congress at Nagpur in December 1920, and with virtual unanimity, adopted enthusiastically the new programme placed before the country. The creed of the Congress was changed; it was no longer "colonial self-government within the Empire" to be achieved by constitutional means, but "*the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means*". The organisation of the Congress shed its former loose character and took on the habiliments of a modern party, with its units reaching down to every locality and a Working Committee of 15 members to function as the year's standing executive. The Congress said good-bye to its old-time respectability; it stood out as leader of the masses in struggle against the government for the achievement of national freedom. It became the focus of a united and militant national movement. One hardly heard the old spate of English oratory; one never saw



Congressmen dressed in any but honest homespun, for *Khaddar* was the uniform of patriotism. The masses were coming forward to take the Congress to its heart, and saw in its leader, the incomparable Gandhi, a man who was no stranger to them and who felt in every marrow their woes and their hopes.

"The British people will have to beware", said Gandhiji at the Nagpur Congress, "that if they do not want to do justice, it will be the bounden duty of every Indian to destroy the Empire." That Empire, Maulana Muhammad Ali declared amid applause, was already dead and buried. The Muslim leader voiced more faithfully the temper of Nagpur, but even Gandhiji, the soul of moderation, could not help saying that, while India did not "want to end the British connection at all costs, unconditionally", it was "derogatory to national dignity to think of the permanence of the British connection at any cost, and it was impossible to accept its continuance in the presence of the grievous wrongs done by the British Government and its refusal to acknowledge or redress them".<sup>2</sup>

There was in those days a mighty exultation in India's air. Our people had plunged into the making of history, their spirit warmed by the certitude that Swaraj was no longer an elusive objective—had not the Mahatma promised its achievement within the year? Few felt any qualms in that atmosphere of mass elation, but in retrospect one wonders why Gandhiji was very much less clear about his plan of campaign than about the date of victory. Some of his keener-sighted colleagues noticed it too at the time, and Subhas Bose, then a young enthusiast who had thrown up his appointment in the Indian Civil Service, records that he failed to gather, in his talks with the leader, "a clear conception of the tactics whereby the hands of the Government could be forced". On the subject of Swaraj, Jawaharlal Nehru writes, Gandhiji "was delightfully vague....and did not encourage clear thinking about it either", but, of course, "we all felt he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader, and having put our faith

<sup>2</sup> Quotations in Chirol, "India Old and New", pp. 190-191.

in him we gave him an almost blank cheque, for the time being at least." What was luring the people irresistibly was mass civil disobedience—in Gandhiji's words, "civil revolution which, wherever practised, would mean the end of Government's authority and open defiance of Government and its law." It was never really defined, never elaborated. And for all the unforgettable heroisms and ecstasies of 1921, hope often deferred made the heart of India sick.<sup>3</sup>

Nineteen hundred and twenty-one saw in any case a great sweep forward of the movement of our masses, without precedent in our history. "Gandhi is India", Jawaharlal's aphorism, was never more true than in those hectic days. It was not, however, only the "orthodox" variety of "non-violent non-co-operation" that shook India to the core. Gandhiji had awakened a sleeping giant, who shook his invincible locks in a manner which did not always fit into the pattern laid down by the apostle of non-violence in thought, word and deed. In Bengal, there was a no-tax campaign among the peasantry of the Midnapore district; Sikh peasants in the Punjab rose against the luxury and corruption of their priests who were backed by the government; in South India there was the rebellion of the Moplahs of Malabar, a rebellion which took on a communal colouring, but was essentially aimed against the alien government and landlords and money-lenders who basked in its favour.

In those hectic months of early 1921, masses of students left the government-controlled educational institutions, and lawyers of the eminence of C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru gave up their practice, abjured their accustomed luxury, and plunged into the movement. In Nehru's province, the United Provinces, the arrest of three *Kisan* leaders caused a vibrant peasant demonstration on January 6th at Rai Bareilly when the police opened fire, killing

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<sup>3</sup> Subhas C. Bose, "The Indian Struggle, 1920-34" p. 68; J. Nehru, "Autobiography", pp. 73, 76. There are other significant quotations in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-09.

seven and injuring many more. Next month, 70,000 *Kisans* of that province made a spectacular entry into the ranks of non-co-operators. About the same time, Sikh peasants joined the movement, and the massacre at Nankana Sahib steeled their resolve. For some years they had been attracted to a puritan movement which, even Valentine Chirol admits, had "unquestionably a nationalist side", and had addressed itself to the recovery of shrines, which had passed into the hands of corrupt *Mohunts*, faithless both to their religious and temporal trust. The incumbent even in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, holiest of all Sikh shrines, was compelled to make a public confession of his wrongdoings and resign his office into the hands of a reformer's committee. Next to Amritsar in wealth and sanctity came Nankana Sahib with a *Mohunt* who was accused of all kinds of enormities. A great popular demonstration was organised for March 5, and some 150 Sikhs had gone out to make arrangements for sheltering and feeding many thousands in the immediate vicinity of the shrine. The *Mohunt*, scenting danger, took the offensive. When the 150 devotees entered the shrine in the morning for the normal worship, the gates were closed upon them and over 100 butchered, their corpses soaked in petrol and burnt, so that only a number of charred skulls remained as evidence of the crime. All India was horrified, and the Akalis would have set the Punjab afire with consequences for good or for evil one cannot tell, if they had not been persuaded to accept the programme of non-violent non-co-operation. For legal reasons, the Government took the side of the evil guardians of Sikh sanctuaries. Next year, in August 1922, there began the daily martyrdom of Guruka-Bagh, when thousands of Sikhs, many of whom had served in the war, pledged themselves to non-resistance, moved silently towards the sanctuary, were beaten into unconsciousness over and over again by British constables massed to prevent trespass, raising not an arm and casting not a glance of defiance. The *Manchester Guardian* described the scene and expressed amazement. "I could not help thinking", wrote C. F. Andrews, "of the shadow of the cross". It was witness to the hold which

Gandhiji had even on minds long inured to a military life.<sup>4</sup>

The movement in 1921 soared on the wings of enthusiastic expectancy of the promised Swaraj. More than a crore of rupees was collected in the Tilak Swarajya Fund before June was out; the poor gave to it more than their mite, women cast off their jewellery at Gandhiji's behest. The boycott of British imported goods was inaugurated by huge sacrificial bonfires of imported cloth on the sea-shore at Bombay. It disturbed some votaries of non-violence like the gentle Andrews, but Gandhiji told him that he was "transferring ill-will from men to things." Meanwhile, clashes took place between the people and the police; firing on unarmed crowds was reported from many provinces. When Yakub Hasan was sent to jail for a Calicut speech, 70,000 people met in Bombay to offer him felicitations. In May, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, veteran ex-president of the Congress and indefatigable peace-maker, arranged an interview in Simla between Gandhiji and the newly arrived Viceroy, Lord Reading. Nothing came of it, and the country fought on against the thralldom it detested.

British tea planters of Assam took the offensive in May 1921 by suddenly dismissing numerous workers, in spite of profits having piled up in recent years. The workers, thrown out of their beggarly shelters in the tea estates, trekked down to Chandpur, but the Government refused to give "coolies" the meanest facilities for transport, and four thousand of them were completely stranded. Their suffering, which a callous administration deliberately multiplied, roused great indignation; even women workers were beaten up, and "coolies" trying to board steamers thrown into the water. Stung by the bureaucracy's behaviour and responding eagerly to the call of patriotism that sounded and resounded all over the land, the entire Indian staff of the Assam Bengal Railway, and a little later all steamship workers, resorted to a strike. Congressmen espoused the workers' cause, and in the end the

<sup>4</sup>Romain Rolland, "Mahatma Gandhi" (London 1924) pp. 145-47.

people succeeded in repatriating the stranded tea-graden labourers to their homes.

In August occurred the famous revolt of the Moplahs. They were “unusually poor peasants along the Malabar coast of South India, numbering about a million in all, distinguished from their neighbours by their low economic level, and by being Muslims.” Often in the past they had risen against their oppressors, blending bravery and ferocity in pathetic protest against their exploitation and misery. The first notable outbreak in modern times happened, it appears, in 1873, and was repeated in 1885, 1894 and 1896; the British, not wishing to let the grass grow under their feet, permanently stationed troops there and a special police force. In 1921 the Moplahs heard, in spite of British prohibition of subversive propaganda, the evangel of non-co-operation. “Presently the peasants were thoroughly aroused, and in a fervour of apocalyptic vision they gathered themselves together and undertook to set up a Khilafat Kingdom of their own, in which they should at last be free. They attacked the police and the military who were there to keep them oppressed, they attacked their landlords and money-lenders, they attacked everyone in sight. For a short time they were in fiery possession of a considerable area. The Moplahs were bitter; bitterly anti-Hindu, bitterly anti-British, bitter against the world that gave them only misery. Their ardour was the ardour of an oppressed class rising against its enemies, the ardour of religious fanaticism destroying sin and establishing a Kingdom of good.”<sup>5</sup>

Gandhiji and the Ali Brothers offered to tour the affected area, but of course, imperialism would have nothing of it and in its own accustomed way utterly crushed the rebellion. That devil’s advocate of an imperialist, Valentine Chirol, fairly gloated. So the “extremely backward and unruly” Moplahs had taught Hindus a lesson! “The murder of Europeans, the burning and looting of Government buildings, the tearing up of railways and telegraphs, recalled the worst excesses committed by Indian mobs two

<sup>5</sup> W. C. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

years ago in the Punjab. "But", concluded gleefully this shameless scribe, "on this occasion there has been no Mahommedan-Hindu fraternisation".<sup>6</sup> There was, no doubt, a good deal of consternation among Hindus, especially in the South; there is no denying that many of them suffered horribly, for fanaticism, when roused to fever pitch, could not always discriminate between Hindus who were pro-Government and lived parasitically as usurers and Government employees, and those who were innocent of such taint. The Moplah rebellion signified to many Hindu nationalists a turning of the ways which became clearer a few years later. Soon after the uprising, Sir C. Sankaran Nair wrote a vitriolic little book: "Gandhi and Anarchy". How much longer would men like the Ali Brothers be permitted to preach such explosive doctrines, was the question asked timorously by co-operating Hindus in the Legislative Assembly. Gandhiji came in for a lot of obloquy when he referred to the rebels as "brave, God-fearing Moplahs". The Congress Working Committee condemning Moplah violence, recorded with hesitation, however, that "provocation beyond endurance was given to the Moplahs and that the reports published by and on behalf of the Government have given a one-sided and highly exaggerated account of the wrongs done by the Moplahs and an understatement of the needless destruction of life resorted to by the Government in the name of peace and order."

India will never forget or forgive the atrocities perpetrated by the agents of the Government, one example of which should suffice. Towards the end of November, 100 Moplahs were huddled into a closed goods wagon in a fateful journey from Calicut to Madras. At Podanoor station, the door was opened, and it was discovered that 66 had died of thirst and suffocation. Every British child reads and shudders at the account of the so-called Black Hole of Calcutta; Siraj-ud-Dowla's crime, however, is a matter of controversy among historians. There is no controversy about the Moplah massacre; there can be no

<sup>6</sup> V. Chirol, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-98.

denying also the role of the British community in India raising funds for the defence of the British officer responsible for the atrocity.<sup>7</sup>

The non-co-operation wave surged more and more powerfully as the months rolled on. At Karachi, on July 8, the all-India Khilafat Committee, after reiterating the Muslim claims, declared that no Muslim should serve in the English army or assist in recruiting. The Conference went so far as to threaten to proclaim a republic in India and advocate civil disobedience at the December session of the Congress if the Government did not change its hostile attitude to the Angora leaders. A little later, on July 28, the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay decided to boycott the Prince of Wales, whose visit had been announced and declared an unrelenting boycott of foreign goods. In September, the Ali brothers and several other Muslim notables were arrested on the charge of seditious speeches at Karachi. Immediately, the Central Khilafat Committee met at Delhi and unanimously ratified the resolutions of the Karachi Conference. Hundreds of meetings all over India did the same. On October 4, Gandhiji announced that he considered himself, as ever, bound irrevocably in friendship with his Muslim colleagues. Fifty leading members of the All-India Congress Committee approved Gandhiji's declaration that every citizen was entitled to express his views on non-co-operation, adding that no Indian, whether civil functionary or soldier, should serve a government which has brought the moral, political and economical degradation of India. The Ali brothers' trial took place at Karachi, and with their fellow-accused, they were sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

To this sentence India replied with unprecedented vigour. On November 4, the All-India Congress Committee met at Delhi and ratified Gandhiji's manifesto. The Committee went further forward, and, crossing the Rubicon, authorised every province on its own responsibility

<sup>7</sup> For the last two paragraphs, see H. P. Ghose, "Congress" (in Bengali), pp. 412-13; Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, 146-51; E. M. S. Namboodripad, "The Peasant Movement in Kerala", *passim*.

to proclaim civil disobedience and begin with non-payment of taxes. A great non-violent "resistance" seemed about to become effective.

There was about this time a historic controversy between Gandhiji and Tagore. The poet wrote in "Modern Review" for October, 1921, a real manifesto—"An Appeal to Truth"—a cry of revolt against the country-wide craze for blind obedience to Gandhiji, though the poet himself spoke of him in beautiful terms of homage. He castigated the fanaticism of the crowd and asked if India should go on reciting a chapter of negation, dwell eternally on the faults of others, and strive for Swaraj on a basis of hatred. When the bird is awakened by the dawn, he said, it does not think only of food; its wings respond to the call of the sky. Its throat fills with joyous songs to greet the coming day. Let India reply in her own glorious way, he pleaded, when a new humanity has sent out its call. To the noble words of Tagore, "a poem of sunlight" Romain Rolland called them, Gandhiji replied with a memorable article in "Young India" (Oct. 13, 1921)—"The Great Sentinel". Like "a *Bodhisattva* of pity who had given up poetic flights in order to live among the disinherited", Gandhiji wrote with unusual passion. None should surrender reason into anybody else's keeping, he emphasised, and then added: "The poet lives for the morrow and would have us do likewise. He presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of the birds in the early morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky. Those birds had their day's food and soared with rested wings in whose veins new blood had flown the previous night. But I have had the pain of watching birds who for want of strength could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings. The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance. I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir...." Here was "the misery of the world rising before the dream of art and crying, 'Dare deny me existence?'" It did not let Gandhiji rest; it made him advise the poet in all solemnity: "Let Tagore spin, like the others,



let him burn his foreign clothes; that is the duty to-day. God will take care of the morrow. As it says in the Gita, 'Do right!'<sup>8</sup>

The struggle soared to new heights as the end of the year approached, and the Government, in desperate anxiety, tried to counter developments by bringing in the Prince of Wales to tour the country. It was, says R. Palme Dutt, "not so much in any vain hopes of conciliating the people, as to test out the feeling of the population in relation to this royal image understood by every Anglo-Saxon expert of the mysterious East to represent the deepest object of veneration and adoration of the Oriental heart." Earlier in the year, the Duke of Connaught had been brought in to inaugurate the Reforms; he had felt the pulse of the country and made conciliatory speeches. "The shadow of Amritsar", he regretted, had "lengthened over the face of India", and he offered India a royal message which included a word held not long ago to bear only a seditious construction: "For years—it may be for generations—patriotic and loyal Indians have dreamed of *Swaraj* for their motherland. Today you have the beginnings of *Swaraj* within my Empire, and the widest scope and ample opportunity for progress to the liberty which my other Dominions enjoy." It was not so easy, however, to butter parsnips. The old Duke, riding in gorgeous panoply, saw the streets deserted. The visit of the Prince of Wales, it was hoped, in spite of Gandhiji's declaration of boycott, would rouse India's dormant loyalty. But the Government's plans went completely awry, and the Prince's peregrination was a fiasco.

On November 17, when the Prince landed in Bombay, a *hartal* was solemnly observed all over India. The opposition of a denationalised minority in Bombay caused a riot which, to Gandhiji, was "an arrow shot in his heart". But there was no question of the people's militancy. On that day the public life of Calcutta was paralysed, and

<sup>8</sup> "Young India, 1919-22", *passim*; Rolland, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-12. On Sept. 22, Gandhiji began wearing the loin cloth that has become famous all over the world since, as a gesture of identification with the unclothed masses.

Anglo-Indian papers like the "Statesman" raised a hue and cry complaining that Congress volunteers seemed to have taken possession of Calcutta and the Government had abdicated. Wherever the Prince went, he met with the same silent resentment on the part of the people. Bright souls in the Government's propaganda department publicised crowded race meetings where the Prince had gone, but the truth could not be held back.

Congress and Khilafat volunteers used, in those days, to drill together, march the streets proclaiming slogans, picket foreign cloth and grog shops in batches. They were pledged to non-violence, but the sight of massive Hindu-Muslim collaboration put the government in a panic. Promptly, the volunteers were declared an illegal organisation. Arrests ensued, in batches of hundreds. Students who left Government institutions and joined the national schools set up, or had plunged into the movement as whole-time workers, were clapped into jail. Imprisonment had no terrors any longer and became the badge of patriotism. When all India was merely an extended prison, incarceration was felt to be no disgrace.

Before the end of December, most of the top-ranking leaders, Gandhiji excepted, were put behind bars. There were at least 20,000 political prisoners at that time, the regular jails were found inadequate and concentration camps, like the one near the Kidderpore Docks, were improvised. They were sordid witnesses to imperialist callousness. The number of political prisoners increased to at least 30,000 at the beginning of 1922. But repression could not cow the people, who resolved to fight with unceasing vigour till *Swaraj* was reached.

The bureaucracy well knew that repression alone could not daunt India's millions. There was, therefore, a certain furtive disposition towards a possible rapprochement. An effort was made in December, principally by Pandit Malaviya, to contact the leaders in different jails and elicit their views. The Pandit came down to Calcutta where he saw the Viceroy and got an assurance that the ban on volunteer organisations could be lifted and political prisoners let out if the movement was called off. The bait

was a proposed Round Table Conference, but Gandhiji, against the advice of men like C. R. Das and Maulana Azad who were then in jail, refused to call off the movement till the conference had met and produced results. The Government had lost its nerve to some extent no doubt, but it was not prepared to accept Gandhiji's terms.

It was in this situation that the annual session of the Congress was held in Ahmedabad. C. R. Das, president-elect, being in jail, his place was taken by Hakim Ajmal Khan, revered by Muslim and Hindu alike. There was no lack of enthusiasm at the session, though *Swaraj* was far away, when the midnight chimes rang in the new year, 1922. Resolutions were passed proclaiming "the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the campaign of non-violent non-co-operation with greater vigour... till *Swaraj* is established", calling upon all over eighteen years of age to join the illegal National Volunteers, pledging "Civil Disobedience, whether mass or individual, whether of an offensive or defensive character", and appointing Gandhiji virtual dictator "as the sole executive authority of the Congress."

The country could not much longer be kept in leash. The people were awaiting, fretfully, the order to march ahead, the directives that Gandhiji was going to give them.

For some time, however, misgivings were coagulating in the leader's mind. The non-violence of his idylls seemed beyond his people's ken. Among his Muslim colleagues especially, there had been a tendency to demand the abandonment of the "non-violence" clause. As early as July, he had cajoled out of the Ali brothers a disavowal of any intention to incite to violence in certain of their speeches. On November 17, the Bombay disturbances drove him to an expiatory fast and to state that the people's wrath had made *Swaraj* "stink in his nostrils." His unbending doctrinal loyalty seemed to blind him to the realities of a truly explosive situation and he demanded of his people an impossible restraint.

At Ahmedabad, therefore, Gandhiji began putting on the brakes. Most people had hoped that from Ahmedabad would come the summons to civil disobedience, but they

were instructed to hold their souls in patience. The references to civil disobedience were hedged round with provisos. And when Maulana Hasrat Mohani moved a resolution defining Swaraj as "complete independence, free from all foreign control", Gandhiji opposed it with every sign of vehemence. "Let us understand our limitations", he told the Congress. "Let Hindus and Musalmans have absolute, indissoluble unity. Who is here who can say to-day with confidence: 'Yes, Hindu-Muslim unity has become an indissoluble factor of Indian nationalism'?... Let us first of all gather up our strength; let us first of all sound our own depths. Let us not go into waters whose depths we do not know.... Are creeds such simple things like clothes which a man can change at will? For creeds people die, and for creeds people live from age to age. Are you going to change the creed which, with all deliberation, and after great debate in Nagpur, you accepted?..." To Gandhiji, Hasrat Mohani's resolution showed "lack of responsibility" and had "grieved" him. No wonder the Congress defeated the Muslim leader's militant move and affirmed continued confidence in Gandhiji's lead. Even the Khilafat Conference, meeting at the same place with Hakim Ajmal Khan in the chair thought it best not to precipitate matters by accepting the "complete independence" resolution.<sup>9</sup>

The Government of India was anxiously watching the situation, and after Ahmedabad the Viceroy, relieved, wired to the Secretary of State that the Congress had "not only rejected the proposals which the extreme wing of the Khilafat party had advanced for abandoning the policy of non-violence", but also that while civil disobedience had been urged, "any reference to the non-payment of taxes" was omitted.<sup>10</sup> The people's eagerness for action remained unfulfilled, and they waited resignedly for the call which Gandhiji was to send out as "the executive authority" of the Congress.

A month went by, a month of gnawing expectation, but no directives came. Many districts approached

<sup>9</sup> "Indian Annual Register" (1922), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> "Telegraphic Correspondence", Cmd. 1586, (1922) quoted in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-13.

Gandhiji, pleading to begin a No Tax campaign. One district in Andhra—Guntur—even launched it without permission. Its contumacy was frowned upon, and Gandhiji sent an immediate note to the Congress officials directing that all taxes be scrupulously paid up by the due date. The Government had been in a quandary, for in January they were hard put to it to collect four lakhs out of nearly fifteen lakhs that were due. To the people, therefore, Gandhiji's letter came as a shock. The iron was indeed hot, but the leader did not think it worth while to strike it.

On February 1, 1922, Gandhiji sent an ultimatum to the Viceroy that he would begin "mass civil disobedience" if political prisoners were not released and repressive measures abandoned. He had decided, however, to make a beginning with one tiny district in his native Gujerat, the district of Bardoli, with a population of 87,000. It was, in Gandhiji's view, a model area, wedded to undeviating non-violence, eminently suited for the experiment.

Scarcely had the letter to the Viceroy been despatched when news came that at Chauri Chaura, a little village in the United Provinces, police constables had opened fire on a crowd of angry peasants, and as they retired to the *thana* when their ammunition was exhausted, the crowd stormed and burned the police station, resulting in the death of 22 policemen. It was the signal, to Gandhiji's overwrought soul, for sounding the retreat. He listened to the "still, small voice" within; he called Chauri Chaura "the bitterest humiliation", it was the cruellest of all his "Himalayan miscalculations", and so he decided to humble himself "before God and man" and call off his campaign. Hastily, the Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli on February 12, and all India, insensible of the refinements of non-violent philosophy, literally "reeled" to hear that civil disobedience had been suspended, and a "constructive programme" of spinning, anti-untouchability, temperance reform and educational work offered in its stead. "I know", wrote Gandhiji, "that the drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is

religiously sound". It was to most Indians, a staggering statement. The country was plunged into the deepest gloom; the mountain, many felt, had brought forth a mouse.

"To sound the order of retreat", wrote Subhas Bose later, "when public enthusiasm was reaching boiling point was nothing short of a national calamity. The principal lieutenants of the Mahatma, Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, who were all in prison, shared the popular resentment. I was with the Deshbandhu at the time and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow."<sup>11</sup> Letters were sent to Gandhiji by Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai, but with no result. Considerable opposition was voiced at the Delhi session of the All India Congress Committee where the Bardoli decisions came up on February 24 for ratification. In the end, however, Gandhiji triumphed. He felt that the majority backed him, not with the kind of faith in non-violence he required, but only because of their regard for his personality. "Is it not a futile experiment I am conducting?" he asked in agony, but he made up his mind to stand four-square to all the winds of criticism: "The patriotic spirit demands loyal and strict adherence to non-violence and truth. Those who do not believe in them should retire from the Congress organisation".

The entire movement got stuck in the morbid mud of emotional frustration. Later, in his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru sought, in a halting manner, to defend the Bardoli decisions; the movement might have got out of hand and a bloody struggle ensued which the Government very likely would have won. Obviously, he forgot Marx's adjuration that history would indeed be easy to make on the basis of infinitely infallible chances. And even he had to admit that there was demoralisation in the country: "It is possible that this sudden bottling up of a great movement contributed to a tragic development in the country . . . the suppressed violence had to find a way

<sup>11</sup> "The Indian Struggle", p. 90.

out, and in the following years this perhaps aggravated the communal trouble."<sup>12</sup>

There was nothing now to prevent the Government striking with full confidence, and on March 10, Gandhiji was arrested and a week later, sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He was released, however, early in 1924, after he had undergone, in the jail hospital, an operation for appendicitis. But meanwhile, there was a fatal ebb in the tide of the movement. Imperialism had come out on top and the crisis had passed.

On the eve of his arrest and during his trial, Gandhiji spoke and wrote words that are engraven in India's memory. "India would not challenge with success the most determined people of the world", said an insolent telegram from Lord Birkenhead and Mr. Montagu, and in answer Gandhiji wrote on February 23: "How can there be any compromise whilst the British lion continues to shake his gory claws in our faces? . . . It is high time that the British people were made to realise that the fight that was commenced in 1920 is a fight to the finish, whether it lasts one month or one year or many months or many years. I shall only hope and pray that God will give India sufficient humility and sufficient strength to remain non-violent to the end. . . ." In a classic statement before the Court he said, among other things: "Little do town-dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of Indians are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the government established by law in British India is carried on for the exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers in India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history."

<sup>12</sup> "Autobiography", p. 86.

Gandhiji explained why he had turned "from a staunch loyalist and co-operator" into an uncompromising disaffectionist. "I knew I was playing with fire, I ran the risk and if I was set free, I would still do the same."<sup>13</sup>

The master was stowed away in prison, and the people plumbed the depths of despair. Was the movement, when it was halted, really going to pieces, as Jawaharlal argued, "inspite of its apparent power and the widespread enthusiasm"? It does not appear to be so, however, if one recalls the Government's own estimate of the situation on the eve of Bardoli. "The lower classes in the towns", cabled the Viceroy to the Secretary of State on February 9, "have been seriously affected by the non-co-operation movement. . . In certain areas the peasantry have been affected, particularly in parts of the Assam valley, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, and Bengal. As regards the Punjab, the Akali agitation. . . has penetrated to the rural Sikhs. A large proportion of the Mohammedan population throughout the country are embittered and sullen. . . The Government of India are prepared for disorder of a more formidable nature than has in the past occurred, and do not seek to minimise in any way the fact that great anxiety is caused by the situation." Lord Lloyd, Bombay's domineering Governor, said in an American interview: "He (Gandhi) gave us a scare! His programme filled our jails. You can't go arresting people for ever, you know—not when there are 319,000,000 of them. And if they had taken his next step and refused to pay taxes, God knows where we should have been!"<sup>14</sup>

C. R. Das, coming out of jail in 1922, said in a speech at Amraoti that Gandhiji had "bungled and mismanaged". He yielded to none in his homage to the leader; in his address to the Gaya Congress he compared Gandhiji with Jesus Christ and called his comfortable critics "the Scribes and Pharisees", but he could see no consistency between Gandhiji's spirited refusal of compromise terms in December 1921 and his whole-hogging retreat in February 1922.

<sup>13</sup> "Young India", *passim*; "Speeches and Writings of M. K. Gandhi", (Natesan, Madras), p. 754.

<sup>14</sup> References in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-16.



C. R. Das was not alone in his view which he shared with perhaps the majority of Congressmen.

It is unsavoury also to recall that in the famous Bardoli resolution, abstract non-violence was not the only issue involved and that no less than three of its seven clauses urgently emphasised the necessity of the payment of rent by the peasants to the landlords or to the Government, and referred to the landlords' "legal rights". Suspicions of a growing fear of awakening mass activity and militancy seem not unwarranted. This, indeed, was a principal reason for the failure of non-co-operation.

Failure, however, tragic, cannot in any case detract from the glory of those days. Never before in history had India seen such a resurgence of her people. Never before had the country resounded so enthusiastically to cries of 'Hindu-Musalman-ki-jai'. Never before had a leader emerged, of Gandhiji's incomparable quality. There were still many lacunae in the movement; Hindu-Muslim unity had not been yet built on the most solid of foundations; workers and peasants had not acquired yet the theory and practice of socialism; the masses could not yet march ahead on their own when the leadership, unsure of itself, flagged and wavered. But truly the country was aflame and our people, weighted under the cross, had a sight, transient but unforgettable, of the Promised Land of freedom and fulfilment.

. . . She that was great among  
the nations, and princess among  
the provinces, how is she become  
tributary !

From the *PROPHETIC BOOKS*

## CHAPTER XII

### "THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT"

**E**XULTATION had given way to depression all over the country with the sad finale of the great days of 1920-22. "A new heroism, steeled by suffering, has arisen", wrote C. F. Andrews, "a war of the spirit". After Chauri Chaura, Gandhiji had written: "Let the opponent glory in our humiliation and so-called defeat. It is better to be charged with cowardice than to be guilty of denial of our oath (of non-violence) and sin against God . . . I would suffer every torture, absolute ostracism and death itself to prevent the movement from becoming violent or a precursor of violence". These were noble words, but politically speaking, they were disconcerting and incomprehensible. The people felt literally stunned. The mere rumour of Gandhiji's arrest had caused riots among the population in 1920. The six years' sentence in 1922 was received—no doubt as the leader would have wished it—in solemn silence. Protagonists of non-violence thought it was a triumph of the spirit, but in reality India's spirit was dazed and benumbed.

A last effort to revive civil disobedience was made in June 1922, when the All India Congress Committee met at Lucknow. After much discussion, a commission with Hakim Ajmal Khan as chairman, and Pandit Motilal Nehru, Dr. Ansari, Sjts. C. Rajagopalachariar, V. J. Patel and S. Kasturiranga Iyengar as members, was appointed to

inquire into conditions and report if the country was ripe for civil disobedience. The Commission toured all provinces and in the autumn sent in a discouraging report. Civil disobedience was found to be impracticable for the present, and three of the members, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Pandit Nehru and Sjt. V. J. Patel even recommended what they called "a practicable and desirable measure of a character similar to civil disobedience", namely, entering the Legislatures in order to "wreck the reforms" and "smash the huge superstructure of world-wide deception which has cost millions to build up." The other three members contended that "the constitution of seats in the Legislative Council with its class, communal and special interests, renders it absolutely impossible to secure a majority sufficient to secure deadlocks in the manner contemplated", and further, that "indiscriminate obstruction must be a manifest violation of the oath of allegiance and it should be repellent to every sincere believer in the basic principles of the non-co-operation movement."<sup>1</sup>

As the controversy over parliamentarism proceeded, the national movement lost its former militancy. In 1921, the membership target, which the Congress nearly reached, was ten million. In 1924, however, Gandhiji stated that no more than 200,000 could be claimed. When at the end of the year he introduced the "spinning franchise", requiring members of elected Congress organisations to send in 2000 yards of self-spun yarn every month, the roll fell to some 10,000 by the autumn of 1925, when it was withdrawn as an obligatory condition and was made optional. In the prevailing gloom, sinister symptoms began to appear. The Muslim League, which had played second fiddle to the Khilafat Conference and toed the Congress line, separated itself again. The Hindu Mahasabha, flourishing in an atmosphere of depression and disruption, raised its head. A recrudescence of terrorism emphasised the confusion and desperation of thought and action.

Events in the Near East quenched before long the old

<sup>1</sup> See C. Y. Chintamani's complacent Liberal criticism of the Congress proceedings in "Indian Politics Since the Mutiny", pp. 134-37.

Khilafat fervour, for Indian Musalmans could not possibly shut their eyes to what was happening. The people of most of the Ottoman Empire rose and overthrew the Sultan's hold over them; in November 1922, the people of the remaining, Turkish, part of it also rose, under their great leader, Mustapha Kemal Pasha, and deposing one Sultan, put another in his stead, only as *Khalifah*, but without temporal power. When in December 1922, the All India Khilafat Conference met alongside the Congress at Gaya, a resolution was passed in approval of the new choice of *Khalifah*, but expressing a pious request that Turkey should maintain the Khilafat in accordance with the *shariat* and in consultation with the whole Islamic world. Everyone knew, however, that what was at the back of the Indian Khilafatists' mind would go unheeded. Muslim countries of the Near East followed in the main their independent line of development. The Khilafat organisation continued in India for some years, but the heart was taken out of it. The majority of educated Indian Muslims were soon paying little attention to it; the masses were disillusioned, for Swaraj had not come, and therefore, inevitably, Indian Musalmans were powerless to have their own way in the affairs of Islam. It took them some time to adjust themselves to the realities of the situation. They had fought to help Turkey and an old order which was crumbling in any case. They had fought at the same time, magnificently against imperialist hegemony. But for the time being, they felt demoralised, and the Muslim middle class, like its Hindu counterpart, turned its energies to the unsavoury competition for the loaves and fishes of office and puny power.

From 1923 onwards, a series of communal riots scarred our record. The bureaucracy not unoften subtly engineered them and then gloated over the exhibition of Indian disunity.<sup>2</sup> Besides, most communal riots were in reality isolated instances of class struggle fought in communal guise. There can be no denying, however, that on the Hindu and

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<sup>2</sup> Ambedkar gives an uncritical summary of these happenings from the official publications: *op. cit.*, pp. 153-75.

the Muslim side tempers were frayed and there was a conspicuous lack of a common 'we' feeling. This was the time when Swami Shraddhananda, whom Musalmans had invited in the great days of 1919 to preach from the pulpit of the Delhi Jumma Masjid, was irrevocably embittered against Musalmans, and while he never ceased talking the idiom of nationalism, completely alienated the Musalmans by vigorously launching a Hindu-chauvinist *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* movements. This was the time when Saifuddin Kitchlew, one of the straightest of India's patriots, devoted himself to the *Tanzeem* and *Tabligh* movements to organise Musalmans as a strong and virile community. In 1924 occurred the tragedy at Kohat in the North Western Province, where in two days' rioting 155 persons were killed and wounded, and tension between Hindus and Muslims continued for long afterwards. This was only one among many instances of communal madness that has marred our history since. In 1924, Gandhiji, only lately released, went on a twenty-one days' fast at Delhi where he was putting up in Maulana Muhammad Ali's house. A Unity Conference met at his bedside, to which there went even sympathetic foreigners like the Bishop of Calcutta, and passed the inevitable resolutions. The canker, however, had eaten deep into the body politic and needed more drastic remedies.

This was only the first of Unity Conferences to be held over and over again, but with diminishing results. Notable among them was the one held at Simla in August 1927 and another at Calcutta two months later. At the former a committee was appointed to work out details of a settlement, and after a few days it adjourned on the understanding that a further meeting would be held on requisition from the members, but the requisition never came. The latter was held under the auspices of the Congress President, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, and passed certain resolutions, but actually brought understanding no nearer than before.

An evil star seemed to haunt India's fate, for nothing emerged out of apparently serious efforts. The All India Muslim League at its annual session at Lucknow in March

1923 passed a resolution urging the establishment of a national pact and appointed a committee to collaborate with similar bodies to be set up by other organisations. The Congress at its special session at Delhi in September 1923, meeting under the Presidentship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, reciprocated the sentiments expressed by the League. A report of the committee on the Indian National Pact was signed by Dr. Ansari and Lala Lajpat Rai and was presented at the session of the Congress held at Cocanada where Maulana Muhammad Ali presided, in December 1923. Along with it came up for consideration the Bengal Pact prepared by the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee under the immediate inspiration of C. R. Das. This latter document had been welcomed by Bengali Muslims who gladly came forward to co-operate in all Congress activities as in the days of 1919-21, but it was thrown out by the Cocanada Congress by 678 votes against 458, presumably because it had conceded separate electorates and reservation of State appointments for Musalmans. With regard to the document prepared by Dr. Ansari and Lajpat Rai, it was decided to refer it back to the All India Congress Committee for further elicitation of opinion, but as Lajpat Rai said later, there was a feeling that it was not opportune to proceed with the Committee's labours, and nothing was done. Gandhiji, of course, took up the threads as soon as he came out of jail, but in spite of all-parties conferences and unity meetings, the picture remained essentially unchanged. "If *azans* and *peepul* trees and noisy processions are our horizon's utter sum", Muhammad Ali declared at Cocanada, "let us ring down, this farce is nothing worth".<sup>3</sup>

The problem of Hindu-Muslim unity was taken up again in right earnest in 1927. The British government had announced the appointment of the all white Statutory Commission, with Sir John Simon as chairman, to sit in judgment upon India's fitness for a further instalment of

<sup>3</sup> The relevant volumes of the Indian Quarterly Register will be found indispensable. See also Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-302, 305-307.

reforms. When the Congress met at Madras in Christmas week 1927, nearly two months after the announcement, Dr. Ansari, the President, demanded that "the problem of Hindu-Muslim difference must be solved once and for all". The Delhi proposals which had emanated from leading Muslims who had met in March 1917 were amicably considered and a resolution was passed authorising the Congress Working Committee to confer with other organisations and draft a Swaraj constitution for India. The Muslim League and Liberal Federation passed similar resolutions. An All-Parties Conference met on February 12, 1928, and appointed a sub-committee consisting of Pandit Motilal Nehru, Sir Ali Imam, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Shuaib Qureshi, to frame a constitution. Everything seemed propitious, for the Muslim League, under Mr. Jinnah's leadership, decided to join hands with the Congress in boycotting the Simon Commission, even at the cost of a split, for a moderate section under Sir Muhammad Shafi broke away and offered its co-operation.

Our spell of failure was not going, however, to break and when the Nehru Committee's Report was ready, Mr. Jinnah proposed at the All Parties Convention held at Calcutta on the eve of the Congress session in the last week of 1928, four amendments on behalf of the Musalmans. These amendments referred to the Muslim demand for 33-1/3 percent representation in the Central Legislature, the reservation of seats on the population basis in Bengal and the Punjab, i.e., the claim to a statutory majority, the vesting of residuary powers, not in the Centre as the Nehru Report had laid down, but the provinces, and the separation of Sind. "I am not wedded to separate electorates", Mr. Jinnah emphasised, "although I must say that the overwhelming majority of the Musalmans firmly and honestly believe that it is the only method by which they can be sure." In a speech in 1931 he said: "I would personally prefer a settlement on the basis of joint electorate. But I also know that there is a large body of Muslims—and I believe, a majority of Muslims—who are holding on to separate electorates. My position is that I would rather have a settlement even on the footing of separate electorate,

hoping and trusting that when we work our new constitution and when both Hindus and Muslims get rid of distrust, suspicion and fears, and when they get their freedom, we would rise to the occasion and probably separate electorate will go sooner than most of us think."<sup>4</sup>

The gulf, therefore, between Hindu and Muslim was by no means wide. The Muslim proposals seem to-day to have been such that they should have been clinched with happy enthusiasm. That, however, was not to be; it seems almost a freak of fate that a narrow gulf was found impossible to bridge.

A section of Musalman opinion held on to the Nehru recommendations, but there was no doubt that Muslim estrangement was growing worse than ever. Maulana Muhammad Ali, that doughty fighter who said in 1923 on his release from jail that he was "out from a smaller prison to a larger one", whose Cocanada speech was a thrilling reminder of the non-co-operation spirit, was speaking now the language of angry disillusionment. Presiding over the All India Khilafat Conference held at Calcutta in 1928, he condemned the Nehru Committee's admitting for India the status of a British Dominion and said: "You make compromises in your constitution every day with false doctrines, immoral conceptions and wrong ideas, but you make no compromise with our communalists with separate electorates and reserved seats. Twenty-five per cent is our proportion of the population, and yet you will not give us 33 per cent in the Assembly. You are a Jew, a *Bania*". Some of the more radical among the Muslim leaders declared themselves suspicious of the Hindus' seriousness about complete independence, and, imprudently oblivious of the paramount need of unity, demarcated themselves from the Congress which, to their mind, was dominated by the Hindus. It was recalled that at Ahmedabad in December 1921, Maulana Hasrat Mohani had vainly called upon the Congress to accept complete independence as its objective, that Gandhiji, presiding over the Congress at Belgaum in 1924, had expressed

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15.



himself against "complete severance of the British connection", that C. R. Das at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Faridpur, which Gandhiji attended in 1925, had spoken of the "spiritual significance" of Dominion Status and its superiority over independence, that, naturally enough, the Nehru Report postulated Dominion Status in spite of the Madras Congress (1927) resolution of the "goal" of "complete national independence", and that even at Calcutta (1928), Gandhiji persuaded the Congress, after anxious debate, that the British government should be allowed time till the end of 1929 to decide if it was going to implement the Nehru recommendations. As against this picture was pointed out that even an all-parties Muslim Conference of the U. P. meeting in November 1928 declared that Musalmans stood for "the goal of complete independence" "which shall necessarily take the form of a federal republic", and that a Khan Bahadur who demurred was sent a note from women visitors in the purdah gallery that if men lacked courage, women would come out of seclusion and take their place in the struggle for independence.<sup>5</sup>

In 1929, on behalf of the Muslim League, Mr. Jinnah formulated his Fourteen Demands. It was thought at the time, disastrously as later events testify, that the demands, which to-day read very far from frightening, came from people more famous than representative and could be ignored with impunity. This was a cardinal error, and its shadow has lengthened; the poison has entered the soul and the situation so deteriorated that to-day one can deplore communalism but hardly avoid it.<sup>6</sup> Memories of the fraternisation of 1919-21 seemed an unreal dream.

Meanwhile, an important section of the Congress leadership, represented by C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, turned to policies more specifically political than were offered by the Bardoli injunctions on the constructive pro-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 274-76, 280-283 and quotations therein from the Indian Quarterly Register.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Noman, "Muslim India" is a specimen of how feelings had been gradually estranged to the point of unconscious morbidity.

gramme. At the Gaya Congress (1922) C. R. Das, presiding, elaborated his scheme of entering the Legislatures with a view to "uniform, consistent and continuous obstruction". In debate his scheme was thrown out by 1740 against 890 votes; undaunted, however, he formed the Swaraj Party which proposed to remain within the Congress and carry forward the fight on the parliamentary plane within the new legislatures. "No-changers", led by C. Rajagopalachari, clung to the "constructive programme", of spinning, temperance, removal of untouchability, and similar social reforms as the only road to freedom. The Swarajist policy was, therefore, a more positive move, perhaps the only one feasible in view of the weakness of the mass movement. Their position inside the Congress remained equivocal till the special session of the Congress at Delhi in September 1923, when Maulana Muhammad Ali spoke of his telepathic communication with Gandhiji, then in jail, to the effect that the Swarajist move should not be hindered. In the elections that followed, Swaraj Party candidates achieved great success in the provinces, and especially in the Central Provinces and Bengal, where the ministries failed to command the confidence of the legislature and the constitution was suspended, and a powerful contingent was returned to the Central Assembly with the redoubtable Motilal Nehru as leader. The Swarajists' tussle with No-changers continued, however, till Gandhiji came out of jail, reviewed conditions in the country, measured the Swaraj Party's strength and decided to give it his blessings, which he did at Belgaum (1924).

When constituencies marked out on the basis of an attenuated franchise returned members to the legislatures, the Swaraj Party's interest shifted inevitably, so to speak, from the masses to the classes. In abstract principle, of course, the Party referred generally in its programme to the need of workers' and peasants' organisation; C. R. Das, who presided over the All India Trade Union Congress in 1924, demanded, in a famous speech, "Swaraj for the 98 per cent". But in practice it was the party of the patriotic and progressive sections of the upper and middle

bourgeoisie. Many joined it with a view only to an easy election; the prosperous predominated, for fighting elections meant considerable expense. There was, thus, a basic clause in the Party's programme of aims which said that "private and individual property will be recognised and maintained, and the growth of individual wealth, both movable and immovable, will be permitted." Expressions of concern for the peasant were expiated by an assurance to the zemindar: "True it is that the Party stands for justice to the tenant, but poor indeed will be the quality of that justice if it involves any injustice to the landlord."<sup>7</sup> It was the reflection of the ebb of the tide of mass struggle. There was nothing to be wondered at when, in Bengal after C. R. Das's death, the Swarajists in the legislature cared more for the interests of the landlord than for those of the tenant during discussions on the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act (1927). This was one of the primary reasons for accentuated antagonism between Hindus (most of the landlords belonged to this category) and Muslims (who were mostly peasants) in East Bengal, illustrated, most tragically of all, in the Kishoreganj riots a few years later. In the Central Assembly, the Party under Motilal Nehru's leadership did a great deal more for the Tata Iron & Steel Company owners than for the workers at Jamshedpur. The Swaraj Party had roused a new enthusiasm when things looked moribund, but the masses hardly figured, really and truly, on its canvas.

"Uniform, consistent and continuous obstruction" was the Swaraj Party's original slogan, a slogan which captured enthusiastic votes, but in Bengal, its leader, C. R. Das offered, on terms, co-operation in running the government. "His Party had come there to offer their co-operation," Das told the Bengal Governor. "If the Government would receive their co-operation, they would find that the Swarajists were their men." In May 1925, a month before his death, C. R. Das was declaring in his famous Faridpur address, delivered in Gandhiji's

<sup>7</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-20.

presence and presumably with his approval, that he saw a "change of heart" in the British Government in spite of the attitude of the then Secretary of State, Lord Birkenhead, who spoke with an insolent sneer of "the unsubstantial ghost of Indian nationalism", and that "independence, to my mind, is a narrower ideal than that of Swaraj". The philosophical excursus apart, this is a statement which suggests divorce from the requirements of a real, live mass movement. His offer of conditional co-operation made the Liberals come out of their seclusion and affirm proudly that wisdom was dawning—better later than never—on fire-eating Swarajists.

Having failed in their declared ambition to "smash" or "end" the councils and "wreck the reforms", the Swaraj party staged a walk-out from all legislative bodies in March 1926. But repeated appeals came from members themselves for permission to walk in again on the ground of the special importance of certain subjects. The Congress executive usually granted such permission, and the Swarajists walking in and walking out made one Liberal call them "peripatetic patriots" and another dubbed their comings and goings as "patriotism in locomotion". The result of it all was pathetic. At the 1926 elections, Congress candidates stood again, but as the liberal publicist Chintamani joyfully records, "at least some of them found that the gilt was off the ginger-bread", and except in Madras, the party suffered a marked setback.<sup>8</sup>

Imperialism refused to let slip this opportunity, and when the Swarajists, divorced from the mass movement, were driven to pleading for terms of conciliation, the Government launched its offensive. The partial economic concessions won by the Indian bourgeoisie during the previous years were now in jeopardy. The Currency Bill of 1927, the establishment of the rupee ratio at 1s. 6d. in the face of nearly universal Indian protests, and the new Steel Protection Bill of 1927 which undermined the protection of the 1924 Act by introducing preferential rates for British steel, were the instruments of the offensive.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 319-20; Chintamani, *op.*, cit., p. 140.

To cap everything, the all-white personnel of the Simon Commission was announced in 1927, a slap in the face of Indian expectations. Something must be done, it was increasingly felt, if India's interests were not to be submerged and her self-respect obliterated.

Frustration in the patriotic camp, after the failure of Non-co-operation, resulted in the recrudescence of terrorism, especially in its home province, Bengal. Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal, spoke in 1923 of a "conspiracy" of people "amongst whom violence is an acknowledged creed and terrorism a deliberate policy", and early in 1924 a number of leading personalities, including Subhas Chandra Bose, were deported under Regulation III of 1818. About this time an Englishman was assassinated in a Calcutta street in mistake for the hated Commissioner of Police; the Government and its friends took much umbrage at the Bengal Provincial Conference under C. R. Das's guidance, which while denouncing the murder as a misguided act, rendered homage to the patriotism and self-sacrifice of the young man who committed it. In September 1924, the Viceroy, in exercise of his emergency power, issued an ordinance suspending trial by jury in cases of alleged terrorist conspiracy and provided for the appointment of special commissioners to try such cases. The Government was taking recourse to its wonted weapon of legalised terrorism.

Much more important was the awakening of mass forces to a new, strident life of their own, to independent political aims, and to active struggle not only against imperialism but also against its junior and often discontented partner, the Indian exploiter. In the mid-nineteen-twenties, the industrial working class was emerging as an important factor, fighting for its rights and evolving its own leadership. For the first time also, the new ideology of the working class, or Socialism, had begun to develop in India and penetrate to the radical and youthful section of Indian nationalists. Imperialism kept, of course, a sharp look-out and at the Cawnpore Conspiracy trial of 1924, sentenced to long terms of imprisonment pioneers of

Marxism in India like Muzaffar Ahmad and Dange. During 1926 and 1927, the growth of the Communist-inspired Workers' and Peasants' Party signalled the advance of trade unionism and the phenomenal strike movement of 1928. Nearly thirty-two million working days were lost on account of the wave of strikes that year, but it did not daunt our working class. About seventy thousand members were enrolled in the Girni Kamgar Union, the Red Flag Union of Bombay Textile Workers, grandest of trade unions in Asia. The G.I.P. Railway Union, the jute workers' unions in Bengal, and the short-lived but the magnificent organisation of the E. I. Railway workers cannot be easily forgotten. The rising militant consciousness of the trade unions, witnessed best of all in the successful six-month strike of 150,000 Bombay textile workers in 1928, gave the Government a premonition of what could soon be expected.

In the Congress and the national movement generally, a new leftwing appeared as the inevitable reflection of this development. The Madras Congress (1927) registered a strong protest against the employment of Indian troops in Shanghai to suppress the Chinese revolution. It was in the same year that the Congress participated in the foundation of the International League of Oppressed Peoples against Imperialism, Jawaharlal Nehru being its representative at the conference in Brussels. The Nehrus, father and son, visited the Soviet Union, and the younger Nehru wrote a book on his Soviet visit and when he came back, did a good deal to popularise Soviet ideals and achievements. A resolution for complete independence was adopted at the Madras Congress; affiliation to the League against Imperialism was arranged; boycott of the Simon Commission was determined, and the Nehru Committee set up to evolve an alternative constitutional scheme. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, leaders of the Left, became general secretaries of the Congress.

In 1928 was witnessed a vivid leftward swing which soon made many of the older leaders pause and take stock of the situation. The Simon Commission was boycotted by the Congress, the Muslim League and the Liberals;

few but the utterest toadies had anything to do with its pompous peregrinations. Sir John Simon and his colleagues met, instead of welcome, hostile demonstrators everywhere; the police *lathi*-charged, injuring even top leaders and hastening Lala Lajpat Rai's death, but that was not the way of cowing our people. In the *hartals* and massive demonstrations of that year, the organised working class took a very large part; the people's movement was striding on to a higher level.

The new face of Indian nationalism frightened, however, a section of the country's leaders. An eleventh-hour effort was made for a compromise with imperialism; the Nehru Report envisaged Dominion Status, and at the Calcutta Congress (1928) Gandhiji was dragged in from his self-chosen seclusion to plead successfully for the postponement of the struggle. The Left amendment insisting on the immediate aim of complete independence was defeated by 1350 votes against 973. Fifty thousand disciplined workers marched to the Congress session and for two hours were in possession of the *pandal*; sticklers for procedural propriety, even the radical Nehru and Bose, tried their hardest to get them out of the *pandal*, but could not, and it was only the personality and persuasion of Gandhiji and the elder Nehru that made them leave the session after their demands had been heard and assured consideration.

Imperialism now openly prepared its offensive, and its strategy, as always, was to divide all patriotic forces. In January 1929, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, declared in the Central Assembly that his Government was taking measures to check "the disquieting spread of communist doctrines". The official report on "India in 1928-29" noted that "the growth of communist propaganda and influence, especially among the industrial classes of certain large towns, caused anxiety to the authorities." In August 1929, the *Manchester Guardian* bemoaned that "the industrial workers in the biggest centres are peculiarly malleable material in the hands of unscrupulous communist organisers." Reformist politicians and newspapers warned against "the gospel of strike".

Early in 1929, the Viceroy issued a special ordinance, the Public Safety Bill "to curb communist activities in India", which the Assembly had thrown out, with Speaker Patel's casting vote, in September 1928. To please the reformists, a Labour Commission was appointed, but the main blow fell in March 1929, when the principal leaders of the working class movement, thirty-two in all, were arrested from all over India and brought to the town of Meerut, far from any big industrial centre, for trial. So began one of the longest, most elaborate and notorious State Trials in history. Three representatives of the British working class movement stood in the dock with their Indian comrades, impressive witnesses to international proletarian unity. For four weary years the trial dragged out. It meant that when the Congress struggle was launched at last in 1930, "the working class was decapitated", its most clear-headed and determined leaders stowed away and unable to pull its full weight in the national movement. The Government prosecutor's speech made it very clear also that the bogey of communism was being raised by wily imperialists to drive a wedge between the dominant trends of the national leadership and the working class.

The Calcutta Congress's ultimatum to the British Government was due to expire on December 31, 1929, if the latter did not concede Dominion Status by that date. The country, therefore, was on tenterhooks, yearning for the inevitable struggle, and enthusiastically elected Gandhiji as Congress President. He stood down, however, and suggested in his stead Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, for "although passionate and resolute in struggle, still he possesses the reason of a statesman". The Left, though mystified by Gandhiji's standing down, was not unhappy at Nehru's selection. A shock came, however, in October-November 1929, when the Viceroy made a declaration on the "goal of Dominion Status" to be reached at some unspecified future date as "the natural issue"—whatever that might mean—"of India's constitutional progress", and in response Gandhiji, Mrs. Besant, the two Nehrus, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and others signed what is known as the



Delhi Manifesto offering co-operation "to evolve a scheme for a Dominion Constitution suitable to India's needs". Jawaharlal later judged his action as "wrong and dangerous", but he was, he admits, "talked into signing" and calmed by a "soothing letter from Gandhiji". It was really an amazing incident; it happened in the context of the heroism of a Bhagat Singh and the self-sacrifice of a Jatin Das. There was confusion and consternation in Congress ranks; imperialists gloated, the London *Times* remarking on November 4, 1929: "What last night's statement means is the scrapping of the programme on which Congress was to have met at Lahore."<sup>9</sup>

Not all the plottings of reaction could daunt the people's spirit, however, and at the Lahore Congress, the decision for action was taken. The Nehru Report, with its acceptance of Dominion Status, was declared to have lapsed, and complete independence (*Purna Swaraj*) adopted as the creed of the Congress. The All India Congress Committee was authorised "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes". At midnight on December 31, as the new year was ushered in, the flag of Indian freedom was unfurled by the Congress President. On January 26, 1930, was celebrated all over India the first Independence Day, when mighty crowds took the pledge, to be renewed every year, to struggle for complete independence, and proclaimed to all the world that it was "a crime against man and God to submit any longer" to British rule. Mystery still shrouded the definition of *Purna Swaraj* and Gandhiji's chosen strategy. But the people of India again pitted their strength against imperialist rule. They could not then defeat the world's mightiest empire, but they made a heroic effort, and for many months the movement surged, the spirit of the people was kindled, and it burned, a brilliant flame.

<sup>9</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-26, and references therein.

Once more unto the breach,  
dear friends, once more.  
SHAKESPEARE, HENRY V

## CHAPTER XIII

### "ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH"

**T**HE year nineteen-hundred-and-thirty made its entry in India on the wings of hope and exhilaration. For all the equivocations which preceded the Lahore session of the Congress, and the defeat, at the session itself, of a forthright left-wing resolution that "a parallel government" should be set up and "workers, peasants and youths" organised for that end, complete independence had been declared the goal and a programme of Civil Disobedience authorised.

"We were vague about the future," wrote Jawaharlal Nehru characteristically in his autobiography. "In spite of the enthusiasm shown at the Congress session, no one knew what the response of the country would be to a programme of action. We had burnt our boats and could not go back, but the country ahead of us was an almost strange uncharted land."<sup>1</sup> This, indeed, is strange language, and from the pen of the man who had presided at Lahore. The fact of the matter, however, was that Gandhiji's strategy was unclear even to his nearest associates. With his flair for paradoxical actions, he published, through an American journal, early in January, a statement that "the independence resolution need frighten nobody", and on January 30, in the columns of "Young India" he put forward Eleven Points, including the demand for the rupee ratio of sixteen pence, protective tariff on foreign cloth, total prohibition,

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography", p. 202.

and reduction of land revenue and military expenditure, and offered, in spite of all that had transpired at Lahore, to call off Civil Disobedience. The indispensability of Gandhiji—which R. Palme Dutt describes correctly as the expression of the precarious balance of class forces in India—made people shut their eyes to seeming inconsistencies and in February, the All India Congress Committee called upon "Mahatma Gandhi and those working with him" to lead and control the campaign of civil disobedience. That this was done in preference to entrusting any elected organ of the Congress with the job was due to the belief that the movement should be run only by "those who believe in non-violence...as an article of faith". Not everybody was happy, however, at this posture of affairs, and the official historian of the Congress has been driven, as so often in his book, to strenuous special pleading. "Those gathered at Sabarmati", we read, "inquired of Gandhi about his plans. . . There was no privacy about our plans. But they were not clear-cut either. They would unfold themselves, much as the path on a misty morning reveals itself to a fast-moving motor, almost from yard to yard. The "Satyagrahi" carried a searchlight on his forehead. It shows the way for the next step."<sup>2</sup> The rhetoric is meretricious, but the point is clear. Everything was left to Gandhiji and his intuitive understanding of the mind of India's masses.

Two opposing strands are distinctly noticeable in the upsurge that soon followed. In his letter to the Viceroy dated March 2, 1930, Gandhiji warned: "It is my purpose to set in motion that force (non-violence) as well against the organised violence force of the British rule as the unorganised violence force of the growing party of violence. To sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above mentioned." A year later, in May 1931, he wrote in an article: "I would welcome even utter failure with non-violence unimpaired, rather than depart from it by a hair's breadth to achieve a doubtful success."<sup>3</sup> If, however, it

<sup>2</sup> B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, "History of the National Congress", p. 628, quoted by R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>3</sup> References in *Ibid.*, p. 329.

was going to be "a fight to the finish", if there was going to be a decisive struggle for the ending of British rule and the establishment of complete independence, this super-human insistence on absolute non-violence could not, it was felt by many who plunged into the struggle, bring about the desired result and could at best be prized as a heroic essay in impossible ethics. It was the price that India had necessarily to pay for an incomparable and still irreplaceable leadership.

The movement began in the manner that Gandhiji chose. "My intention", he wrote in February, "is to start the movement only through the inmates of the Ashrama and those who have submitted to its discipline and assimilated its methods." He sent no summons, significantly, to the industrial working class. He enlisted the support and interest of the peasantry, but he did not send them such directions as might embroil them with the landlords. He decided to lead the fight against the salt monopoly of the Government and with his seventy-eight chosen disciples, started on the famous three-week march to Dandi for the ceremonial making of salt on the seashore on that memorable anniversary, April 6. He was not immediately arrested; strangely enough, the Government did not appear to mind the enormous publicity given to the Salt March through the Press, the cinema and every other propaganda device. Imperialism, for its own purposes certainly, kept its iron fist well concealed for the time being inside a velvet glove, but it had not forgotten to take special precautions. Even before Independence Day, Subhas Bose had been arrested, and soon after Dandi the ugly face of imperialism was completely unmasked and ruthless repression was in full blast.

India's debt to Gandhiji is irredeemable. He taught us to fear the conqueror no longer. He roused our dormant spirit, restored our self-esteem. In his serenity he has embodied the soul of our India. It hurts, therefore, to have to express misgivings about the oddities, to put it mildly, inseparable from his leadership. Perhaps, however, the country has a right to remonstrance. Gandhiji has given so much to India that a lot more was rightfully expected.

In his instructions issued on April 9, he asked for the manufacture, in every village, of contraband salt, the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops, universal spinning, burning of foreign cloth, eschewal by Hindus of untouchability, communal "heart unity", boycott of schools and colleges, and resignation of Government service. The mass movement went a great deal beyond the limits set out. Even a leadership, subtle and sublime at the same time, could not put its own invariable stamp on every manifestation of mass discontent. There had been, inevitably, an economic background to the Indian struggle. The world economic crisis of 1929-30 had projected its shadow on our country. The price of agricultural produce had fallen by nearly half, and the drop in the price of silver had hit hard the peasants' meagre savings. The rupee ratio, fixed by Government at eighteen pence, had added eleven per cent to India's debt. Each class had reason for disaffection, and the movement, naturally, made large strides. The "Gandhian alchemy" was again at work, and heroes were moulded out of clay.

Massive demonstrations from one end of the country to another were a proud feature of those days. Young and old, men and women, braved police *lathis*; they squatted on the road in passive resistance for hours on end when processions were blocked. For some months, the district of Midnapore appeared to be beyond the reach of the Bengal Government. Death-defying patriots, unattracted by non-violence, raided the armoury in Chittagong and organised a network of revolutionaries who put cowering fear in bureaucracy's heart. For ten days, the British writ did not run in Peshawar. The working class set up for a week its own authority at Sholapur. The peasantry rose in many localities, especially in the United Provinces, and withheld payment of rents. Those were great days, joyous and proud.

At Peshawar, in April, happened an incident which will never be forgotten. Local leaders had been arrested, and armoured cars were sent to cow the angry mass demonstrations. One of these cars was seized and burnt, but its occupants came to no harm. This was followed by whole-

sale firing on the unarmed crowds and the inevitable casualties. It was at this time that two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles, Hindu troops in the midst of a Muslim crowd, refused the order to fire and fraternised with the people.<sup>4</sup> This was the signal for a tremendous mass advance; from April 25 to May 4, Peshawar was in the hands of the people and had to be "recaptured" by powerful British forces with air squadrons. All demands for inquiry into the incident were refused by the Government. A court-martial imposed savage sentences on seventeen men of the Garhwali Rifles; one was given life transportation, another fifteen years' rigorous imprisonment, and the rest terms varying from three to ten years.

The brave Garhwalis had given a demonstration of real non-violence, but strangely enough, Gandhiji found reasons to condemn their conduct. "A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks an oath," he said to a foreign newspaperman. In the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement which concluded the first round of the struggle, the clause for the release of political prisoners specifically excluded the Garhwalis. There is no mention of the episode in Dr. Sita-ramayya's officially sponsored history of the Congress. Whatever their technical deviation from the mysteries of philosophic "non-violence", the heroism of the Garhwalis lives in the hearts of the people and will be cherished even when many present reputations are unmade.

The mass movement was gathering momentum at a rate that frightened the bureaucracy, and on May 5, Gandhiji was arrested. "While Mr. Gandhi", said the Government communique, "has continued to deplore these outbreaks of violence, his protests against his unruly followers have become weaker and weaker, and it is evident that he is unable to control them." The more important consideration, surely, was that Gandhiji was, in spite of

<sup>4</sup> A first-hand description of the incident appeared in the Bombay weekly "People's War" (May 1945). Thakur Chandra Singh who wrote the article was one of those who got long sentences for disobedience to military orders. The publication of the article led the U. P. Government to ban "People's War"!

his incomprehensible interpretations of non-violence, the symbol of the people's unbending will to freedom, and could not very well be left at large. A wave of *hartals* and mass strikes all over India followed the arrest. Perhaps the most spectacular one was witnessed at Sholapur in Bombay Presidency, 50,000 of whose 140,000 inhabitants were textile operatives, where for a whole week, till martial law was proclaimed on May 12, the workers held possession of the town and set up their own administration. There is sufficient contemporary evidence that complete order was maintained, but naturally the vials of imperialism's wrath were spent on the brave citizens of Sholapur.

There was no limit to the repression which the Government had let loose. Where martial law had not been declared, Ordinance *Raj* was a near enough substitute. In June the Congress and all its organisations were declared illegal. According to Government figures, certainly an underestimate, 60,000 civil resisters were sentenced in less than a year after the movement was launched. The official historian of the Congress records that "in 1930-31, within a short interval of ten months, 90,000 men, women and children were sentenced." On July 14, 1930, it was admitted by the Government spokesman in the Legislative Assembly that from April 1 to that date there had been 29 cases of firing on the public which killed 103 and injured 420 persons. Indeed, imprisonment was the least of the forms of repression. Jails were filled to overflowing and wholesale imprisonment could not check the movement. Imperialism employed, therefore, its accustomed methods, accentuating them whenever necessary. Indiscriminate *lathi* charges were the order of the day; no record was kept of the beating up of citizens which was a regular feature of police activity; firing on unarmed crowds and punitive expeditions against refractory villages completed the repulsive picture. The strictest censorship prevailed; Congress inquiry committees produced a mass of certified and attested facts about, for example, the Government terror in Peshawar and Midnapore, but their reports were banned. A "Labour" government, ironically,

was in office in Britain at the time, which the reactionary *London Observer* described as "a providential chance".<sup>5</sup>

Repression could not hide the consternation in the camp of imperialism, and by the summer of 1930 there was something like alarm, especially among the British trading community who were hit hard by the boycott. This was noticeable most of all in Bombay, the chief centre of the strength of the working class and also of the advanced Indian bourgeoisie, and there the movement was about the strongest in the country. "Bombay," said one of its many proud citizens, "had been turned into a non-violent edition of Paris, in its well-known revolutionary days."<sup>6</sup> The *London Spectator* published on July 5 "a letter from Bombay" which reported that "the Government of Bombay would be overthrown in a day and the administration would be taken over by the Congress with the assent of all. Even the British businessmen, normally dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, joined with Indian businessmen in demanding immediate self-government for India on a Dominion basis. It was astounding to hear the *Tory Times of India* (Bombay) raising its voice for responsible government at the centre. The Bombay Branch of the European Association, as Haw-Haw a body as one could find anywhere under the sun, decided by a majority not to commit itself to the Simon Report because it was not acceptable to Indian opinion. Demoralisation bordering almost on panic was beginning to be discerned, behind all the bluster and repression, in the camp of imperialism.

Efforts were now made to bring about, if possible an agreement with Congress leadership, which was never so militant. In August 1930, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar saw Gandhiji at Yeravada Jail, where the two Nehrus were especially brought from another jail to join the consultations about the Viceroy's offer to the Congress for taking part in the Round Table Conference.

<sup>5</sup> See "Indian Annual Register"; R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-34 and references therein. The Communist Party of Great Britain published, on the basis of Congress inquiry reports, an invaluable but unobtainable pamphlet "India under the British Terror."

<sup>6</sup> K. M. Munshi, "I Follow the Mahatma," p. 85.



Nothing came of it, and Congress was unrepresented when the Conference met in London in January 1931. On the 26th of that month, however, Gandhiji and the members of the Congress Working Committee were released, and negotiations for a settlement followed. On March 4 was signed the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement and the struggle that had opened with such promise was declared provisionally suspended.

The agreement was, in many respects, a most disappointing document. Not one major demand of the struggle was conceded, not even the repeal of the Salt Tax, but Civil Disobedience was called off. In spite of the demand for complete independence which at Lahore had seemed irreducible, the Congress agreed to join the Round Table Conference, where the basis of discussion was to be a Federal Constitution with "Indian responsibility", and agreed to the principle of reservation to the British of safeguards "demonstrably in the interests of India". The ordinances were to be withdrawn and political prisoners released—but not those among them who were guilty of "violence" or "incitement to violence" or were soldiers convicted for disobeying orders. Imperialism sought a treaty with Indian nationalism, but obviously on its own terms.

However, the fact of imperialism treating with our people's representatives was in itself a rousing demonstration of the strength of the movement. Winston Churchill raved against the "naked fakir" strutting up the stairs of Viceregal Lodge and mocking at Britain's might, to enter into a pact with Lord Irwin. There was naturally in India a widespread sense of elation and victory, though the more politically conscious sections knew that the fruits of struggle were in danger of being whisked away at the negotiation table. With a naivete unforgivable in one who was then a Congress bigwig, Mr. K. M. Munshi in his "I Follow the Mahatma" describes the Gandhi-Irwin truce as "the greatest event in the history for centuries." It was very far from being so. Slowly but surely the realisation dawned that by a strategic move imperialism got a respite and our movement was bewildered. Not one even of the Eleven Points adumbrated early in 1930 was conceded, and Con-

gress agreed to participate in the Round Table Conference, which it could have done earlier without a struggle and with a larger representation. It seemed as if the cruel history of 1922 was repeating itself; the Gandhi-Irwin agreement was Bardoli on another scale.

Did the movement show signs of exhaustion, for in that case the leaders might well have called for a halt? But Gandhiji himself told the French paper *Monde* that "the suggestion of the impending collapse of our movement" at the time the Agreement was signed "was entirely false; the movement was showing no signs of slackening". On March 5, the *London Times* rejoiced: "Such a victory has seldom been vouchsafed to any Viceroy."<sup>7</sup> Gandhiji spoke fairly quizzically on "a Swaraj constitution", on "disciplined self-rule from within" which by no means excluded "association with England", all of which doubtless sounded highly spiritual, but concealed the realities of a demoralising capitulation.

That the country felt it was a capitulation was clear at Karachi, where the Congress was hastily convened in March 1931, and the Agreement was unanimously endorsed. Jawaharlal Nehru had to fight "great mental conflict and physical distress" before he could be persuaded, as so often before and since in similar situations to move the endorsement; he had to fight, indeed, a lot more than his accustomed qualms in giving way to Gandhiji's directives. "Was it for this", he thought, as he tells us in his autobiography, "that our people had behaved so gallantly for a year? Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this?" He decided, however, that it would be "personal vanity" to express his dissent and braced himself to moving the resolution. The Agreement, Nehru himself says, was "not popular"; one delegate is said to have remarked that if anyone but Gandhiji had been responsible for it, he would have been thrown into the nearby sea; "Gandhiji's Karachi speeches", writes K. M. Munshi, "in anybody else's mouth, would have evoked resentment." Subhas Bose records that while the delegates would not have agreed to

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

oppose Gandhiji's stand, "the general public, and particularly the youth" felt very strongly against it. No one inside the Congress, not even Bose, voiced this "larger support", and Bose contented himself with reading a Leftist manifesto. All this happened in spite of the Congress meeting under the shadow of great national grief, for Bhagat Singh and some of his comrades, hauled up on charges of terrorism, but enshrined securely in the memory of patriotic youth all over India, were executed during the Congress session, in defiance of the country's demand for reprieve.

Left-wing elements had to be conciliated, however, and principally on Jawaharlal Nehru's initiative a resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme was adopted at Karachi. It was progressive, and included a basic democratic charter of a fairly advanced type, nationalisation of key industries and transport, labour rights and agrarian reform. Munshi, discussing it tauntingly, says: "It shocked the bourgeoisie but did not placate the ardent Marxists." Gandhiji, he says further, was inclined to postpone its consideration, but since "it was the pet child of the impetuous Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru", approved the ultimate draft.<sup>8</sup> No doubt it was an important step forward for the Congress to take, but it was poor consolation, even perhaps to Jawaharlal Nehru, for the virtual capitulation embodied in the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement.

At Karachi there definitely was a rift in the lute. Black Flag processions reminded the leaders that all was not well. It was largely because of the atmosphere of disillusionment that within three weeks of the publication of the Agreement there broke out in Cawnpore a savage communal riot in which a courageous patriot, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, had to give his life. From youth conferences and student organisations came a spate of resolutions denouncing the compromise. When Gandhiji left Bombay for England to take part in the Round Table Con-

<sup>8</sup> "I Follow the Mahatma", pp. 93-94.

ference, there were hostile demonstrations which were till then simply inconceivable.

The less said about the Round Table Conference the better. "The honour of the Congress", R. P. Dutt remarks, "was lowered by its inclusion as an item in the motley array of Government puppets brought like captives to imperial Rome to display their confusion and divisions for the amusement of Westminster legislators." Gandhiji went as the Congress's sole representative; Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Pandit Malaviya attended, but only in their individual capacity. It seems that Gandhiji miscalculated his strength and refused to consider the utility of numbers in a conference. The communal question loomed large, and to our shame it must be recorded that all efforts to solve it by consent proved unsuccessful. The impasse developed over the Muslim list of safeguards, which to-day seems comparatively innocuous, formulated in the well known Fourteen Points, and the British Government, posing as the virtuous and unwilling arbiter, decreed several months later the Communal Award. The sad story of 1928 was repeated, and in a setting that humiliated even more our patriotic pride. About the All Parties Convention in Calcutta (1928), Maulana Azad had said: "The Muslims were fools to ask for safeguards, and the Hindus were greater fools to refuse them." A foolish competition over the externals of power not yet achieved put the halter securely round the necks of Hindu and Muslim alike.

Gandhiji's role as world-teacher was well publicised during his visit, and all kinds of people, well-meaning cranks being a large proportion, met him and listened to him at innumerable little gatherings. His personality and his courage—for it needed nothing less to face, as he purposely did, the workers of Lancashire whom his boycott had hit hard—made a great impression. But the main purpose of his visit—Indian freedom—seemed pushed to the background. He came back home, empty-handed.

From Port Said, nevertheless, Gandhiji had cabled the India Office that he would do all in his power for peace. When a delegation from the India League in

Britain toured India in 1932-33, they were told by Dr. Syed Mahmud, member of the Congress Working Committee, that Gandhiji, after arrival in Bombay on December 28, 1931, drafted a resolution which proposed not to renew the struggle. But he had reckoned without his host. The government of Lord Willingdon, Irwin's successor, was determined to take the offensive.

The people of India had also realised, even before Gandhiji's return, that the fight could not be staved off any longer. A few days before his arrival in Bombay, the U. P. Congress Committee adopted the policy of non-payment of revenue. Promptly, Jawaharlal Nehru and T. A. K. Sherwani were clapped in jail. In the North-West Frontier Province, where during 1929-30, a mighty Red Shirt movement had grown, its leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (called the Frontier Gandhi) and his brother, Dr. Khan Sahib, were arrested. Emergency ordinances were brought into force into the United Provinces, the North-West Frontier and Bengal.

Gandhiji heard from his colleagues a pitiful tale of infringement by the Government, in letter and in spirit, of the Agreement. He cabled to the Viceroy, requesting an interview. It was refused. While the London comedy was being staged, imperialism in India had made its preparations. Unruly Bengal, where terrorism had raised its head and linked up with organisations up-country, was given into the grim charge of Sir John Anderson with his experience of the "Black and Tan" regime in Ireland. The bureaucracy, lately subdued, wanted to teach the Congress a lesson.

It did not take long before the blows were showered. On January 4, 1932, Gandhiji was arrested; the principal Congress leaders all over the country were simultaneously taken into detention; the Congress and its organisations were declared illegal, their press banned, their funds, premises and property confiscated; ordinances poured forth wholesale, and not in dribblets as in 1930. It was a stern, ruthless challenge.

India's manhood took up the gauntlet. Repression this time needed, therefore, to exceed by far the level of

1930-31. On May 2, 1932, Pandit Malaviya reported that in the first four months there had been 80,000 arrests. A session of the Congress, which met illegally at Calcutta for a short electrifying period before being beaten up and dispersed in April 1933, was told that the total had reached 120,000 arrests. Wholesale violence, physical outrage, shooting and beating up, punitive expeditions, collective fines on villages and seizure of lands and property accompanied the arrests. No wonder the Government calculated that the movement would be over and done within six weeks' time. But it took no less than twenty-nine months before the people, fighting "a soldier's battle without strategic leadership", were compelled to give up.<sup>9</sup>

Imperialism made no bones about its methods during the struggle. Sir Samuel Hoare, whom Gandhiji had befriended in London, told the House of Commons that the Ordinances were "very drastic and severe" and that there was to be no "drawn battle" this time. A Bombay Government spokesman boasted that "war is not fought with gloves on." The mounting wrath of the masses found no corresponding leadership, however. Even when Congress was illegal, orders were actually issued against secrecy as a perversion of Congress principles! By the summer of 1932, the centre of gravity was sought to be shifted from the question of political freedom, when Gandhiji declared he was giving all his mind to the cause of the *Harijans* ("untouchables"). In September 1932, he took recourse to a "fast unto death", not for freedom or some major aim of the life-and-death struggle still going on, but to prevent the scheme of separate representation for the "depressed classes", since that, it was said, would vivisect Hinduism. Naturally enough, the country's anxieties centred on the great man's precious life, and the upshot was the so-called Poona Pact which increased the number of reserved seats for the "depressed classes". Whatever the ethical implications of the Fast,

<sup>9</sup> There is a valuable collection of facts pertaining to the movement in the India League delegation's report "Condition of India" (London, 1933). Members of the delegation were Ellen Wilkinson, Leonard Matters and V. K. Krishna Menon.

it served to distract attention from the national struggle which needed, in view of the failure of Hindu-Muslim Unity Conferences held on Pandit Malaviya's initiative, to be nursed back carefully to strength and self-assertion.

In May 1933, Gandhiji undertook another fast, not against the Government, but "for purification of myself and my associates for greater vigilance and watchfulness in connection with the Harijan cause." Whether "purification" happened or not, one does not know; anyhow the Government decided to release him unconditionally. The acting president of the Congress consulted him and announced the suspension of the civil disobedience movement for six weeks. It drove V. J. Patel and Subhas Bose, then in Europe, to issue a manifesto pointing out Gandhiji's "confession of failure" and calling for a radical reorganisation of the Congress, "on a new principle with a new method, for which a new leader is essential".<sup>10</sup>

The manifesto of Patel and Bose was not particularly helpful, for a new method and a new leadership cannot simply be wished into existence. Gandhiji remained on the field, and there was no alternative leadership that was strong and understanding enough in sight. In July 1933, he asked the Viceroy for an interview and was refused. In spite of it, the Congress leadership decided to end mass civil disobedience and replace it by individual civil disobedience. At the same time, by order of the acting President, all Congress organisations were dissolved. The Government remained indifferent to these happenings and only intensified repression against the individual civil resisters. Gandhiji himself was arrested in August and released before the month was out. It was a slightly confusing situation. On conscientious grounds Gandhiji decided for a time to keep away from politics and went on a *Harijan* tour. "Meanwhile the struggle dragged on, neither ended, nor led."

The end came in May 1934, when the All India Congress Committee was allowed to meet at Patna and decided to call off civil disobedience unconditionally,

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<sup>10</sup> References in R. P. Dutt *op. cit.*, pp. 341-42.

except for the proviso that Gandhiji alone, when he thought it necessary, could offer civil resistance. A month earlier, Gandhiji had issued a statement that the message of *Satyagraha* had been "adulterated in the process of transmission". "In the present circumstances only one," he added, "and that myself, should for the time being, bear the responsibility of civil disobedience." It was a melancholy situation, comparable to that after Chauri Chaura, and inevitably the leading Congressmen's fancy turned towards thoughts of parliamentarism, and with Gandhiji's sanction a new *Swaraj* party was, so to speak, set up under Dr. Ansari to contest pending elections to the Central Assembly.

The ban on the Congress was not lifted till June 1934, though it remained on a number of its subsidiary organisation, youth organisations and the Red Shirts of the North-Western Frontier. In July, the Communist Party, *bete noire* to all reactionaries, was declared illegal. A new chapter of repression was opening.

Soon afterwards, Gandhiji announced his resignation from Congress membership. To the majority of Congressmen, he felt, non-violence was not a "fundamental creed", but only "a policy". He remained behind the scenes, however, the powerful guiding influence whom all must needs consult. It was not till the crisis of 1939-40 that he assumed direct leadership again. On the whole it was an unhappy and confusing state of affairs.

This distressing finale cannot and should not blind our eyes to the magnificent achievements of 1930-32. We can be proud of those years of epic struggle, proud of the sight, then vouchsafed us, of the untapped reservoirs of our people's patriotism. Communal problems had not been transmuted by the older alchemy of 1919-21, but antagonisms were forgotten during the years of hope, and Muslim participation in the people's suffering and sacrifice was commensurate with their position in Indian life. The multifarious craftiness and the ugly repression of imperialism could not daunt the people who fought on, even when virtually leaderless, as long as it was possible. The struggle left rich lessons, particularly in regard to the



wobblings of a leadership growingly bankrupt, and in the furnace of searing experience, it forged a new self-confidence, pride in our common people and determination to fight till freedom is won.

I hate, I despise your feast days,  
And I will not smell in your  
solemn assemblies.

*From the PROPHETIC BOOKS*

## CHAPTER XIV

### "I DESPISE YOUR FEAST DAYS"

**I**T was a memorable session of the Congress that met at Lucknow during Easter 1936 with Jawaharlal Nehru in the chair. But the session at Bombay (October 1934), the first formal plenary session to be held since the Karachi Congress (March 1931), had been by comparison rather insipid. The ecstasies of 1930-32 had given way to depression; political enthusiasm was running low; the only major issue decided upon was the endorsement of the comparatively uninspiring parliamentary programme accepted by the All India Congress Committee at Patna. The country had not recovered yet from the effects of a heavy struggle; Jawaharlal was still in jail, and demoralisation was in the air. Membership of the Congress stood at below half a million, numbering only 457,000. Gandhiji himself moved a resolution drastically altering the constitution of the Congress, appealed to the members to impose on themselves a self-denying ordinance by reducing their numbers, and in the end announced his personal decision to withdraw from the Congress. Bewilderment and a sense of frustration continued to oppress our people, whom the meagre electoral activity over the Central Assembly elections on a restricted franchise could not galvanise into enthusiasm.

From 1934 to 1939, however, was a period remarkable for the rebuilding, on sounder foundations, of the Congress organisation, for the people's spirited recovery after terrible repression, the formulation of new lines of policy, the

magnificent advance of workers and peasants, and the resultant approach towards a qualitatively different level of the struggle for freedom. The elections to the Central Assembly towards the end of 1934 were a humdrum affair and aroused little mass interest. Nehru's presidential address at Lucknow criticised unsparingly the state of things then prevailing and roundly admitted that "we have largely lost touch with the masses", particularly among the Muslims. It gave also a resounding lead, for it proclaimed a socialist objective, the demand for a broad mass front of all anti-imperialist forces, uniting the working class and the peasantry with the middle-class elements predominating in the Congress, and the focussing of the Indian struggle in the context of the developing world movement against fascism and its friends in the camp of imperialism and reaction. At Lucknow, in one of the Congress pandals, was launched the All India Kisan Sabha, which henceforth would be a force to reckon with in national politics. A new *elan* was visible, indeed, on every side.

A spur to the people's militancy came on account of the universal opposition to the imperialist scheme to impose on India, under the Government of India Act 1935, a constitution that was, in the words even of the liberal publicist Sir C. Y. Chintamani, "a cruel denial of the most cherished aspirations of the people of this country". It was based on a White Paper which was submitted for scrutiny by a Joint Select Committee of the two Houses of Parliament, and some Indians handpicked for being "safe" were associated with the Committee during the examination of witnesses. These latter had no part or lot in the Committee's deliberations. Two memoranda were submitted to the Committee, one by the British Indian delegates, headed by the Aga Khan of race-course fame, and the other separately by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Chintamani points out: "Their proposals did not err on the side of excess. But they were cast to the winds almost as if they had been the ravings of maniacs, and the majority of the Joint Select Committee made recommendations, dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the White Paper, except where it was made worse." "It is India's misfortune", he adds, "that she

is so divided by communal and other differences that a truly effective protest cannot be made in a practical form against a great wrong as smaller and more homogeneous communities might have been able to do.”<sup>1</sup>

A few words might be said generally about the nature of the “Reforms” offered to India. Indian ruling princes, fantastic reactionaries and puppets of British imperialism, got the right, through an inflated number of nominees in the federal legislature, to interfere effectively in matters of exclusive concern to British India, while not a word could be said by the legislature with regard to the governance of the States. The people of the States, it goes without saying, had not the vestige of a right and were to go completely unrepresented. “The British Government has retained in its hands through the Governor-General and the governors of Provinces almost every power to make its will and the interests of Britain prevail. Defence is forbidden ground for the new government and legislature. The future Finance Minister will certainly have to perform the duty of raising revenue by imposing taxes, but he will not have the right of determining how the bulk of the revenue so raised shall be spent. . . . The future Government and legislature will be able to do little for the protection of India’s trade and industries, because they can act only within the limits set by the British government from the point of view of British exploiting interests. ‘Law and order’ will doubtless be in the hands of ministers, but subject to a special position accorded to the police and to the exercise by governors and the Governor-General of their almost unlimited right to exercise ‘individual judgment’ or to act in their ‘discretion’. The all-India services will continue to be under the special care of the Secretary of State. He will recruit them, not the Government of India, and officers of the I.C.S., the I.P., the I.M.S., and other all-India services will retain their privileged position and be able, if so minded, to confound imprudent ministers who may rashly think of controlling them. . . Then there are the second chambers in the majority of provinces. . .

<sup>1</sup> “Indian Politics since the Mutiny”, pp. 174-175.

If there is an Indian", concludes Chintamani, "who can enthuse over this scheme of reforms, I confess, I am not he, and if I should find him, I will not envy him."<sup>2</sup> "The alleged concession of responsibility" was "all but meaningless"—such was the verdict even of the leading British authority on constitutional law, Professor A. Berriedale Keith.<sup>3</sup>

Our people, heirs to a proud legacy of struggle, could not fail to answer the challenge of imperialism. Their desperation still found expression in the misguided, but courageous, thirty-year old movement of terrorism. Paradoxically, one encounters in the Bengal Administration Report of 1934 an unusual admission that "terrorism has not yet been eradicated from Bengal and never will be merely by special legislation."<sup>4</sup> And all over the country, our common folk, the worker and the peasant, forged ahead, their "hearts now more capacious", in Milton's massive language, their "thoughts more erected to the search and expectation of greatest and exactest things".

In his Lucknow speech, Jawaharlal Nehru, referred to his own firm conviction, that the world's ills, including naturally India's, could only be cured by socialism, reiterating the position he had taken up in three earlier articles on the subject which had put socialism, so to say, on the map of Indian nationalism. He spoke of the mounting struggle all over the world against the gangrenous advance of fascism and sent on behalf of India a message of accord with that struggle. It was the period when, fed and fostered by imperialism, Mussolini and Hitler were strangulating freedom in Europe and Africa, and Japan, swooping down on unhappy China, was aided and abetted by the sanctimonious upholders of "democracy". Nehru was India's organ-voice, condemning this multiplex reaction and stressing the link-up of our struggle for freedom with the global

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-78. The Hindu Mahasabha, it will be recalled, was the only organisation which welcomed the Act of 1935. Even the Liberals would not touch the "federal" part of it with a pair of tongs.

<sup>3</sup> "A Constitutional History of India, 1660-1935" (1936), pp. 473-74. There is a valuable discussion of this subject in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 440-54.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Chintamani, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

fight against fascism and its friends. Nearer home, he called for intimate communion between the Congress on the one hand and worker-and-peasant organisations on the other, and a special effort to win the heart of the Muslim masses who were developing symptoms of distrust of, and estrangement from, our principal patriotic organisation. Speaking of the Soviets and their "monumental and impressive record", he gave his view that there had been "no such practical application of the democratic process in history", and in spite of his somewhat muddled disagreement with much of Soviet policy, he looked upon "that great and fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilisation as the most promising feature of our dismal age".

"We cannot isolate India or the Indian problem from that of the rest of the world"—this was his clear-cut formulation. "Inevitably," he added, "we take our stand with the progressive forces of the world which are ranged against fascism and imperialism. We have to deal with one imperialism in particular, the oldest and most far-reaching of the modern world, but powerful as it is, it is one aspect of world imperialism. And that is the final argument for Indian independence and for the severance of our connection with the British Empire."

Nehru emphasised that when he spoke of socialism as "the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems," he used that word "not in a vague, humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense". It was, to him, not merely an economic doctrine: "It is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart." He did not wish, however, "to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence". Here, possibly, is to be found the root of Nehru's frequent vacillation, and artificial demarcation, which his head and heart does not accept, but which he allows himself to be persuaded to think expedient, between the national struggle and social issues. But he was at any rate practically the one top leader in the Congress or elsewhere who was conscious of the emergence in the mid-thirties of the independent political role and organisation of the working class in alliance with the awakened

peasantry. At Lucknow he had suggested the collective affiliation of workers' and peasants' organisations to the Congress, but the proposal was defeated in the Subjects Committee.

The modern history of the Congress, remarks R. Palme Dutt, opens with the Lucknow session in 1936. It was not the first time, however, that the Congress had ceased to think of India as an anchorite peninsula, out of the current of world affairs. In 1927, the Madras Congress had condemned the employment in Shanghai and elsewhere of Indian troops and police in the suppression of the Chinese Revolution. The Congress, represented by Nehru himself, was a foundation member of the International League against imperialism. In 1935, when Mussolini treacherously attacked Abyssinia, the Congress offered its sympathy and support to that wronged country. During the Civil War in Spain, India's feelings were unequivocal, and Nehru went himself to that country, representing the Congress and proclaiming from the housetops its greetings to Spanish anti-fascists.

Since Lucknow, a rapid advance took place in Congress strength and organisation. By the time of the Faizpur Congress in December 1936, the membership had reached 636,000. At Haripura, in February 1938, it totalled 3,102,000. By the end of 1938, it had passed the four million mark, with 1½ million in the United Provinces alone. By the time of the Tripuri Congress (1939), it touched five millions—perhaps the largest political organisation anywhere in the world.

The election campaign of 1937, in which the Congress after much discussion participated, was a trial of strength, out of which it emerged with flying colours. In 1934 the Congress had put forward the basic demand for a Constituent Assembly, but it was decided at Lucknow that, in spite of the obvious limitations of the Constitution Act of 1935, the elections should be contested. At Faizpur, the election manifesto was approved and then broadcast to the country. "The Congress", it was said, "repeats its resolve not to submit to this constitution or to co-operate with it, but to combat it both inside and outside the legislatures,

so as to end it. The Congress does not and will not recognise the right of any external power or authority to dictate the political and economic structure of India. . . ." The election manifesto reiterated the Karachi Declaration of Fundamental Rights and announced a broad democratic programme, voicing directly the immediate demands of the peasants and industrial workers and rousing in consequence an enormous mass support.

There was at Faizpur a division of opinion over the question of office acceptance, and the majority favoured postponement of the decision till after the elections were completed. There were leftwing amendments, one directing refusal to accept office and another asking for preparation of mass struggle in order to make possible the convocation of a real Constituent Assembly, but they were thrown out by a majority vote. At the elections, however, the Congress stood out as the organ of the United National Front.

In spite of the active hostility of the bureaucracy, which helped anti-Congress parties in many provinces, and in the U. P. even issued an indiscreet circular which had to be apologised for and withdrawn, the Congress swept the polls, winning absolute majorities in Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa. In Bengal and Assam, it came out as the strongest single party. The Liberals, better known in India as Moderates, were completely eclipsed. Non-Brahmins in Madras, who had so long had their own "Justice Party", registered their disapproval of its to a day leadership and voted *en masse* for Congress candidates. Only in the Punjab and Sind did the Congress fare badly.

There was a fly in the ointment, however, for the seats won by the Congress were almost entirely the "general"—non-Muhammadan seats. Of the 482 Muslim seats, the Congress contested only 58 and won 26 (15 in the North-West Frontier Province where Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his "Red Shirts" were a power, and a meagre eleven in all the rest of the country). There is no doubt whatever that the Congress leadership showed a deplorable vacillation and lack of self-confidence when it forbore from putting



up Congress candidates for Muslim constituencies. In spite of all the talk at Lucknow, the Congress virtually sought no contact with the Muslim masses except in the Frontier Gandhi's area.<sup>5</sup>

The dominant leadership of the national movement cannot, therefore, escape responsibility for sharpening communal misunderstanding and antagonism by its obvious supineness. As a matter of fact, Muslim dissatisfaction with the Congress's proceedings, which we noted in the previous chapter, had been accentuated by it. In 1932, the British Communal Award was announced, following upon the failure of the Indian Delegation at the Round Table Conference to agree on terms, and the Congress's inability to come to a decision about it distressed many of the most unimpeachably nationalist among the Muslim leaders. There was widespread Hindu disgruntlement with the provisions of the Award and considerable pressure on the Congress to refuse to accept them. A compromise, unhappy in all conscience, was ultimately reached, and the Congress declared that it neither accepted nor rejected the Award. There was a report that Dr. Ansari, Chaudhuri Kaliquzzaman and others threatened to resign if the Congress fought the Award without first reaching an alternative Hindu-Muslim agreement of its own. Meanwhile, many Muslims began drifting from the Congress into purely Muslim organisations, of which the League was indubitably the most important.

It will be relevant at this stage to record certain aspects of this historic default of the dominant leadership of our national movement. We have already seen now, in the first great wave of national awakening in the *Swadeshi* days, Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose and others virtually identified the resurgence with Hindu revivalism. There has never been a greater protagonist of Hindu-Muslim unity than Mahatma Gandhi, but in spite of his great-hearted espousal of the Khilafat cause, it cannot be forgotten—and it was to many Muslims disconcerting enough—that "at any moment

<sup>5</sup> Z. A. Ahmad, "Some Lessons of the Elections", in the *Congress Socialist*, March 30, 1937, quoted in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 415-16.

throughout the modern national struggle Gandhiji could pass from Congress politics to a Hindu reform movement (as in the crisis of the struggle in 1932-33) and vice versa." It is embarrassing also to find Gandhiji speaking of Hindus as "we" and Muslims as "they": "We shall have to go in for *tapasya*," he wrote in *Young India* in September, 1924, "for self-purification, if we want to win the hearts of Musalmans."<sup>6</sup> The chasm between Hindu and Muslim was most uncomfortably obvious at election time and was to yawn wider still as time brought no balm of unity. Imperialist machinations did, of course, have its goodly share of responsibility, but that can by no means be held forth as absolution for ours.

On an all India plane, however, the Congress had demonstrated its massive strength, which impressed even its enemies. It had won victories, remarked the *London Times*, "on issues which interested millions of Indian rural voters and scores of millions who had no votes."

The question of office acceptance came up on the agenda after the elections were over, and in March 1937 a formula, devised by Gandhiji, was adopted by 127 against 70 votes in the All India Congress Committee, authorising formation of Congress Ministries on condition that "the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the office of ministers in regard to their constitutional activities." It took three months of pourparlers before the Congress could as a start, set up its administration in six provinces. The Governors pleaded inability to divest themselves of "certain obligations" which Parliament had conferred upon them. There ensued a constitutional deadlock, and to "conceal" this "breakdown", said Professor A. B. Keith, "interim Ministries" were set up on the inauguration of the Constitution, with unwitting facetiousness, on April 1, All Fools' Day. The deadlock was finally resolved after the Viceroy's declaration on June 22, that provincial Governors would be anxious "not merely not to provoke conflicts with their Ministers but to leave nothing undone to avoid or resolve such conflicts". In July 1937, therefore,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417.

on the basis of the "gentlemen's agreement", Congress Ministries were formed in six provinces where the Congress held absolute majorities. Soon after, the accession of eight non-Congress members enabled the formation of a Congress Ministry in the North-West Frontier Province, and later still, Congress Coalition governments were formed in Assam and Sind. Of all the British Indian provinces, only the Punjab and Bengal remained out of the Congress orbit.

Till a few months after the outbreak of war in September 1939, Congress Ministries continued in office in nine out of eleven Indian provinces. The people were happy and proud that on seats of authority were men who had so long been fairly regular tenants of British jails. Among the Congress Ministers was one gifted woman, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's sister. There was a general expectation that in the sphere of administration a new age would be dawning and the people's leaders now at the helm of affairs would give effect to long-voiced demands for radical reconstruction.

It was in the sphere of civil liberties that the Congress Ministries registered their most notable achievements. Gradually, most of the remaining political prisoners were released in the Congress Provinces. Bans on many political organisations were lifted, though not the Central Government's all-India ban on the Communist Party. Freedom of the press and of publications was considerably enhanced in the Congress Provinces, and the result was a phenomenal growth of political literature. Even the Communist weekly *National Front* made its appearance from Bombay.

If hopes of a dynamic radicalism were pinned on the Congress Ministries, they were to meet before long with a certain disillusionment. There were many among the Congress bigwigs who looked with no special satisfaction on the zealous campaign of workers and peasants for organising themselves alongside and in fraternal friendship with the Congress. In the first few months of its tenure of office, Sjt. Rajagopalachariar's government in Madras won notoriety for a six months' sentence on a leading socialist, S. S. Batliwala. Instances of the employment of

the often-denounced provisions of the Penal Code—Sec. 124 A (against seditious propaganda) and section 144 (for the prohibition of meetings)—could be charged against Congress Ministries. There was a good deal of aggrievement in Congress ranks, but the Government's fear of mass resurgence found expression in the announcement that arrest and imprisonment would be the penalty for those guilty of "propaganda of violence".

It was not that the working class and the peasantry broke away at once from their affection for, and allegiance to, the Congress. After all, the Congress belonged to the people and not alone to whatever was the leadership at the time. The fond hopes of the toiling masses were not, of course, fulfilled, but neither could the Congress leadership absolve itself altogether from the duty of attending to their grievances and demands. On the urgent question of indebtedness, measures were adopted for cancelling a proportion of old arrears, as in Madras, for an immediate moratorium, as in the U. P. and Bombay, for scaling down of debts and for limitation of the rate of interest, usually to a figure of 6 to 9 per cent. Tenancy legislation was adopted and gave a certain degree of protection against ejectment, against enhancements of rents and irregular additional charges. Remission of land revenue was granted in some cases, and in Bombay, 40,000 *Dublas*, serfs tied to the soil, were manumitted. The extent of the agrarian legislation was, however, rather limited. In provinces like Bihar and the United Provinces, there was a widespread peasant agitation, and symptoms of a Congress-landlord allegiance were deprecated.

The working class also hailed the Congress as the greatest national organisation and expected its cause to be espoused by the Congress Ministries. This was the period which registered a great advance of working class organisation and militancy; strikes in 1937 accounted for the loss of nine million working days and involved 647,000 workers, the highest figure since 1929. The Congress ministries, while inclined towards industrial conciliation—the Ahmedabad Mazdoor Mahajan, founded by Gandhiji and guided on lines of class collaboration, was to most Congress leaders

the model union—used their power and influence somewhat to secure wage increases and improve working conditions. In Bombay and Cawnpore wages improved, and in the latter city, the communist-controlled Mazdoor Sabha demonstrated during a memorable strike an unprecedented fraternisation with the Congress Committee.

Soon, unfortunately, Congress ministers appeared to call a very different tune. In Madras and Bombay, the workers' right to strike came to be in jeopardy. A sharp controversy developed over the Bombay Industrial Disputes Bill in the latter part of 1938. The bill seriously limited the right to strike by imposing a four months' interim period for the operation of conciliation machinery, during which strike action was illegal; it also directed registration of unions in a way which would favour company unions. The Bombay Trade Union Congress called a protest strike against the bill on November 7; and the *hartal* encountered police shooting which caused, to everyone's consternation, many casualties and one death. The loud votaries of "non-violence" said not a word in condemnation, Nehru and the Congress "leftist" President, Subhas Bose, also kept quiet, presumably in order not to incur the displeasure of the redoubtable Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board.

Prohibition was an important and much publicised plank of the Congress programme, and considerable progress was made in that sphere. Congress Ministries, generally, gave more attention than their predecessors to education and public health. Accepting no more than a mere five hundred rupees a month, they set an example of economy, but it was only a gesture, for such exceptional retrenchment could not swell the provinces' scanty coffers, and progress in education and public health could only be minute. On the whole, it came to be found, when the first flush of enthusiasm died down, that Congress ministers were leaning, towards the possessing classes and were not even averse to agreement with imperialism in order to keep on to power. They seemed to forget that the Congress owed its strength to the people and a divorce from the

soil would mean its ruination. A crisis developed, therefore, in the national movement, and there was a great deal of discontent with the dominant trends in the Congress. One heard warnings against "the drift to constitutionalism" and the Congress High Command's deviations from old-time militancy.

There was considerable perturbation in the country, which the Haripura Congress session (1938) could not alleviate. Subhas Bose, who presided there and gave an address which in spite of ideological confusions, was unequivocally go-ahead, now came forward as the principal spokesman of left-wing opinion. He was the only one among top-rank all-India leaders to take stand, and got, as a result, the support of all leftist groups when he stood for re-election as Congress president and defeated, by 1575 to 1376 votes, Gandhiji's own nominee, Patabhi Sitaramayya.

Instead of left-wing consolidation, there followed, however, a phase of melancholy disruption. Thunder on the Left rumbled pathetically away, and with grim resolution the Right trusted in Gandhiji and kept its powder dry. A worm had entered the staff of the Congress movement, and the exultations of 1936-37 gave way to sullen suspicions. Congress estrangement from the Musalmans was accentuated; all the world was darkened and the joy of the land was gone.

Back in 1935, negotiations had been carried on for over a month between Rajendra Prasad, Congress President, and M. A. Jinnah, President of the Muslim League. "We regret", they said in a joint statement, "that in spite of our best efforts we have not been able to find a formula (of agreement)." In 1937, after the elections in which the Muslim League with its hastily improvised organisation could only put up a weak show, Jawaharlal Nehru offended Muslim opinion by declaring that there were only two parties in the country, the Congress and the Government, and that the others must simply line up. Proposals for forming ministries in conjunction with the League were firmly repulsed, a proceeding which created bad blood between the two communities. In 1938, however, Pandit

Nehru met Mr. Jinnah, who reiterated the Fourteen Demands of 1929, and added some more, including the demand for Congress withdrawal of opposition to the Communal Award as "a negation of nationalism", for changing the Tricolour flag and giving up the *Bande Mataram* song. A Committee set up by the Congress recommended deletion of certain portions of the *Bande Mataram* song, but it pleased neither the Muslim League nor a large proportion of Hindus in the Congress, of course for exactly contrary reasons. The Nehru-Jinnah talks proved unavailing, and so did the talks between Jinnah and Subhas Bose. A new complication now arose, for the League refused to "treat or negotiate with the Congress the question of Hindu-Muslim settlement except on the basis that the Muslim League is the authoritative and representative organisation of the Musalmans of India." It is notable that in the meantime the League at its 1937 session had declared its objective to be "full independence in the form of a federation of free democratic States in which the rights and interest of the Musalmans and other minorities are adequately and effectively safeguarded in the constitution." It adopted also, on the analogy, it seems, of the Congress's Karachi declaration, a radical "economic, social and educational programme", in order, obviously, to steal the Congress thunder. It followed up its success by persuading a majority of the Muslim members of the provincial legislatures, already elected on some other platform, to join the League.<sup>7</sup> The cup of disharmony was not full to the brim yet, for the *Pakistan* resolution did not come up till 1940, but growing Muslim alienation from the Congress seemed a process that no amount of mere goodwill could stop.

It was in this unhappy context that one must view the unseemly tug-of-war between the Left and the Right in the Congress. The deadlock threatened the national interest, but neither side seemed to realise it. The defeat of Gandhiji's nominee in the Congress presidential election rattled the great leader in a manner

<sup>7</sup> M. Noman, "Muslim India", pp. 323-4, 334-40, 354-61; W. C. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-90; Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-54.

which was unworthy of him. Twelve out of the fifteen members of Bose's Working Committee, including paradoxically Nehru, resigned, in order, they said, to leave him a free field, but quite obviously to make his position untenable. Incidents happened at the Tripuri Congress over which it is better that a veil be drawn. The facade of unity was, however, somehow maintained at Tripuri, but it could not be kept up much longer. Disruption broke out among the Left elements, to the jubilation of the Right. At a meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Calcutta (April-May 1939) Subhas Bose resigned his Presidentship, but made the mistake of his life in forming forthwith a new group in the Congress, the "Forward Bloc". That equivocal body of "Congress Socialists", who represented at one time the growing radicalism in Congress ranks but trailed too often behind Jawaharlal's dubieties, supported Bose for a while before Tripuri, but dropped him with little ceremony. Bose's nonchalant challenge to the Congress—for his "Forward Bloc" meant little less than that—killed all hopes, however, of unity inside the Congress to fight the impending imperialist offensive.

For sometime, nevertheless, it was not quite evident, and Bose appeared to command unusual support even in areas like Gujerat, where the writ of the Right was known to run. But he overplayed his hand, and was soon to pay the penalty. The Congress leadership struck, and struck hard, when under Bose's leadership, public demonstrations were held on July 9, 1939, by the "Left Consolidation Committee", in protest against certain Congress resolutions intended to check the tendency towards independent mass action unauthorised by the leadership. For infringement of Congress discipline, Bose was disqualified from holding office in the Congress for a period of three years. This was followed by an unsavoury conflict in Bose's own province, Bengal, where one saw the disgraceful spectacle of two rival Congress Committees in existence.

If Subhas Bose had really meant business, he could, even at that stage, have turned the tables by launching his much-awaited mass struggle for civil liberties. Direct



action, valorously undertaken, might have broken the evil spell of discord. He did nothing, however, but conduct a sort of vendetta against the right-wing leadership of the Congress. He did not realise that the Congress was long enthroned in India's heart, and his wordy fireworks against the leadership would recoil upon himself if he could offer no real, alternative, fighting programme. The Congress was greater than its leadership, and mere vituperation of the latter, howsoever justified on occasion, was certain before long to offend the country. The "Forward Bloc" did not in reality differ basically from those it castigated; it could not offer a programme and leadership to a militant mass movement. Bose did not seem to think in terms of national unity; he did not see that disrupting the Congress and blaring "struggle" slogans meant really the struggle's doom; he did not seem to understand that he was mouthing "left" phrases but that they were airy ejaculations.

As Bose with his bravedo made confusion worse confounded and particularly in Bengal dragged Congress through the mire, the right-wing leaders, with Jawaharlal fretting uneasily in their company, set inert and uninspiring. Between them the country sulked and sorrowed, and lacked a dynamic leadership when war broke out in September 1939, and the people became "as fuel of the fire".

That day is a day of wrath. A  
day of trouble and distress, A  
day of wasteness and desolation,  
A day of trumpet and alarm  
against the fenced cities and  
against the high towers.

*FROM THE PROPHETIC BOOKS*

## Chapter XV

### "THE FENCED CITIES AND THE HIGH TOWERS"

THE "prologue arm'd" to World War II had been conspicuous for some time, and India's national movement, conscious of the inevitable impingement of the international set-up, had often warned against the impending peril. The Haripura Congress (1938) declared unequivocally that India would take no part in Britain's imperialist war and would resist the employment of India's man-power and resources. Our national movement, be it said for all its faults and hesitations, never for a moment stood aloof from the world-wide struggle against the evil machinations of imperialist power politics.

The second Imperialist War really began in 1931 with Japan's attack on Manchuria, and spread with Italy's attack on Abyssinia and with re-armed Germany's aggressions in Europe. These three powers stepped forth on the arena of world politics with a clamorous claim for "living space" for their peoples and as zealous crusaders against the menace of Communism and revolution. The British and American imperialists did not hate these rivals less, but they hated the Soviets and all that they represented, a mighty lot more. So, as the world's bosses, they played "the big and dangerous game" of nourishing fascism and reaction, hoping frantically that the latter would not smite the hand that fed them but would rather hurl themselves

against the Soviets and the rising forces of progress and freedom in every country.

A world movement for a Peace Front and Collective Security was the people's answer to the intrigues of reaction, and India's contribution to that movement, represented best of all in Jawaharlal Nehru's splendid though often unclear work, was by no means a negligible quantity. The peace front, however, was disrupted before it could be consolidated. It was betrayed by those who believed that Chamberlain and Daladier "non-intervened" in Spain in order to save peace, who believed that Czecho-Slovakia was being broken up and handed over to Hitler to save peace, who believed that Japan was being "appeased" to save peace.

The result was that the British, the French and the American imperialists went on with their perilous game of strengthening their fascist rivals in the hope that they would dutifully attack the Soviet Union. These plans ended, of course, in fiasco. Hitler did not feel himself strong enough yet to attack the Soviet Union; Stalin's warning against people pushing "their pigs' snouts into the Soviet garden", had, it seems, gone home for the time being. Germany preferred, therefore, to sign a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and attacked Poland.

British and French imperialists told the world that they were fighting against Hitlerism, for freedom and democracy, and for Poland. In reality, they were doing nothing of the sort. They were indignant because Hitler had "betrayed" them by refusing then to attack the U.S.S.R. and play the role of junior partner in their scheme of world domination. It was on both sides a war for supremacy, for colonies, raw materials and markets. For nearly nine months, however, it was a phoney war, for the Anglo-French ruling class got the war in a manner they had not bargained for. Even after the outbreak of war, therefore, they tried to shift the centre of gravity, provoke Finland to fight the U.S.S.R. and openly supported it, and staked on themselves being involved in a war with the Soviets with a view to encouraging Germany also

to get into it. These efforts proved unavailing, and the new world crisis sharpened.<sup>1</sup>

The maturity of our national movement is witnessed by the fact that contrary to the state of things in 1914, when not only the Princes and the puppets in India but also the best-known leaders had rallied to the support of the British Empire and the deep mass discontent slowly developed over a period of years, the conflict between the Indian national movement and the British Government was open and sharp in the very first weeks of the war in 1939.

Within a few hours of the declaration of war, the Viceroy, without any consultation with the representatives of the people, proclaimed India as a belligerent. A Government of India Amendment Act was rushed through the British Parliament in eleven minutes, and the Viceroy was authorised to override the provisions of the Constitution even in respect of provincial autonomy. The Defence of India Ordinance of September 3, 1939, made in the name of defence and public safety a ubiquitous invasion on every variety of civil liberty. "Autocratic government was to continue in India, without any constitutional fig-leaf and reinforced by the most far-reaching Extraordinary Powers. Once again, as a quarter of a century before, the Indian people were to be dragged at the heels of the British government in a war in whose making they had had no choice, and in regard to which they had continually protested at the policy which had made it inevitable."<sup>2</sup>

The Congress Working Committee, meeting on September 14, took "the gravest view of these developments", called upon Congress members of the Central Assembly to refrain from attending the next session, and declared: "The Committee are aware that the governments of Great Britain and France have declared that they are fighting for democracy and freedom and to put an end to aggression. But the history of the recent past is full of examples showing the constant divergences between the

<sup>1</sup> See P. C. Joshi's article "Peace Front to People's War", ed. G. Adhikari (1944), pp. 347-61.

<sup>2</sup> R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

spoken word, the ideals proclaimed, and the real motives and objectives." The committee laid down the claim to "the right of self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference," and pressed for a definite declaration of war aims: "The Working Committee invites the British government to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the New Order that is envisaged; in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and be given effect to in the present. Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?"

A negative and niggardly reply was all that came from the Viceroy to this straightforward question. "Dominion Status" was promised as before, but it was to be achieved, of course, "in the fulness of time", and as far as immediate prospects were concerned, a "Consultative Committee" of Indian nominees for helping the Viceroy prosecuting the war was offered.

Long negotiations and diplomatic exchanges followed between the Viceroy and the leaders of the Congress but led to no more than small offers of concessions which altered nothing in substance and only served to make it plain that the British Government was firmly resolved to maintain its imperialist hold on India. As the protracted diplomatic interchanges with the Viceroy went on, the masses surged ahead on their own. On October the 2nd, 90,000 Bombay workers carried out a one-day political strike against the war and the repressive measures of imperialism. This was the first mass strike against the war in any of the countries involved in it. Similar strikes were organised in Jubbulpore and other towns and testified to the fundamental maturity of the Indian working class. At the close of the historic strike, thousands of Bombay workers assembling in the Kamgar Maidan proclaimed:

"This meeting declares its solidarity with the international working class and the peoples of the world, who are being dragged into the most destructive war by the

imperialist powers. The meeting regards the present war as a challenge to the international solidarity of the working class and declares that it is the task of the workers and peoples of the different countries to defeat this imperialist conspiracy against humanity.”<sup>3</sup>

The working class, pre-eminently, was throwing out a challenge to the whole system of imperialism. Confident of the strength that is born of indefeasible international fraternity, it was giving, for the first time, a rousing lead to the country. Congress's protest against India's compulsory involvement in the war was disregarded; the Congress then resigned provincial office and protested again, but did nothing more lest it should “embarrass” the the British, for it was infraction of the philosophy of non-violence, the fantastic argument ran, if Britain's extremity was regarded as India's opportunity. “Congress Socialist” leaders voiced radical sentiments, yet gyrated happily with the chariot-wheels of Gandhism. M. N. Roy, his international reputation marred by a penchant for disruption and ideological deviation, went over with his tiny following to the camp of imperialism, tried to break-up trade union unity, and lisped distorted Marxism to justify support to the bureaucracy and slander of our patriots. Subhas Bose's undoing, in spite of a consistent and courageous anti-imperialist militancy, was an incapacity to take an impersonal, scientific view of the developing social context. The Communist Party, hunted and illegal, was a widely growing force and the vanguard of the working class in Bombay and other main centres; its formulation of the “proletarian path” of mass struggle against imperialist war was the only positive lead before the country, but it was still small in number and its voice hardly reached to the ends of the land.

India's dignity found vibrant expression in the resolutions of the Congress Working Committee, but unfortunately, little was done to enlist the people in the struggle against imperialism. Hopes of a compromise still lingered, and when, after April 1940, the European situation began to change kaleidoscopically and drastically against the

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Allies, there was expectation among many Congress leaders that Britain, in a quandary, would concede a settlement. Imperialism, at bay in Europe, tried frantically, however, to keep a firm grip on Indian possessions, and the demand for a National Government was again rejected. Meanwhile, the growing scarcity and rise in prices had intensified the people's discontent, and the Congress, just in order to hold on to its position, had to do something that was spectacular. On September 30, 1940, when negotiations finally broke down, Gandhiji wrote a magnificent letter to the Viceroy:

"As I made it plain in the course of our talks, the Congress is as much opposed to victory for Nazism as any British can be. But their objection cannot be carried to the extent of their participation in the war. And since you and the Secretary of State for India have declared that the whole of India is voluntarily helping the war effort, it becomes necessary to make clear that the vast majority of the people of India are not interested in it. They make no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that rules India."<sup>4</sup>

This brave declaration was followed up, however, by action that was meek and mild. Gandhiji personally chose a number of *Satyagrahis* who would give notice to the authorities, to save them the trouble of looking for their whereabouts, appear at a particular spot, shout anti-war slogans and be carted away to jail. The country hungered for some sort of a movement, and even this strange parade created considerable commotion; a few thousand *Satyagrahis* became the guests of the king in jail. But there was nothing like a countrywide resurgence, the deadlock remained unsolved, the tribe of the Birlas, turned friends and patrons of Congress, waxed fat on war contracts, and the government had little to worry about. In the United Provinces, Jawaharlal Nehru was sentenced to four years' imprisonment; the savage punishment was deeply resented, but the national leadership tried not to transmute resentment into struggle. "Our hands are tied and our eyes are blindfolded; we cannot move our limbs and we cannot see the way before us"—that was virtually what

<sup>4</sup> See D. N. Pritt, "Choose your Future" (1941), p. 40.

our leaders said when they asked plaintively for a National Government and sat back inert as the cry was unanswered.

It was in this period that the Congress lost the allegiance of most Muslims—and, as W. Cantwell Smith well says, “for the very simple and very adequate reason that it was not offering them anything in which they were interested.” In the absence of a real movement, when all objectives except “non-industrial cloth making” and the preaching of absolute pacifism had been pretty well given up, when even individual *Satyagraha* was called off, “in recognition apparently, of its ridiculousness,” the Congress was found bankrupt of leadership, and communalism as a mode of thinking and feeling advanced rapidly and among all sections.<sup>5</sup>

We have noticed earlier how the Achilles' heel of our national movement, ever since the Khilafat days, has been the recurrent inability to bring the generality of Hindus and Muslims together. The refusal of the Congress in 1937 to form ministries in coalition with the Muslim League had left a sour taste in the mouth. Maulana Azad, in his memoirs, has referred to this as a “mistake”, for which Jawaharlal Nehru, with his “theoretical bias”, and perhaps under the influence of U. P. leaders like Tandon, was mainly responsible.<sup>6</sup> Things went from bad to worse and Muslim discontent, both real and imagined, accumulated against the Congress administration. In 1938, the League issued the ‘Pirpur Report’ on “atrocities” suffered by Muslims at the hands of Congress ministries. The catalogued ‘injustices’ hardly amounted to ‘atrocities’, but the psychological tension made even irrational accusations credible. On December 12, 1939, when Congress ministries relinquished office in protest against the treatment meted out to India in the war, the League celebrated a ‘Day of Deliverance’ all over India. The Congress was attacked not only as an anti-Muslim organisation, but also ridiculed for its political timidity. The League had not fought on its own two such vast anti-British campaigns as the Congress had done, but

<sup>5</sup> W. C. Smith. “Modern Islam in India”, pp. 251-59.

<sup>6</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, “India Wins Freedom” (Calcutta, 1959), p. 160.



it boasted that only the Muslims were really radical, that the Khilafat Committee was more aggressive than the Congress in 1920-21, that men like Maulana Muhammad Ali and Hasrat Mohani had left the Congress out of disgust for Gandhist equivocations on the issue of independence, and that the Congress wanted with the British a bourgeois political settlement to lord it over the Muslims ever afterwards. Most of the Muslim youth and petty bourgeoisie saw the Congress drifting into passivity, applauded the growing radicalisation of League resolutions, remembered that specific trend in our national movement when the Muslims had acted as a religio-political entity, and were won over to the League's perfervid and exaggerated formulations.

At the Muslim League's historic session at Lahore (March 1940) was adopted enthusiastically the *Pakistan* resolution, countering Congress nationalism with the Muslim demand for the partition of India. First mooted in 1935, it had attracted little serious attention. Even earlier, in 1930, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, poet and philosopher, spoke in his presidential address at the Muslim League, of "the Punjab, North-West Frontier province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single State" as "the final destiny of the Muslims at least of north-west India." It was not, however, for some years a real live issue, but the apparent insolubility, in a capitalist context, of Hindu-Muslim estrangements furthered a process of thought which made perhaps a majority of politically conscious Muslims regard themselves in what they called their "homelands" as a nation rather than a community. At Lahore was promulgated the most famous demand of the Muslim League and perhaps the most important issue of the day in India—the demand for *Pakistan*. The resolution which adumbrates a proposition far more clear-cut and comparatively unexceptionable than later commentaries by League spokesmen, speaks of "the following basic principle, namely, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north-

western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign." Quite obviously, this formulation calls for considerable clarification and amendment, but it is an infinitely better basis for understanding than the many meandering propositions put forward both by the League and its critics.

In his presidential address at Lahore, Mr. Jinnah said, of course, that the League stood "unequivocally for the freedom of India", but his main emphasis was on the two-nation theory. He made much play with the contents of a letter written in 1925 by Lala Lajpat Rai to C. R. Das, in which the former had said that Muslim history, Muslim law and the loyalty of the finest and most patriotic Indian Musalmans to Scriptural injunctions seemed to make Hindu-Muslim unity a fairly impracticable proposition.<sup>7</sup> More seriously, he added arguments that deserve quotation: "It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are in fact different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality...The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religions, philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither intermarry nor inter-dine...their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Musalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is the foe of the other, and likewise their victories and defeats overlap." In a speech before the special Pakistan session of the Punjab Muslim Students' Federation on March 2, 1941, he retorted pugnaciously to the argument that Muslims in India were Hindus at one time and that it was fantastic that conversion to a religion meant conversion to a nationality: "Have you not got eyes to see

<sup>7</sup> See "Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah" (1942) ed. J. Ahmad, pp. 149-51; Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, p. 268 and references therein; cf. in this connection Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali's "Pakistan" (Cambridge, 1935), perhaps the first firm envisagement of a "fatherland" for Indian Muslims.

and don't you have brains to understand that an Englishman, if he changes his religion in England, he, by changing his religion, still remains a member of the same society, with the same culture, the same social life, and everything remains exactly the same when an Englishman changes his faith? But can't you see that a Muslim, when he was converted, granted that he was converted more than a thousand years ago, the bulk of them, then according to your Hindu religion and philosophy, he becomes an outcaste and a *Mlechha*, and the Hindu ceased to have anything to do with him socially, religiously, and culturally, or in any other way? ... It is now more than a thousand years that the bulk of the Muslims have lived in a different world, in a different society, in a different philosophy and a different faith. Can you possibly compare this with the nonsensical talk that mere change of faith is no ground for a demand for Pakistan? Can't you see the fundamental difference? ..."<sup>8</sup>

Issues that were by no means frivolous, and demands which in spite of a certain crudity in expression touched the heart-strings of Muslim India, needed therefore to be understood and appraised by a serious mental effort which unfortunately was not forthcoming. The result was bickering and mounting mutual suspicion, and the gulf between Congress and the League continued to widen, to the unconcealed rejoicing of the British intruder who flourished on intra-Indian differences. The Hindu Mahasabha forged ahead, and its permanent president, V. D. Savarkar, spoke militantly of Hindus as a nation, of India as "the abode of the Hindu nation", Hindustan being "the land of the Hindus", where Muslims, only "territorially Indians", would have the rights of citizenship but must agree to live as a minority, in the position of subordinate co-operation with the Hindu nation.<sup>9</sup> K. M. Munshi was allowed by Gandhiji to resign from the Congress and start a short-lived movement for *Akhand Hindustan*. The Congress leadership, of course, never went so far, but at successive

<sup>8</sup> "Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah" pp. 153, 218.

<sup>9</sup> Savarkar's speech at the Calcutta session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Dec. 1939, was printed as a pamphlet and is revealing reading.

meetings during 1940-41 at Delhi, Wardha and Poona, it sought an agreement with the British Government over a national government at the centre, without seeking at the same time an understanding with the League. In April 1941, at the Madras session of the League, Mr. Jinnah said in regard to the remark of Shri Rajendra Prasad that the Congress never discussed the Pakistan scheme as it was never referred to it by the former: "Do you believe that the Working Committee of the Congress never discussed the scheme? This ghost has been haunting them since March 1940. What standard of truth is this? Every Congress leader heading (sic) with Mr. Gandhi has discussed, issued statements and written volumes about Pakistan. Babu Rajendra Prasad has actually issued a pamphlet with regard to the Pakistan scheme giving out his views. And he says it was never discussed by the Working Committee, because Mr. Jinnah never referred it to them. I say to Babu Rajendra Prasad, ask your Working Committee to discuss it, if they have not. I say not only discuss it but apply your mind to it honestly, without prejudice and without silly sentiments, if there is any political wisdom or statesmanship still left in the Congress leadership."<sup>10</sup> Quite obviously tempers were frayed, not a happy prolegomena to understanding.

The vacillation and ineffectiveness of the major national leadership in India, represented by the Congress, during the first and nakedly imperialist phase of World War II were due, not merely to the communal tangle which bade fair to be a national problem, but also to the presence in its ranks of representatives of many differing outlooks and varied social elements. What was to be the shape of things in a free India, was a question to which, quite apart from Pakistan, basically different answers were given. There was in the movement an influential group, inspired by Gandhiji, who were something like a counterpart of the Russian "populists", dreamt of resurrecting the "enduring fabric of Indian life", and looked upon machinery and the "satanic Western civilisation" as the enemy. Village

<sup>10</sup> M. Noman, "Muslim India", p. 427; "Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah", p. 251.

reconstruction and opposition to industrialism—"the greater our material possessions, the greater our bondage to earth"—formed planks of their positive programme. While village reconstruction, handspinning and allied crafts have obviously a great contribution still to make in Indian economy, the opposition to industrialism on account of its evil concomitants flies in the face of the facts of modern life, and ends with a medievalism that cannot help catering to reaction. In 1934, for example, Gandhiji told a deputation of U. P. Zemindars that he would fight on their side if their property rights were attacked. "The *Ram Rajya* of my dream," he said, with sublime incongruity, "ensures the rights alike of prince and pauper." The pauper, it appears, was to be there, even in *Ram Rajya*, so that the prince could exercise his pity and earn a niche in heaven. None would question Gandhiji's deep and abiding concern for the poor, but he thought that the prerogatives of the prosperous and the deprivations of the disinherited could, with minor adjustments, co-exist. Obviously, therefore, he held no truck with the idea of class conflict and the imperative urgency of working class and peasant organisation. No call ever came from him to the class-conscious proletariat and his peasant allies, and the national movement was to that extent cribbed and confined.

There was certainly in the Congress a more modern outlook which has always fought for progressive industrial development. We have noticed already how at every important stage of our national struggle the economic imperatives of infant capitalism in India resisting colonial restrictions have played an important role. In earlier days, industrial conferences used to be held alongside Congress sessions; now we got the Congress-sponsored National Planning Committee. Between trends such as these and Gandhism undefiled, there was a very wide gulf, but the leading representatives of the former disliked, most of them, the independent initiative and organisation of the working class and the peasantry. Unable to wish away socialism altogether, they sometimes spoke of it as an exotic, good only in parts, or with subtler intuition hailed "Indian

Socialism" with its magic property of healing and harmonising class antagonisms. These were the people who opposed the toiling masses organising themselves on a class basis, who called on them to eschew separate organisation and join the Congress, on the specious principle that freedom must first be won and socialism thought about later. Clearer-sighted leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru had spoken of the inevitability in a class society of class conflicts and the organic inter-relation between the struggle for independence and for social and economic change. For all his understanding, however, the Jawaharlal of 1936 changed a great deal: at Haripura, Tripuri, Ramgarh he seemed to have lost his Lucknow spirit. And for all his congenital militancy, Subhas Bose never had Jawaharlal's insight and, naturally enough, missed the bus in 1940.<sup>11</sup>

As early as 1924, Sir Malcolm Hailey, Governor of the U. P., had warned the Swaraj Party that "among the ignorant masses of India a political revolution would become a social revolution in a very short space of time." Alongside this observation, may be placed what Gandhiji himself wrote in *Harijan* (January 1940):

"It has been suggested to me by a Congressman wielding great influence that as soon as I declared civil disobedience, I would find a staggering response this time. The whole labour world and the Kisans in many parts of India will, he assures me, declare a simultaneous strike. I told him that if that happened I should be most embarrassed and all my plans would be upset.. I hope I am not expected knowingly to undertake a fight that must end in anarchy and red ruin."

The self-denying ordinance that Gandhiji imposed on himself proved the undoing of our mass forces, and in the evil days of the imperialist war our people heard no call from him and his friends to hurl themselves against the fenced cities and the high towers of profit and power.

<sup>11</sup> There is an important discussion of this point in R. P. Dutt, *op cit.*, pp. 509-528.

Thou hast great allies;  
Thy friends are exultations,  
agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquer-  
able mind.

WORDSWORTH!

## Chapter XVI

### "THOU HAST GREAT ALLIES"

**A**S World War II ended in 1945 the pincer attack of Fascism from West and East with a view to world domination became slowly a lurid recollection. The perspective, however, which opened before the people of every country when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union on that fateful day in history—June 22, 1941—the perspective of marching arm in arm with the Soviet to destroy not only Fascism but all its allies and to smash up the very structure of World Imperialism whatever its label, still awaited fulfilment.

That June 22, 1941, marks one of history's climacterics cannot, on any computation, be doubted. The cruel assault on the country to whose Red Star progressive movements everywhere had hitched their wagon, the assault on the land of victorious socialism which stretched across Europe and Asia and was a perennial nightmare to the world's money-bags, deepened our concern for the outcome of the War and made everyone think hard and think afresh.

On June 22, 1941, imperialism was confronted with the most excruciating dilemma. Fascism was in very truth imperialism's vile progeny and long-nurtured protégé. It was intended and expected to be the spearhead of the capitalist attack on the workers' fatherland, the fortress of World Revolution—the Soviet country. And so from 1931, when World War II to all intents and purposes began, the

conspiracy was fairly obviously going on. When Japan grabbed Manchuria and China's northern provinces, her ruling class had no abler and no more unashamed advocate than the British Foreign Secretary. Britain, indeed, was for years the leader of international reaction. Mussolini's adventures in Abyssinia produced no real application of the sanctions provided for in the League of Nations Covenant. When Hitler and Mussolini were brazenly making mincemeat of Spanish freedom, Chamberlain and Daladier, intent on augmenting Fascism's might, took shelter behind that biggest lie of world politics in the 'thirties—"non-intervention". It was the same sordid story when Austria was overrun by Hitler's hordes and Czechoslovakia was grievously mutilated at Munich and obliterated a few months afterwards. The imperialist expectation, however, that the Fascist Powers would not smite the hand that fed them and would attack instead the Soviet Union, ended in a fiasco, for in August 1939 Hitler, still diffident about the prospects of an assault on the Soviets, was constrained to sign, dramatically, a non-aggression pact with the U.S.S.R. It is common knowledge that a similar pact between Britain and the U.S.S.R. had been under discussion for some time, but the British reactionaries then in power sabotaged it by the most provocative discourtesy and indecision.<sup>1</sup> It is not quite so clearly realised, however, that when in September 1939, British and French imperialists told their people that they were fighting Hitler because their heart bled for Poland and for freedom and democracy, they were in reality doing nothing of the sort. In Hitler they were fighting, as we have noted before, the rival imperialist who had "betrayed" them, who had refused to fight the U.S.S.R. forthwith and to play the part of junior partner in the Anglo-French scheme of world domination.<sup>2</sup>

Lest it should be thought that this is an over-simplification, the story of World War II, till at any rate the fall of France, needs to be recalled. It is not intended to

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, D. N. Pritt's "Light on Moscow" (1939) and "Must the War Spread?" (1940).

<sup>2</sup> P. C. Joshi's articles in "Peace Front to People's War" (1942) give an important analysis of this point.



minimise the tragedy of one European country after another prostrating itself before the Hitler machine, but who does not remember that for months the Allies carried on what was widely dubbed at the time a "phoney war"? The winter of 1939-40, when the Soviet-Finnish War was being fought, showed up the hypocrisy of the Western imperialists. The official press in England and France gave the news of Finnish fighting far greater prominence than the war against Germany. Itching for a crusade against the Soviets, Daladier, France's Premier, openly addressed an appeal to those "even in the enemy States". Duff Cooper, official British propagandist in America, was prophesying glibly that "Britain will be at war with Russia very soon". On Nov 28, 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain told the House of Commons: "None of us knows how long this War will last, none of us knows in what direction it will develop, *none of us knows when it is ended who will be standing by our side and who will be against us.*" The Minister of War, accepting a present of ambulances to the War Office, went out of his way to make this mystic declaration: "Where these ambulances may go, I know not. *They may render service in theatres of war of which we know not to-day.*" As early as October 11, the Paris Press had threatened: "In the event of a Russo-Finnish War, Britain and France could not respect Soviet neutrality." On October 31, the "New York Herald Tribune" stated that the object of the War was not to defeat Germany but to "save it for Western Civilisation". On November 1, the United States recalled its ambassador from Moscow. Mussolini's Italy defiantly sent its "volunteers" and airplanes to Finland. A perfect shriek of ballyhoo was raised everywhere and the call was sent forth that Mannerheim's Finland was the innocent little lamb which was being gobbled up by the big bad Soviet wolf. The League of Nations which, under its reactionary leadership, had never been permitted to raise its little finger against patent and recurrent fascist aggression, promptly met and expelled the U.S.S.R. without ceremony. If the Soviets had taken longer to beat Mannerheim's thugs, the much-publicised 100,000 "Volunteers" recruited and equipped by Britain and

France would have been in the fight against the Red Army. The Anglo-French imperialists staked heavily on getting themselves involved in a war with the U.S.S.R. so that Hitler-Germany would give up the contest against them and join their crusade.<sup>3</sup>

Hitler took longer, however, to decide on attacking Soviet land: he wanted to make sure of his European Empire so that Britain could only play second fiddle. He had noticed with chagrin how the Soviets had grown in strength even after September 1939; he did not in the least relish half Poland and the Baltic States joining the U.S.S.R. and all the Slav peoples pinning their hopes on the Soviets. He knew, of course, what Stalin had said as early as 1934 in his report to the Seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R.: "Those who try to attack our country will receive a stunning rebuff to teach them not to poke their pig's snout into our Soviet garden again." But he decided he had sooner or later to destroy the base of future revolutions—the Soviet Union—and hoped to strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts of the pro-fascists and near-fascists—the "appeasers". That is why he sent his deputy Hess to Britain. But as Stalin put it, he "gambled against the class revolution" and failed. A division in the ruling circles of British and American imperialism did indeed come about, but not as Hitler wanted it. That section which now became dominant in Britain was not the pro-fascist section that had pursued the anti-Soviet policy, but the one which decided to ally itself with the Soviet Union. A parallel change took place also in America. The crisis of world imperialism had reached such a climax that the rulers of Britain and America found themselves compelled to throw overboard their twenty-three-year-old hostility towards the Soviet Union and join hands with her. They, of course, had their own reasons and hoped to save their world domination even through the new unwonted and unsavoury alignment. They became parties to the anti-Fascist front through imperialist motives—to escape having to surrender to Hitler, to be

<sup>3</sup> See article on "The Soviet and Finland" in Hiren Mukerjee's "Under Marx's Banner".

able to salvage as much of their empire as possible. But as one flaming communist peroration put it: "The imperialist rulers of the world are no more making history. They are being yoked to its chariot...The actors are new—peoples and nations. It is they who are getting into stride. It is these mighty forces that will shape world events more and more."<sup>4</sup> World history since June 22, 1941, records mainly, the tug-of-war, still very much in process, between the forces of the people, stronger than ever before, and the forces of imperialist reaction which will fight, of course, to the last ditch, and though often vanquished, are yet far from dead.

So in 1941, the two biggest and most decisive events of World War II took place—Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union (June) and Japan's full-dress entry into the War (Dec.). As far as India was concerned, the designs set forth without equivocation in 'Mein Kampf' and the Tanaka Memorial appeared to be approaching materialisation. World fascist strategy was spreading out its eastern and western pincers in the battle for India. The climax of Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, coinciding with the climax of Japanese-Fascist advance in Asia, seemed to establish the fact of mutual co-ordination between them and emphasised the common interests of the Soviet, Chinese and Indian peoples. "My sympathies are undoubtedly in favour of China and Russia," Mahatma Gandhi said in an important interview in May, 1942. "I used to say that my moral support was entirely with Britain. I am very sorry to have to confess that to-day my mind refuses to give that moral support. British behaviour towards India has filled me with great pain...And, therefore, though I do not wish any humiliation to Britain and therefore no defeat, my mind refuses to give her any moral support."<sup>5</sup> Britain's acts of omission and commission, and her dogged refusal to part with any real power to the Indian people, had produced in the majority of Indian patriots this bifurcated attitude to the War.

<sup>4</sup> "Peace Front to People's War", p. 376.

<sup>5</sup> Quotation in Horace Alexander's "India Since Cripps" (1944), p. 26.

In December 1941, however, Pandit Nehru and other leaders were released. The progressive elements in Britain, particularly in the ranks of Labour, were putting forward two basic demands—for a thorough-going alliance with the Soviet Union and for settlement with India. It is important to note that British reaction, naturally, resisted both demands for as long as was possible, and only yielded when it had to. So the Second Front in Europe, which the Churchill Government had promised the Soviet Foreign Commissar Molotov would be opened before the end of 1942, was deferred and deferred till as late as June 1944. In the case of the demand for settlement with India, reaction obviously was in a stronger position and only offered from time to time trumpery proposals that patriotic India could not bring herself to accept.

India's leaders did not fail to recognise that the world alignment of forces had changed in 1941. Pandit Nehru told a Lucknow press conference on December 8: "I think that in the grouping that exists, there is also no doubt that progressive forces of the world are aligned with the group represented by Russia, China, America and England." The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Bardoli on December 30, 1941, noted: "While there has been no change in Britain's policy towards India, the Working Committee must nevertheless take into consideration *the new world situation* that has arisen by the development of the War into a world conflict and its approach to India. The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably lie with the people who are the subjects of aggression and who are fighting for their freedom."

The first months of 1942 were a crucial time for our country. A mighty and apparently irresistible enemy had suddenly appeared on the horizon in the east. Bengal might at any time have become the prey of the Japanese invader. In a few weeks British forces had been driven out of Malaya and had run away from reputedly impregnable Singapore. They were withdrawing helter-skelter from Burma, and Rangoon fell on March 7. Indian refugees were beginning to stream over into India with terrible tales of disorder, confusion and racial discrimination by the still-

so-arrogant British authorities. Areas in Bengal and Assam were being summarily evacuated, with little or no provision made for simple peasants hounded out of their hearths and homes, either by way of adequate compensation or alternative accommodation. The notorious 'Denial Policy' took away, suddenly, a major prop of the amphibious Eastern Bengalee's life—his little boat. British imperialism enormously accentuated its original sin of isolation from the people, and with congenital ineptitude committed blunder after blunder that alienated and embittered every section of our population. To the man-in-the-street the dynamics of the international set-up were naturally not very obvious; he knew his enemy—which was British imperialism; he began to argue with simple logic and to gloat over the successes of the enemy. Jawaharlal Nehru tried sharply to pull him up; on July 16, he said: "During the last three or four months we have been fighting a definite pro-Japanese feeling in the country which is not pro-Japanese essentially, but is so anti-British that it leans over to the Japanese side. We do not wish India to lapse into a feeling of passivity. It is fantastic to talk of peace with Japan."<sup>6</sup> Gandhiji himself, with his pacifist pre-suppositions, seems once to have expected that if the British withdrew from India, the Japanese would probably leave us alone, but it was a fallacy which he soon discovered, and he made during an interview in June a remarkable declaration that deserves to be recorded: "Remember I am more interested than the British in keeping the Japanese out. For Britain's defeat in Indian waters may mean *only the loss of India*, but if Japan wins, India loses *everything*."<sup>7</sup> When the hopes of a section of our people centred on "outside help" in our struggle for freedom, Pandit Nehru called them sharply to order: "...any force that may come from outside, really comes as a dummy force under Japanese control". (April 12, 1942). On June 21, Gandhiji wrote explicitly in *Harijan*: "I have never attached the slightest importance of weight to the friendly professions of the Axis Powers. If they come to India they will come not as

<sup>6</sup> See "Gandhi against Fascism", Ed. J. P. Chander, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> There is a good chapter entitled "Gandhi and the Japanese" in Horace Alexander's "India Since Cripps".

deliverers but as sharers in the spoil. There can therefore be no question of my approval of Subhas Babu's policy."<sup>8</sup> It is important to recall these basic statements, because the Government of India in a White Paper sought with deliberate mendacity to foist pro-fascist views on our national leadership and so defame it in the eyes of progressive peoples all over the world. "We have the best of intentions but how can we transfer power to such people?" was the line of imperialist propaganda.

India's national leadership realised that there was a new and greater danger to our national existence but, unlike the Communists, they did not see in the new situation also an unprecedented opportunity for our people. "We cannot put our soul in this fight till we have a National Government; our hands and feet are fettered, and we do not yet feel the glow of freedom in our hearts"—that was the burden of Congress' complaint. It was, of course, a very real complaint, and to pooh-pooh its basic soundness is to betray an egregious lack of understanding, a failure to assess the psychology natural to a long suffering and manacled people. But after all, the most crucial problem is the test of leadership. And the tragedy of India in 1942 was that we writhed at imperialism's chains, our Congress leaders spoke with beautiful passion of the sorrows of subjection, but we could not devise ways and means of breaking those chains and ending that subjection, and we continued to hope that imperialism being itself in a tight corner, would soon be climbing down to meet our demands. We paid hated imperialism the compliment of leaving the initiative for solving the deadlock in its hands.<sup>9</sup>

The Imperialists knew very well that if the Indian

<sup>8</sup> Since Subhas Chandra Bose escaped from British restraint in India dramatically on January 26, 1941, and went across to Germany and later to South-East Asia, he appeared to many to utilize Fascist help for the freedom of India, but on evidence reaching later it is plain that he never intended entire reliance on, and thus subservience to fascism.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Nehru's statement on April 18, 1942: "I do not know what to do, but am moving about impelled by a sense of restlessness, feeling oppressed with the idea that while India is being attacked by an enemy, I myself feel helpless." ("Gandhi against Fascism", p. 129.)

people were given the opportunity and the freedom to rouse the spirit of resistance and patriotism all over the country against the Fascist invader, it would have meant the beginning of the end of imperialist domination. They did everything, therefore, to prevent a national settlement and the establishment of a provisional National Government. When in February 1942, Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek came to India, met Gandhi and Nehru, and on the eve of his departure appealed to Indians "to exert themselves to the utmost in the cause of freedom for all mankind", and to the British Government to give them "real political power", the rulers of India turned a discreetly deaf ear. It was only natural, for imperialism cannot permit itself to undergo a "change of heart"; it only yields when it has to, under pressure, which, unfortunately we could not bring to bear upon it in adequate measure. India hated the notion of an Axis victory, but she hated also the prolongation of the agony that was British rule, a domination which prevented our proud people pulling anything like their full weight in the fight against Fascism. Our leaders could not quite see the way out of the dilemma. "They (the British) neither allow us to live honourably nor to die honourably," said a noted leader, Govind Vallabh Pant, at the Allahabad meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in May 1942.

Only the Communists tried in face of odds to put before the country a positive, non-defeatist and confident programme to smash the stalemate, assert national unity and mobilise the masses for defence. Functioning illegally—the Communist Party was under ban till as late as July 1942—they underlined the supreme duty of "taking India's War in India's hands". "To fight to win this War, is to defend our country and realise our liberation." Imperialism, they said, stood bankrupt and isolated; its egregious failure in Malaya, for instance, was its monument of ineptitude; no Indian worth his salt had any illusion left about it, and our job was "to take the fate of our nation out of imperialist hands and...to hurl India's unity against the imperialist autocracy". They called it a People's War, principally because they believed that in the new international set-

up the peoples would get the better of the reactionaries, and the Churchills who were bloated with the insolence of empire would not come out on top when the War was over—a reading that may well claim to have been borne out by subsequent events. Communists, it must be added in fairness, did not promise automatic liberation ensuing from the War, but only forecast that the degree of liberation of each people would depend on their own strength and work and also on the unity of the people's camp everywhere. Support of the War, they emphasised, did not "lead to servile co-operation or submission to imperialist Government but to a struggle against it for winning democratic rights and establishing a National Government". "The character of the War has changed," their basic formulation explained, "but not the character of the war effort in our country nor of the Government that guides and controls it... We take a positive attitude towards the war effort. We co-operate where we can, we resist where we must, we co-operate where it is in the people's interest to do so, we resist where it is demanded by the people's interest. We thus bring the people into action to defend their interests and advance them."<sup>10</sup> No effective action was of course, possible without a National Government, but that was no reason, they said, why in the meantime we should remain just desperately indignant *and* inert. Imperialism sought to defame the Congress internationally as defeatist, pro-fascist, and therefore not to be trusted, and internally it followed a provocative policy so that the spontaneous resistance to its malignity might furnish the factual evidence for their slander campaign abroad.

In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps was sent by the British Cabinet to India with proposals which Prime Minister Churchill described as a "just and final solution" of the Indian problem. By April 11, the world knew that the Cripps Mission had failed. C. Rajagopalachari, one of the wisest of Congress statesmen, has put it on record that if Cripps had shown more patience and "had more earnest co-operation been forthcoming from the then Viceroy", the

<sup>10</sup> The quotations are taken from "Forward to Freedom", published early in 1942.



issue might have been solved.<sup>11</sup> It soon became apparent that the British Government had made a gesture of 'conciliation' with many mental reservations. Britain's prestige had sunk very low and within the United Nations there was a strong feeling that she was prejudicing the common war effort by meeting every Indian demand with blank refusal. It was to save face, so to say, that the Cripps Mission came to India, and there was relief and rejoicing in New Delhi and at Whitehall when the Mission failed, and blame for it was sought to be placed on the shoulders of Congress "extremists" and on Gandhiji's pacifism. The way the Cripps episode was manoeuvred is, indeed, a classic illustration of Lenin's warning that "there is always a way out" for the ruling class in a crisis unless the people manage to seal it up. Our leaders only saw that Churchill must have been in a tight corner when he was constrained to send Cripps, but hardly realised that ways and means for escape were still open to the imperialist.

Cripps had come to India with two sets of proposals. The first four-fifths of the Draft Declaration dealt with the future. It contained a promise, hedged round with many qualifications, of Dominion Status with the right of secession if India chose to exercise it, after the War was over. It envisaged a "constitution-making body" consisting of one-tenth the number of an Electoral College of 1585 members, which in turn would be elected by 11 per cent of the population of the provinces enfranchised by the Government of India Act of 1935. The Princes were given the option to "appoint" about 500 nominees to the Electoral College. Cripps spoke, it seems, with many voices: to the Congress, he said that the constitution-making body, so formed, would frame the constitution as a basis for a treaty with Britain, and India could remain inside or quit the British Commonwealth as she thought fit; to the Muslim League, he said that provinces with a

<sup>11</sup> C. Rajagopalachari, "Reconciliation: Why and How?" (1945), p. 13. Cf. Azad's statement (*op. cit.* pp. 64-66) that Jawaharlal Nehru "felt genuine grief that India should not be fighting by the side of the democracies", and as "a confirmed anti-fascist" was inclined for some time towards acceptance of the Cripps offer.

Muslim majority could separately elect their own constitution-making bodies and have a separate treaty with the British Government; to the Princes he said that if they did not like the new constitution Britain would see that their "treaty rights" were not tampered with; and to racial and religious minorities he gave the assurance that Britain would use her power to see that "justice" was done to them. He met different groups separately; Britain wanted, it appeared, not so much to quit India as to divide her patriots and make sure of her continued domination.

The Declaration was put before the Indian leaders to be approved or rejected by them in its entirety. It said that its object was to set up a new "Indian Union", "equal in every respect, in no way subordinate" to the Dominions. There was neither democracy nor freedom, however, in the concrete measures laid down to implement the high-sounding objective.

India was sick, in any case, of promises for the future. Churchill, Cripps's boss, was *bete noire* to Indian nationalists, and only six months ago had made the shameless declaration that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to India. The people were not interested, as Gandhiji put it, in a "post-dated cheque on a failing bank". What they were interested in was the changes in the Government of India that Britain proposed to make *during the War*. Here Cripps hummed and ha'ed, but had virtually nothing to offer. Britain was to retain power and to continue to direct India's war effort; the Viceroy was to keep his dictatorial authority. But "the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people" were invited to "immediate and effective participation" in the "counsels of their country" and thus to "give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India", that is, the defence of India against the Japanese. On the crucial subject of defence, Sir Stafford submitted a list of the items that would come under the Minister of Defence Co-ordination (in contrast to the Minister of Defence, who would still be the Commander-in-Chief). This list, under nine headings, was received by nationalist opinion with a chorus

of jeers, and was caricatured as putting the new Minister in charge of stationery, canteens and petrol. So the Cripps Mission failed, and its failure was due not to Congress "defeatism" and reluctance to defend India, but to the British Government's refusal to give India the only thing capable of mobilising and enthusing her people for the war effort: a provisional National Government. The negotiations broke down on this issue—not on the minorities question which, as Cripps later admitted in Parliament, he did not even discuss with the Congress leaders.<sup>12</sup>

"In to-day's grave crisis," the Congress Working Committee's resolution emphasised, "it is the present that counts and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present." The reason for the final breakdown of negotiations can be best summed up in the words of Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Congress President, who wrote to Cripps:

"You had referred both privately and in the course of public statements to a National Government and a 'Cabinet' consisting of 'Ministers'. These words have a certain significance and we had imagined that the new Government would function with full powers as a Cabinet, with the Viceroy acting as constitutional head.... We did not ask for any legal changes but we did ask for definite assurances and conventions which would indicate that the new Government would act as a free Government, the members of which act as members of a Cabinet in a constitutional Government. In regard to the conduct of the War and connected activities the Commander-in-Chief would have freedom, he would act as War Minister. We were informed that nothing can be done at this stage, even vaguely and generally about the conventions that should govern the Government and the Viceroy.... The picture of the Government, which was so like the old in all essential features, is such that we cannot fit into it."

"It would be a tragedy," he concluded, "that even

<sup>12</sup> Horace Alexander, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-21;  
George Anderson, "What is India?" (1945), pp. 30-35;  
G. Adhikari, "The Imperialist Alternative", *passim*;  
S. K. Dutt, "Congress Fights for Freedom" in *Amrita Bazar Special Puja Number* (Calcutta 1945).

when there is this unanimity of opinion in India the British Government should prevent a free National Government from functioning and from serving the cause of India as well as the larger causes for which millions are suffering and dying today.”<sup>13</sup> “We are not interested in the Congress as such gaining power,” Moulana Azad had said, “but we are interested in the Indian people as a whole having freedom and power.” The lack of a prior agreement between Congress and the League (both of which organisations rejected the Cripps formula) was, however, exploited by Sir Stafford in his speeches after the failure. As everyone knows, Cripps had the reputation of being a genuine radical, but it was clear that behind his expressions of polite regret at the failure, there was something like gloating over the result. He emphasised, for example, that British sincerity had been proved and patronisingly added that although various Indian leaders had come to see him on a number of occasions they would not cross the road to meet each other and come to an agreement. He tried thus in the manner of social democrats the world over, to throw in our face the old slander of Indian disunity, and so to prove before Britain’s allies that her well-intentioned efforts to settle with India had failed on account of Indian perversity.

Disillusionment and embitterment were the dominant emotions of political India after the hopes roused by the Cripps visit were frustrated. The resolution adopted late in April by a special meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Allahabad was the very definition of dignified restraint and consistent anti-fascism. It said, *inter alia*: “The Committee repudiates the idea that freedom can come through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the professions of that nation may be. *In case an invasion takes place it must be resisted.* Such resistance can only take the form of non-violent non-cooperation as the British Government has prevented the organisation of National defence by the people in any other

<sup>13</sup> “India Unreconciled”, pp. 10-11. This is a highly useful documented history of Indian political events from the spring of 1942 to February 1944.

way. The Committee would, therefore, expect the people of India to offer complete non-co-operation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to them. We may not bend the knee to the aggressor nor obey any of his orders. We may not look to him for favours nor fall to his bribes. If he wishes to take possession of our houses and fields we must refuse to give them up even if we have to die in the efforts to resist them" (*Italics mine*).

Anti-British feeling naturally grew after the Cripps failure; it is the most natural thing in the world for a colonial people to think that its enemy's enemy is its friend, at least for the time being. "We cannot afford to be bitter," warned Jawaharlal Nehru, "because bitterness clouds the mind and affects judgment at a grave crisis." He said this at a press conference on April 12, 1942, where he also talked of organising independent resistance to the Japs—"it may be we would have to take up guerrilla warfare"—by "our own war effort on the basis of a free and independent India".<sup>14</sup> The Congress resolution and Nehru's statements tell us what to think of the persistent official propaganda that Congress was pro-Axis.

If Nehru argued in favour of independent mass action against the menace of Fascism, Rajagopalachari attempted to solve the problem of internal unity and strengthen the national front. He brought up a resolution recommending that Congressmen should "acknowledge the Muslim League's claim for separation, should the same be persisted in, when the time came for framing the constitution of India". He wanted to start negotiations with the League at once "for the purpose of arriving at an agreement and securing the installation of a National Government". He wanted Congress to accept Pakistan as a "necessary evil"; someone, he argued, would have to swallow this poison and only Congress was strong enough to do it. Rajagopalachari was overruled by the A.I.C.C. but in order to be free to propagate his view and secure support for his plan of an agreement with the League, he resigned from Congress and carried on political talks with the League leader, Jinnah. Not being prepared to go deep into matters of

<sup>14</sup> *Bombay Chronicle*, April 13, 1942.

principle involved, Rajagopalachari offered his scheme only as a sort of opportunist remedy for India's malady and soon became *persona non grata* both to Congress and the League.

About this time, Gandhiji began to popularise his slogan: "Quit India". Early in May 1942, he said in the course of an interview: "From the frustration of every effort made to bring about unity by me among others, has arisen this logical step for me that not until British power is wholly withdrawn from India, can there be any real unity, because all parties will be looking to the foreign power.... Therefore I have come to the conclusion that real heart unity, genuine unity, is almost an impossibility unless British power is withdrawn and no other power takes its place." This demand was taken up by the Congress Working Committee which met at Wardha on July 14 and passed a resolution in the course of which it said:

"In making the proposal for the withdrawal of British rule from India, the Congress has no desire whatsoever to embarrass Great Britain or the Allied Powers in their prosecution of the war, or in any way to encourage aggression in India or increased pressure on China by the Japanese or any other power associated with the Axis group. Nor does the Congress intend to jeopardize the defensive capacity of the allied powers. The Congress is, therefore, agreeable to the stationing of armed forces of the Allies in India, should they so desire, in order to ward off and resist Japanese aggression and to protect and help China. The proposal of the withdrawal of the British was never intended to mean the physical withdrawal of all Britishers from India."

"The Congress is anxious," this famous resolution went on, "to avoid the experience of Malaya, Singapore and Burma, and desires to build up resistance to any aggression or invasion of India by the Japanese or any foreign Power. The Congress would change the present ill-will in the country against Britain and make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise for securing freedom for the nations and peoples of the world and in the trials and tribulations which accompany it, and this is only possible

if India feels the glow of freedom." Should its appeal fail, however, the Committee warned, there would be nothing left but recourse to a non-violent struggle under Gandhiji's leadership, and the matter was to be decided by the A.I.C.C. at its meeting on August 7, 1942.

The response of the Government was characteristically unimaginative and inept. The A.I.C.C. office at Allahabad was raided by the police who took away certain documents including Gandhiji's draft resolution with stray marginal notes on it. The Government then issued what became notorious as the "Puckle Circular" asking all provincial Governments to get ready for the coming struggle with Congress. The authenticity of its terms, as revealed by the Indian press in a well-known scoop, was never denied.

Meanwhile the country confronted also a steadily deteriorating economic situation. Food prices were soaring; there was danger of interruption of supplies; distress was widespread in view of the mounting cost of living. Conditions were such that progressive public opinion in Britain and the U.S.A. was addressing appeals to the British Government to settle the Indian imbroglio. On July 31, 1942, in answer to the inquiries in Parliament as to the desirability of "a further approach" towards resumption of the negotiations that Cripps had initiated, the Secretary of State for India, L. S. Amery, gave the strangely wooden reply that a "not inconsiderable amount of discussion" with Indian leaders had already taken place and that Congress's demand "would, if conceded, bring about complete and abrupt dislocation of the vast and complicated machinery of the Government of India".<sup>15</sup> The door was slammed haughtily in the face of India's leaders, and the tension in the country produced, inevitably, the thunderclap of August and the tempestuous events that followed.

In a series of *Harijan* articles, Gandhiji explained that he wanted, as the best friend of the British people and of the allied cause, to rid them of a moral burden, the subjection of India. India *must* be free, and free now, not only in her own interest but of that of Britain also. Indians must, therefore, be ready even for "open rebellion", and

<sup>15</sup> "India Unreconciled", *passim*.

to "do or die"—of course in the non-violent fashion which he was not prepared in any case to eschew. By a rather different mental process, Nehru reached the same point. "He (Nehru) fought against my position," wrote Gandhiji, "with a passion which I have no words to describe. But the logic of facts overwhelmed him." Nehru was not unaware that a struggle at that juncture involved some risk, but there was no other way, he felt, because the British, in spite of their performance in south-east Asia would not draw from it the correct conclusion and part with power to the Indian people. The risk, however, was worth taking, he believed, for the struggle was expected to be "short and swift", and would bring India, glowing with freedom's exhilaration, really and truly in the camp of anti-Fascism.<sup>16</sup>

Goaded thus, by continued and provocative bureaucratic intransigence, the All-India Congress Committee, meeting at its historic session in Bombay passed on August 8: what has come to be known as the August Resolution. The main part of the resolution was notable for its flaming anti-fascism, its declaration of sympathy with the cause of the United Nations, the unqualified pledge to organise both armed and non-violent resistance to the Jap aggressors and the demand for National Government. "The Committee," it said, "is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardize the defensive capacity of the United Nations. But the peril grows both to India and these nations, and inaction and submission to a foreign administration at this stage is not only degrading India and reducing her capacity to defend herself and resist aggression, but is no answer to that growing peril and is no service to the people of the United Nations. The Committee resolves, therefore," ran the fateful operative part of the resolution, "to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle."

<sup>16</sup> See Horace Alexander, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-45.



During the meeting Gandhiji spoke twice, and some of his pronouncements are worth quoting: "Give up the attitude of mind which welcomes Japan." "I want you to adopt non-violence as a matter of policy. With me it is a creed, but so far as you are concerned, I want you to accept it as a policy. As disciplined soldiers you must accept it in toto and stick to it when you join the struggle." In an interview before the meeting Gandhiji said: "I have definitely contemplated an interval between the passing of the resolution and the starting of the struggle.... A letter will certainly go to the Viceroy, not as an ultimatum, but an earnest pleading for avoiding a conflict. If there is a favourable response, then my letter can be the basis for negotiation." This readiness for a settlement is borne out by the contents of the letter which Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy from the Aga Khan Palace in Poona where he was kept in detention. Government had crossed the Rubicon, however, and Gandhiji was given to understand that there was no common ground for discussion.<sup>17</sup>

The Government which displayed the most shocking inefficiency in fighting fascism abroad or providing civil defence and economic well-being at home, sallied out with lightning rapidity ruthlessly to suppress Congress though the struggle, non-violent as it was announced to be, had not even been started by Gandhiji. Early in the morning of August 9, Gandhiji and all members of the Congress Working Committee were taken to distant detention camps. Notable Congress members were rounded up all over India. The Working Committee, the A.I.C.C. and almost all provincial Congress Committees were declared unlawful organisations, Congress headquarters at Allahabad were sealed up and A.I.C.C. funds confiscated. The press was muzzled so that no news of arrest, firings, and casualties could appear in the papers except for the trickle that a rigid censorship permitted to go through. The blitz of brutal repression let loose by the imperialist bureaucracy had set the country aflame. The accumulated anger and discontent of the people were goaded by Government into

<sup>17</sup> "India Unreconciled"; S. K. Dutt's articles in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Puja Number*, 1945.

unorganised and spontaneous outbursts and then met with *lathis*, tear gas and bullets. The bureaucracy struck so hard and so fast because it feared that Congress might go ahead to forge unity with the League—Moulana Azad's announcement that residuary powers would vest in the provinces in free, federated India was a good augury—and it feared also that Congress's clarion-call of anti-fascism might really reach the ears of the United Nations. There followed, then, the most intense and widespread repression of Indian patriotism that had ever before happened in the history of British rule.

No complete figures of arrest and prosecutions are available, but from statements made by the Home Member in the Central Legislative Assembly, the following may be taken as an official estimate for the period till the end of 1942:—

Persons arrested—60,229; persons detained under Defence Rules—18,000; persons killed by Police or Military Firing—940; persons injured on account of Police or Military Firing—1,630.

It was also stated by the Home Member that the military had to be called out in about 60 places, that the police had to resort to firing on about 538 occasions and that planes were used in five places to disperse crowds. Such, in a summary, was the official version, but from the speeches made in the Legislature and from statements of public men—which survived the censorship—it is clear that the figures were very much of an under-estimate. Horace Alexander, sent to India by the Society of Friends in Britain, reported that hospital doctors had told him that in Calcutta casualty figures were much higher than those officially published.

Government alleged that there were concerted outbreaks of mob violence, arson, murder and sabotage, apart from the usual *hartals*, protest meetings and similar demonstrations. According to official accounts, in the weeks following the arrests, some 250 railway stations were damaged or destroyed, over 500 post offices were attacked, of which fifty were burnt and the rest damaged. The railway system of Bihar and the eastern districts of the United

Provinces was dislocated for many weeks. Communications were seriously interrupted over a large part of India. Over 150 police stations were attacked, besides other Government buildings. Over thirty members of the police force were killed and a few other officials and soldiers. Horace Alexander notes that even if we accept the Government figures as approximately correct, the casualties on the Government side were less than a twentieth of those on the side of the people.<sup>18</sup>

Without a leadership and real organisation, our people gave nevertheless a heroic answer to what Gandhiji rightly termed the "leonine violence" started by Government to "goad our people to madness". The story is too fresh yet in many memories to be told dispassionately, and facts about the people's upsurge only later came to light as a result of inquiries instituted in several provinces by the Congress organisation. Serious allegations were made regarding measures taken by Government, but inquiries were generally prevented. Apart from bombing and machine-gunning, there were at Chimur, Midnapore, Nandurbar, Poona and Allahabad, for instance, such methods as the imposition of collective fines and the enforcement, with communal exemptions, of the principle of collective responsibility on the inhabitants of villages and towns. In April 1943, when the Federal Court of India held that Rule 26 of the Defence of India Act under which Gandhiji and other Congress leaders were detained was invalid in law, Government directly proceeded to issue a new Ordinance to "legalise" the illegality.<sup>19</sup> The superb strength of our people was seen in many districts of Bihar and eastern U.P., in Midnapore where over large areas the British Government was *non est* for about a month, in Satara where a parallel administration functioned for quite a long time, and many other places. Dubious elements had, of course, entered the field; a self-appointed "A.I.C.C. Directorate" defied the letter and spirit of the Congress resolution by issuing, through circulars and the fortnightly *Ninth August*, instructions for sabotage; there was the inevitable handful of fifth-columnists and

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Alexander *op. cit.*, pp. 46-49.

<sup>19</sup> See in this connection "Recent Judgments in India" (1944).

political irresponsibles who wanted to fish in troubled waters. It remains a fact, however, that acts of sabotage and violence were by no means widespread.

Imperialist propagandists carried on a campaign of vilification of Gandhiji and the Congress. Gandhiji was maligned as pro-Axis, even when the Government of India were actually in possession of a letter, dated Sept. 23, 1942, written by him to the Viceroy, denouncing and disclaiming all responsibility for the acts of violence committed in the name of Congress. In this letter, Gandhiji said: "...In spite of all that has been said to the contrary, I claim that the Congress policy still remains unequivocally non-violent. The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control. I feel that the Government, not the Congress, are responsible for the destruction that has taken place. The only right course of the Government seems to me to be to release the Congress leaders, withdraw all repressive measures and explore ways and means of conciliation. Surely the Government have ample resources to deal with any overt act of violence. Repression can only breed discontent and bitterness..." It is significant that this letter was held back when Government published, on the eve of Gandhiji's fast on Feb. 9, 1943, the correspondence that had passed since August between him and the Viceroy. Obviously, Gandhiji was holding forth the olive branch and the Viceroy was repelling it. In his letter dated Jan. 19, 1943, disowning responsibility for the disturbances which Government was trying frantically to foist on him, Gandhiji wrote: "(1). If you want me to act singly, convince me that I was wrong and I will make ample amends. (2). If you want me to make any proposal on behalf of the Congress, you should put me among the Congress Working Committee members. I do plead with you to make up your mind to end the impasse."<sup>20</sup>

Every time Gandhiji got 'NO' for an answer. Indeed, Government wanted the impasse. Imperialist bureaucrats could not tolerate free India fighting fascism with the glow

<sup>20</sup> "India Unreconciled", pp. 114-123; the Government version can be found in "Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances".

of freedom in her heart. They could only justify their conduct before the United Nations by dubbing Congress pro-Axis, by provoking our people into fury and ruthlessly suppressing them. They, therefore, blacked-out the truth about India. They knew very well that Congress was anti-fascist, that the movement, envisaged but not launched, was definitely planned to be non-violent, that, as Moulana Azad wrote later to the Viceroy, "The A.I.C.C. at no time contemplated such a campaign [sabotage], never issued instructions [for it], secret or other..." Naturally, they pretended not to know it at all. By the most extreme provocation, they incited our people to a spontaneous upsurge and so secured for Churchill, their super-boss, the chance in November 1942 to shout in defiance of all high-sounding 'War Aim' declarations that he had "not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire".

The cup of Gandhiji's patience was full, when he decided to go on a fast for 21 days from February 9, 1943, "a fast according to capacity". It was a characteristic protest against the Government's "leonine violence" inevitably driving our people to a frenzy, and against the refusal either to set him free or allow him to meet members of the Congress Working Committee to review the political situation in the light of what had happened. He told the Viceroy that his heart bled for the privations of India's millions on account of a scarcity—which later took the form of a horrible famine—that "might have been largely mitigated, if not altogether prevented, had there been a *bona fide* National Government". Lord Linlithgow's answer to the announcement was couched in such terms that even Gandhiji must have found it difficult to restrain his indignation. "You have described the step," wrote Gandhiji, "as an attempt 'to find an easy way out'. That you, as a friend, can impute such a base and cowardly motive to me passes comprehension. You have also described it as 'a form of political blackmail'. Despite your description it is on my part an appeal to the Highest Tribunal for justice which I have failed to secure from you. Posterity will judge between you as representative of an all-powerful

Government and me as a humble man who has tried to serve his country and humanity through it."<sup>21</sup>

All India was thrown suddenly into a state of indescribable perturbation. There was none in the country so poor as to think well of a callous bureaucracy that had drowned in blood and tears the brave, blind, spontaneous upsurge of our patriots; that had failed, unspeakably, in offering effective protection to the people when Jap bombs were raining on Chittagong, Noakhali, Calcutta and on various places in Assam; that had bungled, with insolent inefficiency, the problem of food supply and had inducted dread famine into our fair land. To the prevailing frustration of spirit was added now the acutest anxiety, for the 74-year old father of the country, its leader and mentor, had undertaken, at Government provocation, a 21-day fast. Out of the nerve-racking anxiety there emerged, however, a country-wide agitation for his release. Except for the handful of political irresponsibles, who wished frantically that Gandhiji might die in a British jail and a demented people might be provoked to fight again with whatever weapons came handy, Indian patriots conducted unitedly the movement for Gandhiji's release. Our unity still had lacunae however; embitterment in relation to Congress made the Muslim League as an organisation keep apart from the movement, though there was no doubt about Leaguers individually being keen on saving Gandhiji's life. A non-party conference, attended by representatives of almost every section of opinion including the Metropolitan of India whom Government had refused permission to see the Mahatma in jail—met at Delhi and urged on Government the desirability in the interest of Indo-British relationship of Gandhiji's immediate release. Both Linlithgow and Churchill remained adamant, however; obviously, we were still not strong enough to make them see sense. Three Indian members of the Viceroy's Executive Council resigned in protest, but no impression was made on a wooden administration which had even refused William Phillips, President Roosevelt's personal envoy in India, permission to see Gandhiji in jail.

<sup>21</sup> Letter dated Feb. 7, 1943, "India Unreconciled," pp. 124-26.

The great man survived the ordeal of the long fast, but the country, unable to win his freedom, plunged again into deep despair. 'Nothing can be done'—came to be the common feeling in the country. Meanwhile, before Linlithgow's infamous Viceroyalty came to an end, fresh calamities overtook India. The whole of Bengal, once India's granary, and large areas of Orissa, Bihar and Madras Presidency, were laid waste by a famine of a kind that had come to be regarded as impossible in the present-day world. The responsibility for it must, primarily, be laid at the door of imperialism and its auxiliaries. The real vicious circle which was at the root of the continuing crisis of Indian agriculture was that, on the one hand, imperialism's throttling grip on industrial development compelled more and more people—as Census Reports show—to live off agriculture, and on the other hand agriculture itself, in the hands of a starving, rackrented and debt-ridden peasantry had been steadily stagnating and declining. In the absence of a National Government, which alone could mobilise the willing co-operation of the people, the imperialists inevitably failed in their much-boosted 'Grow More Food' campaign; expensive posters (too often in English!) fattened Government publicity agents, but left the peasantry cold.

The excruciating story of the Bengal Famine of 1943 is one of the ugliest blots on the escutcheon of British rule in India. Literally millions died of starvation—a greater number than the total of British Empire casualties in the War. A Government commission of inquiry—the Woodhead Commission—reported in 1945 its estimate of 1,500,000 famine deaths; this figure is generally considered an underestimate, and while five million deaths were often reported, the most reliable figure, arrived at by Calcutta University's Anthropology Department, seems to be three-and-a-half million. Thousands were trekking down to Calcutta in search of food and, in spite of relief arrangements, were dying on the streets and in hospitals. These "sick destitutes" as they came to be called, were witnesses to the cruel mockery that was British rule. In large areas of Bengal, family life was uprooted, whole classes of artisans and agricultural labourers were wiped out, social and

moral disintegration set in. The tragedy was heightened, by anti-social practices—hoarding, profiteering, black-marketing—which became rampant; the frustration of patriots prevented political unity of the sort which would have checked this degeneration and furnished the corrective to the incredible bungling and callousness of the Government of India as well as of the Provincial Governments. Lord Linlithgow, worthy British satrap, did not even care to pay a flying visit to stricken Bengal, nor would he permit the country's popular leaders to come out of jail and help in relief measures and restore confidence. The ugliest thing about the famine, as a British newspaper commented, was that it could have been avoided. Bengal paid a horrible toll to man's inefficiency and inhumanity, and felt to the marrow the agonies of subjection.<sup>22</sup>

The year 1944 opened under better auspices than the years preceding it. Both in Europe and the Far East, the forces of the Axis were reeling back. In March, the Japanese invaded north-eastern India and pushed menacingly forward in Assam and Manipur, but it failed to create any undue uneasiness, and the Commander-in-Chief described it as a "token invasion". Government policy in regard to the national movement continued, however, to be as pig-headed as before. The only member of the Congress Working Committee then out of jail, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, was giving the lie to Government propaganda against Congress and its leaders and was reiterating India's detestation of Fascism, but after her Independence Day (Jan. 26, 1944) statement, a ban was imposed on her public speaking. Things were beginning to look up, however, and when Gandhiji fell seriously ill with malaria, he was released unconditionally on May 6. Government took all grace out of the gesture by emphasising that the decision was arrived at on purely medical grounds, but that surely was not the whole story. Bureaucrats who apparently did not mind Gandhiji dying on their hands in 1943 when he had gone on his 21-day fast, could not possibly be suddenly solicitous about his health.

<sup>22</sup> See Kalicharan Ghosh, "Famines in India"; P. C. Joshi. "Who Lives If Bengal Dies?"; H. Alexander, *op. cit.*



About a month after his release Gandhiji gave an interview to Stuart Gelder, correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, in which he said that there was no question of again starting Civil Disobedience, that 1944 was not 1942, and that though he did not have the authority to withdraw the August resolution, its operative part sanctioning non-violent struggle might be deemed to have lapsed. He wrote a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, for permission to meet the Working Committee members in jail or to see the Viceroy to discuss matters. He made the "concrete proposal" that he was prepared to advise the Working Committee to offer "full co-operation in the war effort if a declaration of immediate Indian independence is made and a National Government responsible to the Central Assembly is formed, subject to the proviso that during the pendency of the War, military operations should continue as at present, but without involving any financial burden on India." The Viceroy chose, however, to stand on ceremony and characterised the proposal as "quite unacceptable" even as a basis for discussion.

Gandhiji was tireless in his efforts for a solution of the deadlock, and took a great step forward when he proposed to meet Mr. Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, with the formula named after its proponent, C. Rajagopalachari, in order to settle the question of the right of Muslims in certain areas to self-determination. All India was agog with joyous expectation that at long last our two greatest organisations would set up a united front against imperialism. To none did it come as a greater spur and as proof of its prescience than to the Communist Party which, in defiance of slander and ridicule directed against it, had agitated since 1942 for national unity as "our shield and our sword", "the most potent and powerful and the only weapon which the people of India have to forge and wield in order to wrest power from the hands of British imperialists." Congress-League agreement to set up a Provisional National Government for the successful defence of the country and for freedom, had been their principal slogan. A study of the history of our national movement had convinced them that there was in it an unmistakable

Muslim trend, that in certain areas of India lived people who might call themselves Muslim nationalities though religion alone was never the basis for them, that the demand for Pakistan, though crudely formulated, contained an element of justice, namely, the freedom urge among such nationalities; that the League, in spite of a number of reactionaries in its leadership, had unquestionably developed an extensive mass basis and had won over a very large proportion of those Muslims who had participated in the Khilafat and Congress movements, that the Jamiat-ul-Ulema and Azad Muslim Board, though opposed to the League, yet supported self-determination, and that to consider Mr. Jinnah as an impossible person and therefore to dismiss him was political folly and meant inexorable alienation of Congress from the Muslim masses. To Congressmen they emphasised the supreme urgency of conceding the right of self-determination to Muslim nationalities; to Muslim Leaguers they pointed out that Muslim independence could only come through joint action with Congress. "The wretched British Government takes advantage of our follies," Mr. Jinnah had said in his address to the League Session at Delhi in April 1943. "Can't we say 'unite, unite and unite', and get the British out?" Action in conformity with this sentiment was all that was desired, but unfortunately such action was not immediately forthcoming.

For nearly three weeks the Gandhi-Jinnah negotiations went on, but unhappy India was told again that the leaders had not come to an agreement. The first steps towards unity had, however, been taken. Although unable to recognise absolutely the right of the Muslims to self-determination, Gandhiji agreed that the Muslim provinces should be given the opportunity to separate themselves from the rest of India if a plebiscite of the entire adult population (Hindus and Muslims) gave a majority verdict in favour of separation and provided that matters of common interest, such as foreign policy, defence, internal communications, customs and commerce, were satisfactorily fixed up by treaty between the new States. Mr. Jinnah, obdurate as ever was unable to agree to these reasonable conditions, which he regarded as limitations on the right of the Muslims

to full sovereign freedom in their homelands, and so the negotiations, to the chagrin of the entire people, broke down. "The tragedy of the situation," wrote P. C. Joshi, the then leader of Indian Communists, was that "Gandhiji failed to see freedom behind Mr. Jinnah's demand and the latter failed to see democracy behind Gandhiji's conditions", while both stood by the principles of freedom and democracy. Both announced that their separation was only an adjournment and that they would meet again. They never met subsequently.<sup>23</sup>

There was no doubt that the British Government hindered, on purpose, unity between Congress and the League. Cripps in 1942 had flaunted the lack of agreement between the two as the only hurdle in the way of Indian freedom. In December 1942, fearing that Mr. Rajagopalachari's unity efforts might be successful Lord Linlithgow gave an unusual homily on India being geographically one and the need to "conserve that unity"—obviously in order to stiffen opposition to brotherly consideration of the Pakistan demand. In February 1944, Lord Wavell told the Indian Legislature that "unless the two main political parties at least can come to terms, I do not see any immediate hope of settlement". This did not prevent him writing to Gandhiji in August that a National Government could only follow "agreement in principle between the *Hindus and Muslims and all important elements* as to the method by which the new constitution should be formed." "All important elements" would doubtless cover a multitude of dubieties that imperialism would beget.

Bureaucratic Machiavellism was seen clearly in June-July 1945, when a conference was held in Simla to discuss what was known as the Wavell Plan. The Viceroy had flown to London to seek instructions in regard to an agreement between the leaders of the Congress and the League parties in the Legislature as the basis for settlement. During the discussions between Amery and Wavell, the

<sup>23</sup> G. Adhikari, "Pakistan and National Unity"; P. C. Joshi, "They Must Meet Again"; C. Rajagopalachariar, "Reconciliation, Why and How"; S. K. Dutt's article in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Puja Number*, 1945; S. S. Zaheer, "A Case for Congress-League Unity."

equal representation in the Central Government between Congress and the League, agreed to by the two leaders, was changed into equal representation for Hindus and Muslims. By this means, Government put a bait before both organisations. Congress whose leaders were released on the eve of the meeting could think that Government would let it have all Hindu seats and also some Muslim seats; the League felt that it would get all the Muslim seats, in which case no Congress Muslim could be nominated (as he could be if it was just equality between the Congress and the League). Both organisations, unfortunately, failed to see through Wavell's game; they tried to use the change made by the British Government to gain at each other's expense, and they failed. It was Government which laid the basis for Congress-League disagreement and the failure of the conference, but it played its cards so cleverly that Congress and the League blamed one another, and British reaction immediately advertised to the world that Britain was willing to transfer power but Indian disagreement prevented it.

Soon after the failure of the Simla Conference a Labour Government came to power in Britain with a large majority in Parliament, and Japan was finally defeated. The Labour Government, however, contrary to fond Indian expectations, followed warily in the footsteps of its predecessors. Elections to the legislature being then pending in India, a decision was postponed till after the results were published in the spring of 1946. Indeed, Labour did not appear to have made up its mind about Indian freedom; in the Secretary of State's announcement on 4 December, 1945, of the visit of a parliamentary delegation to India, the goal was described variously as "full self-government"—whatever that might mean—and "a full and rightful position as an independent partner State in the British Commonwealth." The verbal ingenuity of imperialism had been so well known in India that there was still much fear of clever British manoeuvres to prevent realization of India's heart's desire.

For far too long India had been kept standing, like Tantalus, chin-deep in spurious British promises of independence which receded each time she bent to slake her

thirst. By this time, however, she knew her own strength, knew also the wiles of her enemy, reaction. To be sure, she knew how internal dissension fettered her powers of movement, but there were signs, both inside India and in the world set-up generally, that those old-time infirmities must not stand in the way much longer. As the Soviet Foreign Commissar Molotov said at the United Nations' meeting in San Francisco (May 1945): "We all understand that a time will come when the voice of an independent India will be heard." And when it came, as it did before long, it was a day of glory, and a day of rejoicing, not only for India but for all mankind.

And in the time of harvest I  
will say to the reapers, Gather ye  
together first the tares and bind  
them in bundles to burn them;  
but gather the wheat into my  
barn.

ST. MATTHEW.

## CHAPTER XVII

### “THE WHEAT AND THE TARES”

**M**UCH water flowed under the bridges and things moved in India so that even the turgid leadership of British Labour had to make gestures of conciliation that appeared slightly less ambiguous than had usually been the case. Freedom's harvest, it was felt, could not be far off and the gleaners girded their loins. And there was a growing and vivid realisation that the grain must be separated from the chaff, that the tares must be burnt and the wheat carefully garnered.

Imperialism's wiles had not, of course, been exhausted, but it was clear that its continued existence hung on a thread that our people had demonstrated they could snap at will. Whenever their emotions had been roused, they had shown their mettle. Unarmed, they had fought the armoured might of imperialism. Over and over again, our common folk had furnished proofs of their pluck, courage and intrepidity, their unanimous detestation of foreign rule and all its symbols, their latent powers of *impromptu* organisation and mobility, and their disregard of danger to life and limb. If they were capable of so much without organised leadership, what must be their showing when a movement, properly prepared, was hurled against imperialism? Did not such events presage, in a crude way perhaps, the people's seizure of power, the achievement of a free India? They were like straws in

the wind, the wind that will blow off the earth's fair face that excrescence of man's inhumanity and greed which goes by the name of imperialism.

It will take very long for anybody to forget what happened on three great days in November, 1945, when the government of His Britannic Majesty seemed hardly to exist in the city of Calcutta where Job Charnock many years ago had laid the foundations of British rule in India. What happened in Calcutta was only a striking manifestation of the spirit of defiance that was stalking all over the country. Everywhere in our vast land and from people belonging to every political grouping, there had gone forth the demand for the release of all "Indian National Army" prisoners without discrimination. The British government which failed most dismally to offer protection to Indian nationals in South-east Asia, whose armies specialised, so to say, in lightning "strategic" withdrawals, and for nearly three years could do nothing worth mention against the Japanese fascists, had forfeited all title to allegiance. That was, at any rate, what Indians in South-east Asia felt very strongly. The trial of the "Indian National Army" prisoners staged dramatically at the Red Fort in Delhi, brought to light certain facts, which appeared to indicate that there was no clear ideological link between them and Japanese fascism, that their primary concern was with the winning of Indian freedom and during the pendency of the war the safeguarding of Indian interests in South-east Asia, that there was considerable resentment of Japanese hesitation in rendering them really effective assistance, that the Japanese attempt to impose fatal restrictions even on the sovereignty over the Andamans which was ostentatiously transferred to the so-called "Azad Hind" (Free India) government convinced them of fascist bad faith, and that in any case, the enthusiastic support the I.N.A. got from Indians in Japanese-occupied countries, whatever its international and ideological implications, was evidence of their one overwhelming desire, namely, the freedom of their homeland. It was to demand the release of these prisoners that on November 19, Calcutta students staged a demonstration and were marching peaceably enough

towards Dalhousie Square, an area which to bureaucratic eyes was sacrosanct on account of the proximity of Government House and the Secretariat buildings. They were stopped on the way by armed police; they squatted on the street, determined to establish the elementary civic right of taking a peaceful procession to wherever it was intended. The agents of law and order, however, had no patience for that sort of thing and as the Coroner's verdict showed, showered bullets on the crowd even without real provocation. That was the signal for a massive upsurge of the people; for two successive days, all Calcutta was on the streets, demonstrating against the powers that be, and there were tussles, resulting in many casualties, between unarmed citizens and the military and armed police. Government was compelled to lift the ban on entry into the Dalhousie Square area, and the general movement all over the country secured the release of the three principal I.N.A. officers who had been sentenced by a military tribunal to long terms of imprisonment.

The November incidents were surpassed in February, 1946, when essentially similar incidents in widely separated parts of India bore striking witness to our people's resolution that they would not suffer much longer the agony and the humiliation of unfreedom and that they were ready and willing to pay the price of that resolution. For three or four days, from February 12 onwards, Calcutta again was in flames. Insensately, the police had fired on demonstrators who demanded the release of Abdur Rashid, one of the I.N.A. prisoners to whom the earlier clemency was not extended. The result was an upsurge, spontaneous and magnificent, uniting Hindu and Muslim much more notably than in November, though the Government had probably planned, in the case of Rashid who was a Muslim, to drive a wedge between the two communities.

There were similar demonstrations everywhere, but the centre of principal interest shifted in a few days from Calcutta to Bombay where began a serious mutiny of naval ratings. In Karachi, Calcutta, Madras, Delhi and many other places, there were sympathetic strikes among the naval and air forces. A little later, a remarkable strike



of the Indian Signal Corps at Jubbulpore took place. Strikes of the police force themselves, in Bihar and even in Delhi, the empire's capital, were to follow before long. Such phenomena are inconceivable in normal times, and the most filmy-eyed bureaucrat could not fail to notice the affiliation of this discontent with the prevailing upsurge of patriotic feeling against the detested thralldom of imperialism.

A word here should be said about Subhas Chandra Bose, whom all India hailed as *Netaji*, when in mid-1943 he formed in Singapore the *Azad Hind* (Free India) Government and gave a new mould and inspiration to the Indian National Army. That day in late-January 1941, when he disappeared from captivity in Calcutta, only to emerge in Germany and proclaim a free Government of India in exile, will not be easily forgotten. When later he performed the perilous submarine journey in the height of wartime from somewhere in Europe to South-East Asia and assumed the leadership of the Indian National Army, his countrymen thrilled again as they have rarely done before or since. Here was indeed a figure of legend and yet a man with a grip on practical things. In the eyes of his people, Subhas Chandra Bose had then reached a stature which almost transcended ideological niceties and beyond the criticism which the likely pro-fascist implication of his dramatic moves might reasonably evoke. Such criticism, legitimate in itself, has been rendered somewhat theoretic and irrelevant by the march of events, by the impact of the mere phenomenon of an Indian National Army, as has just been noted, on the mind of the Indian people. Moreover, it is pertinent to recall what has been stated by Subhas Chandra's intimates, namely, that while in Hitler's Germany he never permitted purely pro-fascist (and anti-Soviet) propaganda over the *Azad Hind* radio. It is known also that he chafed over Japanese refusal to equip the Indian National Army with mechanised weapons and units like an airforce indispensable to modern warfare—it was perhaps one of those significant happenings which kept this whole-hogging nationalist away from the real contamination of fascism which had toppled everything down.

in south-east Asia. When in August, 1945, following an air crash, he disappeared from the scene, he left the impression of a brave, imperturbable man, lonely but never morbid, who kept his balance and his patriotic pride in the most difficult environment. If behaviour in a crisis is a test of greatness, Subhas Chandra Bose passed it many times but never so well as in the peculiarly complex days of World War II in South-east Asia.<sup>1</sup>

Far and away the most important and impressive incident in this period was the strike in the Royal Indian Navy and the concomitant happenings in Bombay (Feb. 21-23) and elsewhere in the country.<sup>2</sup> In 1930, at Peshawar, the Garhwali soldiers had refused to fire on unarmed crowds. That was the first clear intimation that British-recruited trained and organised Indian armed force could not for ever be used for the suppression of a people's movement. The widespread strikes in the Navy and also the Indian Air Force dissolved the imperialists' complacent confidence and marked, therefore, the end of an era.

The Bombay general strike and *hartal* on February 22 was the biggest ever in that city of many proud patriotic memories. There was no citizen—Hindu or Muslim, Congressman or Muslim Leaguer—who hesitated to respond to the call of the R.I.N. ratings when they fought heroically, not merely for improvement of their conditions but for the abolition of racial discrimination, for the vindication of Indian self-respect. The courage of the masses of the people in meeting the most callous military violence has never been excelled in our country. The unity of all—symbolised in the hundreds of Congress, League and Communist flags intertwined—showed that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. apart from Subhas Chandra Bose's own writings a very competent biography by Hugh Toye, "The Leaping Tiger" (London, 1959)

<sup>2</sup> Reference has been made in this chapter generally to newspaper reports too recent to need specific mention except in a few instances. On the R.I.N. strike, there is a useful little pamphlet—"Strike" edited by G. Adhikari (Bombay, 1946)—which seems so far to be the only book on a very important

despite divisions and vacillation in the top leadership, the people were moving, all together. Official figures showed that military shootings had taken, in forty-eight hours, a toll of no less than 250 civilian lives—a record for the British administration. The R.I.N. lads had struck work peacefully and had presented their demands on February 19; they took to arms when they were shelled and fired upon, ceased fire only after a seven-hour battle and remained in readiness with arms till, on the intercession and advice of the people's leaders, they surrendered on the morning of the 23rd. Despite their heroism and the wonderful response of the common people, however, the leadership of the Congress, not to speak of the Muslim League, proved hesitant and virtually bankrupt, so that surrender was followed by victimisation and in spite of assurances to the contrary over 600 of the mutineers were arrested. The military *raj* let loose diabolically on Bombay for three dark days could not have happened if the leaders had shown a greater spirit and understanding of the issues at stake. Even Pandit Nehru, whose heart warmed to see that "the iron wall which Britain created between the Indian Army and the Indian people has collapsed", found his head befogged by conflicting counsel, and fearing that the Bombay demonstration, held in spite of Congress direction to the contrary, was due to the Communists' growing influence, ridiculed "the seven-hour gun-battle" as "more or less harmless"; he did not realise that it was a historic notice served on British imperialism, and not in a voice of philosophic cajolery, by the conjoint forces of Indian patriotism. Searching frantically for justification of his proposition, which possibly gave him some qualms, he tried to point out that barricades and 18th-century methods of revolution were out of date, "You cannot fight machine-guns with rifles and match big guns with small ones." He forgot that while sporadic violence can never result in the people's seizure of power, it was utterly ridiculous to advise a slave people never in any circumstances to take recourse to arms in which they were necessarily out-matched by the state, and to imply that the R.I.N. action was a mere, detached incident and was not helping to

forge unity between the people and the armed forces so that together they might triumph over the oppressor.

Some day, perhaps, the full story of the battle of Bombay harbour and of Castle Barracks where the mutineers locked themselves in, will be properly told. The ratings took over the ships and barracks and, from all accounts, showed coolness and resource and capacity for organisation. "We sat expecting death any minute, with shrouds around our heads," said one participant, describing the tense atmosphere. A young naval officer went up the high wall surrounding the barracks and opened fire; he got a bullet in his body and where he fell and lay for two whole days, since the British besieging troops would not even let the dead be taken out, his comrades painted a red cross with their fingers dipped in blood. Such heroism inspired them, and even more did the aid which the common people, so often described as street urchins and "hooligans", sent them at very grave risk of life; a young working-class lad tried to get across to them a packet of 'chana' (gram) and was sniped down by British troops in cold blood. The Central Naval Strike Committee did not give in, till they were told definitely to do so by Congress as well as by Muslim League leaders and were assured there would be no victimisation. "For the first time," said their manifesto, "the blood of men in the services and men in the streets flowed together in a common cause. We, in the services, will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people! Jai Hind!"

This was also a period of intense, wide-spread, recurrent struggles of the working class, and to a lesser extent, of the peasantry. From November 1945 onwards, there came a virtual wave of strikes in almost every important industry. For some time in Calcutta, the transport services were pulverised, and the strike of all municipal employees, including those who worked the water-supply plants, was quite an event. The end of the war ushered in fresh problems in a hundred industries—retrenchment, reduction and abolition of wartime extra payments, attacks on dearness allowance and the like. The highest point of the strike wave was betokened by a

projected all-India general strike of railwaymen. The bourgeois leadership of the country's national movement fought shy of its implications and counselled caution. But workers in a ballot voted overwhelmingly in favour of the strike. Indian railways then used to send twenty million pounds every year as profits to stock-holders in Britain, who had got already many times more than the original investment, and yet the meagre demands of those who slaved for them were repeatedly ignored. The strike effort, then, came as no surprise. The situation, besides, had been such that strikes were seriously contemplated, and in some cases even launched, by teachers in primary schools who were paid less than domestic servants but had always demarcated themselves from the working man, who were well-known for their meek and mild submissiveness and wore sufferance as the badge of all their tribe.

It would seem, therefore, that a situation subsisted which called for vigorous organisation and leadership with a view to bringing about basic changes. Unluckily, however, the leadership was lacking and the organisation necessarily inadequate. The new upsurge of our people, who ached for freedom now more than ever before, who gathered in enormous and enthusiastic crowds to greet their leaders and listen to their message, naturally looked up most of all to the Congress, the time-honoured leader of Indian militancy. Its principal spokesmen, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru, had not been chary of brave words; there was talk of “enormous unheavals” if the people's freedom urge was not soon satisfied, but at the same time, paradoxically, the spirit of the people was twitted and maligned, as during the happenings noted above, and sought to be canalised into sedate, respectable conduct. Paeans of praise for the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had become with Congress leaders a kind of habit since the Simla Conference of June-July 1945; the “Wavell-is-sincere” slogan was sounded *ad nauseam*. At a speech before leading European businessmen in Calcutta on December 10, 1945, Wavell criticised the Congress leaders' attitude towards the I.N.A., ridiculed “Quit India” which, he said, “will not act as the magic sesame which opened

Ali Baba's cave", and warned that India's problem "cannot and will not be solved by violence." Congress leaders who had in speech after speech glorified the August movement as a spontaneous revolution and denounced Communists as "traitors" who betrayed it, did not answer Wavell. The Working Committee passed, instead, on December 11, a resolution reaffirming the old principle of non-violence, which Maulana Azad called "the most important" of the session. The resolution on the Indian National Army laid down that sympathy and legal and other aid for I.N.A. officers and men "do not mean that the Congress has in any way deviated from its policy of attaining Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means." While revolutionary perspectives were opening out on every side, while militant action, however motivated, against the hated British imperialism was hailed tumultuously by the common people, Congress leaders, masters of demagoguery, made blood-and-thunder speeches, but hastened to assure the agents of imperialism that they were anxious only for the country's advance "by peaceful and legitimate means."

Leaders of India's two major organisations—Congress and the Muslim League—continued to think in terms of unilateral importance and remained apart. The elections in the autumn of 1945 to the Central Legislative Assembly on the basis of a very limited franchise, resulted in Congress securing an overwhelming majority of non-Muslim seats, and the League winning in virtually one hundred per cent of the Muslim constituencies. Mr. Jinnah declared, in bellicose fashion, that it was the League's "first round" triumph, implying further rounds in a fight against Congress rather than against the common imperialist oppressor. The first quarter of 1946 saw elections to Provincial Legislative Assemblies, on the basis of a less restricted franchise, and here again Congress secured an overwhelming majority of non-Muslim seats while the League won parallel, and sometimes even more impressive success in Muslim constituencies everywhere, except in the North-west Frontier Province, which continued to be a Congress stronghold in spite of its predominant population of Muslims. It was good that Congress demanded

immediate transfer of power from the British Government; only it was a pity that it could not come to terms with the League on the principle of unity based on self-determination among Indian peoples. The League's demand for a free Pakistan in a free India could be justified only to the extent it was based on the principle of self-determination; it went in, however, for fantastic claims and unjust boundaries when it asked for an inexorable partition of the country and the inclusion in Pakistan of six Indian provinces. Both parties whipped up popular emotion during the election campaign to fever pitch, but they were no nearer agreement and a joint front against imperialism than during the Simla Conference of the summer of 1945.

The elections pretty nearly steam-rolled other parties, except significantly, the Communist party which carried on, undaunted, a campaign for unity in our people's final bid for power. In order to be able to play their independent role more effectively and as a gesture of protest against the tragic failure of Congress and the League to join hands, they decided in October, 1945 to resign *en masse* from Congress. (The League, always ahead of Congress in obscurantism, had already thrown out every communist it could lay its hand on). In the provincial elections, they set up 108 candidates all over India, not as a partisan exhibition of injured vanity, but to popularise their programme of unity and freedom on the basis of an unqualified recognition of the self-determination of nationalities and the final struggle for power. They warned the country against crafty imperialist manoeuvres, but that did not prevent them being maligned and attacked from every side. The League called them the fifth column of Congress, while the latter could not forget their refusal, on ideological grounds, to join the upsurge which followed August 9, 1942. National figures like Jawaharlal Nehru conducted unceasingly against them a vitriolic campaign, chartering air planes to address election meetings wherever they were a factor to reckon with. They won nine seats altogether, which was in the circumstances quite a creditable performance; even their bitterest critics admitted that they had been pitted against

Congress's enormous prestige as well as a terrific Big Money-Bureaucrat combine and that they stood their ground.

At election time, of course, things happen in almost every country which are best forgotten when the temporary frenzy is over. Between Congress and the League, however, and between the League Muslims and the so-called nationalist Muslims of various categories to whom Congress lent support, the acrimony too often took a very undesirable form. Imperialists counted on the acrimony being more than a temporary phenomenon and built their plans accordingly. Unfortunately, our principal parties did not realise the seriousness of the manoeuvre and failed to counter it effectively.

From time to time the insolence of imperialism added insult to our injury even during the last six months when talk of a political settlement had been very much in the air. On December 10, 1945, Lord Wavell said, patronisingly: "I repeat that it is our earnest wish and endeavour to give India freedom; but we cannot and will not abandon our responsibilities without bringing about some reasonable settlement." In January a team of ten members of Parliament—two peers, five Labour, one Liberal and two Conservative M.P.s—toured India. It was an odd assortment, most of them without political experience or understanding, intent more on the pleasures of going places and seeing things than on finding out ways and means of a real Indo-British settlement, and as an eminent Congress leader publicly stated, frivolous and almost discourteous. The leader of the delegation denied the discourtesy, but the impression remained unsavoury. Our national leaders showed great patience, indeed, and in March 1946, Maulana Azad, Congress President, went so far as to discountenance strikes and *hartals* since power, he averred, was going soon to be transferred and "no immediate cause has arisen to join issue with the foreign rulers who are acting as caretakers." So our national leadership toned down the popular demand for non-official enquiry into recurrent police and military excesses and only asked mildly—and unsuccessfully—for a judicial enquiry. The people were told that the British were



getting ready to quit India and should be helped to do the packing; they were bewildered, and as a left-wing leader put it, if that was the way of the British quitting India it was a very grim way indeed.

Independence can never come as a gift from imperialists; this is a lesson which has been burnt deep in our people's consciousness. And yet such was the depth of credulity produced by the degradation of protracted foreign domination that the announcement of the Cabinet Mission's visit to India gave rise to great expectations of freedom issuing from its hands. In September, 1945, the Labour Government had declared: "After the (provincial) elections, the British Government would hold discussions with representatives of those elected *and of the Indian States* to determine the form which the Constitution-making Body should take, its powers and procedure." To this, in December, Lord Wavell added the commentary: "There are various parties to the settlement who must somehow or other reach a measure of agreement amongst themselves—Congress, the largest political party in India; the minorities, of whom the Muslims are the most numerous and the most important; *the rulers of Indian States*; and the British Government. The objective of all is the same—the freedom and welfare of India." That "the rulers of Indian States" were objects of the most solicitous concern to Britain was explained very clearly in a book written by the Empire's colonial expert, Professor Coupland, on "The Constitutional Problem of India."

The announcement that Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, was coming to this country along with Sir Stafford Cripps, whose reputation of being India's firm friend was sedulously built up, and Mr. A. V. Alexander, known as one of Labour's strong, silent men, was widely acclaimed. There was little realization, however, that Labour's basic policy towards colonies differed hardly at all from that laid down in the bad old days of Churchill and Amery. On September 19, 1945, Mr. Attlee, Britain's Labour Prime Minister, stated in the House of Commons: "The broad definition of British policy towards India, contained in the Declaration of 1942, which

had the support of all parties in this country, stands in all its fulness and purpose." He then reiterated the "gracious" speech from the Throne that "In accordance with promises already made to my Indian peoples, my Government will do their utmost, in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion, for the early realisation of full self-government in India." On November 9, he said: "*India's complete freedom has been there for the taking ever since the Cripps Offer in 1942. The only obstacle so far—a very grave obstacle—has been the failure of the Indian communities to agree among themselves.*" It was playing beautifully with words, but their sense seemed worse than dubious.

Memories of the Cripps debacle were still fresh, and it was difficult to make out what was what as Britain manoeuvred for position. Mr. Attlee made an unctuous speech in which he warned recalcitrants in India that they would not be permitted to hold up the country's advance on which the British Government had set its heart. He announced also, significantly, in Parliament that the British military forces must remain in India, for the transfer of power had to be in a calm atmosphere which could be ensured only, it seems, by the benevolent British bayonet.

"Is the official deputation coming to deceive a great nation?" asked Mahatma Gandhi of those of his countrymen who were suspicious of the move; "It is neither manly nor womanly to think so." (Amrita Bazar Patrika, Feb. 27, 1946). To many, however, it was an automatic, animal reaction that imperialism still had many tricks up its sleeve. They recalled that Egypt had been "independent" since 1922, but British troops still remained in that country; they feared also that the Indian States might be like so many Sudans, bases of imperialist manoeuvre.

The story of the Cabinet Mission's stay in this country, the interviews, many and prolonged; singly and all together, with Congress and League leaders, does not need to be related. Several things stand out, however: Congress and the League failed again to present a joint front; each stuck stolidly to its guns, though from time to time there were indications of an agreement, and pinned its

hope on a unilateral understanding with Britain; the Mission's decision was a skilful attempt to win general support, for though described as a recommendation it was in reality an award to which there was no obvious alternative if militant political action was not contemplated by Indian patriots. With consummate artistry, the Mission began by exhibiting to the world India's internecine differences and ended by laying down its award. Many discerned independence in it, to be sure, but as Pandit Nehru's paper, *National Herald*, remarked: "British political vocabulary is so rich in shades of meaning that the word 'independence' may mean a great deal as well as very little." Ex-Secretary of State Amery called the Mission's plan "classically reasonable"; in the House of Commons, Mr. Clement Davies, Liberal leader, said grandiloquently; "We have done our best to teach and be kind and to help them (Indians) to arrive at the present moment, when, as free people, they can take over the government of their own land and take up their proud part in the counsels of the world State." (*Statesman*, May 17, 1946). Such perorations recall the British reputation for hypocrisy and make us search our hearts and search also the precious document, which is the Mission's gift, for proofs of our freedom.

Let there be no mistake about it; the Mission's plan for India did not mean independence. The responsibility for framing India's future was not given to a democratically elected Constituent Assembly but to a special body whose composition and procedure had been entirely fixed by a unilateral British decision. Nominees of the Princes, medieval hang-overs in a modern world, were to form one-fourth of this body; the rest were to be elected by the provincial assemblies where it was provided that representatives allotted to each community would be chosen by members of that community only. While there was to be a Union Centre to deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications, and residuary powers vested in the provinces, there was to be something like a partition of India into three regional groups, apart, of course, from the States where denial of the citizens' elementary rights was to remain unchecked. The three-tier system might

very well prove cumbrous and even unworkable. Perhaps, however, the Mission's anticipation was that in the constitution-making body, elected communally, there would be yet another delectable exhibition of India's ineradicable disunity. Meanwhile an interim government composed of popular representatives was to be set up, but it would operate on the basis of the Act of 1919 under the Viceroy who retained full powers of veto and general control. A question in the House of Lords about the powers of the interim government elicited the answer that in the absence of an Act of Parliament it was the Viceroy's old Executive Council with its personnel altered. There was, therefore, under the Cabinet Mission's dispensation, no immediate transfer of power, no specification of the date of independence, no mention of the withdrawal of the British army of occupation, nothing, in short, to show that the Mission really meant business.

The reason for the British Government's eagerness to prove to the world and to Indians its anxiety for Indian freedom lay elsewhere. They refused us freedom even during the dark days of the War, when the gift of it would have put a glow in our hearts and immeasurably strengthened the Allies' war effort. It did not stand to reason that now, when war was over, they were goaded by magnanimity to offer us our liberation. They had their own special motives even when they thought of getting us some little food when famine raged; did not Herbert Morrison, one of the Big Three in British Labour, warn America that if food supplies failed "India will become prey not only to famine but to political extremism"? (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 17, 1946). They knew that unrest swelled menacingly in India, and on a world scale there was the new and growing alliance between the Soviet Union, the new democracies in Europe and the people's movement in every country, an alliance against which Anglo-American imperialism was to plot indefatigably from China to Peru, mask machinations in the Middle East, crush the forces of freedom, wherever it could, from Greece to Indonesia. How could it be that Britain, which employed even Japanese troops to drown in blood the heroic movement for Indonesian freedom,

which offered Malaya a fantastic and specious variety of constitutional "reforms", which did not then even propose full Dominion Status for Burma and Ceylon, had decided, out of sheer goodness of heart, to part with power to the Indian people and make a gift to us of "the brightest jewel in the British Crown"? Whatever imperialism offered us must have been in conformity with its interests, and it knew very well the idiom of clever conciliation. Its game was to join hands with elements in India that were either reactionary upholders of vested interests or were chary of further rounds of necessarily relentless struggle, and to pacify our resurgent people with verbal magic. The Cabinet Mission's plan was, to quote the words of a well-known politician in another context, no better than a maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten version of independence. It may very well have been a large improvement on the then existing constitutional set-up; it could even be trumpeted as the most feasible solution that could be *offered* by a foreign agency. But it was not, by any means, independence. India's freedom remained still to be fought for and won.

The wicked have drawn out the sword and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and the needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

*From the PSALMS*

## Chapter XVIII

### DARKNESS AND DAWN

**O**N July 18, 1946, the Right Honourable A. V. Alexander, British stalwart met already as a member of the Cabinet Mission to India, made a speech in the House of Commons. In the course of it, he unburdened himself of observations which are very revealing. "We have to deal with a situation", he said, "when there is a political awakening throughout the world and specially in the East, and if some attempt had not been made to get the agreement we have so far secured in India, I am certain we should have faced a position of uprising and of bloodshed and disturbances in India already, and with a future military commitment that no one could at the present moment, forecast."<sup>1</sup>

Imperialism in India, was, therefore, according to this authoritative spokesman, in a very real quandary and was making an "attempt" to get out of it. He had been worried over "future military commitment", for discontent in India was, in his own reckoning, so deep and so widespread that it could not be tackled otherwise. But he was worried no longer, it seemed, not at any rate overmuch; his policy had "secured" important success in India already, for Congress and the Muslim League had accep-

<sup>1</sup> *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), July 19, 1946.

ted the British Plan, though with mental reservations aimed mutually against one another rather than against the British.

What this Plan was like, has already been noted in a summary. It is difficult to see what lured the leading Indian parties, for the Plan was in very truth, what R. Palme Dutt described as "a new chapter in divide and rule."<sup>2</sup> With the unabashed assurance characteristic of Social-Democratic parties when they seek vainly to justify blatant deviations, Professor Harold Laski, then Chairman of the British Labour Party, said in a much publicised interview on May 23: "It is the biggest abdication of power in modern history in a non-violent way, made by any imperialist power to any people, and I hope Indian nationalist leaders will appreciate this offer made on a gold platter." The platter had, of course, to be gold, when its contents were so very tinsel. The British Plan envisaged for India neither independence, nor unity, nor democracy.

Far from "abdicating" power, imperialism was launching upon a new manoeuvre to seek a new social basis for the perpetuation of its domination. Placate with the most honeyed words the bourgeois leadership of the country; offer them a partnership, really very junior but ostensibly on equal terms, in the business of exploitation of the common man's interests; draw Congress and the League into an alliance with the Princes, the five-hundred-and-eighty-five British puppets who keep a third of our country's territory and a full quarter of our population in thrall—this, indeed, had been the imperialist machination! The Constituent Assembly, really speaking a humdrum constitution-making body, had 292 members indirectly elected on a communal basis from the existing provincial legislative assemblies and 93 representatives of the Princes, its very manner of composition a flagrant denial of democracy. The proposed division of India into four

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<sup>2</sup>See R. P. Dutt's pamphlet with the same title (Bombay, 1946). Even the generally clear-sighted Maulana Azad was taken in; he thought the plan was "a great victory for the Congress", cf. "India wins Freedom" (Calcutta 1945), p. 154 Perhaps his hopes of somehow overdoing partition of the country had given him this idea.

zones—a Hindu-majority zone (the largest in area and population), two Muslim-majority zones, and sprawling across our land, the Princes' zone of feudal despotism which British imperialism had begun already to fortify as havens invaluable even when things went awry in the rest of India<sup>3</sup>—had, of course, nothing in common with the principle of national self-determination, and was meant, as later events tragically showed, to deflate and inflate by turns the balloon of hopes dangled before Hindu and Muslim and keep them, therefore, at logger-heads. If and when this motley body of constitution-makers, assembled at Britain's bidding and committed to limits laid down by the Cabinet Mission's pronouncements, drew up a document, it must, in Britain's judgment, obviously, make "adequate provision for the protection of minorities", a subject not to be trusted to the tender mercies of Indian politicians, and it must demonstrate "willingness to conclude a treaty with His Majesty's Government to cover matters arising out of the transfer of power."<sup>4</sup> If anything emerged clearly from the tangle of Indian events, it was that the British were not quitting India, and that the advice given his people by Sardar Patel, one of Congress's topmost leaders, to behave themselves and quietly help the British with their packing, was a costly misapprehension.

Britain's spurious offer of independence was accompanied by a subtler continuance of the old method of "divide and rule", the counterposing by crafty alternations of encouragement and patronage of Hindus against Muslims and of the League against Congress. Glib speeches on the transfer of power continued to be made when imperialism, even with a Labour Party for its principal agent, manoeuvred to maintain its essential economic and strategical domination. The agreement between Birla Brothers, Ltd., one of the largest Indian monopoly concerns and the Nuffield Organisation in England, or between Tatas and the Imperial Chemical Industries, was

<sup>3</sup> In connection with this last point see *People's Age* (Bombay) for brilliant exposure material.

<sup>4</sup> "Papers relating to the Cabinet Mission" (Government of India, 1946).



evidence of the astute economic plans of British imperialism. Far from finalising and facilitating the speedy withdrawal of British troops from India, the Commander-in-Chief, himself a Britisher of course, was not prepared to set any time limit for Indianisation which might, he said in the Central Legislature, "take ten years, twenty years or more." There ought to be, according to Field Marshal Auchinleck, some 2500 Indian Officers in the Army by April, 1947, while the total need is for 9000 officers. Assuming that "suitable" candidates do offer themselves, the proposed Indian Military Academy near Poona cannot supply more than 100 qualified officers every year, and at this rate we ought to have an Indianised army in just sixty-five years!

How queer it seemed for the leaders to hug their illusions when the British Cabinet, for all its cunning essay in political bamboozlement, did from time to time let the cat out of its bag! A few days after Jawaharlal Nehru thundred at Benares that "We have now altogether stopped to look to London....we have not entered the Constituent Assembly to place our decisions on a silver dish and dance attendance on the British Government for acceptance"—a statement somewhat natural after the pathetic trip he made at White Hall's invitation—the Secretary of State for India, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, virtually dismissed it as sound and fury; it was, the Labour peer patronisingly pointed out, only "a political rejoinder to a very provocative speech made a few days ago (Mr. Churchill) in the House of Commons", and therefore, presumably, to be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. This was followed by a speech of the Prime Minister, Attlee, who made no bones about his Government's intention. "I have always thought of Mr. Churchill", he said, "as a great historian, but he seems to have forgotten some recent history. When he talks of India he seems to have forgotten the Cripps Mission, the declaration made in his own Interim Government by Mr. Amery—and *our declaration has gone no further than that*" (*Italics mine*).<sup>5</sup> Nothing could be clearer, and his colleague, A. V.

<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary reports in *Statesman* (Calcutta), Dec. 17 & 21, 1946.

Alexander, had pricked the bubble also of the Interim Central Government in India, where Congress and the League were participating, the former avowedly because it meant a fundamental if not a formal constitutional change. "There had been no constitutional change", the worthy minister had said, "and there could be none without the Government's coming to Parliament for authority for such a constitutional change"; when Nehru submitted names of Congress nominees, "the Viceroy retained full discretion with regard to his acceptance."<sup>6</sup>

What of the other member of the noted trinity, that internationally celebrated friend of India, Sir Stafford Cripps? As long ago as June 14, 1945, he made a speech at Edinburgh, boosting Mr. Amery's plan for reconstitution of the Viceroy's Executive Council so that except for the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief all portfolios were to be held by Indians, there would be a foreign affairs portfolio in the hands of an Indian and fully accredited ambassadors and ministers appointed to represent India abroad, and a British High Commissioner appointed to India. So these so-called attributes of sovereignty, widely acclaimed in India's nationalist press, were really part of Churchill's scheme!<sup>7</sup> And yet with a gullibility that is difficult to understand, India's bourgeois leadership repeated the legend of the transfer of power.

This legend appeared to have been swallowed whole and by a process, that is, to tell the truth, rather shameful. On May 24, 1946, the Congress Working Committee made an able and very unflattering analysis of the Cabinet Mission's recommendations, but ended up with a confession that it was "unable to give a final opinion at this stage". On June 6, 1946, the Muslim League Council critically examined the proposals, but, perhaps as a counter-blast against Congress, accepted the scheme. Twenty days later, the Congress Working Committee blowing hot and cold at the same time, refused to enter an interim Government at the centre but decided to join "the proposed Constituent Assembly". On July 29, the League Council answered with a somewhat delusive thunderbolt; it withdrew its

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1946.

<sup>7</sup> S. Cripps *Democracy Alive* (1946), p. 116.

former acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's proposals, called upon its members to renounce British titles and decided to launch "direct action" for the achievement of the League's aims. This might have meant at any rate a good augury for mass action, but it was, as subsequent events made abundantly clear, not really a call for anti-imperialist militancy but merely pressure on Britain, supposed then to be partial towards Congress, for a favourable compromise. Congress apparently interpreted the League's threat of "direct action" to be aimed against itself, and somersaulting deviously, entered the Interim Government at the centre before August was out. Things happened in the meantime, for gruesome fratricidal strife had already started, but the game continued of power-politics between Congress and the League, both in varying attitudes deferential towards British intentions, and hopeful of unilateral settlement with the foreigner. So in October, with a leading Prince as the latest mediator, the Viceroy held confabulations with Congress and League leaders, posed to both as the virtuous neutral, got them to disagree once again, and the League to accept seats on the Interim Government as Pakistan's "sentinels in the Centre", and with Congress nominees as uneasy company. The League still kept out of the Constituent Assembly, though it looked as if it might come in before long, because of Congress's accepting, after a lot of demur, the British declaration of December 6 on the point of Sections and Grouping. This declaration, however interpreted, was further evidence of the British Government's oft-repeated claim to overriding at will India's right to unfettered constitution-making.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, as politicians pursued their profoundly pettifogging quarrels, the country was plunged, on a sudden, into the deepest despair. For on August 16, 1946, an ill-fated day which the League had marked for its "direct action", there broke out in Calcutta a communal conflict of a character and intensity hitherto unknown. Even before August 16, there were isolated Hindu-Muslim clashes in the United Provinces and in Ahmedabad, the

<sup>8</sup> *Cabinet Mission in India* (1946) by D. R. Parkash, is a useful handbook of information.

first fruits of the devil's work which the Cabinet Mission, in dove's mask, had performed. But "direct action" which Calcutta saw on August 16, and whose repercussions many other parts of the country experienced later, was conceived in folly and executed in filth, and provoked reprisal and counter-reprisal of the most heinous kind.<sup>9</sup> It was clear—and only the Communists had foretold it—that the League's so-called "struggle" led, in the absence of basic agreement with Congress, to murderous civil war and not to an anti-imperialist fight. The League leadership had obviously gambled with the threat of civil war, but lest Congress leaders be thought paragons of patriotism, it must in fairness be added that by itself the League's ill-conceived action would not have given the chance to British imperialism parading before the world its beneficent neutrality as between inveterate antagonists, unless the Congress leadership, too, had not joined the game from the other end.<sup>10</sup>

The leaders of the country's two foremost organisations had walked into the spider's parlour of imperialism. They had chosen to concentrate their fire, not against the foreign enemy but against each other. To the Muslim, unceasing propaganda had driven home the distorted idea that the Congress leadership, almost entirely Hindu, really intended to wipe him off India's map and so stolidly resisted Pakistan; none but the Communists, with their unflagging insistence on the self-determination of nationalities in a multi-national India, tried to give even a really cogent answer to the accusation. To the Hindu, Congress pleaded successfully that it had got the British very nearly to quit and that the League, hand in glove with imperialism, was the major stumbling block; Muslim readiness to collaborate in anti-imperialist struggle was never, in answer, stressed by the League's motivated monomaniac leadership. Between Congress and the League, which came to mean virtually between Hindu and

<sup>9</sup> The Anglo-Indian Daily, *Statesman*, called it "the great Calcutta killing"; its purpose was dubious but the appellation was accurate enough.

<sup>10</sup> See in particular the illuminating commentaries in the weekly *People's Age* (Bombay).

Muslim, there emerged an ineluctable antagonism that found senseless expression in that ugly competition in cruelty which was staged by either community in Calcutta and Bombay, in Noakhali and Behar and in the United Provinces. When Congress and the League prated, each in its own way, of independence, and treated separately with British imperialists; when each painted the other as black as it could; when Congress, screening a new-found sedateness behind Jawaharlal's fascinatingly equivocal phrases, shied as gracefully as it could from the contemplation of anti-imperialist militancy, and the League blatantly proclaimed its indifference to the struggle for freedom, the result could only be the cruel disaster which the communal carnage represented.

To imperialists the Hindu-Muslim hostility was like the veriest manna from heaven. Not that they had got it through pre-destination; they had worked hard for it, and the devil gave them their deserts. They had manoeuvred elaborately, had played with a practised hand on Indian divisions. The Cabinet Mission, encouraging and often initiating unilateral approaches to itself, had succeeded in transferring intra-Indian power-politics to the Constituent Assembly. When it had first arrived, Mahatma Gandhi had expressed the rosiest of illusions about the peaceful ushering in of Indian freedom. Soon after it left, "he saw darkness where he saw light before,"<sup>11</sup> In the Constituent Assembly, imperialism sought to function as the well-masked impresario of a priceless show of India's querulous perversities. Its hopes were high, for so far the country's major leaders had been found, in spite of their differences, to be fairly malleable in imperialist hands.

No wonder, then, that wherever in the world the flag of the bourgeoisie flies, wherever the ruling class covets empire as a prize to be fought for with the blood of their dupes, the press headlined and front-paged news of the Calcutta riots. With characteristic mendacity, it had given not an inch to what happened in that very Indian city on July 29,—or if it happened through a reputation for honesty

<sup>11</sup> The relevant file of *Harijan* is an amazing witness to the placidest kind of self-contradiction.

to mention it, stowed away a truncated story in a neglected corner—when a general strike in sympathy with India's postal and telegraph workers fighting for a bare living wage drew out in demonstrations near two million people. To the imperialist and his instruments, the biggest thing in Indian life was the communal conflict, while, as a matter of fact, there were in it at the same time depths still properly unplumbed, there were reservoirs of strength still untapped, there were signs that beckoned unfailingly in defiance of the encircling gloom.

Not for nothing had the Right Honourable A. V. Alexander foreseen in India "a position of uprising and of bloodshed and disturbances." That was his characteristic way of portraying the massive unrest of our people seeking the balm of freedom. The All-India General Strike of Railwaymen, scheduled for June 27, 1946, had been withdrawn on the express assurance of national leaders that their "grievances and demands", admittedly just, would be "sympathetically considered", and on the gesture, extracted from the Railway Board, that questions like retrenchment and minimum living wage be referred at once to adjudication. The strike ballot all over India had raised, however, such enthusiasm among railway workers, even where they were generally looked upon as politically immature and timorous, that the railway administration did not relish it at all and pursued, in defiance of the leaders' assurances, a policy of mean vendetta against the workers. This went so far that from August 24 to September 23, for full one month, there was a general strike on the South Indian Railway, home of the country's strongest railway union, in which 40,000 workers took part and could not be cowed even by the cruellest repression. The aim of the owning class, of course, was to get the General Strike postponed, to persuade the national leaders to offer counsels of moderation, and to prepare, during the time gained, for successful offensive, if and when the General Strike was called again by a working class disillusioned with many of their respected leaders. This was almost exactly in line with what happened in Britain during 1925-26, when the projected general strike was first postponed through the help of

"Labour" leaders and when it came later, was sabotaged and the miners' lone action smashed.<sup>12</sup>

From May 1946, there was happening in India a sequence of events that proved the people's temper. From the Himalayas to Cape Comorin the country was very nearly in flames. The month of May saw the unforgettable fight, in the sylvan surroundings of beautiful Kashmir, of people who suffered every conceivable deprivation at the hands of a cruel and infamous autocracy that misruled their lovely country. The battle of the Dal lake, where in the past tourists from every land have tasted as it were the joys of paradise, was the high watermark of a genuine people's movement.<sup>13</sup> From Kashmir, where the movement defied suppression, the eyes of our people travelled to every single working-class centre where mammoth demonstrations of the kind which happened in Calcutta on July 29, lifted the All-India Postal Strike to a militant political level. Here, again, the country's principal leaders, turned tragically sedate, advised calling-off of the strike on the assurance of a few minor benefits and sympathetic consideration in the future. In August-September, came the S. I. R. Strike, already referred to, sanctified by the blood of martyrs and the privations of worker families. In October-December, the centre of people's interest shifted to two large strongholds of feudal-cum-imperialist reaction—Hyderabad ruled by the world's richest man, the Nizam, and Travancore in the far south, both propped up only too visibly by British bayonets. The blood of our people had flowed, sometimes even at the instance of Congress Ministries, at Amalner in Bombay (August 27), at the Golden Rock in Trichinopoly (September 5), at Kolar (November 4), and at Coimbatore (November 11). Andhra *Kisans* fought in Telengana (Hyderabad) a heroic battle against imperialist-propped feudalism and paid a heavy toll in lives and in suffering. In Travancore State, the common people made

<sup>12</sup> Compare article on "The General Strike" by G. Allison (*Communist Review*, London, May, 1946.)

<sup>13</sup> Sheikh Abdulla, jailed for three years, was the leader of this great upsurge; his speech after arrangement in Kashmir Court has been printed in *Labour Monthly* (London) Nov. 1946.

history, resisting military might at Vayalar and Punnapra.<sup>14</sup> In November there began in Bengal the *Tebhaga* movement of share-croppers claiming two-thirds instead of half the produce of their own unaided labour. The history of it was written in blood, but it was no exception to the rule all over India. Among India's agricultural labourers there was great and growing ferment, and the most notable illustrations come from different regions in Madras Presidency, from the Warlis in Maharashtra (Bombay), from usually Congress-minded Bihar and U. P. districts like Unao, Basti, Aligarh, Rae Bareilly and many others. This ferment, alike in the working class<sup>15</sup> and in the peasantry, and spread all over India, "British" as well as "Princely", was the most significant fact of that day. This ferment grew inspite of discouragement from the leaders and an almost complete lack of publicity in the "national" newspapers owned mostly by a chain of unashamed capitalists. A disgusting but very revealing instance of "fairness" in publicity was furnished by the strike of workers in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, one of India's premier newspapers, which, except for the communist press, was blacked out by newspapers all over India and of every political persuasion—Congress, League, European. This ferment was the only thing that enabled India's common folk to beat off the scourge of communal passion, to try to extinguish its flames, as Lalmohan Sen did in Noakhali, with their very blood, to build people's fortresses against communal frenzy as they did in Hasanabad, to draw all into common struggles for common objectives and so to defeat the machinations of imperialists and the capitulationism of the leaders. It was in this proud ferment that was embedded every hope for the future that our country cherishes. And it was this hope that imperialists sought vainly to drown in agony when on January 21, 1947, their agents in Calcutta and elsewhere lathi-charged and tear-

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<sup>14</sup> See *Travancore in Travail* (Travancore Defence Committee, Bombay); *S.I.R. Strike*, by Krishnan and Chari (Bombay); *Blood Bath at Amalner* by Dange (Bombay).

<sup>15</sup> 7½ million working days were lost in strikes during the first seven months of 1946. This is an official estimate (Government of India Labour Gazette.)



gassed and shot young, unarmed students demonstrating for the freedom of Indo-China and signifying in their gesture the unity of Asia, resurgent and fighting, whatever the odds, for the freedom that is their right.

In contrast to this upsurge of the people and their readiness for action, was the confusion and sectional division of the top leadership. Not all the brave speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru could explain away the fact that the Interim Government at the Centre was still the Viceroy's Executive Council unable, even if it was willing, to stop the spate of Public Safety and other Ordinances promulgated in the provinces to suppress communists on the score of subversive agitation and propaganda. Not all the graces of oratory could turn the Constituent Assembly into a sovereign body building, unimpeded, the structure of India's freedom; it was more than significant that in the Constituent Assembly, a communist amendment to Nehru's resolution on objectives was ruled out of order because it called upon the Interim Government, composed as it was of popular representatives, to function as if it was the government of free India. Not all the sophistication in the world could see in the British Government's statement of December 6, 1946, which the Congress had been constrained to accept, anything but a reiteration that the final arbitrament rested with the British Government.

In the Soviet journal *Izvestia*, there appeared about this time an article by Dyakov which hit the nail on the head. "The new provisional Government of India", he wrote in reference to the Executive Council of which Pandit Nehru was the Vice-President, "taking into account the limitation of its authority and the weakness of the elements of state power administration at its disposal, can carry out an independent foreign and home policy, corresponding to the interest of the peoples of India, *only if it bases itself on the broad popular masses*". (*Italics mine.*) This, indeed, was the task to be undertaken, pre-eminently, by leaders of the calibre of Nehru.

We had allies all over Asia and all over the world—and pre-eminently the Soviets who, through the mouth of Molotov, declared at the plenary session (December 1946) of the United Nations Organisation: "Although

India is a member of the U. N. O. and consequently, in accordance with the Charter, should enjoy the status of sovereign equality with Britain, have we not heard here at the General Assembly her request for support and assistance? One should not turn a deaf ear to all this—it is time to acknowledge India's just demands". To imperialism, of course, 'justice' is a vain word. India had therefore to make up her mind to fight, with the heroism and strength her people have displayed so often, till the darkness that seemed sometimes to envelop her was finally and irrevocably dispelled by the glow of that dawn for which she had waited so long, in agony and in hope.

And what I say unto you, I say  
unto all, Watch.

ST. MARK

## CHAPTER XIX

### JOURNEY'S END ?

**I**T has already been seen how in spite of imperialism's clever and callous playing upon intra-Indian differences, in spite of the communal carnage that was fanned, subtly and sometimes quite openly with a view to confounding and contaminating eager participants in a growing class upsurge, the temper of India *vis-a-vis* her rulers was never one of submission; the giant slept because he was cruelly doped, but he slept uneasily and he woke whenever the call sounded loud and true. It was necessary, therefore, for imperialism to resort to a manoeuvre, craftier and more tempting than the Cabinet Mission's plan. If the last chance was to be seized, a risky gamble was imperative.

So on February 20, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee startled the world with a declaration of Britain's policy towards India. "Successive British Governments", he claimed, had worked for "the realization of self-government in India"; since, however, there seemed little chance of "all parties" agreeing on the Cabinet Mission's plan, steps would be taken, anyhow, "to effect the transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948." Power would be handed over "to some form of central government, for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial governments or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interest of the Indian people." It was further stated that there was no intention, on the final transfer of power, "to hand over powers and obligations under Paramountcy to any govern-

ment of British India", so that the rulers of the Indian States, checkerboarding India's map for so long in Britain's interest, would be free either to join on their own terms any of the States to be formed in India or to proclaim their independence. To signalise, as it were, a big breach with all previous policy, Field-Marshal Wavell was recalled and Viscount Mountbatten appointed Viceroy and Governor-General in his stead.<sup>1</sup>

Indo-British relations had so deteriorated, remarked Sir Stafford Cripps during the Commons debate on the declaration, that Britain had either to remain in India against the wishes of Indians for fifteen to twenty years longer or to renounce responsibility for a mounting difficult and thankless administration and transfer power to Indian hands. Britain could not take the former course; neither the Indian nor even the British people would have it. Nothing remained, therefore, said Cripps in effect, but to follow the second alternative.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, it was fear of the popular movement and realization of Britain's inability to maintain her Indian empire by force that led to the Attlee declaration. Much was said, of course, about the mission of Britain in India and its fulfilment with Indian freedom, but all that was part of imperialism's familiar window-dressing.

Fixation of the deadline—August 15—distinguished, however, the Attlee gesture which was, for that reason mainly, hailed as a "Quit India" statement. Congress welcomed it, even though the statement threateningly prognosticated a disrupted India. "The end of an era is at hand", said a resolution of the Congress Working Committee, "and a new age will soon begin". Vested interests that are an inevitable concomitant of imperialism did not particularly fancy the new age that was being fondly

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Attlee's declaration as well as many other documents of constitutional importance will be found in Dhirendranath Sen's *Revolution by Consent?* (Calcutta, 1947), a very clear-sighted and important study.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Attlee speaking in the House of Commons on 5 March, 1947, was at pains to stress that it was administratively & militarily out of question to stay in India beyond 1948; cf. Alan Campbell-Johnson, "Mission with Mountbatten" (London 1951), p. 26.

anticipated. There were provisions, therefore, in the Attlee declaration which boded ill for the future.

Mr. Attlee had been careful to say that power was to be transferred "to some form of central government.. or in some areas to the existing provincial governments or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interest of the Indian people." It would be difficult, indeed, to find a more typical essay in a last-minute equivocation. Every single fissiparous tendency in India found in it the requisite encouragement. There was no call now for the Muslim League to come to terms with Congress and join the Constituent Assembly; division of the country was unashamedly envisaged by the British Cabinet. Even Congress which had denounced the division of India with an almost morbid vehemence now only hoped for the best—hadn't the good Attlee spoken of "some form of central government" and hadn't he a year earlier said he would prevent a minority impeding what the majority wanted?—and prepared at the same time for the worst, for partition. Communal strife notwithstanding, the common people's upsurge had not abated to the extent that the bourgeoisie wished, and in fear and trembling at the revolutionary ferment that threatened to grow in spite of heavy odds, it was felt that the Attlee declaration should be made the most of. The Congress leadership, as if suddenly awaking to the inevitability of partition, proposed that Muslim-majority provinces (to which Mr. Attlee might grant independence!) like the Punjab and Bengal should be divided, so that areas where non-Muslims formed the larger number could keep out of Pakistan and remain with the rest of India. Congress thus virtually accepted the principle of partition, and that unfortunately not on the basis of nationalities but of religion.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing could be more welcome to Mr. Attlee and his friends, among whom, on the India issue, could be counted even the redoubtable Winston Churchill. That the empire as they had known and loved it was dead as a door-nail,

<sup>3</sup> Azad, "India Wins Freedom" (Calcutta 1959) has a chapter "The End of a Dream," pp. 191 ff., where the pathos of a situation where Congress was constrained to accept partition is very well conveyed.

they were compelled to admit; "long live the Empire"—in another guise, that was their hope and their effort.

Relying thus on the support of the reactionary Princes and of definite sections of India's propertied classes, and exploiting their fear of the popular liberation movement, wherein the worker and the peasant were taking an increasingly significant role, Britain schemed to perpetuate her rule in India, under a mask of voluntary abnegation of power, by splitting her into pieces and converting her into a conglomeration of feeble, and as far as possible, mutually hostile States. The British Labour Government hastened to confer on separate parts of dismembered India a kind of independence which it wished would be like that devised earlier for Iraq and Trans-Jordania.

Fearful of solving boldly the dilemma—hurl the people's organised strength for *real* freedom or accept a glittering but somewhat specious offer of independence—the Congress leadership chose the latter course. It was the signal, immediately, for extreme communal reaction on either side to rear its ugly head, clamour for partition on the basis of religion, and call out of the catacombs of bestiality that underlie so much of us the cruel spectre of senseless fratricide. The Punjab, India's sword-arm province, immune so long from the communal venom, saw arson, loot and murder on a scale that horrified the country. In many places the communal situation remained tense, with intermittent outbreaks; from the last week of March, Calcutta citizens, Hindu as well as Muslim, could only move stealthily for, while there was no mass frenzy, assassins lurked everywhere and life was worth nobody's purchase. The British, of course, enjoyed the scene, and their bureaucracy, police and military forces aggravated rather than eased the tension. If Hindus and Muslims could condemn themselves out of their own mouths and proclaim, under whatever variety of duress, their inability to form one proud State of their own, imperialism could wish for nothing better.

Immediately, therefore, as Congress agreed to partition and the League insisted on clinching the point, Lord Mountbatten, emerging happy and proud from his gracious confabulations with querulous Indian leaders, left for

London to confer with the British Government on steps to follow. And on June 3, returning from home, he announced from Delhi the Plan for the transfer of power, directing a partition on communal lines of Bengal, the Punjab and a part of Assam, and a division of British India into two parts, with the status of full-fledged British Dominions as from August 15, 1947—the Indian Union (popularly called Hindustan) and Pakistan. The Constituent Assemblies of the two States were authorised to decide if they would remain with the British Commonwealth or keep out of it. As for the Indian States, havens of feudal tyranny, they could accede to either Dominion or remain independent, since British Paramountcy was to lapse and not to be inherited by the two successor-States on Indian soil.

The Plan was accepted by the leadership both of Congress and of the League. Pandit Nehru recommended it to the people as the only way out of a critical situation and thanked Mountbatten for his "assistance to India". Partition was of course regretted by Congress in so many words; the League on its part was also sorry, for it was not getting all the area it had asked for. Both Congress and the League, unwilling to call on the people for a united movement for thorough-going freedom, accepted the British decision and even used all the devices of propaganda to make Mountbatten a hero.

Abul Kalam Azad, as Congress President, was closely in touch with the nearly frantic pourparlers preceding partition, and has left in his posthumously published memoir a record of facts as he saw them.<sup>4</sup> Even if they are not in every little detail entirely accurate, they add up to something very significant. To him it appeared that Mountbatten took the initiative in asking Congress to agree to partition; that Vallabhai Patel, angry with the Muslim Leaguers' role in the interim government and happy to be rid of it for ever, was the first among top Congress leaders to "fall for the idea"; that surprisingly even Jawaharlal Nehru was "won over by Lord Mountbatten", perhaps on account of Patel's arguments as well

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, specially pp. 181-91, 191-92.

as in consequence of certain personal influences which Azad could not approve; that even Gandhiji who had said, "If the Congress wishes to accept partition it will be over my dead body," was persuaded against his better judgment and his deepest instincts to give his blessing to the bifurcation of the country. Maulana Azad has also left it on record that Lord Mountbatten had given him assurance "as a soldier, not a civilian", that once partition was accepted in principle, there would be no communal disturbances anywhere and the Viceroy would use "the sternest measures" and bring out the army and tanks and the air force to "nip the trouble in the bud". On this assurance Azad's comment runs: "The whole world knows what was the sequel to Lord Mountbatten's brave declaration . . . Rivers of blood flowed in large parts of the country . . . Nothing effective was done to stop the murder of innocent Hindus and Muslims."<sup>5</sup>

It is important also to notice what this great man thought of the British Labour Party's role in the drama. Azad's words deserve to be quoted in extenso: "The Labour Party had always sympathised with the Congress and its leaders and had many times openly declared that the Muslim League was a reactionary body. Its surrender to the demands of the Muslim League was in my opinion due more to its anxiety to safeguard British interests than to its desire to please the Muslim League. If a united India had become free, there was little chance that Britain could retain her position in the economic and industrial life of India. . . . *With a British base in Pakistan, India would have to pay far greater attention to British interests than she might otherwise do.*" (Italics added). Maulana Azad wrote further that the fact of Winston Churchill favouring the Mountbatten Plan might "also have weighed with the Labour Government."<sup>6</sup> The transfer of power, as it came to be generally described, was a planned manoeuvre, and by no means by Britain. "Each concession, each gain towards self-government had come only after struggle and sacrifice. From the mass movement following the first

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-92.



World War, through the countless arrests and soul-wasting years, in which Nehru had fully shared, each rung in the ladder had been hammered into the place until the revolt within the rank of the Royal Indian Navy spectacularly heralded the finish. With Britain's armed forces streaming off their own groups to join hands with the people in the streets it was plain that there was no longer any choice except withdrawal for the British Raj."<sup>7</sup>

However in the eulogy showered on Britain for expediting the "Quit India" policy, one little matter was quietly forgotten. There was very good reason, indeed, for the unwonted despatch with which Government departments, specialists in pompous procrastination, pushed through the technicalities over the transfer of power on August 15. It was the American loan of nearly a thousand million pounds which Britain had negotiated in December 1945, wherein was a clause (just repudiated by Britain) that as from July 15, 1947, Britain's creditor countries should be free to convert on demand their sterling assets into dollars and buy goods directly and more copiously from America. If Britain, therefore, wanted India to be friendly to herself and remain in the sterling area rather than trip petulantly across to the more tempting region of the dollar, something had to be done and done quick. So everything was rushed—an ugly and unnatural agitation, backed by riots, for partition; pour-parlers with leaders who feared revolution like the plague but who still had the ear of the people; perpetuation under cover, of British spheres of influence in the Indian States which, even acceding to one Dominion or the other, retained all essential powers at home; military, naval and air agreements; guarantees which came easily for foreign capital interests. All this could be done, even to the accompaniment of a fanfare of applause, as the top level of India's wealthy classes had compelled the dominant section of the national leadership to compromise with Britain and her native allies.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Margaret Bourke-White, "Interview with India" in B. N. Puri, "Indian History of Review" (Bombay 1960), p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> In *New Times*, (Moscow, June 13, 1947.) Dyakov wrote a  
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August the fifteenth does not mark, therefore, our journey's end, but it is a milestone whose seminal importance must not, on that account, be belittled. Imperialism, however it continued its machinations, had suffered a frontal, and nearly fatal, defeat. Whatever imperialism's mental reservations and whatever the stratagems up its sleeve, the August 15 change-over was interpreted by our people in their own fashion. Demonstrations all over the country, except for the Punjab, and particularly in a place like Calcutta where on August 15 and subsequent days indescribable scenes of communal fraternisation wiped clean the sorrows and humiliations of a year-old internecine strife, were evidence of the strength that is in our people. On that day there was no rancour even against the British, but the crowd that good-humouredly swarmed, for example, into Calcutta's Government House and filled every nook and cranny of a place once hated and feared, represented a new *e'lan*, a spirit that can never be beaten. Our people had gone through so much, and with such heart, that they knew their hopes could not long be deferred: On that day, thus, their countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

"Long ago we made a tryst with destiny", declared free India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 14-15 August, 1947 "and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." He was well aware, however, of the price that had to be paid, but in the sublimity of the moment preferred to conclude with the exhortation: "This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell." It cannot, however, be forgotten that the country's leadership had entered into a deal with Britain and had refused to call on the people, who were straining at the leash, for a united movement for thorough-going freedom, the very process of which would have meant a moral cleansing, a

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valuable article, "The New British Plan for India". See Arun Bose's "Indo-British Business Deals" (Bombay 1947).

lighting of that glow in the people's heart, of which Jawaharlal had often beautifully spoken, and which has been missing even since independence. Undoubtedly, the circumstances were peculiarly difficult on account mainly of the Muslim League's sustained intransigence; but that cannot mean entire exoneration. When the casualties of communalism, before and after August 1947 are recalled, it is hard to say that we did not pay a much heavier price than struggle might have entailed. To that, however, a blind eye was turned, and to this day one hears echoes of the thought that in 1947 we had from Britain a magnanimous and voluntary gift of freedom—which "blesseth him that gives and him that takes"—while on any objective analysis it can be seen to be a conscious political manoeuvre extorted by conditions of crisis which were beyond the power of imperialism to control. Even the *Manchester Guardian* had commented editorially on 11 October, 1947: "Public opinion has preened itself on British virtue in withdrawing voluntarily from India; but posterity may dwell rather on the hustle with which the withdrawal was carried out. .... It may be hard to disentangle whether the British action was based on high principle or on a less glorious desire to retreat to shelter before the storm broke."<sup>9</sup>

It is important to reiterate that India not having to pay much of a price for her freedom—"with such little bloodshed and violence"—is a myth. Apart from the strivings of our martyrs and others unwedded to non-violence, the process of the transfer of power to deliberately divided India implied, before and after the event and as an inevitable concomitant thereof, an amount of human suffering which, in quantity or in quality, is hardly less than the suffering involved in perhaps any of history's great revolutions. The second thing to remember is that unlike in such revolutions, the suffering borne by the people of India and Pakistan, before and after the constitution of the two States, was at bottom senseless and no spur, at all, to great endeavour. It was a form of massive agony which numbs body and soul and does not release,

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Hiren Mukerjee, "Gandhiji: A Study", (Calcutta 1958) p. 177.

in the very suffering of it, heightening qualities of character. One might almost say that we purchased our political freedom with coin that was ethically counterfeited, and so it has been that even yet our people do not feel sufficiently the glow of that freedom. On 15 August, 1947, no doubt, there was in our people a mighty exhilaration, but the mood and the spirit passed—while it could have been lasting if we had won our freedom otherwise than by arrangement with an imperialism which exacted a price from us which we could not pay without drastic detriment to our soul. This, it bears repetition, should be remembered earnestly, if we wish to understand why even for such forward-looking things as the Plans the heart of our people still remains really untouched. The manner we won our freedom—and most of all it saddened the great Gandhi—has left an unwanted stamp on almost everything that has followed so far.<sup>10</sup>

No doubt the tasks before independent India were (and still are) vast. The stupendous problem of refugee rehabilitation had to be met; from West Pakistan there came as refugees to India between five-and-a-half and seven million people immediately after partition, while from East Pakistan there was, to start with, a much smaller exodus but it grew later to the figure of no less than five million. Pakistan had to face, also, a lesser but sufficiently arduous problem of refugees from India. This phenomenon of humanity uprooted has cast an ugly pall over our freedom. However, the tasks of rehabilitation had to be undertaken; it was too heavy a job to be satisfactorily accomplished, but it might be said that while generally the problem of West Pakistan refugees has, by and large, been tackled, that of refugees from East Pakistan remains yet to be met. This is being written not in order to censure Government, though its defaults have been many and grievous, but in order to stress the fact that a massive load of agony had been laid on the shoulders of India as a concomitant of the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-93; when asked for a message for 26 January, 1948, Gandhi replied he had none, that he had "run dry". He is even reported to have said that he was "disillusioned" about independence—"at least I am, even if you are not", cf. H. Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", p. 169.

transfer of power, a load that could not possibly be lightened without the kind of effort that we could not easily muster in the unhappy circumstances in which we were then placed.

This is not the occasion to tell the story of India since independence,<sup>11</sup> but it will be remiss not to recall the sorrows that came, as it were, in battalions to bedevil the country's future in the period immediately succeeding the transfer of power. It was even reported at one time that Winston Churchill, ever the enemy of Indian freedom, was counting on India being pulled back again into the British yoke ! The virus of communalism had then got into every pore, as it were, of India's body politic. War between India and Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir, which the British did all in their power to aggravate, seemed to be quite on the cards (and did, though to a limited extent, take place). And when on 30th January, 1948, an assassin's bullet put an end to the life of Mahatma Gandhi who was, if anyone ever has been, the Father of the country, and, like Bhagirath cajoling the gods to let the Ganga flow and vivify the land, had brought the waters of patriotic exhilaration to a land that was parched and dry and choked with the dust of the ages. Gandhiji's death meant not only the loss of our greatest treasure; our problems of reconstruction seemed, as a result of it, many times more heavy and complicated.

On 15th August, 1947, there were in India some 562 Princely States which, under the terms imposed by Britain, could of their own will accede to either Dominion or remain independent. These States covered nearly 48 per cent. of the territory of India and had a population just short of 25 per cent. of that of the entire country. They had always been the pawns of British imperialism and a dead weight against Indian freedom; the atmosphere in most of them was one of nearly unalloyed feudalism. Their continued existence on the old lines was a menace to the country, and it was only a happy sign of the times that sensing the writing on the wall, most

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<sup>11</sup> Reference may be made to Romesh Thapar's book on the subject (Bombay 1957).

of them had to agree to integration with India. A large contribution was made in this regard by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as Home Minister, but the result was not achieved without considerable effort. Even in mid-1948, some twenty-six states including Coochbehar, Tripura, Mayurbhanj, Manipur, Bhopal, and above all, Hyderabad, were resisting integration. The attitude of the Nawab of Junagadh and of the Nizam of Hyderabad were such that the Indian Government could not possibly tolerate it. For some time Hyderabad had even planned to remain independent even though it was entirely land-locked in the heart of India, and to enter into treaties with countries like Portugal and also, of course, Great Britain. The Junagadh Nawab left the State, and against tougher Hyderabad, the Indian Government took police action, which showed how hollow was the basis of the Nizam's pretensions, for almost without bloodshed the State was taken over and a Military Governor put in charge till the Nizam saw reason. (September, 1948). Over the State of Jammu and Kashmir, there was more trouble and it is not over yet. The Maharaja of that State had under powers conferred legally upon him, acceded to India (26 October, 1947) in order to resist the violent pressure being put upon him by Pakistan. Even before that date, with the active support of the Pakistan Government and its British advisers, Pakistan raiders, armed to the teeth with modern weapons, had entered Kashmir and started perpetrating terrible atrocities. The Indian Army had necessarily to be sent and with the support of the Kashmir people, almost entirely Muslim, repelled the intruder. Meanwhile, as early as December, 1947, Pakistan had brought in the United Nations Security Council a charge of aggression in Kashmir against India, a charge hardly tenable in view of the complete legality of the Maharaja's accession to India, but imperialist powers, then largely in control of the United Nations, merrily fished in the troubled waters in order to alienate India and Pakistan to the maximum extent possible. While India's case is clear and correct, this matter has continued to hang fire in the United Nations, and India has seen, repeatedly, how countries like Britain and the U.S.A. have delighted

in maligning her and virtually blackmailing her over this issue.

When Sardar Patel, the main architect of the integration of the States, died (1949), there were still certain conglomerations of former Princely States; among them were Patiala and the East Punjab States Union, Travancore-Cochin, the fourteen States of Rajasthan and the four comprising Matsya, the twenty-two States of Madhya Bharat, the thirty-three States of Vindhya Pradesh, the twenty-four States of Himachal Pradesh, and Saurashtra incorporating some 449 petty princedoms. Apart from states like Hyderabad and Bhopal which retained their separate identity, these princely conglomerations functioned as constituent states of the Indian Union. It was not till after the completion of the re-organisation of States (on a linguistic basis, very largely) and the elections of 1957 that these princely states as such ceased to exist; Hyderabad, or to be exact, most of it, is now part of Andhra Pradesh. However, there are lacunae still in the process of the formation of linguistic States; the rights of linguistic minorities are still quite often in jeopardy in certain areas. The power of the Princes is also by no means entirely eliminated. Their Privy Purse, immune even from income-tax, remains lavish, some of their former prerogatives continue, and their intervention in politics, whenever it happens, props up reactionary forces.

Under the Constitution of India which came into force on 26 January, 1950, we have a sovereign democratic Republic, though we remain a member of the British Commonwealth and acknowledge the British Crown as its head. In the Constitution there have been included Fundamental Rights (which are justiciable) and Directive Principles of State Policy (which are not justiciable but are morally incumbent on Government); they read very well, a splendid expostulation of our people's rights. Not unoften, however, they are disregarded, both in letter and even more in spirit. The elections of 1952 were held when the biggest electorate in the world, some 173 million voters, returned on the basis of universal adult suffrage, about 4000 representatives, 499 to the Lok Sabha (House of

the People) at the Centre and 3,375 to the various State Assemblies. The organisation and conduct of these elections were a credit to the country; it was not an easy job to run 196,000 polling booths and it was on the whole well and fairly done. On a somewhat larger scale took place the elections of 1957 and of 1962, again with a smoothness which betokened India's political maturity. On all three occasions, it is significant, the Communist Party, the target throughout of attack from every side, emerged as, after Congress, the major political force in the country. In the Lok Sabha and in many State Assemblies, it has been the leading group in the opposition. In the number of seats, however, though not in the proportion of total votes polled, Congress continues to be far in advance of all other parties in Opposition. After the 1957 elections, a Communist Party Government was returned to power in Kerala—the first instance in history of communists forming the administration after a process of parliamentary election in a set-up dominated by the bourgeoisie. Every hurdle that the ignuinity and lack of scruple which Big Money and its allies can commandeer was placed in its way during its twentyeight-month tenure of office. The Congress Government at the Centre and the Congress Party in Kerala, allying itself with even such utterly reactionary groups as the blatantly communal Muslim League of that State, joined hands together in a violent campaign against the Communist Government, a campaign which rode roughshod over every vestige of constitutional propriety and political decency, and has left a smear on the record of Congress which will not be easily wiped out. The incident was a grim warning that there are elements still in India which will not brook the possibility of basic change in our socio-economic life even though such change is sanctioned by the generally belauded processes of parliamentary democracy. It is an unsavoury but instructive story, which however is beyond the purview of the present volume.

A more unexceptionable instance of achievement in the years after independence is the launching of the Five Year Plans in 1951-52, the third in the sequence being now in active prosecution. Imperialism had kept India in a



state of planned backwardness, as a kind of "agrarian hinterland" to its metropolitan economy. Even after independence, when our main reliance was on Britain and the U.S.A., heavy industry could not properly grow, iron and steel works which the country badly needed could not be constructed, machine building and heavy electricals and oil exploitation were items that could hardly be thought of. By the time that the Second Plan was initiated (1955-56), salutary changes, however, had taken place, and economic relations on a free and genuinely friendly basis had begun to develop with the socialist countries and particularly with the greatest of them all, the Soviet Union. India, holding as it were the moral balance in the world, gets "aid" from countries in east and west, but it is relevant to record that while countries like the U.K. and the U.S.A. and West Germany want their own capital to penetrate our economy further and extract profits, assistance rendered by countries like the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Poland and East Germany is intended clearly to help India build her own basic economy and shed forever her former dependence on foreign capital interests. In this context it is pertinent to point out that our people's envisagement of socialism has lately grown so imperative that Congress, the country's largest party, has, mainly under Jawaharlal Nehru's inspiration, accepted the socialist pattern as the aim of economic construction. Even if it remains largely a paper formulation, the very fact of it having been made is enormously important.

In the years since independence, India's contribution to the cause of peace and progress in world affairs has been substantial and significant. Except for a period of hesitancy which was seen roughly till 1952-53, India's record remains, by and large, one to be proud of. Without her efforts, jointly with People's China and the USSR, the cease-fire in Korea (1953) could not have been achieved, nor could the flames of war have been extinguished in Indo-China (1954-55). India's tireless insistence that the Chinese People's Republic be accorded its rightful position in the United Nations and her advocacy of China's indisputable title to Taiwan (Formosa) have

been a matter of prime importance. The principled stand taken by India on the question of prohibiting atomic and hydrogen weapons and reducing conventional armaments to the minimum, in order to utilise for peaceful construction the immense resources now absorbed by the arms drive, has world-wide approbation. As a sponsor and leader of the first conference of Asian and African countries at Bandung (1955), India has represented the urge of the people of our two continents for peace and national freedom. India has consistently protested against aggressive military blocs and has called for collective peace and the settlement of international problems by negotiation. The *Panchsheel*, a concept redolent of India's history, which India and China were the first to invoke and promulgate jointly for the world to follow, calls for peaceful co-existence of nations, inculcates respect for one another's rights, and heralds the march ahead to a better world. There are dark shadows today, unfortunately, on India-China relationship, which, one is entitled to hope in the context of its history, will not take too long to be dispelled.

There is a debit side, of course, to the conduct of our foreign, as of our internal, affairs—witness such things as the continued Anglo-American influences over India's economy, and the ejaculation as late as 1959 by our Ambassador Chagla that the U.S.A. should give us more "aid" lest we go communist! This is not the place, however, for anything like a detailed critique of India's internal administration and foreign policy since independence. The latter, in any case, has won the acclaim of the world, and has, in spite of some lacunae, evoked the pleasure and pride of our people.

The world, and specially the Afro-Asian world, has changed almost beyond recognition since India won her independence. From Hiroshima (1945), where U.S. atomic bombs pulverised Japan's spirit, to Bandung (1955) where Afro-Asian nations sought proudly to rise to the full stature of their being, the change was of epic character. The years before World War II seem today almost like aeons away. And in the year since Bandung, the resurgence of Africa has been an event that has truly

shaken the world and shed much of the dross of past history; a giant awake is shaking his invincible curls. Before our eyes things happen which we cannot often see in perspective, but history, a kind of history where the people will be in the fore, is being made. To this process India has made and will surely continue to make, in spite of occasional falterings that the backlog of her history causes, a large and important contribution. The independence of India, whatever the carefully planted hurdles in the way of its fulfilment, has changed to an extent the moral climate of the world. There may not be before us a new heaven and a new earth, but let us help, as India's pious obligation to her history is to help, in the building of a new community of man rid of all avoidable misery and exploitation, full of fresh hope with the light of the eastern sun in its eyes.

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Apart from the six-volume *Cambridge History of India* the work, mainly, of non-Indian scholars, one may usefully turn to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan edition of the *History and Culture of the Indian People* (ed. R. C. Majumdar) in ten volumes, of which the latest published so far brings the story up to the Delhi Sultanate. Vincent Smith's *Oxford History of India* should better be read in its 1919 edition than in the inept revision made by Sir Percival Spear (1950). The *Cambridge Shorter History of India* (1934) by H. M. Dodwell makes dull but useful reading, as does *Advanced History of India* (1946) by Majumdar, Ray Chaudhury and Datta. There are certain better written books, like *India, a Cultural History* by H. G. Rawlinson, K. M. Panikkar's *A Survey of Indian History* (1946), and A. L. Basham's *The Wonder that was India* (1954). K. A. Nilakanta Sastri's *History of South India* (1955) corrects certain imbalances in historical presentation. For Indo-British history up to 1934, the best book perhaps is Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt's *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (1934), in spite of its sanctimonious title, Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946), an unequal but important book, includes chapters on the history of India from the earliest times.

On India's constitutional history under British rule the standard book is A. Berriedale Keith's *A Constitutional History of India, 1600-1935* (1937). Keith has also edited in the world's classics series a two-volume collection of *Indian Constitutional Documents*. P. Mukherji's voluminous compilation of the same name, and S. M. Bose's *The Working Constitution of India* (1944) will be found useful. Important from many points of view are R. Coupland's *The Indian Constitutional Problem* (1944), his report on the Cripps Mission (1942) and *India, a Restatement* (1945). Durgadas Basu's authoritative commentary on India's present constitution has many useful and suggestive historical excursions.

The rise of the nationalist movement in India is dealt with in a number of books, but not very satisfactorily. The official *History of the National Congress* (1935) was written by P. Pattabhi Sitaramayya on the occasion of the Congress's Golden Jubilee. It is a long and rambling book, good only in parts. Years ago, Mrs. Annie Basant, Congress President in 1917, wrote an important book which is nearly unavailable today, *How India Wrought for Freedom* (1915). Another Congress President, Ambika Charan Mazumdar, wrote the story of *Indian National Evolution* (1915). C. F. Andrews and Girija Mukherji's *Rise and Growth of the Congress* (1938), and H. C. E. Zacharias' *Renascent India* (1933) are useful compilations. Much suggestive material will be found in K. S. Shelvankar's *The Problem of India*

(1940) and better still, a book which is in its own way a classic on India's economic and political situation before independence, R. Palme Dutt's *India Today* (1940).

G. A. Natesan's famous publications from Madras on the nationalist movement—the reports of speeches made and resolutions adopted at the Congress sessions, the lives of eminent Indians, and the speeches and writings of many of them—are indispensable to any serious study. M. K. Gandhi's *Young India* (1919-22, selection edited by Rajendra Prasad) is a collection of articles which made history in India; it seems to be very rarely available but is pre-eminently the kind of book which one might wish to beg, borrow or steal. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, by M. K. Gandhi (1927), C. F. Andrew's *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas* (1929), *Mahatma Gandhi; His Own Story* (1930), *Mahatma Gandhi At Work* (1931) Natesan's *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, S. Radhakrishnan's (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work* (1939), P. Spratt's *Gandhism*, Nirmal Kumar Bose's *Studies in Gandhism*, J. B. Kripalani's *The Gandhian Way*, and as many as one can read of Gandhi's own works (a collected edition is being brought out by the Government of India) should be consulted. The standard biography of Gandhi is D. G. Tendulkar's *Mahatma* (8 vols. 1951-54), a massive work with copious quotations from Gandhi's speeches and writings and a wealth of illustration; it can be read along with Pyarelal's *Mahatma Gandhi; The Last Phase* (2 vols. 1954, 1958) which vies with it in bulk. One should, on the subject of Gandhi, look up also R. R. Diwakar's *Satyagraha: its Technique and History* (1946), Indulal Yajnik's *Gandhi as I knew him* Part I, 1914-22 (1933), and Part II, 1923-39 (1943), Romain Rolland's *Mahatma Gandhi* (1924) E. M. S. Namboodiripad's *The Mahatma and the Ism* (1958), T. K. N. Unnithan's *Gandhi and Free India* (1956), Hiren Mukerjee's *Gandhiji* (1958, 2nd ed. 1960) and Homer A. Jack's *The Gandhi Reader* (1955).

Among biographies of other important political leaders one may mention *Dadabhai Naoroji*, by R. P. Masani (1939), *Phirozeshah Mehta*, by H. P. Mody, *My Master Gokhale* by Srinivasa Sastri (1943), *Gokhale*, by T. V. Parvate (1959), *Bankim, Dayananda and Tilak*, by Aurobindo Ghose, *Lokmanya Tilak*, by D. V. Tahmankar (1956), C. R. Das, by Prithwis C. Roy (1929), and *Jawaharlal Nehru*, by M. Brecher (1960). Surendranath Banerjee's own life-sketch *A Nation in Making* gives a panoramic view of the first phase of India's political struggle. B. C. Pal's *Memories of My life and Time* (1932) is notable, Abul Kalam Azad's memoir, *India Wins Freedom* (1959) illumines the period on the eve of independence. The *Autobiography* of Jawaharlal Nehru (1936) is at the same time a charming literary work and a suggestive commentary on

significant events and trends. Mention should also be made of Rajendra Prasad's *Autobiography* (1957).

Karl Marx's *Articles on India* (introduction by R. Palme Dutt, 1938) throw a flood of light on problems created by the British subjugation and also the perspectives thereby opened. Lester Hutchinson, one of the accused in the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case, attempted in delicious style though sometimes with frivolity, a Marxist interpretation of Indian history, *The Empire of the Nabobs* (1935); his *Conspiracy at Meerut* is also very much worth reading. Joan Beauchamp's *British Imperialism in India* (1934) is a mine of significant information. Ralph Fox's unfinished study of *Colonial Imperialism* (1933) is highly suggestive. Not on the same level but interesting is Raginald Reynold's *The White Sahibs in India* (1937).

For the history of the so-called *Indian Mutiny*, the standard book is still that by Kaye and Mallsan (6 vols., 1888), but it can only be read along with more recent work. *The Other Side of the Medal* (1927) by Edward Thompson furnishes an important corrective to conclusion generally drawn in British schools. One should read V. D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence* (London, 1909; first Indian reprint, 1947), and for balanced presentation, perhaps the best single book on the subject, S. N. Sen's *Eighteen-Fifty-seven* (1957). The centenary of 1857 brought out a number of books, among them R. C. Majumdar's *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, S. B. Chaudhuri's *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies, 1857-59, and Rebellion: 1857* (ed. P. C. Joshi). S. B. Chaudhuri's *Civil Disturbances during British Rule, 1757-1857* (1955) is a mine of facts that are usually ignored.

No one book describes the *Swadeshi* and Terrorist upheaval in Bengal, Maharashtra and elsewhere (1905 ff) or even the mighty Non-co-operation movement (1919-22). In Indian languages (like Bengali and Marathi) there are some valuable treatises, but it is not possible here to indicate them. Valentine Chirol wrote two much-boosted books, *Indian Unrest* (1908) and *India Old and New* (1921) which give the imperialist version of things. Another imperialist spokesman, Verney Lovett, wrote *A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement* (1921). R. G. Pradhan's *India's Struggle for Swaraj* (1930), M. A. Buch's *Rise and Growth of Indian Nationalism*, 2 vols. (1939-40), and C. Y. Chintamani's *India Since the Mutiny* (1937) are worth mention. For the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-32 an important document, though almost unavailable, is the India League (London) delegation's report on the *Condition of India* (1933). For the events of 1942-44, it is necessary to look up *India Unreconciled* (1943), the British version of *Congress Responsibility for Disturbances* (1943) and *Gandhiji's Correspondence with Government* (1945). For an understanding of the period preceding the transfer

of power (August 15, 1947) one should read Azad *op. cit.* and Alan Campbell-Johnson's *Mission with Mountbatten* (1951). Such disparate books as V. P. Menon's *Integration of the Indian States* (1956) and Guy Wint's *The British in India* (1955) can also be recommended for perusal. Dhirendranath Sen wrote two valuable books, *Revolution by Consent?* and *From Raj to Swaraj* (1954).

Subhas Chandra Bose's *The Indian Struggle* (1934) is an important record of happenings since 1921. Some parts of his autobiography have also been published, but the editions are unsatisfactory. A recent publication is *Cross roads; Works of Subhas Chandra Bose 1938-40* (1962). The "Indian National Army" he created has not yet had its story properly told. H. Toye's study, *The Springing Tiger* (1959) remains the best effort so far towards an understanding of "Netaji" as Bose has been called by his people.

On the problem of communities in India there is a prolific literature but unequal quality. William Hunter's rare tract on *The Indian Mussalmans* (1871) has luckily been reprinted (1945). W. Cantwell Smith's *Modern Islam in India* (1943) and its not so-valuable sequel, *The Muslim League* (1945) are indispensable. K. B. Krishna's *The Problem of Minorities in India* (1939), D. N. Sen's *The Problem of Minorities* (1940), and A. Mehta and A. Patwardhan's *The Communal Triangle in India* (1942) are useful studies. B. R. Ambedkar's *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1945) is, in spite of a certain perversity of approach, an important contribution to a difficult theme. *Divided India* by Rajendra Prasad (1946) is a learned, but somewhat inconsequential study. M. Ashraf's *Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah* require to be read. M. Norman's *Muslim India* (1944), K. T. Shah's *Why Pakistan and Why Not?* (1944), G. Adhikari's *Pakistan and National Unity* (1943), in spite of having dated a great deal, will bear reading.

Indian economic studies which rank as classics belong to an earlier age, among them being M. D. Ranade's *Essays in Indian Economics* (1898), Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901) and Romesh C. Dutt's *India Under Early British Rule* (1902) and *India in the Victorian Age* (1904). Since then, a number of useful studies have been made by K. T. Shah, Radhakamal Mukerji, Gyan Chand, D. R. Gadgil, V. K. R. V. Rao, and a host of others. Vere Austey's text-bookish *Economic Development of India* (1929) has not, however, within its limitations, been yet improved upon.

On India's culture there is naturally a voluminous literature, and only a few titles can be mentioned. These are Rene Grousset's *India* ("Civilizations of the East", Vol. I 1934), Ananda Coomareswamy's *History of India and Indonesian Art*, H. Zimmer's *The Philosophies of India*, A. Yusuf Ali's *Cultural History of India during the British*



*Period* (1940), S. Radhakrishnan's *Hindu View of Life* (1926) and *Eastern Religion and Western Ethics* (1950), Radhakumud Mookerji's *Hindu Civilization* (1936), Tarachand's *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (1943), Rammohan Centenary Volume and *The Golden Book of Tagore*, both edited by Ramananda Chatterjee, Abid Husain's *The National Culture of India* (1961), D. P. Mukerji's *Modern Indian Culture* (1943), *Modern India and the West*, edited by L. S. S. O'Malley (1941), and G. T. Garratt's (ed.) *The Legacy of India* (1938).

There are certain official publications indispensable to a study of Indian conditions before independence. Among them may be noted the *Census Reports*, 1901-41, the *Administration Reports*, and important *ad hoc* reports like those of the *Royal Commission on Agriculture* (1929), the *Simon Commission* (1929), and the *Royal Commission on Labour* (1931). The *Indian Year Book* and the *Statistical Abstract for British India* should also be consulted. The *Indian Annual Register* (ed. Mitra) contains valuable information though the editing leaves much to be desired.

The foregoing list is far from being exhaustive, but it should help closer study.

# INDEX

## A

- Asoka 4  
 Akbar 8  
 American War of Independence 27  
 Arnot, R. Page 31  
 Ambedkar, Dr. 32  
 All India Depressed classes Congress 32  
 Abolition of Sutte 36  
 Ananda Math 41  
 Abdul Wahab 42  
 Ahl-i-Hadis 44  
 Amar Singh 60  
 Ahmad Ullah 56, 65, 66  
 Amir Khan 67  
 Amrita Bazar Patrika 78, 82, 83  
 "Advocate" 83  
 Amvika Charan Mazumdar 83, 112  
 Anandamohan Bose 84, 91  
 Annie Besant 93, 128, 176  
 Age of Consent Bill 100  
 Arya Samaj 101  
 Andrews, C. F. 105, 147, 162  
 Aswini Kumar Dutta 111, 117  
 A. Rasul 111  
 Aravinda Ghose 112, 117, 201  
 Anusilan Samity 118  
 Ajmal Khan, Hakim 123, 155, 156, 162, 163  
 Ansari, Dr. 126, 162, 166, 167, 201  
 Abdul Latif Khan, Moulavi 68  
 Abul Kalam Azad 57, 127, 129, 131, 140, 155, 166, 188, 216, 235, 236, 242, 245, 262, 264, 287, 288  
 "Al Hilal" 127  
 Aga Khan 128, 195  
 Abbas Tyabji 137  
 All Parties Conference (1928) 167  
 All India Trade Union Congress 170  
 Abdul Gaffar Khan 189, 200  
 All India Kisan Sabha 195  
 Azad Hind Govt. 255  
 Atlantic Charter 234  
 Amery 239  
 Attlee 265, 266, 273, 283, 285

## B

- Battle of Plassey 16, 17, 18, 35, 52  
 Bolts, William 17

- Burke 17, 27  
 Bentick, Lord 18, 36, 41  
 Birkenhead 30, 172  
 Brahmo Samaj 37, 47, 101  
 Buchanan, Dr. Francis 37  
 Bhatnagar, O. P. 40  
 Bankim Chandra Chatterjee 41  
 'Bande Mataram' 41  
 Boxer Rebellion 50  
 Bahadur Shah 53, 55, 56  
 Bipin Chandra Pal 64, 111, 112, 129, 133  
 Bhagrit 70  
 Birsait Outbreak 70  
 Bengal Administration Report 74  
 Bengal Tenancy Act 75, 171  
 British India Society 82  
 Bombay Association 82  
 Bengal National League 82  
 "Bengalee" 83  
 "Bombay Samachar" 83  
 Bholanath Chunder 87  
 British Indian Association 88  
 Budruddin Tyabji 104  
 Brahmabandhab Upadhyay 112, 117  
 Bhai Parmanand 119  
 Blackhole Tragedy 150  
 Bardoli Satyagraha 157, 160  
 Bhagat Singh 177, 187  
 Bombay Worker's Strike against war (1939) 213  
 Bengal Famine of 1943—247  
 Bandung 298

## C

- Clive 18, 38  
 Curzon, Lord 24, 94, 108, 109, 111  
 Churchill, Winston 27, 30, 232, 285, 293  
 Cromer, Lord 28, 29  
 Chirol, Valentine 36, 38, 101, 114, 117, 121, 139, 147, 149  
 Cotton, Sir Arthur 38  
 Cornwallis 39, 40  
 Company's Charter 48  
 Canning 49, 54, 57, 60, 61, 72, 73  
 Congress (Sessions, Committees, Views, etc.) 24, 82, 85, 88, 98, 104, 109, 111, 113, 116, 122, 128, 130, 134, 135, 139, 144, 145, 150, 151, 154, 155, 157, 158, 160, 162, 163, 166, 170,

174, 175, 177, 186, 194, 199,  
202, 206, 208, 210, 212, 214,  
216, 221, 228—231, 236, 238  
—241, 244, 262, 263, 270,  
274—277, 284, 285, 287, 297  
Councils Act of 1892—92  
Chintamani, C. Y. 96, 113, 195  
Chapekar Brothers 97  
Chicago Parliament of Religi-  
ons 101  
Chidambaram Pillai 117  
"Comrade" 127  
Champaran Satyagraha 130  
C. R. Das 137, 139, 146, 155,  
158, 160, 161, 166, 169, 170,  
171, 173, 218  
Chelmsford 138  
Chandpur Tea Workers' strike  
148  
Civil Disobedience 155, 178,  
179, 180, 181, 185  
Chouri Choura 157, 162  
Communal Award 188, 201  
Communist Party 192, 214, 232,  
249, 251, 263, 276, 296  
Chinese Revolution 199  
Civil War in Spain 199  
Constituent Assembly 200, 213,  
271  
Cripps Mission 232, 233, 234,  
265, 266  
Chamberlain 225  
Chiang Kai Sek 231  
Coupland 265  
Cabinet Mission 266—270, 272,  
274, 275, 277, 283  
Constitution of India 295

D

Dadabhai Nouraji 26, 79, 82, 91,  
95, 112, 113  
Dudhu Miyan 45  
Dalhousie 49, 53  
Duff, Rev. Alexander 58  
Deccan Riots (1874-75) 75  
Dufferin 81, 82, 87, 89, 93, 96,  
122  
Dwarkanath Ganguly 87, 102  
Dwijendranath Tagore 87  
Dayanand Saraswati 101  
Dhingra 119  
Dyer 120, 137  
Duke of Cannaught 153  
Dange 174  
Dandi March, 180  
'Denial Policy' 229

E

East India Company 17, 19, 38,  
53, 63

Engels 23  
Ellenborough, Lord 47

F

Fa-Hien 4  
French Revolution 19, 27, 28,  
36  
Farazi 44, 45, 64, 74  
Firuz Shah 56, 57  
Forrest 57  
Famine Commission 76, 97  
Fuller 77, 111  
Fundamental Rights Resolu-  
tion of Karachi Congress 187,  
200, 207  
'Forward Bloc' 208, 209

G

Gupta Dynasty 4  
Gurjara-Pratiharas 4  
George, Lloyd 30  
Gokhale 95, 109, 111, 112  
Gandhi 129, 130, 135, 137, 139,  
140, 142—146, 148—150, 152,  
154—156, 158—166, 168—171,  
175, 180, 182, 188, 190—192,  
194, 202, 215, 222, 227, 229,  
234, 240—250, 277, 288, 293  
Ghadr (Party, paper) 131, 132,  
133, 134  
Gurudit Singh, Baba 132  
Girni Kamgar Union 174  
Garwali Soldiers' strike 182,  
258  
Gandhi-Irwin Pact 182, 185,  
186, 187  
Gulab Singh, Maharaja 60  
Ganesh Sankar Vidyarthi 187

H

Harappa 3  
Huns 4, 7  
Harshavardhana 4  
Hiou-ent-Siang 4  
Hastings, Warren 17, 40, 41, 43  
Hampden 21  
Haji Shariat Ullah 44  
Hunter 39, 45, 65, 66, 67, 137  
"Hindu Patriot" 54, 55, 59, 61,  
83  
Harish Chandra Mukherjee 54,  
59, 82  
Hume, Alan Octavian 81, 82,  
85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 93  
"Hindu" 83  
"Herald" 83  
Hindu Mela 102  
Hardinge, Lord 120  
Hasan Imam 123, 135  
"Hamdard" 127

"Home Rule" scheme 128  
 Hasrat Mohani 129, 156, 168, 217  
 Hindu Mahasabha 163, 219

## I

Indian Industrial Commission 11  
 Industrial Revolution 14, 17, 18  
 Indian Mutiny 26, 46, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 64, 69  
 Irwin, Lord 30, 175  
 Imperial Gazetteer 33  
 Indian Historical Records Commission 40  
 Inayat Ali 44  
 Indian National Army 62, 255, 257, 262  
 Indigo Commission 71  
 Ilbert Bill 78, 84  
 Indian Association 82, 84, 88  
 "Indian Mirror" 83  
 "Indu Prakash" 83  
 "Indian National Union" 87  
 Iswar Gupta 100  
 Iqbal 127  
 Iyenger, S. S. 165  
 Indian Signal Corps. Strike 257  
 'Izvestia' 281

## J

Jhansi, Rani of 53, 55, 56, 57  
 Jones, Ernest 62  
 "Jam-e-Jamshed" 83  
 Jawaharlal Nehru 98, 145, 146, 160, 174—178, 186, 194, 197, 198, 206, 207, 209, 211, 216, 222, 229, 237, 259, 261, 263, 273, 287, 290  
 Jalianwallabag Massacre 120, 136, 137  
 Jamal-uddin Afgani 127  
 Jinnah, M. A. 127, 130, 167, 169, 206, 207, 218, 220, 249, 250, 262  
 Jatin Mukherjee 132  
 Jayakar 137, 184  
 Jatin Das 177  
 Justice Party 200  
 July 29, 1946 (General strike) 279

## K

Kaniska 4  
 Kanauj 4  
 Kambhojas 6  
 Kurus 6  
 Kautilya's Arthashastra 6  
 Karl Marx 6, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 22, 23, 24, 60, 73, 158

Kushans 7  
 Kautsky 23  
 Karamat Ali 44  
 Khilafat (movement, Committee) 45, 127, 139, 140, 143, 144, 151, 154, 156, 163, 164, 168, 201, 216, 217  
 Kunwar Singh 55, 57, 60  
 Kol rebels 70  
 "Kesari" 83  
 Krishna Kumar Mitra 117  
 Krishnavarma 119  
 "Komagatamaru" incident 132  
 Kitchlew, Dr. 144, 165  
 Kamal Pasha 164  
 Kishoreganj Riot 171

## L

Lichchavis 6  
 Lenin 17, 28, 30, 123  
 Lewis, George Cornwall 17  
 Lala Lajpat Rai 21, 111, 112, 117, 130, 144, 158, 166, 175, 218  
 Lal Mohan Ghose 24  
 Lawrence 29, 37, 51, 60  
 Lytton, Lord 29, 68, 85  
 Long, Rev. James 71  
 Lokhande, N. M. 80, 87  
 Lansdowne 96  
 Liberal Federation 114, 167  
 Lucknow Pact 128  
 Lahore Conspiracy 133  
 League against Imperialism 174  
 Linlithgow 243

## M

Mahanjodaro 3  
 Mallas 6  
 Magna Carta 21, 26  
 Mill, J. S. 25, 27, 28  
 Macaulay 28, 48  
 Morley, John 28, 29, 110, 123, 124  
 Minto-Morley Reforms 28, 116, 122, 135  
 MacDoland, Ramsay 30  
 Munro, Sir Thomas 34, 36  
 Metcalfe 36, 46, 77  
 Minto, Lord 39, 122, 123  
 Moulvi of Fyzabad 55  
 Mangal Pandey 58  
 Mulka and Sitana Campaign 65  
 Mayo, Lord 67  
 Mahajana Sabha 82  
 "Mahratta" 83, 97  
 Mookerjee's Magazine 87  
 Maichael Madhusudan Dutt 100  
 "Moderates" 116

Mahammad Ali, Moulana 122,  
127, 129 139, 140, 142, 143,  
145, 166, 168, 170, 217  
Muslim League 122, 123, 127  
—129, 134, 163, 165, 167, 169,  
174, 206, 207, 216, 217, 218,  
220, 249, 252, 259, 262, 263,  
270, 274, 285, 287, 291  
Mazharul Huq 123, 129  
Mahammad Hasan, Moulana  
131  
Mahendra Pratap 131  
Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms  
134, 135  
Muhajirins 141  
Mopla Rebellion 146, 149, 150  
Motilal Nehru 146, 158, 162,  
163, 167, 169, 175  
Madanmohan Malaviya 184,  
154, 188  
Muzaffar Ahmad 174  
M. N. Roy 214  
"Mein Kampf" 227  
Molotov 281  
Mountbatten 284, 286, 287, 288  
Munshi, K. M. 185—187, 219

N

Nana Sahib 55  
Neill 62  
"Nil Darpan" 71  
"Nababibhakar" 83  
"Native Opinion" 83  
National League 84  
National Conference 84, 88  
National Mahomedan Associa-  
tion 88  
National Union 90  
Natu brothers 97  
Nabagopal Mitra 102  
Nankana Sahib Massacre 147  
Nehru Committee's Report  
167, 168, 169, 174, 175  
"National Front" 203  
National Planning Committee  
221  
November incidents (1945)  
256  
No-changers 170

O

Ohedullah Sindhi 131  
O'Dwyer 138

P

Palas 4  
Pallavas 5  
Pandyas 5  
Panchals 6  
Pattavi Sitaramya, Dr. 206

Pheroze Shah Mehta 24, 91,  
112, 113, 114  
Permanent Settlement of  
Bengal 37, 41, 58, 74  
Pindaris 40, 46  
Pearychand Mitter 82  
Partition of Bengal 105, 109,  
110, 114, 116  
Peace Conference, Versailles  
130  
Prince of Wales (his visit)  
153  
Patel, V. J. 162, 163, 191  
Patel, Sardar 272, 287, 294,  
295  
Public Safety Bill (1929) 176  
Pakistan Resolution 217  
Puckle Circular 239  
Police Strike (Bihar) 257  
Pethick-Lawrence, Lord 273  
Panch Sheel 298

Q

Queen Victoria (proclamation,  
jubilee, etc.) 26, 29, 61, 63,  
68, 69, 86  
"Quit India" (movement) 238

R

Romain Rolland 1  
Rastrakutas 4  
Russian Revolution 27, 108  
Rammohan Roy 27, 36, 37, 48  
R. P. Dutt 31, 33, 85, 153, 179,  
199, 271  
Rabindra Nath Tagore 31, 91,  
103, 138, 152  
Rohillas 43  
Rao Sahib 57  
Rangalal Banerjee 63  
Ramesh Ch. Dutt 25, 76, 79,  
92, 95  
Ranade, M. G. 79, 82  
Rajendralal Mitra 82  
Ramgopal Ghosh 82  
"Reis and Ravat" 83  
"Rast Gofar" 83  
Rajnarayan Bose 87, 102  
Ramkrishna Mission 101  
Ramkrishna Paramhansa 101  
Rahimtullah Savani 104  
Rakhibandhan 110  
Rashbihari Ghose 112, 116  
Rowlatt Bill 135, 136  
Reading, Lord 149  
Round Table Conference 155,  
184, 185, 188  
Raiagopalachari 162, 170, 203,  
232, 237, 249  
Red Shirts 192, 200

Rajendra Prosad 220  
R. I. N. Strike 258, 259, 260

## S

Sourastras 6  
Sher Shah 8  
Soviet Union 28, 31, 223  
Salisbury, Lord 29  
Sannyasis (Rebellion) 41  
Shuja-Ud-Daula 41  
Sleeman, Colonel 40  
Saiyid Ahmad Shah 42, 43, 44, 66  
Suren Sen, Dr. 56, 57, 58, 61  
Santal Insurrection 59, 70  
Savarka, Vinayak Damodar 62, 119, 219  
Subhas Chandra Bose 62, 145, 167, 173, 174, 175, 187, 191, 205—209, 214, 222, 257, 258  
Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Sir 68, 103, 104, 121  
Sisir Kumar Ghose 82  
Surendra Nath Banerjee 82, 84, 110, 111, 112, 113  
Sarvajanic Sabha 82  
"Somprokash" 83  
Sayed Mahammad, Nawab 128  
Shah Waliullah, Moulana 42  
"Sulabh Samachar" 33  
"Sadharani" 83  
"Swadeshmitram" 83  
Sasipada Banerjee 87  
Sorabji Shapurji Bengalee 87  
Sibnath Shastri 87  
Sankaran Nair, Sir C. 97, 138, 150  
Sedition Committee (Rowlatt Com.) 98, 102, 118, 119, 126, 127, 130, 135  
Swadesi movement (Bengal, 1905) 109  
Swadeshi Mela 112  
"Sandhya" 117  
Shyamsundar Chakrabarti 117  
Subodh Chandra Mullik 117  
Shibli 127  
Saukat Ali 129, 139  
"Silk Letters" case 131  
Shraddhananda, Swami 136, 165  
Sivaswamy Aiyer, Sri P. S. 137  
Subrahmanya Iyer 138  
Simon Commission 20, 31, 32, 166, 167, 174  
Shuaib Qureshi 167  
Swaraj Party 170, 171

Sholapur Rising 181  
Sorojini Naidu 188, 248  
Stalin 111, 226  
Stuart Gelder 249  
Simla Conference 252, 261, 263

## T

Timur 8  
Tipu Sultan 40  
Thugs 40  
Titu Miyan 43, 44, 45  
Tai Ping Rebellion 50  
Tantia Topi 53, 56, 57  
"Tribune" 83  
Theosophical Society 85  
Tilak, Bal Gangadhar 97, 98, 99, 100, 111, 112, 113, 117, 123, 130, 133, 135, 201  
Tosa Maru 133  
Tej Bahadur Sapru 167, 176, 184, 195  
Tanaka Memorial 227  
Tebhaga movement (Bengal) 280

## U

United Nations 253

## V

Vrijjians 6  
Vincent Smith 53  
"Voice of India" 83  
Vivekananda, Swami 101  
"Vandemataram" (newspaper) 117

## W

Wilson, H. H. 15  
Wellesly 40  
Wahabi (ism, movement etc.) 42—45, 64—67, 74, 131  
Wilayat Ali 44  
W. C. Bonnerjee 88  
Workers and Peasants' Party 174  
World War II 210  
Woodhead Commission 247  
Wavell, Lord 249, 251, 261, 264, 265

## Y

"Yugantar" (daily) 117  
"Young India" 202

## Z

Zafar Ali Khan 126  
"Zamindar" 126, 127, 133



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