

"And you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free" BIBLE — John 8:32

**GANDHI**  
**SAINT**  
**OR**  
**SINNER ?**

**Fazlul Huq**

# **GANDHI**

## **Saint or Sinner ?**

**Fazlul Huq**  
Barrister, London

**Rewriting Indian History**  
**Foreword by V.T. Rajshekar**

1992

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# REWRITING INDIAN HISTORY

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## FOREWORD

'If a man with god's name on his tongue and a sword under his armpit deserved the appellation of a Mahatma, then Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a Mahatma'.

This is the verdict of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. And those who read Fazlul Huq's simple, straight-forward, honest book of history cannot but agree with this verdict of Babasaheb, the greatest Indian after the Buddha. Not only that. Nobody with a heart can resist tears on reading the facts of history as presented by Huq. Why tears? Because one with a conscience cannot but conclude that such a great majority (over 85%) of India's 850 million people is being persecuted by the country's tiny ruling class so that it remains as the ruling class. And this ruling class swears by the name of Gandhi and launches all its war and violence against this 85% in the name of Gandhi. That means every injustice and violence inflicted on India's Untouchables (20%), Tribals (10%), Backward Castes (35%) plus its Muslims (15%), Christians (2.5%), Sikhs (2%) and also women has the blessings of Gandhi.

Small-minds may get annoyed not because the facts are wrong but because these facts have exposed the "Father of the nation". A writer – if he is an honest intellectual – has to wield his pen like the surgeon uses his knife. But one swayed by sentiments and hero worship cannot be an honest historian or social scientist. The problem with India's ruling class is it has hardly produced honest, fearless thinkers and scholars comparable to Babasaheb Ambedkar. That is why even a simple truth is dubbed polemical and naked truth termed terrorism. The logic in India is whatever the ruling class says is gospel truth and others wrong. That is how when Michael Edwardes wrote *The Myth of the Mahatma* (Constable, London, 1986) there was demand by K.K. Birla in Parliament to ban the book. (*Hindustan Times*, Dec.2 1986). This is the

meaning of "Hindu tolerance." Young people who read such myths called history become morons. But an honest Intellectual will not hesitate to speak out the truth – even at the cost of his life. Only then he can be called an intellectual.

But withholding truth to shield one's *jati* (class-caste) or racist interests is the bane of Indian intellectuals. The brahminical social order has produced any number of learned people but not a single intellectual, said Dr. Ambedkar. It is India's misfortune that its intellectuals belong mostly to this class. Such dishonest intellectuals distort history and call it patriotism and suppress facts and call it law and order. Huq is sure to be honoured by great minds because he has the courage to speak out the truth.

We the Untouchables of India, engaged in separating myth from history, are compelled to subject Gandhi to the test of history because we love India more, as its original inhabitants, much more than its alien Aryan rulers. Fazlul Huq's book on Gandhi is a rare exception in this intellectual wasteland that is India. As Ambedkarites charged with the task of rescuing India from highway robbers, thugs and pindaris, we have to be essentially idol-breakers, not idol-worshippers. Without pulling down the myth of the mahatma we cannot project the burning thoughts of the Father of India – Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Nobody in India had the courage to challenge Gandhi when he was alive. The only one who did it was Babasaheb who wrote two historic books – *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables* and *Gandhi and Gandhism* – that exposed the "naked fakir" in his true colours. R.C. Mozumdar, a noted historian, said Gandhi "was history's magnificent failure". Dr. Ambedkar improved upon it and said he was a "successful humbug". American historian Perceival Spear said Gandhi "remains an enigma". Koestler sees Gandhi as a Hindu obscurantist. Michael Edwardes says "Gandhi's life was a Hindu life and his message was Hindu also. Hindu morality is centred upon the self and self-realisation. It has little concern for others". Gandhi helped replace British imperialism with a more deadly brahminical imperialism under which India is today groaning.

Dalit Sahitya Akademy has brought out three books on Gandhi

(*Why Godse Killed Gandhi ?* 1986, *Hinduism, Fascism and Gandhism* 1984, *Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar - A clash of Two Values* 1989). We are sure those interested in science, rational thinking, logic and reason will appreciate this book which simply quotes from Gandhi's own journals, books by Gandhi admirers and Hindus own publications.

If Gandhi was north pole, Babasaheb was south pole. Gandhi represented the interests of Hindu rulers of India. He not only lived with the richest Marwadi of the day but defended the capitalists' illgotten wealth. He said he stood for peace and non-violence but converted the country into a first-class anarchy – perhaps the most violent one on earth. He said abolishing untouchability was dearer to him than independence to India but Babasaheb, the Saviour of Untouchables, called him the Enemy No.1 of Untouchables. Like all Hindus, he was a bundle of contradictions – both in thought and action. And this contradiction perfectly suited the "Hindu Mind". Soon myth-makers surrounded him and conferred upon the wily Gujarati Bania the title of mahatma. And what did this mahatma do? "Mahatmas have come and mahatmas have gone. They have raised lot of dust but never the level of the people", said Babasaheb.

The non-Aryan population of India, the victims of his mahatmahood, and even some members of the Aryan ruling class are gradually seeing through this game – the game of fooling through false promises and glorifying the mean and the treacherous. And the "gandhian era" is ending with the end of the 20th century. The 21st century shall be the "Dr. Ambedkar Era".

Gandhi was a Bania (Vaishya), belonging to the third class of the Hindu four-fold *varna* system – sanctified racism – and hence hated by the brahminical class. Bala Gangadhar Tilak, an authority on Hinduism and himself a Chitpavan Brahmin, had never hidden his hatred of Gandhi who unnecessarily distorted brahminism/hinduism and invited the wrath of the "sacred brahmins". An honest but infuriated Nathuram Godse, a Chitpavan Brahmin, could no longer tolerate the nonsense and shot Gandhi dead. And the Hindu party to which Godse belongs even today celebrates the death of Gandhi by distributing sweets and drinking milk. On one side the Brahmins

(Aryans) hated the Banias and on the other the Untouchables (non-Aryans) called him the Enemy No.1. Sandwiched between these opposing forces, Gandhi today remains a mere symbol of India's ruling hypocritical forces having two faces, one for the outside world and another for inside. The mahatma was killed not by the victims of his whims but by a collective conspiracy of the very brahminical forces which he helped turn into an aggressive imperialist power – Hindu nazism – threatening India's very unity and integrity.

But for Gandhi, the socio-economic-political convulsions rocking India then would have culminated in a major upheaval in which brahminism itself would have been destroyed leading to the Indian revolution. The credit for averting this revolution, saving hinduism and giving it a new aggressive thrust goes undoubtedly to Gandhi. That is why the Indian rulers worship him and every police station – the symbol of the ruling class authoritarianism and corruption – has the mahatma's portrait at the very entrance.

Some people say that the moral crisis in the Indian ruling class has reached the boiling point. We beg to differ with this. India's rulers had never believed in morality or ethics. Justice and truth were never part of its vocabulary. Its sole motive is greed and cold-blooded exploitation. How to profit at somebody else's misery? "Treachery and deceit", says Dr. Ambedkar, "are the weapons of the weak. Gandhi always used this weapon". If this is the guiding principle of Gandhi, it is nothing but another name for brahminism, *sanatana dharma*/Arya dharma, or hinduism. Saying one thing and doing the exact opposite of it. Gandhi truly represented this religion. Can the followers of such a religion ever build a just happy society?

A Hindu believes what he wants to believe. This belief system is the bedrock of the Hindu value system which has played havoc with the Hindu society and has inflicted tremendous harm not only on its own 15% Hindu population making it a house divided, but spread the contagion to its 85% non-Hindus as well. So much so, the country itself has to pay a very heavy price for this belief system. It is this belief system that makes a Hindu (a definition of which has defied even best brains) to hold Gandhi in great reverence. To lionise him suits



the Hindu racial interests. They lionise him because of a pure personal motive. The Hindu does not bother that this queer belief system will harm the society and the country. He is least bothered about the society or the country as long as the belief system brings him unearned profits.

Huq has profusely quoted from historical documents and Hindu sources itself. So, those with an objective, analytical mind cannot question his critique of Gandhi. But the problem with the "Hindu mind" is that it does not "believe" in scientific proofs or rational arguments. Any amount of documentation will not be accepted by the "Hindu mind". That is why this "Hindu mind" does not realise the need for either justice, liberty, equality, fraternity or democracy, socialism, secularism. All these are foreign to the "Hindu mind". All these great principles of modern thought are found in the Constitution of India framed by Dr. Ambedkar. But the "Hindu mind" finds it difficult to accept these liberating thoughts. Gandhi rightly symbolises this "Hindu mind". The country is caught in this conflict between the revolutionary thoughts of Babasaheb and the antediluvian axioms of Gandhi.

The book deals with this unending conflict. And even after four decades of Gandhi's death, this conflict continues. Today, Gandhi is almost forgotten and young, westernised Hindus laugh at the very mention of his name. But the very people who have bid goodbye to Gandhi and gandhism will pounce upon you like mad dogs the moment the mahatma is criticised. Why this double-standards? Here lies the wonder that is the "Hindu mind". The mahatma may be mauled, mocked and murdered by them. But others have no right to do this. Why? Because Gandhi represents all that brahminism stands for. Gandhi may be dead and forgotten, but the sole credit for cementing those eternal values, also called *sanatana dharma*, goes only to him. They killed Gandhi the man but hang on to his values. This is the wonder of the "Hindu mind".

The problem with the brahminical social order is that it is under a delusion that if the legitimate demands of the sections outside this order are met that would effect its position, privilege and property. If the rulers have to remain happy, the others should remain miserable, deprived. This is the cause

for all the tension and chaos converting India into the world's most violent country.

This ruling class swears by justice, tolerance and calls it dharma. Those outside this order have never harmed those inside this order. Muslims who ruled India for over 1,000 years lived in perfect harmony with it. So too the Christians and Sikhs. The Untouchables, Tribals and Backward Castes – the three indigenous peoples of India – always served this order. There is no record of any indigenous peoples having come into any clash with it – although they always distrusted the alien Aryans. This is history.

In spite of it, every section is kept deprived and dehumanised. Its human rights denied. And when this deprived and dehumanised majority (over 85%) demand their human rights they are subjected to war and violence in the name of dharma by those claiming to be gandhians

We have no hope of this ruling class learning anything new. To learn the new one has to forget the old and the outdated. So, instead of heart-searching, some small minds may become furious. But this book is aimed more at the non-Hindu majority who are India's only hope along with the few enlightened souls among the Hindus. So too the foreign scholars. Hence Huq's is the first bold and sincere attempt at correcting history and rewriting the distorted Indian history which is the urgent need of the hour.

Bangalore, (India)

Oct. 1 1991

**V.T. RAJSHEKAR**

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# THE ADVENT OF GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

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1

The Indian traders in Africa towards the end of the 19th century were well aware of the hostility they engendered in their European counterparts. Under the terms of Ordinance 1 of 1885, all Indian traders in the Orange Free State were required to register with the magistrate of the district in which they did their business. In September 1890, legislation was introduced which provided for the elimination of Indian traders in the Orange Free State. All the shops were required to close down within a year without any compensation. Three of them had assets worth £9,000.

In the Transvaal, the Indian traders' interests came under direct attack when Law 3 of 1885 was introduced to curb Asian trade competition. Law 3 prohibited Asians from acquiring landed property or citizenship rights. It also made it possible to designate streets, wards or locations, where they must reside.

As early as 1885 the traders had petitioned the British authorities concerning a variety of grievances with reference to both Natal and the Transvaal. In December, a select committee of the Natal Legislature produced a draft constitution for the introduction of Responsible Government within the colony. The draft did not contain adequate safeguards for the interests of the Indians in Natal, which was the base from which Indian traders operated in Southern Africa. These traders could foresee that a pattern was developing in Southern Africa which would ultimately deprive them of their trading rights in those areas. These events spurred them into action.

**Indian politics begins:** Up to 1890 they had met every situation with legal counsel and occasional petitions to Colonial or Imperial officials, and made no attempt to form a political organisation. But in 1891 they began a wider and better organised campaign in an attempt not only to salvage what had been lost, but to prevent further deterioration of the situation. This was the starting point of Indian politics in South Africa, and it set the pattern for the next decade. The traders had formed the Durban Indian Committee, headed by Haji Dada as Chairman and Dada Abdullah as Secretary, and in January 1891 the Committee launched the first South African political campaign to protect their commercial interests in Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The campaign started with a list of grievances, which was sent to the Honourable Fazulbhoj

Visram, a trader-cum-politician of Bombay. Visram and other Bombay traders who had trading links with Mauritius, Natal, Zanzibar, Delagoa Bay and other places in Africa, jointly sent a memorandum to the Governor of Bombay which attracted a lot of attention.

The traders then started using more sophisticated political techniques. In October 1891, they petitioned by cable for the first time. Telegrams were sent from Durban and Pretoria to the Colonial Office, and from Pretoria to Queen Victoria, Dadabhai Naoroji, and Gladstone who was then Prime Minister. This was the first time Naoroji had been drawn into the affair, and his participation in it continued for a long time.

By the end of 1892 the traders had distributed the first pamphlet on Indian grievances in Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. At the same time they appealed again to the Colonial Office. In June 1893 a second pamphlet was sent to the Colonial Office. In fact, an earlier attempt to deprive them of the franchise had been prevented only by immediate action on the part of the Indian Committee. The Committee claimed that Natal was unfit for Responsible Government, and if this was granted, it would do the Indians incalculable harm as they feared that any Constitutional advance in Natal would soon be followed by the same kind of discriminatory legislation as was already threatening their interests in the Transvaal, and which had led to their expulsion from the Orange Free State.

Natal was granted Responsible Government in 1893. Since the 1880s, the white settlers had been pressing for a ban against competition in trade from non-whites. With the introduction of Responsible Government, the attainment of that objective became a distinct possibility. The power of the British government to review and disallow Acts passed by the Legislature still remained, but the British rulers conveniently developed a fiction that constitutional propriety forbade the exercise of this right in purely internal affairs, and used the fiction to deprive the non-white races in the British Colonies, by subterfuge, of all rights. Those Colonies formed part of the British Empire and were protected by its armed forces. But the Imperial rulers were able to hide behind this fiction to get all their dirty work done by the local settlers, and to pretend not to be responsible for them.

On April 25 1894, the introduction of the Franchise Amendment Bill, designed to deprive Indians of Parliamentary franchise, was announced during the opening of the Second Session of Natal's first legislature under Responsible Government. During the first

Parliamentary sessions under the new constitution, there was enough antagonism manifested in the Legislative Assembly debates to make it clear that the Franchise Amendment Bill was indeed the beginning of a major assault on Indian commercial interests.

Another bill was introduced to give increased powers to municipal corporations to regulate sanitary conditions. It could not escape the notice of those who read the reports of debates in the local press, that the Transvaal Government was currently using an alleged danger to public hygiene in its attempts to remove Indian traders to designated locations. In fact, the Premier of Natal had already declared that the increased municipal power was intended as a means to refuse trade licences to Indian traders on alleged sanitary grounds.

The Indian traders followed the reports of the Assembly debates in the press, and were alive to the danger of what Responsible Government could do to them. They were aware of the scale of activity required to defend their interests. They had gained sufficient experience from earlier campaigns and knew that a more arduous task lay ahead.

**Traders hire Gandhi:** These were the circumstances under which Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was inducted into politics. Many writers describing the entrance of Gandhi into South African politics portrayed a romantic picture, far removed from reality: the Indians were illiterate, helpless, demoralised, divided on the basis of religion. Then the Saviour in the shape and form of Gandhi appeared in their midst and made them understand the significance of the Franchise Amendment Bill. As discussed above, the traders were already aware of the significance of the Bill. But as the traders cannot engage in full-time politics: they found Gandhi, with his legal training and fluency in Gujarati and English and also a trading background, ideally suited to their needs. So they hired him to handle the time-consuming administrative and legal work of a second campaign. The essential continuity with pre-Gandhi politics was preserved.

Another romantic description is that, being aroused by the sufferings of his fellow countrymen in South Africa, he plunged into the work from a mere spirit of self-sacrifice, totally unmindful of his personal interests or comfort. In this connection, it is mentioned only that Gandhi refused to accept any salary for his work. In his autobiography, Gandhi wrote:

I had made up my mind not to stay at public expense. I felt it necessary to set up an independent household. I thought that the house should be good and situated in a good locality. I also had the idea that I could not add to

the credit of the community unless I lived in a style usual for barristers. And it seemed to me to be impossible to run such a household with anything less than £300 a year. I therefore decided that I could stay only if the members of the Community guaranteed legal work to the extent of that minimum, and I communicated my decision to them.

(*An Autobiography: Gandhi, p.104, 2nd Ed. 1940. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.*)

Gandhi did not accept any salary for his work for the campaign because, as he explained:

..... then I should have to appeal to you frequently for funds for the work, and if I were to draw my maintenance from you, I should find myself at a disadvantage in making an appeal for large amounts, and we should ultimately find ourselves at a standstill. Besides I want the community to find more than £300 annually for public work...

The upshot of this discussion was that about twenty merchants gave retainers for one year for their legal work. Besides this, Dada Abdullah purchased for me the necessary furniture in lieu of a purse he had intended to give me on my departure.

(*Ibid p. 104 p.45 Navajivan Publishing House 1961.*)

Gandhi also mentioned this incident in his book, *Satyagraha in South Africa*. He came to South Africa for a payment of £105 for a year to help a merchant in his litigation. To obtain a secure income of £300 the following year was a lucky event which anybody would wholeheartedly welcome in those circumstances. Also as a barrister, in India he had been a dismal failure. It must certainly have been uppermost in his mind that experience of legal practice in South Africa would be of great advantage to him on his return home. Not that there was anything wrong with this deal – the merchants needed his services, and Gandhi needed a start.

### **Fundamental Trends of Gandhi's Politics**

From beginning to end, M.K. Gandhi was loyal to Imperialism. The western news media and their Indian allies, by a massive propaganda exercise, created the illusion of sainthood around Gandhi and made people believe that he fought Apartheid, and in the process of doing so, developed a new method of non-violent struggle called *satyagraha*, which was an effective alternative to armed struggle, and through this unique method achieved India's independence. Nothing is farther from the truth. *Gandhi, for the major part of his life, worshipped British Imperialism and too often proudly proclaimed himself a lover of the Empire. He was Kipling's Gunga Din in flesh and blood.*

To understand Gandhi's politics in South Africa, it is essential to note the three fundamental trends which all along persisted underneath all his activities. They were: (a) his loyalty to the British

Empire; (b) his apathy with regard to the Indian "lower castes", meaning the country's indigenous population, and (c) his virulent anti-African racism.

**Loyalty to the Empire :** Gandhi never missed a chance to send a birthday message to Queen Victoria and her successors in typical Gunga Din style.

Differing authors described the uprising of 1857 in India in different ways. To the Indians, it was a war of independence and they cherished the memory of those who had fought and failed against the superior might of the foreigners. They were martyrs. The British and their collaborators glorified the heroism of those who fought and foiled the uprising. In the editorial of *Indian Opinion* (July 9 1903) Gandhi, denouncing the uprising, wrote:

As the world knows, the year 1857 was a great anxiety and trouble throughout the British dominions owing to the great Sepoy Revolt in India. At the time the clouds looked so black that even the final result had become a matter of uncertainty. An appeal was made to the worst superstitions of the people of India. Religion was greatly brought into play and all that could possibly be done by the evil-minded was done to unsettle people's minds, and to make them hostile to British rule.

Gandhi in his *Indian Opinion* expressed his strong disapproval of the anti-imperialist trend and clamour for "Egypt for Egyptians", "China for Chinese" and so on and so forth. Then he wrote (*Indian Opinion* 1.6.1907. Also in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, hereinafter referred to as CW, CW.VII. p.6. Published by Director, Publication Division 1961, Delhi 6*):

And now India. There too we hear the thunderous cry of 'India for the Indians'. Towards this end, efforts are in progress everywhere to bring together Hindus and Muslims. In the Punjab a Muslim has started a paper named *Hindu-Muslim* and he urges the two communities to become united. From the other side, agitation is being carried on by papers like *Bande Mataram* for ending British rule. The proceedings against *The Punjabee* led to riotous demonstrations, in which prominent Indians took part. Some of them were arrested and some will be deported from the country, and some will be imprisoned. Highly educated gentlemen like Lala Lajpat Rai were among those involved. The question should naturally arise as to what we should do at such a time. Though we can do nothing, thoughtful men should consider what attitude they should adopt.

Should the British be thrown out of India? Can it be done, even if we wish to do so? To these two questions we can reply that we stand to lose by ending British rule and that, even if we wanted to, India is not in a position to end it... They are a powerful nation, and India enjoys not a little protection under them. It is not, therefore, desirable that British rule in India should disappear.

Then Gandhi admitted that due to British rule India was becoming poorer. He even went so far as to admit that it was an "important cause of even the plague in India"; and "adds to the ill-will between Hindus and Muslims". Then he went on:

We ought not to raise ill feeling against them. Rather we ought to admire their heroism. The fault, in fact, lies with us. If we remove the fault, British rule, which is a cause of misery today, can become a source of happiness. Public spirit is not likely to grow among us without Western education and contacts with the West. If that spirit grows, the British may grant our demands even without a fight, and may leave India if we want them to do so.

**Tilak criticised:** Tilak wrote two articles in his journal, *Kesari*, praising the enthusiasm of the Bengal revolutionaries, without, however, endorsing their violent methods. Self-rule, he said, was the only lasting solution to the problem. He also warned the government against suppressing public opinion through the Newspapers Act. On June 24 1908, he was arrested on a charge of sedition on two different warrants, one for each of his two articles. Tilak was found guilty by the jury on a vote of seven (English) to two (Indians) and sentenced to six years' imprisonment and deported to Mandalay in Burma. Gandhi's comment in *Indian Opinion* was as usual (*Continuation of previous. 1.8.1908 – also CW. VIII pp. 418-19*):

What we need to consider is whether Indians should accept the views of Mr. Tilak and his party. We submit after great deliberation, that Mr. Tilak's views should be rejected. India's welfare does not consist in merely uprooting British rule.

Concerning the repressive press laws and their indiscriminate use to suppress the native press and the consequent resentment in India, the following was Gandhi's response published in *Indian Opinion* (9.1.1909):

But we have no right to complain. We consider this activity on the part of the Government of India a passing phase. They are in a state of panic and, wishing to do something, they intend to stop the circulation of literature that shows the slightest independence of spirit. This over-zeal is bound to kill itself. The really dangerous publications will seek all kinds of dubious and devious methods of circulation and we fear that they will, on that account, be read by the very class whom the Government intend that they do not reach.... We sympathize with the Government of India in their desire to stop the spread of methods of violence. We would do and give much to stop it. But the only way we know to eradicate the desire is to popularize passive resistance of the right stamp.

Most of the Indians living in South Africa did not share Gandhi's sense of loyalty to the British crown. So on the occasion of the Coronation in 1911 the Gunga Din presented his queer logic in the editorial column of the *Indian Opinion* (24.6.11 and also in *CW.XX p.112*) in both the English and Gujarati sections:

We, however, found some Indians asking questions: Why, and to whom shall we show our loyalty? With what face can we take part in the celebration? We are submerged in a sea of troubles. Conditions in our country give us no cause for rejoicing. That the King is to go to India for his coronation gives us no reason to be happy. That will result in the draining of money. India will be ruined further....



Our view of the matter is that, if those who argue in this manner feel that they cannot be loyal, they should declare their want of loyalty and outlaw themselves. Otherwise they will lay themselves open to the charge of insincerity and cowardice. Our sufferings here are to be blamed on the local authorities and more so on ourselves.

To Gandhi, "Indian loyalty is loyalty that requires no quid pro quo".

To express loyalty to a King, in whose name all the satanic acts were being carried out amounted to an expression of loyalty to Satan himself, however innocent the person of the King might have been. What avenue was open to those who, being caught in the poverty trap, sold themselves to slavery or those who were forcibly taken to the colonies and used as slaves and many of whom committed suicide? *Gandhi knew very well, as a matter of fact he confessed, that the British rule brought poverty, famine, epidemics, degradation and Hindu-Muslim riots. But still he wanted British rule to continue.* The British Raj was tyrannical, he admitted, but it was the Indians who were at fault. If all the Indians could become sadhus then the British would also become sadhus. Perhaps he imagined that all members of the parliament led by Churchill would start dancing, singing and chanting *Hare Krishna, Hare Rama* in the streets of London, and until such a perfect state was attained, Indian would go on suffering, particularly the poorer sections, as the heavy death-toll from famines was their fate. Commenting on the logic of Gandhi once, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, "It is the logic of a madman or caveman".

### **Apathy to Indian Lower Classes**

Europe always wanted the produce of the tropics which could not be grown in northern latitudes. With European Imperialist expansion, it became possible for European countries to take over, not only the lucrative trade but also the cultivation of those products in their newly acquired tropical colonies. A new method of agriculture emerged called 'plantation'. It was a method of production on a large scale, with division of labour and financial arrangements which were typical of industry rather than agriculture. It was a factory method applied to agriculture. The populations of these colonies were sparse. The planters relied wholly upon the importation of slave labour. With the abolition of slavery in 1834, the planters faced a serious shortage of cheap labour. So they turned to impoverished India and it became India's role, within the British Empire, to supply the cheap labour: slave in all but name. It was Lord Russell who in 1850 called it 'a new system of slavery'. (Mentioned next to cover page in *"A New System of Slavery" by Hugh Tinker. Oxford University Press 1974*). But always the wishes of the finance

houses prevail.

Indentured labour on the plantations were introduced within the overall framework of slavery. Labourers were strictly confined to the limits of their employers' estates, unless given permission to move. Even when the period of indenture was completed, in most of the sugar colonies ex-indentured Indians were required to carry passes. Absence from the estate without a pass was an offence punishable by a fine or imprisonment, while prolonged absence was treated like desertion by serving soldiers. Even within the estate, failure to appear at the correct time for work, refusal to carry out an order or instruction, insolence etc. on the part of the labourer, were punishable offences. Beating and flogging were regular day-to-day occurrences on plantations and continued right into the 20th century. In the West Indies the cattle whip was employed, in Malaya it was the cane; and in Natal the Sjambok, the rawhide cattle lash. Every man was a magistrate on his own estate. He had the right to do whatever he wished, short of killing, so long as the coolie worked for him. Indeed, the Mauritius Royal Commission recorded that between 1867 and 1972, 50 Indians had died of rupture of the spleen as a result of severe beating, without any reference as to whether any action was taken by anybody for the cruel murder of those helpless Indians. While workers in industrialised societies faced the penalty of losing their wages if they withheld their labour, indentured Indians forfeited their pay and also found themselves condemned and prosecuted as criminals.

The working day was also determined by the custom of the slave times. According to McMohan, a Ceylonese planter:

In Natal they still work from daybreak to nightfall, and from four in the morning to seven in the night, and far beyond their capacity.... The slavery there under the British flag is indeed worse than the slavery there under the Sultan of Zanzibar. (*Cited: "A New System of Slavery" p.190*)

The indentured labourers were in various ways defrauded in the matter of wages, which were generally far lower than in the labour market of those colonies.

**Plight of coolies:**The labourers were kept two to three months, sometimes for a year and in one case for three years, without wages, which in the end were arbitrarily cut down and sometimes not paid at all.

Another device to defraud the indentured labourers was the system of stoppages operated according to the rules laid down by planters and owners. The main excuse for cuts was an unfinished task: an indentured Indian would receive only one day's pay for two days' work because the first day, with the task unfinished, was booked

as a blank; in one case the wages of a gang of men were stopped over a period of three months "to pay for a fork" (*British Guinea Commission 1871 p.111 cited "A New System of Slavery" p.187*). In addition, the most imaginative device invented by the planters to defraud the indentured Indians was the system of double cuts. If an indentured Indian missed one day's work, due to illness or any other reason, he not only lost that day's wages but was also fined two days' wages. So if he could not work for a month, he had to work for two months without wages to pay off the fine, and the net result was that the poor fellow had to live for three months without wages. The effect of double-cuts was to reduce the wages bill by one-third to one-half of the proper level. In addition to double cuts, there was the widespread practice of adding one day to the total period of indenture for every day's absence from work. The Natal Law of 1891 included a provision whereby an indentured Indian, who was absent for more than 25 days in one year, had double-time added to his indenture. Edward Bateson, an ex-magistrate, said:

The position of indentured coolies when charged in the courts is hopeless — justice they get only by accident — they are deterred from giving evidence themselves and ... unable to procure evidence... The coolie is absolutely defenceless..... I was a machine for sending men to prison for the convenience of the employers.

(An article by Monilal Doctor published in "Indian Review" and reproduced in "Indian Opinion" on 1.3.1912).

Again the same honest Englishman said:

Their plight is equally unhappy when they bring a charge for assault; witnesses from the estates will not come forward, from fear; indeed it is practically impossible to substantiate a charge against an employer — the hand of every man is against the complainant and the police are quite as corrupt as in India.

What stand can a poor, nervous, illiterate, ill-bred, ill-dad, ill-treated and timid Indian make before the courts of a European colony, where the magistrates and lawyers are as a rule cousins, nephews, brothers or sons of planters and, therefore, incapable, being only human beings, of doing or obtaining justice to or for a homeless and defenceless stranger, who neither understands the language, nor the procedure of the courts before which he may stand charged or prefer a complaint?

**What was Gandhi's response?**

Gandhi never took the trouble to involve himself in enquiring into their condition or organising and acting to make their lives a little bit tolerable. Sometimes he reproduced reports published in the colonial press owned by the planters and mine owners. On Nov. 24 1904, the *Natal Witness* reported that some Indians without passes (which was a criminal offence) were wandering. They deserted because of ill treatment. In its issue of Dec. 17 1904, Gandhi wrote in the *Indian Opinion*:

We print elsewhere a report from the witness' representative on the condition of the indentured labourers in the coal mines in Natal. If the allegations are true, they reveal a shocking state of things. Our contemporary demands an enquiry. We join in the request... The general condition of the indentured labourer in the colony is satisfactory, and it can only enhance its reputation if causes even of suspicion are removed.

**Budding Mahatma:** After living in Natal for almost a decade and seeing from very close quarters how badly they suffered, our budding Mahatma did not hesitate to proclaim that the general condition of the indentured labourers in the colony was "satisfactory".

Under the headline "*Natal's Helot*", the following article appeared in the *Morning Leader* in December 1908 (*Reproduced in "Indian Opinion" on 16.1.1909.*

A considerable number of the Queen's subjects are to be found in the Transvaal and among the many misdeeds of the South African Republic, I do not know that any one can fill me with more indignation than its treatment of these Indians.

*(Lord Lansdowne, at Sheffield, November 1899)*

While these words were being spoken, some 3,000 per annum of our fellow subjects in India, deluded, many of them, by the specious promises of hired agents, were being hurried in hundreds, packed in transport, to five year's hard labour in the fields and mines of the British colony of Natal. The system of indentured Indian labour has now existed in this colony for nearly half a century. By an Act passed by a British (not a Boer) Government, the labourers are here 'allocated' in groups, just like cattle at an auction, to any employer who likes to apply for them. There is a sinister ring of familiarity in some of the terms of their service, as defined with legal precision under this Act of 1891, which consolidates the law on the subject. Any person harbouring or receiving into his service an 'assigned' Indian immigrant is to be liable to a fine of £10. Any shipmaster who takes one on board his vessel is to pay £20. When all or a number of Indians absent themselves from work to make a complaint, such Indian or any number of them shall be liable to be brought before the court, and on conviction to be punished by a fine not exceeding £2 sterling, or by imprisonment for any period not exceeding two months, with or without hard labour, whether such complaint shall or shall not be adjudged to be groundless or frivolous, and notwithstanding that such complaint may be successful.

The *Natal Advertiser* in 1908, commenting on this position, wrote:

This means that, even if a number of Indians carry a gross complaint against ill-treatment to the Protector, and succeed in getting compensation and redress, they are liable to two months' hard labour for having dared to seek justice without first obtaining permission. This, we take it, is the most scandalous provision extant in any British statute book anywhere. What if these unfortunate wretches have to ask permission to go to the Protector from the very man they propose to complain against? Is he at all likely to grant it? And if not, are they to endure in patience? This section alone is enough to damn the whole Act.

*(Reproduced in "Indian Opinion" on 28.1.1911).*

Ritchie, the secretary of the African British Indian Committee,

interviewed on the working of the system, said:

Does anyone in England know, that these Indians are bought and sold as part of the estate to which they are allocated? That they pass, as farm fixtures, from purchaser to purchaser?

(*"Indian Opinion"* 16.1.1901).

If Indians in Natal, after ten years of indenture and after escaping the net of the employers, became free, their lives did not become rosy. Ritchie said:

The special annual taxation which a free Indian has to pay in Natal is as follows:

An annual tax of £3 for himself; a tax of £3 for his wife; a poll tax of £1.

How is an Indian, out of the savings of a princely income of 14 shillings a month, to meet that taxation? (Ibid)

Ritchie went on:

Of the spirit which this vile system engenders, there is perhaps no more striking evidence than that afforded by one sentence in the Protector's report. This is no inhuman document: it is marked by a good deal of official humanity. But the Protector is expressing his sympathy with employers whose Indians will not work, so that they have to be 'severely handled and taken before the magistrate'. 'It is this class of Indians', he writes, 'who readily contract disease, and when attacked show little or no inclination to recover, and who consequently are a continual source of trouble and expense to the employer'. Strange that they should be so inconsiderate; yet their malice extends even further. They not only take disease and die, but many of them cause their employers further trouble and expense by committing suicide. The suicide rate among these Indians is six times what it is in England, and twelve times as high as that among the free Indian population in India itself.

**Pathetic case of a woman:** A very pathetic case was reported in the *African Chronicle* of Sept. 9, 1911 (Published from Durban, Natal, edited by P.Ś. Aiyar). A woman, Jannumia, had been indentured to a European on the South coastline about 3 1/2 years previously and her husband was doing manual labour for the master. Her mistress, under some pretence or other, used to ill-treat her, and especially when she was pregnant the mistress used to double the severity of treatment to her. It so happened that one of the Africans employed in the household stole some lemons, and her mistress so brutally assaulted her that she had a miscarriage and the child died. When she was about to give birth to a second child, she was ordered to work as if nothing had happened. She gave birth to the child on Sunday and the mistress ordered her to turn up to work on the following Monday and forbade her to touch the child when at work. Owing to the severity of these commands, the child was dying of starvation and consequently this woman and her husband resolved to desert. While they were on their way to lodge a complaint with

the Protector, the child died at a place called Isipingo. After burying the child in some unknown locality, the couple reached the Protector's office and lodged a complaint, but this gentleman sent them back to their master, apparently thinking that it was a frivolous charge, even without bothering to ascertain the facts.

When she was expecting her third child, and approaching confinement, she was being systematically assaulted, kicked and knocked about. Not being able to suffer such punishment, she reported the matter to the Protector, but he again sent her back to her employer. When she went back in the custody of the police, she was again subjected to the same kicks and blows in the very presence of the guardians of the law. Subsequently both husband and wife deserted and appeared again before the Protector who first ordered them to remain at the depot while he investigated the matter, but changed his mind for some unknown reason and ordered them to go back to their employer.

After their return, this pregnant woman was not given rations for a week. So she chose this time to lead the life of a nun in the jungle, rather than take the risk of losing her third child. Not far from the place where she had suffered incessant persecution, there was an area of thick uncleared bush or forest. She made for herself a little hut out of the branches of wood and grass, and lived on roots and wild fruit amidst the howls and terrifying noises made by wild animals in that forest. She lived there alone for about a month, and then gave birth to the child. One day it so happened that an African gentleman was passing that forest and heard the cry of a baby. He paused, and managed to find his way to the solitary little nest of this woman, whom he persuaded to go to his hut. He provided her with everything necessary to restore the mother and baby to health.

Another equally pathetic case appeared in the *Natal Advertiser* (reproduced in *"Indian Opinion"* on 1.6.1912) in May 1912:

In an accident the woman's baby was severely burnt. The woman's duties in her master's house kept her away from her child from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. with the exception of two short intervals for breakfast and dinner, and the employer deliberately prevented her from attending its wounds. After terrible suffering for a fortnight, the child died. Not only physical abuse like kicking and beating, and also periodical withholding of food, but her wages were also withheld. The total wages received in the course of a year were nine shillings.

She came to Durban to make complaints to the Protector, and since she refused to go back to her employer she was charged and sentenced. She served continuous sentences amounting to six months for steadfast refusal to return to her employer. An argument arose as to whether continued successive punishments could be awarded for the same offence, and it was pointed out by the magistrate that a section governing such a case

provided that each successive refusal to comply with an order of the Court was separately punishable. His Worship said that it seemed an unfortunate thing that a woman could thus be punished time after time for a matter wherein she had a particular aversion to some special place of employment. She was willing to work elsewhere if she could get a transfer.

Before going to prison, this woman came to M.K. Gandhi and related her sad story, but he does not seem to have done much except to send her to the Protector.

**Gandhi defends slavery:** However, when her employer gave up all hope of getting her to return, he gave his consent to her being shipped to India, from which she had been abducted and brought to Natal in the first place.

Gandhi's Phoenix Settlement was within the heartland of the sugar plantations where a large number of indentured Indians were employed. He knew very well what kind of hell those poor creatures lived in. Since the inception of this new system of slavery, many organisations, individuals and commissions of enquiry had exposed the barbarity of the system. The Anti-Slavery Society and the Aboriginal Protection Society in England from time to time made efforts to arouse public opinion against the vile system. Many scandals broke out in India and many scandalous reports of their treatment in the Colonies were published in the Indian press. So no educated Indian could or should plead total ignorance. *Many propagandists portrayed Gandhi as the champion of the indentured Indians. What we see when we examine all the facts, is that he knew that the treatment of these unfortunate people at the hands of their employers was so inhuman that it drove many to suicide, but the sufferings of the poor did not stir the heart of this Gunga Din, as did any danger signal to the British Empire.* All along, in his *Indian Opinion*, he focussed attention on the injustice to the merchants, who kept him in comfort and style. Sometimes, casually, he mentioned the indentured labourers, and there were also tit-bits from court cases and most of the time reports reproduced from the newspapers of the white colonists. *Never did he find time, energy or inclination to launch a campaign for the abolition of flogging, deduction of wages, stoppages, or the stupid law which required permission from the employers to lodge complaints against them.* It was a maze of inhuman laws. On the contrary, to please the big finance houses in England, he certified that indentured labourers were treated well. That was despicable. In a letter to the *Times of India* (17.10.1986 and CW 11 p.87) he wrote:

At the most, it can prove that the lot of the indentured cannot be very unhappy and that Natal is a very good place for such Indians to earn their livelihood. I am prepared to admit both. Moreover, it should be remembered

that the return passage story was nothing to do with the trading class, who go to Natal on their own account, and who feel the hardships the most.

Of course the merchants were experiencing hardship. But to say that not the indentured labourers but the merchants were suffering hardship, was extremely wicked.

In an interview on board the *Courland* (13.1.1897 CW II p.160), he said:

*I have said most emphatically, in the pamphlets and elsewhere, that the treatment of the indentured Indians is no worse or better in Natal than they receive in any other parts of the world.*

In the editorial column of the *Indian Opinion* of Nov 15 1905, Gandhi first discussed how much indentured labourers were in demand in the colony, and then wrote:

Whilst we are not prepared to subscribe to any general charge of ill-treatment, we have no hesitation in saying that, in the majority of cases, Indian labour is used regardless of any fellow feeling for indentured Indians.

Then he came to the point he wanted to make, and added:

We feel therefore that now is the time for pressing the truth home to the Colonists. If they must continue to draw upon India for the cheap source of prosperity of the Colony, they must also be prepared to share the inconvenience, if it be an inconvenience, of having to give fair treatment to the free Indian population; and if this were done, it would be purely a matter of a reasonable bargain.

The most hated among the Apartheid laws was perhaps the Pass Law. Here also the attitude of Gandhi was very clear as to the indentured Indians, not to speak of the Africans. (CW III p. 267).

We recognise that so long as there is an indentured population in the Colony, some pass law is necessary, and the remedy probably lies in the judicious administration thereof. Respectable people, men and women, were only lately arrested under the suspicion that they were indentured Indians, one man was out in search of a doctor for his wife who was in labour.

He was arrested, and bail was refused

Gandhi suggested the idea of locations for the poorer classes. Of course he dressed it up with the provision that it should be voluntary and not compulsory. But once such an evil idea is accepted in principle, then whether it is compulsory or voluntary becomes purely academic.

**Voting rights opposed:** Gandhi from the very beginning made it clear that he did not want franchise rights for the Indians. He knew that the demand for franchise rights would bring him in direct conflict with the long-term strategy of his imperial masters to create a white-dominated South Africa based upon the Nazi doctrine of race superiority. He said (CWI p.274):



Having said so much, I venture to say on behalf of my fellow brothers, that they would not think of objecting to any measures, with regard to the franchise, which may be devised in order to keep the Voters' Role clean of objectionable men or to provide against preponderance of the Indian vote in future. I am confident that the Indians have no wish to see ignorant Indians, who cannot possibly be expected to understand the value of a vote, being placed on the voters' list. They submit that all are not such, and that such are to be found more or less in all communities. The object of a very right-minded Indian is to fall in with the wishes of the European colonists as far as possible. They would rather forgo a crumb from the loaf, than have the whole in opposition to the European colonists and to England.

The merchants did not settle in South Africa. They went there, carried on business for some years and then came back to India, leaving a member of the family in charge of the business. But it was different for ex-indentured Indians and their colonial-born children. It was their home. The question of franchise was very vital to them.

The following report of an interview by a reporter of *The Statesman* of Calcutta with Gandhi was published on Nov. 18 1896:

'Then, are we to understand', the interviewer asked, 'that the Indians in Natal, the great bulk of whom are coolies who would never have aspired to free institutions in their own country, are desirous of wielding political power in Natal?'

'By no means', Mr. Gandhi replied. 'We are most careful to point out in all our representations to the Government and the public that the object of our agitation is merely the removal of vexatious disabilities devised, as we believe, to degrade us as compared to the European population.'

In his *Indian Opinion* (CW II p.135) he wrote:

Political power is not our ambition, but to be left alone to carry on trading, for which we are eminently suited as a nation, is all we ask. This, we think, is a reasonable demand.

On another occasion he expressed (CW I p.271) the same sentiment:

*There would have been no franchise agitation had not attempts been made to tread upon our commercial pursuits.*

Many authors made out that Gandhi fought for and achieved the abolition of the £3 tax on ex-indentured Indians. It was P.S. Aiyar who started and continued the campaign for the abolition of the £3 tax for some years, when Gandhi refused to co-operate with that campaign. He included the removal of the £3 tax in his list of demands at the fag-end of his stay in South Africa because, at that time, he was alienated from the merchants and was completely dependent upon the support of the colonial-born and ex-indentured Indians.

### **Support to Anglo-Boer War**

In the Anglo-Boer War of 1899, Gandhi, in spite of the opposition from some Indians and also his own belief that truth was on the side of the Boers, formed an ambulance unit in support of the British forces, holding that if Indians sought the advantages of the status of British subjects, they must also accept the obligations. Gandhi was very earnest about taking up arms and laying down his life for his beloved queen. He led his men on to the battlefield to remove the wounded: the Corps was mentioned in dispatches and Gandhi received a war medal.

Before proceeding to the front, he declared in a press statement that their dream had been realised and although, unfortunately, they were not to be engaged in the fighting line, he hoped they would be able to discharge their duties. Gandhi at that time did not mention anywhere that the British had introduced concentration camps and had committed inhuman atrocities. This was the forerunner of Nazi concentration camps.

After a lapse of many years and long after he had been removed from the scene, he wrote in his *Satyagraha in South Africa* (p. 16 *Navajivan Publishing House 1961*):

Boer women understood that their religion required them to suffer in order to preserve their independence, and therefore, patiently and cheerfully, endured all hardships. Lord Kitchener left no stone unturned in order to break their spirit. He confined them in separate concentration camps where they underwent indescribable sufferings. They starved, they suffered biting cold and scorching heat. Sometimes a soldier, intoxicated with liquor or maddened by passion, might even assault these unprotected women. Still the brave women did not flinch.

There was a storm of protest in England. Many honest Englishmen and women came forward and strongly condemned the war and its consequent atrocities, whereas a second-hand Englishman like Gandhi argued that it was not for the subjects to question the decision of their sovereign.

Gandhi was not a whit less racist than the white racists of South Africa. When Gandhi formed the Natal Indian Congress on Aug. 22 1894, the no.1 objective he declared was: "To promote concord and harmony among the Indians and Europeans in the Colony." (CW.I pp.132-33).

He launched his *Indian Opinion* on June 4 1903: "The object of *Indian Opinion* was to bring the European and the Indian subjects of the King Edward closer together". (CW. IV p.320).

What was the harm in making an effort to bring understanding among all people, irrespective of colour, creed or religion? Did not Gandhi know that a huge population of blacks and coloured lived there? Perhaps to Gandhi they were less than human beings.

Addressing a public meeting in Bombay on Sept. 26 1896 (CW II p.74) , Gandhi said:

Ours is one continued struggle against degradation sought to be inflicted upon us by the European, who desire to degrade us to the level of the raw Kaffir, whose occupation is hunting and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with, and then pass his life in indolence and nakedness.

In 1904, he wrote (CW. IV p.193) :

It is one thing to register natives who would not work, and whom it is very difficult to find out if they absent themselves, but it is another thing — and most insulting — to expect decent, hard-working, and respectable Indians, whose only fault is that they work too much, to have themselves registered and carry with them registration badges.

In its editorial on the Natal Municipal Corporation Bill, the *Indian Opinion* of Mar. 18 1905 wrote:

Clause 200 makes provision for registration of persons belonging to uncivilised races, resident and employed within the Borough. One can understand the necessity of registration of Kaffirs who will not work, but why should registration be required for indentured Indians who have become free, and for their descendants about whom the general complaint is that they work too much?

The *Indian Opinion* published an editorial on Sept. 9 1905 under the heading, "The Relative Value of the Natives and the Indians in Natal". In it Gandhi referred to a speech made by Rev. Dube, a most accomplished African, who said that an African had the capacity for improvement, if only the Colonials would look upon him as better than dirt, and give him the chance to develop self-respect. Gandhi suggested that "A little judicious extra taxation

would do no harm; in the majority of cases it compels the native to work for at least a few days a year". Then he added:

Now let us turn our attention to another and entirely unrepresented community – the Indian. He is in striking contrast with the native. While the native has been of little benefit to the State, it owes its prosperity largely to the Indians. While native loafers abound on every side, that species of humanity is almost unknown among Indians here.

Nothing could be further from the truth, that Gandhi fought against Apartheid, which many propagandists in later years wanted people to believe. *He was all in favour of continuation of white domination and the oppression of the blacks in South Africa.*

In the *Government Gazette* of Natal for Feb. 28 1905, a Bill was published regulating the use of fire-arms by the natives and Asiatics. Commenting on the Bill, the *Indian Opinion* of Mar. 25 1905 stated:

In this instance of the fire-arms, the Asiatic has been most improperly bracketed with the native. The British Indian does not need any such restrictions as are imposed by the Bill on the natives regarding the carrying of fire-arms. The prominent race can remain so by preventing the native from arming himself. Is there the slightest vestige of justification for so preventing the British Indian?

Here is the budding Mahatma telling the white racists how they can perpetuate their Nazi domination over the vast majority of Africans.

In the British imperialist scheme, one important strategy was to divide and rule. Gandhi advised Indians not to align with other political groups in either coloured or African communities. In 1906 the coloured people in the colonies of Good Hope, the Transvaal and the Orange River colony, addressed a petition to the King Emperor demanding franchise rights. The petitioners showed clearly that, in one part of South Africa, namely the Cape of Good Hope, they had enjoyed the franchise ever since the introduction of representative institutions.

Commencing on the petition, the *Indian Opinion* of Mar. 24 1906, declaring that "British Indians have, in order that they may never be misunderstood, made it clear that they do not aspire to any political power", added:

It seems that the petition is being widely circulated, and signatures are being taken of all coloured people in the three colonies named. The petition is non-Indian in character, although British Indians, being coloured people, are very largely affected by it. We consider that it was a wise policy on the part of the British Indians throughout South Africa, to have kept themselves apart and distinct from the other coloured communities in this country.

In a statement made in 1906 to the Constitution Committee, the British Indian Association led by Gandhi (*CW.V p.335*) said :

The British Indian Association has always admitted the principle of white

predominance and has, therefore, no desire to press, on behalf of the community it represents, for any political rights just for the sake of them.

Commenting on a court case, the *Indian Opinion* of June 2 1906, in its Gujarati section, stated:

You say that the magistrate's decision is unsatisfactory because it would enable a person, however unclean, to travel by a tram, and that even the Kaffirs would be able to do so. But the magistrate's decision is quite different. The Court declared that the Kaffirs have no legal right to travel by tram. And according to tram regulations, those in an unclean dress or in a drunken state are prohibited from boarding a tram. Thanks to the Court's decision, only clean Indians or coloured people other than Kaffirs, can now travel in the trams.

**Aparthled defended:** Gandhi accepted racial segregation, not only because it was politically expedient as his Imperial masters had already drawn such a blueprint, it also conformed with his own attitude to the caste system. *In his own mind he fitted Apartheid into the caste system: whites in the position of Brahmins, Indian merchants and professionals as Sudras, and all other non-whites as Untouchables.*

Though Gandhi was strongly opposed to the commingling of races, the working-class Indians did not share his distaste. There were many areas where Indians, Chinese, Coloureds, Africans and poor whites lived together. On Feb. 15 1904, Gandhi wrote to Dr. Porter, the Medical Officer of Health, Johannesburg (*CW. IV p. 244, and "Indian Opinion" 9.4.1904*) :

Why, of all places in Johannesburg, the Indian Location should be chosen for dumping down all Kaffirs of the town, passes my comprehension.

Of course, under my suggestion, the Town Council must withdraw the Kaffirs from the Location. About this mixing of the Kaffirs with the Indians I must confess I feel most strongly. I think it is very unfair to the Indian population, and it is an undue tax on even the proverbial patience of my countrymen.

Dr. Porter replied that it was the Indians who sub-let to Africans.

Commenting on the White League's agitation, Gandhi wrote in his *Indian Opinion* of Sep. 24 1903:

We believe as much in the purity of race as we think they do, only we believe that they would best serve these interests, which are as dear to us as to them, by advocating the purity of all races, and not one alone. We believe also that *the white race in South Africa should be the predominating race.*

Again, on Dec. 24 1903, *Indian Opinion* stated:

The petition dwells upon 'the commingling of the coloured and white races'. May we inform the members of the Conference that so far as British Indians are concerned, such a thing is particularly unknown. If there is one thing which the Indian cherishes more than any other, it is the purity of type.

In his farewell speech at a meeting held in the house of Dr. Gool in Capetown, which was reported in the *Indian Opinion* of July 1 1914, Gandhi said :

The Indians knew perfectly well which was the dominant and governing race. They aspired to no social equality with Europeans. They felt that the path of their development was separate. They did not even aspire to the franchise, or, if the aspiration exists, it was with no idea of its having a present effect.

Gandhi joined in the orgy of Zulu slaughter when the Bambata Rebellion broke out. It is essential to discuss the background of the Bambata Rebellion, to place Gandhi's Nazi war crime in its proper perspective.

### **The Bambata Rebellion – Background**

The spiritual foundation of Nazism was the superiority of the Aryan race or its modern version, the Anglo-Saxon race. When Disraeli was Prime Minister, Britain enunciated a doctrine, like the Monro Doctrine, warning other European powers that Africa would be a British preserve, and that from the Cape to the Limpopo, if not to Cairo, only white people would have local political power. Successive British Governments pursued this policy.

In the 1870s, the Zulu Kingdom was by far the most powerful African State south of the Limpopo. Cetewayo, who succeeded his father in 1872, was an able and popular ruler. He united the kingdom and built up a most efficient army. He followed a policy of alliance with the British Colony of Natal. The Zulu Kingdom and the Boer Republic of the Transvaal had been feuding for a long time. The Zulus were defeated twice by the Boers, in 1838 and 1840. By 1877 Cetewayo was ready to invade the Transvaal. But the British stepped in and annexed the Transvaal in 1877, only to prevent Cetewayo from doing it first and becoming powerful and a challenge to white supremacy.

Some contemporary reports throw light on the relative strength of the Zulus and their Boer enemies. Colonel A.W. Durnford wrote in a memorandum on July 5 (*"The Secret History of South Africa" by Abercrombe. The Central News Agency Ltd., Johannesburg South Africa. 1951 p.6*):

About this time (April 10th) Cetewayo had massed his forces in three corps on the borders, and would undoubtedly have swept the Transvaal, at least up to the Vaal River if not to Pretoria itself, had the country not been taken over by the English. In my opinion he would have cleared the country to Pretoria.

Shepstone, the British Administrator, himself wrote concerning the reality of the danger on Dec. 25 1877:

The Boers are still flying, and I think by this time there must be a belt of more than a hundred miles long and thirty broad in which, with three insignificant exceptions, there is nothing but absolute desolation. This will give some idea of the mischief which Cetewayo's conduct has caused. (*Ibid p.7*).

The above facts explode the myth that the British protected the Zulus from the Boers.

**British barbarity on Blacks:** After annexing the Transvaal, Shepstone turned his attention to destroying all the independent African states in that region, particularly the Zulu Kingdom. Before annexation of the Transvaal, Shepstone sided with the Zulus in their border disputes with the Transvaal. After annexation he made a volte-face and used those disputes as excuses to invade Zululand. The British public was told that the Zulu War was to liberate the Zulu people from a tyrannical ruler, and South Africa from a menace to "Christianity and civilisation".

In 1879, the British invaded the Zulu Kingdom and defeated Cetawayo. Then they started their complete subjugation. *First the army was broken, thus destroying their ability to defend themselves. The country was then split into thirteen separate units under the nominal control of the chiefs, salaried by the Government.* The white magistrates supplanted the chiefs as the most powerful men in their districts. Most important of all, the land was partitioned. Before the war, Shepstone had expressed the hope that Cetewayo's warriors would be "changed to labourers working for wages". It makes a sad story, how this was accomplished. In 1902-4, the Land Commission delineated a number of locations for the Zulus, and threw open the rest of the country to white settlement. Out of a total acreage of more than 12 million acres, the Africans held some 2 million acres. They numbered, at the lowest reckoning, over three hundred thousand. The Europeans, who were less than 20,000, owned most of the best land. A large proportion of the African population was forced to live upon land to which it had no legal claim. Where the Africans lived upon private or crown lands, they lived there entirely upon sufferance and without legal title. By this time, other independent African states in that region were also destroyed by the British army. Wheresoever they marched, in Basutoland, Zululand or Bechuanaland, the Queen's horses and the Queen's men were like unto a "Salvation Army" ministering to the welfare of the colonists. The sufferers were the Africans.

Gandhi wrote in his *Satyagraha in South Africa (p.15)*:

The Boers are simple, frank and religious. They settle in the midst of extensive farms. We can have no idea of the extent of these farms. A farm with us means generally an acre or two, and sometimes even less. In

South Africa, a single farmer has hundreds or thousands of acres of land in his possession. He is not anxious to put all this under cultivation at once, and if any one argues with him he will say, 'Let it lie fallow; lands which are now fallow will be cultivated by our children'.

Also in his *Indian Opinion* (March 15 1913), he wrote:

General Botha has thousands of acres of land ... (there is) a big company in Natal which has hundreds of thousands of acres of land.

Thou shalt not steal but rob.

It did not seem to occur to Gandhi how these people came into possession of thousands of acres of land, whereas Africans were cooped in locations like chicken in pens.

Grabbing the land was not enough: it needed manpower to cultivate that land. The cry of the farmers was for labour. Naturally it found a favourite response from Shepstone, whose dream it was to convert Cetewayo's warriors into labourers for white men. His native policy was to meet the demands of the European farmers. He agreed that Europeans could not expand or grow in wealth unless they could draw more fully upon the reservoirs of labour in the African reserves.

In the process of European colonisation, the swiftly expanding land-hungry Europeans turned the bulk of the African population into a proletariat. Due to the congestion and landlessness in the reserves, created deliberately by the white rulers, their agricultural return was not sufficient for bare existence. Then there were the taxes on huts, cattle and what not. On the other hand, working for white men did not provide them with adequate sustenance. In Natal, the sugar farmers of the coast relied upon the Indian indentured labour, whereas the stock farmers of the interior relied exclusively on Africans, and regarded the failure of Africans to work for them as a criminal offence. In a report to the Chief Commissioner of Police in 1903, the Police Inspector W.F. Fairley wrote: "With regard to crime, the principal complaints made by Dutch farmers to patrols was of the refusal to work on the part of the natives." (*Departmental Reports 1903 p.67 cited "Reluctant Rebellion" by Marks p.17. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1970*). Complaints about the shortage of African labour were voiced in all parts of the country. The farmers were later joined by the mining industries. The most obvious change was the broadening of the economic base from being entirely agricultural to one in which mining played a more and more important part. Diamond, gold, coal became major industries, and with this development, the deeper involvement of the big finance houses, particularly Rothschilds. So the fate of the Africans as the source of cheap labour, and the fat dividends derived from mining by the British ruling class, became interlinked. This still continues in a modified form. Now it is Anglo-American corporations.



**Cheap labour from India:** Europeans assumed that Africans lived only to meet their requirements of cheap labour, and as such they had no right to establish themselves as self-sufficient and independent farmers because this conflicted with European interests. Famines in India facilitates the recruitment of indentured Indian labourers for white employers in the Colonies. It was no different in relation to Africans. In a Report of the Native Affairs Commission, (*Native Affairs Commission Report 1939-40 cited "Oxford History of South Africa" p.182. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969*) it was admitted that "African reserves were regarded by whites as reservoirs of labour, and congestion, landlessness and crop failure were welcomed as stimulants to the labour supply". Similar situations among whites were viewed as national calamities. The Government lent millions of pounds to white farmers, gave them tax relief in times of famine, paid subsidies, facilitated the export of their produce, and wrote off their debts. But what about Africans? Famine would be rampant, crops ruined, food exhausted, thousands of Africans and their cattle would starve to death, but the government would not raise a finger.

The whites not only stole the land from the Africans, and used them as cheap labour, but also looked to them for revenue. They drew a relatively large and growing income from the Africans. "The Native population of Natal", Shepstone admitted (*"Imperial Factor" by De Kieweit p.193. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1970*), "contribute to the revenue annually a sum equal, at least, to that necessary to maintain the whole fixed establishment of the Colony for the government of the whites as well as themselves." Taxation is a financial measure to gather revenue to meet the expenditure of the state. But in South Africa it was used to reduce Africans to slavery. The sole motive behind the extra taxation imposed on Africans was to force the Africans to work on terms dictated by the whites.

Always there was resentment against any measure which would allow the Africans to settle in locations instead of keeping them as labourers. It was not only the farmers' conferences, the press owned by the mining magnates joined the outcry of the farmers to enact special laws to compel the Africans to come out of their locations and work for the whites. The press was in the forefront to arouse the sentiment that Africans not in European service were necessarily living in idleness. Gandhi's *Indian Opinion* played second fiddle to the white press in this respect. To Gandhi, the imposition of taxes upon the Africans to compel them to work for the white employers was "gentle persuasion".

By a stroke of the pen, the major part of the available land was taken away from the Zulus and given to Europeans. Some of the

dispossessed Zulus were allotted locations and others remained on the land of European landlords on sufferance. Bambata was one of these unfortunate chiefs. He became Chief in 1890 and he and his people were placed in private locations on very high rents. The land was useless for any agricultural purpose. To make things worse, the Boer farmers suspected Bambata of informing the British about their pro-Boer activities, and naturally they tried to victimise him and his people. But after the war, the British rulers leaned backwards and went out of their way to kiss and hug the Boers. So Bambata was caught in a cleft stick. By 1905 the tension between Bambata and his white landlords reached crisis point. The Assistant Magistrate of Greytown, H. von Gerard, wrote to the Under Secretary of Native Affairs recommending the allocation of a location for his people. Gerard described how people were being oppressed and squeezed by the landlords, what useless land it was for agricultural purposes, and how summons after summons was being issued against people who were unable to pay high rents. Finally he remarked (*"Reluctant Rebellion" by Marks. p. 201*):

A most desperate state of affairs, the more so as there seems no remedy for it... My sympathies are entirely with Bambata's people ... but I see no way out of the difficulty.

The military and civilian leaders of Natal were consciously developing a picture as if an uprising was imminent. Not that they could foresee one, but they wanted to foresee one because that would give them a golden opportunity to inflict severe punishments on Zulus who, according to the colonists, were growing insolent. They drew up a plan to deal with this imaginary uprising swiftly, and all agreed that was the way they could save not only Natal but North Africa from the "barbarities which only the savage mind can conceive." (*Ibid p. xvii*)

**Zulu Revolt:** But outside Natal, people were not so sure. Styne, President of the Orange Free State, called it "hysteria". Smuts, Botha and Merriman expressed concern as to whether the whites of Natal would spur a rebellion. Some churchmen and many radical humanitarians in Natal, as well as England, produced volumes of irrefutable evidence proving that it was a conspiracy to goad the Zulus into rebellion and then massacre them. In this, Harriette Colenso, the famous daughter of a famous father, Bishop Colenso, made the most outstanding contribution. There was a cry of imminent native revolt in the press long before active rebellion broke out.

As far back as 1902, Lieut. G.A. Mills in his report (*GH513 G818/02. Cited "Reluctant Rebellion" p.158*) to the Chief of Staff, Natal, on July 1 informed him:

Every Boer expresses the most bitter hatred of the Zulus. They all express a wish that the Zulus would rise now while the British troops are in the country so that they may be practically wiped out. The Boers all say that in the event of a rising, every one of them would join the British troops in order to have a chance of paying off old scores against the Zulus. When I first came here, I visited farms and asked the Boers what they thought of the advisability of keeping troops here. They all said it was most necessary, as they were afraid of the Kaffirs and it would not be safe to stay on their farms if the troops withdrew.... Taking everything into consideration, I cannot help being forced to the opinion that many Boers intend to provoke a Zulu rising if they can do so.

It was Colonel Mackenzie, the military supremo before the rebellion, who was prophesying a native uprising and cleaning the barrels of his guns to use the "golden opportunity" to inflict "the most drastic punishment" on leading natives he found guilty of treason, and to "instil a proper respect for the white man". (C.O. 179/233/12460. *Despatch 9.3.06 cited "Reluctant Rebellion" p. 188*).

On June 14, Charles Saunders, Chief Magistrate and Civil Commissioner in Zululand (1899-1909) wrote to C.J. Hignet, the magistrate of Nqutu (*"Reluctant Rebellion" p.241*):

I quite agree with your conclusions as to our men trying to goad the whole population into rebellion, and you have no idea of the difficulties we had in Nkandha in trying to protect people one knew perfectly well were faithful to us.

In his communication of July 10 1906 to the Prime Minister, (*PM 61/15/66 Governor to PM 10.7.06*) the Governor described the "sweeping actions and the mopping-up operations as continued slaughter. Fred Graham, a permanent civil servant in the Colonial Office, in his Minute of July 10, described it as "massacre".

**Nazism & racism:** The most revealing was the long letter of July 24 1906 (*CO 179/236/24787 minute 10-7-06*) sent by the Anglican Archdeacon, Charles Johnson, from St. Augustine's in Nqutu division, to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in London. He was a man of the British establishment and not known to have excessive zeal for standing up for the rights of the Africans. He wrote (cited *"Reluctant Rebellion" p. 241*):

Many thinking people have been asking themselves, what are we going to do with this teeming population? Some strong-handed men have thought the time was ripe for solving the great question. They knew that there was a general widespread spirit of disaffection among the natives of Natal, the Free State and the Transvaal, but specially in Natal, and they commenced the suppression of the rebellion in the fierce hope that the rebellion might so spread throughout the land and engender a war of practical extermination. I fully believe that they were imbued with the conviction that this was the only safe way of dealing with the native question, and they are greatly disappointed that the spirit of rebellion was not strong enough to bring more than a moiety of the native peoples under the influence of the rifle.

Over and over again it was said, 'They are only sitting on the fence, it shall be our endeavour to push them over'; and again, speaking of the big chiefs, 'We must endeavour to bring them in if possible! Yes, they have been honest and outspoken enough — the wish being father to the thought — they prophesied the rebellion would spread throughout South Africa; had they been true prophets, no doubt the necessity of solving the native question would have been solved for this generation at least.

John Merriman was a veteran Cape politician. He was one of those so-called liberals who accepted Nazism as a doctrine, or in other words Anglo-Saxon superiority, but regretted its consequent atrocities and thus fumigated their consciences. He wrote to Goldwin Smith (*Merriman papers NHo. 202, 16.9.06. cited "Reluctant Rebellion" p.246*) in September 1906:

We have had a horrible business in Natal with the natives. I suppose the whole truth will never be known, but enough comes out to make us see how thin the crust is that keeps our christian civilisation from the old-fashioned savagery — machine-guns and modern rifles against knobsticks and assagais are heavy odds and do not add much to the glory of the superior race.

In the letter of the Archdeacon the expression "practical extermination", and in the letter of Lieutenant Mills "practically wiped out", have been used. This was what the German Nazis wanted to do to the Jews: to exterminate them. *Does it make any difference whether the victims of racial slaughter are Jews or blacks?*

**Conspiracy to massacre Blacks:** Gandhi was well aware of the conspiracy to massacre the Africans. When there was war hysteria in the colonial press, this prophet of non-violence did not apply his mind as to how to stop such a conflict. On the contrary, he did not want Indians to be left behind, but wanted them to take a full part in this genocide.

In his editorial in the *Indian Opinion* of Nov. 18 1905, long before the actual rebellion broke out, Gandhi complained that the Government simply did not wish to give Indians an opportunity of showing that they were as capable as any other community of taking their share in the defence of the colony. He suggested that a volunteer corps should be formed from colonial-born Indians, which would be useful in actual service.

*Indentured Indians lived in conditions worse than slavery. Gandhi during his 20 years' stay in South Africa, did not raise a finger to ease their sufferings. But he was quick to suggest using them as cannon fodder for racists against Africans.*

In his *Indian Opinion* in Dec. 2 1905 he referred to Law 25 of 1875 which was specially passed to increase "the maximum strength of the volunteer force in the colony by adding thereto a force of

Indian immigrant volunteer infantry". To assure the Europeans that such Indians would only kill Africans, he pointed out that "section 83 of the Militia Act states that no ordinary member of a coloured contingent shall be armed with weapons of precision, unless such contingent is called to operate against other than Europeans".

**Gandhi defends massacre:** Many years later, he wrote (p.233) in his autobiography:

The Boer War had not brought home to me the horrors of war with anything like the vividness that the 'rebellion' did. This was no war but a man-hunt, not only in my opinion but also in that of many Englishmen with whom I had occasion to talk. To hear every morning reports of the soldiers' rifles exploding like crackers in innocent hamlets, and to live in the midst of them, was a trial.

Then to justify his participation in this massacre, he went on (*Autobiography p. 231*):

I bore no grudge against the Zulus, they had harmed no Indian. I had doubts about the 'rebellion' itself, but I then believed that the British Empire existed for the welfare of the world. A genuine sense of loyalty prevented me from even wishing ill to the Empire. *The rightness or otherwise of the 'rebellion' was therefore not likely to affect my decision.*

What about the Nazi war criminals? Did they not have a genuine sense of loyalty to Hitler and Nazism?

In Great Britain another storm of protest was raised against the atrocities perpetrated in Natal. The only time Gandhi mentioned the Zulu suppression was on Aug. 4 1906, when he wrote in his *Indian Opinion*:

A controversy is going on in England about what the Natal Army did during the Kaffir rebellion. The people here believe that the whites of Natal perpetrated great atrocities on the Kaffirs. In reply to such critics, the *Star* has pointed to the doings of the Imperial Army in Egypt. Those among the Egyptian rebels who had been captured were ordered to be flogged. The flogging was continued to the limits of the victim's endurance; it took place in public and was watched by thousands of people. Those sentenced to death were also hanged at the same time. While those sentenced to death were hanging, the flogging of others was taken up. While the sentences were being executed, the relatives of the victims cried and wept until many of them swooned. If this is true, there is no reason why there should be such an outcry in England against the Natal outrages.

One may notice that the article was very cleverly written. First Gandhi stated that people in England believed that the whites of Natal perpetrated great atrocities on Africans, as if he himself did not know what happened, and also gave the impression that it was the local Natal Army and not the Imperial Army which was involved in the atrocities, which is not true. Even at this stage, he was not willing to tell the simple truth, that atrocities were committed. Then he borrowed the description of hanging and flogging in Egypt from

the *Star* as if he did not know about that either. Did or did not Gandhi know that those Egyptians were not common criminals to be flogged and hanged — that they were the patriots, the flowers of the Egyptian nation?

*If Gandhi unequivocally accepted or found out that the Imperial Army committed those atrocities, then he could not claim that he believed the British Empire existed for the welfare of mankind. The last and the vilest of all was the subtle suggestion that if the Imperial Army did what they were accused of doing, then there was no reason why there should be such an outcry in England against the Natal outrage. Why could this Imperialist-manufactured Mahatma not say clearly that both were crimes against humanity?*

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## BACK TO ENGLAND AND THE WAR EFFORT

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Gandhi left South Africa on July 18 1914 and when the ship reached the English Channel, he learnt that the First World War had started. He could leave England at once and go home, but he wanted to see Gokhale first, who was stranded in Paris. On Aug. 13, Gandhi sent round a confidential circular to all Indians living in England, signed by himself, his wife, Sarojini Naidoo and 50 others, stating that after mature deliberation they had decided, for the sake of the motherland and the Empire, to place their services unconditionally at the disposal of the authorities for the duration of the crisis. On Aug 16, he sent a letter to the Secretary of State for India, signed by himself and others, offering their services unconditionally.

On Sept 18 1914 Gandhi, in his letter (*CW.XII p.531*):- to Maganlal Gandhi wrote :-

All of you may want to know why I have undertaken even the nursing of the wounded. Recently I used to say, in South Africa, that as satyagrahis we cannot help in this way either, for such help also amounts to supporting war: one who would not help in a slaughterhouse should not help in cleaning the butcher's house either. But I found that, living in England, I was in a way participating in the War. London owes the food it eats in wartime to the protection of the Navy. Thus to take this food was also a wrong thing.

In another letter (*Nov. 15, 1914 CW.XII p. 554*):- to one Pragji Desai, he wrote:-

And am I, doing nothing, to continue enjoying myself, eating my food? The Gita says that he who eats without performing *yajna* (sacrifice) is a thief. In the present situation here sacrifice meant, and means, self-sacrifice.

*Gandhi was an expert in quoting the Gita out of context to justify his service to the Empire. Lord Krishna would have been very amused.*

At this time many British pacifists underwent physical and mental torture and stood their ground in the face of possible execution. In 1916, Lord Brockway, then plain Fenner Brockway, was charged at Bow Street Magistrates' Court for refusing to report for military service. He told the magistrates:

Acts of Parliament may deem me a soldier; tribunals may decide that I must be a soldier; you, Sir, may hand me over to the military to become a soldier; officers may order me to fulfill the duties of a soldier; but no power on earth can make me do what I believe to be wrong. (*"The Daily Telegraph"*,

London, 30th April 1988. Obituary).

He was prosecuted nine times in the 1914-1918 War as a conscientious objector, spending nearly three years in prison. Throughout the War he was in and out of prison. After he led what was described as a mutiny in the Liverpool goal, he was sent for eight months' solitary confinement to Lincoln. He left prison with a partly paralysed leg. Many people may agree or disagree with his viewpoint. But nobody could call him a hypocrite. He practised what he professed.

**Gita defends violence:** Gandhi always quoted the Gita out of context to say that the Gita's *ahimsa* is against all violence. It was always employed whenever anybody wanted to fight injustice and oppression, but he always twisted his argument to justify participation in Imperialist violence. In the process, Gandhi produced a Gita suited to the requirements of his Imperialist masters but quite distinct and different from that which forms part of the Hindu religion. The Gita originated on the battlefield and not in a cowshed. Its message is revolutionary violence, simple and pure. Arjuna, taking the posture of pacifism, refused to fight for truth and justice; he accepted the creed of non-violence in the extreme, due to his love for his family, friends and relatives, whereas Gandhi upheld the creed of non-violence because of his love for the British Empire. Arjuna did not raise the question of whether the war was right or wrong. He had fought many wars and faced many enemies. Krishna advised Arjuna, at the time of the war, to discard desire, ill-feeling and anger. If the mind could be prepared in that way, then *himsa* (violence) became impossible. He must fight against wrong, but if hatred overtakes him, then he sustains a spiritual defeat. *himsa* and *ahimsa* are conditions of mind. As, for example, the African revolutionaries want to overthrow the system of Apartheid by armed struggle: if they harbour ill-will against the whites and want to destroy or harm them as people, they will be guilty of *himsa*. But when they declare that they want to destroy the evil system and in its place establish another system based on justice, equality and brotherhood irrespective of colour, race and religion, they are enunciating the doctrine of *ahimsa*. The same was true of the Indian revolutionaries. Some of them read the Gita until the last moment when they were led to the gallows, and mounted with smiling faces. Any intelligent observer will notice that *those who sustain the Apartheid in South Africa, who unleash the weapons of terrible destruction upon innocent people, are the greatest admirers of Gandhi and his brand of ahimsa. It suited the greatest Imperial power of his time, and it suits the Super Powers who replaced the Imperial powers.*



## Back to India

Gandhi formed a voluntary corps but could not command it, as he did in both the Anglo-Boer War and the Bambata Rebellion, as he fell ill with pleurisy. He returned to India, and *on June 3 1915, in the King's Birthday Honours, Gandhi received the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal from the Viceroy for his services to the Empire.*

Proposing a toast to the British Empire at a dinner in Madras in April 1915, Gandhi said:

I discovered that the British Empire had certain ideals with which I have fallen in love, and one of these ideals is that every subject of the British Empire has the freest scope possible for his energy and honour and whatever he thinks is due to his conscience. I think that is true of the British Government as it is true of no other government. I have more than once said that government is best which governs least. I have found that it is possible for me to be governed least under the British Empire. Hence my loyalty to the British Empire."

*("Mahatma Gandhi" by Tendulkar, Vol.1. Vithalbai K. Javeri & A.G. Tendulkar, Bombay 1952, and other books).*

Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, on April 27 1918, invited Gandhi to attend the War Conference at Delhi. Gandhi expressed his reservations because at that time Tilak, the Ali Brothers and many other nationalist leaders were in prison. However, he was persuaded by the Viceroy and attended the conference, and the Viceroy requested him to support the resolution on recruitment for the army. With the permission of the Viceroy, he supported the resolution in Hindustani: "With a full sense of my responsibility, I beg to support the resolution".

*(Tendulkar Vol 1 p. 277)*

Many biographers of Gandhi made a song and dance about the fact that he moved the resolution in Hindustani, forgetting that thousands of young men were being sent to be slaughtered in a war which was no concern of theirs.

**Opposes Home Rule:** When the conference was over, Gandhi wrote a letter to the Viceroy and, with his consent, released it to the press (*ibid* 276):

If I could make my countrymen retrace their steps, I would make them withdraw all the Congress resolutions and not whisper 'Home Rule' or 'Responsible Government during the period of war. I would make India offer all her able-bodied sons as a sacrifice to the Empire at its critical moment.

On June 23, Gandhi issued an appeal from Nadiad to the people of Kheda in particular and of Gujarat in general:

If we want to learn the use of arms with the greatest possible dispatch, it is our duty to enlist ourselves in the army. There can be no friendship between

the brave and the effeminate. We are regarded as a cowardly people. If we want to become free from that reproach, we should learn the use of arms.  
(*Ibid p.280*)

Gandhi called upon his people to flock to his banner in thousands  
(*Ibid 280*).

Tilak, after his release from prison, agreed to work for recruitment. As a guarantee of his good faith, he had sent Gandhi a cheque for Rs.50,000, the amount to be forfeited if certain conditions were not fulfilled by Tilak. He undertook to recruit 50,000 persons from Maharashtra, if Gandhi could secure a promise from the Government beforehand that Indians would get commissioned rank in the army. Gandhi's position was that help should not be in the nature of a bargain, and he therefore returned the cheque to Tilak.

On July 4 1918, Gandhi wrote (*Tendulkar p.281-282*) to both Mrs. Annie Besant and Jinnah urging them to plunge into the recruitment campaign. "Seek ye first the recruiting office and everything will be added unto you." It does not seem that either of them took any notice of it. When both Tilak and Surendranath Bannerjee requested Gandhi to attend the Congress session, he refused and told them: "I believe that we can render great service to India by devoting ourselves to the work of recruitment and taking lakhs of people with us."

If India, under Gandhi's instruction, were to sacrifice all her able-bodied sons to preserve the British Empire, why could not a fraction of that number be sacrificed for the emancipation of India? If Indians could participate in the Imperialist wars of aggression, why should they be forbidden to participate in the war of liberation? Even if Indians had learnt the use of firearms – thousands of Indians actually did learn – of what benefit was this, because they were not to use their skill to liberate their own country, as at once Gandhi's non-violence would come into operation against such a move. After all, what happened to Tolstoy's teachings? Gandhi promised that if they co-operated with the British in their war effort, full responsible government would be given to India within a year, if not sooner: what did India get?









An official publication (*Ibid* 235) recorded with alarm, "There is unprecedented fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims" – because Hindu/Muslim unity meant a notice to them to pack up!

**Dr. Ambedkar on Gandhi:** This was the scenario of Indian politics, the golden era of Hindu-Muslim unity. At this juncture Gandhi, the greatest lover of the Empire, was initiated into Indian politics. Here he could serve the Empire and at the same time be at the helm of a process which would terminate the Empire. It is interesting to note Gandhi's acrobatics. Dr. Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar, one of the principal actors of Indian politics at that time, wrote (*Ibid* p. 122/123) in his book, *Gandhi and Gandhism*:

The Nehru Committee Report was presented in the open session of the Congress for discussion. Some amendments were to be made in the Report. All of you must be knowing about it. Mr. Jayakar was hired by Mr. Gandhi to oppose these amendments. These amendments were very vehemently opposed by Mr. Jayakar and his supporters. This is known to many people. But what were these amendments, and why so were these forcefully opposed? Not many people know the background of these amendments. I came to know about the opposition of Jayakar (it is a fact I have no reason to question the truth about it) from people who had opposed the amendments. All this was made known by Pandit Motilal Nehru, and Mr. Jinnah who was betrayed by Mr. Gandhi. The corrections which were proposed to be made in the Nehru Committee Report were suggested by Mr. Jinnah for the benefit of his community. But when Gandhi came to know about it he thought a great deal more had been given to the Moslems by Pandit Motilal Nehru than what he wanted to give originally.

In order to humiliate Pandit Motilal Nehru, he vehemently opposed these proposals. Hindu-Moslem hostility is the result of this deceitful action on the part of Mr. Gandhi.

The man who was considered to be a friend of the Untouchables and the Moslems, betrayed the cause of the very same people whose cause he claimed to champion. This immensely pained me. There is an old saying which befits the occasion: *Bagal men chhuri munh men Ram Ram* (God's name on the lips and a dagger under the arm).

### **The Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre**

When the war broke out in 1914, Allied statesmen declared that the war was being fought to make the world safe for democracy and freedom for all peoples. The British, with the help of Indian Gunga Dins and by massive propaganda, made many Indians believe that "all people" included the Indians, and by helping the British at the hour of need, they would reap a tangible reward. India furnished 1.3 million troops, suffered 106,000 casualties, and not only bore the expense of its vast overseas force but contributed nearly a billion dollars to the British cause. Lord Birkenhead, acknowledging these services to the Empire at the critical moments of war, remarked: "Without India, the war would have been

immensely prolonged, if indeed without her help it could have been brought to a victorious conclusion".

("An Advanced History of India", p. 980. R.C. Majumdar & H.C. Raychaudhury, Macmillan, London 1967).

In 1912, Montague made his much trumpeted declaration, promising responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire, and in 1919 the Montague Chelmsford reforms, providing for elections to provincial councils with some local powers, were introduced. At the same time in 1919 the Government passed a set of new coercive measures, known as the Rowlatt Act from the name of the chairman of the committee on whose report it was based. These sought to perpetuate the extraordinary repressive powers conferred on the Government during the war. Indians saw it as giving something very little while reinforcing the British authority with all the apparatus of a police state – trial of political cases without jury, and the weapon of summary internment. On March 18 1919, the Rowlatt Act became law. Indians were shocked and they wondered, was this the reward for the blood the Indians shed in the war?

**Muslims turn against British:** After the war the dismemberment of the Turkish empire offended the religious and historical sentiment of the Muslims of India, and consequently they adopted an aggressive anti-British attitude. The Ali brothers and Maulana Azad organised a Muslim mass movement known as the Khilafat movement.

There was already widespread unrest among the industrial workers. The Bombay mills strike affected more than 125,000 workers at the beginning of 1919 and there were no fewer than 200 strikes involving 1.5 million workers during the first six months of 1920.

Gandhi called for satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act, shrewdly aligning himself with the Khilafat movement, a cause dear to many Muslims. This produced a huge mass movement.

When the Rowlatt Act was gazetted, Gandhi decided to launch a satyagraha movement starting with *hartal*, an old Indian technique to bring all activities to a standstill. "The idea came to me last night in a dream, that we should call upon the country to observe a general *hartal*", wrote Gandhi in his autobiography. (*Ibid p. 339*). What a democratic way of taking a political decision? The date of the *hartal* was first fixed for March 30 1919 but was subsequently changed to April 6. The whole of India from one end to the other, towns as well as villages, observed a complete *hartal* on that day. It was a mighty wave of mass demonstrations. There was some violence. Then Gandhi called off the demonstration. He had already



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developed the technique in South Africa of organising a movement, and when it was in full swing, calling it off on some excuse. He not only suspended the movement, but also declared his readiness to assist the Government to restore normal conditions. Before this news of suspension reached the Punjab, something serious, ghastly and of far-reaching consequences took place. At Amritsar on April 10, the two most popular leaders, Dr. Kitchlev, a Muslim, and Skatyapal, a Hindu, were arrested. It made things worse and the authority panicked.

On April 13 1919, Amritsar was handed over to Brigadier-General Dyer, Commander of the Jullandar Brigade. He immediately imposed martial law, but even before his soldiers went round drumming the news, he heard of a massive meeting being held at Jallianwallah Bagh. He was immensely pleased that the "rebels" had played into his hands. And it was the pleasure of a vicious animal. He hurried there with troops and armoured cars. Jallianwallah Bagh was a large open space surrounded by high walls with a single very narrow entrance. Twenty thousand men, women and children were listening to their leaders. It made no impression on Dyer that the crowd was completely unarmed, peaceful, and contained many children. The entrance was too narrow for his armoured cars. So he abandoned them there, ordered his troops to block the entrance, and without any warning opened fire. The crowd, hemmed in by high walls and so unable to disperse, surged to and fro, vainly seeking some way to escape. On his own admission, 1,605 rounds were fired before his men ran out of ammunition, and he withdrew, ordering the armoured cars to remain and prevent anyone from entering or leaving the Bagh so that people could not attend or nurse the wounded. According to official figures, 337 men, 41 women and a baby of seven weeks had been killed, and 1,500 people were injured. Gandhi, "conducting a thorough inquiry," came to the conclusion that the death toll was 1,200.

In his own testimony, Dyer made it clear that it was not done to maintain law and order but to terrorise people; he had gone down to the Jallianwallah Bagh with the intention of setting a ferocious example to the rest of India. (*Hunters Committee Report, cited in "The Life of Mahatma Gandhi" by Louis Fisher pp. 200-204 Jonathan Cape, London 1951*):

I fired (he said) and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand, the casualties would have been greater in proportion. It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect from a military point of view, not only upon those who were present but more specially throughout the Punjab.

The following day another spot was bombed and machine-gunned from the air. Martial law was declared throughout the Punjab and was not lifted until June 9. During this period, in Amritsar, Indians passing through a certain street where an English missionary woman had been mugged, were forced to crawl on their hands and knees. According to the Government-appointed Hunter Committee, floggings were ordered for such offences as the contravention of the curfew order, failure to *salaam* a commissioned officer, for showing any disrespect to any European, or refusal to sell milk, and similar contraventions. It can be seen that flogging for showing disrespect to Europeans displayed the same sense of superiority of the white races as in South Africa.

Though the Government of India vehemently dissociated itself from such a policy of intimidation, Dyer was expressing the general attitude of most of the civil and military personnel in India. Dyer was removed from his command, but his actions and motives were applauded by a large section of the press, as well as by members of parliament. The House of Lords passed a motion condoning the General who had ordered his troops to open fire at point-blank range of the defenceless Indians. The English in India expressed their approval of the General by raising a purse for him of £28,000. In England, an even larger sum was raised by popular subscription. Probably no General in British history has been so handsomely rewarded in cash for so foul a deed.

What did Gandhi do ?

This is what he said:

... my going to the Punjab had to be postponed again and again. The Viceroy would say 'not yet' every time I asked permission to go there, and so the thing dragged on. In the meantime the Hunter Committee was announced to hold an enquiry in connection with the Punjab Government's doings under the Martial Law. Mr. C.F. Andrews had now reached the Punjab. His letter gave a heart-rending description of the state of things there, and I formed the impression that the Martial Law atrocities were in fact even worse than the press reports showed. He pressed me urgently to come and join him. At the same time Malaviyaji sent telegrams asking me to proceed to the Punjab at once. I once more telegraphed to the Viceroy asking whether I could go to the Punjab. He wired back in reply that I could go there after a certain date. I cannot recollect now, but I think it was 17th October.

(Autobiography p.350).

So it took six months for him to reach Jallianwallah Bagh.

The Congress decided to boycott the Hunter Committee and appointed a non-official committee headed by Gandhi. When he published his findings, the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre became history. The Congress session held in the last week of December

1919 at Amritsar could not take any action on the Jallianwallah Bagh incident because the result of his enquiries was still not known. This was the way Gandhi saved the British Raj from facing another upheaval like the one in 1857 and the possible consequence of its demise. Up till now Gandhi had proclaimed his undying love for the British Empire. Had he done so after the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, people would have thrown him on the scrap heap. That is why he changed his public posture on Aug. 1 1920: in his letter to the Viceroy, Gandhi wrote:

I can retain neither respect nor affection for a Government which had been moving from wrong to wronger in order to defend its immorality.

*(Tendulkar vol. 2 p.1).*

At this time Gandhi was 51 years old. Some people may think that Gandhi grew his wisdom teeth when he lost his front ones.



In a special session of the Congress in Calcutta in 1920, Maulana Hasrat Mohani brought a proposal to boycott purely British goods, so far as practicable, in place of Gandhi's boycott of foreign clothes. Gandhi saw the danger signal. To block the move Gandhi at once introduced his Non-Cooperation resolution and the Congress adopted it. It recommended the renunciation of government titles and the boycotting of the legislature, the law courts and government educational institutions, leading at a later date to non-payment of taxes. The new policy was acclaimed with enthusiasm and received overwhelming support from the masses.

The atrocities in the Punjab which stirred the whole country, combined with the "Lucknow Pact" of 1916 and the subsequent support of the Khilafat movement by the Congress, provided an "opportunity for uniting Hindus and Muslims" as would not arise again in a hundred years.

The Congress, at its Annual Session at Allahabad in December 1921, not only expressed its determination to continue the programme of non-violent non-cooperation with greater vigour, but took steps to organise civil disobedience. Gandhi was appointed by the Congress as its sole executive authority (in other words, sole dictator) to lead the national movement. In August 1921, Gandhi had said that he was sure of getting swaraj before the end of the year and that he could not conceive of himself as living beyond Dec. 31 without having won swaraj. The popular enthusiasm rose to feverish pitch and there was eager expectation of a mass-movement on a very big scale and the start of the phase of the non-payment of taxes.

Then suddenly came the anticlimax. In February 1922, Gandhi suspended the movement on the pretext that there had been violence. At Chauri Chaura, a village in the district of Gorakhpur, police had opened fire on a peaceful procession without any provocation and the public went out of control, charged the police, drove them back into the police station, and set fire to the building. Twenty-two policemen lost their lives. Gandhi's decision was received with dismay all over the country. *Many leaders, including C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai resented his suspension of the movement when it was at its climax. They called it Gandhi's greatest blunder and protested vehemently against the ignominious and ill-timed retreat. These were the stalwarts of Indian politics*

*when people did not even hear the name of Gandhi. They turned into non-entities and Gandhi became the sole dictator, because of an alliance between the British establishment and the Indian mill-owners.*

**Anti-Muslim riots begin:**The spirit of frustration caused by the suspension of the mass movement adversely affected the relations between the Hindus and the Muslims. There was no programme to bring them together. And the traditional force of divide-and-rule and its Indian allies were at work. A series of communal riots broke out in 1923 and, with occasional intervals, continued to be almost a regular feature of Indian political life.

Was Gandhi's satyagraha movement intended to achieve India's independence, or was it a cunning device to protect the British Empire? *Whenever there is a genuine movement organised by the oppressed, and the oppressors find that the frontal attack of repressive measures may not be effective, they set up some of their agents as freedom fighters and those agents, with secret help from their masters, would take over the genuine movement, direct it into the wrong channels, and kill it. Had Gandhi not started satyagraha, the armed struggle would have erupted from one end of India to the other like a thousand volcanoes.*

The early months of 1923 had witnessed a revival of violence in Bengal. On Aug. 23 1923, Birley, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, addressed a long letter to the Government of India giving a detailed account of how alarming was the situation created by the activities of the revolutionaries and asking for all the powers of the Defence of India Act and the notorious Rowlatt Act. Subhas Bose figured in the memorandum. The Government of India, though sympathetic, declined for various political reasons.

On Jan. 12 1924, Gopi Nath Shaha, a young revolutionary, shot a man he was convinced was Charles Tegart, the notorious police commissioner of Calcutta. He was mistaken; it turned out to be Ernest Day, an innocent British businessman. Shaha was promptly arrested, tried and sentenced to death. The Bengal Provincial Congress Conference in May 1924, on the advice of Subhas Bose, passed the following resolution:

While adhering to the policy of non-violence this Conference pays its respectful homage to the patriotism of Gopi Nath Shaha who suffered capital punishment in connection with Mr. Day's murder.

*(The resolution and its consequences are in file no.308/1924 Home Poll. NAI cited "Lost Hero" by Mihir Bose, Quartet Books, London, 1982 pp.45-46, and also in India Office Library and Records under different file nos. And also in other books).*

*(Connection of Revolutionaries with the Swarajya party — File No.399/11/1924 Home Poll. NAI cited "The Lost Hero" pp.45, 46. Also in India Office Library files).*

Gandhi was furious. He wrote that if Gopi Nath Shah's patriotism was to be mentioned at all, it should be qualified by the phrase 'misleading'. In spite of Subhas Bose's opposition, the epithet 'misleading' was inserted.

**The rise of Subhas Chandra Bose:** A further letter from Bengal to the Indian Government declared: "It has been shown that Subhas Bose is a leader of the Jugantar party, and since he is the chief lieutenant of Mr. C.R. Das, it is impossible to believe that Mr. Das is not fully aware of his activities".

Bengal spent much of 1924 in detailed correspondence with Delhi, pleading for special powers. Lord Lytton travelled to Simla to plead personally for them, arguing that unless something was done, the future would be grim and might even require the imposition of martial law. On Aug. 23, Bengal applied by cipher telegram for warrants for the arrest of Subhas Bose and 21 other leaders, backing up the request with all sorts of miscellaneous intelligence information. On Saturday Oct. 25, Subhas Bose was arrested and taken to Alipore Central Jail. Then he was hurriedly shipped to Mandalay in Burma where he lived in the same jail where Tilak, the militant nationalist, had lived 20 years earlier. In February 1926, Subhas Bose led his fellow prisoners at Mandalay in a hunger strike. However, Maulana Shaukat Ali, one of the Ali brothers, arrived at Mandalay and persuaded Subhas Bose to give up the hunger strike. But it led to the deterioration of his health. This opened up a fascinating debate among the Raj officials on how to deal with him. He was too dangerous to be freed, but he could be more dangerous if he died in a British jail. Subhas Bose was released on May 16 1927.

### **Gandhi's Second Acrobatics**

After Gandhi's betrayal of Chauri Chaura in 1922, Congress was in a state of gradual decline. Gandhi withdrew from politics and devoted himself to his so-called constructive activities.

The Swarajya Party was in total disarray after the death of C.R. Das in 1925. The reform of 1919 required that a review of the Indian political scene be made every ten years. On Nov. 27 a seven-man team, composed entirely of whites, was announced. It suddenly brought India politically back to life. In February 1928 the team, headed by Sir John Simon, arrived in India and was greeted with black flags everywhere. At Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai roused

public resentment. The public expected a positive lead from the Congress leaders but no such directions came from the Congress headquarters. Only in Bengal the Provincial Committee led by Subhas Bose launched an intensive campaign.

"There is absolutely no doubt that if the Congress Working Committee had taken their courage in both hands, they could have anticipated the movement of 1930 by two years. (*Indian Struggle 1920-1942*. Edited by Sisir K. Bose. Netaji Research Bureau. Netaji Bhawan, Calcutta, 1981, p.163).

When Subhas Bose visited Gandhi at Sabarmati, he reported to Gandhi the public enthusiasm which he had met with in many provinces and begged him to come out of his retirement and give a lead to the country. At that time Gandhi's reply was that he did not see any light, though before his very eyes the peasantry of Bardoli were demonstrating with a no-tax campaign that they were ready for a struggle. During the whole of 1928 and 1929, there was so much unrest in the labour world that if a political campaign had been started at that time, it would have been well-timed. In 1930, when the movement was launched by Gandhi, the labour unrest had subsided to a large extent and the situation in some provinces was much quieter than before.

At the Calcutta Congress in December 1928, Gandhi moved a resolution in the Subject Committee to adopt the Nehru Report with a warning to the British that if they did not respond by Dec. 31 1930, Congress would re-start non-cooperation and refuse to pay taxes. Previously, during the Madras session held in 1927, the Congress had declared complete national independence as its goal, whereas the Nehru Report agreed to accept Dominion status. Subhas Bose argued strongly against Gandhi and his back-sliding and two days later Gandhi brought the deadline forward by a year. Subhas Bose was convinced that harping on Dominion status would demoralise the younger generation. Just before the Lahore Congress, Gandhi met Irwin. The Viceroy failed to give any assurance about Dominion status. When the Congress met in Lahore in December 1929, Gandhi himself moved the resolution calling for complete independence. Still Subhas Bose severely criticised the fact that Gandhi had proposed no plan to back up a civil disobedience movement by setting up a parallel government. In his amendment speech, Subhas Bose argued that the Congress aim should be a parallel government, and that it should start immediate and intensive mobilisation of youth, workers, peasants, etc. Swaraj must mean complete severance of the British connection, and the harnessing of all the have-nots of India in a final struggle against



alien rule. Subhas Bose lost the amendment.

**Subhas Bose ridicules Gandhi:** At this time, in 1929, two incidents took place at Lahore and Delhi. At Lahore, an English Inspector of Police, Saunders, was assassinated. This was the inspector who led an attack on Lala Lajpat Rai in 1929 in connection with the anti-Simon demonstration which resulted in his death. It is widely believed that Saunders' assassination was an act of reprisal. In April 1929 when the Assembly was sitting in Delhi, two young men, Sardar Bhagat Singh and Bakutiswar Dutt, were arrested for throwing a bomb. After these two incidents the British Raj threw their net very wide, rounded up young men from all over the country, and started the all-India conspiracy case at Lahore in mid-1929. These young men were charged with the murder of Saunders and conspiracy to overthrow the British rule. The prisoners under trial demanded that they should be accorded better treatment than ordinary criminals on the ground that they were political prisoners and undertrials, who should be deemed to be innocent until they were actually convicted. When all constitutional methods failed, they resorted to hunger strike. Among the prisoners was Jatin Das, a young man from Calcutta who, at the time of the Calcutta Congress in 1928, took a leading part in organising and training volunteers. People throughout the country were greatly agitated over the hunger strike. Besides intensive press agitation, meetings and demonstrations were held all over the country demanding humane treatment for political prisoners. Incidentally it was also a demand of the Congress that political prisoners should be treated differently from ordinary criminals. As the days rolled by, other hunger strikers gave in, but not Jatin Das. He died on the 61st day of his fast, Sept. 13 1929. As his dead body was moved from Lahore to Calcutta for cremation, people assembled in tens of thousands at every station to pay their homage.

What was the reaction of Gandhi? Subhas Bose remarked in his book, *The Indian Struggle* -1920-42 p. 180:

The pages of *Young India*, ordinarily filled with observations on political events and also on topics like health and diet, etc., had nothing to say about this incident. A follower of Mahatma, who was a close friend of the deceased, wrote to him enquiring as to why he had said nothing about the event. Mahatma replied to the effect that, if he had done so, he would have been forced to write something unfavourable.

How could the principle of non-violence be offended when people demand humane treatment for prisoners? It is universally recognised to be part of civilised behaviour.

The British Raj had no intention of responding to Gandhi's call at the Calcutta Conference for acceptance of the Nehru Report. In

January 1929, the Indian Government asked the Bengal Government to report on Subhas Bose and provide grounds for his prosecution. The Bengal Government itself soon concluded:

The appeal of Subhas Babu and his other revolutionary associates was not made in vain. And they are getting active support from the Youth Associations in carrying out all the items of their programme — both open and secret. The All-Bengal Youth Association had introduced a form of vow for the boycott of foreign goods, particularly clothes, which its members must take and induce others to subscribe, while repeated exciting and inflammatory speeches and constant secret propaganda have so changed the outlook of the minds of the youth of Bengal that they are no longer afraid to give vent to seditious and bloodthirsty feelings and to declare openly their demand for complete independence.

*("Indian Struggle 1920-1942" p. 180. File no. 179/1922. Home Poll. NAI cited "Lost Hero" by Mihir Bose, p.69).*

The Young Comrades' League was founded in Calcutta towards the end of 1928. It took up seriously the work of organising the peasants. In this work the Kishorganj branch in Bengal came into prominence for organising and leading the revolt of peasants against the oppression of the landlords and moneylenders. A public meeting was organised in Kishorganj town in June 1929. Hindu and Muslim landlords as well as the local Congress and Hindu Mahasabha combined to combat the attempts of the League to organise the movement. The counter attack came almost instantaneously. The public meeting was broken up by hired hooligans and workers were assaulted. Police repression also started simultaneously. Warrants of arrest were issued against all prominent workers. In spite of all this, a strong volunteer force consisting of peasants was organised. The house of a notorious landlord and moneylender was raided. This acted as a signal for the Government to launch brutal repression on the peasants. A strong force of armed constabulary from Mymensingh, Dacca and Comilla was despatched. A virtual reign of terror was let loose on the peasants before the movement could be crushed. Among the peasants who were arrested, some died inside the jail due to inhuman torture. Some were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment from one year to transportation for life. Four were hanged.

**Marwari Press:** At this time newspapers in India were owned either by the English or Marwaris. The Marwari-owned ones called themselves 'nationalist' papers. All the newspapers in Calcutta, including those so-called 'nationalist' ones, branded this as a communal disturbance. The overwhelming majority of the oppressed peasants belonged to the Muslim community, while the overwhelming majority of the landlords and money-lenders were

Hindus. The movement was directed equally against the oppressors, irrespective of community. Though the movement, and the raid itself, was led by Hindus, yet advantage was taken on the pretext that the first house of a landlord-cum-moneylender to be raided belonged to a Hindu. Even the Governor-General of India had to admit later that the Kishorganj incident was not communal disturbance but agrarian unrest. The same thing happened in the Moplah rebellion where oppressive landlords were Hindus and the peasants were Muslims.

The so-called nationalist newspapers turned these events into opportunities to preach communalism, and actually many communal disturbances followed. *The same hands of the Marwaris were feeding Gandhi very well. Things have not changed much. All the English-owned newspapers have passed into the ownership of Marwaris. One noted Indian journalist very recently described them as the Indian national "toilet papers".*

At the Lahore Congress in 1929, when the time came for electing the Working Committee for the coming year, the Fuhrer came forward with a list of 15 names, from which the names of Srinivas Iyenger, Subhas Bose and other left-wingers had been deliberately omitted. There was a strong feeling in the All-India Congress Committee that at least the names of Srinivas Iyenger and Subhas Bose should be retained, but Gandhi would not listen. He said openly that he wanted his list to be passed in its entirety. Once again it became a question of the same blackmail: if Gandhi were to be repudiated, the flow of Marwari funds would cease and the Congress would die. Subhas Bose wrote (*"Indian Struggle 1920-1942"* p.224):

After Lahore Congress, Mr. Srinivas Iyenger had retired from public activity. Along with other left-wing leaders, he had been treated shabbily by the President of the Lahore Congress (Jawaharlal Nehru) and by the Mahatma, who was instrumental in excluding him from the Working Committee, though he was the most outstanding leader from Madras and was an ex-President of the Congress. This insult he had taken to heart so much that he had vowed he would have nothing to do with the Congress so long as Mahatma Gandhi remained the leader.

Thus India lost the services of a brilliant person, and this was only one instance among many of Gandhi's political extermination of opposition.

Gandhi realised that the independence resolution of the Congress at Lahore had been received with unprecedented enthusiasm all over the country, but had alarmed his wealthy supporters, the capitalists. Some sort of 'explaining away' was therefore necessary, particularly in view of the fact that the word 'independence' implied

severance of the British connection. On Jan. 30, he issued a statement in his paper, *Young India*, saying that he would be content with the 'substance of independence'.

**Gandhi pleases capitalists:** On April 12 1930, Gandhi launched the civil disobedience movement. The Government adopted stern measures of repression. According to official figures, there were 29 cases of firing resulting in 103 killed and 420 injured, and 60,000 people were imprisoned in less than a year. Indiscriminate and merciless beating of men and women formed a feature of the repressive campaign undertaken by the Government. By the summer, Irwin was forced to concede that he was in difficulties. Then came the usual Gandhi trick. While Subhas Bose was in jail, on March 5 1931 Gandhi signed an agreement which came to be known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, or the Delhi Pact. He signed it under pressure from his rich backers, who surrounded him and a few politicians who were dying for a settlement. Gandhi promised to call off the civil disobedience movement and join the Round Table Conference in London, while Irwin agreed to release all political prisoners arrested in connection with the movement, to withdraw emergency ordinances, to allow people who lived within a certain distance of the sea to make salt, and to permit peaceful propaganda in favour of prohibition and against foreign clothes. But there was no mention of complete independence, the great issue over which they had fought. Subhas Bose openly criticised the pact, and (*"Indian Struggle 1920-1942" p.222*): wrote :

The pact – called the Delhi Pact or the Gandhi-Irwin pact – was published the next morning in all the papers. It was a lengthy document and from the Congress point of view the drafting was faulty because it did not give the impression that the Congress had scored a victory. When the publication of the pact created an uproar in the country, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came out with a statement that he did not approve of some of the terms of the pact; nevertheless, as an obedient soldier, he had to submit to his leader. The country, of course, had regarded him as something more than an obedient soldier. The perusal of the terms of the pact had a dampening effect on all 'Congressite' leaders. I was then in the Alipore central jail in Calcutta. For days, the papers had published substantially correct forecasts of the terms of the coming pact. Even the blind followers of the Mahatma, when they read the forecasts, invariably remarked that it was unthinkable that their leader – meaning the Mahatma – would agree to those terms. Nevertheless, what was unthinkable came to be actual.

He added:

Before my release from prison on 8th March, I ascertained that the political prisoners, as a rule, were hostile to the pact. I naturally shared their feelings. But after coming out, I realised that the pact was a settled fact, and there was no possibility of preventing its ratification at the Karachi Congress. The only question that we had to decide was whether we should put up insignificant opposition at Karachi, or whether we should refrain from dividing

the House while disapproving of the pact.

In March, he visited Gandhi in Bombay and was further depressed to find that the inquiry into police atrocities, which was a central plank of the Congress demands, had been voluntarily thrown away by Gandhi. When Gandhi left Bombay for Delhi, Subhas Bose accompanied him in the same train. As they arrived in Delhi, they learned that the Government had decided to execute Sardar Bhagat Singh and two of his comrades in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. Subhas Bose suggested that Gandhi should intervene, as this was against the spirit of the pact. But Gandhi did not like to identify himself with the revolutionary prisoners by going as far as this. On March 23, Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades were executed. This caused great nervousness among the supporters of the pact, as they apprehended an open split in the Congress at Karachi when it met on March 26. The Congress Session which followed the signing of the pact reaffirmed Gandhi's power (or in other words, Marwari power) and the left just disappeared. The Viceroy gleefully reported: "Later, the opposition of Subhas collapsed."

A large number of young men had arrived in Karachi from the Punjab and elsewhere. As Gandhi approached Karachi station, the members of the Naujawan Sabha shouted, "Gandhi, go back! Down with Gandhism! Gandhi's truce has sent Bhagat Singh to the gallows!" And they shouted, "Long live Bhagat Singh!" A session of the All-India Naujawan Bharat Sabha was held simultaneously with the Congress in Karachi, over which Subhas Bose was invited to preside. The youths from the Punjab and Sind wanted to break away from the Indian National Congress, but Subhas Bose persuaded them not to break away but to capture the official Congress machinery. He vehemently criticised the pact, which met with the general approval of the youths.

The revolutionary movement always closely paralleled the Gandhian one, and in early 1930 it underwent a remarkable revival. As Gandhi reached Dandi to make salt from the seawater, it was the signal to start the civil disobedience movement, the revolutionaries nearly succeeded in liberating one of British India's important port towns, Chittagong. There, on the night of April 18 1930, 62 young men and women seized the armouries belonging to the police and auxiliary forces, and set up a provisional revolutionary government. Although, due to lack of proper planning and experienced leadership, the British swiftly recaptured the city, this marked the start of a remarkable wave of revolutionary violence. No police officer, whether Indian or British, was immune from attack. Bombs exploded in Government offices. On Dec. 8 1930, three men coolly entered the Bengal Secretariat and shot and killed the Inspector-General of

Police. One judge trying the revolutionaries, warned that after giving judgement he would "leave the country without leave". A wave of unbelievable hysteria swept the British community in Bengal. Anglican clergymen slept with revolvers under their pillows. At the same time a similar grave situation arose on the North-West Frontier. The Red Shirt movement led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan reached a very critical state. There was widespread shooting of unarmed crowds. The Government called for the reinforcement of the existing army. But two platoons of a battalion of the Gharwal Rifles refused to enter Peshawar, on the grounds that it was not part of their duty to shoot "unarmed brethren". It seemed that the very foundations of British rule were rocking.

The restricted scope of the amnesty promised under the pact caused a great deal of disappointment among the revolutionaries and trade unionists, and alienated them from Gandhi further; and as he became the spokesman of the Satyagrahis, the revolutionaries in prison wrote an open letter to Lord Irwin intimating that if he desired a real settlement of the Indian question, the Government should come to a separate understanding with the Revolutionary party. The Government took note of the representation, and a few months later the Governor of Bengal made an unsuccessful attempt to come to an understanding with the revolutionaries.

## C.R. DAS EFFORT FOR HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY

6

India came in contact with Islam more than a thousand years ago. A major part of British India was under Muslim rule for nearly 700 years. For centuries, Hindus and Muslims lived with mutual goodwill and tolerance. It is significant that in the uprising of 1857, Hindu and Muslim leaders joined together to install the deposed Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, and Hindus and Muslims fought together under his banner to overthrow the alien rule. The North-West Frontier had always been hostile to the British who, failing to subjugate them, bought their cooperation by paying annually handsome subsidies to the tribal leaders. The area enjoyed almost independent status.

Obaidullah, a leading figure of the Wahabis, set up his headquarters in the region with the avowed purpose of liberating India, and had formed a provisional government of India in Kabul with Raja Mahendra Pratap of Mathura as its President, and Barkatullah, a leader of the Ghadar party, as the Prime Minister. Those behind this move included a large section of Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab, including Satya Pal, Master Mota Singh, Lala Hardayal and Sardar Ajit Singh. The fact that Hindu and Sikh leaders joined hands with the Wahabis, with all the attendant risks, showed that communal relations in the political sphere were nothing abnormal. They were indeed unexceptional, in sharp contrast to what India witnessed following Gandhi's emergence as a leader.

The Hindu-Muslim question in India was more of an economic nature than a religious one. The British overthrew the Muslim rule and naturally wanted to destroy the Muslim power in India. The grinding of the Muslims was hardest in Bengal. Due to the discriminatory treatment which the British meted out to the Muslims, they were ousted from all fields of gainful activities. The Muslims naturally resented it.

C.R. Das was a genuine patriot. He wanted to right this wrong. Maulana Azad, in his *India Wins Freedom*, wrote (pp. 20-21. *Orient Longmans, Bombay 1959*):

I have said that the Swaraj party won a large following in the central as well as provincial legislatures; perhaps its most remarkable achievement was its success in capturing seats reserved for Muslims. This was largely due to the political realism of Mr. Das to which I have referred above. The electorates were communal, and Muslim voters returned Muslim legislators.

The Muslim League and other communal parties were therefore able to play upon the fear of the Muslims and generally returned candidates with communal leanings. Mr. Das was able to overcome the apprehension of the Muslims of Bengal and was acclaimed as their leader. The way he solved the communal problems of Bengal is memorable and should serve as an example even today.

In Bengal, Muslims were the majority community, but for various reasons they were educationally and politically backward. Even though they numbered over 50 per cent of the population, they held hardly 30 per cent of posts under the Government. Mr C.R. Das was a great realist and immediately saw that the problem was an economic one. He realised that until the Muslims were given the necessary assurance for their economic future, they could not be expected to join the Congress whole-heartedly. He therefore made a declaration which impressed not only Bengal but the whole of India. He announced that when Congress secured the reins of power in Bengal, it would reserve 60 per cent of all new appointments for the Muslims till such time as they achieved proper representation according to population. He went even further in respect of Calcutta Corporation and offered to reserve 80 per cent of the new appointments on similar terms. He pointed out that so long as the Muslims were not properly represented in public life and in the services, there could be no true democracy in Bengal. Once the inequalities had been rectified, Muslims would be able to compete on equal terms with other communities and there would be no need for any special reservation.

This bold announcement shook the Bengal Congress to its very foundation. Many of the Congress leaders violently opposed it and started a campaign against Mr. Das. He was accused of opportunism and even partisanship for the Muslims, but he stood solid as a rock. He toured the whole province and explained his point of view. His attitude made a great impression on Muslims in Bengal and outside. I am convinced that if he had not died a premature death, he would have created a new atmosphere in the country. It is a matter for regret that after he died, some of his followers assailed his position and his declaration was repudiated. The result was that the Muslims of Bengal moved away from the Congress and the first seeds of partition were sown.

The above declaration was known as the Bengal Pact. Maulana Azad was the President of the Congress during the whole Second World War. Lifelong he served the Congress and all along he was a leading personality in Indian politics. But what he did not say was that it was not some of the followers of C.R. Das, but Gandhi himself who torpedoed the pact as he did in a similar fashion the Lucknow Pact which brought Hindus and Muslims so close together.

**Birla Conspiracy:** Under Gandhi's guidance, the annual session of the Congress in 1923 rejected the idea. According to Subhas Bose, the Congress and the country as a whole must regret the short shrift given to Das's proposals. There is no doubt at all that if they had been accepted in the spirit in which they were conceived, similar settlements could have been arrived at in other provinces and the communal question, which was to result in the partition of



British India, might have been satisfactorily settled. On May 29 1924, in a long article in *Young India*, Gandhi strongly objected to the pact on the grounds that for the administration to be efficient, it must be in the hands of the fittest. Maulana Azad was quite right to say that had C.R. Das not died a premature death, he would have created a new atmosphere in the country. What he did not say was that had Gandhi not hounded his political heir-apparent, Subhas Bose, and frustrated all his efforts to organise a genuine freedom movement, the situation would have been different. *In relation to the Muslims, and the Untouchables as well, Gandhi's attitude was to give them a lot of love but never to share political power or economic prosperity with them.*

The Hindu communalists inside the Congress continued their virulent propaganda even after the death of C.R. Das. Pandit Motilal Nehru was with C.R. Das in the Swaraj party. His letter to his son, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, commenting on the elections of 1926, was very revealing:

It was simply beyond me to meet the kind of propaganda started against me under the auspices of the Malaviya-Lala Gang. Publicly I was denounced as anti-Hindu and pro-Mohammedan but privately almost every individual voter was told that I was a befeater – in league with the Mohammedans to legalise cow slaughter in public places at all times\*.

(\**Bundle of old Letters*" Asia Publishing House, 1958, Bombay. pp.49-50).

He went on :

The Malaviya-Lala Gang, aided by Birla's money, are making a frantic effort to capture the Congress. They will probably succeed as no counter effort is possible from our side.

The expression 'Birla's money' is very significant. It was Birla's money which enabled the Hindu communalists to tear to pieces the communal understanding and harmony many Hindu and Muslim leaders endeavoured to build up over a period of many years. *It was a colossal amount of Birla's money which kept Gandhi living in poverty to preach the Gospel of Hindu-Muslim unity, and at the same time to torpedo all the efforts made in that direction.* It was Birla's money which stimulated the hands to go up in favour of resolutions supporting Gandhi against Subhas Bose. Birla's money played many tricks. Here is a very pertinent question: was or was not Gandhi a party to the Birla conspiracy?

### **The Round Table Conference**

Gandhi appointed himself as the sole representative of the Congress to attend the Round Table Conference, of course selected by the Congress Working Committee. Shortly before his departure for

London, Subhas Bose warned Gandhi that every effort would be made at the Conference to drag him into minor issues with a view to setting the Indians to fight amongst themselves so that they would not be able to unite against the Government. That is exactly what happened. Gandhi kept himself busy with all sorts of extra activities and the Indian members of the Round Table Conference complained that it was difficult to get hold of Gandhi when they wanted him. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Leader of the Untouchables of India at the Round Table Conference, wrote:

The Congress point of view at the Round Table Conference was that the Congress was the only party in India and that nobody else counted, and that the British should settle with the Congress. This was the burden of Gandhi's song at the Round Table Conference. He was so busy in establishing his own claim to recognition by the British as the dictator of India that he forgot altogether that the important question was not, with whom the settlement should be made, but what were to be the terms of the settlement. (*Gandhi and Gandhism by Dr. Ambedkar*).

Before his departure for London, Gandhi submitted a list of the violations of the pact. The Viceroy turned down his request to appoint an arbitrator to look into the matter. As anticipated, nothing came out of the Round Table Conference. Gandhi returned to India on Dec. 28 and found that more repressive measures had been adopted. His request for an interview with the Viceroy was refused.

On Jan. 1 1932, the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution for the renewal of civil disobedience and the boycott of British goods. On Jan. 2, Subhas Bose was arrested and on Jan. 4, Gandhi and Patel, and on the same day the Government of India issued instructions to the local authorities throughout India to strike at the Congress at once. Sweeping arrests of Congress leaders were made before they could launch the Civil Disobedience campaign. Congress was declared an illegal organisation and its office sealed and funds seized. The "national" press was gagged. The Government issued a number of repressive ordinances. They were openly defied and the Government took severe measures against the resistance movement. According to Congress estimates, over 120,000 persons had been arrested by the end of March 1933, and a dismal record of "wholesale violence, physical outrages, shooting and beating up, punitive expeditions, collective fines on villages and seizure of lands and property of villagers" is found in the India League Delegation Report issued in 1933.

### **The Poona Pact**

It was at this juncture that Ramsay MacDonald announced on Aug. 17 the establishment of a separate electorate for the Untouchables,

which formed part of the "Communal Award". The following day Gandhi wrote to the British Premier, informing him that he would commence a fast unto death at noon on Sept. 20, and as announced, he commenced the fast. On the fifth day of his fast, a solution was found through an agreement known as the "Poona Pact", which virtually did away with separate electorates for the Untouchables. Assessing its effect, Subhas Bose remarked:

The fast had another unfortunate effect which proved to be more serious. It side-tracked the political movement at a time when all possible attention should have been devoted to it. (*The Indian Struggle 1920-1942. p. 276*).

According to an official :

It was in conditions of this kind, when the civil disobedience movement was failing and Mr. Gandhi's stock was low, that he decided on September 13th to 'fast unto death' in Yaravda jail unless the method of representation provided for the depressed classes was altered.

(*"Subhas Chandra Bose" by Nanda Mukherji p.37. Jayasru Prakashan, Calcutta 1981*).

But there is no doubt that was the turning point, and before the year was out, the movement fizzled out.

Subhas Bose was ill in prison and was allowed to go to Europe for treatment. While he was in Vienna, Gandhi started another three weeks' fast on May 8 in prison, as his followers outside the prison had not made sufficient progress with the "Untouchability campaign". The Government felt so confident that they released Gandhi the same day, and the next day he suspended the Civil Disobedience movement.

While responsible Congressmen in India were unwilling or afraid to speak out against Gandhi after his surrender in May 1933, the following manifesto was issued by Subhas Bose and Vithalbhai Patel, who was also undergoing treatment in Vienna, condemning Gandhi's decision:

The events of the last thirteen years have demonstrated that political warfare based on the principle of maximum suffering for ourselves and minimum suffering for our opponents cannot possibly lead to success. It is futile to expect that we can ever bring about a change of heart in our rulers merely through our own suffering and by trying to love them. And the latest action of Mahatma Gandhi in suspending the civil disobedience movement is a confession of failure as far as the present method of the Congress is concerned. We are clearly of the opinion that as a political leader Mahatma Gandhi has failed. The time has therefore come for a radical reorganisation of the Congress on a new principle and with a new method. For bringing about this reorganisation a change of leadership is necessary, for it would be unfair to Mahatma Gandhi to expect him to evolve or work a programme and method not consistent with his life-long principles. If the Congress as a whole can undergo this transformation, it would be the best course. Failing that a new party will have to be formed within the Congress, composed of

all radical elements. Non-Cooperation will have to be changed into a more militant one and the fight for freedom to be waged on all fronts.

Due to the upsurge of emotion generated by Gandhi's fast, the manifesto did not produce the effect which it would otherwise have done.

**Gandhi wanted one-party Dictatorship:** The Civil Disobedience Campaign dragged on till May 1934, when it was virtually abandoned by the Congress. After making a mess of everything, Gandhi once again withdrew from active politics and devoted himself to other activities. In 1934, he announced his decision to resign from the Congress. The reason he advanced was that the educated and intelligent section of the Congress had no faith in his programme, though they did not say so openly.

Once more the Congress decided, as in 1922, to work the reforms introduced by the Act of 1935. And when the first elections to provincial legislatures were held at the beginning of 1937, Congress swept the polls so far as the general or predominantly Hindu seats were concerned, and secured majorities in seven out of the eleven provinces. In March 1937, Gandhi also returned to active politics and allowed the formation of seven Congress Ministries. Had Subhas Bose been free in India in 1933-35, he could have formed his new party at Gandhi's expense. But the British Administration could see the danger in it. When he was released in 1937 he found Gandhi had regained his lost ground. Another development took place which had serious and far-reaching consequences. The Muslims desired to form a coalition Ministry with the Congress in each province but the Congress, or to be more precise, Gandhi, refused to admit into the Ministry anyone who did not subscribe to its creed. This decision widened the cleavage between the Congress and the Muslim League.

Traditionally land belonged to the tillers of the soil. It goes as far back as the Code of Manu, composed sometime around 300 BC, which specifically stated that land belonged to those who cleared the forests and brought it under cultivation. Later works suggested that the ruler was entitled to a share in the produce of the land as a "protector of the soil". During the Muslim period, this sharing of the produce remained but under a slightly different conception. Land belonged neither to any individual nor to the ruler. There were no intermediary absentee landlords as only the peasants could take a lease to cultivate and share the produce with the rulers for the services they rendered. There was no fixed rent. By a well established and long time tested method, which worked perfectly well, the peasants used to give a portion of their produce to the

ruler, so the fate of the ruler and the ruled were directly linked. Every governor tried his best to enable the peasants to produce more so that he could have more for his own administration as well as for the centre. If the peasants could not produce, the Governor could get nothing and consequently he would go to the wall.

**How Zamindars were created:** The Muslim ruling class used to employ Hindus in rural areas to collect taxes from the peasants. They were called Zamindars. Lord Cornwallis changed the whole structure of society by Bengal Regulation 1 of 1793, and it was commonly known as permanent settlement; the title of landholders was formally conferred on the Zamindars, the men who had collected revenue before the days of British rule. This had a dual purpose: one was to create a class of parasites who would look to the British Raj for protection, and the other was to break the backbone of the Muslims. These Zamindars became the landlords or rural Kulaks. Side by side with them were the money lenders. The lives of the peasants were not their own.

After the election of 1936, Fazlul Huq formed the Ministry in Bengal. It was a coalition of the Krishak Praja party (Krishak = peasant, praja = tenant) and the Muslim League. He was the first person to raise the slogan, 'Dhal Bhat for everybody' (Dhal - lentils, Bhat - rice). In other words, everybody must get the basic necessities of life and nobody should go hungry. There was no scarcity of pious slogans in India. He was the only person in India at that time and in his position to make an honest effort to translate that slogan into action. His Ministry passed the Bengal Tenancy Act which virtually transferred the ownership of land to the peasants; though the Zamindars were still responsible for collecting rent, they could no longer do whatever they liked. It would not appear sufficient now, but at that time and in the prevailing circumstances it was a great step forward. *Fazlul Huq also passed the Mahajani Act (Money-lenders Act) and released the peasantry from millions and millions of rupees of rural indebtedness. He reserved jobs for both the Muslims and the Untouchables. He himself retained the portfolio of Education, introduced free primary education and brought literacy within the reach of the poor people, particularly the Muslims and the Untouchables. He also arranged Government grants for poor Muslim and Untouchable students for higher education. It was curious that the Untouchables benefited greatly from the Huq Ministry alone. Most of the provinces at that time had Congress ministries, but none of them moved an inch in the direction Huq was taking.*

Subhas Bose wanted to win over Fazlul Huq, break up the coalition, and bring the Krishak Praja party into alliance with the Congress

on the basis of a more radical common programme. But Gandhi rejected it on the grounds that, for the purity of the administration, Congress should not align itself with any other party. But the real reason was that Fazlul Huq, by his radical programme and actions, aroused the deep hostility of the rural Kulaks and the money lenders, who were the backbone of the Congress. Gandhi did not want to alienate them. Subhas Bose was very upset. *Had not Gandhi done the mischief, Bengal could have been the model for Hindu-Muslim unity.* It would also have brought an upsurge of the common people and influenced the whole of India. After that Fazlul Huq joined the Muslim League, which turned into a mass movement, and it was he who moved the Pakistan resolution at Lahore in 1940.

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## GANDHI – NO.1 ENEMY OF THE UNTOUCHABLES

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7

**W**hen the Aryan nomads, two millennia before Christ, poured down into the plains of India, they were barbarian mountain people, physically strong. They found the plains occupied by Adi-Dravidians and Dravidians, a dark-skinned people. These indigenous people were the founders of the Indus Valley Civilisation, one of the oldest and most magnificent on earth. Their descendants are the oppressed "low caste " Untouchables of today's India.

The Aryans quickly subjugated the natives, learnt many things from them, and built up another civilisation known as the Ganges Valley or Hindu Civilisation. To perpetuate the enslavement of the original inhabitants of India, these ancient Hindu intruders created the diabolical caste system, which excluded the dark-skinned Dravidians from their society and made them serfs. The Sanskrit word for caste is 'varna', which means 'colour'. Caste originally was a colour-bar, and in India, as later in America, served at first to separate free men from slaves. But caste became much more than that. Gradually over the centuries it became the foundation of a religiously ordained social fabric for the Hindu people. The four original divisions had multiplied like cancer cells into almost 5,000 sub-castes, 1,836 for the Brahmins alone. Every occupation had its caste, splitting society into a myriad of closed guilds in which a man was condemned by his birth to live, work, marry and die.

*The myth-making Mahatma industry in India and abroad projected Gandhi as the champion of the Untouchables, whereas Dr. Ambedkar, the Saviour of the Untouchables, branded him as their "Enemy No.1". It is not possible in this small volume to go into the details of Gandhi's treachery to those whose friend he pretended to be. Here we can only give a short glimpse of it. Those who are interested to know the details should read Dr. Ambedkar's works, particularly *Gandhi and Gandhism*.*

**In defence of caste system:** Gandhi wanted the caste system to perpetuate, but Untouchability abolished. Untouchability is only a by-product of the caste system. It makes no sense that anybody can believe in both, the perpetuation of the caste system and the emancipation of the Untouchables, or for that matter, the perpetuation of Apartheid and the emancipation of the Black people of South Africa.

Some of the observations Gandhi made on the caste system were simply primitive (*"Gandhi"* by Shiru, p. 117):

*Some argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion, it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.*

The seeds of Swaraj are to be found in the caste system. Different castes are like different sections of a military division. Each division is working for the good of the whole. (*"Gandhi and Gandhism"* by Dr. Ambedkar, p. 128).

A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess a unique power of organisation.

To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation, which is the soul of the caste system. The hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him Brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if every day a Brahmin is to be changed into a Sudra and a Sudra is to be changed into a Brahmin. (*Ibid* p. 129).

I believe that inter-dining or inter-marriage are not necessary for promoting national unity. That dining together creates friendship is contrary to experience. If this was true, there would have been no war in Europe. Taking food is as dirty an act as answering the call of nature. The only difference is that, after answering the call of nature we get peace, while after eating food we get discomfort. Just as we perform the act of answering the call of nature in seclusion, so also the act of taking food must also be done in seclusion. (*Ibid* p.129).

This is as stupid as it is revolting!

The caste system cannot be said to be bad because it does not allow inter-dining or inter-marriage between different castes. (*Ibid*. 129).

Gandhi's views on the caste system were revolting, but his activities in relation to Untouchables were stinking.

In 1921, Gandhi collected Rs.13,500,000 for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Gandhi insisted that there was no possibility of winning Swaraj unless Untouchability was removed. But out of this huge amount, a paltry Rs. 43,000 was given to the cause of the Untouchables. When his attention was drawn to this, he simply said that he was busy in planning a campaign to win Swaraj, and that he had no time to spare for the cause of the Untouchables. Could it be that he had no time even to ask how much money had been allocated to the cause supposed to be so dear to his heart? It was not indifference, but something else.

In 1922, the Congress Working Committee drew up the Bardoli Programme of Constructive Work, upliftment of the Untouchables being an important item in it. A committee was appointed to work out the details. The committee never functioned and was dissolved,



and the upliftment of the Untouchables as an item in the Constructive Programme was dropped. Only Rs.500 were allotted to the Committee for working expenses. Gandhi remained silent while others were pressing the Congress Working Committee to assign sufficient funds.

In 1924, Gandhi introduced, among other items, a resolution that the Congress franchise, instead of being 4 annas per annum, should be a tender of 2,000 yards of hand-spun and self-spun yarn, with a penalty clause attached to it by which any default in this matter would automatically disqualify a person from being a member of the Congress. He could have included one item, that if a Hindu wished to enroll himself as a member of the Congress, he should prove that he did not observe Untouchability.

In 1929, the Untouchables in the Bombay presidency opened a campaign of satyagraha against the Hindus in order to establish their civic rights in the matter of temple entry and taking water from public wells. They hoped to get the blessings of Gandhi in as much as satyagraha was Gandhi's own weapon to get wrong redressed. When appealed to for support, Gandhi surprised the Untouchables by issuing a statement condemning their campaign of satyagraha against the Hindus. The argument urged by Gandhi was very ingenious: he stated that satyagraha was to be used only against foreigners; it must not be used against one's own kindred or countrymen, and as the Hindus were the kindred and countrymen of the Untouchables, by the rules of satyagraha the latter were debarred from using this weapon against the former.

In 1935, the Untouchables of a village called Kavitha in the Ahmedabad district demanded from the Hindus that their children should be admitted to the common school of the village, along with other Hindu children. The Hindus were enraged and took their revenge by proclaiming a complete social boycott. The Untouchable boys were thus practically banned from the village school and nobody was to help them. This caused despondency among the Untouchables to such an extent that they were thinking of migrating in a body to some other village. And Gandhi advised them to migrate elsewhere.

Gandhi in 1932 virtually coerced the Governor-General to give his sanction to the introduction of the Temple Entry Bill. As fresh elections to the Central Legislature were announced, the Congress party withdrew its support for the Bill at the stage of referring it to a select committee, on the grounds that the Bill gave offence to the Hindus, and Ranga Iyer, a Tamil Brahmin, cursing Gandhi had to drop it. Gandhi even went to the extent of justifying the conduct of the Congress Party.

Gandhi in 1933 established Harijan Sevak Sangh. Some people demanded that the institution should be handed over to the Untouchables and should be run by them. Others demanded that the Untouchables should have representation on the Governing Board. Gandhi flatly refused, on the grounds that the Harijan Sevak Sangh was an act of penance on the part of the Hindus, who must do the penance, and money collected by them was given by the Hindus.

Dr. Ambedkar wrote:

During the Round Table Conference he told people, 'I shall not raise any objection against the demands presented by the representatives of the depressed classes'. But, as soon as the representatives of the depressed classes pressed their demands, Gandhi quietly forgot about the assurances given by him. I call it a betrayal of the people belonging to the depressed classes. He went to the Moslems and told them that he would support their fourteen demands if they in turn opposed the demands placed by the representatives of the depressed classes. Even a scoundrel would not have done this. This is only one instance of Gandhi's treachery. (*Ibid p.67-68*).

Dr. Khare was the Prime Minister in the Congress Ministry in the then Central Provinces. With a view to forming a new cabinet, in full conformity with constitutional practice, Dr. Khare submitted his resignation, and the Governor recalled him to form a new Ministry, which he did. Dr. Khare's new cabinet was different from the old one in one important respect, namely, it included one Agnibhoj, an Untouchable, though he was a member of the Congress, a member of the Congress Party Assembly, and in many ways better qualified than some other ministers. On July 26 1938, the Congress Working Committee met in Wardha and passed a resolution condemning Dr. Khare on the grounds that in tendering the resignation of his old colleagues in the old Ministry, he was guilty of a grave error of judgement and that in forming a new Ministry he was guilty of indiscipline. In explaining what was behind this charge of indiscipline in forming a new Ministry, Dr. Khare openly said that according to Gandhi the act of indiscipline lay in the inclusion of an Untouchable in the Ministry. Dr. Khare also said that Gandhi told him that it was wrong on his part to have raised such aspirations and ambitions in the Untouchables, and it was such an act of bad judgement that he (Gandhi) would never forgive him. This statement was repeatedly made by Dr. Khare from platforms. Gandhi never contradicted it. Agnibhoj was omitted from the new Ministry.

*("What Congress & Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables," Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, 1945 p.96, Thacker & Co., Bombay).*

**The farce of temple entry:** After Gandhi's fast and the signing of the Poona Pact, not only the Marwari-owned newspapers but also

Gandhi's *Harijan* and *Young India* were ceaselessly publishing how many temples were thrown open to the Untouchables, as if Untouchability had already crumbled. On Aug. 17 1939, one scheduled caste member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly asked a question as to how many temples in the Bombay presidency had been thrown open to the Untouchables since 1932 when Gandhi started his Temple-entry Movement. According to the figures given by the Congress Minister, the total number of temples thrown open was 142, of which 121 were ownerless temples standing by the wayside, which were under the care of nobody in particular and which nobody used as places of worship. Another fact revealed was that not a single temple had been thrown open to the Untouchables in Gujarat, the state which was the home of Gandhi.

*The above facts show what kind of fraud Gandhi practised on national and international public opinion in general, and Untouchables in particular.*

What a legacy did Gandhi leave behind! In the daytime, caste Hindus worship Gandhi, and rape the Untouchable women at night.

For an example of rape of Untouchable girls and women, not by their husbands, but by 'officials' (in this instance, police) at Ranipur, see the *Times of India* of 17th December 1975. The decade's recorded violence against poor (men and) women of low caste was very serious. But it is in exceptional circumstances that it becomes a matter of public notice — in cases of murder, aggravated assault or, say the 'branding with hot iron of Untouchable women in Madhuban village, Saharsa district, Bihar on 17th July 1973.

*Indian Express*, 24th December 1973. "An Eye to India" by David Selbourne p.68. Penguin, London 1977).

Every year atrocities against Scheduled Castes have been mounting and the Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1977-1988, admits that the Scheduled Castes in many parts of the country are humiliated, insulted, manhandled, assaulted, burnt alive, tortured and their women folk molested.

The Government passed the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1979. The report of the Commissioner notes:

The district authorities, who are charged with the responsibility of enforcement of the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1979, have not lived up to the obligations enjoined upon them to protect the civil rights of weaker sections.

The Commissioner traced the cause of their ineffectiveness to the "indifferent, often hostile, caste prejudice of the police, the magistrates and the bureaucrats in the Government departments, coupled with vested economic muscle-power of the dominant caste-class groups".

On April 2 1990, the *Indian Post* reported:

The Uttar Pradesh Government has rushed police reinforcements to Khadda village of Deoria district following the cold-blooded murder of over a dozen scheduled caste villagers by a gang late on March 30 night. Killers led by one Vasudev Yadav, are said to have asked for the caste of each victim before shooting him down. According to information reaching here, Yadav sneaked into the village pretending to be a well-wisher and whisked away a whole group of residents to a secluded spot. He later pumped bullets into them.

On May 2 1990, Labour and Welfare Minister Ram Vilas Paswan informed the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) that a total of 14,269 atrocities were committed against *Harijans* in 1989. These included 479 murders and 759 rapes. The largest number of atrocities were reported from Madhya Pradesh (4,226) followed by Uttar Pradesh (3,945) and Rajasthan (1,588). Bihar had 997 such incidents, Andhra Pradesh 511, and Tamil Nadu 409.

On Aug 14 1989, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Minister of Welfare, told the Lok Sabha that :

During 1989-89 over 15,000 serious cases involving Scheduled Caste members were registered and over 3,000 cases involving Scheduled Tribe members. Cases of rape and minor offences against Scheduled Castes totalled 3,300 and against Scheduled Tribes 783.

Arthur Bonner, an American journalist, in his recently published book, *Averting the Apocalypse — Social Movements in India*, wrote:

Periodically, Untouchables are killed in what journalists and others describe as actions 'to set an example'. Some incidents are remembered, like the miniature Jallianwallah Bagh massacre of twenty-one men and women at Arwal in Bihar in April 1986, and the extermination of the wounded tribal coalminers at Gua in Bihar in September 1980. Others are all forgotten, like the mass arson of Untouchable huts in a Tamil Nadu village on Christmas Day 1968, in which *forty-two Dalits were burned alive*. All the twenty-three landlords accused of the atrocity were acquitted by the Madras High Court. Similarly, when in May 1980 a Dalit marriage party passed through an upper caste village in Almora district, Uttar Pradesh, with the groom carried in a palanquin, upper caste women objected to this breach of caste privileges. The Dalits were attacked and fled. Six who took shelter in a building were burned alive, and another eight were fatally injured with knives and lathis. Originally ten of the accused were acquitted, but on appeal a higher court sentenced two of them to five years in prison.

*("Averting the Apocalypse—Social Movements in India", Arthur Bonner, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1990).*

Since Independence, atrocities against the Untouchables have become a regular feature of Indian life; particularly horrible is the burning of people alive. Western media as a whole are very vociferous in claiming human rights. But there is hardly any mention of the sufferings of these poor people. The human rights of the Western media do not include the protection of the poor people – victims of sanctified racism – from being roasted alive.

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## GANDHI AND HIS CAPITALIST FRIENDS

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8

Gandhi's Congress was all along financed by the millionaires. An interview on June 6 1942 which Louis Fischer recorded in his book, *A Week with Mr. Gandhi*, is very revealing:

I said I had several questions to ask him about the Congress Party. Very highly placed Britishers, I recalled, had told me that Congress was in the hands of big business and that Mr. Gandhi was supported by the Bombay mill-owners who gave him as much money as he wanted. What truth is there in these questions, I asked. 'Unfortunately they are true' he declared simply. 'Congress hasn't enough money to conduct its work. We thought in the beginning to collect four annas (about eight cents) from each member per year and operate on that. But it hasn't worked.' 'What proportion of the Congress budget', I asked, 'is covered by such Indians?' 'Practically all of it', he stated. 'In this ashram, for instance, we could live much more poorly than we do and spend less money. But we do not and the money comes from rich friends.' (*Allen & Unwin, London 1943. Cited in "Gandhi and Gandhism"*).

In Bengal, these city business magnates are known by the common name of Marwaris, though all of them are not Marwaris. There is one thing common to this class: they father all sorts of corruption. *Marwaris, money lenders, rural Kulaks, corruption, Congress and Gandhi-Nehru, all together formed a vicious circle.* Had one element been removed, the whole circle would have collapsed. And that vicious circle continues even to this day.

In the beginning, most of the money for the maintenance of Gandhi's Ashram and organisations like Harijan Sevak Sangh, Peasant Uplift, Cow Protection and others, came from two Marwari wealthy persons, one was Jamnalal Bajaj and the other G.D. Birla. After the premature death of Bajaj, Birla became the sole provider. His outlay for Gandhian enterprises ran into millions of rupees. It gave Birla business advantages – and thanks to Gandhi, the Birlas have become India's No.1 business house. Dr. Ambedkar wrote:

Money can come only from, and in fact comes from the Bania. If the Bania is financing the Congress, it is because he realised — and Mr. Gandhi has taught him — that money invested in politics gives large dividends. (*"Gandhi & Gandhism"*).

It was essential for the perpetuation of British rule to maintain the natives states of Nawabs, Rajas and Maharajas. Also the tax collectors were turned into feudal landlords. Without them British

rule would have crumbled, and without British protection they would have been swept away. By the beginning of this century, the power balance in Great Britain was shifting from feudal lords to city financiers. In a similar way, the rulers in colonial countries needed junior partners and commissioned agents, to perpetuate capitalist exploitation. The weaker colonial capitalists needed the support of the stronger imperialist capitalists, and vice versa. So a form of partnership developed. Multi-national corporations control the finance and politics of the West as well as of the Afro-Asian countries in partnership with local capitalists. Using hand-picked politicians, these local vampires have mortgaged the Afro-Asian countries to the international corporate money lenders.

*All the business magnates of India who financed the Congress were pro-British. All of them were opposed to any revolutionary changes. They used Gandhi to make sure that no other revolutionary struggle sprang up in the country for socio-economic changes. They did not want to come out of the imperialist orbit, which could lead to an uncertain future for them in India and loss of privilege to play the sub-exploiters' role in other British colonies.*

**Trusteeship theory:** Gandhi, the Bania, since his early political life in South Africa, always served the interests of the propertied classes and opposed any campaign against them. Referring to the propertied classes, he once said that he did not wish to destroy the hen that laid the golden egg. His solution for the economic conflict between the owners and the workers, between the rich and the poor, between landlords and tenants, and between the employers and employees, was very simple. There was no need for the owners to deprive themselves of their property. All that they needed was to declare themselves trustees for the poor. Of course, the Trust was to be a voluntary one, carrying a spiritual obligation. What a cunning Bania formula!

While Gandhi was on a tour of Bengal, one Nirmal Kumar Bose asked for his comment on the conflict between landlords and tenants as, particularly in Bengal, it had turned into a 'communal conflict'. Gandhi replied that the only rightful owner of the land was he who tilled the land. How noble! Then came the Bania twist: the present proprietors were morally entitled to hold land only if they became trustees. If the cultivators of the fields of a proprietor who had become a trustee, refused to till the land for him, he would not sue or seek otherwise to coerce them. The 'Mahatma' did not say that if the cultivators took all the produce, or the major part of it, he should not sue or otherwise coerce them.

When interviewed by Margaret Bourke White, an American journalist,

### Gandhi told her about Birla:

He is trying in the sense I have suggested. I fondly hope that they don't deceive me. If I find out that Birla deceives me, I would not be here under his roof. I am here because I believe what he says. I have known him for a long period. I have not found him guilty of deceiving me. A trustee does not make a farthing for himself. A trustee is always entitled to his commission. He will take his commission subject to those for whom he is a trustee. (Cited in "Gandhi & Gandhism").

When did Birla consult his workers about his finance? Those who know the life-style of the mill-owners of Bombay and Ahmedabad, and the most appalling conditions in which the mill-workers of these cities live in slums, will realise to what depth Gandhi could sink.

### Gandhi versus Subhas Bose

In his presidential address in Haripura, Subhas Bose concluded:

Ours is a struggle not only against British Imperialism but against World Imperialism as well, of which the former is the key-stone. We are, therefore, fighting not for the cause of India alone but of humanity as well. India freed means humanity saved.

(*"Subhas Chandra Bose"* by Nanada Mukherji p.58, Jayasvee Prakashan, Calcutta, 1981).

Gandhi and Subhas Bose came to a head-on clash when in 1938 the latter decided to stand for re-election as President of the Congress. In theory, members of the All-India Congress Committee elected Congress presidents. But Gandhi had usurped the function and since 1920, in practice, he had chosen them. Sometimes, apart from the President, he chose the entire Working Committee. Though Gandhi at this stage did not come into the open, his followers, headed by Sardar Patel, decided to oppose by all means Bose's re-election as President. He explained his position in a statement:

This issue is not a personal one. The progressive sharpening of the anti-Imperialist struggle in India has given birth to new ideas, ideologies, problems and programmes. People are consequently veering round to the opinion that, as in other free countries, the presidential election in India should be fought on the basis of definite policies and programmes, so that the contest may help the clarification of issues and give a clear indication of the working of the public mind. (*"Netaji and Gandhi"* p. 114 by Ahluwalia. New Delhi. Indian Academic Publishers 1982).

Apart from other considerations, this process of open debate and contest could have destroyed Gandhi's absolute dictatorship and allowed the Congress to develop into a democratic institution.

This was not merely a personality clash but a confrontation between two opposing forces. It was widely known at that time that the Second World War was imminent. In this, Subhas Bose saw an

opportunity for pressing India's demand for independence. The British Raj was naturally alarmed; without India's manpower and material resources, they could not contemplate sustaining a war for even a short time, let alone win it. So they found in Gandhi a proxy to wage war on Subhas Bose with a view to keeping India secured for the British. *Subhas Bose was a brave fighter and he did not shirk his responsibility for fear of the combined forces of Gandhi and the British Raj.* But at that stage he was quite content to place before the country a militant programme and wait for a favourable moment to launch a civil disobedience movement.

Bose won the election, defeating Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya who was set up by Gandhi and his followers, though until that time Gandhi had remained in the background. On Jan. 3 1939, he came into the open and declared:

Since I was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi not to withdraw his name as a candidate when Maulana Sahib withdrew, the defeat is more mine than his .... It is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand. I rejoice in this defeat...

I must remind all Congressmen that those, who being Congress-minded remain outside it by design, represent it most. Those, therefore, who feel uncomfortable in being in the Congress, may come out, not in a spirit of ill-will, but with the deliberate purpose of rendering more effective service. *(Ibid pp.118-119 and other books).*

It was an incitement to revolt against the elected, but not selected, president of the Congress. *Sardar Patel, Gandhi's 'dirty tricks manager', began to marshal forces on his behalf and Gandhi and his followers employed all the dirty tricks they could muster.* It was an attack on the very democratic process.

In reply, Bose issued his statement on Feb. 4:

I have read the statement of Mahatma Gandhi on the recent presidential election with all the attention that it deserves. It grieves me to find that Mahatma Gandhi has taken it as a personal defeat. I would respectfully differ from him on this point. The voters, that is the delegates, were not called upon to vote for or against Mahatma Gandhi. Consequently the result of the contest does not in my view, and in the view of most people, affect him personally.

Personally I am definitely of the opinion that there is neither reason nor justification for a split within the ranks of the Congress. I therefore earnestly hope that there will be no occasion now or in the near future for the so-called minority party to non-cooperate with the so-called majority party ... *(Ibid p.120-121 and other books).*

In March 1939, in the Tripuri Congress session, Subhas Bose proposed a bold resolution demanding self-determination for India within six months under the threat of civil disobedience. But his proposal was opposed by the Gandhi wing and Nehru, and was



thrown out. But more humiliating for Bose was a resolution expressing confidence in Gandhi and the former ex-Working Committee, by implication a vote of no-confidence in the President. It also contained the following directive:

In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year, and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such a crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that the Congress Executive should command his explicit confidence and requests the President to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi. (*Ibid p. 130 and other books*)

Even a casual observer will notice that this resolution was fascist in character and a negation of all democratic principles and practices. Anyway, to the delight of all the lovers of the British Empire, the resolution was passed and Subhas Bose's plan to gear up the Congress for the final struggle was smashed.

In a long letter, Subhas Bose wrote to Gandhi:

Perhaps you are aware that at Tripur it was given out by those who were canvassing in support of Pant's resolution that a telephone conversation had taken place with Rajkot and that resolution had your full support. A report to that effect appeared in the daily press also. It was further given out in private conversation that nothing short of that resolution in its entirety would satisfy either you or your orthodox followers. (*Ibid p. 135*).

Of course Gandhi denied collusion. His followers passed the Pant resolution and he refused to cooperate with Subhas Bose on the basis of that resolution. Consequently Subhas Bose resigned in April 1939.

Commenting on the role of Gandhi and his followers, Prof. Hiren Mukherjee, a distinguished author and admirer of Gandhi, wrote:

It was one of the rare occasions when the great man, so cool and collected in his dignity, seemed small and peevish. (*Gentle Colossus p.78*. Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986).

He also wrote:

At the Tripuri Congress itself, where Bose presided in spite of a high fever, an incident happened, at the instance no doubt of the pious votaries of 'non-violence' over which it is better that a veil is drawn. (*Bow of Burning Gold" p.53*. People's Publishing House, New Delhi. 1977)

The British author, Michael Edwardes, observed:

Gandhi now turned the technique of non-cooperation, not against the British, but against Congress's own President. Bose was forced to resign.... (Gandhi, whom so many both in India and abroad believed to be compounded only of sweetness and light, had by the use of his overwhelming prestige and the sort of intrigue one would expect from Tammany Hall, succeeded in disposing of the only real opposition to his leadership. (*"The Last years of British India" p.67*. Michael Edwardes. Cassell, London 1963).

**On May 5 1939, an Indian journalist asked Gandhi:**

Your statement after Subhas Bose's election has somewhat changed the situation. Why did you not issue any statement at the time of the election? Some people are of the view that the present situation would not have arisen if you had issued a statement at the time of the election. (*"Netaji and Gandhi", Ahluwalia pp. 155-156*).

**Gandhi answered:**

It is true that I did not issue any statement. According to Annanda Babu, that has changed the situation. What he means is that the situation would not have taken the turn it did if I had issued a statement earlier. But the statement issued by Sardar Vallabhai and others contained a small sentence which suggested that I too was connected with it.

The dictator not only demanded of his followers absolute submission to his expressed wishes, but he also wanted people to tremble at their knees even if there was an indirect suggestion of his displeasure. Whereas when Subhas Bose told him that those same followers were telling people that Gandhi was behind the Pant Resolution, he denied collusion.

**Birth of Forward Bloc :** After his resignation, Subhas Bose formed the Forward Bloc. The Bloc functioned within the Congress more as a platform than as a party. Its aim was complete independence for India. The first step it took was to set up a Left Consolidation Committee with the Congress Socialist Party, the National and the Radical Democratic Party. To meet the challenge posed by the left alliance, the All-India Congress Committee passed two resolutions. The first resolution prohibited any member of the Congress to offer or organise any form of satyagraha without the sanction of the provincial Congress Committee. The second resolution directed that any difference between the Provincial Congress Committee and the Congress Ministries should be referred to the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Congress. Subhas Bose unsuccessfully opposed the resolution. Under his leadership the Left Consolidation Committee decided to observe July 9 1939 as a protest day against those two resolutions.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Gandhi's hand-picked President of the Congress, issued a statement condemning such a move and also wrote a letter to Subhas Bose asking for an explanation of his action. According to him it would be impossible for the Congress to function if subordinate committees and office-bearers, instead of carrying out the resolutions, organised protests and demonstrations against them. He personally considered it not only destructive of all discipline but fraught with the greatest consequences for the future of the Congress organisation.

Subhas Bose in his reply claimed that it was his constitutional right to give expression to his opinion regarding any resolution passed by the All-India Congress Committee: one had to distinguish between protest against a certain resolution and actually defying it or violating it. The Congress had been fighting the British Government for civil liberty, among other things, and that included freedom of speech. What Dr. Prasad demanded was that they should not claim freedom of speech when they did not see eye to eye with the majority of the Congress. In the name of discipline he was trying to check healthy criticism. Subhas Bose also drew his attention to certain incidents at the time of the Gaya Congress in 1922 and after, when the All-India Congress Committee amended the resolution of the Gaya Congress; the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, led by Sardar Patel, resolved to defy it. Subhas Bose also pointed out that Gandhi had written some time previously in the *Young India* that the minority had the right to rebel.

Gandhi's hand-picked Congress Working Committee did not consider Subhas Bose's explanation satisfactory; they decided to debar him from being a member of any elective Congress Committee for three years, and to disqualify him as President of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. Gandhi knew that there would be a storm of opposition all over the country which the Working Committee could not withstand, so he came into the open and put his own prestige on the line. In an editorial in *Harijan* of Aug 21 1939, Gandhi wrote: "I must confess that the Subhas Babu resolution was drafted by me". It was a great victory for Imperialism.

**The British-made Mahatma:** England declared war on Germany on Sept. 3 1939. The next day the Viceroy, without consulting anybody in India, announced that India too was at war with Germany. Indians generally resented it. They had not forgotten that in return for their enormous help during World War I, they received only the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre. The Viceroy reiterated that:

At the end of the war they will be very willing to enter into consultation with the representatives of the several communities, parties and interests in India, and with the Indian princes, with a view to securing their aid and cooperation in framing such modifications as may seem desirable. ("*Netaji and Gandhi*", Ahluwalia p.173).

What did the British-manufactured Mahatma do? He ran as fast as he could to Simla, met the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgo, on Sept 6, and issued a press statement that, despite differences between India and Britain, India should cooperate with Britain in her hour of peril. On Sept. 7, *The Times* (London) published the following report under the headline, *Mr. Gandhi talks with the Viceroy*:

In a statement to the press after his interview with the Viceroy, Mr. Gandhi said that while making it plain that he could not speak for the Indian Congress, he had told the Viceroy that his own sympathies were with Great Britain and France from the humanitarian standpoint and he could not contemplate without being stirred to his very depths, the destruction of London. As he pictured to the Viceroy the possible fate of the Houses of Parliament, he broke down.

Mr. Gandhi said that in July he sent a letter to Hitler begging him to listen to the appeal of one 'who has deliberately shunned the method of war, not without considerable success'.

'I am not thinking just now of India's deliverance' (said Mr. Gandhi). 'It will come, but what will it be worth if England and France fall? Yet it seems that Hitler knows no god but brute force, and Mr. Chamberlain says he will listen to nothing else.'

Mr. Gandhi has left Simla for Wardha, where the Congress Working Committee meets on Friday to discuss the war situation.

Miss Ellen Wilkinson, ex-MP, after her visit to India in 1922 as a member of the India League deputation, had observed: "Gandhi was the best policeman the Britisher had in India". (*Indian Struggle 1920-1942" p.219*).

Gandhi's statement was likely to have a dampening effect on the public, but the Forward Bloc, which by this time had grown to be an all-India organisation, immediately went into action and commenced counter-propaganda on a large scale. The views of the Forward Bloc impressed many people. On Sept. 8 1939, the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha to decide what attitude the Congress should adopt towards the war. Subhas Bose, as he was not then a member, was specially invited to attend. He endeavoured to induce the Congress leaders to agree to the immediate launching of a movement to win Swaraj. He also declared that if the Congress did nothing, the Forward Bloc would. But his was a cry in the wilderness. Gandhi regarded a campaign in the near future as outside the domain of possibility. In face of the Forward Bloc's vehement criticism, Gandhi and his followers soon realised that people would not accept a policy of cooperation, and this would surely damage their image and seriously affect their prestige and popularity. So they changed their tactics, and in place of outright cooperation, resorted to equivocation.

On Sept 14, after prolonged discussion, the Working Committee passed a resolution asking the British Government to declare its war aims. The resolution further declared that if India were granted freedom, then "a free and democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic cooperation". After its adoption, Gandhi revealed that Nehru had drafted it. "I was sorry", Gandhi commented, "to

find myself alone in thinking that whatever support was to be given to the British should be given unconditionally and non-violently". (*Tendulkar, Vol V. p.204*). Nevertheless, he commended the manifesto to the country. "I hope the statement will receive the unanimous support of all parties among Congressmen". When asked about war aims Churchill, in a funny reply, said, "to win the war".

Subhas Bose definitely believed that:

....If the Congress as a whole had taken up a bold and unequivocal attitude of determined opposition to the war from the very outset, Britain's war production in India would have been seriously affected, and it would not have been easy for the British Government to send troops on active service to different theatres of war, far away from India. By postponing a final decision on the war issue, in my view, Gandhi, Nehru and their followers helped the British Government. It is but natural that, when the Congress did not give a clear lead to the people, the propaganda carried on by the agents of British Imperialism in India should have partially succeeded in winning the cooperation of certain sections of the Indian people.

(*"Netaji and Gandhi" Ahluwalia p.175*).

Thousands of Indians died in different theatres of war, far away from home. But that was covered by Gandhi's non-violence as it served the British Empire.

**Pandit Nehru supports British:** The Forward Bloc was carrying on continuous propaganda against cooperation in the war, and for commencing a national struggle for independence. Apart from that, Subhas Bose undertook a lecture tour throughout the country, and addressed a thousand meetings in the ensuing months.

On May 20 1940, Pandit Nehru made a surprising statement in which he said (*"Subhas Chandra Bose" by Nanda Mukerji, pp.63-69*).

Launching a civil disobedience campaign at a time when Britain is engaged in a life and death struggle would be an act derogatory to India's honour."

Similarly Gandhi said:

We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin. This is not the way of non-violence.

Subhas Bose presided over the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh. In his presidential address, delivered on March 19 1940, he said, among other things:

Comrades, those who aver that the Congress is the biggest anti-compromise conference, perhaps suffer from shortness of memory and their brains consequently need refreshing. Have they forgotten that as soon as the war began, Mahatma Gandhi proceeded to Simla without caring to consult the Congress Working Committee and informed His Excellency the Viceroy that he was in favour of rendering unconditional help to Great Britain in the prosecution of the war? Do they not realise that Mahatma Gandhi being the sole dictator of the Congress, his personal views necessarily have a far-reaching implication? Have they forgotten that since the outbreak of the

war, the Congress Working Committee was sidetracked from the main issue, namely the demand for Purna Swaraj, by putting forward a demand for a fake constituent assembly?....

A compromise with Imperialism will mean that an anti-Imperialist national struggle will soon be converted into a civil war among the people themselves. Would this be desirable from any point of view? (*Biography of Subhas Chandra Bose* by Sisir Kumar Bose. p. 266).

As soon as it was launched, the Congress High Command directed all its attack, not against the British Raj, but against the Forward Bloc. Subhas Bose was playing the same leading role in the Bengal Provincial Congress even after his expulsion. In spite of the resolution, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee affirmed its full confidence in Subhas Bose and resolved that, until a final decision, the post of the BPCC President be kept vacant and all business be transacted under his guidance. The Congress Working Committee ordered the BPCC to expunge this resolution and elect a new president, which they did. The new president also acted in consultation with Subhas Bose. So the Congress Working Committee virtually suspended the BPCC for some time.

On May 25 1940, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee met at Dacca and resolved to "demolish all monuments of political servitude which militated against national consciousness". It was decided to observe July 3 1940 as "Sirajuddowla Day", to honour the last independent King of Bengal. Subhas Bose announced his decision to lead the volunteers to demolish the Holwell Monument on that day. On June 6 1940, he made a surprise declaration, proposing to establish a provisional Indian Government with complete sovereignty, on the basis of the joint demand by the Hindus and the Muslims. This provoked the British authorities, and they arrested Subhas Bose on July 2, 1940 and lodged him in the Presidency jail. During his detention, he was elected a member of the Central Legislative Assembly.

The highest tribute Subhas Bose paid to Gandhi and his gang was when on Oct. 31 he wrote to his brother, Sarat Bose, from prison:

The more I think of Congress politics, the more convinced I feel that in future we should devote more energy and time to fight the High Command. If power goes into the hands of such mean, vindictive and unscrupulous persons when Swaraj is won, what will happen to the country.?

(*"Netaji and Gandhi"* p.185. *Biography of Subhas Chandra Bose*, by S.K. Bose, p.100. Also *"Netaji and Gandhi"* p.188).

Those who lived in the post-Independence era should know the answer.

Again the behaviour of Sardar Patel provoked him to comment:

One is forced to wonder which is a greater menace to India's political







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## ROLE OF GANDHI IN PARTITION OF INDIA

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**G**andhi was determined not to start or allow anybody to start a movement and he realised that he could not afford not to start any movement if the Congress was to keep its hold on the masses. So he conjured up a trick called 'individual satyagraha', just for public consumption.

According to Maulana Azad:

I have already said how much opposed he was in the beginning to any movement during the war. He had held that India should stand for non-violence and not deviate from it for any reason. That is why, in spite of my efforts, he would not consent to any mass movement, for he felt such a movement might lead to violence. In fact, it was with great difficulty that I could persuade him to agree to individual satyagraha or the Civil Disobedience movement. Even then he laid down so many conditions that the movement could be nothing more than a moral gesture. (*India Wins Freedom* by Maulana Azad. pp.72-73, Orient Longmans, Bombay, 1959).

Ian Stephen, the editor of the Calcutta *Statesman*, in a letter to Mahdev Desai, Gandhi's private secretary, complained that such satyagraha was an act of revenge on England; Gandhi replied on Feb. 2 1941:

Non-violent action became peremptory, at this juncture, when even non-violent expression was sought to be throttled. I freely grant that there is a great deal of bitterness against Britain. It had to take a violent course, if it had not taken the present course, call it what you will. If this can be proved, as it can be, I fancy you will change your opinion, and believe with me that the course adopted by the Congress is the best under the circumstances. (*Monsoon Morning* by Ian Stephen. p.148. Benn. London 1966).

Churchill had often declared that he had not become His Majesty's First Secretary of State to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. But events moved very fast. Even a diehard imperialist like Churchill had to change his tune. In early 1942, Roosevelt told close friends that he thought India was lost to the Japanese, and Churchill himself told King George VI that Burma, Ceylon, Calcutta, Madras and part of Australia might fall. On Feb. 15, Singapore fell. On the same day Subhas Bose gave a broadcast over the Azad Hind Radio (*Freedom Quest* by N.G. Jog. Orient Longmans, New Delhi 1969):-

The fall of Singapore means the collapse of the British Empire and the end of the iniquitous regime which it has symbolised and the dawn of a new

era in Indian history.

Immediately after the fall of Singapore, the British government sent Stafford Cripps to India. He met the Indian leaders and made the constitutional proposal of granting India Dominion status after the war. A provision allowed any province that wished to do so to secede from the Indian union and form a separate Dominion. However, the Cripps mission failed and ended in mutual recriminations.

After Cripps departed, Gandhi's attitude underwent a great change. Maulana Azad wrote. (*"India Wins Freedom" p.73*):

Gandhi's mind was now moving from the extreme of complete inactivity to that of organised mass effort. The process had perhaps begun earlier but it became clear only after Cripps left. In June 1942, I went to visit him at Wardha and stayed with him for about five days. During my talks with him, I saw that he had moved far away from the position he had taken at the outbreak of the war.

I now began to sense that the Government anticipated a Japanese attack on India. The Government seemed to be of the view that if the whole country was not invested, the Japanese would make an attempt to occupy Bengal. They thought that the Japanese would attack by sea and advance on Calcutta from Diamond Harbour. I came to know that the Government had decided to abandon Calcutta in such a contingency. A secret circular had been issued to selected officers, instructing them about the stage at which they should leave Calcutta, Howrah and the 24 Parganas, and the route they should follow. The Government had also taken certain precautionary measures. They had worked out a plan of resistance at different places, and even prepared provisional orders about the line of retreat in case a withdrawal became necessary. According to this, the first line of resistance would be along the River Padma, the second between Asansol and Ranchi, and the last near Allahabad. The Government had also decided that in case of a Japanese attack, something like a 'scorched earth' policy must be followed. They had also prepared measures for the blowing up of important bridges and the destruction of factories and industrial installations in order to deny them to the Japanese. Plans for the destruction of the Iron and Steel factory at Jamshedpur had somehow become known, and there was great anxiety and unrest in the whole area.

He (Gandhi) told me in unqualified terms that if the Japanese army ever came into India, it would come not as our enemies but as the enemies of the British.

Harold Macmillan wrote in his memoirs:

.... specially at this particular moment the whole of the Indian sub-continent had remained totally defenceless and its doors were open to the enemy. The British rulers in India also knew that in 1942 the Japanese navy could, without any opposition, go in and out through the Bay of Bengal, and India, for the first time since its domination by the British, was threatened by an invasion by an Asian power and the defences that the British had built up in India were not equal to the danger. (*"The Blast of War 1939-45". Macmillan, London, 1967. p. 285*).

### Japanese Invasion

Gandhi sent one Khurshid, the grand-daughter of the famous Dadabhai Naoroji, to carry out intelligence work in Bengal. Nirmal Kumar Bose, an associate and admirer of Gandhi (except that he found Gandhi's sexual habits very obnoxious), wrote:

It was about the middle of May 1942, that Khurshid came to Bengal on a very special mission. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was then broadcasting from some station in Europe to the people of India. Rangoon had fallen, and the airport of Chittagong had been bombed by Japanese raiders. Khurshid proceeded to Chittagong in order to find out how the people would react in case the British withdrew and Netaji arrived with the Japanese forces. After her return from Chittagong, she got into contact with various political parties in Calcutta in order to find out how they would react, in case Gandhi launched a movement for implementing the 'Congress' demand to the British for quitting India. (*My Days with Gandhi* by Nirmal Kumar Bose. p.17. Orient Longman, Bombay 1974).

At the beginning of the war Gandhi was determined not to start or allow anybody to start a movement which might disturb the war effort, and he wanted to offer unconditional help. But when he was convinced, as were Churchill, Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek, that Britain was going to lose India to the Japanese, then and only then did he change his mind. His *"Quit India"* movement was a clever design to pre-empt Subhas Bose rather than a struggle for Indian independence. Gandhi knew that if Subhas Bose could set foot on the soil of Bengal, he would easily overrun India, and in that case Gandhi and his cronies would be thrown on the scrap heap.

In the evening of Aug. 8 1942, the All-India Congress Committee met in Bombay and passed the "Quit India" resolution by an overwhelming majority. Gandhi, Nehru, Azad and many others down to the lowest level of Congress leadership, were arrested in the early hours of next morning. India was virtually placed under martial law. What followed, however, was an entirely different movement, a very spectacular violent explosion. In spite of the fact that there was no plan of action, no leadership to give guidance, no coordination between the different parts of India, still the movement spontaneously erupted and continued. Underground radio stations operated for some months afterwards and there were many successful guerrilla actions. Extensive damage was done by the cutting of vital communication links, arson, looting and other acts of mass resentment. About 900 power stations were burnt, telegraph wires were cut, postal communication paralysed, nearly 800 railway stations burnt, 59 trains derailed and 945 post offices raided. Over 60,000 people were arrested, and on six occasions rebel territories were bombed from the air. *This part of the "Quit India" movement,*

*which was wholly violent, was the only effective operation of this great upheaval, while the non-violent part of the movement was negligible. Gandhi neither condoned nor condemned the violence this time.*

By autumn 1943 the revolt was over and the Government was so confident that it started releasing the prisoners. Gandhi was released in 1944 and Nehru and Azad in 1945. For Gandhi it marked a colossal failure.

### **Victory of Subhas Bose**

After the surrender of Japan, 25,000 Indian National Army prisoners were repatriated to India. The senior Army Commanders wanted to punish them severely and set an example; the Indian National Army prisoners were already housed in camps in Delhi's Red Fort and this, it was decided, would be an excellent place for the trial. The Fort was ideally situated, too, for press and media coverage, thus turning it into a spectacular show. On Nov. 5 1945, the trial of Shah Nawaz Khan, Prem Kumar Saghul, and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, one Muslim, one Hindu and one Sikh, began. They were charged, *inter alia*, with waging war against His Majesty the King Emperor of India. The trial lasted until Dec. 31. Auchinlek wanted it to be a sensation – which it was, but not in the way he intended.

The British Raj at that time felt very sure they had won the war and also crushed the nationalist movement. But when the British held the victory celebration, suddenly the Indians went wild with fury. The Old Delhi Town Hall was partly gutted. Indians dressed in European clothes were attacked, parading troops were booed and the police had to open fire to restore order. The Indian National Army and Subhas Bose had created a potentially revolutionary situation. *The Congress leaders were the first to seize the opportunity to make capital out of the popularity of the Indian National Army and Subhas Bose whom they had, in the past, condemned in no uncertain terms. The Congress realised the potential of the fervour behind the Indian National Army and quickly adopted resolutions both approving their actions and pledging itself to defend them at the trial. A party dedicated to non-violence at last realised the usefulness of violence. It also exposed the hypocrisy of Gandhi, who condemned the resolution appreciating the patriotism of Gopi Nath Shaha, and insisted on inserting the epithet "misguided" before the word 'patriotism'; he also treated the martyrdom of Jatin Das with the utmost contempt.*

The Congress persuaded the three undertrials to seek assistance from them. A defence team was formed, led by Bhulabhai Desai,

who in the past had been a bitter critic of Subhas Bose. Nehru, who had never practised law and who had not only severely criticised Subhas Bose's actions but made many vile personal attacks, such as calling him a traitor, took the barrister's gown and joined the team of defence lawyers. Now they wanted to shine in the reflected glory of Subhas Bose. Gandhi, in his weekly *Harijan*, referred to Subhas Bose as Netaji, and conceded that "the hypnotism of the Indian National Army has cast a spell upon us. Netaji's name is one to conjure with. His patriotism is second to none. His bravery shines through all his actions."

The Indian press was full of stories of the Indian National Army, the existence of which was not known to the public during the war. The trial itself became, to a certain extent, the devotional songs of praise to Subhas Bose and the Indian Army. The pent-up emotion of the Indian people at last found an outlet. *Again it was the Indian National Army which brought Hindus and Muslims together.* Indian National Army days had been organised all over India even before the trial began. Between Nov. 21 and 26, Calcutta was strike-bound. Hindus and Muslims, their trucks flying both the Congress and Muslim League flags, jointly staged unprecedented demonstrations. Some military vehicles were destroyed, 97 damaged, and about 200 military personnel injured; 32 Indians lost their lives and 200 were wounded. The violence soon spread to all parts of India.

**Netaji hypnotizes Indians:** Claude Auchinlek, the Commander-in-Chief who ordered the trial, was no longer confident. He wrote to the Viceroy expressing his doubts about the loyalty of the Indian troops and his anxiety over their growing sympathy for the Indian National Army. He set up a special organisation at his military headquarters to find out secretly the real feelings of the Indian ranks on this subject. To his horror, he found that they were not only sympathetic, but had started identifying themselves with the Indian National Army.

The three were convicted of treason, but their sentences were commuted and they were set free, and this was hailed with joy and acclamation throughout the country. They were feted, feasted and carried in a hundred processions. It was not British mercy that had prompted their release but the sheer pressure of Indian public opinion and the growing political consciousness in the regular Indian army. This was frankly conceded by General Auchinlek when, in a revealing minute, he explained the reasons that impelled him to remit their sentences:

Having considered all the evidence and appreciated to the best of my

ability the general trend of public opinion and of the feeling in the Indian army, I have no doubt at all that to have confirmed the imprisonment solely on the charge of waging war against the King, would have probably precipitated a violent outbreak throughout the country and created active and widespread disaffection in the Army, especially amongst the officers and the more highly educated rank and file. To have taken this risk would have been seriously to jeopardise our object.

*(Biography of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. S.K. Bose p.240).*

The Muslim League also wanted to reap some benefit out of the Indian National Army popularity. They, like the Congress, persuaded some Muslim Indian National Army prisoners to seek assistance from the League. The British, however, continued the selective trials, and on Feb. 4 1946 Captain Abdur Rashid, one of those who sought assistance from the Muslim League, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for certain acts of brutality. So the Muslim League came into the picture. For four days between Feb. 11 and 14, the streets of Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi witnessed unique political demonstrations in which Hindus and Muslims forgot their differences and came together to fight the Indian National Army's battle. Four days of strict martial law were required to bring Calcutta back to normal; by then fifty were dead and over five hundred injured.

*Subhas Bose and the Indian National Army had not only hypnotised the civilian population, but had also affected the regular Indian Army. It created a political consciousness to which the Indian servicemen had never been exposed before. The Indian National Army and the Indian Army represented two parts of one and the same Indian society. When India reverberated to the songs of one part in praise of fighting the British, it became glaringly obvious as to where the other part stood. Nobody could be a loyal subject of the crown and a patriotic son of his country. They were diametrically opposite. The loyalty of the Indian Army was the solid foundation on which the British Empire stood. This was the first time since the uprising of 1857 that this loyalty was shattered. Subhas Bose in his defeat and death achieved what he wanted, that was the liquidation of the Empire, and the British in their victory lost what they wanted to keep. It was this political consciousness inspired by the Indian National Army which sparked the revolts in the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Indian navy, which assumed serious proportions in 1946. Even Gandhi admitted to a group of senior National Army officers who called on him:*

You have the satisfaction that the whole country has been roused, and even the regular forces have been stirred into a new political consciousness and have begun to think in terms of independence.

*(Biography by S.K. Bose. p. 241).*

In January, some 5,000 Royal Indian Air Force personnel had gone on strike to protest over their conditions, and as an expression of support for the Indian National Army prisoners. On Feb. 18, a revolt began on *H.M.S. Talwar*, a training ship of the Indian Navy. Within a couple of days the whole of the Royal Indian Navy was in open rebellion. Seventy-eight ships in the various ports in India - Bombay, Karachi, Vizagapattanam, Calcutta and Cochin, and even in Andamans, and nearly all the shore establishments, had hauled down the Union Jack. Only ten ships and two shore establishments still remained with the British. Between Feb. 22 and 25, the Royal Indian Air Force in Bombay and Madras went on strike, and on Feb. 27, Indian soldiers in Jabalpur followed suit. The combined left had called for a sympathetic strike and over 600,000 workers from the textile mills of Bombay had responded. They had clashed with the troops and the British had to call in white troops to quell the uprising.

The Congress leaders were plainly frightened by the prospect of leading a revolution. Gandhi not only deplored the revolt but post-haste sent Nehru, Azad and Patel to Bombay. All of them exerted their influence on the ratings to surrender. Patel met their leaders privately in his Marine Drive flat, and told them frankly that he disliked the idea of personnel in the Defence Services staging a strike which, he said, would undermine the morale of the armed forces of the country. He told them that he could not regard the strike other than as an act of insubordination, and they would get no encouragement from him in their illegal actions. His final words to the ratings' leader were, "Go back and surrender". No one was more aware of the vital importance of the advice Patel gave to the strikers than V.P. Menon, who had the advantage of seeing things from inside the Government. He writes in *The Transfer of Power in India*. "It was largely due to the efforts of Vallabhai Patel that the ratings surrendered."

### **The Cabinet Mission**

The British Government could clearly read the writing on the wall. On Dec. 4 1945, Herbert Morrison announced in the House of Commons that a ten-member Parliamentary delegation would visit India to study the situation. The five-week visit took place in January and February 1946, and by the end of it all the visiting MPs were convinced that India was in a dangerous state. The British Government announced in February that a Cabinet Mission of three Ministers would visit India and start negotiations to transfer power.

Gandhi's spinning-wheel could produce a few ounces of thread, but not freedom. Both Gandhi and Subhas Bose wanted blood: one

for the British Empire and the other for Indian Freedom. Subhas Bose said: "Give me blood, and I promise you freedom." Gandhi said: "I would make India offer all her able-bodied sons as a sacrifice to the Empire."

The Cabinet Mission arrived on March 14 1946 and remained in India for more than three months, seeking by every diplomatic device and cunning known to British statesmanship to break the Congress-League deadlock. By the end of April the Cabinet Mission came out with a proposal. The solution it proposed was a union embracing British India and the States, with central powers limited to foreign affairs, defence, communications and the powers necessary to raise the finances required to support all three functions. All other subjects and residual powers were to be vested in provinces that would form groups to be called 'A', 'B', and 'C'. Group B was to embrace the Punjab, Sind, North-Western Frontier and Baluchistan; Group C would contain Bengal and Assam; Group A, everything else.

It was a remarkable scheme; it offered at least rational hope for a transfer of power from British to Indian authority without communal violence. "We and our Government and countrymen hoped that it would be possible for the Indian people themselves to agree upon the method of framing the new Constitution under which they will live", concluded the Cabinet Mission in unveiling its plan, adding that since "that has not been possible" they had devised what "they trust will enable you to attain your independence in the shortest time and with the least danger of internal disturbance and conflict". The only alternative, they feared, would be "a grave danger of violence, chaos and even civil war". "(A New History of India" p.342 and 343. By Stanley Wolpert. Oxford University Press, London 1982).

Gandhi's immediate reaction to the proposal was to state:

Whatever the wrong done to India by British rule, if the Statement of the Mission is genuine, as I believe it is, it is in discharge of an obligation they have declared the British have to India, namely to get off India's back. It contains the seed to convert this land of sorrow into one without sorrow and sufferings.

Then came the tragedy. The following is the mournful description of that tragedy by Maulana Azad in his book, *India Wins Freedom* (pp. 149-151):

I have already mentioned that the Cabinet Mission published its scheme on 16th May. Basically it was the same as the one sketched in my statement on 15th April. The Cabinet Mission plan provided that only three subjects would belong compulsorily to the Central Government. These were Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications. The Mission, however, added a new element to the plan. It divided the country into three Zones A, B and C, as



the members of the Mission felt that this would give a greater sense of assurance to the minorities. Section B would include the Punjab, Sind, the North-West Frontier Province and British Baluchistan. This would constitute a Muslim majority area. In section C, which included Bengal and Assam, the Muslims would have a small majority over the rest. The Cabinet Mission thought that this arrangement would give complete assurance to the Muslim minority and satisfy all legitimate fears of the League.

The Mission had also accepted my view that the majority of subjects would be treated at the provincial level. Muslims in the majority provinces would thus exercise almost complete autonomy. Only certain agreed subjects would be dealt with at the sectional level. Here also the Muslims were assured of a majority in Sections B and C and would be able to satisfy all their legitimate hopes. So far as the centre was concerned, there were only three subjects which from the nature of the case could not be provincially administered. Since the Cabinet Mission plan was in spirit the same as mine and the only addition was the institution of three sections, I felt that we should accept the proposal.

The Muslim League Council met for three days before it could come to a decision. On the final day Jinnah had to admit that there could be no fairer solution of the minority problem than that presented in the Cabinet Mission plan. In any case he could not get better terms. He told the Council that the scheme presented by the Cabinet Mission was the maximum that he could secure. As such, he advised the Muslim League to accept the scheme and the Council voted unanimously in its favour. In our discussion in the Working Committee I pointed out that the Cabinet Mission plan was basically the same as the scheme Congress had accepted. As such, the Working Committee did not have much difficulty in accepting the main political solution contained in the plan.

### **Nehru changes course of history:**

The acceptance of the Cabinet Mission plan by both Congress and the Muslim League was a glorious event in the history of the freedom movement in India. It meant that the difficult question of Indian freedom had been settled by negotiation and agreement and not by methods of violence and conflict. It also seemed that the communal difficulties had been finally left behind. Throughout the country there was a sense of jubilation and all people were united in their demand for freedom. We rejoiced that we did not know that our joy was premature and bitter disappointment awaited us.

Now happened one of those unfortunate events which changed the course of history. On July 10, Jawaharlal made a statement which in normal circumstances might have passed almost unnoticed, but in the existing atmosphere of suspicion and hatred, set in train a most unfortunate series of circumstances. Some press representatives asked him whether, with the passing of the resolution by the All-India Congress Committee, the Congress had accepted the plan in toto, including the composition of the interim Government. Jawaharlal stated in reply that Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly 'completely unfettered by agreements and free to meet all situations as they arise'. (*Ibid pp. 154-155*).

Press representatives further asked if this meant that the Cabinet Mission plan could be modified. Jawaharlal replied emphatically that the Congress had agreed only to participate in the Constituent Assembly and regarded

itself free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission plan as it thought best.

I must place on record that Jawaharlal's statement was wrong. It was not correct to say that Congress was free to modify the plan as it pleased. We had in fact agreed that the Central Government would be federal. There would be a compulsory list of three central subjects, while all other subjects remained in the provincial sphere. We had further agreed that there would be the three sections, viz. A, B and C, in which the provinces would be grouped. These matters could not be changed unilaterally by Congress without the consent of other parties to the agreement.

Another eye-witness to this tragic event was Louis Fischer. He wrote:

Thwarted, seeing no alternative, Jinnah accepted the Mission's Confederation Scheme. 'Now happened one of those unfortunate events which changed the course of history', Azad writes. The event was a Nehru press interview in Bombay. I attended that fateful question-and-answer period and when it ended I said to Nehru in the presence of Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, his sister, 'You have changed the entire basis of the agreement with England'. He replied, 'I am aware of that'.

Nehru had told the assembled journalists that the Congress party, of which he, Gandhi, Azad and Patel were leaders, would not be bound by the Cabinet Mission's Confederation plan. Actually the All-India Congress Committee had met in the same city of Bombay only two days earlier under Nehru's chairmanship and in Gandhi's presence and voted for the plan. Azad, who participated in the discussion, bears witness to it.

Nobody in his senses would imagine that Maulana Azad, as Congress President, could have made his statement on April 15 regarding constitutional proposals without the knowledge and consent of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and other Congress leaders. To make matters worse, with the support and encouragement of Gandhi, Gopi Nath Bordoloi, the Congress Chief Minister of Assam, declared that his province would not join any grouping.

Jinnah read Nehru's comments as "a complete repudiation of the basic form upon which the long-term scheme rests and all of its fundamentals". (*A New History of India* p.343). The Muslim League then demanded that the Viceroy should go ahead and constitute a provisional Government, even though the Congress refused to take part. This, of course, was not accepted. The League withdrew its previous approval of the Mission's proposals. The Viceroy then re-constituted his executive council - but with Congress members only. The League's reaction to this was to declare Aug 16 as a day of 'Direct Action'. India was thrown into turmoil. The history of communal violence that followed before and after partition is well known. The plan presented by the Cabinet Mission was a Congress plan in substance and accepted by the Muslim League, whatever might be the reasons used, and then accepted by the Congress in a meeting under Nehru's own chairmanship. That was the last

chance to avoid communal friction on such a scale. To throw away such a chance, as if it was a game of cards, was unforgivable, particularly at a time when people inside and outside India were well aware that if Congress and the League could not come to an understanding, civil war was inevitable. That was the way India was plunged into a bloodbath. Even at this stage, had the rank and file members of the Congress been free to take a decision, the colossal tragedy which overtook India would have been avoided. Gandhi's dictatorship was the root of all evils.

**Gandhi wanted partition:** Then Lord Wavell was recalled and Lord Mountbatten came to India as the Viceroy in February 1946. The sombre recollection of Maulana Azad in his book, *India Wins Freedom*, tells how Gandhi, Nehru and Patel instantly accepted partition like good boys when it was proposed by Mountbatten. These were the same politicians who had spent their lives opposing the very idea. Not only that, they forced the partition of the Punjab and Bengal strictly on communal lines. Maulana Azad wrote. (*India wins Freedom* p.186):

We expected that he (Gandhi) would come to meet Lord Mountbatten and he actually arrived on 31st March. I went to see him at once and his first remark was: 'Partition has now become a threat. It seems Vallabhbai and even Jawaharlal have surrendered. What will you do now? Will you stand by me, or have you also changed?'

I replied, 'I have been and am against partition. Never has my opposition to partition been so strong as today. I am however distressed to find that even Jawaharlal and Sardar Patel have accepted defeat and in your words, surrendered their arms. My only hope now is in you. If you stand against partition, we may save the situation. If you acquiesce, I am afraid India is lost.'

Gandhi said, 'What a question to ask! If the Congress wishes to accept partition, it will be over my dead body. So long as I am alive I will never agree to the partition of India. Nor will I, if I can help it, allow Congress to accept it.' (Later that day Gandhiji met Lord Mountbatten. He saw him again the next day and still again on 2nd April. Sardar Patel came to him soon after he returned from his first meeting with Lord Mountbatten and was closeted with him for over two hours. What happened during this meeting I do not know. But when I met Gandhiji again I received the greatest shock of my life, for I found that he too had changed. He was still not openly in favour of partition but he no longer spoke so vehemently against it. What surprised and shocked me even more was that he began to repeat the arguments Sardar Patel had already used. For over two hours I pleaded with him but could make no impression on him.

Tahmankar wrote a biography of Sardar Patel. The author was a great admirer of both Gandhi and Patel. The book was dedicated to Birla and its foreword written by Lord Mountbatten. The author did not like the remark of Maulana Azad in his book, that it was

Patel who accepted partition first and then persuaded Gandhi to follow suit. In defence of Patel "*(Sardar Patel*" by Tahmankar. p.272. Allen & Unwin, London 1970 ), he wrote:

At this stage it will not be unprofitable to note that politician Rajagopalachari and industrialist Ghanashyam Das Birla were quietly making notes and analysing day-to-day developments. Rajagopalachari had suggested, as far back as 1942, that Pakistan should be conceded. Birla had maintained very close and cordial relations with Congress High Command as well as with conservative leaders, including Winston Churchill. Whenever he visited London, Birla met Churchill and lunched or had tea with him. The two men talked freely and frankly. He also discussed the Indian problems with other British leaders, and kept Gandhi and Patel informed of his talks. In London he gathered a firm impression that the British would never use the big stick against the League, however unreasonable their demands. His extraordinary knowledge of economic conditions in the country and his astute appraisals of political developments convinced him that partition could no longer be avoided; it had been proved time and time again that any concessions made to the League served only to whet its appetite. Birla told Gandhi and Patel his conviction that partition would be the only solution to end the agony of uncertainty and chaos".

Perhaps Churchill periodically audited the accounts of the colossal amount of money Birla spent to keep Gandhi living in poverty. The future will tell what part Churchill and Whitehall played in internal Congress politics and its decision-making through Birla and others like him who financed the Congress.

*Gandhi's odious hypocrisy lay in the fact that publicly he was telling people that India would be partitioned over his dead body, whereas he was secretly negotiating with the British Cabinet behind the back of the Congress President, and it was he who, through his secret emissary, suggested the partition of the Punjab and Bengal. ("Gandhi's Emissary" by Sudhir Ghosh. p. 199 The Crescent Press, London. 1967)*

Mountbatten, before leaving England for India, met this secret agent. He sabotaged every plan to keep India together on the basis of power sharing between the major communities. The net result was the massacre of thousands and thousands, while many millions became refugees. Mir Jafar betrayed the Nawab of Bengal in 1757, which gave birth to the British Empire. Gandhi's betrayal gave birth to neo-Colonialism. Had there been an honest leadership in India at the time of, and immediately after, the Second World War, which was a period of great transition, it could have brought about the solidarity of the Afro-Asian countries, terminated Western domination, and eliminated the North-South divide.

## THE BETRAYAL OF THE SIKHS

10

As already stated the Congress Party was encouraged by the British administration only to make Indians good British subjects. But soon some Hindu militant movements grew in Bengal and Maharashtra. First it was in Bengal. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a civil servant, in the latter part of the 19th century, in his books projected the glory of Hinduism and utter destruction of Muslims. It was pro-British. The hero in his book, *Ananda Math*, said that the foreigners (British) would destroy the Muslims and then leave India for Hinduism to flourish. The anti-Muslim hatred sprouted in his books, particularly *Ananda Math*, exceeded all the bounds of human decency. He wrote the song, *Vande Mataram*, which he incorporated in his *Ananda Math*, and later on the Congress and M.K. Gandhi adopted it as the national anthem, which naturally the Muslims did not like. Unfortunately, as if under the spell of a curse, the *Ananda Math* and other books of Bankim Chandra were translated into all the major languages of India.

He was followed by Aurobindo Ghosh who led a Hindu terrorist movement which was anti-British and thus a departure from Bankim Chatterjee's concept. He edited the newspaper, *Vande Mataram*. In Maharashtra, B.G. Tilak, a contemporary of Aurobindo Ghosh, led a brand of Hindu militant movement, a crude expression of extreme Hindu communalism. To organise and channelise Hindu upper caste awakening, he had popularised the "Ganesh Festival" and the Shivaji cult – thus giving them a communal overtone. But it was Dayananda Swaraswati who founded the Arya Samaj and blended Hindu revivalism and politics together. It was a dangerous cocktail. All the Hindu reformers before Dayananda were admirers of Islam. His teachings were anti-Muslim, anti-Christian and anti-Sikh. It was all Hindu, Hindi and Hindustan, and everything else was to be subordinated to it. Arya Samajists started the *sudhi* and *sangthan* directed against minorities. To counteract this the Muslims started *Tabligh* and *Tansim* and the Sikhs the Singh Sabha.

Many prominent Congress leaders were Arya Samajists. The domination of the Congress Party by the Arya Samaj gave the freedom movement an aspect of Hindu resurgence and was chiefly responsible for the aloofness of the Muslims and the Sikhs.

**Congress assurance to Sikhs:** A group emerged within the Congress, led by C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Jinnah, and a host of others who were genuinely secular. C.R. Das was a great statesman

and a patriot. He matched his strength against Gandhi and cornered him. The death of C.R. Das was a real tragedy for India. After his death the Congress was completely taken over by the Arya Samaj. As mentioned before Motilal Nehru in 1926 in his letter to Jawaharlal wrote: "The Malaviya-Lala gang aided by Birla's money are making frantic efforts to capture Congress. They will probably succeed as no counter effort is possible from our side." He meant Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who were also prominent Arya Samajists. Jinnah was ousted and to quote Subhas Bose's expression, "Motilalji surrendered without firing a shot". The ousting of Subhas Bose from the Congress in 1939 by Gandhi was the last act of clearing the Congress of genuine secular elements. Gandhi picked up what Tilak had left (minus his anti-British stand), organising "Hindi prachar", "cow protection" etc. He took the public posture of Hindu-Muslim unity, whereas by subterfuge implementing the programme of Arya Samaj. So he had to resort to hypocrisy and deceit.

The British ostensibly adopted the policy of gradual transfer of power to Indians through constitutional means. The minorities naturally felt deeply concerned as to what would be their position in India where Hindus were in overwhelming majority.

In 1929, when the Congress held its session in Lahore, the Sikhs staged a massive demonstration (against the Nehru Report not safeguarding Sikh interests) led by Baba Kharak Singh. Before the Congress session began, Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru met Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders. The Congress leaders informed them that as the Congress Working Committee had withdrawn the request for Dominion Status, the Nehru Report had automatically lapsed. They assured them that in future no solution would be acceptable to the Congress which did not give satisfaction to the Sikh and Muslim minorities (*CW. 42 p.359*). A resolution to this effect was also later passed by the Congress at its Lahore session. The text of the resolution said:

The Congress believing that in an independent India Communal questions can only be solved on strictly national basis; but as the Sikhs in particular and the Muslims and the other minorities in general have expressed dissatisfaction over the solution of Communal questions, proposed in the Nehru Report, the Congress assures the Sikhs, the Muslims and other minorities that no solution thereof in any future constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned.

*(The Indian Annual Register 1929, Vol.2 p.310)*

**Nehru goes back on promise:** The resolution, according to Gandhi, was adopted primarily to satisfy the Sikh minority (*CW. 42*

p.378). Gandhi repeated the same commitment on the eve of his departure to attend the Round Table Conference. It was a solemn assurance given by Nehru the father, Nehru the son and Gandhi the Holy Ghost. It makes a fascinating study how Nehru the son honoured this commitment when he inherited the British Indian Empire minus Pakistan. Those who make a promise with the intention of not keeping it are common criminals guilty of fraud, however naive those who are deceived may be.

Sardar Kapur Singh in the Lok Sabha, while opening the debate on the Punjab Reorganisation Bill 1966 on Sept. 6 1966, said:

Afterwards, the policy Resolution was repeatedly reiterated officially and demi-officially, throughout the period, up to August 1947, and it was not officially repudiated till 1950 when the present Constitution was framed. The trusting Sikhs, who in their Daily Prayer, extol keeping faith as the noblest of human virtues, placing complete reliance in this solemn undertaking given to them by the majority community, resisted and refused all offers and proposals made to them by the British and the other people – the Muslims – whom we now prefer to call the Muslim League – proposing to accord the Sikhs a Sovereign and Autonomous status in the areas constituting their ancestral homeland between the river Ghaggar and the river Chenab. This is the first link of the history which I am going to narrate here so as to provide background to the conclusions as to why the Bill should be rejected. The second link is that in the year 1932, at the time of Second Round Table Conference, the British Government through Sardar Bahadur Shivdev Singh, then a member of the India Secretary of State's Council, made an informal proposal to the Sikhs that if they disassociate finally with the Congress movement, they would be given a decisive political weightage in the Punjab, such as would lead to their emerging as a third independent element in India after the British transfer power to the inhabitants of this sub-continent.

The much maligned, but naive, Master Tara Singh, to my personal knowledge, promptly rejected this tempting offer. I was then a student at the University of Cambridge and was closely associated with these developments.

To have recourse to solemn oath, to inspire confidence that might be betrayed when convenient, is quite in the political tradition of the Indian National Congress. On March 16, 1931, Gandhi came to a special Sikh Congregation held in Gurudwara Sisganj, Delhi, where he was asked as to what guarantee there was that his Indian National Congress would implement the assurance given to the Sikh people in 1929, at Lahore. His reply published in his *Young India* (March 19 1931), says:

.... Sardar Madhusudan Singh has asked for an assurance that the Congress would do nothing that might alienate sympathies of the Sikhs

from the Congress. Well, the Congress, in its Lahore session, passed a Resolution that it would not enter into or be a party to any settlement with regard to the minority question that failed to satisfy any of the minorities concerned. What further assurances the Congress can give to the Sikhs, I fail to understand... I ask you to accept my word and the Resolution of the Congress that it will not betray a single individual, much less a community. If it ever thinks of doing so, it will only hasten its doom ... I pray you, therefore, to unbosom yourselves of all your doubts ... What more shall I say? What more can I say than this: 'Let God be the witness of the bond that binds me and the Congress with you'.

When further asked as to what the Sikhs could do in case of betrayal, he said that Sikhs could, in that case, take their *Kirpans* in hand with perfect justification before God and man.

Following the demand for a separate sovereign state for the Muslims in the North-West of India, a delegation of the Akali leaders, comprising Baldev Singh, Ujjal Singh, Jogendar Singh and Master Tara Singh, met Stafford Cripps in 1942. Cripps advised the Sikh leaders to bargain with both the Congress and the Muslim League for a Soviet District-type autonomous area and join the State that offers better terms. (*N. Mansergh: The Transfer of Power, Vol.1, Document 396*). It was rejected by Master Tara Singh.

### **Sikhs wanted united India.**

The issue was again taken up by Master Singh in 1945 when the Pakistan Scheme was being fervently discussed. But throughout this period the Akali leaders' demand was firm. They said in a number of statements that they stood for a united India but would opt for a separate Sikh State in case the plea for a Muslim State was accepted. *During all these years the demand for a Sikh State had the tacit approval of the Congress and the Arya Samaj leadership as they thought it would be a counterweight against the demand for Pakistan. The Sikhs were exploited to fight the battle of the Hindus against Pakistan and for a united India on their own terms.* And it was for this reason that the entire Hindu population of the Punjab at one time acknowledged the leadership of Master Tara Singh when he had announced that the creation of Pakistan would be resisted to the last.

In his book, *Fifty Years of Punjab Politics*, Harcharan Singh Bajwa wrote:

... On 5th August 1944, Mr. Jinnah declared that the Sikhs were a separate nation and their sentiments needed to be respected. (*p.68*)

... On 15th April 1946 Sardar Patel declared "Sikhistan issue will be considered in the Constituent Assembly after the transfer of power in



the hands of the Indians. (p. 69).

... Earlier in 1946 while myself, Sardar Kartar Singh Dewana and Master Sujan Singh Sirhali met Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel as representatives of the Akali Dal, they had assured us that in the event of suffocation felt by Sikhs in free India, a separate Sikh State would be carved out for them in the Indian Union.. (p.79)

(*Modern Publishers, Chandigarh, 1979*)

Jinnah was once -

... confronted by a British lady who wanted to know why the League-Congress differences could not be patched up. Jinnah shot back with characteristic exasperation, "Patched up with whom? I talk to Jawaharlal who says he appreciates the Muslim view point and will talk to Gandhi. I don't hear anything from Jawaharlal again. I talk to Gandhi. He says, of course, the Muslims' special rights as a minority should be safeguarded; of course the League is an important institution." When I asked him, why not sort out matters?, the old man says, what matters? What is the problem, really Mr. Jinnah? He says he will talk to Nehru. In any case, says he, let India be free, then everything will be all right. Yes, it will be all right for them for they will be in a burgeoning majority then. I don't trust them. This was at a time when Jinnah had not formally expressed himself in favour of Pakistan. (*"Punjab in Indian Politics" by Amrikh Singh, Ajanta Publishers, Delhi 1985*).

The most fatal expression is "I don't trust them". Muslims led by Jinnah did not trust Gandhi. The result was partition of India and the emergence of Pakistan. Sikhs led by Master Tara Singh trusted Gandhi. They are now fighting for much less than what was offered to them on a plate, even after the lapse of half-a-century. It is a classic case of betrayal.

**Jinnah offers Khalistan:** At the end of the War, a "Sikh homeland" plan was evolved by the communists. G. Adhikari in a letter to Prof. I.N. Madan on Jan. 25 1943 wrote:

Azad Punjab is not the demand of progressive Sikh nationalism. It is a demand which is a counterblast to the demand for self-determination by the Muslims in the Punjab. It is in the interest of the Sikh people that they accept the demand of the Muslims of the Punjab and get them to accept their own rights of self-determination.

In 1946, on Jinnah's initiative a meeting took place between Jinnah on one side, and on the other side the Maharaja of Patiala, H.S. Malik, Prime Minister of Patiala, Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh. Satinder Singh, in his book, *Khalistan*, says:

...Jinnah was most friendly and explained to those present about anxiousness that the Sikhs should accept Pakistan and agree to live there after it was created, and he went on to explain that if Sikhs did that he would agree to everything that Sikhs would wish for to safeguard

their interests as a minority... Malik asked Jinnah to spell out more precisely what would be the position of the Sikhs in Pakistan. Malik said to him, 'Mr. Jinnah, you are being very generous but we would like to have a clearer picture. You will have a Cabinet, a Parliament, the Judiciary, the Armed Forces. What exactly will be our share in all these?' In reply Jinnah recounted the story of Zaghlul Pasha who, after Egypt became independent, was the virtual ruler of Egypt, and the Copts, the important Christian minority living in that country, and added, 'I shall deal with you as Zaghlul Pasha dealt with the Copts'. The story as narrated at that time by Jinnah was this. The Copts came to Zaghlul Pasha in deputation to ask for certain guarantees regarding their position as an important minority in the new Egypt. After a brief discussion, Zaghlul Pasha advised the leader of the Copts delegation to think the whole thing over carefully and put into a written document all that they wanted and come and see him again. At their second meeting, according to Jinnah, when the Copts leader handed to the Pasha the written document that he had asked for, the Pasha, without examining it, wrote on it, 'This is how I will deal with you'. All present there were very embarrassed as they were determined not to agree the demand for Pakistan. But what to do in the face of such an offer?...

Masterji told him that he would think it over and let him know. The meeting then ended and Jinnah left.

Maharaja, Malik, Kartar Singh and Master Tara Singh then discussed the whole matter briefly among themselves and decided that something must be done immediately so that there may be no chance of any propaganda being done by Jinnah's people claiming that the Sikhs had agreed to Pakistan. Malik then went and saw U.N. Sen who wielded considerable influence in press circles in those days and was an old friend of Malik, and said to him, My friend, I have never asked you to do anything for me but today I have a request to make, a very important request. Malik then told him about the meeting with Jinnah and added, I want you to see to it that the *Statesman* carries on its front page the next morning, a headline in the largest letters, 'The Sikhs will under no circumstances accept Pakistan'. Sen promised to do his best and, sure enough, the next day the *Statesman* carried the headline that Malik had asked for. And that was the answer to Jinnah. Sikhs could then have had Sikhistan if they wanted, as that was what Jinnah was really hinting at, because he knew truly well that Sikhs would never agree to live in Pakistan. That was the price he was offering to Sikhs to agree to his demand for Pakistan and gives a statement in this favour.

(p.64 *Amar Prakashan, New Delhi, 1982*).

Discussing the situation as it developed in 1946, Moon in his book, *Divide and Quit*, disclosed that he approached the Sikh leadership through an "Akali Friend" with the following suggestions as a basis for resolutions with the Muslim League:

(1) A separate unit of Eastern Punjab with a position in Pakistan equal

to that of any other unit, e.g. Sind and Western Punjab.

(2) Special privileges for the Sikh minority in Western Punjab.

(3) Special privileges for the Sikhs in Pakistan as a whole. "If the Sikhs took the course I suggested they would become the most important minority in Pakistan and it would be in the Muslims' interest to make them happy, secure and contented." Then, he narrated the course of negotiations stating the Sikh leadership was not responsive. (*Divide and Quit*, p.86. Chatto & Windus, London 1961).

Kapur Singh, in his speech in the Lok Sabha on Sept. 6 1966, however, stated that the Cabinet Mission wanted to define a Sikh homeland from Ghaggar to Chenab but it was not acceptable to the Sikhs. Similarly Jinnah, after consulting British leaders, appealed to the Sikh leaders that Patiala should become independent and areas from Panipat to Ravi should be merged in it, but it was rejected by Master Tara Singh. He further said:

In the month of July 1946, the All India Congress Working Committee met at Calcutta, which reaffirmed the assurances already given to the Sikhs, and in his press conference held on the 6th July, there, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru spelt out the concrete content of these solemn undertakings in the following glowing words:

'The brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set-up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom.'

In these words, an autonomous state of the Sikhs, within India, was promised.

On Dec. 9 1946, when the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly was held under the chairmanship of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru moved the first and the fundamental resolution which said:

Adequate safeguards would be provided for minorities.. It was a declaration, a pledge and an undertaking before the world, a contract with millions of Indians, and, therefore, in the nature of an oath, which we must keep.

The Congress Working Committee, however, succeeded in persuading the Sikh leaders to accept the Partition Plan on its promise that their rights and interests would be duly safeguarded. The Akali Working Committee passed a resolution for the division of Punjab on April 17 1947. Master Tara Singh demanded the division of Punjab with Chenab as the border as the only solution for terminating the swelling riots.

The Sikh leaders in their talks with the Viceroy insisted upon the partition of the Punjab, despite warnings from the latter that it would mean division of the Community and denied to them some of their best lands.

(p. 242, M.V. Hodson "The Great Divide", Hutchinson, London 1969)

When in the month of July 1947, the Hindu and Sikh members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly met at Delhi to pass a unanimous resolution favouring partition of the Punjab, it contained the following sentence to reassure the Sikhs of the bona fides of the Congress leadership:

In the divided Indian Punjab, special constitutional measures are imperative to meet the just aspirations and rights of the Sikhs.

**Punjabi Hindus disown mother tongue:** But no sooner did India become independent than the "Solemn undertaking" was forgotten. The Sikhs felt particularly upset when the Hindu press started attacking the Sikhs and Akali Dal as being aspirants to the formation of a Sikh state, and exhorted the Government to curb their "communalism" in "secular India". It was safely forgotten that *Gandhi, Congress and the Arya Samaj cunningly exploited the Sikhs to fight the battle of the Hindus against Pakistan. In pre-Partition days the same forces were solidly behind Master Tara Singh, and soon after Partition all of them turned against him.* Simultaneously, the Punjab press, Arya Samaj, Congress and the Jan Sangh started a campaign to persuade Punjabi-speaking Hindus to disown their mother tongue and adopt Hindi.

#### **Sikhs Called Dangerous People**

The pre-partition non-Muslim press in Punjab belonged to the Arya Samaj section of the Punjab Hindus. Whereas the Sikh press was almost non-existent, many other newspapers of the same Arya Samaj trend came into existence after independence. The writings of the days immediately after Partition reflected the policy towards what they called "secularism", meaning thereby the suppression of the minorities and their absorption in Hindu society. The policy found support in the programme adopted by the Congress High Command, though in a deceitful manner. The Congress always stood for demarcation of the units of the country on a linguistic basis. It had resisted the Bengal partition in 1905 on the plea that would split a linguistic province or unit. But when, at the time of the transfer of power, they found that in Bengal some Hindus would live where Muslims would have dominant influence, they demanded the partition of Bengal and secret initiative was taken by India's holy man. That is truly Indian "secularism"

Chandu Lal Trivedi, the Governor of Punjab, on Oct. 10 1947 sent a secret circular to all the Deputy Commissioners containing the following:

Sikhs as a community are a lawless people and are a menace to the law-abiding Hindus in the province. Deputy Commissioners should take

special measures against them. (*Fifty Years of Punjab Politics, p.82*).

It was at a time when Sikh refugees were streaming from Pakistan into India, when India's holy man Gandhi was still alive, when the Administration was headed by his beloved disciple Nehru, and he in his turn appointed his close and trusted Chandu Lal Trivedi as the Governor of Punjab.

**Persecution of Kapur Singh:**What Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan related to the author about his involvement with the said secret circular was that, at the time of the incident, Kapur Singh, a brilliant ICS officer, was the Deputy Commissioner of Hoshiarpur and a friend and classmate of Master Dasondha Singh, Dr. Chauhan's uncle. At the invitation of Kapur Singh, both Master Dasondha Singh and Dr. Chauhan went to see him. He showed them the secret circular and gave them a copy. Dr. Chauhan straightaway went to Amritsar and met Master Tara Singh and showed him the secret circular. He was furious. He at once summoned a meeting of his close associates and sent a delegation to Delhi headed by Uddham Singh Nagoke, the other two members being Darsan Singh Pheruman and Teja Singh Akkarpuri. All the three were members of the Indian Parliament. Dr. Chauhan accompanied the delegation. When the delegation (and Dr. Chauhan) met Nehru he pretended surprise and said that he knew nothing. He suggested that it was Sardar Patel's department and they should see him. When the delegation met Patel, he was very sweet and pretended to be angry with Trivedi and assured the delegation that he would look into the matter. Dr. Chauhan formed the impression that both Nehru and Patel were well aware of the secret circular. However, Chandu Lal Trivedi remained in his post and did all the mischief his superiors wanted him to do. It was not difficult for the Indian Government to find out that it was Kapur Singh who divulged the secret; he was an officer noted for his integrity and highly commended before Independence. After the incident, he was continuously persecuted and finally forced to resign in disgust. The Sikh community honoured him by electing him to Lok Sabha.

Sikh refugees were accorded most callous treatment by all the Congress administration in general and Delhi, and the Uttar Pradesh Government even issued orders stopping the entry of refugees into that State.

It must be admitted that the Delhi administration was most unsympathetic to the refugees. In fact, Uttar Pradesh government even issued orders stopping the entry of refugees into that state. Ajit Singh Sarhadi, a Sikh leader, wrote in his book *Punjabi Suba (p.12)*

(p. 151, *U.C. Kapur & Sons, Delhi 1970*)

All this happened under the very nose of Pandit Nehru. When Sikhs were suffering, Sardar Baldev Singh, a Sikh member of the Nehru Cabinet, was busy indulging in anti-Pakistan rhetoric and getting big applause from the Indian press.

The Sikh leadership felt frustrated, bewildered and that it was groping in the dark. Three Akali leaders, namely, Harcharan Singh Bajwa, Bhupinder Singh Man and Giani Kartar Singh, went to Dr. Ambedkar, the most neglected wise man of India, and solicited his guidance. He told them, If you clamour for a Sikh State, it will be a cry in the wilderness. Why don't you ask for a Punjabi-speaking State? Congress is committed to linguistic basis for re-organisation of the States. They can defer satisfaction of this, but they cannot oppose it for long. (*Fifty Years of Punjab Politics – 1920-1970*. Harcharan Singh Bajwa, Modern Publishers, Chandigarh, 1979).

The Sikhs got a Punjabi Suba after all, but not so long as Pandit Nehru was alive. He mobilised State power, corruption and Hindu chauvinism to frustrate the legitimate demands of the Sikhs.

**Congress Mischief:** The Congress committed itself to the principle of linguistic provinces in a resolution in 1921 and continued to do so up to Independence. Then its attitude to the subject changed, particularly in relation to Sikhs and Punjab. The Constituent Assembly of India appointed a Linguistic Provinces Commission under the chairmanship of Justice S.K. Das but excluded Punjab from its terms of reference. The Commission recommended a postponement of the consideration of this question on the plea that a reorganisation of the States mainly on linguistic considerations was not in the larger interests of the Indian nation. It went beyond its terms of reference and made the following gratuitous remark:

The formation of linguistic provinces is sure to give rise to a demand for the separation of linguistic groups elsewhere. Claims have already been made by the Sikhs, Jats and others and these demands will in course of time be intensified and become live issues if once the formation of linguistic provinces is decided upon." (*Das Commission Report, para 20*)

The Indian National Congress in 1948 in its Jaipur Session set up a committee to review the Das Commission Report. The J.V.P. Committee (Jawaharlal, Vallabhai and Pattabi Sitaramaya) reported:

We are clearly of the opinion that no kind of rectification of boundaries in the provinces of Northern India should be raised at the present moment whatever the merits of such a proposal might be ... This not necessarily means that the demands for the readjustment of provincial boundaries are unjustified or without merit. We believe there is some force in them or some adjustment may ultimately become necessary. (15-16, *Report of the Linguistic Provinces Committee, 1948- New Delhi 1953*).

In spite of the attitude of the Congress, the demand for linguistic States was gaining momentum all over India. The Government had to concede the demand of Andhra Pradesh, forced by the explosive situation created in the Telugu-speaking region by 58 days of fasting by Potti Sriramulu followed by his death. The demand for a Marathi-speaking state also became very strong. The Indian Government in 1953 appointed a Commission to consider the question of reorganisation of the States.

In 1948, the Punjab princely states were merged into one unit – the Patiala and East Punjab States Union. The majority of its population was Sikh. All that was needed was to merge the Sikh majority districts of East Punjab to PEPSU to make the Sikh State a reality. Jinnah had given the same outline before Independence.

### **Punjabi Suba demand**

The demand for a Punjabi Suba was, however, made in February 1948. Explaining the objectives, Master Tara Singh declared:

We have a culture different from the Hindus, our culture is Gurumukhi culture and our literature is also in the Gurumukhi script ... We want to have a province where we can safeguard our culture and tradition.

*("Akali Patrika" 2:1, Jullundar, Oct. 11 1949)*

He, however, made it clear that they did not want a separate and independent sovereign state.

The Praja Socialist Party and the Communist Party supported the demand of the Akali Dal for a Punjabi-speaking province, though they differed in certain details. Jaya Prakash Narayan warned against suppressing the language question:

That way lies danger to national unity. Let us not invest this natural desire with the epithets of parochialism or treat it as a crime against the nation. The present exaggerations and aberrations of linguism would not have appeared had we frankly accepted the linguistic case and proceeded fairly and squarely to meet it. (*"Janata", 11.3 – Feb. 12 1956*)

As the demand for a Punjabi Suba came mainly from the Sikhs, the Hindu followers of Gandhi launched the Maha (Greater) Punjab movement which laid stress on the merger of Punjab, PEPSU and Himachal Pradesh. The Arya Samaj held a conference on Dec. 26 1953 at Ambala and their leader, R.B. Badri Dass, presiding over the conference, pronounced the objectives of the Maha Punjab. Arya Samaj delegates from all the three States and also from Delhi attended. The irony is that the Punjab Provincial Congress, the Punjab government and the PEPSU Congress completely identified themselves with the Arya Samaj objectives. Can anybody with

average intellect draw the conclusion that Pandit Nehru and the Congress High Command were not behind this move?

**Nehru called tyrant & liar:** Hukam Singh, a prominent Sikh leader and later the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, wrote:

Pandit Nehru is, to say the least, the spearhead of militant Hindu chauvinism who glibly talks about nationalism, a tyrant who eulogises democracy and a gobelian liar – in short a political cheat, deceiver and double dealer in the service of Indian reaction.

(*Spokesman* vol. II No.3, Jan. 16 1952)

*The whole purpose of the Maha Punjab exercise was to sabotage the Punjabi Suba movement so that Sikhs could not have effective voice, though a genuinely Punjabi-speaking area would have had Hindu majority.*

The Sikh hopes were rekindled when the Central Government appointed the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in the winter of 1953. But the SRC rejected the case for a Punjabi-speaking state on the ground that "a minimum measure of agreement necessary for making a change in the existing set-up was absent".

Master Tara Singh described the SRC Report as yet another instance of gross discrimination against the Sikhs. Had there been no Sikhs in Punjab, he said, a unilingual state would have been conceded without a second thought. Denouncing the SRC report as a "decree of annihilation", he threatened to launch a "morcha" for the formation of a Punjabi Suba. Giani Kartar Singh said that *out of 14 recognised languages in the Indian Constitution, 13 States had been formed on a linguistic basis. Only a Punjabi Suba had not been formed because the Sikh loyalty was suspected.*

(*The Akali*, Oct. 13 1955).

Master Tara Singh on April 30 1960 launched a peaceful agitation in support of his demand. Although over 57,000 Akali workers courted arrest, Nehru remained unmoved. When Sant Fateh Singh went on a fast unto death, the Nehru Government, fearful of the dire consequences, agreed to look into the grievances of the Sikh community. Sant Fateh Singh broke the fast but it turned out to be a deceitful move by Nehru. He advanced the argument that denial of a Punjabi-speaking province did not amount to discrimination and so there was no grievance. Then Master Tara Singh undertook to fast unto death unless the Suba was conceded. He began his fast on Aug. 15 1961 in the sanctuary of the Golden Temple. After 43 days he broke his fast. It is debatable whether his spirit was broken or he was tricked by Nehru's emissaries. But it killed his political career and the leadership was taken over by Sant Fateh



Singh.

In 1961, Nehru declared in Parliament that the demand for a Punjabi Suba was "a communal demand, even though it is given a linguistic basis". He said that Punjab constituted "a definite social and linguistic unit" so that "another partition now would cause it deep injury". He pointed out that "the whole of Punjab, whether it is in regard to language, whether it is in regard to the ways of living, whether it is the food you eat and so many other things, it is unity – whether it is Hindu or Sikh or, I may add, Muslim – now there are not many Muslims there". He was convinced that to form a Punjabi Suba was "inviting disaster", similar to the earlier partition "because the way it has grown up – there is no doubt about it that it has grown up not as a linguistic issue but as a communal issue". If Nehru believed that Punjab was a unit, then why did he and his Guru Gandhi conspire with Arya Samaj to partition Punjab? Why, all over India, when Hindus demanded linguistic provinces it was secular, but when Sikhs demanded the same thing it became communal? Was it not Nehru himself and the Arya Samaj who turned it into a communal issue?

Until his death on May 27 1964, Nehru refused to give in to the Akali demand. He told the correspondent of the *The Times*, London, in an exclusive interview that he would rather face Civil War on the issue of the Punjabi-speaking State than concede it. Lal Bahadur Shastri continued the policy of his predecessor.

The following statement by Master Tara Singh shows how very disillusioned he was on Indian secularism:

Although the Constitution of the Country pretends to be of one nation and citizenship irrespective of caste and creed, in practice the entire administrative working and the implementation of the laws of the country is oriented by Communal considerations.

*(Press conference, July 1961 at Imperial Hotel, New Delhi).*

**Kashmir discrimination:** Before Independence this man was an idol worshipped by the Indian National Congress and the Hindu press. Another idol was Sheikh Abdullah. In a protest meeting in March 1969 at Mujahid Manzil in Srinagar, he said:

He was not keen to enter into an argument with Jan Sangh. He would ask those in India claiming to be Secular as to how many Muslims had got jobs during the past twenty years in India, and how many were encouraged in trade. The Banks in the Kashmir Valley, he said, refused to advance loans to local people, even if they pledged their property against it. But no such restriction was imposed in Jammu, where loans were freely available. Is it because Kashmir is predominantly Muslim, while Jammu is Hindu, he asked. (*The Tribune* March 16 1969).

He complained bitterly, "when we linked ourselves with India, we had thought we were associating ourselves with a nation which would treat all equally, but our assessment proved wrong".

Another idol was Abdul Ghafar Khan, known as the Frontier Gandhi. The Indian Government invited him to attend the Gandhi Centenary celebrations and to receive the Nehru Award. Addressing pressmen at Raj Bhavan at Ahmedabad on Oct. 21 1969, when a correspondent pointed out that, unlike Pakistan, India was wedded to secularism, he replied, "what is the use of its being just on paper? Is it being implemented? How could communal clashes take place if there was true secularism, he wondered." (*Hindustan Times*, Oct. 22 1969).

In May 1965 a Conference was held at Ludhiana in the name of the distinguished Sikh soldier, General Hari Singh Nalua, where a resolution was passed demanding self-determined political status within the Indian Republic. Needless to say that the Hindu press became hysterical, describing it as a demand for a sovereign Sikh state.

Sant Fateh Singh decided to launch "morcha" once again for the formation of a Punjabi Suba. At this time tension between India and Pakistan was at its height. Both sides were preparing for a confrontation. Indian rulers realised that the bitterness of the Sikhs in such a situation might spell disaster for them. So they accepted the Punjabi Suba demand. There is a Bengali saying, "When hardpressed, a goat can cross the bamboo bridge".

After the war, Lal Bahadur Shastri died at Tashkent and Mrs. Indira Gandhi succeeded him. True to the tradition of Gandhi, her father and Congress, she started playing tricks.

The boundaries of New Punjab did not satisfy the Sikhs, as during the reorganisation, Chandigarh was not awarded to Punjab. It was to be the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana. Some Punjabi-speaking areas were also given to Haryana. To redress the grievances, Darsan Singh Pheruman, a leader of great repute and standing, a founder member of the Shiromoni Akali Dal in the twenties, and later chief of the State Swatantra Party, began a fast unto death on Aug. 15 1969. He carried out his threat and died after 74 days, on Oct 27. It made the Sikh masses very angry, not only against the Central Government but also against the Akali Dal as it did not throw its full weight behind Pheruman. To retrieve his position, Sant Fateh Singh went on another fast on Jan. 26 1970, declaring that he would lay down his life if Chandigarh was not handed over to Punjab. Mrs. Gandhi made an astute move. In an

award announced on Jan. 29 1970, she gave Chandigarh to Punjab and promised the appointment of an expert committee in the future to examine the question of merging Punjabi-speaking areas into it. But she awarded Fazilka and Abohar, two rich cotton-producing areas, for purely communal reasons, though the areas were not contiguous to Haryana and hence would need a corridor.

**Sikh quota In Army reduced:** The Hindus, including M.K. Gandhi, always opposed the fixing of quotas in the Services for minorities and depressed classes. Recent (1990) anti-reservation agitation would be an eye-opener to every impartial observer. On the eve of Independence, the proportion of Sikhs in the armed forces was 33%. By the early seventies the Central Government reduced it to 12%. To reduce the Shikh share further, the Union Government in 1974 fixed Punjab's quota in recruitment to the armed forces to a mere 2.5%. Of these, the Sikh share works out to around 1.3 percent. *Job reservation becomes communal when it adversely affects the Hindus, and it is secular when it adversely affects some community other than Hindus.*

By this time the alienation of the Sikhs was complete. Within the Akali Dal a group, though still small, emerged who pledged the establishment of a sovereign, independent Sikh state. This group was led by Kapur Singh and Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan. Dr. Chauhan tried to put the case of the Sikhs before the United Nations. He published a half-page advertisement in the *New York Times* (Oct. 11 1971) advocating the case for a sovereign Sikh state.

Though the Sikhs as a community felt betrayed and bitter, still the majority was hoping against hope that somehow or other, they could find an accommodation within India. By the early seventies they were demanding an autonomous Punjab. This demand was made a policy issue at Anandpur Sahib in 1973. Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan organised a demonstration there, demanding a sovereign independent Sikh state. The All-India Akali Conference held on Oct. 28/29 1978 formally adopted the said resolution. According to this resolution, Central Government was to control the defence, foreign affairs, communications and currency. All other powers and functions were to be under the jurisdiction of the State Government.

**"Blue Star" and Sant Bhlndranwale:** It slowly but definitely grew into a confrontation between Hindu chauvinism headed by Mrs Gandhi, and the Sikh masses who were determined to protect their identity. In the meantime, Sant Jamail Singh Bhindranwale emerged as the leader of the Sikh militancy. He made the Golden Temple his headquarters to direct the movement. On June 3 1984, the Indian army invaded the holiest of Sikh shrines – the Golden Temple

of Amritsar. The battle called the "Blute Star Operation" lasted for five days, at a cost of about 3,000 lives, including women and children. The Army used artillery and heavy tanks. In total, all over Punjab the Army killed more than 10,000 people to gain control of the various shrines. It is curious that the Army moved in at a time when they knew that there would be a large number of pilgrims in the Golden Temple. (*Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab*, foreword by Justice V.M. Tarkunde, Citizens for Democracy, Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat Publication, Bombay 1985 ).

On Oct. 31 1984, two Sikhs assassinated Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Anti-Sikh riots erupted in the cities and towns. But that was not a spontaneous expression of grief. It is interesting to note that riots flared up in some areas with extreme ferocity whereas some other areas remained quiet. What was the combusting chemical in those riot-torn areas? Riots flared up in areas under Congress administration, whereas non-Congress areas remained quiet. The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) which investigated the riots of Delhi said in its reports that "the attacks on members of the Sikh community in Delhi and its suburbs during this period, far from being a spontaneous expression of 'madness' out of popular grief and anger at Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, as was made out by the Authorities, were the outcome of a well-organised plan marked by acts of both deliberate commissions and omissions by important politicians of the Congress (I) at the top and by the authorities in the administration".

That is the true face of Indian secularism.







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