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MAHATMA GANDHI
A Biography

B. R. NANDA

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MAHATMA GANDHI

Few men in their lifetime aroused stronger emotions or touched deeper chords of humanity than Gandhi. 'Generations to come, it may be,' wrote Einstein, 'will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.' Yet it is important that the image of Gandhi does not become that of a divinity in the Hindu pantheon, but remains that of a man who schooled himself in self-discipline, made his life a continual process of growth, and tenaciously adhered to certain values to which humanity pays lip-service while flouting them in practice.

This revised and abridged biography is both chronological and analytical. Chapters are devoted to the background of Indian nationalism, the political scene, Gandhi's own religious evolution, his ethics and economics and his attitudes towards war and untouchability. But here also is the fullest account of one of the most eventful and moving lives in modern times.

B. R. NANDA

MAHATMA GANDHI

A BIOGRAPHY

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To the memory of
my mother
and
my brother A.P.

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Preface

FEW men in their lifetime aroused stronger emotions or touched deeper chords of humanity than Gandhi. 'Generations to come, it may be,' wrote Einstein of Gandhi in July 1944, 'will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.' While millions venerated Gandhi as the Mahatma, the great soul, his political opponents saw in him only an astute politician. Not until 1946-7, when the transfer of power enabled them in their minds to disengage Mr Gandhi the man from Mr Gandhi the arch-rebel, were the British able to see him in a gentler light. And it was his tragic death which finally convinced his Pakistani detractors that his humanity encompassed and transcended his loyalty to Hinduism.

It is not easy to write the life-story of a man who made such a strong impact on his contemporaries. Yet it is important that the image of Gandhi does not become that of a divinity in the Hindu pantheon, but remains that of a man who schooled himself in self-discipline, who made of his life a continual process of growth, who shaped his environment as much as he was shaped by it, and who tenaciously adhered to certain values to which civilized humanity pays lip-service while flouting them in practice.

Though the arrangement of this biography is necessarily chronological, I have attempted at appropriate points to analyse Gandhi's attitude to important issues. The background of Indian nationalism, the Indian political scene when Gandhi returned from South Africa, his religious evolution, the transformation in his mode of life and acquisition of new values, his ethics, economics, and political movements, his attitude to war and untouchability—all these have been treated in separate chapters. This combination of the chronological and the analytical methods has facilitated the discussion in a single volume of Gandhi's long and many-sided life in some detail, and the correlation of the story of his life with the evolution of his ideas. Gandhi was no theorist; his principles evolved in response to his own needs, and the environment in which he found himself. In fact, it is as difficult to assess the events of his life without understanding the ideas which inspired him, as it is to interpret his ideas on religion, morals, politics, or economics without reference to the context of his own life.

I know how hard it is for one who has lived through the last forty years to be completely objective about the events of which Gandhi was the centre, but in assessing and reassessing events and personalities, it has been my endeavour to understand and to interpret in the historical perspective, rather than to uphold or to condemn. How far I have succeeded in this endeavour it is for the reader to judge.

I am grateful to the Government of India and the Director of the National Archives for permission to examine and use material from contemporary records, which have enabled me to present, for the first time I believe, a two-dimensional story of Gandhi's relations with the government. Any account of Gandhi's struggles which is wholly, or even largely based on official sources is, however, apt to be lopsided. I have therefore used these sources only to illuminate some of the obscurer spots, and to see events in their proper perspective.

The material for a biography of Gandhi is enormous. It is no easy task to try to sum up his long, rich and varied life in a single volume. I owe a heavy debt of gratitude to authors of numerous works on Gandhi and on the Indian national movement; acknowledgements have been duly made in the text, and in the footnotes. I am grateful to the Navajivan Trust for permission to quote from Mahatma Gandhi's writings. I would also like to thank the following for according permission to reproduce brief extracts, Messrs Victor Gollancz Ltd, from W. C. Smith's *Modern Islam in India*; Messrs Cassell and Company, from Vincent Sheean's *Lead Kindly Light*; Messrs Curtis Brown Ltd, from *Nine Troubled Years* by Lord Templewood; Oxford University Press, from *India: A Re-statement* by Reginald Coupland; and Messrs Jonathan Cape Ltd, and Philip Mason, from *The Guardians* by Philip Woodruff.

For assistance given to me in the preparation of this book my thanks are due to the Gandhi Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi, particularly to Mr Avanibhai Mehta; to Mr Girja Kumar, Librarian, and his assistants in the Indian Council of World Affairs Library; and to the staff of the Central Secretariat Library.

I am grateful to Mr V. K. Krishna Menon, Mr Pyarelal and Kaka Seheb Kalelkar, who were good enough to discuss and elucidate certain points. Among those who evinced keen interest in the progress of this book I must mention Mr Devadas Gandhi, who unfortunately did not live to see it; and Mr N. C. Chaudhuri, Mr K. P. Mushran and Mr M. K. Kaul gave me much encouragement.

Mr B. N. Khosla read the entire book in manuscript and made useful suggestions. I alone, however, bear responsibility for the views expressed in the book and for its shortcomings.

I am indebted to my wife for her encouragement and patience during the long hours of silence in which this book was composed.

B. R. NANDA

CHAPTER I

Childhood

'WHY were you absent from the gymnastics class on Saturday?' asked the headmaster, as he looked severely from the attendance register to the fourteen-year-old boy who had been brought before him.

'I was nursing my father,' replied the boy, 'I had no watch and the clouds deceived me. When I arrived all the boys had gone.'

'You are lying,' said the headmaster curtly.

The year was 1883. The place was Rajkot, a small princely state in Western India. Dorabji Edulji Gimi, the headmaster of the Alfred High School, was a strict disciplinarian; he had made games compulsory for the students of the upper forms and accepted no excuses from those who failed to attend. The boy was Mohandas Gandhi. That he should have been convicted of lying was more than he could bear. He cried helplessly. He knew he was right but he did not know how to convince the headmaster. He brooded on the incident until he came to the conclusion that 'a man of truth must also be a man of care'. Never again, he said to himself, would he put himself in a position in which his explanations would be dismissed as lies.

He shone neither in the classroom nor in the playground. Quiet, shy and retiring, he was tongue-tied in company. He did not mind being rated as a mediocre student, but he was jealous of his reputation. He was proud of the fact that he had never told a lie to his teachers or classmates; the slightest aspersion on his character drew his tears.

This moral sensitiveness may seem precocious in a boy of fourteen, but it was part of the tradition of the Gandhi family. Mohan's father Karamchand and grandfather Uttamchand had been known for their integrity and for the courage of their convictions.

Bania by caste, the Gandhis were grocers and hailed from Kutiyana in Junagadh State. An enterprising member of the Gandhi clan, Harjivan Gandhi, bought a house in the year 1777 in Porbandar, where he and his children set up as small traders.

The family, however, came into prominence when Uttamchand, a son of Harjivan Gandhi, made such a striking impression on Rana Khimaji, ruler of Porbandar, that he was appointed as the *Diwan*.

Porbandar was one of some 300 states of Kathiawar Gujerat which were ruled by princes whom the accident of birth and the support of the suzerain power kept on the throne. Kathiawar, though feudal in structure and politically backward, had not remained impervious to currents of social reform which have given India her fundamental unity over the centuries. Some of the famous places of Hindu pilgrimages are situated in Gujerat: Dwarka in the extreme west, hallowed by association with the life and death of Lord Krishna, and the historic temple of Somnath. The teachings of Buddha, Mahavira and Vallabhacharya, have mingled in common emphasis on the sacredness of all that lives, and the songs of Mirabai and the poems of Narsinh Mehta have inspired the people. Gujerat has been noted for its enterprising businessmen, but it has also produced religious and social reformers; one of them Swami Dayananda, an apostle of reformed Hinduism, was a contemporary of Karamchand Gandhi. There is a certain tenacity in the Gujerati character which, when allied to a sense of mission, can sweep everything before it. Perhaps it was not an accident that Gandhi and Jinnah, the two men who in different ways most influenced the history of India in this century, had Gujerati blood in their veins.

To be a Diwan of one of the princely states was no sinecure in those days. To steer one's course safely between the wayward Indian princes, the overbearing British Political Agents of the suzerain power, and the long-suffering subjects required a high degree of diplomatic skill and practical sense. Uttamchand Gandhi proved a brilliant administrator and rescued Porbandar from the mismanagement and insolvency into which the state had drifted. Unfortunately for him, Rana Khimaji died young, and the Queen Regent, into whose hands the reins of administration fell, did not appreciate the virtues of integrity and independence in her Diwan. The inevitable clash came when Uttamchand gave his personal protection to Kothari, a minor but honest official of the state treasury, who had refused to oblige the Queen Regent's maid servants. The enraged Queen sent a contingent of troops to surround and shell the house of her chief minister; for long the ancestral house of the Gandhis bore the marks. Luckily the British Political Agent heard of these operations and had them stopped. Uttamchand left Porbandar for his native village in Junagadh, where he was kindly received by the *Nawab*. Observers noted, however, that the fugitive minister saluted the *Nawab* with his left hand. Questioned on this discourtesy, he replied that, in spite of all that had happened, his right hand was pledged to Porbandar. Uttamchand had to atone for this breach of court etiquette by standing barefoot in the sun for ten minutes; but the *Nawab* was chivalrous enough to commend his loyalty by exempting him and his descendants from payment of customs duty if they traded in their native village.

When the Queen Regent's rule came to an end and Rana Vikramjit came to the throne, efforts were made to get Uttamchand Gandhi back to Porbandar as the *Diwan*. He declined, and the post was given in 1847 to his twenty-five-year-old son Karamchand Gandhi, who served as *Diwan* for twenty-eight years. Like his father, Karamchand was an upright and fearless minister; in due course, he too incurred the displeasure of the ruling prince, and leaving the ministership to his brother Tulsidas, moved to Rajkot, where he became the *Diwan*. It was in this capacity that he had the temerity to reprimand the Assistant British Political Agent for speaking insultingly of the ruler of Rajkot; he was arrested, but refused to apologize to the British officer who, though taken aback by the intrepidity of a native minister, thought better of it, and let him go.

Karamchand Gandhi married four times, death having claimed three wives in succession. Putlibai, the fourth wife, was nearly twenty years younger than her husband. She bore him three sons, Lakshmidas (Kala), Karsandas (Karsania) and Mohandas (Mohania) and a daughter Ralitabehn (Goki), who survived all the brothers. Karamchand had also two daughters from his earlier marriages.

Mohandas, the youngest child and the future Mahatma, was born on October 2, 1869.

Even as the chief minister of Porbandar, Karamchand continued to share the three-storeyed ancestral house with his five brothers and their families. The suite allotted to him was on the ground floor and had, besides a tiny kitchen and veranda, two rooms, one of which was 20 feet long and 13 feet wide, and the other 13 feet long and 12 feet wide. It was in this house, with his brothers and sisters, and numerous uncles and cousins that Mohandas Gandhi grew up. The town of Porbandar, with its narrow lanes and crowded bazaars, surrounded by massive walls which have since been largely demolished, is no more than a

stone's throw from the Arabian Sea. The buildings, though by no means architecturally distinguished, are built of a white soft stone which hardens with the years, shines like marble in the sunlight, and has given to the town the romantic name of the 'White City'. The streets are dotted with temples; the ancestral house of the Gandhis was itself built around two temples. But the life of this port was and is necessarily centred on the sea. Even in the latter half of the nineteenth century there were scores of families with business contacts overseas, and it was to one of these contacts that M. K. Gandhi owed his introduction to South Africa.

When he was seven Mohan's parents moved 120 miles east to Rajkot; though the family link with Porbandar remained, Rajkot became henceforth the Gandhis' second home. Rajkot had no sea-beach where the children could play; it lacked the picturesque panorama of the 'White City', but politically and socially it was less of a backwater and had better facilities for education. In Porbandar, Mohan had attended a primary school where the children wrote the alphabet in dust with their fingers. Rajkot boasted of a high school.

Mohan's mother Putlibai was a capable woman who made herself felt in court circles through her friendship with the ladies of the palace. But her chief interest was in the home. When there was sickness in the family she wore herself out in days and nights of nursing. She had little of the weakness, common to women of her age and class, for finery or jewellery. Her life was an endless chain of fasts and vows through which her frail frame seemed to be borne only by the strength of her faith. The children clung to her as she divided her day between her home and the temple; her fasts and vows puzzled and fascinated them. She was not versed in the Scriptures. Except for a smattering of Gujerati, she was practically unlettered; her knowledge of religion was acquired at home or from discourses heard at religious gatherings. She was orthodox, even superstitious. She would not let the children touch an 'untouchable' or look at the lunar eclipse. Mohan was more curious than the other children and asked searching questions. How did contact with Uka, the household sweeper, contaminate? How could the eclipse harm the onlooker? Her explanations did not always carry conviction. But for all this scepticism he was bound to her by bonds the strength of which he felt throughout his life. 'His voice softens when he speaks of his mother,' wrote an observer in 1908, when Mohan was thirty-nine years old, 'and the light

of love is in his eyes'. She could not satisfy his curiosity nor stop him from rushing headlong into the secret atheism of his adolescence, but her abounding love, her endless austerities and her iron will left a permanent impression upon him. These qualities proved an undying source of inspiration for one whose life was to be one long struggle for self-mastery, and whose battles were to be waged and won in the hearts of men. The image of woman he imbibed from Putlibai was that of love and sacrifice. Something of her maternal love he came to possess himself, and as he grew it flowed out in ever increasing measure, bursting the bonds of family and community until it embraced the whole of humanity. He owed to his mother not only a passion for nursing, which made him wash lepers' sores in his *ashram*, but also an impetus for his technique of appealing to the heart through self-suffering—a technique which wives and mothers have practised from time immemorial.

Mohan's father Karamchand Gandhi was a man of little academic education but rich in experience of men and affairs. He was, in the words of his son, 'a lover of his clan, truthful, brave, generous'. He had little interest in piling up money and left hardly any property for his children. The epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, were recited in the house, and occasionally there were discussions with Jain monks and Parsi and Muslim divines. But religion was for Karamchand mostly a matter of ritual. 'Whatever purity you see in me,' recalled his son at the age of sixty-two, 'is derived from my mother, not from my father.'[1]

The half-century which divided Karamchand from his youngest son made the father not so much an affectionate companion as an object of reverence. It was a child thus predisposed who read the ancient play *Shravan Pitribhakta* portraying the boundless love of the mythical boy Shravan for his parents. The picture of Shravan carrying his blind parents on a pilgrimage by means of slings fitted to his shoulders was indelibly printed on Mohan's mind. The story moved him deeply and Shravan became his model. Obedience to parents became his motto. The rule of implicit obedience was extended from the parents to teachers, and from teachers to all 'elders'. This surrender of the privileges of childhood may have contributed to an excessive passivity, passing into a morbid diffidence and preventing him from playing with, and even speaking to, other children. If a prize or a medal came his way at school, he took it to be beyond his deserts;

[1] *The Diaries of Mahadev Desai*, Vol I, entry dated March 31, 1932.

he carried the distinction in his inner pocket, as it were, lest others should discover his poor worth.

And as if this were not sufficient handicap for a boy in his teens, he was married at the age of thirteen. For the greater economy and convenience of the parents, it was a triple wedding in which Mohan, his brother Karsandas and an elder cousin were married off. Mohan's bride, Kasturbai, was the daughter of Gokaldass Makanji, a merchant of Porbandar and a friend of the Gandhi family. Love came to these children, and more so to Mohan, with the hurricane force of adolescent awakening. From a Gujerati pamphlet he had imbibed the ideal of life-long fidelity from her and to exercise a surveillance over her movements. To visit friends or the temple, she had to have his permission. The fact that he was under the influence of a vicious companion who fanned his jealousy made matters worse. Kasturbai, the proud little girl, chafed under these arbitrary restrictions, and in her own quiet and determined way resisted them. These 'dark days of doubts and suspicions' proved to be a useful education to the young husband. 'I learnt,' he told John S. Hoyland many years later, 'the lesson of non-violence from my wife when I tried to bend her to my will. Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand, and her quiet submission to the suffering my stupidity involved on the other, ultimately made me ashamed of myself and cured me of my stupidity in thinking that I was born to rule over her; and in the end she became my teacher in non-violence.' The immediate effect of the marriage was that Mohan lost a year at school, though he made it up later by skipping a class. Luckily for him marriage did not mean, as it meant for his elder brother and cousin who had been married at the same time, the end of his education.

Mohan had secretly prided himself on being an obedient child. He had learnt 'to carry out the orders of the elders, not to scan them'. But there came a time when this want of independence began to hurt. The form which adolescent revolt takes depends upon the strength of the taboos which are broken. In the Vaishnava community in which the Gandhis lived meat-eating and smoking were horrible sins. There is little wonder, therefore, that Mohan should in this rebellious phase have been enticed into them. Mehtab, one of his schoolmates, filled the role of Machiavellian tempter. He argued in favour of meat-eating. He claimed that many people in the town, including the teachers in the school, secretly took meat in spite of their pretence to the contrary; that the British, being meat-eaters, were hardy and could

not be overthrown by the vegetarian Indians. Meat was in fact a cure-all; it could prevent boils and tumours and drive off the ghosts which troubled little Mohan in his sleep.

The subtle sophistry of this friend overthrew Mohan's last defences and he consented to a meat feast, at a lonely spot by the river in order to spare his parents a shock. He had a bad night after the first feast, 'the goat bleating inside me'. The dinners were repeated at suitable intervals and gradually he overcame his early disgust. One complication, however, remained: after joining in these furtive feasts, he had to invent apologies to his mother for lack of appetite at mealtime. Since lying went against the grain, he was driven to the conclusion that the change in his diet would have to wait until he grew up and became accountable to no one except himself.

Smoking was another transgression of this period. With another boy Mohan began to pilfer stumps of cigarettes thrown away by his uncle. This was of course unsatisfactory. As the children had no money to buy cigarettes, they began to steal the servants' coppers, but that did not take them far. Then they started smoking the stalks of a wild plant. Their young spirits at last felt thwarted. One evening, in sheer despair, they slipped into a temple for a final ceremony to cut the Gordian knot by committing suicide. Their courage failed them at the critical moment; rather than quit the world, they decided to give up smoking.

Another escapade of the period was the theft of a bit of gold to pay off a debt incurred by his brother. The guilt weighed upon him until he could bear it no longer. He wrote out a confession and presented it to his father; their simultaneous tears at once marked the atonement by the son and forgiveness by the father.

The adolescence of Mohan was no stormier than that of many of his contemporaries; adventures into the forbidden land of meat-eating and smoking and petty pilfering were, and are, not uncommon among boys of his age. What was extraordinary was the way his adventures ended. In every case he posed for himself a problem for which he sought a solution by framing a proposition in moral algebra. 'Never again' was his promise to himself after each escapade. And he kept the promise.

There was nothing to mark him off from other boys of his age except perhaps an unnatural seriousness and passivity. He did not seem to be a child who could elbow his way forward. But under his cold unprepossessing exterior there was a

burning passion for self-improvement. It was his habit 'to forget what he did not like and to carry out what he liked'. What others read for pleasure he read for instruction. Millions of children—and adults—in India have heard the stories of Prahlad and Harishchandra. The boy Prahlad, who suffered untold hardships without faltering in his faith in God, and King Harishchandra, who sacrificed all he had for the sake of truth, are heroes of Hindu mythology, the creatures of poetic imagination, and have been treated as such. But for Mohan they became living models. History or literature were for him not merely an unminted mine of wonder, but an inspiration for a better and purer life. While children of his age competed for the conventional prizes and trophies in the school, this sensitive child posed and puzzled out moral problems for himself.

CHAPTER II

Off To England

MOHAN passed the matriculation examination in 1887. His father's death a year earlier had strained the means of the family. Being the only boy in the family who had persevered in his studies, its hopes rested on him and he was sent to Bhavnagar, the nearest town with a college. Unfortunately for Mohan, the teaching in the college was in English. He was unable to follow the lectures and despaired of making any progress.

Meanwhile, Mavji Dave, a friend of the family, suggested that Mohan should go to England to qualify at the bar. It was easy enough to become a barrister; in contrast, the degrees of Indian universities consumed more time, energy and money and had less value in the market. A Bombay degree was likely to produce nothing better than a clerical post. Mavji Dave argued that if Mohan aspired like his father and grandfather to be the *Diwan* in one of the states of Kathiawar, he needed a foreign degree. Karamchand and Uttamchand Gandhi had held high posts and managed with very little education, but times had changed. The universities were now producing Bachelors of Arts and Law by the thousand, products of the English education for which Macaulay had planned. There were, however, too many of them. It was, therefore, a definite advantage in the competition for the plums of public service to be able to sport a foreign degree.

Mohan jumped at the idea of going abroad. Not only was he anxious to see England, 'the land of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilization', but also because it offered him an immediate escape from the agony of attending the classes in Bhavnagar College, where the teachers seemed to be talking over his head. His elder brother had no doubt that the proposal was attractive but wondered how they could afford it. Mother Putlibai felt lost. How could she let her youngest boy sail to an alien land to face unknown temptations and dangers? She wished her husband had been living to take a decision to which she felt unequal. She asked Mohan to seek the advice of his

uncle, who was the eldest member of the Gandhi family. Mohan trekked by cart and camel to Porbandar to see his uncle, who was courteous but visibly reluctant to bless the unholy trip across the seas. Another disappointment was in store for him when he approached Mr Lely, the British Administrator of Porbandar, a state which the Gandhis had served so well, to grant him a scholarship for studies in England. The British officer treated him with scant courtesy, asked him to take a degree at Bombay University and then ask for a scholarship. All this was depressing enough, but Mohan did not lose heart. He knew that if the trip to England fell through, he would have to return to the classrooms of Bhavnagar, a none too pleasant prospect. He thought of selling his wife's jewellery. This desperate course was rendered unnecessary when his generous brother undertook to find funds. The misgivings of the mother were set at rest when a Jain monk, Becharji Swami, made the boy take a solemn vow that he would not touch wine, woman or meat while he was away from the shores of India.

A fresh hurdle appeared just when Mohan was about to sail. The elders of the Modh Bania caste to which the Gandhis belonged summoned him before the caste tribunal and declared that the trip to England was a violation of the Hindu religion. The nineteen-year-old boy, who had been unable to stammer a few words of thanks at a farewell party at his school, mustered the courage to resist the browbeating of the bearded leaders of his caste. Infuriated at this defiance, the caste tribunal issued a fiat of excommunication against Mohan. But before this order could become a real nuisance, he sailed from Bombay on September 4, 1888.

From the rural surroundings of Rajkot to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of a steamship was a tremendous change for Mohan. Adaptation to Western food, dress and etiquette was a painful process. He felt tongue-tied when accosted by fellow-passengers. The slender hold on the English language which he had acquired in school and college nearly gave way. He could hardly speak without being weighed down with a feeling that he was making a fool of himself. The vegetarian vow added to his embarrassment. Afraid to question the waiters on the composition of the menu, he lived on the fruits and sweets he had brought with him. He received much gratuitous advice. One passenger told him that he would not be able to do without meat after leaving Aden. When Aden had been safely passed, he was warned that meat would be indispensable after crossing the Red Sea. In the

Mediterranean, a prophet of doom announced grimly that in the Bay of Biscay he would have to choose between death on the one hand and meat and wine on the other.

His sense of isolation increased after he landed in England. A terrible feeling of loneliness gripped him. It was partly the usual nostalgia of the Indian student as he begins his self-imposed exile. To it were added the misgivings of an exceedingly diffident and sensitive boy. His thoughts wandered back to his home in Rajkot, his beloved mother, his wife, his baby boy. The prospects before him appeared to be bleak. He had to acclimatize himself to another climate, strange surroundings and a new mode of living. Vegetarianism, to which he was vowed, seemed to condemn him not only to perpetual semi-starvation, but also to public ridicule. Indescribably lonely, he wept as he lay awake in bed, and thought of the three long years which must run their weary course before he could return home.

The vegetarian vow became a continual source of embarrassment to him. Friends in England feared that his food fads would ruin his health, and make of him, socially, a square peg. He could not rebut the arguments of advocates of meat-eating; secretly he had always wanted to take meat but felt bound by the vow. When he felt puzzled or weak he went on his knees and prayed to God to help him keep the word he had given to his mother.

One day, while roaming about in London, he stumbled upon a vegetarian restaurant in Farringdon Street. 'The sight of this restaurant,' he recorded later, 'filled me with the same joy that a child feels on getting a thing after its own heart.' He had his first hearty meal since he had sailed from India. In the restaurant he also bought a book entitled *Plea for Vegetarianism* by Salt, whose arguments went home. A meatless diet had been hitherto a matter of sentiment to him; henceforth it was one of reasoned conviction. Vegetarianism, adopted out of deference to his parents, had been an inconvenient obligation, but before long it became a mission, the starting point of a unique discipline of body and mind, which transformed his life. The discovery of this restaurant was an event more significant than he could see at the moment. There was a long and hard but sure road which led from Farringdon Street in London to the Phoenix and Tolstoy Settlements in South Africa, and to the Sabarmati and Sevagram Ashrams in India.

The conversion to vegetarianism brought a new self-assurance to Gandhi. Henceforth he might appear a crank, but he did not

feel like one. His friends, however, feared that by insisting on meatless meals he would make a mess of his health as well as his studies. To disarm his critics, and to prove that, vegetarianism apart, he was not impervious to the new environment, he began to put on a thick veneer of 'English culture'. There was a lot he had to cover up. Used to his native Kathiawari costume in school and college, he had felt palpably awkward in English dress while travelling aboard ship and stepping ashore. His hold on the English language was tenuous and even ordinary conversation entailed a laborious mental rehearsal from his mother tongue.

Having made up his mind to become an 'English Gentleman', he spared neither time nor money. Whatever the cost, the veneer had to be the best in the market. New suits were ordered from the most fashionable tailors in London; the watch was adorned with a double gold chain from India; under expert tuition lessons began in elocution, dancing, and music. The product of these sartorial and cultural exercises was later described by a contemporary. This is how the twenty-year-old M. K. Gandhi struck Sachchidanand Sinha in February 1890, when he saw him in Piccadilly Circus: 'He was wearing a high silk top hat burnished bright, a Gladstonian collar, stiff and starched; a rather flashy tie displaying almost all the colours of the rainbow, under which there was a fine striped silk shirt. He wore as his outer clothes a morning coat, a double-breasted vest, and dark striped trousers to match and not only patent leather boots but spats over them. He carried leather gloves and a silver-mounted stick, but wore no spectacles. He was, to use the contemporary slang, a nut, a masher, a blood—a student more interested in fashion and frivolities than in his studies.'[1]

Gandhi could not, however, throw himself into this experiment with complete self-abandon. The habit of introspection had never deserted him. English dancing and music did not come easy to him. Drapers and dance halls could turn him into an English gentleman, but only an English gentleman about town. His brother was straining the slender resources of the family, perhaps incurring debts to enable him to continue his studies in England. As he brooded over it all, he realized the folly of chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of an English gentleman.

After a brief three months' excursion, the introvert returned to his shell. There was a rebound from extreme extravagance

[1] Article in the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Republic Day Souvenir), January 26, 1950.

to meticulous economy. He kept an account of every farthing he spent. He changed his rooms, cooked his own breakfast, and to save bus fares walked 8 to 10 miles daily. He was able to pare down his expenses to £2 a month. He began to feel keenly the obligations to his family and was glad that he had reduced the calls on his brother for funds. Simplicity harmonized his inward and outward life; the dandyism of the first three months had been only a defensive armour against those who considered him a misfit in English society.

The connection between dietetics and religion may seem farfetched, but the two were intimately related in the evolution of M. K. Gandhi. His early vegetarianism was part of his Vaishnava heritage; he had abstained from meat because it was repugnant to his parents. Sheikh Mehtab, a clever schoolmate, had coaxed him into meat-eating for a while; but he had given it up when obliged to tell lies to his parents to ward off their suspicions, and decided to defer the enjoyment of this delicacy till he was old enough to be independent of parental authority. In England he scrupulously observed the promise he had given to his mother not to touch meat, but he was conscious all the time that sentiment rather than reason was on his side. Not until he read Salt's book did he discover the virtues of vegetarianism. With the zeal of a new convert he devoured books on dietetics, developed an interest in cooking, outgrew the taste for condiments, and came to the sensible conclusion that the seat of taste is not in the tongue but in the mind. The control of the palate was one of the first steps in that discipline which was to culminate many years later in total sublimation. The dietary experiments, dictated by considerations of health and economy, were to become a part of his religious and spiritual evolution.

The immediate effect of vegetarianism was to give a new poise to him in England, and to draw him out of his shell. He made his first venture into journalism by contributing nine articles to the *Vegetarian*. These articles, largely descriptive, dealt with the diet and habits of the Indian people, their social system and festivals, and had occasional flashes of humour. That he should have sent these articles for publication is a notable achievement, if we recall that in Bhavnagar College he had been unable to follow lectures in English. He became a member of the executive committee of the London Vegetarian Society and took an interest in designing its badge. In Bayswater, where he stayed for a

short time, he founded a vegetarian club. He came into contact with at least one eminent vegetarian, Sir Edwin Arnold, the author of *The Light of Asia* and *The Song Celestial*, two books which moved him deeply. In the vegetarian restaurants and boarding-houses of London he came across not only food faddists but also a few devout men of religion. He owed his introduction to the Bible to one such contact.

His excessive shyness was not, however, shaken off by three years in England. Apart from the Vegetarian Society, the only organization which drew him was the *Anjuman Islamia*, an organization of Indian Muslims, mostly students, who debated political and social questions over light refreshments. Non-Muslim students were permitted to join these discussions, which brought together a number of Indian students in England who were later to make their mark in India's public life. Among these were Gandhi, Abdur Rahim, Mazharul Haq, Muhammad Shafi, Sachchidanand Sinha and Harkishan Lal Gaub. Gandhi (along with Sinha and Harkishan Lal) held nationalist views on political questions, but he spoke little and unlike some others, lacked the faculty for vehement assertion.

New literary, social and political forces were stirring in the England of the eighties and nineties but there is little evidence of Gandhi having been susceptible to them. He does not refer in the course of the forty-page account of his stay in England to Karl Marx, Darwin or Huxley. Science, literature and politics did not excite him. He was wholly preoccupied with personal and moral issues. The crucial problem for him was how to marshal his inner resources in order to keep the promise he had given to his mother, to fight the recurring temptations of 'meat, wine and woman', and to inject into his daily life simplicity, economy and purpose. His efforts at journalism were confined to the columns of the *Vegetarian* and his reading to religious texts such as the *Gita* and the New Testament. If any subject seemed to strike a vital chord in him, it was religion. Nevertheless, at this stage his acquaintance with religion, even with Hinduism, was quite elementary.

In an article in the *Vegetarian* of June 20, 1891, Gandhi gave his own assessment of what the stay in England had meant to him: 'In conclusion I am bound to say that during my nearly three years' stay in England I have left many things undone . . . yet I carry one great consolation with me, that I shall go back without having taken meat or wine, and that I know from personal experience that there are so many vegetarians.'

Here was an earnest but diffident young man with a definite but limited range of interests. Not even the most partial observer could have detected in this young barrister-at-law any promise of distinction when he sailed for India. He did not seem to be cut out for a brilliant career, least of all in law or politics.

CHAPTER III

Briefless Barrister

As Gandhi gave up the cultivation of the social graces and turned his attention to his studies, he felt that the law course could not engage him fully and that he had time to improve his basic education. His high school training had been indifferent; the lack of fluency in English troubled him in particular. Since he could spare neither the time nor the funds to go to Cambridge or Oxford, he decided to prepare for the matriculation examination of the London University. Undismayed by the first attempt, in which he was ploughed in Latin, he passed the examination. Knowledge of Latin proved useful to him in the study of law; it was an asset to him when he practised in South African courts where Roman Dutch was the Common law. Latin also helped to fashion his simple and crisp English prose.

Law Examinations at this time were not difficult; the examiners were generous and the percentage of successes was high. Most law students crammed summaries of their text-books for the examination; but Gandhi was too conscientious to use these short cuts. He read the Roman Law in Latin, and laboriously studied Broom's *Common Law*, Snell's *Equity*, Tudor's *Leading Cases*, William's and Edward's *Real Property*. Thanks to his conscientiousness and diffidence he turned even the bar examination into an arduous affair; when he got through it, he was assailed by fresh doubts and anxieties. He had read the law, but could he practise it? He found it hard enough to speak to strangers even in a small party. How would he be able to cross swords with his rivals in the court room? He had heard of legal luminaries like Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, and could well imagine the sorry figure he would cut in comparison. Frantically, he looked for advice. He could not venture to meet the great Indian lawyer and statesman Dadabhai Naoroji, who was in England at the time. An English lawyer, however, advised the Indian youth to widen his reading, to improve his knowledge of history, and to study human nature. Naïvely, Gandhi hastened to buy a book on physiognomy and to equip himself for the

difficult role of a practising lawyer. He distilled what consolation he could from the opinion of this English lawyer that exceptional acumen, memory and ability were not the only prerequisities for success at the bar, that honesty and industry could also go far. Thus, 'with just a little leaven of hope mixed with despair', he sailed for India.

A great shock lay in store for him when he landed at Bombay. His mother had died while he was in England. The news of the tragedy had been deliberately withheld from him. It was a cruel blow. Many years later, he recorded in his autobiography, that 'most of my cherished hopes were shattered'. The austere life, the immutable faith and the abounding love of his mother were, nevertheless, indelibly imprinted on him. She was perhaps the biggest single influence in shaping the Mahatma of the future, the man in the loincloth, vowed to days of silence and fasts, waiting upon God for guidance, and answering hate with love.

He had now to reckon with the Modh Bania caste which had excommunicated him when he had sailed for England. As a sop to orthodoxy, he was persuaded by his brother to visit Nashik to wash off his transgression with a dip in the holy waters of the Godavari. This atonement appeased only one section of the Modh Banias; the other section stubbornly declined to lift the ban. Gandhi met this tyranny in an unorthodox manner. He did not protest nor betray any rancour against his opponents; indeed he co-operated in the enforcement of the boycott against himself. This attitude blunted the edge of caste-tyranny; the appeal to the heart went home. Many of his critics among Modh Banias later whole-heartedly supported his social and political movements. These early experiences did not sour him. He continued to defend the institution of caste, 'the Varnashramdharma', without, of course, its later incrustations.

Gandhi was anxious to justify the hopes of his family which had invested so much in his foreign education. His brother expected rich dividends in the form of 'wealth, and name and fame'. The barrister's degree, however, was not an open sesame to the top of the bar. The law course in England had not included Hindu or Muslim law; Gandhi noticed that the home-bred *vakils* of Rajkot knew more of Indian law and charged lower fees than barristers. To practise in Rajkot was thus to invite sure ridicule; Gandhi therefore accepted the advice of his friends that he should go to Bombay to study Indian law, to gain experience of the High Court and to secure what briefs he could. He threw himself with gusto into legal studies, digested

the Evidence Act, skimmed Mayne's *Hindu Law* and grappled with the Civil Procedure Code.

His knowledge of Indian law began to grow but not his income. Brokerage to 'touts' for briefs secured through them was an accepted mode of building up practice, but to Gandhi it was something beneath the dignity of his profession. Briefs were slow in coming. After waiting an unconscionable time, he got his first brief from Mamibai, a poor woman whom he charged thirty rupees. As he rose in the small-causes court to cross-examine a witness, he was unable to collect his thoughts, collapsed into his chair and refunded the fee to his client. This was a disgraceful *début*, which filled the young barrister with black despair as to his future in a profession he had entered at such a heavy cost.

The straits to which he had been reduced may be surmised from the fact that he applied for a part time job as teacher in a Bombay High School with the modest salary of seventy rupees a month. He had passed the London matriculation examination with Latin as his second language. But he lacked what the school wanted, an Indian university degree. London matriculation could not secure him a teacher's post, but it had given him a command of English. It was with some relief that he discovered that he had a flair for drafting memorials and petitions, and that he could make a living out of it. To set up as a petition writer it was not necessary to prolong his stay in Bombay. He wound up his little establishment and returned to Rajkot, where petition writing brought him in an income of 300 rupees a month.

He might have settled down as a barrister scribe but for a predicament into which he was pitchforked. His elder brother, Lakshmidas, who had once held a political appointment, was under a cloud and persuaded him to see the Political Agent, whom he had met in England. The Political Agent resented this intervention and had the young barrister turned out of the house. Gandhi's cup of humiliation was full. He thought of filing a suit against the British officer for insulting him. Those who knew the world, the British bureaucratic world, advised him that such a procedure could only be ruinous to himself. The great lawyer of Bombay, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta was consulted. 'Such things,' he commented, 'are the common experience of many *vakils* and barristers. Gandhi is still fresh from England and hot-blooded. If he would earn something let him pocket the insult.' This was the heyday of British rule in India, before

the political awakening. The professional classes were painfully conscious of their dependence upon local officials. The angry breath of a British officer had shrivelled the career of many a hot-headed young man.

With the continual tug of war among its petty princes and their favourites, the atmosphere of Kathiawar was too full of intrigue and corruption to be congenial to Gandhi. Most of his work lay in the court of the Political Agent, who was now irreconcilably prejudiced against him. So when an offer of a job came to him from South Africa, he gladly accepted it. The contract was for a year in connection with a civil suit involving £40,000. The remuneration was £105, a first-class return fare and actual expenses. The fee was modest, and it was not quite clear whether he was engaged as counsel or as a clerk, but he was in no position to pick and choose. Without seeking any elaboration of the offer, he accepted it.

A second voyage was in store for him. Ironically enough, like the first it provided an escape from immediate difficulties. In 1888 he had welcomed the trip to England because he had been unable to get on in the Bhavnager College. Five years later he welcomed a year's exile in South Africa because his *amour propre* and professional fortunes had suffered rude buffets in his homeland.

He could hardly have imagined the new vistas of maturity and public service which the South African adventure was to open to him. The conceited British officer who had bundled the young Indian barrister out of his house had unwittingly done a disservice to the British Empire.

CHAPTER IV

A Fateful Journey

GANDHI landed at Durban in May 1893. He was received by his employer Abdulla, one of the wealthiest Indian merchants in Natal.

After a week's stay in Durban, Gandhi left for Pretoria to take up the assignment which had brought him to South Africa.

His brief stay at Durban had given him disconcerting evidence of colour prejudice. He was taken by Abdulla to see the Durban court. The European Magistrate ordered him to take off his turban. Gandhi refused, left the court-room and wrote a letter of protest in the local press, in which he was mentioned as 'an unwelcome visitor'. It was a new experience for him. He had never before encountered blatant racial prejudice. The arrogance of British officials in India he had attributed to individual aberrations. And in England he had come into contact with many Englishmen whose courtesy and goodwill he treasured.

The experience in Durban, however, was nothing compared with what befell him in the course of his journey from Durban to Pretoria. When his train reached Maritzburg late in the evening, he was ordered to move to the van compartment. He refused, but was unceremoniously turned out of the first-class carriage. It was a bitterly cold night as he crept into the unlit waiting-room of Maritzburg station and brooded over what had happened. His client had given him no warning of the humiliating conditions under which Indians lived in South Africa. Should he not call off the contract and return to India? Should he accept these affronts as part of the bargain? He had already left India because his position in Rajkot had become untenable after he had incurred the displeasure of the Political Agent. Was he now to flee back to India because South Africa was too uncomfortable for him? He felt he had to draw the line somewhere. Determined to face whatever happened, he resumed his journey.

At Charlestown, then a rail terminus, he had to take a stage coach for Standerton. He was told he could not sit inside the coach with European passengers and was seated with the driver.

A little later he was asked to travel on the footboard. He refused and suggested that he might be given the seat due to him in the coach box. This impertinence was too much for the white official in charge of the coach, who fell upon Gandhi and belaboured him mercilessly until some of the European passengers intervened. Gandhi had borne the beating, but had not budged from his seat. It was a classic scene, a fit subject for a great artist; quiet courage and human dignity pitted against racial arrogance and brute strength.

On arrival at Standerton Gandhi met some Indian merchants. They explained to him that what had happened to him was the daily lot of Indians in the Transvaal. He reported the incident to the Agent of the Coach Company, though he made it clear that he did not wish to proceed against his assailant. At Johannesburg he drove to the Grand National Hotel, only to be told that Indians were barred; moreover, it required extensive quotations from railway regulations and special pleading with the Station Master of Johannesburg before he was able to buy a first-class ticket for Pretoria, and but for the intercession of a European fellow passenger he would again have been pushed out of the first-class compartment.

The five days' journey from Durban to Pretoria was a long-drawn-out agony. But it dramatized for Gandhi the condition of Indian immigrants in South Africa. Indian merchants had learnt to pocket these humiliations as they pocketed their daily earnings. What was new was not Gandhi's experience, but his reaction to it. So far he had not been conspicuous for assertiveness; on the contrary, he had been pathologically shy and retiring. But something happened to him in that bleak windswept waiting-room of Maritzburg railway station as he smarted under the insult inflicted on him. The iron entered his soul. In retrospect, this incident seemed to him one of the most creative experiences of his life. From that hour, he refused to accept injustice as a part of the natural or unnatural order in South Africa. He would reason; he would plead; he would appeal to the better judgment and the latent humanity of the ruling race; he would resist, but he would never be a willing victim of racial arrogance. It was not so much a question of redeeming his own self-respect as that of his community, his country, even of humanity. The helpless resignation of the mass of Indian settlers, the fact that they were illiterate, had few rights and did not know how to assert the rights they had—all this had the miraculous effect of dissipating his own diffidence. The feeling of in-

feriority which had dogged him as a student in England and as a budding lawyer in India vanished. In Bombay he had been unable to face a small-causes court, but one of the first things he did on arrival at Pretoria was to invite its Indian residents to a meeting 'to present to them a picture of their condition in Transvaal'. The meeting was a great success. Gandhi suggested the formation of an organization to voice the grievances of the Indian community. A token of this practical leadership was his offer to teach English to those Indian merchants who wanted to learn it. His first three pupils were a barber, a clerk and a petty shopkeeper, who received the free tuition on their own premises. He came to know every Indian in that town. He brought the disabilities of the Indian community to the notice of the British Agent in Pretoria, who was sympathetic but pleaded helplessness because the Transvaal was a Boer state outside the orbit of the British Empire. The Boer Government had already chased most of the Indian settlers out of the Orange Free State. South Africa seemed to have no room for a self-respecting Indian. Gandhi's mind became more and more exercised with the question of how this state of affairs could be put right.

Meanwhile, he had to attend to the civil suit which had brought him to South Africa. In this suit were involved the huge sum of £40,000 as well as trade rivalry and family feuds between two of the biggest Indian merchants in South Africa, Abdulla of Natal and Tyeb Sheth of the Transvaal. True to the litigation tradition of their native land, these two merchants were resolved to fight it out to the bitter end. Gandhi was assigned the modest role of examining the books of Abdulla's firm and serving as a link with its lawyers. The young barrister did not disdain the duties of an accountant-clerk. What may have appeared to another as an affront struck him as an opportunity. He dug deeply into the details of the case, acquired a knowledge of book-keeping and trade practices and improved his English by copious translations from Gujerati, in which the firm's accounts were kept. He carefully observed how the material prepared by him was sorted by the attorney and how the brief itself was prepared.

The high-water mark of the legal profession had once appeared to him to consist in feats of forensic eloquence or facile quotations from law manuals. After a year's hard labour on this suit he learnt that the function of the lawyer is to sift the facts and to find out the truth. He was conscious that he was neither

eloquent nor learned, but he could depend for success upon his integrity and industry. This case taught him what a junior barrister learns in a senior barrister's chambers; it also gave him the confidence that he should not, after all, fail as a lawyer, that facts were three-fourths of law and that 'once we adhere to truth, the law comes to our aid naturally'.

On a close examination of the facts, Abdulla's case appeared to him to be strong in fact as well as in law. But he saw that the suit was ruinous to both the parties. The mounting fees of the lawyers, the inevitable dislocation in the normal work of the firms, and the bad blood engendered all round, dictated the wisdom of a settlement out of court. Not without reluctance did the two firms accept arbitration. The arbitrator's verdict went in favour of Abdulla. If it had been enforced immediately, Tyeb Sheth would have faced bankruptcy. Gandhi persuaded his client to be magnanimous in his hour of triumph and agree to payment by instalments. He could look back on his first important brief with satisfaction: 'I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder.'[1]

Henceforth it was his constant endeavour to reconcile opponents outside the court-room rather than let them fight it out. It was not only the litigants who gained in the process. 'I lost nothing,' he recorded many years later, 'not even money, certainly not my soul.'

[1] Gandhi, M. K.: *Autobiography*, Ahmedabad (1945), p. 168.

CHAPTER V

Plunge into Politics

THE civil suit at Pretoria having happily concluded, Gandhi's contract was over, and he returned to Durban to catch a steamer for India. At the farewell party which Abdulla, his grateful client, gave in his honour Gandhi happened to glance through the pages of the *Natal Mercury* and read a news item entitled 'Indian Franchise'. A bill was being introduced in the Natal Legislature to disfranchise Indian settlers, but Gandhi's host and other merchants attending the party were unable to throw any light on this measure. They knew enough English to be able to converse with their white customers, but few of them could read newspapers, much less follow the proceedings of the Natal Legislature. They had come to Natal for trade, and politics did not interest them. They had not yet realized that politics could affect their trade. Only recently, Indian traders had been hounded out of the Orange Free State, and now Natal was enacting a racial measure. 'This is the first nail into our coffin!' was Gandhi's comment. The Indian merchants pleaded with him to stay on in Natal to take up the fight on their behalf. They had so far relied on European barristers, and were therefore glad to have an Indian barrister in their midst. He agreed to defer his return to India for a month, and hoped that by then a decision on the disenfranchisement of Indian voters would be taken.

Gandhi lost no time in settling down to work: the farewell party converted itself into a political committee to plan Indian opposition to the bill. A sound instinct seems to have guided the twenty-five-year-old barrister in organizing his first political campaign. The insight he had acquired, while at Pretoria, into the Indian settlers' problems stood him in good stead. His strategy was threefold. In the first place, a spirit of solidarity had to be infused into the heterogeneous elements composing the Indian population. The Muslim merchants and their Hindu and Parsi clerks from Bombay, the semi-slave 'indentured' labourers from Madras, and the Natal-born Indian Christians had all to realize their common origin. On the Indian Christians it

was to be impressed that because they were Christians they did not cease to be Indians. The merchants had to accept their kinship with the poor indentured labourers, whom extreme poverty had brought to a life of toil in far-off Natal. Secondly, the implications of the disfranchising measure had to be brought home to the Indian community, as well as to the saner section of European public opinion and the Natal Government. Finally, the widest publicity had to be given to the Indians' case, to quicken the conscience of the peoples and governments of India and Great Britain.

It is a measure of Gandhi's success as a publicist that the Indian National Congress in its annual session in December 1894 recorded its protest against the disfranchising bill, and in the next three years the London *Times* devoted eight leading articles to the Indian problem in South Africa. A petition drafted by Gandhi and signed by nearly 500 Indians was presented to the Legislative Assembly of Natal. The petition created a stir in the Natal Legislature and the Government, but the bill was passed nevertheless. The Indians were not dismayed by their failure; they had at least been roused from their political lethargy. As for Gandhi, this first experience of political agitation into which he had been pitchforked cured him of what once had seemed an incorrigible self-consciousness. Not that he had a sudden attack of egotism. He explained his limitations in a letter dated July 5, 1894, to Dadabhai Naoroji, the eminent leader of the Indian National Congress, and at that time a member of the British Parliament: 'A word for myself and I have done. I am inexperienced and young and, therefore, quite liable to make mistakes. The responsibility undertaken is quite out of proportion to my ability. So you will see that I have not taken the matter up, which is beyond my ability, in order to enrich myself at the expense of the Indians. I am the only available person who can handle the question. You will, therefore, oblige me very greatly if you will kindly direct and guide me, and make necessary suggestions which shall be received as from a father to his child.'[1]

The concept of inferiority is a relative one; in a community looking to him for leadership, Gandhi forgot his own limitations. As 'the only available person', he undertook a task from which elsewhere he might have shrunk.

One last chance remained. The bills passed by the Natal Legislature required the Queen's assent before they became law.

[1] Masani, R. P.: *Dadabhai Naoroji*, London, p. 468.

Gandhi decided to send a monster petition to the Colonial Secretary in London. The petition bore 10,000 signatures, covering almost the entire population of free Indians in Natal. It was part of Gandhi's technique to use every move in this campaign for the political education of the community. For example, no one was allowed to sign the petition until he had understood and accepted its contents. A thousand copies were printed and mailed to prominent politicians and newspapers. Both in India and Britain, the case of the Natal Indians had a good press.

Meanwhile the month for which Gandhi had postponed his departure for India came to an end. The Indians of Natal begged him to stay on. It was not certain that the British Government would veto the offending measure. Moreover, had he not warned them that this was the first nail in their coffin? Would he leave them in the lurch and see his own work undone? Gandhi agreed to prolong his stay, but how was he to make a living? Since he would not hear of payment for public work, twenty merchants offered him retaining fees to produce a minimum of £300 a year, which he reckoned enough to pay his way in Durban.

The Bar Society of Natal opposed Gandhi's admission as an advocate to the Supreme Court. The Chief Justice admitted him, but in keeping with the etiquette of practising barristers, ordered him to take off his turban. A year before, as a visitor in a lower court in Durban, Gandhi had walked out rather than give in to this humiliation. Now, as an advocate of the Supreme Court, he swallowed the bitter pill with the reflection that, if he was to fight colour prejudice, he must choose bigger issues and other occasions.

Gandhi felt that what the Indians urgently needed was a permanent organization to look after their interests. Out of deference to Dadabhai Naoroji, who had presided over the Indian National Congress in 1893, he called the new organization Natal Indian Congress. He was not conversant with the constitution and functions of the Indian National Congress. This ignorance proved an asset, as he fashioned the Natal Congress in his own way to suit the needs of the Natal Indians. The Indian National Congress of this period was a debating society of the intelligentsia which was hardly heard of between its annual pageants of speeches and petitions and protests. The Natal Indian Congress was, however, designated as a live body, functioning throughout the year and dedicated not only to politics but to the moral and social uplift of its members. Though it served a community which had very little political experience, it was not a one-man

show. Indefatigable secretary though he was, Gandhi enlisted popular interest and enthusiasm at every step. He made the enrolment of members and the collection of subscriptions into something more than a routine. He employed a gentle but irresistible technique for exerting moral pressure on half-hearted supporters. Once in a small village, he sat through the night and refused to take his dinner until at dawn his host, an Indian merchant, agreed to raise his subscription for the Natal Indian Congress from three to six pounds.

Since his student days in London Gandhi had kept a meticulous account of his daily expenses. He exercised a similar vigilance on the finances of the Natal Indian Congress. So efficiently were its accounts maintained that thirty years later he could write: 'I dare say, the account books of the year 1894 can be found intact even today in the records of the Natal Indian Congress'. For himself he refused to accept anything from public funds. He felt that if he became a paid advocate of the Indian community, he could not remain its fearless servant; honorary public service was thus not only a duty to his people, but also a safeguard of his own independence. In these early years of his political apprenticeship, he formulated his own code of conduct for a politician. He did not accept the popular view that in politics one must fight for one's party right or wrong. The passion for facts, which he had recently cultivated in his practice of law, he brought to bear on politics; if the facts were on his side, there was no need to embroider them. He avoided exaggeration and discouraged it in his colleagues. The Natal Indian Congress was not merely an instrument for the defence of the political and economic rights of the Indian minority, but also a lever for its internal reform and unity. He did not spare his own people and roundly criticized them for their shortcomings. He asked them to improve their standards of living and integrity in business. He was not only the stoutest champion of the Natal Indians, but also their severest critic.

To appreciate the role which Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress were to play in the Dark Continent, it would be well at this stage to look back and to see the problem in its historical perspective.

'The Asiatics,' wrote Lord Milner, 'are strangers forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them.' In fact, the Indian emigration to South Africa in the eighteen sixties started at the instance of the European settlers, who were in possession of vast virgin lands ideal for tea, coffee and sugar

plantations, but lacked man-power. The negro could not be compelled to work after the abolition of slavery. The Government of India was therefore approached by the Europeans of Natal for Indian labourers to be permitted to emigrate to that country. Recruiting agents of the planters toured some of the poorer and most congested districts of Madras and Bengal and painted rosy prospects of work in Natal. Free passage, board and lodging; a wage of ten shillings a month for the first year, rising by one shilling every year; and the right to a free return passage to India after five years' 'indenture' (or alternatively, the chance to settle in the land of their adoption), drew thousands of poor and illiterate Indians to distant Natal.

The first shipload of 'indentured labourers' from India arrived in Durban in November 1860. By 1890 nearly 40,000 Indians had been imported as indentured labourers. Theirs was, to use Sir W. W. Hunter's phrase, a condition of semi-slavery. Not all employers were cruel, but it was difficult to change employers on the plea of ill-treatment, and if a labourer did not renew his 'indenture' after five years, he was hemmed in by all sorts of restrictions. Nevertheless, many of these labourers, already cut off from their roots in India, preferred to settle in Natal. They bought small plots of land, grew vegetables, made a decent living and educated their children. This excited the jealousy of the European traders, who began to agitate for the repatriation of every Indian labourer who did not renew his term. In other words, the Indian was wanted in Natal as a slave or not at all. In 1885 a commission on Indian immigration found European public opinion heavily weighted against the presence of free Indians, whether in agriculture or in trade. The commission considered the ex-indentured Indian an asset and his repatriation not only unjust to him but ruinous to the economy of the colony. The argument of enlightened self-interest did not, however, appeal to those who were haunted by the fear that the Indian would under-live and under-sell the European.

The grant of responsible government to Natal in 1893 removed whatever little restraint the Colonial Office in London exercised on the policy of racial discrimination. A delegation from Natal took to India proposals for compulsory indenture or compulsory repatriation of all Indian labourers; alternatively it suggested an annual poll tax of £25 per head. The British Indian officials' ignorance of the conditions in Natal was equalled only by their eagerness to help the European planters in that country. The Government of India agreed to the levy of a £3 tax payable by

every member of the family of the ex-indentured labourer, who was merely exercising his right to settle in Natal in terms of the agreement which had governed his emigration from India. It was a crippling tax for the poor wretches whose wages as indentured labourers ranged between ten and twelve shillings a month. Poor, illiterate and unorganized, they were helpless and the only quarter from which they could hope for sympathy and support was the Indian merchant.

The Indian merchant had followed the Indian labourer to South Africa and found a ready market among the Indian labourers and the negroes; the latter found that the Indian merchant was more courteous and a little less rapacious than the European merchant. The growing prosperity of the Indian merchant, however, became an irritation to his European rivals. The legislation to disfranchise Indians, which had led Gandhi to prolong his stay in Natal, was aimed at the Indian trader. The possession of immovable property worth £50 or an annual rental of £10 being the minimum qualification for a vote, only 250 Indians were on the electoral list as against 10,000 European voters. The enrolment of even a few Indians as voters appeared a danger signal to the Europeans, who would not admit the 'niggers'—black, brown or yellow—to a share in the wealth or government of Natal. The politicians of Natal made no secret of their object which, as one of them put it, was 'to degrade the Indian to the level of a Kaffir' and 'to prevent him from forming part of the future South African nation that is going to be built'. The measure was designed, declared another politician, 'to make the Indians' life more comfortable in their native land than in Natal'.

The bill disfranchising the Indians was passed by the Natal Legislature and received the assent of its Governor. The Colonial Office in London, largely influenced by the agitation organized by Gandhi, vetoed the bill on the ground that it discriminated against the inhabitants of another part of the British Empire. The Europeans of Natal were not discouraged by this veto; they sought their object without avowing a colour bar as such. An amended bill was passed according to which, 'no natives of countries (not of European origin) which had not hitherto possessed elective representative institutions founded on parliamentary franchise were to be placed on voters' lists unless they obtained an exemption from the Governor-General'. Though the amended bill was as effective a check on the Indian franchise as the one which had been vetoed by the British Government,

it was something of a gain that racial discrimination had not been written into the statute-book.

Indian trade and immigration also came under galling restrictions. No one could henceforth trade in Natal without a licence, which a European could have for the asking and an Indian only after much effort and expense, if at all. And since an educational test in a European language was made a *sine qua non* for an immigrant, the door was barred and bolted against the majority of potential immigrants from India, except, of course, the semi-slave indentured labourers who continued to be imported.

In this anti-Indian campaign, the Europeans of Natal were only following in the footsteps of their Boer neighbours in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Kruger, the bellicose president of the Transvaal (Boer) Republic, had told an Indian deputation: 'You are the descendants of Ishmael and, therefore, from your very birth bound to slave for the descendants of Esau.' A representative of the British Government was stationed in Pretoria, but he pleaded helplessness. When the Boer War broke out, the maltreatment of Indians was part of the indictment against the Boers. The Indians had still to learn that in South Africa they could get no more justice from the Briton than from the Boer.

The legal disabilities of Indians were bad enough, but the daily humiliations they suffered were worse. Every Indian without distinction was called 'a coolie'—a contemptuous word for a labourer. Indian schoolmasters were 'coolie schoolmasters'; Indian storekeepers were 'coolie store-keepers'. Gandhi was a 'coolie barrister'. Even the steamers owned by Indians were called 'coolie ships'. Indians were commonly described as 'Asian dirt to be heartily cursed, chockful of vice, that lives upon rice, and the black vermin'. In the statute-book they were described as 'semi-barbarous Asiatics, or persons belonging to the uncivilized races of Asia'. They were not allowed to walk on footpaths or to be out at night, without a permit. First and second-class tickets were not issued to them. If a white passenger objected, they could be unceremoniously bundled out of a railway compartment; they had sometimes to travel on the footboards of trains. European hotels would not admit them. 'Natal,' wrote the *Cape Times*, 'presents the curious spectacle of a country entertaining a supreme contempt for the very class of people she can least do without. Imagination can only picture the commercial paralysis which would inevitably attend the withdrawal of the

Indian population from that colony. And yet the Indian is the most despised of creatures.'

In the Transvaal, Indians could not trade or reside except in specified locations which the London *Times* described as ghettoes. In the Orange Free State, there was a law prohibiting Asiatics and other coloured persons from trading or carrying on any business whatsoever. 'Wherever the Indian goes,' wrote the *Cape Times*, 'he is the same useful well-doing man, law-abiding under whatever form of government he may find himself, frugal in his wants and industrious in his habits. But these virtues make him a formidable competitor in the labour markets to which he resorts.' As Lionel Curtis told Gandhi many years later, it was the virtues rather than the vices of the Indians which had aroused the jealousy of the European and exposed them to political persecution.

CHAPTER VI

Lynched

WHAT with his public activities and what with his legal work it looked as if Gandhi was now settled in Natal. In the middle of 1896 he visited India to fetch his family and, incidentally, to canvass whatever support he could for the Indian cause in South Africa.

From Calcutta, where he landed, he took a train for Bombay *en route* to Rajkot.

On arrival at Rajkot, Gandhi devoted the better part of a month to the writing of a pamphlet on the Indian problem in South Africa and had it printed and despatched to influential public men and newspapers all over the country. This pamphlet covered, though more cautiously, the same ground as his earlier pamphlets in Natal, *An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa* and *The Indian Franchise.*

He followed up this pamphlet with a country-wide tour to educate public opinion. In Bombay he had an audience with the 'uncrowned king' of that town, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, whom he had regarded since his student days in London with a reverence bordering upon awe. Under the distinguished patronage of Sir Pherozeshah, a meeting was called to hear Gandhi on South Africa. As he rose to read the script he had been warned to prepare, the crowded hall seemed to whirl before him, his hands trembled and his voice trailed away into nothingness. The rest of the speech was read with good effect by Wacha, a local orator.

In Poona, he met the two giants of Maharashtrian politics—Gokhale and Tilak. Gokhale, who had devoted himself wholeheartedly to public life, was always on the look-out for patriotic young men; the earnestness of the young barrister from South Africa impressed him at once. On Gandhi's side it was a case of 'love at first sight'. Immediately—and this is an interesting fact—Gokhale and Tilak, who disagreed about almost everything, agreed jointly to sponsor a public meeting in Poona to hear the grievances of the Indians in South Africa. The great Tilak, a politician to his finger-tips, could not help observing that the

young lawyer from Natal was hopelessly unfamiliar with Indian politics.

The poise and leadership which had come so naturally to Gandhi in South Africa was missing on Indian soil. He became morbidly conscious of his youth and inexperience. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta reminded him of the Himalayas, Tilak of the ocean and Gokhale of the holy Ganges. The 'débâcle' at the meeting in Bombay, when he was unable to finish his speech, was painfully reminiscent of the breakdown four years earlier in a local court, which had compelled him to quit Bombay and the legal profession for that of a scribe at Rajkot. It was a fortunate circumstance that his political career began in South Africa. If he had entered politics in India at that time, the odds were heavy that he would have floundered hopelessly. Apart from the sense of immaturity which haunted him in the homeland, Indian politics at this time offered few outlets for his constructive genius, and were beginning to be riddled with personal and factional rivalries. The uniform kindness which he received from prominent politicians was due to the fact that the cause he championed, that of Indians overseas, was common ground among politicians of all shades.

The Presidency of Madras, from which the majority of indentured labourers in Natal hailed, gave Gandhi a very warm welcome. He received unstinted support from leaders of public opinion and the Press, particularly the influential *Hindu*. The pamphlet on the Indians' condition in South Africa sold like hot cakes and a reprint became necessary. In Calcutta, the response from the local leaders and the Press was not so cordial. Nevertheless, two British-owned papers, the *Statesman* and the *Englishman*, featured interviews with him.

While plans were afoot for holding a public meeting in Calcutta, Gandhi received a cable from Natal urging him to return immediately. The trip ended abruptly, but it had served the cause nearest to his heart. It had stimulated the interest of the homeland in the condition of Indians overseas. Public meetings had been held under influential auspices in the principal towns, and the Press, including its Anglo-Indian section, had pulled out the skeleton in the imperial cupboard.

Distorted versions of his activities and utterances had reached Natal and inflamed Europeans of that colony. A four-line cable from Reuter's London office was featured prominently in Natal papers. It ran: 'September 14. A Pamphlet published in India declares that the Indians in Natal are robbed and assaulted and

treated like beasts and are unable to obtain redress. The *Times of India* advocates an inquiry into these allegations.'

The reference was to the pamphlet which Gandhi had published in India. The leading paper of Johannesburg, the *Star*, had once complimented Gandhi for 'writing forcibly, moderately and well', and the *Natal Mercury* had commended 'the calmness and moderation' of his writings. The pamphlet published in India was, if anything, more subdued in tone than what Gandhi had said and written in Natal. His speeches in India had been delivered from carefully prepared texts. So transparent was his sense of fairness that the editor of the *Englishman* of Calcutta had let him see the draft of an editorial on the Indian question in South Africa.

The truth about Gandhi's activities in India did not, however, percolate to Natal. Meanwhile, the cable from London made him the most hated man in the colony. He was accused of smearing the country which had harboured him and of 'dragging the Europeans of Natal in the gutter and painting them as black as his own skin'. He was alleged to have organized an agency to flood Natal with Indian immigrants. It so happened that the ss *Courland*, by which the Gandhi family travelled, and another ship the ss *Naderi* had left Bombay for Natal about the same time. Gandhi's first client and friend Abdulla was the owner of one ship and the agent of the other. The two ships had about 800 passengers on board, half of them bound for Natal. It was just a coincidence that the two ships had sailed almost at the same time at the end of November 1896, and that they arrived together in Durban harbour on December 19. To the Europeans of Natal, already excited by Reuter's report, the coincidence looked like a conspiracy. Two thousand Europeans met in the town hall of Durban and called on the Natal Government to prevent the 'free Indians' from disembarking.

After the ships had cast anchor in the port, the Europeans did their best to coax, cajole or coerce the Indians. A free return passage was dangled before those who would agree to go back; and those who declined were threatened that they would be pushed into the sea. The shipowners were warned to return their unwelcome cargo to India or incur the implacable wrath of the Government and Europeans of Natal. The ships were placed under quarantine; when the duration of quarantine was prolonged from five days to three weeks, its political use was obvious. These tactics had the support of influential Europeans, including Harry Escombe, the Attorney-General of Natal. If

the Indians, most of whom were illiterate and on their first voyage with their families, did not succumb to these threats, it was due to Gandhi's infectious courage and optimism. For him these were anxious days. The lives of these passengers, most of whom he did not know, and those of his own family were in jeopardy on his account; it was he who was the *bête noire* of the Europeans of Natal. On Christmas Day, 1896, there was a small party in the Captain's cabin and somebody asked Gandhi what he would do if the Natal Europeans were as good as their word and forcibly prevented the landing of Indians. 'I hope,' he said, 'God will give me the courage and sense to forgive them, and to refrain from bringing them to law. I have no anger against them. I am only sorry for their ignorance and their narrowness.'

When twenty-three days of this political quarantine and threats failed to browbeat the Indians, the ships were permitted to enter the harbour, on January 13, 1897. The Indians were allowed to disembark with the exception of Gandhi, who had received a message from Escombe to wait till the evening, when he would be escorted by the Superintendent of the Water Police. In the afternoon, however, Laughton, a European lawyer and friend of Gandhi, came aboard and announced that all danger was at an end and that in any case it was undignified for Gandhi to slip into Durban 'like a thief in the night'. It was therefore decided that Mrs Gandhi and the children would immediately drive to the house of Rustomji, the Gandhis' host, and Gandhi and Laughton would join them later on foot. They had not walked far when some European boys recognized Gandhi. A crowd began to collect; as it swelled, it became more and more menacing. Laughton hailed a rickshaw to save his friend, but the Zulu boy pulling the rickshaw was scared away. Laughton and Gandhi began to walk together, followed by the mob. When they reached West street, Laughton was torn away. A hailstorm of rotten eggs and brickbats raged round Gandhi. 'Are you the man who wrote to the Press?' shouted a European, and gave a brutal kick. Gandhi nearly fainted, held on to the railings of a house to regain his breath, and staggered along. He had given up hope of reaching home alive; he recalled later that even at this critical moment his heart did not arraign his assailants. 'Then a beautiful and brave thing happened'. Mrs Alexander, the wife of the local Superintendent of Police, came on the scene. She recognized Gandhi, began to walk alongside him and opened her sunshade to keep off the flying missiles. The Europeans had run amuck, but they dared not raise their

hands against a white woman. Meanwhile, a few constables arrived and escorted Gandhi to the house of his host.

Hardly had Gandhi's wounds been dressed when a European mob surrounded the house and threatened to burn it if Gandhi did not surrender. Superintendent Alexander posted himself at the gate and began to humour the mob to gain a little time. Meanwhile, he sent word to Gandhi to agree to being smuggled out of the house if he did not want to have all the inmates, including women and children, roasted alive. Dressed as an Indian constable, with a metal saucer under his turban, and attended by a detective dressed as an Indian merchant, Gandhi slipped through the crowd and after jumping fences, squeezing between rails and passing through a store, reached the police station.

He did not have to remain in the police station for long. The Natal Europeans had been provoked by Reuter's brief and somewhat garbled report of Gandhi's activities in India. On the morning of the day on which he was assaulted, in an interview with a Press correspondent, he had explained away the various charges against him. There was a belated recognition that he had been the victim of a misunderstanding.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies in London cabled to the Natal Government to prosecute Gandhi's assailants. Gandhi's reaction was characteristic. It was, he said, a principle with him not to seek redress of a personal wrong in a court of law; and in any case it was hardly fair to haul up a few hot-headed young men for acts of violence without calling influential Europeans to account, including members of the Natal Government who had worked up the Europeans of Durban to white heat.

That day, January 13, 1897, was fateful. Gandhi had escaped from the very jaws of death. His poise and magnanimity had raised him not only in the affections of the Indians, but in the esteem of the saner Europeans in Natal. He continued to serve the Natal Indian Congress and to organize the Indian community. In 1899, when the Boer War broke out, he was faced with a major decision on the attitude which the Indian community should adopt towards the conflict which was to change, for better or for worse, the history of South Africa.

CHAPTER VII

Stones for Bread

THE outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 was the final phase in the struggle between the Boer and the British for hegemony in South Africa. The Indians had been badly treated by both Boers and British, though more blatantly by the former, and some of them were not sorry at the prospect of the two races bleeding each other white. Gandhi's own ideas on non-violence and pacifism had not yet matured. It was, he felt, neither possible nor desirable for each citizen to determine in such a crisis on which side the balance of justice lay. The Indians in Natal had been denied elementary rights as citizens, but Gandhi argued that those who even claimed rights could not escape corresponding obligations. The suggestion that the Boers were likely to win and that Indian neutrality would pay dividends after the war he dismissed as downright cowardice.

He succeeded in swinging the majority of the Indians in Natal to his point of view. The Government, however, was in no hurry to avail themselves of the Indians' co-operation. Jameson, a member of the Natal Legislative Council, told Gandhi: 'You Indians know nothing of war. You would only be a drag on the army; you would have to be taken care of, instead of being a help to us.' 'But,' pleaded Gandhi, 'is there nothing we can do? Can we not do ordinary servants' work in connection with the hospitals? Surely, that will not demand very great intelligence?' 'No,' replied Jameson, 'it all needs training.' It was only when General Buller's forces were suffering heavy casualties on the banks of the river Tugela and British morale touched a low ebb that the Indians' offer was accepted, and the formation of an Indian Ambulance Corps permitted. The corps consisted of nearly 1,100 Indians with Dr Booth of the Indian Anglican Mission as Medical Superintendent and Gandhi its *de facto* leaders. The corps reached the front on the eve of the action at Colenso, where it spent a strenuous week. The next summons came on the eve of the battle of Spionkop. The corps was in the field for about three weeks. It was the duty of the

'bearers', as the rank and file of the Indian Ambulance Corps were known, to receive the wounded outside the line of fire, and to tramp with them to the base about twenty miles away. Even though their terms of service did not require them to serve within the firing line, the Indians did so cheerfully on several occasions.

Vere Stent, the editor of the *Pretoria News*, has left a pen-portrait of Gandhi on the battlefield: 'After a night's work which had shattered men with much bigger frames, I came across Gandhi in the early morning sitting by the roadside—eating a regulation army biscuit. Every man in Buller's force was dull and depressed, and damnation was heartily invoked on everything. But Gandhi was stoical in his bearing, cheerful and confident in his conversation and had a kindly eye.'

The work of the Indian Ambulance Corps was mentioned in General Buller's despatches and the thirty-seven 'leaders' of the Indian Ambulance Unit received war-medals. The Indian effort, considered as a contribution to the British victory in the Boer War, may have been, as Gandhi would have been the first to admit, insignificant, but it was a fine gesture on the part of an oppressed minority. For a while the Indians were flattered on being greeted in the European Press as the 'Sons of the Empire'. And among those who personally complimented Gandhi were a number of Europeans who had been the ringleaders of the anti-Indian demonstration in Durban which had nearly ended in the lynching of Gandhi in January 1897.

When the issue of the war was no longer in doubt Gandhi felt that the change in the political climate had made it possible for him to return to India. The Natal Indians released him reluctantly and on condition that he would return, if they required him, within a year.

He landed at Bombay at the end of 1901, just in time to attend the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. After the Congress session he stayed on for a month with Gokhale, whose kindly interest in Gandhi had not abated since they first met during Gandhi's visit to India in 1896. It was Gokhale's ambition to launch Gandhi into Indian public life. There was a strong bond of mutual respect between the two men; Gokhale was fascinated by Gandhi's sincerity, zeal and method, and Gandhi by Gokhale's complete dedication to the service of India.

After practising for a while in the Rajkot courts, he moved down to Bombay, where Gokhale had urged him to settle and

take a hand in the affairs of the Indian National Congress. He moved into a fine bungalow in Santa Cruz, and quickly built up a good practice. Gokhale was happy; an able and earnest worker had been added to the not-too-thick phalanx of Indian patriots. But all the plans, Gandhi's and Gokhale's went by the board when a cable arrived from South Africa, urging Gandhi to return to lead the Indian settlers in the crisis that faced them.

The occasion for the urgent summons was the visit to South Africa of Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary in the British Cabinet, and the opportunity it provided for representing the grievances, new as well as old, of the Indian settlers.

At the end of the Boer War, the British Government appointed a committee to scan the Boer statute-book, and to repeal the laws which were repugnant to the spirit of the British Consitution and inconsistent with the liberty of Queen Victoria's subjects. The committee interpreted the liberty of the subject as the liberty of the white subject; the Indians thus remained outside the pale of the reformed code. In fact, all the anti-Indian laws of the Boer régime were compiled in a handy manual.

When Gandhi landed at Durban in December 1902, he found that the Indians had to free themselves not only from the old chains fastened on them in Natal, but also the new chains being forged for them in the Transvaal. He headed a deputation of Natal Indians, which waited on the Colonial Secretary at Durban. Chamberlain gave the usual 'patient hearing' to the Indian deputation, but argued that the colonies were self-governing and the Indians had better come to terms with the colonists.

The assignment for which he had been recalled from India—the interview with the Colonial Secretary—was over. For Gandhi the temptation to return to his family, and professional and public activities in India was strong; but the peril to the Indian community was so palpable and its trust in him so great that he decided to prolong his self-imposed exile. In 1893 he had come to South Africa for a year and stayed for eight years; in 1902 he had come for six months and was to stay for twelve years. He resolved that he must live in South Africa until 'the gathering clouds were dispersed or until they broke open and swept all away, all our counteracting efforts notwithstanding'.

He had himself enrolled as an attorney of the Transvaal Supreme Court and set up his office at Johannesburg, which was henceforth to be the centre of his activities.

A new phase opened in Gandhi's career. The racial and anti-

Indian policies of the European colonies in Natal and the Transvaal, far from being reversed by the victory of the British over the Boers, were receiving a new impetus. The Indians had to fight not for equality with Europeans but even for elementary civic rights, and for the preservation of interests which they had built by dint of hard work over a quarter of a century. Evidently the struggle was an unequal one and there was no knowing how long it would be protracted. Gandhi, by taking upon himself the responsibility of leading it, had burnt his boats: his own career and family were as nothing beside the cause he had taken up. His life underwent a transformation, not only in externals, in his style of living, but also in the acquisition of new values.

The story of this transformation is not only fascinating in itself, but reveals the springs of that moral and spiritual strength which enabled him to play a unique role in the public life of two continents.

CHAPTER VIII

The Religious Quest

WHEN at the age of nineteen Gandhi arrived in London his acquaintance with the religion of his birth was of the meagrest. It was with some embarrassment that he owned to his theosophist friends, who had invited him to read Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial*, that he had never read the *Bhagavad Gita* in Sanskrit, or even in Gujerati, his mother tongue. This was his introduction to a book which was to become his 'spiritual reference book'. Another book of Sir Edwin's, *The Light of Asia*, also fascinated him; the story of Gautama Buddha—his life, renunciation and teaching—stirred him to his depths.

Gandhi did not join the Theosophical Society, but its literature stimulated his interest in religion. It was in England too that he was introduced to the Bible by a fellow enthusiast for vegetarianism. The New Testament, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, went straight to his heart. The verses, 'But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also', reminded him of the lines of the Gujerati poet, Shamlal Bhatt, which he used to hum as a child:

> For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;
> For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;
> For a single penny pay thou back with gold;
> If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.
> Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
> Every little service tenfold they reward.
> But the truly noble know all men as one,
> And return with gladness good for evil done.

The teachings of the Bible, the Buddha and Bhatt fused in his mind. The idea of returning love for hatred, and good for evil captivated him; he did not yet comprehend it fully, but it continued to ferment in his impressionable mind. Before Gandhi

left England, he had already crossed 'the Sahara of atheism'[1] into which he had strayed in his adolescence.

During his first year in South Africa he came across some ardent Quakers who perceived his religious bent and decided to annex him to Christianity. They loaded him with books on Christian theology and history; they preached at him, and prayed with him and for him. Finally, they took him to a Convention of Protestant Christians in the hope that mass emotion would sweep him off his feet. Gandhi was lavish in praising the nobility of the Quakers' character, but said blandly that he felt no inner call to renounce Hinduism and to embrace Christianity.

When he had read Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, he felt he had learnt more from it than from all the books which his Quaker friends had given him. Tolstoy had condemned Christian churches of all denominations for perverting the true teaching of Christ to maintain their power over the masses, and had drawn pointed attention to the contradiction between Christ's teachings and the daily life of Chiristians. In an earlier book, *What I believe*, Tolstoy had argued that Christ was not merely the founder of a religion of worship and personal salvation, but that Christ's teachings constituted a philosophical, moral, and social doctrine. These views of a Christian anarchist proved an effective counterblast to the indoctrination attempted by the Quakers.

Though he visited a renowned Indian Christian for 'enlightenment' as late as 1901, the possibilities of his conversion had already long receded. He began to study other religions, including his own, and came to the conclusion that all religions are right and every one of them is imperfect because they are 'interpreted with poor intellects, sometimes with poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted'. The essay on 'The hero as Prophet' in Carlyle's *Hero Worship* had first introduced him to Islam. He read a translation of the Koran and the life of the Prophet Mohammed by Washington Irving, and was struck by the poverty and humility of the Prophet, and by the courage with which he and his first followers had faced the humiliations and hardships heaped upon them.

While books on Christianity and Islam were easily available in South Africa, Gandhi had to send to India for books on Hinduism. He began to correspond on religious subjects with his friend Raychandbhai, who counselled him to be patient and to seek in Hinduism 'its unique subtlety and profundity

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 92.

of thought, its vision of the soul and its clarity'. Raychandbhai's scholarly exposition reinforced Gandhi's sentimental bond with Hinduism and was decisive during the period when his Christian friends believed him to be on the way to baptism.

The book which was ultimately to form his strongest bond with Hinduism as well as the greatest influence in his life was the *Bhagavad Gita*. He had read it in 1890, in Sir Edwin Arnold's verse rendering *The Song Celestial*. In South Africa, he studied other translations with the original, and the book became his daily reading. He memorized one verse every morning while going through his morning toilet, until he had the entire poem by heart.

The *Gita* became Gandhi's 'spiritual dictionary' and an 'infallible' guide to conduct: 'When I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me. I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left visible and indelible effects on me, I owe it to the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*'.[1]

The two words *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *sambhava* (equability) opened to him limitless vistas. 'Non-possession' implied that he had to jettison the material goods which cramped the life of the spirit, to shake off the bonds of money, property and sex, and to regard himself as the trustee, not the owner, of what could not be shed. 'Equability' required that he must remain unruffled by pain or pleasure, victory or defeat, and work without hope of success or fear of failure, in short, 'without hankering after the fruit of action'. Only thus could he treat alike 'insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition and men who had always been good' to him. Years later, Gandhi confided to a group of Christian missionaries: 'Hinduism as I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* which I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount.' The Hindu belief in the oneness of all life confirmed and sustained his own faith in *ahimsa* (non-violence). He did not accept every Hindu tenet or practice. He applied the 'acid test of reason' to every formula of every religion. When scriptural sanction was cited for inhumane or unjust practices, his reaction was one of frank disbelief. The oft-quoted text, 'for women there can be no freedom', ascribed to Manu the law-

[1] Natesan: *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Madras (Fourth Edition), p. 1061.

giver, he regarded as an interpolation, and if not then he could only say that in Manu's time women did not receive the status they deserved. Similarly, he lashed out against those who supported untouchability with verses from the Vedas. His Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: in the supreme reality of God, the unity of all life and the value of love (*ahimsa*) as a means of realizing God. In this bedrock religion there was no scope for exclusiveness or narrowness. It was in his view a beauty of Hinduism that: 'in it there is a room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the word . . . Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his own faith or *Dharma* and so it lives at peace with all religions'. He chided Christian missionaries for their 'irreligious gamble' for converts. It was the way a man lived, not the recital of a verse, or the form of a prayer, which made him a good Christian, a good Muslim, or a good Hindu. The missionaries' bid to save souls struck him as presumptuous. Of the aborigines and hillmen of Assam he said: 'What have I to take to (them), except to go in my nakedness to them? Rather than ask them to join my prayer, I would join their prayer.'

The study of comparative religion, the browsing on theological works, the conversations and correspondence with the learned brought him to the conclusion that true religion was more a matter of the heart than of the intellect, and that genuine beliefs were those which were literally lived. This was something beyond the grasp of those who had acquired, in the words of Swift, enough religion to hate one another, but not enough to love one another. In his lifetime Gandhi was variously labelled a *Sanatanist* (orthodox) Hindu, a renegade Hindu, a Buddhist, a Theosophist, a Christian and 'a Christian-Mohammedan'. He was all these and more; he saw an underlying unity in the clash of doctrines and forms. 'God is not encased in a safe,' he wrote to a correspondent who had urged him to save his soul by conversion to Christianity, 'to be approached only through a little hole in it, but He is open to be approached through billions of openings by those who are humble and pure of heart.'[1]

[1] *The Diaries of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, entry dated September 4, 1932.

CHAPTER IX

Transformation

TOLSTOY has recorded that before his 'conversion' his philosophy of life was 'that one should live so as to have the best for oneself and one's family and not to try to be wiser than life and Nature'. Gandhi had his 'conversion', but even in the years which later seemed to him as unregenerate, he did not live only for himself and his family. In Durban, as well as in Johannesburg, he kept an open table. His clerks and junior counsel usually lodged with him and were treated as members of the family. There were, in addition, almost always guests in the house, Indians as well as Europeans. For his wife this community living was often an ordeal. There was once a scene, graphically described in the autobiography, when Kasturbai declined to clean a chamber-pot for a Christian clerk of *panchma* (untouchable) parentage. Her prejudice struck her husband as entirely irrational. He insisted that she should not only perform the distasteful task but do so cheerfully, or else leave him. His moral zeal had blinded him with anger, and he could not see how much strain it placed on his wife. Years later he recorded that he had been a 'cruelly kind husband'.

Even in those days of 'ease and comfort', as he described them later, money-making as such did not interest him. As a budding barrister he had been anxious to make good and to contribute to the family coffers, but he would not stoop to lucrative but immoral expedients. He was told that a certain lawyer with a practice of Rs. 3,000 a month was attracting briefs through touts by paying illegal commission. 'I do not need to emulate him,' he replied, 'I should be content with Rs. 300 a month. Father did not earn more.' The nadir of his fortunes was reached when he was turned down for the post of part-time teacher in a Bombay school with a paltry salary of Rs. 70 a month. It was only in South Africa that he found himself as a lawyer. From the £300 which had been promised to him in 1894 as the minimum retaining fee, his income steadily rose to the peak figure of £5,000 a year. His public life helped him in build-

ing up his practice, but it also made heavy inroads on his time. Nor did he accept every brief that came to him. He did not view it as his professional obligation to defend a client if he was in the wrong. If he was convinced during the progress of a case that his client had withheld material facts from him, he did not hesitate to repudiate him openly in the court. He had never forgotten how as a child his frank confession of a petty theft had moved his father to forgiveness and himself to repentance. He believed that an error must be confessed and atoned for. Parsi Rustomji, a wealthy merchant of Durban and close friend of Gandhi, once found himself in trouble for evasion of customs duties and came to him for advice. Instead of preparing a defence for him Gandhi persuaded him to make a clean breast not only of this but also of other dubious transactions, and to pay up the tax as well as the penalty. To cap it all, the repentant merchant recorded a confession of his misdeeds and had the document framed and hung in his house for the edification of his descendants.

There were doubtless abler and richer lawyers among Gandhi's contemporaries, but few of them could equal his human approach to the profession of law. When a client failed to pay his dues, Gandhi would not have recourse to law; it was, he said, his own error of judgment which was responsible for the loss. Again, to a colleague who protested that clients came even on Sundays, his answer was: 'A man in distress cannot have Sunday rest.'

One day there was much amusement in the Durban courts when Gandhi appeared with the starch dripping from his shirt-collar. This was not the handiwork of a careless launderer; it was his own first experiment in washing clothes. On another occasion his fellow-lawyers held their sides with laughter when they saw his hair cropped in a crazy fashion. He explained that the white barber had declined to attend to him, and he had become his own barber. He trained himself as a dispenser in a charitable hospital, attending the indentured labourers, the poorest of the Indians in South Africa. He read diligently on nursing and obstetrics and acted as a midwife at the birth of his youngest son, when the nurse who had been engaged did not turn up in time. Barber, launderer, dispenser, nurse, he was also a schoolmaster. Since he would not accept as a favour for his children what was denied to other children as a right, his children had to stay out of European schools, and to content themselves with the scraps of instruction they could get from their father as they walked with him the ten miles to and from

his office in Johannesburg. These peripatetic lessons were often interrupted by clients or colleagues, but despite their mother's protest, Gandhi refused to put his children into European schools.

The trend towards simplicity received a tremendous fillip in 1904. One evening that year, as Gandhi was taking a train from Johannesburg to Durban, his journalist friend Polak gave him a book to read. It was Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. Gandhi sat through the night and read it from cover to cover. Ruskin had denounced classical economists for not conceiving economics in terms of human welfare, and condemned the poverty and the injustice which industrialism had brought or intensified; these and other ideas were to ferment in Gandhi's mind and to colour his outlook. But what immediately impressed him most was Ruskin's reference to the ideal of a simple life in which manual work should be the joy of existence. 'The book,' records the autobiography, 'confirmed and strengthened some of my own deepest convictions.'

When the train reached Durban next morning, Gandhi was intent on reducing Ruskin's theories to practice. With Albert West, a European friend, who was at this time looking after the *Indian Opinion* press at Durban, he discussed a plan for transferring the journal to a farm where the settlers would literally live by the sweat of their brow. A 100-acre estate situated amidst sugar plantations, served by a spring, and full of fruit trees and snakes, was purchased for £1,000. The nearest station, Phoenix, was two and a half miles from the estate and fourteen miles from Durban. The first settlers included, besides Polak and West, a few cousins and nephews of Gandhi who had accompanied him to South Africa. A hall seventy-five feet long and and fifty feet wide housed the press. Eight buildings of corrugated iron and thatched roofs were put up in the little colony.

Indian Opinion began to be published from Phoenix. The little colony was a busy hive on the day the paper had to be printed and made ready for despatch. Gandhi and Polak corrected the proofs, the printers ran off the corrected pages, the children folded and wrapped the journal.

Gandhi's cottage was the pivot of the corporate life of the settlement. Every Sunday all the residents met in his room for a community prayer in which recitations from the *Gita* and the Bible, Christian hymns and Gujerati *bhajans* mingled to lift the audience above their immediate surroundings, beyond the boundaries of race and religion. As for Gandhi, he had found a quiet

corner away from the heat and the dust of towns, away from men's greed and hatred; working on the farm among people who shared his ideals, he had time to pose questions about his inner growth.

For Gandhi the 'fulfilment of Phoenix' was not to last long. Both public and professional work made it imperative for him to return to Johannesburg. A vivid account of the Johannesburg household has been given by one of its inmates, Millie Graham Polak, in her book *Mr Gandhi: The Man*. It was community life in miniature. Gandhi as the benevolent patriarch had no special privilege except perhaps that of looking after everybody else. He was amusing and easily amused. The house resounded with laughter as the children joined with the parents every morning in the grinding of wheat in a hand-mill. The evening meal was a pleasant hour, interspersed with light conversation and serious discussion, and occasionally enlivened by Kasturbai's ventures into the English language. After dinner Gandhi would debate religion and philosophy and recite from the *Gita*. An intimate pen-portrait of Gandhi as he was in his late thirties has been left by Joseph J. Doke, Gandhi's first biographer, and a Baptist minister of Johannesburg.[1] In December 1907 he saw Gandhi for the first time:

'. . . to my surprise, a small, lithe, spare figure stood before me, and a refined earnest face looked into mine. The skin was dark, the eyes dark, but the smile which lighted up the face, and that direct fearless glance, simply took one's heart by storm. I judged him to be some thirty-eight years of age, which proved correct. But the strain of his work showed its traces in the sprinkling of silver hairs on his head. He spoke English perfectly and was evidently a man of great culture . . .

'There was a quiet assured strength about him, a greatness of heart, a transparent honesty, that attracted me at once to the Indian leader. We parted friends . . .

'Our Indian friend lives on a higher plane than most men do. His actions, like the actions of Mary of Bethany, are often counted eccentric, and not infrequently misunderstood. Those who do not know him think there is some unworthy motive behind them, some Oriental 'slimness', to account for such profound unworldliness. But those who know him well are ashamed of themselves in his presence.

'Money I think has no charm for him. His compatriots are angry; they say, "He will take nothing. The money we gave him

[1] Doke, Joseph J.: *M. K. Gandhi*, Madras, pp. 6-8.

when he went as our deputy to England he brought back to us again. The presents we made him in Natal, he handed over to our public funds. He is poor because he will be poor."

'They wonder at him, grow angry at his strange unselfishness, and love him with the love of pride and trust. He is one of those outstanding characters with whom to walk is a liberal education, whom to know is to love.'

CHAPTER X

Discovery of Satyagraha

NATIVE policy in South Africa, Sir Alan Burns[1] has pointed out, degenerated into a defence of the 'poor white', who himself is a product of the system intended to degrade only the non-white. Behind the specious pleas of cultural differences, of conflicting ways of living, has always been economic rivalry. Lionel Curtis, a British official in the Transvaal who played a part in the formulation of the system of dyarchy in the Indian reforms of 1919, recalled a conversation he had with Gandhi in 1903:

'He (Mr Gandhi) started by trying to convince me of the points in the character of his countrymen, their industry, frugality, patience. I remember that after listening to him I said, "Mr Gandhi you are preaching to the converted. It is not the vices of the Indians that Europeans in this country fear, but their virtues."'[2]

The Europeans of Natal, who had imported thousands of indentured Indian labourers—semi-slaves—to work their sugar plantations and mines, were unwilling to suffer 'free Indians' as traders and farmers, in their midst, while after the Boer War the Europeans of the Transvaal raised the bogey of an 'Asiatic Invasion'. In 1905 a committee appointed by the British High Commissioner found that the accusation of secret smuggling of Indians into the Transvaal lacked foundation. Even though many Indian families who had left the Transvaal after the outbreak of war returned with the cessation of hostilities, the total Indian population of the Transvaal in 1903 was less than what it was in 1899.

Fear among Europeans that South Africa was being flooded with Indian immigrants were exaggerated. Gandhi considered them irrational, but he recognized the strength of European feeling on the subject. He was prepared to go so far to accommodate European prejudices as to agree to a total embargo on the 'export' of Indian labour.

[1] Burns, Sir Alan: *Colour Prejudice*, London, 1948, p. 73.
[2] *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, London, 1939, p. 67.

No more indentured labourers might be admitted, but a limited number of educated Indians were required to serve as clerks and accountants to the Indian merchants. Gandhi was prepared to meet the Europeans more than half-way even on other issues between the Indian community and the Europeans, backed by the local governments. The regulation of Indian trade by licences could be continued provided the local bodies issued them subject to the supervision of the Supreme Court. The Indians were similarly prepared to submit to local and municipal regulations regarding the ownership of land and the right of residence, provided the regulations applied to Europeans and Indians alike. Gandhi did not ask for the right to vote. 'What we (Indians) want,' he told the British High Commissioner in South Africa, 'is not political power; but we do wish to live side by side with other British subjects in peace and amity, and with dignity and self-respect.' This was precisely what the Boer and Briton did not want. General Smuts declared later that the Government had made up its mind to 'make this a white man's country, and however difficult the task before us in this direction, we have put our foot down and would keep it there'.

A stage was soon reached when Gandhi's policy of conciliation, of 'live and let live', was to meet with a rude rebuff. Matters came to a head on the question of the registration of Indians in the Transvaal. At first it had been considered sufficient to obtain the signature or (in the case of illiterate immigrants) the thumb impression. Later, a photograph was also required and Indians had to take out new permits. When Gandhi returned from the 'Zulu Rebellion', after doing his duty (as he then conceived it) as a citizen of the Empire, he found that a new measure had been devised to make the registration of Indians as irksome and humiliating a process as possible. He was stunned when he read the clauses of the bill in the *Transvaal Gazette* of August 22, 1906, which had been prepared for the Transvaal Legislature. It required every Indian—man, woman and child above eight years—to register and to give finger and thumb impressions on the registration form. If parents failed to give finger-prints of minor children, the latter were required to do so on attaining the age of sixteen, or to face the penalty, which might be a fine, imprisonment or deportation. In courts, revenue offices, indeed almost at any time or place, an Indian could be challenged to produce his registration certificate; police officers could enter an Indian's

house to examine permits. 'Dog's collar' was indeed an apt description of this measure. The professed object of this drastic measure was to check the illicit influx of Indians into the Transvaal. Not only was there no proof of an influx on any large scale, but the existing laws were severe enough. During the years 1905-6 the Government had successfully conducted 150 prosecutions of Indians for unauthorized entry into the country. In one case a poor Indian woman had been torn away from her husband and ordered by the European magistrate to leave the country within seven hours. A boy under eleven years was arrested and sentenced to a fine of £30 or three months' imprisonment.

The object of the new registration measure was apparently to humiliate and demoralize the better educated and prosperous Indian, and to make the Transvaal too hot for him. Gandhi became convinced that if this measure became law and the Indians accepted it, it would 'spell absolute ruin to them'. It was better he felt, for Indians to die rather than submit to this law. But how were they to die? What should they dare and do, so that there would be nothing before them except a choice between victory and death? An impenetrable wall was before him; he could not see his way through it.

In the autumn of 1906, the political prospects for Indians in South Africa seemed dim. The British victory in the Boer War had brought no relief to Indians in the British colonies; in the former Boer states it had made their lot worse. The new régime in South Africa was to blossom into a partnership, but only between the Boer and the Briton. As Gandhi looked back on the twelve years he had devoted to the agitation for elementary civic rights for the Indian community in Natal and the Transvaal, he could not help feeling that 'love's labour had been lost'. His hopes of securing an amelioration of the Indians' condition by educating public opinion in South Africa, India and Britain had been frustrated. With the exception of a few Europeans, Christian missionaries or youthful idealists, he had been unable to make a perceptible impression upon the South African Europeans, who regarded the Indian question not as a matter of political ethics but one of 'bread-and-butter and of their children's bread-and-butter'. In India there was plenty of sympathy and a rare unanimity among all shades of opinion, reflected in the resolutions on South Africa passed every year by the Indian National Congress. Indian politicians were conscious of their limitations, however; the unreality of these verbal protests was

brought out bluntly in Sir Pherozeshah Mehta's remark to Gandhi when they were travelling to Calcutta for the 1901 session of the Indian National Congress: 'But what rights have we in our own country? I believe that so long as we have no power in our own land, you cannot fare better in the colonies.'

In England, Gandhi was on occasions able to win influential support for his struggle for Indians' rights, particularly that of the London *Times*, but the British Colonial Office, in its anxiety to humour the South African whites, continued to dwell on the 'logic of self-government', according to which the colonies were free to do what they liked—even to grind the Indian subjects of the Empire.

It was clear that to resist the latest attack upon their self-respect, namely the measure for the registration of Asiatics, the Indians had to depend upon their own resources. They had no vote and no representation in the legislature. On September 11, 1906, they held a meeting at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg which was 'packed from floor to ceiling'.[1] The main resolution on the agenda drafted by Gandhi was that the Indian community was determined not to submit to the proposed measure for registration of Asiatics. When one of the speakers declared in the name of God that he would never submit to that law, Gandhi was 'startled and put on his guard'. The suggestion of a solemn oath helped him to think out 'the possible consequences in a single moment', and his 'perplexity gave way to enthusiasm'. A solemn oath meant much to Gandhi. His life had been moulded by the vows he had taken; the threefold vow he had taken on the eve of his departure for England had had a profound effect on him, and only recently he had snapped the common ties of family and property in order to give undivided allegiance to public service. The idea of a pledge of resistance to an unjust law, with God as witness, and with no fear of consequences, demolished the wall which had been obscuring his vision. He experienced the relief and exhilaration of a mathematician who suddenly discovers the solution to an intractable problem. The solution was no fluke; his whole life had been a preparation for it. Since his childhood in his personal life truth had been his guiding principle and he had tried to practise it at any cost. He had shed those smaller loyalties which make cowards of most men. The courage and the faith he evinced on this historic occasion had behind them a lifelong discipline. To his fellow-Indians assembled in that Empire

[1] *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 161.

Theatre hall in Johannesburg he spoke out fearlessly: 'There is only one course open to those like me, to die but not to submit to the law. It is quite unlikely, but even if everyone else flinched leaving me alone to face the music, I am confident that I would not violate my pledge.'[1]

He asked them to search their hearts. He warned them that those who resisted the Government would run the risk of confiscation of property, imprisonment, starvation, flogging and even death. The meeting ended with a solemn oath by 'all present standing with raised hands, with God as witness not to submit to the (Asiatic Registration) Ordinance if it became law'. Gandhi did not explain the mode of resistance; perhaps he was not himself clear about it. Of one thing there was no doubt; it was to be free from violence. Gandhi was vaguely aware that some new principle of fighting political and social evils had come into being. The term 'passive resistance' was at first employed to describe the new principle, but the association of this term with the verbal and physical violence practised by the suffragettes in England made it unsatisfactory. *Indian Opinion*, which was to become the voice of Gandhi's movement, invited suggestions for an appropriate name. The word 'sadagraha' (which means firmness in good conduct) appealed to Gandhi; he amended it to 'Satyagraha' (firmness in truth). The principles and the technique of the new movement, however, were to evolve gradually in the ensuing months and years; its author was a man for whom theory was the handmaid of action.

It is not surprising that the movement should have borne the impress of his peculiar evolution. In 1908, Doke questioned him on the genesis of Satyagraha and recorded:

'Mr Gandhi himself attributes the birth and evolution of this principle (Passive Resistance), so far as he is concerned, to quite other influences. "I remember," he said, "how one verse of a Gujerati poem, which as a child I learned at school, clung to me. In substance it was this: If a man gives you a drink of water and you give him a drink in return, that is nothing. Real beauty consists in doing good against evil. As a child, this verse had a powerful influence over me, and I tried to carry it into practice. Then came the Sermon on the Mount".'

'"But surely," I said, "the *Bhagavad Gita* came first?"

'"No," he replied, "of course, I knew the *Bhagavad Gita* in Sanskrit tolerably well, but I had not made its teaching in that particular a study. It was the New Testament which really

[1] *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 168.

awakened me to the rightness and value of Passive Resistance. When I read in the Sermon on the Mount, such passages as 'Resist not him that is evil, but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also', and 'Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven', I was simply overjoyed, and found my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it. The *Bhagavad Gita* deepened the impression, and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* gave it permanent form."[1]

[1] Doke, Joseph J.: *M. K. Gandhi*, p. 88.

CHAPTER XI

First Satyagraha Movement

IN spite of the unanimous and vehement opposition of the Indian community, the Asiatic Registration Bill was carried by the Transvaal Legislature almost *in toto*. The royal assent was received. It was announced that the new law would take effect from July 1, 1907.

The Indians had failed to make themselves heard. The time had come for Gandhi to fulfil the pledge of resistance to this unjust law. He formed a Passive Resistance Association to conduct his campaign. Though the oath of resistance to the hated law had been taken by Indians present at that historic meeting in the Empire Theatre in September 1906, he had it readministered to give the waverers a chance to withdraw. *Indian Opinion*, which had been for many years a drain on his purse, was to prove a handy instrument for the political education of the Indian community. It played the part in South Africa which *Young India* and *Harijan* were to play later in India; it was read not only by his colleagues and co-workers but also by his opponents, as it unreservedly indicated his plans. Its popularity is shown by its circulation, which reached a peak figure of 3,500 in a country where the total number of potential Indian readers did not exceed 20,000 and where copies were also circulated from door to door.

The Government opened permit offices in the principal towns, and called upon all Indian residents in the Transvaal to register by July 31, 1907, or face the penalties prescribed by law. The Passive Resistance Association advised the Indian community to boycott the permit offices. Posters appeared with the striking caption: 'Loyalty to the King demands loyalty to the King of Kings . . . Indians be Free.' Gandhi planned the picketing of the permit offices to the minutest detail. He recruited volunteers—some of them boys in their teens—and posted them outside the permit offices to dissuade Indians from taking out the registration certificates under the new law. But volunteers were forbidden to be violent or even discourteous towards those who

insisted on registering themselves. And they surrendered themselves cheerfully if the police wished to arrest them. Though pressure of every kind was ruled out in this campaign, the force of public opinion was itself strong enough for the blacklegs. There were a few instances in which permits were taken out at night in collusion with the permit offices, but by and large the boycott was effective. The Government extended the date of registration, but by November 30, 1907, only 511 Indians had taken out the registration certificates.

On December 28, 1907, Gandhi and twenty-six of his prominent colleagues attended a Johannesburg court to show cause why, through failure to register under the law, they should not be deported from the Transvaal. Gandhi received two months' simple imprisonment. If the Government had hoped to break the spirit of the rank and file by locking up their leader, they had made a serious miscalculation. There was lively competition among the Indians in courting imprisonment. The fear of imprisonment had gone; gaol came to be known as King Edward's Hotel. Johannesburg gaol began to fill, until it had 155 passive resisters where it could accommodate only fifty. They slept on the ground and the food served to them was such that only the kaffirs could relish it; their morale was high. They asked for manual labour, but since their sentences were in most cases without hard labour, those in charge of the gaol could not oblige them.

Gandhi had hardly begun to feel settled in prison when he received a visit from his friend Albert Cartright, a liberal European, whose paper *The Transvaal Leader* had often supported the Indian cause. Cartright told Gandhi that he had seen General Smuts and had brought with him the draft of a settlement, according to which the Asiatic Registration Act was to be repealed provided the Indians registered voluntarily. Two days later, Gandhi, still a prisoner, was received by General Smuts in his office at Pretoria. The General praised the perseverance of the Indians, pleaded his helplessness on the registration issue in view of the strong European feeling and repeated the assurance already conveyed by Cartright that the Asiatic Registration Act would be taken off the statute-book if Indians registered on their own. The General accepted some amendments which Gandhi suggested. 'Where am I to go?' asked Gandhi. The General laughed and replied: 'I am phoning the prison officials to release the other prisoners tomorrow morning.'

It was seven o'clock in the evening. Gandhi did not have a farthing with him. Borrowing the railway fare from General Smuts' secretary, he rushed to the railway station to catch the last train for Johannesburg. He called a meeting of the Indian community within a few hours of his arrival to discuss the informal agreement he had reached with Smuts. There was a good deal of criticism. Was he not playing into the hands of the Government? Why did the repeal of the Registration Act not precede rather than follow voluntary registration? What would happen if the Transvaal Government did not keep their word? Gandhi explained that it was part of the duty of a Satyagrahi to trust the word of even an adversary. If the Government went back on its word, it was open to the Indians to resume their resistance. A rugged Pathan hailing from the North-West frontier of India persistently heckled Gandhi and even accused him of having sold the Indian community to General Smuts for £15,000. On the morning of February 10, 1908, Gandhi left his residence to take out, as he had publicly promised, the first registration certificate in accordance with the understanding he had reached with General Smuts. In Von Brandis Street the Pathan, Mir Alam and his friends attacked Gandhi, who fainted with the words '*He Rama*' (Oh God!) on his lips. Were it not for some companions who warded off some of the blows, and for the intervention of European passers-by, Gandhi would have been killed on the spot.

Bleeding profusely, he was carried into the nearest shop. As he regained consciousness, his first thought was for his assailant. 'Where is Mir Alam?' he asked his friend Doke, who had arrived on the scene. 'He has been arrested along with the rest,' replied Doke. 'He should be released,' said Gandhi. Doke replied: 'That is all very well but here you are in a stranger's office with your lip and cheek bandaged. The police are ready to take you to the hospital, but if you will go to my place, Mrs Doke and I will minister to your comforts as best we can.' Gandhi preferred to go to the Dokes's house.

Gandhi had risked his life to fulfil his part of the compact with Smuts. But the Boer General backed out with a brazenness which left not only Gandhi but Albert Cartright, the honest broker, gasping. The Transvaal Government did not repeal the Asiatic Registration Act; it brought forth a new measure to validate the voluntary registration of the Indians. This meant that Indian immigrants who entered the country in future would still be subject to the 'Black Act'. Gandhi gave vent to his feelings

in *Indian Opinion* in an article entitled 'Foul Play'. His colleagues taunted him with gullibility; he wrote to Smuts and recalled conversations with Albert Cartwright and with the General. Unfortunately the General's recollections did not coincide with Gandhi's.

CHAPTER XII

Second Round

THE Indians' discomfiture looked complete. They had voluntarily put on 'the dog's collar', and the law against which they had agitated nevertheless remained on the statute-book. The Government refused to return the Indians' original applications for voluntary registration. Gandhi declared that the Indians would burn their registration certificates and 'humbly take the consequences'.

The earlier campaign in the autumn of 1907 had planned itself. Now, with better knowledge of his people and a surer grasp of the technique which he was evolving, Gandhi planned the second round in the Satyagraha struggle. A huge bonfire was held at which a large number of Transvaal Indians consigned their registration certificates to the flames. The scene was compared by the Johannesburg correspondent of the *Daily Mail* with the 'Boston Tea Party'. The Indians' struggle in the Transvaal may not have been as historic an event as the American War of Independence, but the burning of the certificates was certainly a bold act of defiance. General Smuts, who may have chuckled over Gandhi's discomfiture, did not have the last laugh. The highlight of the demonstration came when Mir Alam, now out of jail, stepped forward and shook hands with Gandhi, who assured him that he had never harboured any resentment against his assailant.

Meanwhile the Transvaal Legislature had passed another measure which effectively excluded new immigrants from India. Gandhi wrote to the Government that the Satyagraha movement would also be directed against the new measures. General Smuts accused Gandhi of raising new issues; he warned the Indians that their spokesman was a person 'who, when given an inch, asked for an ell'. In fact Gandhi had been straining hard to restrict the scope and area of his struggle, and had, with some difficult, held back Indian settlers in other colonies in South Africa from launching sympathetic movements.

The Indians were prepared to fill the prisons. In August 1908 a few prominent Indians from Natal, who had an old right of

domicile in the Transvaal, crossed the frontier, not to settle in the Transvaal but to defy the Registration Act. They were arrested. In the Transvaal the easiest passport to King Edward's Hotel—as Gandhi called the gaols—was to hawk without a licence. Hawkers who had licences refused to produce them on demand and trooped into prisons. Their example was followed by well-to-do Indian merchants and barristers, who turned hawkers overnight, peddled vegetables without a licence and marched into prison. The terms of imprisonment in this second Satyagraha campaign were, unlike those in the first, usually with hard labour. The treatment of Indians in gaol became harsher. Boys in their teens were made to break stones, sweep the streets and dig tanks. One of them named Nagappa, an eighteen-year-old boy who was taken to work in the early winter mornings, died of pneumonia.

Gandhi himself had a taste of this severe treatment in a Transvaal prison when he landed there in October 1908. He spent the first night in the company of some kaffiir criminals, 'wild-looking, murderous, vicious, lewd and uncouth'. He kept his composure by repeating verses from the *Gita*. This was the hardest term he ever had in prison. At seven in the morning he was one of a gang of prisoners, led by a relentless overseer, which dug hard ground with spades. As the day wore on, with his bent back and blistered hands Gandhi was seen cheering up his companions, many of whom all but broke under the strain. In the evenings and on Sundays he pored over the *Gita* and books by Ruskin, Thoreau and others, which he could get in gaol. The rigorous prison routine harmonized with the philosophy of life which he had been working out, the renunciation of creature comforts and the sublimation of self in the service of humanity. His personality developed and took on that steely strength which was to become a powerful force in years to come. 'Each time he returned,' writes Mrs Polak, 'one felt that some almost indefinable growth had taken place in him during his absence in gaol.'[1]

Prosecutions, deportations and economic pressure did not crush the Satyagraha movement. Nevertheless, it could not continue at a high pitch all the time and gradually fell to a low ebb. A sort of war-weariness crept over the Indian community, particularly over its richer section. There was a stalemate; the Indians did not give up the fight, though they were unable to make a spectacular impression.

[1] Polak, M.: *Mr. Gandhi: The Man*, p. 94.

After a fruitless trip to England in 1909, Gandhi saw that the Indians' struggle for their rights would be a protracted affair. Repression by the Transvaal Government had told on the small Indian community. Many merchants had suffered heavy losses and had retired from politics. A small band of Satyagrahis, however, continued to court imprisonment. To the families of these Satyagrahi prisoners the Satyagraha Association had been giving subsistence allowances, but the funds of the Association were running out. Since 1906 Gandhi's political preoccupations had brought his practice at the bar to a standstill, and all his savings had been sunk in the movement. Money was needed not only to help the distressed families, but to run the offices of the movement in Johannesburg and London, and to keep *Indian Opinion* going. In this war of attrition, time was evidently on the side of the Transvaal Government and the Indian resisters were in danger of being starved into surrender. Gandhi felt that if the Satyagraha struggle was to be sustained, financial commitments must be drastically cut. He came to the conclusion that the most economical arrangement was to lodge the families of Satyagrahi prisoners at a co-operative farm. The Phoenix Settlement in Durban which he had founded in 1904 was the obvious choice; but it was ruled out, owing to its distance from Johannesburg, thirty hours away by train.

Kallenbach, a German architect who had thrown in his lot with Gandhi, came to his rescue. He bought a 1,100-acre farm twenty-one miles from Johannesburg and gave it rent free for the use of the Satyagrahis. The estate, which was styled 'Tolstoy Farm', had about a thousand fruit trees and a small house. With such local labour and materials as they could muster, Gandhi and Kallenbach put up a small colony of corrugated structures. The residents of Tolstoy Farm, whose number varied between fifty and seventy-five, hailed from almost all parts of India, and included Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians. They were served by a common vegetarian kitchen and led a frugal and hard life, which was in fact harder than life in jail. All the residents, including children, had their quota of manual labour. The colony tried to be self-sufficient; its workshop, under the expert supervision of Kallenbach, manufactured odds and ends. Kallenbach learnt shoe-making from the monks of a German monastery and taught the craft to his fellow residents, including Gandhi. 'We had all become labourers', writes Gandhi, 'and therefore put on labourers' dress, but in the European style, viz. workman's trousers and shirts, which were

imitated from prisoners' uniform.'[1] Those who went to the town on private errands had to walk the forty-two miles to and back from Johannesburg. Gandhi himself, though past forty and living only on fruits, did not think much of walking forty miles a day; he once did fifty-five miles without feeling any the worse for it.

Gandhi was in high spirits; his 'faith and courage were at their highest on Tolstoy Farm.'[2] He became a firm believer in nature-cure and it was during this period that he wrote his *Guide to Health*. 'There was not,' he writes, 'a single case of illness on the farm in which we used drugs or called in a doctor.' In Kallenbach he found an enthusiastic comrade for his experiments. They tried to work out the implications of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and to apply the principle to snakes. They ran a school for the children of the colony where Gandhi tried his ideas on education, which he had so far tested only on his children. He laid emphasis on the culture of the heart, rather than on the sharpening of the intellect, and made manual work an integral part of the curriculum.

The children of Tolstoy Farm merrily dug pits, felled trees, lifted loads, learnt carpentry and shoe-making. Gandhi had a high conception of his duty as a teacher: 'It would be idle for me if I were a liar to teach the boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant . . . I saw, therefore, that I must be an eternal object-lesson to the boys and girls living with me. They thus became my teachers, and I learnt I must be good, and live straight, if only for their sakes.'

The increasing discipline and self-restraint Gandhi cultivated at Tolstoy Farm was attributed by him to his awakened sense of responsibility as a teacher. Tolstoy Farm was another milestone in his growth; it also made a valuable contribution to the Satyagraha struggle. Not only did it offer an asylum to the families of Satyagrahi prisoners, but the spectacle of a handful of Indian patriots cheerfully leading a life of voluntary poverty and austerity, rather than surrender to the organized might of the Transvaal Government, was to prove an inspiring example to the rest of the Indian community when Gandhi led it in the last phase of his Satyagraha campaign. And the men, women and children who had known the austere discipline of Tolstoy Farm could have little fear of gaol.

The Satyagraha struggle had continued for four years. The

[1] *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 375.
[2] *Idem*, p. 371.

Indians went in and came out of gaol. The weaker and the richer members of the community could not sustain the tempo of the struggle, but the morale of the minority which held out under Gandhi's leadership was high. Public opinion in India was becoming restive. Gokhale piloted through the Imperial Legislative Council a resolution banning the emigration of indentured labour to South Africa. As the coronation of King George V drew near, the Imperial Government was also anxious to pour oil on troubled waters and appease Indian opinion. The result was an announcement in February 1911 by the South African Government that it would remove the racial bar; the entry of Indians into the Transvaal was to be restricted not as Asiatics, but by means of a severe education test.

On May 27, 1911, *Indian Opinion* announced that a provisional settlement with the Government had been reached, and that Indians and Chinese were free to resume their occupations. On June 1st, the Satyagrahi prisoners were released. The truce lasted till the end of 1912.

The great event of 1912 was a visit from Gokhale. For fifteen years, Gokhale had been in touch with, and lent his powerful support to, Gandhi from inside and outside the Imperial Legislative Council at Calcutta. His tour of South Africa was planned with the consent of the British Government; he came as a state guest and was given a saloon for his rail journeys. Gandhi received him at Cape Town, and acted as his secretary—and valet—throughout the one-month tour. Railway stations were illuminated and red carpets rolled out for Gokhale. The Indian community showered addresses and caskets on him, and gave him a right royal welcome. In Pretoria, the capital of the Union, he had a conference with Union ministers at the end of which he told Gandhi, 'You must return to India in a year. Everything has been settled. The Black Act will be repealed. The racial bar will be removed from the emigration law. The £3 tax will be abolished.' 'I doubt it very much,' replied Gandhi, 'you do not know the ministers as I do.'

As Gokhale turned his back on South Africa, it became clear that he had been bluffed. General Smuts told the South African Parliament that, in view of the European feeling in Natal, it was not possible to abolish the £3 tax on the ex-indentured labourers, and their families.

Another 'breach of faith' gave a new lease of life to the Satyagraha movement.

CHAPTER XIII

Final Phase

GANDHI decided to launch his final campaign and to throw his 'all' into it. Gokhale had written from India enquiring about the strength of 'the army of peace' which was to wage this campaign; Gandhi replied that he could count on at least sixteen and, at the most, sixty-six Satyagrahis. Gokhale, a seasoned politician, was somewhat amused at these statistics and wondered how a handful of Indians could bring the Transvaal Government to terms. But Gokhale could not foresee Gandhi's strategy, which was soon to unfold itself and suck thousands of Indians into the movement.

Gandhi's first move was to send a party of sixteen, including Mrs Gandhi, from Phoenix settlement in Natal to the Transvaal. They were arrested for entering the Transvaal without a permit on September 23rd and imprisoned. A few days later, a party of eleven women from Tolstoy Farm in the Transvaal crossed into Natal without a permit, and proceeded to Newcastle; before they were arrested, they had persuaded the Indian miners to go on strike.

The strike in the coal mines was a serious affair. Gandhi hastened to Newcastle to take charge of the situation, and to guard against any disorder or violence on the part of the strikers. The mine owners invited him to Durban. 'You have nothing to lose,' they taunted him, 'but will you compensate the misguided labourers for the damage you will cause them?' The workers, replied Gandhi, were aware of the risks they ran, and in any case there could be no greater loss than the loss of self-respect, which they had suffered for many years in the form of the £3 poll tax. On returning to Newcastle, Gandhi told the miners of the threats made by their masters, but the miners did not flinch; their faith in 'Gandhibhai' (Brother Gandhi) was complete. Their employers began to tighten the screws on them. They cut off water and electricity from the miners' quarters, so the poor Indians with their scanty belongings left their quarters. Gandhi did not know what to do with these jobless and home-

less men. The Indian traders of Newcastle were reluctant to help the miners for fear of incurring the Government's displeasure. An Indian Christian family offered to feed them, but how long could it afford to do so? There were great risks involved in allowing hundreds of illiterate and unemployed labourers to idle about. So Gandhi decided to march this 'army' to the Transvaal, hoping that *en route* it would be taken out of his hands by the Government and deposited in gaol. But if by some miracle the miners and their families escaped imprisonment, they were to support themselves by working on Tolstoy Farm.

The labourers covered in two days—on a ration of a pound and a half of bread and an ounce of sugar—the 36 miles from Newcastle to Charlestown, which was close to the Transvaal border. A week later, on November 6, 1913 began the march across the border. There were 2,037 men, 127 women and 57 children. 'The pilgrims whom Gandhi is guiding', wrote the *Sunday Post* 'are an exceedingly picturesque crew. To the eye they appear most meagre, indeed emaciated; their legs are mere sticks, but the way they are marching on the starvation rations show them to be particularly hardy.' There were a few instances of indiscipline, but on the whole the courage, the discipline and the fortitude of these poor, illiterate labourers were amazing. They knew little of politics but they knew their leader, whose word was law to them. One of the women was marching with a baby; the baby fell down from her arms as she was crossing a stream and was drowned. 'We must not pine for the dead', she said, 'it is the living for whom we must work,' and marched on.

Gandhi was arrested at Volksrust. At Balfour station the marchers were placed under arrest and put into three special trains which were to deport them to Natal. There was a critical moment when the strikers refused to board the train without orders from *Gandhibhai*. They were, however, persuaded to obey. On the way, they were starved, and on reaching Natal were prosecuted and sent to gaol. The Government hit upon an ingenious device for working the mines and at the same time punishing the strikers. It declared the mine compounds as 'outstations' to the Dundee and Newcastle gaols, and appointed the mine-owner's European staff as the warders. To complete the cruel joke, working the mines was made part of the sentence. The labourers were brave men and flatly refused to be forced underground, and for this they were brutally whipped.

The news of this ruthless repression spread and led to spontaneous strikes in the north and west of Natal, where Indian labourers came out of plantations and mines. The Government adopted a policy of 'blood and iron'. Racial feeling and vested economic interests combined in savage punishment of the poor Indian labourers, who were chased back to work in the mines by mounted military police.

In Volksrust gaol Gandhi was made to dig stones and sweep the compound. Later he was transferred to Pretoria gaol and lodged in a dark cell ten feet long and seven feet wide, which was lit at night only to check up on the prisoners. He was denied a bench, refused permission to talk in the cell and subjected to numberless pinpricks. Summoned for evidence in a case, he was marched to the court with handcuffs on his hands and manacles on his feet.

The 'blood and iron' policy of the South African Government stirred India deeply. Gokhale, who had been in touch with Gandhi by letter and cable, toured India in a campaign to mobilize moral and financial support for the Satyagrahis. Bishop Lefroy, the Metropolitan of India, backed the Indians' cause in an outspoken letter to the Press. The viceroy, Lord Hardinge, was impressed by the strong feeling in the country; he was advised that 'there had been no movement like it since the Mutiny'. He declared that the Indian resisters in South Africa had the sympathy of India, and 'also of those like myself who without being Indians themselves, have feelings of sympathy for the people of this country.'[1] The Viceroy went on to ask for an impartial enquiry into the charges of atrocities levelled against the South African Government.

General Smuts found himself in an unenviable position between his own bad conscience and the South African Europeans' intransigence which he himself had encouraged. 'He was in the same predicament as a snake which has made a mouthful of a rat but can neither gulp it down nor cast it out.'[2] He resorted to the time-honoured face-saving device of appointing a Commission of Inquiry. There was no Indian on it, and two of its three members had been noted for their anti-Indian bias. Gandhi felt that unless the commission was reconstituted the Indians could expect no justice from it. Gokhale sent Andrews and Pearson to assist in the mediation.

The major points on which the Satyagraha struggle had been

[1] Hardinge of Penshurst: *My Indian Years*, London, 1948, p. 91.
[2] Smuts, J. C.: *Jan Christian Smuts*, p. 106.

waged were conceded to the Indians. The £3 tax on the ex-indentured labourers was abolished; marriages performed according to Indian rites were legalized, and a domicile certificate bearing the holder's thumb-imprint was to be a sufficient evidence of the right to enter the Union of South Africa.

General Smuts's son has recorded that 'Gandhi's outwitting by my father was complete, and it was in this sense of failure that he set out dejectedly to brood and scheme in India'.[1] This was, however, not the opinion of his father, who wrote in 1939 that it had been his 'fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect'. As for the Satyagraha movement, he recalled: 'Gandhi himself received—what no doubt he desired—a short period of rest and quiet in gaol. For him everything went according to plan. For me—the defender of law and order—there was the usual trying situation, the odium of carrying out a law which had not strong public support, and finally the discomfiture when the law had to be repealed. For him it was a successful coup.'[2]

In gaol Gandhi had prepared a pair of sandals for General Smuts, who recalled that there was no hatred and personal ill-feeling, and when the fight was over 'there was the atmosphere in which decent peace could be concluded'.

[1] *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 485.
[2] Radhakrishnan, S. (Ed.): *Mahatma Gandhi*, London, 1939, pp. 277-8.

CHAPTER XIV

A Hero on Probation

GANDHI'S work did not provide an enduring solution for the Indian question in South Africa; it only postponed the evil day for the Indian minority. Forces, some of which he knew and fought, and others which were to emerge in the years to come, were to forge a new racial tyranny more ruthless and shameless than the pre-1914 world could conceive. The issues on which for eight years the Satyagraha struggle was waged and won by Gandhi have indeed only an academic interest today.

What Gandhi did to South Africa was, however, less important than what South Africa did to him. He had gone to South Africa as a junior counsel of a commercial firm for £105 a year; he stayed on to command, and then voluntarily give up, a peak practice of £5,000 a year. In Bombay, as a young lawyer, he had a nervous breakdown while cross-examining witnesses in a petty civil suit; in South Africa he had founded a new political organization with the sure touch of a seasoned politician. The hostility of the European politicians and officials and the helplessness of the Indian merchants and labourers had put him on his mettle. 'I am the only available person who can handle the question,' he had written to Dadabhai Naoroji. The Natal Indians, who had no franchise and no representation in the Legislature, had to be saved from being pushed over the precipice; Gandhi could not avoid giving them a helping hand. No glittering rewards awaited him; the perils ranged from professional pinpricks to lynching. Nevertheless, it was a piece of good fortune that he began his professional and political career in South Africa. Dwarfed as he had felt by the great lawyers and leaders of India, it is unlikely that he would have developed much initiative in his homeland. When he founded the Natal Indian Congress at the age of twenty-five he was writing on a *tabula rasa*; he could try out ideals which in an established political organization would have been laughed out of court. What had truth and vows to do with politics? It was a question which often recurred in Indian politics, and if Gandhi was

not confounded by it, it was because, far back in South Africa, he had observed and confirmed the connection. For a man who was no doctrinaire, and whose theory often lagged behind practice, it was a decided advantage that the scene of his early activities should have been one where he was unfettered by political precedents or professionals. Natal and the Transvaal were no bigger than some of the smaller provinces of India. The struggle for Indian independence was conducted by Gandhi on a much larger scale and on much bigger issues, but there were not a few occasions when he derived inspiration from his experience in South Africa. He had seen Hindus and Muslims co-operating in Natal and the Transvaal, and therefore never lost his faith in Hindu-Muslim unity. He had seen the vicissitudes of the Satyagraha struggle against the Asiatic Registration Act, and was never dispirited by the ebb and flow of the freedom movement in India. He had seen thousands of poor, unlettered labourers, bereft of almost all worldly goods, briskly marching, oblivious to the perils of imprisonment, flogging and shooting which awaited them; no wonder that he believed in the practicability of Satyagraha for the masses.

Not only his politics, but his personality took shape in South Africa. The most formative years of his life had been spent there. His interest in moral and religious questions dated back to his early childhood, but it was only in South Africa that he had an opportunity to study them systematically. The Quaker friends who made a dead set at him on his arrival in Pretoria failed to convert him to Christianity, but they whetted his innate appetite for religious studies. He delved deep into Christianity and other religions including his own. From the *Gita* he imbibed the ideal of 'non-possession' which set him on the road to voluntary poverty. The ideal of 'service without self' and of 'action without attachment' broadened his vision and equipped him with extraordinary stamina and faith for his public life.

Few men read so little to so much profit as Gandhi did. A book was for Gandhi not a mere diversion for the hour, it was embodied experience which had to be accepted or rejected. Books could thus exercise an amazing impact on him. Ruskin's *Unto This Last* drove him with compelling urgency from the capital of Natal to the wilderness of Zululand to practise a life of voluntary poverty, and literally to live by the sweat of his brow. It was in Tolstoy's books that we may seek one of the strongest influences on Gandhi. He was, of course, not given to indiscriminate imitation, but in Tolstoy he found a writer whose

views elaborated his own inchoate beliefs. It was not only on the organized or covert violence of the modern state and the right of the citizen to civil disobedience that Gandhi found support in Tolstoy. There were innumerable subjects, ranging from modern civilization and industrialism to sex and schools, on which he tended to agree with Tolstoy's analysis. There was an exchange of letters between the two which gives an impression of gratitude and reverence on the part of the young Indian on the threshold of his career, and of delighted surprise on that of the aged Tolstoy, already under the shadow of domestic tragedy and death. Many of Tolstoy's ideas were to be tested and tried by his Indian admirer.

Hind Swaraj or 'Indian Home Rule', which was written in 1909 during Gandhi's return voyage from London to South Africa, bears the impress of Tolstoy and Ruskin. Directed at the 'school of violence', the young anarchists who sought the salvation of India by using against the West its own weapon of bomb and pistol, *Hind Swaraj* is a compendious political manifesto.

Before he left South Africa Gandhi remarked that India was a strange country to him. Between the year 1888, when he sailed for England, and 1914, when he finally left South Africa, he had spent less than four years in India. He, however, was no stranger to India. Gokhale had told his countrymen, after his tour of South Africa in 1912, that Gandhi 'is without doubt made of the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made. Nay, more, he has in him the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs'.

A hero's welcome awaited him when he landed on January 9, 1915 at the Appollo Bunder in Bombay, and the Government of India joined with the people in showering honours on him. He received a Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal in the New Year's Honours list of 1915. His association with Gokhale was guarantee enough of his being a 'safe' politician. He had, of course, led an extra-constitutional movement in South Africa, defied laws and filled gaols, but the cause for which he had fought appeared as much humanitarian as political, dear to all Indians and all Englishmen whose sense of humanity had not been blunted by racial arrogance or political expediency. Lord Hardinge's open support of the Satyagraha movement had removed any stigma of 'rebellion' from South Africa's Indian movement.'

One of the first things Gokhale did was to extract a promise from Gandhi on his return to India that he would not express

himself upon public questions for a year, which was to be 'a year of probation'.

Gokhale was very keen that Gandhi should join the Servants of India Society. This society, founded by Gokhale, consisted of a small band of carefully selected social workers and scholars living on a subsistence wage and pledged to devote their lives to the cause of the country. Gandhi was only too willing to fall in with the wishes of Gokhale, but several members of the Society feared there was too great a gap between the ideals and methods of the Society and those of Gandhi. His critical approach to Western civilization and modern science, and his use of religious jargon to describe everyday social and economic problems, his extra-constitutional method of political agitation (Satyagraha) jarred on the small coterie of the 'servants of India'. While the question of Gandhi's admission as 'a servant of India' was being debated, Gandhi visited his home towns of Porbandar and Rajkot and went on to Santiniketan in West Bengal, the cosmopolitan university of the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

The trip to Santiniketan ended abruptly with a telegram from Poona telling him that Gokhale was dead. Gandhi was stunned. For a moment he felt lost. 'Launching on the stormy sea of Indian public life,' he wrote later, 'I was in need of a sure pilot. I had had one in Gokhale and had felt secure in his keeping.'[1] He mourned Gokhale by going barefoot for a year, and out of respect for the memory of his friend, philosopher and guide, he made another effort to seek admission to the Servants of India Society. Finding a sharp division of opinion in the Society on this point, he wrote to Srinivasa Sastri, who had succeeded Gokhale as the head of the Society, that he wished to withdraw his application for admission and save those opposed to him from an awkward position.

During 1915—the year of probation—Gandhi eschewed politics severely. In his speeches and writings during this period he confined himself to the reform of the individual and society, and avoided the issues which dominated Indian politics. His restraint was partly due to self-imposed silence and partly to the fact that he was still studying conditions in India and making up his mind.

While his political views were yet unformed, Gandhi's immediate problem was to settle the small band of relatives and associates in the South African struggle who had cast their lot in

[1] Gandhi: *Autobiography*, p. 471.

with him. A party of eighteen boys from Phoenix in Natal, led by Maganlal, had arrived in India while Gandhi was still in England. They had enjoyed the hospitality of two great cultural and educational institutions, Gurukul Kangri and Santiniketan. At Santiniketan Tagore received them kindly and wrote to Gandhi thanking him 'for allowing your boys to be our boys as well, and thus form a living link in the *sadhana* of both our lives'. Gandhi was, however, anxious to set up an 'Ashram' where he could lodge these boys and other co-workers to enable them to resume the life of simplicity and service in which they had been nurtured in South Africa.

Gokhale had promised to finance the Ashram, but he died in February 1915. Gandhi received invitations to found the Ashram in various parts of the country, from his home town Rajkot, from holy Hardwar, and from Calcutta, but he chose Ahmedabad. Apart from the fact that some of the local industrialists promised to find the money for the setting up and running of an Ashram, he felt that he could best serve the people of the province of his birth. Ahmedabad, a great textile centre, was also best suited for experiments in hand spinning and weaving which appeared to him the only practicable supplementary occupations for the underworked and underfed masses in the villages of India.

In his *History of the Satyagraha Ashram*, which was begun in Yeravda gaol in 1932 but published after his death, Gandhi defined an Ashram as 'group life lived in a religious spirit'. The word 'religious' was used here in the widest sense. Gandhi's Ashram did not enforce any theology or ritual, but only a few simple rules of personal conduct. Some of the vows administered in the Ashram, such as those of truth, non-violence and chastity, were of universal application; others, such as those to eradicate untouchability, to do bodily labour and to practise fearlessness, were intended to meet the peculiar conditions of contemporary Indian society, which was caste-ridden, discounted the dignity of labour, and was dominated by an alien government.

The vows were to be observed in an intelligent and creative way. They were not intended to be mechanical formulae, but as practical aids to moral and spiritual growth. They may appear to be platitudes, but nevertheless they embodied ancient truths which were none the less valid for not having been realized by the common run of mankind in workaday life.

We may begin with the vow of truth. 'The Satyagraha Ashram,' wrote Gandhi, 'owes its very existence to the pursuit and

the attempted practice of truth."[1] There was no ready-made formula for truth. He conceded that what appeared as truth to one person might not do so to another. 'There is nothing wrong,' he added, 'in everyone following truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so.'

The vow of *ahimsa* (non-violence) was not only a negative concept of non-injury to others. Nor was it carried in daily life to its logical but impossible conclusion that breathing and eating vegetables destroyed living organisms. The motive force of *ahimsa*, the love for all that lives, had to be intelligently interpreted. Orthodoxy in India received a rude shock when Gandhi permitted in Sabarmati Ashram the mercy-killing of a calf suffering from an excruciating but incurable pain. He did not regard non-violence simply as avoidance of physical injury to animate beings. He knew that guns and bombs and daggers probably take a smaller toll of human life than ill will, malice and hatred, which cramp and kill humanity inch by inch. The Gandhian non-violence aimed at liberating men and women from inner as well as outer violence.

Another vow was that of *brahmacharya* (celibacy), meant for those who wished to consecrate themselves wholly to the service of their fellow men. It may appear that Gandhi was imposing a puritanical tyranny and straining human nature to the limit, but we must remember that celibacy was part of a wider discipline he advocated, including an appropriate regimen of food, manual labour, social service, prayer and sleep.

The vow of non-stealing may appear a truism for an Ashram of this type, but it had a deeper social meaning. From the *Gita* Gandhi had imbibed the ideal of non-possession. Ideally, 'man should like the birds have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow'. This is evidently impossible of attainment in the world in which we live, but Gandhi wanted human wants to be reduced to the minimum. He had already stripped himself of money and property, and brought himself down to a level of material possession where he could feel a twinge of conscience even for 'usurping' the food and the shelter which might be more urgently needed by the hungry and homeless everywhere.

The story of a theft in Sabarmati Ashram is interesting for the light it sheds on the social philosophy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The thieves had taken away a box belonging to Kasturbai. Instead of reporting to the police, Gandhi observed

[1] Gandhi: *From Yeravda Mandir*, p. 1.

that the thieves apparently believed the Ashram had things worth stealing and that he had failed to imbue the people of the locality, including the potential thieves, with the spirit of the Ashram. As for Kasturbai's box he was, he said, surprised that she had possessed one! When she explained that it contained her grandchildren's clothes, she was told that it was for her children and grandchildren to mind their own clothes. From that day hers was the tiniest kit in the Gandhian entourage.

Two more vows administered in Sabarmati Ashram, one of fearlessness, and the other of anti-untouchability, had a limited but contemporary interest; the fear of British rule, and the ill-treatment of the untouchables had cramped the Indian people in different ways, and the members of the Ashram had to rise above those limitations.

A mere enumeration of the vows is enough to indicate that life in the Ashram was austere. It was also busy. Everyone had to put in some manual work. There was a spinning and weaving department, a cow-shed and a large farm. Every inmate of the Ashram cleaned his own plates and washed his own clothes. There were no servants. The atmosphere, however, was not so much that of a monastery as of a large family under a kindly but exacting patriarch. Gandhi was *Bapu*, the father of this household; Kasturbai was *Ba*, the mother. It was a motley group including little children and octogenarians, graduates of American and European universities and Sanskrit scholars, devout whole-hoggers, and thinly-disguised sceptics. It was a human laboratory where Gandhi tested his moral and spiritual hypotheses. It was also to him what the family is to most people; a haven from the dust and din of the world. It was a family linked not by blood or property but by allegiance to common ideals. The patriarch was a great democrat, and once appointed a committee to select verses for morning and evening prayers. When confronted with a request or a complaint he would laugh and say, 'I am a guest in the Ashram.' He ruled the Ashram but his authority there, as well as in the rest of the country, was moral. When things went wrong or a member of the Ashram was guilty of a serious lapse, he would take the blame upon himself and atone for it by undertaking a fast.

The Ashram was a laboratory in which Gandhi experimented with himself and others. It was also a military academy, if the term may be used for the training of men and women for a war without violence. Early in 1915 he had told C. F. Andrews that he did not anticipate an occasion for Satyagraha for five years.

Nevertheless, in his Ashram a band of young men and women were being trained in the moral and emotional controls essential for a Satyagrahi, so that his grip would not give way to hatred or violence, even under provocation. The Sabarmati Ashram was to do for the Satyagraha struggles of 1920 and 1930 what the Phoenix and Tolstoy farms had done in South Africa. It was also to provide men and women for constructive activities which, between spells of Satyagraha, built up the nation's morale.

CHAPTER XV

Indian Nationalism

WHEN Gandhi came on the Indian scene, the nationalist movement had already secured a foothold among the educated and professional classes in the country. In December 1885, nearly three years before he had left for England to qualify as a barrister, the Indian National Congress had held its first meeting at Bombay. Neither in England, nor after his return to India had he evinced any interest in politics. For twenty years, from 1894 onwards, he was wholly absorbed in the struggle for survival of the Indian community in South Africa. Nevertheless, within a few years of his return from South Africa, the reins of the nationalist movement of which he had been only a distant spectator were to fall into his hands, and were to remain with him until his death. A brief flash-back on the movement at this stage may help us to understand the state of Indian politics in 1915 and the nature of Gandhi's impact on it.

That the British conquest of India could not be a permanent feature was foreseen by far-sighted British administrators like Thomas Munro and Mountstart Elphinstone. India had been invaded before the British from the north-west and governed by foreigners for more than seven centuries, but they had gradually been assimilated within the Indian body politic. As Thomas Munro pointed out, there had been foreign conquerors who had been more violent and more cruel, but none had treated Indians with such secret scorn as the British, by stigmatizing 'the whole people as unworthy of trust'. Sir Henry Lawrence had commented caustically on the tendency among the British administrators to talk of the 'black fellows' as if they were very much in the way (of the British administrators) in their own country, except in so far as they might be turned to the comfort and aggrandizement of the rulers. The Mutiny led to a further severing of the races. It may not have been a purely military nor a primarily Muhammadan outbreak. On the contrary it was far from being a War of Independence, though in northern and

central India it fed upon anti-British feeling Since its leadership was feudal it was fighting for a lost cause and foredoomed to failure.

The Mutiny was a war without pity, and there were crimes on both sides. The British continued to cherish the heroism and suffering of those who had fought and foiled the rebellion. The Indians cherished the memories of those who had fought and failed against the superior might of the foreigner. The victors had no doubt that Providence had tilted the scales in their favour. 'Those who had counted the English as few at the beginning of the war had forgotten to ask on which side God was to be counted.'. A bitter legacy of suspicion and fear was left by the Mutiny. The Governor-General, Lord Canning, who was nicknamed 'Clemency Canning' for not being tough enough with the 'natives', wrote to Queen Victoria of 'a rabid and indiscriminating vindictiveness' which was abroad. The correspondent of *The Times* reached the melancholy conclusion that 'perhaps confidence will never be restored'. The British commanders and civilians seemed to be less worried about restoring confidence than about tightening their grip on the country to make sure that 'it will not happen again'.

The official report on the reorganization of the Indian Army after 1857 pointed out that next only to 'the grand counterpoise of a sufficient European army, comes the counterpoise of natives against natives'. The British proportion in the army of occupation was henceforth to be adequate, and the recruitment of sepoys (soldiers) to be confined to areas and communities whose loyalty had successfully stood the test of the Mutiny. The Indian States were treated with tenderness, and built up as breakwaters against a future rebellion. A new chasm, wider and deeper than any in the first half of the nineteenth century, divided the world of the British officials and the Indian masses; there was too much authority or arrogance on one side and excessive sensitiveness or servility on the other. Not for another sixty years was an Indian who was not a prince to meet the ordinary run of Englishmen, official or non-official, as Ram Mohun Roy had met them.

The pacification of India seemed to be complete with the disarming of the country and the strengthening of the British garrison. One can, however, do anything with bayonets except sit on them—for ever. The social, economic and political forces opposing foreign rule could not be dammed for ever. The British administrators poised peacefully in their sequestered

cantonments and 'civil lines' could no more hold them back than King Canute could stop the waves of the ocean.

There were seven famines in India in the first half of the nineteenth century; there were twentdy-four in the second half. In the 1870s East Bengal and the Deccan seethed with agrarian discontent, which led the Government to enact legislation for the protection of tenants and to evolve a famine code. The agrarian trouble in the countryside was accompanied by rumblings of discontent in the towns. The educated classes, who had been nurtured on John Stuart Mill, were applying the principles of British liberalism in India and noting the gap between precept and practice.

Rabindranath Tagore has recorded his early admiration of the British. As a boy in England the poet had the opportunity of listening to John Bright in and outside parliament, and the large-hearted liberalism of those speeches, transcending national barriers, made a deep impression on him. Madan Mohan Malaviya had asked as a young man, 'What is an Englishman without representative institutions?' and answered himself 'Why, not an Englishman at all, a mere sham, a base institution.' There was something in the scepticism of the British officials who had seen red at the introduction of Western education in India: the products of Macaulay's Western education could call upon his successors to live up to their own traditions. The British officers who governed India were not liberals or radicals, but it was with liberal politics and radical economics that the rising middle class in India associated all the best in Britain. The first demand of Western-educated Indians was for a share in the administration of their country.

The question of the recruitment of Indians to the civil service provoked the first organized agitation in India in 1877-8, when Surendranath Banerjea, the great orator of Bengal, toured the country and pleaded before crowded meetings for simultaneous examinations in India and England for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service.

The middle classes were also stirred by movements of religious and social reformation, which harked back to the golden age of Indian history. Swami Dayananda, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and Swami Vivekandand stirred Hinduism, and by emphasizing its spiritual and cultural heritage helped to compensate for the political demoralization inevitable under foreign rule. Foreigners, including thesophists like Olcott and scholars like Max Muller, raised the self-esteem of the intelligentsia by

drawing upon the rich reservoir of Indian philosophy and religion.

The segregation of the races since the Mutiny and the cold aloofness of the ruling races were a source of continual humiliation to sensitive Indians. There were not a few cases where a European got away with the murder of an Indian coolie or servant on some flimsy plea; enlarged spleen of the native was the usual explanation which the courts swallowed without any qualms. The obsequiousness of the classes which flourished on official bounty was met with a mixture of contempt and patronage. An interesting example is the permission granted in 1868, by a formal resolution of the Government of India, to native gentlemen wearing boots and shoes of European fashion to appear 'thus habited' at Durbars and other ceremonial occasions, and the injunction to those who wore shoes of Indian fashion, to take them off 'within customary limits'. The clamorous agitation from European officials and businessmen against the Ilbert Bill (by which Lord Ripon attempted to do away with racial distinctions in the administration of justice) was an eye-opener to the Indian middle class; its success indicated that organized agitation alone could bring the Government to its knees.

An important ingredient was added to the nationalist ferment by the emergence of modern industry in India. The first cotton mill was established in Bombay in 1854; in the next fifty years the number of textile mills rose to nearly 200. The Government was unsympathetic to Indian industry when it competed with industry 'at home'. When in 1882 the duties on cotton imports were withdrawn, the Indian industrialists knew that the real beneficiary was not the Indian consumer, but the British manufacturer in Lancashire and Manchester.

It is a strange irony of history that the Indian National Congress, which contributed most to the liquidation of British rule in India, was conceived and founded by a Briton. Allan Octavian Hume, a former Secretary to the Government of India who had retired from the Indian Civil Service in 1882 after more than thirty years' service, believed that though England had given India peace, she had not solved her economic problems, that the Government was out of touch with the people, and that it was essential to leaven the administration with a representative Indian element. He thought of an organization which could act as a 'safety valve for the great and growing forces generated by our own action'. When he met the Viceroy,

Lord Dufferin, and unfolded his scheme of an All-India meeting every year to discuss social matters, the Viceroy suggested that it should also discuss problems of administration. Hume visited the principal towns in India to canvass support, paid a hurried visit to England and returned just in time for the projected All-India meeting. On December 28, 1885, seventy-two representatives from different parts of India met in Bombay under the chairmanship of a Calcutta barrister, W. C. Bonnerjee, who declared that the Indians' 'desire to be governed according to the ideas of government prevalent in Europe was in no way incompatible with their thorough loyalty to the British Government'. The first speech on the first resolution in 1885 spoke of 'the merciful dispensation of Providence' which had brought India under the dominion of the great British power.

This thick veneer of loyal phrases has led present-day critics to debunk the early phase of the Congress as that of 'political mendicancy'. Of the first twenty-five sessions of the Congress, five were presided over by Europeans. In 1892 there was even a serious proposal to hold a session in London, and in 1911 the Congress session would have been presided over by Ramsay MacDonald but for his wife's death. The resolutions of the congress repeated year after year what, today, seem to be verbal exercises. To the contemporary British administrators, however, even this rhetoric was a danger signal. The official attitude to the Indian National Congress quickly changed from a benevolent patronage to a thinly-disguised antagonism. Lord Dufferin, who had blessed the birth of the Congress in 1885, belittled it three years later as a 'microscopic minority'. In 1890 government officials were directed not to attend Congress sessions. In 1898 Lord Elgin declared in a speech in the United Services Club, Simla: 'India was conquered by the sword, and by the sword it shall be held'. Lord Elgin's successor, Lord Curzon, tried to put the educated Indian in his proper place, and assured the Secretary of State for India in 1900 that 'the Congress is tottering to its fall and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise'.

It was Lord Curzon's destiny to put new life into the nationalist movement and the Indian National Congress. The partition of Bengal, whatever its administrative merits, was taken by the Bengalis as an attack on the integrity of their province and evoked a vehement agitation. There was a movement for the boycott of British goods, and stray acts of terrorism against Europeans took place.

From 1905 onwards there was a struggle within the Congress between its moderate and extremist wings. A split was avoided in 1906 by inviting the eighty-one-year-old Dadabhai Naoroji, who came from England, to preside over the annual session held at Calcutta. The following year the Congress met at Surat in a tense atmosphere. While the moderates were confident of their majority in the Congress session, the extremists were conscious of their popularity in the country. There was pandemonium and the session broke up in disorder. The moderates, with nearly 1,000 adherents out of the 1,600 delegates, met in conference under the protection of the police and drew up a constitution which reaffirmed their faith in the steady reform of the existing system of government 'by constitutional means'. The extremists had lost in the first round.

'What happened in the 1907 Congress session,' wrote Valentine Chirol, a shrewd observer, 'was but a pale reflection of what was happening outside . . . The cry of Swaraj was caught up and re-echoed in every province of British India.' The discontent expressed itself in sporadic violence aganst British officials and loyal Indians. The Indian language papers, particularly B. G. Tilak's *Kesari* in Maharashtra and Aurobindo Ghose's *Bande Matram* in Bengal, stirred popular feeling. Anarchist societies grew up. 'Elaborate, persistent and ingenious' was a comment on the revolutionary movement made by an official committee which later investigated its ramifications. Gandhi, then resident in South Africa and a detached observer of Indian politics, was so alarmed by the rising tide of violence that he attempted a re-education of Indian anarchists by a series of articles in his paper *Indian Opinion.*

Meanwhile the Government was trying to rally moderate public opinion by doling out measured doses of constitutional reform. Unfortunately, each dose was pitifully small, belated, and grudgingly conceded; it succeeded not so much in satisfying as in whetting the appetite for reform. The Minto-Morley Reforms increased the elected element in the legislatures but not to the point where it could outvote the government bloc. The Government was very anxious, wrote Lord Morley, 'to avoid any appearance of a parliamentary franchise . . . We didn't want a Parliament at all; we wanted councils'. And worst of all, communal electorates were introduced for Muslims, and the evolution of democracy was thus poisoned at the source.

The general political ferment in the first decade of this century could not but suck in the Muslim middle classes. Valentine Chirol had written in his *Indian Unrest* (1910) that 'never before had the Muhammadans of India as a whole identified their interests and their aspirations with the consolidation and permanence of the British rule'. The Muslim middle class was not so staid as Chirol made himself believe. The Muslim League, since its inception in 1906, had been a mouth-piece for affirming Muslims' loyalty and demanding a greater representation for Muslims in councils and in the services. The younger generation in the League, however, was chafing at the strait-jacket of loyalty in which the old guard had so firmly wrapped it. The initial discontent was not to spring from local or national grievances but from foreign sources. The Mutiny had shattered the Imperial day-dreams of the Muslim middle class, which turned for inspiration to Muslim countries. Events in the Middle East had disconcerted Indian Muslims. Persia had been carved into two spheres of influence between Russia and Britain. The Balkan Wars, from which Britain kept out, had stripped the Turkish Empire of some of its European provinces. The Balkan Wars may be viewed historically as a conflict between outmoded Turkish Imperialism and the forces of nationalism in South-eastern Europe, but to the Indian Muslims they looked like the hopeless struggle of Islam against the Christian Powers. Poets such as Iqbal and Shibli, scholars and publicists such as Abul Kalam Azad and Mahomed Ali, roused the Muslim middle class to the many dangers which beset Islam in the world. The professions of Muslim loyalty began to wear thin. In 1913 the objective of the Muslim League was declared to be not only the protection of Muslim rights, but also 'the attainment of a system of self-government suitable to India'. The same year a Muslim, Nawab Syed Mahomed, presided over the Indian National Congress, welcomed the enlarged objective of the League and expressed the hope that the two bodies would co-operate for the good of the country.

The outbreak of the world war in 1914 created a dilemma for the Muslim middle class. The dilemma arose, in the words of a Muslim leader, from the fact that 'the Government of our Caliph (Turkey) should be at war with the Government of our King-Emperor'. The political consciousness of the Muslim middle class was thus heightened by events abroad. The Hindu middle class had become politically conscious and sensitive by the acts of commission or omission of the Government at home. The two streams of discontent were to converge in 1916 into a pact signed between the National Congress and the Muslim League.

Early in 1915, however, when Gandhi landed at Bombay, Indian political life was at a low ebb. The Government had assumed vast powers under the 'Defence of India Rules'. The Congress was dominated by the moderate leaders, Pherozeshah Mehta, Banerjea and Gokhale; Tilak, the great leader of Maharashtra and of the extremist group in the Congress, recently released from prison, was lying low; Lala Lajpat Rai, the fiery orator from the Punjab, was in exile; Aurobindo Ghose had retired from politics to Pondicherry. Abul Kalam Azad and the Ali brothers, the critics of British policy towards Turkey, were within a few months to find themselves in gaol. The result was to be a lull in Indian politics—a welcome lull for a government preoccupied with the war.

CHAPTER XVI

Splendid Isolation

INDIAN politics, which seemed so stagnant early in 1915, were stirred deeply the following year by the Home Rule Movement. Its founder was Mrs Annie Besant, who had carved for herself a unique position in India's public life. A leader of the Theosophist movement, and one of the foremost educationists in the country, she had completely identified herself with India. A few months before the outbreak of World War I, she had told a London audience that the price of India's loyalty was India's freedom. In a series of articles in *New India* in the spring of 1915 she had outlined a political campaign which she intended to conduct. She canvassed support for this campaign at the annual Congress session in December 1915, and undaunted by the opposition it evoked from moderates in the Congress, she founded the Home Rule League in September 1916.

Mrs Besant had sought but failed to secure Gandhi's support in launching the Home Rule League. Gandhi was opposed to a political movement which was likely to embarrass the Government during the war; he felt that the time for constitutional reforms would come when the war was over. Mrs Besant was amused at Gandhi's conviction that India was bound to get self-government after the war. She told him that only a Britain hard-pressed by the exigencies of a a world war could be made to give freedom to India. 'Mrs Besant,' replied Gandhi, 'you are distrustful of the British; I am not, and I will not help in any agitation against them during the war."[1]

Self-government for India within the British Empire through law-abiding and constitutional means, the declared objective of the Home Rule League, might seem tame in the light of later history, but in 1916-17 the impact of this organization on Indian politics was swift and strong. The appeal of the movement to the educated classes was due to the fact that it answered some of their own inchoate aspirations, and offered an outlet to the ferment which the war had generated.

[1] Kanji Dwarkadas: *Gandhi Through my Diary Leaves*, p. 10.

Mrs Besant's genius for propaganda and organization helped her in raising the political barometer. George Bernard Shaw, who knew her in her youth, once remarked that she was capable of bearing the burden of three men. A great organizer, an eloquent speaker and a forthright writer, she quickened the political consciousness of the educated classes.

The Government of India watched the progress of the Home Rule Movement with growing anxiety. In a minute dated January 17, 1917 the Home Member, Sir Reginald Craddock, pointed out that the minds of the people who read newspapers were being poisoned against the British Government, that Home Rule was being advocated not so much as a constitutional reform but as the only salvation from the innumerable wrongs and grievances under which India was groaning. The popular support the movement had evoked was, from the point of view of the Government, its most deplorable feature: 'The position is one of great difficulty. The moderate leaders can command no support among the vocal classes, who are being led at the heels of Tilak and Besant. The greater figures among the moderates have passed away, and so far they have no successors.'

Craddock went on to ridicule Mrs Besant as 'a vain old lady' who was influenced by 'the passionate desire to be a leader of movements', and Tilak as a man who was 'impelled by a venom and hatred against everything British'. Nevertheless he did not underrate the gravity of the problems, administrative and constitutional, which these two politicians had posed to the Government: 'Sedition in India is like the tides which erode the coast line as the sea encroaches. The last high tide was in 1907-8. The tide went out, but it is flowing in now rapidly and it will reach a point higher than ever before. We must have a dam in order lest it inundates sound land.'

The Home Rule agitation was thus to provide a powerful impulse for the famous declaration of August 1917 that the policy of His Majesty's Government was 'that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of a responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'.

The fact that Gandhi had not taken part in the Home Rule agitation, nor in the negotiations which had led to the Lucknow Pact between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League in 1916, showed that he was largely isolated from the main currents of Indian politics. It was not Gandhi

but the Besant-Tilak combination which dominated the political scene and impressed the Government. In 1917 Edwin Montagu recorded in his diary that Tilak was 'at the moment probably the most powerful man in India'. Of Gandhi, Montagu's impression was of 'a social reformer with a real desire to find grievances and to cure them not for any reasons of self-advertisement, but to improve the conditions of fellow men. He dresses like a coolie, forswears all personal advancement, lives practically on the air and is a pure visionary'.

Gandhi did not figure much in contemporary politics because of his self-denying ordinance on participation in political agitation during the war. There was also another reason. His ideas and methods did not quite fit in with those of the two dominant groups in the Indian National Congress. Gokhale, the leader of the moderates, whom Gandhi avowed as his mentor in Indian politics, had paid high tribute to him; he had said at the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1909 that in Gandhi 'Indian humanity has reached its high watermark'. But in 1915 Gokhale had found his own closest associates reluctant to admit Gandhi into the Servants of India Society. In any case Gokhale died soon after Gandhi's return to India. The fact that Gandhi had been so close to Gokhale could not add to his popularity with the extremists, who may have respected him for his South African record but did not understand, much less appreciate, his policy of non-embarrassment towards the British during the war.

In these early years in India (1915-18), even though Gandhi seemed to be ploughing a lonely furrow, his personality and politics had been firmly cast in moulds peculiarly his own. Explaining why he did not join the Home Rule League he told his friends: 'At my time of life and with views firmly formed on several matters, I could only join an organization to affect its policy and not be affected by it. This does not mean that I would not now have an open mind to receive new light. I simply wish to emphasize the fact that the new light will have to be specially dazzling in order to entrance me'.[1]

No light could be more dazzling than that of Satyagraha, the technique of non-violent action with which, for a decade, he had sought to guide his life in personal as well as public spheres. Gandhi believed he had discovered an effective instrument for rectifying injustices, righting wrongs and ironing out conflicts.

[1] G. A. Natesan in an article entitled 'Reminiscences' in *Gandhiji*, p. 215, on Gandhi's 75th birthday in 1944.

Having discovered it and wielded it with a measure of success in South Africa, he felt he could not deny it to those of his countrymen who came to him for help. The fact that he was committed to abstention from political agitation during the war did not prevent him from championing just grievances which could not brook delay.

One of the first calls for help came to Gandhi from a quarter he had not thought of. Champaran in Bihar had been seething with agrarian discontent for some time. The racial factor gave additional acerbity to relations between the European indigo factory owners and Indian cultivators. Gandhi was present at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in December 1916 when the Champaran troubles came up for discussion. He was invited to take part in it, but declined, for the simple reason that he knew nothing about the matter: Champaran was for him no more than a dot on the map of India. After the Congress session Rajkumar Shukla, a peasant from Champaran, requested Gandhi to visit the district and see things for himself. Shukla's tenacity was remarkable; he followed Gandhi from one end of the country to the other, until he escorted him to Champaran and confronted him with a problem which had strained relations between the planters and the peasants for nearly a century.

Rajkumar Shukla had given Gandhi some details of the planter-tenant conflict in Champaran. After arriving in Bihar, Gandhi learnt enough to become anxious to investigate the facts for himself. From Patna he went to Muzaffarpur and from Muzaffarpur to Motihari, the headquarters of the district of Champaran. He was served with a notice to quit the district 'by the next available train' as his presence was considered a danger to public peace. He refused to comply. He told the magistrate who tried him on April 18, 1917: 'As a law-abiding citizen, my first instinct would be, as it was, to obey the order served on me. I could not do so without doing violence to my sense of duty to those for whom I came . . . I am fully conscious of the fact that a person holding in the public life a position such as I do, has to be most careful in setting examples . . . I have disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being —the voice of conscience.'

The Commissioner of Tirhut Division had ordered Gandhi's arrest without consulting his superiors, but these orders were cancelled by the Government of India. Gandhi was now at liberty

to continue his investigations into the peasants' grievances; he carefully sifted the evidence, cross-examined each witness searchingly and discouraged exaggeration. A portrait of Gandhi at work, which is as intimate as it is honest, is sketched in a letter (April 29, 1917) written by a young British officer, W. A. Lewis, I.C.S., Sub-divisional officer, Bettiah, to W. H. Heycock, District Magistrate, Champaran:

'Mr Gandhi arrived last Sunday and called on me on the morning of Monday. He explained to me the object of his investigation which is to secure redress for certan definite wrongs to which he claims the *raiyats* (peasants) are now subjected. I gathered that he is already in possession of a large mass of information on local problems. Mr Gandhi impressed on me that he wishes his investigation to be impartial.

'On Wednesday afternoon, I rode out to . . . one of the villages where he was then collecting information. I sat with him for a time while his enquiries were being conducted. Each witness is subjected to severe cross-questioning as Mr Gandhi is determined to get his facts on an incontrovertible basis. Mr Gandhi is accompanied by Babu Brijkishore who is working on similar lines. . . . He also records depositions in writing.

'In a sense he (Mr Gandhi) has superseded the local authority . . . Mr Gandhi claims that the local administration has been very largely dominated by planters' influence. . . .

'By the planters Mr Gandhi is very naturally regarded as their natural enemy. The affairs of the great majority of factories, even those which we consider well managed, will not under present circumstances stand the severe critical analysis on all points of economic detail to which they are now being subjected, and Mr Gandhi will have in his hands material based on indisputable facts to form the basis of a very formidable indictment . . .

'It is with the effect of Mr Gandhi's presence on the *raiyats* that I wish especially to deal with . . . We may look on Mr Gandhi as an idealist, a fanatic, or a revolutionary according to our particular opinions. But to the *raiyats* he is their liberator, and they credit him with extraordinary powers. He moves about in the villages asking them to lay their grievances before him, and he is transfiguring the imaginations of masses of ignorant men with visions of an early millennium. I put the danger of this before Mr Gandhi, and he assured me that his utterances are so carefully guarded that they could not be construed as an incitement to revolt. I am willing to believe Mr Gandhi, whose

sincerity is, I think, above suspicion: but he cannot control the tongues of all his followers . . .

'On matters which require redress Mr Gandhi is prepared to go to any length to secure it and would willingly immolate himself in that cause: nor will he disengage himself from the district until very great changes are effected: but he is, I am sure, amenable to reason in his treatment of these difficult problems.'

The Government of India felt perturbed at Gandhi's presence in Champaran and the possibilities of a Satyagraha struggle developing in the indigo districts of Bihar. At the suggestion of Craddock, the Home Member, the Viceroy wrote to Sir Edward Gait, the Governor of Bihar suggesting the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry on which a seat could be offered to Gandhi as well. Sir Edward at first resisted the suggestion. 'It would be a device,' he wrote to Lord Chelmsford, 'for heading off Mr Gandhi; and it is by no means certain that it would be effective.' The Champaran Agrarian Committee was thus appointed at the instance of the Government of India and not because, as Gandhi suggested in his autobiography, the Governor was 'good'.

With the evidence of 8,000 tenants in his hands, there was no aspect of the agrarian problem with which Gandhi was not thoroughly acquainted. Knowledgeable, persuasive and firm he was able to make out an irresistible case for the tenants. The Commission unanimously recommended the abolition of the oppressive 'tinkathia system', and of the illegal exactions under which the tenants groaned.

While Gandhi was engaged in Bihar, trouble was brewing in the textile industry of Ahmedabad. Since August 1917 a 'plague bonus', equivalent in some cases to eighty per cent of the wages, was being paid to dissuade the workers from fleeing the plague-ravaged town. When the epidemic was over, the employers wanted to discontinue the 'bonus'. The workers resisted the move, arguing that the cost of living had more than doubled during the war and the bonus only partially set off the loss in purchasing power.

Apprehending a showdown between the millowners and their employees, the British Collector of Ahmedabad wrote to Gandhi to exert his influence with the mill owners for a compromise. One of the leading mill owners, Ambalal Sarabhai, was a friend of the Gandhi family; it was his anonymous charity that had saved the Sabarmati Ashram in its early days, when the

admission of an untouchable family had brought a storm over Gandhi's head. Gandhi had long discussions with the representatives of the mill owners and the workers, as a result of which both parties agreed to arbitration by a tribunal consisting of three representatives of the employers and three representatives of labour with the Collector as chairman. Before this tribunal could commence its work, the mill owners took advantage of a stray strike, declared the agreement void, backed out of arbitration and announced that the workers who declined to accept a twenty per cent bonus would be dismissed.

When the mill owners threatened 'united action' against their employees, Gandhi's comment was that they were organizing 'a union of elephants against a union of ants'. He took up the workers' cause as another experiment in Satyagraha. The crucial question was whether the just demand of textile labour at Ahmedabad could be won by a peaceful, non-violent strike. This demand has been brought down to the thirty-five per cent bonus which he adjudged to be an irreducible minimum. The strike, organized on the principles of Satyagraha, was to be different from the familiar pattern. The morale of the workers was not to be boosted by working up their passions. There was to be no violence, neither against the employers nor against blacklegs. There was no room for bitterness, for fabrication of grievances, exaggeration of claims, or competition in invective. The strikers' enforced idleness was to be utilized in constructive activities: alternative trades were to be learnt, houses were to be repaired, and roads in workers' colonies were to be swept.

Not the least interesting feature of this dispute was that Gandhi's chief lieutenant in organizing the strike was Ambalal Sarabhai's sister Anasuyabehn. As the strike progressed, Gandhi watched it with some anxiety. The workers' morale after the first few days began to sag. It was impossible for most of them to exist without work and wages. It was at this moment that Gandhi announced that he would undertake a fast. Had he not declared at the beginning of the strike that if it led to starvation he would be the first to starve? The object of the fast was to rally the workers. Nevertheless, it could not but affect the mill owners, some of whom respected and even loved Gandhi. The result was an unintended but definite pressure on the mill owners.[1] It was this feeling, that the fast was exercising an element of coercion, which led Gandhi after three days' fast to accept a compromise. The fundamental issue on which the breach had

[1] Desai, M. D.: *Ek Dharam Yudh* (A Righteous Struggle), p. 45.

occurred had been the refusal of the employers to accept the principle of arbitration; on this issue they now yielded. The arbitrator's award went in the workers' favour and the thirty-five per cent bonus was ultimately won.

The labour dispute at Ahmedabad had scarcely been settled when Gandhi was drawn into a conflict between the peasants of Kheda district in Bombay Presidency and the local administration on the remission of land revenue. A drought had blighted the crops in this district. The 'revenue code' provided for a total remission of the land revenue when the crops were less than twenty-five per cent of the normal yield. But opinion was sharply divided on the exact damage to the crops. On-the-spot inquiries by three members of the Servants of India Society and estimates by V. J. Patel, then a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, and Gandhi, put the damage at more than three-fourths of a good year's yield. The officials belittled these estimates as emanating from 'outsiders'.

Gujerat Sabha, of which Gandhi was president at this time, took a leading part in this agitation. When petitions, interviews and press statements failed to bring relief to the peasantry, the agitation passed into Gandhi's hands. This was the first real agrarian Satyagraha which Gandhi organized in India. The basic problem was to rid the peasantry of fear: the fear of officials, the fear of forfeiture of land and property. Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel toured the villages of Kheda to train the people in the hard school of Satyagraha. The Government tightened up the tax collection. Those who refused to pay were sternly dealt with; cattle and household goods were seized and even standing crops were attached. The peasantry showed much courage and fortitude, but the repression told severely on a district already suffering from the after-effects of drought, plague and high prices. Gandhi felt that the peasantry had reached the verge of exhaustion and it was prudent to prevent it from being driven to utter ruin. When the Government issued instructions that land revenue should be recovered only from those who had the capacity to pay and that no pressure should be exercised on genuinely poor peasants, he felt justified in calling off the no-tax campaign.

To put these early experiments in Satyagraha in proper perspective we must remember that during these years World War I was in progress, and that Gandhi had no intention of distracting the Government. He avoided any collision as far as possible. In Champaran and Kheda he could not altogether avoid

one, but he endeavoured to localize these conflicts and sought solutions which secured a modicum of justice to the peasantry without creating a national crisis.

His attitude to the war had indeed marked him off from other prominent leaders; he cherished the hope—which few knowledgeable politicians shared—that India would receive self-government at the end of the war if she whole-heartedly supported the British war effort.

When World War I broke out Gandhi was on the high seas; he was homeward bound, though he hoped to spend a few weeks in England. On August 6, 1914 he landed on English soil and lost no time in calling a meeting of his Indian friends to raise an ambulance unit.

Were it not for a severe attack of pleurisy he might have continued to serve in the ambulance unit he had raised, and his return to India may have been indefinitely delayed.

When he arrived in India he found that nationalist opinion was opposed to unconditional support for the war effort. Only those who were politically backward or flourished on official patronage were for loyalty at all costs. Gandhi did not favour a bargain with the Government by offering co-operation at a price and he told the Gujerat Political Conference in November 1917: 'That we have been loyal at a time of stress is no test of fitness for Swaraj. Loyalty is not merit. It is a necessity of citizenship all the world over.'[1]

Early in 1918 the war was going badly for the Allies; a German thrust was expected on the western front and the Viceroy summoned prominent leaders of Indian opinion to a War Conference in Delhi. A number of nationalist leaders including Tilak, Jinnah and Khaparde, were not invited, as they had raised the question of the terms on which co-operation should be accorded to the Government. Indian political opinion had swung heavily against vague promises unbacked by any concession in the constitutional sphere. Gandhi's first impulse was to boycott the conference, but he was persuaded to attend. He supported the resolution on recruitment with a single sentence in Hindi: 'With a full sense of my responsibility, I beg to support the resolution.'

He threw himself heart and soul into a recruiting campaign. There was something comic in this votary of non-violence touring the villages of Gujerat to secure recruits for the British Indian army to fight on the battlefronts of Europe and the

[1] Natesan: *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 409.

Middle East. He went to Kheda district, where a few months earlier he had organized a no-tax campaign. He found that it had been easier to persuade the villagers to queue up for prison than for the army. Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel, who accompanied him, discovered that they were no longer the heroes they had been in this part of the country only recently. In a village which had been conspicuous for resistance to the Government no one came out even to meet them; for three days they stayed on the outskirts of the village and cooked their own food.

Not infrequently, unable to get carts for their journeys, Gandhi and his colleagues had to march on foot twenty miles a day. The strain was too much for him and at last a severe attack of dysentery laid him low. Averse to taking medicines he fasted, but in vain. He did not agree to injections owing to what he described later as his 'ridiculous ignorance' about them. His friend Ambalal Sarabhai took him to his palatial house in Ahmedabad, but he would not submit to medical treatment and devoted nursing alone could not restore him to health. One day while still suffering from high fever, he insisted on being moved to Sabarmati Ashram. Dr Rajendra Prasad, who saw him next day, found him emaciated in body and in spirit resigned to the approaching end. His whole life had been, Gandhi reminisced sadly, one in which he had taken up things and left them half-done, and now he was to pass away; but if that was the will of God, it could not be helped.

Gandhi believed that he was at death's door. He recited verses from the *Gita* and summoned the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram. They trooped in silently. 'My last message to India,' he said, 'is that she will find her salvation through non-violence, and through non-violence alone India will contribute to the salvation of the world.'

While he lay in agony watching his body slowly wear away, an 'ice-doctor' came on the scene. Gandhi let him experiment with ice-therapy, which infused into him fresh energy and hope. The will to live returned; one symptom was that he was persuaded by Kasturbai to take goat's milk on the plea that the vow he had taken many years before not to take milk applied only to cow's milk. This was, of course, a mere quibble and the bluntest comment on it is in his autobiography: 'The will to live proved stronger than the devotion to truth.'

The greatest incentive for living was to be furnished to Gandhi by the Government of India. The publication of the Rowlatt Committee Report and the Rowlatt Bills stirred him to his depths. 'If I had been well,' he said, 'I would have toured the whole of India to rouse her.' Friends came to him for consultation. How was the country to fight the new legislation which attacked civil liberties? As Gandhi brooded over it all he recalled how he had pleaded for support to Britain in her hour of need in the hope of a worthy gesture at the end of the war. Once again he had received stone for bread. He had done his best to keep out of political agitation during the war. Now he felt an irresistible call to fight a wrong perpetrated in peace.

CHAPTER XVII

Shadow of Amritsar

THE Rowlatt Bills which had pulled Gandhi out of his sick-bed were based on the recommendations of the Rowlatt Committee, which had reported on measures to combat political violence.

Nobody had been a more vehement critic of political violence than Gandhi. Ten years before the Rowlatt Bills were conceived he had, in his *Hind Swaraj*, condemned revolutionary activities on moral as well as practical grounds. He put forward Satyagraha—'soul force'—as a superior and more effective substitute for bomb and pistol. Opposed as he was to violence, he argued that it was not right to frame drastic legislation for the whole of India because political crimes occurred in a few places. Nor did he favour investing an executive, which was not yet responsible to the people, with wide powers.

There was a rare unanimity among Indian leaders on opposition to the Rowlatt Bills. Jinnah observed that a government which enacted such a law in peace forfeited its claim to be called a civilized government. Sapru described the laws as 'wrong in principle, unsound in operation and too sweeping'. 'We think,' said V. J. Patel, 'that all our constitutional agitation for any reforms whatsoever would die if these bills are passed.'

The reaction of the Government of India to this agitation was characteristic. It discounted its strength and attributed it to mass hysteria among Indian politicians. The Government of India rushed the bill through the Imperial Legislative Council in March 1919 with almost indecent haste. All the elected Indian leaders voted against the bill; nevertheless it became law. The passage of the first Rowlatt Bill was an eye-opener to Gandhi. He had heard the debate in the Imperial Legislative Council and seen how the eloquent logic of Indian Councillors had been wasted on the official benches. 'You can wake a man,' he wrote later, 'only if he is really asleep; no effort that you may make will produce any effect upon him if he is merely pretending sleep.' The conviction grew upon him that the 'Great Civil Service Corporation' and the British commercial community had made the Government of India impervious to popular feeling. A government which really cared for public opinion would not have enacted a measure which had been opposed by every shade of Indian opinion. And a government which was hoping to introduce a substantial measure of constitutional reform could hardly have provided a worse prelude to an instalment of self-government.

The constitutional opposition to the Rowlatt Bills having proved fruitless Gandhi felt that recourse must be had to Satyagraha to secure the repeal of the Rowlatt Act. Already in February 1919, he had drafted and circulated a pledge of resistance to the Rowlatt Bills: 'In the event of these bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit, and further affirm that in this struggle we shall faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property.'

Now that the Government had put the first Rowlatt Bill on the statute-book, Gandhi—though he had not yet fully recovered from his recent illness—picked up the gauntlet. He toured the country to educate the people in the implications of the Satyagraha pledge and founded a new organization, the Satyagraha Sabha. While in Madras he woke up one morning and told his host, Rajagopalachari, that 'in the twilight condition between sleep and consciousness' it had occurred to him that the country should be called upon to observe a day of 'hartal', when all business should be suspended and people should fast and pray as a protest against the hated legislation. The date fixed for the 'hartal' was March 30th, but it was later changed to April 6th. The idea of a 'hartal' as a measure of mourning or protest was not a novel one in India, but as a one-day national strike it was a masterly stroke. In Bombay, in addition to the cessation of business a beginning was made with civil resistance by selling certain books, including Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and *Sarvodaya*, which had been banned as seditious by the Government. And on April 7th appeared *Satyagraha, a news-sheet*, edited by Gandhi and published in defiance of the Press Act.

The hartal in Delhi, owing to a misunderstanding, was observed on March 30th instead of April 6th, and it was also marred by some rioting. Gandhi promptly condemned the ex-

cesses of the mob as well as those of the local officials who, he said, had used a hammer to crush a fly. Tension mounted in the Punjab, where the local leaders felt that Gandhi's presence would assist in maintaining peace; but the Government did not let Gandhi reach the Punjab. While he was on his way to Delhi he was taken out of his compartment at a small station and put in another train bound for Bombay, where he was released. He would have again left for Delhi, had he not discovered that in his absence disturbances had broken out in the city of Bombay, Ahmedabad, Nadiad and other places in his own province, which was the least expected to forget his doctrine of non-violence. He came to the conclusion that he had underrated the latent forces of violence. He decided to retrace his steps, to give up the idea of seeking re-arrest, restrict and finally suspend Satyagraha. He observed a three-day fast to atone for his 'Himalayan miscalculation' in launching a mass movement without making sure that the people were ready for it.

Meanwhile, events in the Punjab had moved to a tragic climax. The Punjab had been suffering from several undercurrents of discontent. Though Gandhi had never visited the Punjab, his name was already something to conjure with in that province. His arrest near Delhi had agitated the people. On April 10th, at Amritsar, following the arrest of two local leaders, a mob ran amuck, burnt down the town hall and the post office, cut telegraph wires and injured a few Europeans, including two women. Order was restored by drafting troops into the city under Brigadier-General Dyer. The city was quiet for the next two days, but on April 13th, the day of the *Baisakhi* festival, a meeting was held in Jallianwala Bagh, which became the scene of a holocaust. Dyer decided to break up the meeting. The entrance was too narrow to admit armoured cars, but he marched into the garden with his troops, who fired 1,650 rounds in ten minutes. The holiday crowd of unarmed men, women and children, unable to escape from the walled compound, were caught 'like rats in a trap'. The Punjab Government estimated the number of killed at 379. Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, a member of the Hunter Committee, estimated that 400 persons had been killed and 1,200 injured.[1]

Later, Dyer explained that his object was to create a 'moral effect' by resolute action. He could not have dealt a bigger blow to the Empire which he was professing to save. Amritsar became a turning point in Indo-British relations almost as important as the Mutiny.[1] The tragedy of Amritsar should not be viewed as an isolated act, but as a symptom of the 'mutiny complex' to which the British in India periodically succumbed. The Punjab Government, with Sir Michael O'Dwyer at its head, had persuaded itself of the existence of a widespread conspiracy to overthrow the Government.

[1] Setalvad: *Recollections and Reflections*, p. 307.

The 'mutiny complex' from which the official and particularly the European community seemed to suffer at this time is the key to the tragic events in the Punjab in the spring and early summer of 1919, when a number of military and civil officers heaped nameless indignities and harsh penalties on Indians, particularly the educated and politically-conscious classes. It is unnecessary to recount the details of this draconian régime. The most notorious order of General Dyer was the one which required Indians to crawl on their bellies in the street where a European woman had been assaulted. Indians were made to alight from vehicles if a European passed on the road and salute him. A number of villages were machine-gunned by armoured cars and aeroplanes. Motor-cars owned by Indians were requisitioned. Colonel Johnson ordered nearly a thousand students of Lahore colleges to march four times daily for three weeks—sixteen miles a day—in the scorching heat of May to answer a roll-call. When a notice pasted on the outer wall of the college building was found torn every male in the precincts of the college, including the professors, was arrested. These military officers doubtless believed that they were holding the bastions of the British Empire at a critical moment in its history. Many of them, having recently returned from European or Middle Eastern battle-fields, were impatient of half-hearted methods. Rabindranath Tagore, who renounced his knighthood as a protest against the events in the Punjab, diagnosed the root of the trouble: 'What happened at Jallianwala Bagh was itself a monstrous progeny of a monstrous war.'

The Government drew a discreet veil over the Punjab tragedy. Gandhi had called off civil disobedience on April 18th and was anxious to go to the Punjab. Since he wished to avoid a clash with the Government, he sought the Viceroy's formal permission to enter the province. This permission he could not get for nearly six months. C. F. Andrews sent him disconcerting accounts of the conditions in that province. The Government appointed a Committee of Inquiry headed by Lord Hunter to

[1] Thompson and Garratt: *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 609.

enquire into the genesis of the Punjab disturbances. The Indian National Congress decided to boycott the Hunter Committee and appointed a non-official committee consisting of eminent lawyers, including Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Abbas Tyabji, M. R. Jayaker and Gandhi. It was as a member of this non-official committee that Gandhi learnt the truth about the martial-law régime in the Punjab. He discovered shocking instances of high-handedness based on incontrovertible evidence which he himself scrupulously sifted. The fanciful image of the British Empire as a merciful dispensation of Providence that he had cherished seemed to crumble to the ground. Nevertheless, he tried to make himself believe that the Punjab had been wronged by a few erratic officers and that the Government would, when it knew the truth, make amends.

On December 24, 1919 King George V issued a proclamation granting his assent to the Indian Reforms Act and an amnesty to political prisoners. The King called upon officials and the people to co-operate. 'This is a document,' wrote Gandhi, 'of which the British people have every reason to be proud and with which every Indian ought to be satisfied. The proclamation has replaced distrust with trust, but it remains to be seen whether it will filter down to the civil service.'

What Gandhi believed to be the spirit of the Royal Proclamation of December 1919 did not filter down to the British administration in India. In vain did he appeal to the Central and the Provincial Governments for 'a change of heart'. When in March 1920 the appeals of twenty martial-law prisoners from the Punjab against sentence of death were turned down, he wrote: 'Judgments even of the highest tribunals were not unaffected by subtle political considerations.' He noted with surprise that the officers responsible for misrule in the Punjab had not been recalled; they were being lionized by the European community. The report of the Hunter Committee, when it came out, struck him as little better than 'thinly disguised whitewash'. Was there, he asked, some secret code of conduct governing the official class in India 'before which the flower of the great British nation fell prostrate?'

Reluctantly and almost painfully, Gandhi was driven to the conviction that the system of government which he had been trying to mend needed to be ended. In December 1919 he had advised the Indian National Congress to make a success of the new instalment of reforms granted by the British Government and thus prepare for a fuller measure of responsibility. In September 1920 he declared that reformed councils and governorships for Indians were 'subtle methods of emasculation'.

Besides the 'Punjab Wrong', the 'Khilafat Betrayal' had contributed to this conversion.

CHAPTER XVIII

Road to Rebellion

EVENTS in the Punjab had placed a great strain on Gandhi's loyalty in 1919, but his links with the British Empire would not have snapped so dramatically during the following year were it not for another strand in Indian politics, represented by the Khilafat movement.

During his brief sojourn in England in 1914, Gandhi had formed some idea of the conflict that tore the politically-conscious Muslims. During the years 1915-18, when he was deliberately avoiding controversial politics, his advice was often sought by Muslim leaders on the future of the Caliphate or, as it came to be known, the Khilafat. He had opportunities of addressing the Muslim League and the Muslim University of Aligarh. Always his advice to his Muslim compatriots was to exercise patience, and in spite of their deep frustration to give up thoughts of violence. He remained in touch by correspondence with Mahomed Ali, one of the leaders of the Khilafat movement who had been imprisoned. During his visit to Delhi for the War Conference in 1918, Gandhi had pleaded for Mahomed Ali's release and for an assurance by the Government that Muslim sentiments about the future of Turkey would be respected.

The end of the war in November 1918 again brought the Khilafat question to the fore. A Muslim deputation waited on the Viceroy in January 1920, but all that Lord Chelmsford could promise was that if a deputation of Indian Muslims wished to proceed to England he would arrange for the necessary facilities.

Some Muslim leaders, including Abul Kalam Azad, the editor of *Al Hilal*, had already ceased to set much store by petitions to the Viceroy and deputations in England. A meeting of the Khilafat leaders debated for six hours without reaching a decision; Gandhi, who was present by special invitation, suggested that a sub-committee should go further into the question. The sub-committee consisted of Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Gandhi. 'It was here,' wrote Azad, 'that non-co-

operation was conceived.'[1] Next day, when Gandhi placed a programme of 'non-co-operation with the British Government' before the Muslim leaders, a majority of them could not conceal their consternation and wanted time to think.

In February 1920, Abul Kalam Azad presided at the Khilafat Conference in Calcutta and advocated acceptance of Gandhi's programme. Meanwhile, the publication of the treaty with Turkey had aggravated Muslim discontent. Turkey had been denied the leniency for which Indian Muslims had been hoping and agitating. The Viceroy's advice 'to bear with patience and resignation the misfortunes of their Turkish co-religionists' was cold comfort to Indian Muslims, whose frustration was complete. The Khilafat leaders were anxious to do something immediately to express their resentment. On June 9th, when the Khilafat Committee met at Allahabad it unanimously approved the programme of non-co-operation which Gandhi had outlined. Gandhi was in fact authorized to launch the non-co-operation programme after giving a month's notice to the Viceroy. A fortnight later Gandhi informed Lord Chelmsford that if the peace terms offered to Turkey were not revised in accordance with the British pledges to Muslims, he would call upon Muslims to cease co-operation with the Government and invite the Hindus to join the movement.

Gandhi, with his deeply religious outlook, unlike Europeans and educated Hindus, could understand and sympathize even though he may not have entirely agreed with the Muslim sentiment underlying the Khilafat. Unfortunately, what he knew of the movement was largely derived from Muslim divines and pan-Islamic enthusiasts. He failed to see that the Khilafat was a moribund institution, that the Turks themselves were sick of it, that the Ottoman Empire could no more remain intact after the war than the Hapsburg Empire, and that the smaller nations, Arab and non-Arab, were struggling to be free from the stranglehold of Turkey.

When the Indian National Congress in its special session in September, 1920 accepted the non-co-operation programme Gandhi became the leader of both the nationalist and the Khilafat struggles. He toured the country with the Ali brothers and Hindu-Muslim cordiality reached a high tide. Gandhi was heard with reverence by Hindus as well as Muslims. He was invited to address meetings of Muslim women where no male except Gandhi, who was considered pure enough to be an exception,

[1] Mahadev Desai: *Maulana Azad*, Agra, 1940, p. 27.

could be present without his eyes being bandaged. His hope of a 'heart-felt unity' between Hindus and Muslims seemed to have been realized.

He was now heading a mass struggle, the avowed purpose of which was to end alien rule. It was an open rebellion, even though a 'non-violent' one.

He had travelled far, though reluctantly, on the road to sedition against the Empire whose anthem he had sung and whose wars, his non-violence notwithstanding, had seemed to him his own.

'Lord Reading must understand,' wrote Gandhi in *Young India* of December 15, 1921 'that non-co-operators are at war with the government. They have declared rebellion against it.'

It was the same Gandhi who had said at the Madras Law Dinner in April 1915: 'It gives me the greatest pleasure this evening at this great and important gathering to redeclare my loyalty to the British Empire . . . I discovered that the British Empire had certain ideals with which I have fallen in love and one of those ideals is that every subject of the British Empire has the freest scope for his energies and honour and whatever he thinks is due to his conscience.'[1]

That there was no equality between the rulers and the ruled, white and coloured, should have been obvious to Gandhi with his twenty years' struggle in South Africa behind him. While the predominantly European colonies had been fast moving towards a position of equality with the mother country, the so-called dependencies of Britain were standing still or moving at a snail's pace towards self-government. Gandhi was not ignorant of the origins and the basis of British rule in India. In *Hind Swaraj* he had given a merciless analysis of Indian History. The East India Company's victories he had attributed to the divisions of the Indian princes. He had criticized *Pax Brittanica*; the peace was in name only, as it had emasculated the Indian nation and made it cowardly. The railways, the law courts and the educational system had all served to tighten the stranglehold of the occupying power. This was a scathing indictment of British rule, but the moral he drew from it was novel: India was ground down not by British rule but by Western civilization, which had perpetuated that rule. The English themselves were the victims of this civilization; they deserved to be pitied rather than hated. He talked of conquering the conquerors

[1] *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 310.

spiritually. 'I tender my loyalty to the British Government,' he declared, 'quite selfishly. I would like to use the British race for transmitting this mighty message of *ahimsa*.' During 1915-16 his emphasis on the materialism of the West and the ancient culture of the East, widow-remarriage, the abolition of untouchability, the promotion of handloom industry and the revival of Indian languages, seemed to mark him out as a visionary, strangely unpolitical and other-worldly.

Those who hoped that his energies would be diverted into the innocuous channels of social reform were, however, mistaken. In his scheme of life there was no sharp demarcation between the political and the non-political. When he exhorted the people to cultivate religion, he exhorted them to fear only God and to shed all fear of temporal authority. When he preached the gospel of *swadeshi*, 'in the religious spirit which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings,' he drew the important corollary that India could not live for Lancashire before she was able to live for herself. He protested against the use of a foreign language as *lingua franca* and threw a bombshell into the War Conference of 1918 by speaking in Hindustani. The Government discovered before long that this visionary was human dynamite, completely unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Speaking on the occasion of the opening of the Benaras Hindu University in 1916, he began to think audibly. He rebuked the Indian princes for their jewellery and liveries: 'Whenever I hear of a great palace rising in any great city of India, be it in British India or be it in India which is ruled by our great chiefs, I become jealous at once and I say: "Oh, it is the money that has come from the agriculturists."' 'If we trust and fear God,' he went on, 'we shall have to fear no one, not Maharajas, not Viceroys, not the detectives, not even King George.' Annie Besant, who was present at the august function, could not bear this 'audible thinking' any more and shouted to him: 'Please stop it.' A senior British Officer murmured: 'We must stop this man from talking such rot.'

But no one could stop Gandhi from saying or doing what he believed to be right. 'I have disregarded the order served upon me,' he told the magistrate in Champaran, 'not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience.' Now this was a more revolutionary doctrine than the most radical politics of the day.

The experiences of these early years filled a gap in Gandhi's

education which had been caused by his long self-imposed exile in South Africa. Something of the seamy side of the idolized British Empire he already knew. The vendetta of a British Political Agent had driven him at the age of twenty-four to seek a job in South Africa. The brief experience in the courts of Rajkot and Bombay in 1902 had given him a glimpse of the 'inconsiderateness and ignorance of the English official'.[1] On his return voyage to India he noticed a distance between the English and Indian passengers on the boat—the social gulf between the rulers and the ruled. He had attributed all these experiences to the aberrations of individual Englishmen, and continued to cherish the belief that the system as a whole was just and beneficial to India; but closer knowledge of conditions in his homeland was to disillusion him.

Of the poverty of India he had some idea; he had referred to it in *Hind Swaraj*, but the truth proved to be worse than his wildest imagination. In December 1917 he wrote to *Indian Opinion*, the organ of the South African Indians, that they should not expect from him contributions for relief work in flood-ravaged areas in South Africa: 'The deep poverty I experience in this country deters me even from thinking of financial assistance to be sent for those who have been rendered helpless. Even one pie in this country counts. I am at present living in the midst of thousands who have nothing but roasted pulses or grain flour mixed with water and salt.'

And in his presidential address to the Gujerat Political Conference in November 1917, he spoke of 'deepening poverty'. The Government, he said, honestly believed that the nation's prosperity was increasing; 'its faith in the blue books was immovable.'

The initial deference which high British dignitaries showed to him was due to their conviction that his loyalty to the British connection was beyond question. The moment he criticized particular policies or officials, he ceased to be a *persona grata*. The officers in the districts, more than their superiors in the provincial and central secretariats, were impatient of any agitation and quickly saw red. Gandhi's first collision with authority came in Bihar with the Commissioner of the Tirhut Division, and his second in Bombay Presidency with the Commissioner of Ahmedabad, about whom he wrote: 'The Commissioner's attitude constitutes a greater peril than the German peril, and I am serving the Empire in trying to deliver it from the peril within.' By 1917, Gandhi was being shadowed by the secret police. Civil

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 300.

Service rule, he declared, was one of fear; 'it was a fetish' with the British officers that it should never be said of them that they had yielded to anything like popular agitation. His irrevocable break with the Government came when he saw how rigid was the official machine, how sensitive to prestige, how slow to recognize mistakes and how reluctant to make amends. 'It is contrary to my nature,' he wrote, 'to believe in the depravity of human beings, but there is evidence of the depravity of the bureaucratic mind that it will stop at nothing to gain its ends.'[1] And it was despair with the bureaucracy which convinced him that the system needed ending and not mending.

The Viceroy seems to have realized at an early stage that, if Gandhi could be a valuable ally, he could also be a dangerous opponent. During the years 1917-18 Lord Chelmsford made some efforts—for example during the Champaran crisis and the Delhi War Conference—to retain Gandhi's goodwill, but during the next two years he gravitated towards the view held by members of the civil service, that Gandhi was ever seeking occasions for trouble with the authorities and was irreconcilable. The British attitude to Gandhi in these early years had a curious ambivalence. Personal esteem for him was overlaid by strong, if vague, suspicions of his motives and policies. The official world saw in Satyagraha only a challenge to British rule; it did not see, what was most important to Gandhi, that the challenge had a moral and non-violent basis. The British saw no particular virtue in being evicted from India non-violently, though there is little evidence to suggest that they believed in the feasibility of a mass movement remaining non-violent. They found it difficult to appreciate Gandhi's advice that on the Rowlatt Bills or the Turkish Question the prestige of the Government could grow by stooping to conquer; to them his professions of loyalty and friendship did not carry conviction.

It is thus obvious that to seek the explanation of Gandhi's transition from a loyalist to a rebel only in the events of the summer and autumn of 1920 is a superficial undertaking. Those events only completed a process which had begun much earlier. The depth of his disillusionment in 1920 was a measure of the illusion he had been hugging, of a new heaven and earth being established after the war by a grateful Empire for the help rendered to it in its hour of need by a subject people. Given the Government's intolerance of all agitators, and Gandhi's assertion of the inherent right of non-violent opposition to political or economic

[1] *Young India*, October 20, 1921.

injustice, a conflict between the two was inevitable. What is surprising is not that it came but that it was delayed so long.

Gandhi was deeply human and almost sentimental, even in politics. In the closing months of 1919 and early in 1920 he was scanning the horizon for a gesture which would restore his faith in the sovereignty of British justice. He was clutching at every straw. The Royal Proclamation of December 1919, which he had hailed as a harbinger of a new era, turned out to be no more than the felicitous phraseology usual on such occasions. In any case its spirit was not caught by His Majesty's Government in India. On both the Khilafat and the Punjab issues, Gandhi found the authorities said one thing and did another. Trusting by nature, he could make many allowances for the Government so long as his faith in its sincerity remained. But when that faith was shaken, he saw British rule in an entirely new light. He had once attributed the faults of this rule to the aberrations of individuals; now its virtues appeared to him accidental or incidental. 'I said to myself,' he wrote in *Young India* (December 31, 1921), 'there is no state run by Nero or Mussolini which has not good points about it, but we have to reject the whole once we decide to non-co-operate with the system . . . the beneficent institutions of the British Government are like the fabled snake with a brilliant jewel on its head, but which has fangs full of poison . . .'

CHAPTER XIX

Swaraj within a Year

THE programme of non-violent non-co-operation with the Government which Gandhi presented to the Khilafat Committee and the Indian National Congress, however revolutionary it seemed to the Government and the people, represented features which had for long been a part of Gandhi's personality and philosophy. 'The English have not taken India,' he had written in 1909; 'we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength but because we keep them.'[1] A year later he had suggested in a message to the Indian National Congress, that 'for the many ills we suffer in India, passive resistance is an infallible panacea'. Hence when he came to the conclusion that the Government did not possess in itself any capacity for self-improvement, that it was 'past mending', he enunciated the right recognized 'from time immemorial of the subject to refuse to assist a ruler who misrules'.[2] His scheme of boycotting conventional schools and establishing national schools filled his eminent contemporaries—such as Rabindranath Tagore, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Srinivas Sastri, and C. R. Das—with misgivings, but Gandhi had experimented on his children. He had criticized the use of English in schools as calculated to make Indian children foreigners in their own country. He always practised what he preached. Had he not surprised the élite of Bombay in 1915 by replying to their welcome in Gujerati, and scandalized the Viceroy and his colleagues by speaking in Hindi at the War Conference of 1918?

As for the British courts in India, he had recorded his verdict on them in *Hind Swaraj* in 1908. 'The lawyers have enslaved India, have accentuated Hindu-Muhammaden dissensions and have confirmed English authority.' The law's delays and expense in India were too well known to need any elaboration. Motilal Nehru, one of the most successful lawyers in the land quoted a proverb to illustrate the ruinous effects of litigation. '*Adalat*

[1] Gandhi: *Hind Swaraj*, p. 27.
[2] Letter to Lord Chelmsford dated June 22, 1920.

mein jo jita so hara, jo hara, so mara' (Success in the court is defeat; defeat is death).

'Swadeshi', or the use of home-made goods, was another plank in the non-co-operation movement Gandhi had been preaching since his return from South Africa. He had told a conference of Christian missionaries in February 1916 that India could not live for Lancashire before she was able to live for herself.[1] His advocacy of the boycott of foreign cloth and the use of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth (khadi) during the non-co-operation movement was taken by the Government—and by most nationalists—as a blow aimed at Britain in her tenderest spot, her commerce with India. To Gandhi, however, the boycott of foreign cloth was not at all a pressure tactic but a means of reviving the oldest cottage industry of India. With increasing pressure on land, agriculture had long ceased to give adequate employment to the peasant; hand spinning could therefore help him to eke out a living in the normal year and act as 'a ready-made insurance policy' in periods of famine and flood.

As for the boycott of councils, which had been and was to prove the greatest bone of contention in the Congress, Gandhi did not subscribe to the claim that legislatures were a necessary training ground for self-government. Nor was he attracted by the strategy of 'capturing' legislatures for the purpose of 'wrecking from within'. As recently as December 1919, when he still had some faith in the sincerity of the British, he had pleaded for working the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms for what they were worth. When that faith had gone the councils appeared to him only a red herring in the path of Indian nationalists.

This was in a nutshell the programme that Gandhi placed before India, the boycott of British courts, schools, councils, and cloth. With some *naiveté*, he claimed that his movement was not unconstitutional:[2] evidently in his dictionary constitutional and moral were synonymous terms. The British saw that the success of this programme of non-co-operation would paralyse their administration. Lord Chelmsford at first tried to kill with ridicule 'the most foolish of all foolish schemes', which would bring ruin to those who had any stake in the Government. He was also apparently rousing the fears of the propertied classes. A number of 'moderate' leaders joined official critics in underlining the risks inherent in mass non-co-operation. M. A. Jinnah had cried halt at the Nagpur Congress in December 1920.

[1] Natesan: *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 341.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 523.

Srinivas Sastri—Gokhale's political heir—warned his countrymen against the perils of the course towards which they were drifting by adopting 'an impracticable programme in unreasoning opposition to the Government'.

The chief argument against non-co-operation, whether from the British Government or the 'moderate' Indian leaders, was that it was likely to open the sluice gates of anarchy. Those who denounced the movement as negative and dangerous did not appreciate the precautions which its author had taken. 'Non-co-operation' was an incomplete and, in certain ways, a misleading description of a movement which was intended not only to dismantle some institutions but also to replace them with others. The students and teachers who walked out of schools run and aided by the Government were invited to join 'national' schools and colleges; the lawyers and litigants who boycotted the courts were to take their briefs to the arbitration boards; those who resigned from the army and the police were to become Congress or Khilafat volunteers. The boycott of imported cloth was to be accompanied by the promotion of hand spinning and hand-woven cloth to clothe the people in villages and towns. There was thus to be no vacuum as a result of these boycotts. The movement was moreover to be carefully phased. Between the surrender of titles and honorary offices to the Government and mass civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes, there were several stages to suit the level of discipline and organization achieved by each particular district and province. From his central control, Gandhi was to permit as much electrical current of non-co-operation to be transmitted as the people could take, and he made it clear that if there was a violent spark he would switch off the mains to prevent a conflagration. The greatest safeguard for peace was the stress he laid on non-violence. Non-co-operation with the symbols and institutions of British rule ruled out even hatred of Englishmen. Again and again Gandhi declared that he would not do to an Englishman what he would not do to a blood-brother. He had, he publicly recalled, non-co-operated even with his brother on matters of principle.

Repeatedly he drew the attention of the non-co-operators to the 'purifying' part of the movement, to its introspective and moral aspects. Violence, disunity and corruptibility among a people strengthened foreign rule and so all had to make themselves proof against these weaknesses. The change of heart for which he was working he expected first among Indians and then

among Englishmen. The Indian people had thus to shed fear of the Government and also rid themselves of the curse of communalism, untouchability, use of intoxicants, forced labour and other social evils.

Gandhi had told the special session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in September 1920 that with an adequate response to his programme of non-co-operation, Swaraj could be attained in one year. 'The promise of Swaraj within a year,' wrote Subhas Chandra Bose 'was not only unwise but childish.'[1] It looked on the face of it too optimistic a proposition that Britain's Empire in India, established for more than a century, could be overthrown by non-violent agitation in a year. The time limit set by Gandhi was not, however, a prediction, nor the promise of a political tactician. A year was in Gandhi's opinion long enough to awaken a people, to make it shed its fear and stiffen its backbone. A moral transformation of the Indian people could be expected to lead to a a transformation of the British Government and people. 'Freedom,' Gandhi wrote, 'is like a birth. Till we are fully free we are slave. All birth takes place in a moment! He had, he declared, laid a practical programme before the country. A nation that could throw away an age-long curse (of untouchability), shed the drink habit, and utilize its spare hours to manufacture sixty crores worth of cloth during a single year would be a transformed nation. Such a nation would have acquired enough discipline, courage and self-sacrifice to convince Britain that India could not be treated on any basis other than that of equal partnership. Swaraj was not to come as a gift from Britain. 'The Act of Parliament,' wrote Gandhi, 'would be merely a courteous ratification of the declared wish of the people of India even as it was in the case of the Union of South Africa.'

That a political programme had no chance of success without an adequate organization to implement it Gandhi had realized at the age of twenty-five, when he had founded the Natal Indian Congress to fight for the rights of the Indians in Natal. The Indian National Congress had therefore to be refashioned if it was to prove an efficient instrument of 'non-violent non-co-operation'. Gandhi saw that what the country needed was not a forum for an annual pageant and feast of oratory, but a militant organization in touch with the masses. The revised constitution of the Indian National Congress, largely Gandhi's own

[1] Bose, S. C.: *Indian Struggle*, Calcutta, 1948, p. 104.

handiwork, was approved at the Nagpur session of the Congress in December 1920; it defined the creed of the Congress as 'the attainment of *Swarajya* by all legitimate and peaceful means'. Satyagraha was thus brought within the four corners of the constitution of the Congress. The Congress was reorganized not only on a more representative basis but in such a way that it could function efficiently between its annual sessions. It ceased to be the preserve of the upper and middle classes; its doors were opened to the masses in the smaller towns and villages whose political consciousness Gandhi was quickening.

The annual Congress sessions at Nagpur in December 1920 confirmed the decisions taken by the Special Session at Calcutta three months earlier. Opposition to the non-co-operation programme died hard. The president of the Congress session, Vijayaraghavchariar, was critical and so in varying degrees were Kelkar, Jinnah and Annie Besant. The enthusiasm of the rank and file of the delegates infected their leaders; non-co-operation became the official programme and Gandhi undisputed leader of the Congress. From now until his death Gandhi was to exercise a unique influence over the Indian National Congress and Indian politics.

Gandhi was now the Mahatma, the great soul; with his voluntary poverty, simplicity, humility and saintliness he seemed a *Rishi* (sage) of old who had stepped from the pages of an ancient epic to bring about the liberation of his country. Nay, to millions he was the incarnation of God. In the course of a tour of Bihar, when a tyre of his car burst, he saw an old woman standing by the roadside. She was stated to be 104 years old and had waited in rain and without food and water for the whole day. 'For whom are you waiting?' somebody asked her. 'My son, which is Mahatma Gandhi?' she answered. 'Why do you want to see him,' asked Gandhi who now stood next to her. 'He is an *Avatara*' (incarnation of God), replied the woman. For the next quarter of a century, it was not only for his message that people came to him, but for the merit of seeing him. The sacred sight of the Mahatma, his *darshan*, was almost equivalent to a pilgrimage to holy Banaras. The unthinking adoration of the multitude sometimes made him feel sick. 'The woes of Mahatmas,' he wrote, 'are known only to Mahatmas.' But this adoration was the mainspring from which was drawn the immense influence he exercised over Indian public life. He inspired old and young alike. In his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru has graphically narrated the story of the boy in his teens who

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was arrested during the non-co-operation movement, stripped and tied to a whipping post and flogged; as each stripe fell on him and cut into his flesh he shouted, 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi' until he fainted.

Gandhi had struck some of the inner chords of Indian humanity; his appeal for courage and sacrifice evoked a ready response because he was himself the epitome of these qualities. It was because he was, to use Churchill's epithet, a 'naked fakir', because his life was one of austerity and self-sacrifice that a great emotional bond grew between him and the Indian people. The number of such 'fakirs' was to multiply fast. Among those who gave up their lucrative careers and queued up for prison under Gandhi's leadership were Motilal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, C. R. Das, Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari. Life acquired a new meaning for them. Abbas Tyabji, a former Chief Justice of Baroda, wrote from a village that he was feeling twenty years younger. 'God!' he exclaimed, 'What an experience! I have so much love and affection for the common folk to whom it is now an honour to belong. It is the fakir's dress that has broken down all barriers.' Motilal Nehru, who had given up his magnificent practice at the Allahabad Bar, wrote to Gandhi from a small health resort where he was convalescing: 'The brass cooker has taken the place of the two kitchens, a solitary servant not over-intelligent that of the old retinue—the three small bags containing rice, dal and masalo that of the mule-load of provisions . . . The *shikar* has given place to long walks, and rifles and guns to books, magazines and newspapers . . . What a fall my countrymen! But really I have never enjoyed life better.'

And it is in writing about this period that Jawaharlal Nehru has recorded how the movement absorbed and engrossed him so wholly that he 'gave up all other associations and contacts, old friends, books, even newspapers except in so far as they dealt with the work in hand . . . I almost forgot my family, my wife, my daughter.'[1]

[1] Nehru, J. L.: *Towards Freedom* (Autobiography), London 1945, p. 77.

CHAPTER XX

Climax

1921 was a year of awakening for India. The non-co-operation movement gathered momentum on the crest of rising enthusiasm. The prospect of 'Swaraj within a year' shattered bonds of centuries; the hypnosis of fear had been broken. Gandhi's call for courage and sacrifice lifted politics from the doldrums in which they had drifted for decades. The Government was anxious, but momentarily perplexed, wondering whether the old methods of fighting violent outbreaks would suppress Satyagraha or strengthen it.

For Gandhi this was a period of incessant activity which taxed him almost to the limits of his endurance. He travelled all over the country, keeping in touch with local leaders, directing, advising and admonishing. His daily mail was enormous and received his personal attention. His secretaries were often hard put to it to locate remote villages even with the help of railway time-tables and post and telegraph guide books. Sometimes, unable to decipher the name of a correspondent, they cut out the signature from the letter and pasted it on the envelope to serve as an address. In the midst of this unremitting activity, Gandhi found time to write for *Young India*, into the pages of which he poured his very soul. Many an article which inspired the country with faith and courage was scribbled in the third-class compartment of a moving train. The four or five hours' sleep which his public engagements left him was often disturbed by the uncontrollable enthusiasm of crowds, which gathered at railway stations at all hours of the day and night to see him. In Krishandas's *Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi* there is an interesting story of the residents of an Assam village who had threatened that if the train carrying the Mahatma did not halt at their station, they would hold it up by lying across the track. They were as good as their word and broke into his compartment at the dead of night, with naked torches and shrill cries of 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai'.

This hero-worship pained Gandhi deeply, but the awakening

of the people, to which his movement was contributing, pleased him. In the course of his tours he noted that 'the spirit of kindness of which the poet Tulsidas sings so eloquently is gaining ground'. His message was simple: it was not British guns but Indians' own imperfections which kept India in bondage. India could acquire a new strength by purging her corporate life of untouchability, communal strife, drink and drugs and dependence upon foreign cloth and institutions run or aided by the British Government. Swaraj was not to come as a gift from the British Parliament. 'I have had the hardihood to say,' he declared, 'that Swaraj could not be granted even by God. We would have to earn it ourselves.'

The first reaction of the Central and Provincial Governments to Gandhi's defiance of laws in April 1919 were sharp and swift. Gandhi was arrested in 1919 on his way to Delhi and put in a train for Bombay, where he was released. The disturbances which broke out in his home province in his absence, and the tragedy which occurred in the Punjab a few days later, led him to suspend civil disobedience temporarily.

The initial 'firmness' which the Governors and the Viceroy showed was not to be repeated for nearly three years. Perhaps in the first flush of excitement they had accepted the inevitability of Gandhi's arrest and prosecution too lightly. When they had had time for second thoughts, they felt less sure of the requirements of the situation and the precise scale and timing of the force required to cope with Satyagraha. The tragic events in the spring of 1919 at least revealed the tremendous hold which Gandhi exercised over the people, and the risks inherent in his arrest. At the same time, his restraint in the summer of 1919 led them to hope that he might not, after all, take the extreme step of open and large-scale defiance of the Government, or he might not be able to carry with him other leaders and groups in the Congress.

'I think,' wrote Sir William Vincent, the Home Member, on April 26, 1919, 'that a good many people will soon be tired of Mr Gandhi and his vagaries.' The same opinion was expressed by Sir George Lloyd, the Governor of Bombay, in a letter to the Viceroy on June 11, 1919:

'I am rather anxious about things here, for Gandhi is beginning to get very restless . . . He has some game on with the Punjab, but exactly what it is we have not yet succeeded in finding out. His meetings are not well attended and his followers are very disgruntled . . . The mere deportation of Gandhi will

raise a considerable storm, whilst his prosecution is a course that I cannot contemplate with any degree of satisfaction. For the rest the Home Rule party is completely split up now in this Presidency. It has suffered blows in the resignations of several important leaders . . . If it were not for Gandhi, all could be extremely well here . . . but he is a real danger point. Unless he forces our hands he is less dangerous loose than bound, for he loses influence daily, but his knowledge of that fact impels him to desperate courses to recover his influence.'

It was in view of these considerations that, even after the adoption of the non-co-operation programme by the Indian National Congress in September 1920, the Government of India prescribed 'non-interference' as the 'wisest policy' in a circular dated September 4, 1920: 'The non-co-operation scheme is so intrinsically foolish that Government have every confidence that the common sense of India will reject it . . . For the time being the policy of non-interference is the wisest policy. They (the Government of India; think that it would be a mistake at the present juncture either to adopt repressive measures of an executive nature under special or emergency laws against the leaders of the movement or even to institute immediate proceedings against them under the ordinary criminal law, because any such action would only result in making martyrs of them, and gaining for them a large number of adherents who would otherwise hold aloof.'

On April 2, 1921, Lord Reading succeeded Lord Chelmsford as the Viceroy of India. At the end of the month the new Viceroy wrote: 'When in England, I was not unduly depressed . . . by the report of serious conditions in India . . . I am reluctantly compelled since my investigations here to take a more serious view.' He adopted, records his son-biographer, 'Fabian tactics' to bide his time for a massive assault on the movement. In the latter half of May he met Gandhi. The meeting had been arranged through the efforts of Madan Mohan Malaviya, primarily to clear some misunderstanding about alleged incitement to violence by the leaders of the Khilafat movement, which was of course inextricably tied up with the non-co-operation movement. The whole trouble had arisen from some references to Afghanistan made by Maulana Mahomed Ali at a time when rumours were rife about an imminent invasion of India by the Amir of Afghanistan. There were in all six meetings between Gandhi and Reading; their discussions ranged over a wide field: the Punjab disturbances of 1919, the Khilafat movement, the meaning of

Swaraj. In a private letter to his son, the Viceroy confessed to a feeling of excitement, almost a thrill, in meeting his unusual visitor, and described his religious and moral views as admirable though he found it difficult to understand his practice of them in politics. Gandhi agreed to ask Mahomed Ali publicly to withdraw the passages in his speeches, which were susceptible of an interpretation of incitement to violence; in doing this he wanted to leave no doubt in the minds of his own followers as well as in that of the Viceroy that non-violence was the basic principle of his movement. The Viceroy viewed the episode from another angle: 'He (Mahomed Ali) is the real factor in the situation; he is the ostensible link between the Mohammedan and Hindu. If trouble comes between him and Gandhi it means the collapse of the bridge over the gulf between Hindu and Mohammedan. If Mahomed Ali does what Gandhi desires—and that no doubt will be to make the declaration—Mahomed Ali will be lowered in the public esteem . . .'[1]

The Secretary of State telegraphed his congratulations to the Viceroy on his skilful treatment of Gandhi!

The breach between the Mahatma and the Ali brothers to which the Government was looking forward did not come. When in September 1921, the Ali brothers were arrested, and the Government of Bombay explained in a communiqué that the charge against them was that of tampering with the loyalty of the Indian soldier, a manifesto was signed by nearly fifty leaders, including Gandhi, calling upon every Indian soldier and civilian to find some other means of livelihood.

The visit of the Prince of Wales had been planned before Lord Reading became Viceroy, and in spite of the disturbed political conditions Lord Reading did not advise postponement. 'Postponement,' he wrote to the Secretary of State, 'would have the disadvantage of attributing power to this movement, and above all of creating both in England and in the Dominions, and throughout the world, the impression that India was so disloyal that it was not safe for the Prince to visit it.' On November 17, 1921, when the Prince landed in Bombay, the non-co-operators abstained from the official ceremonies. Gandhi was in Bombay on this day and was present at a big meeting held in the morning to make a huge bonfire of foreign cloth; in the afternoon rioting broke out in the town, in which assaults were made on Europeans, Parsis and others who had participated in the

[1] Reading, Marquess of: *Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading*, Vol. II, p. 199.

reception to Prince Edward. Personal appeals and a fast by Gandhi, and frantic efforts by his colleagues, saved Bombay from the maze of violence and counter-violence into which it slipped. Fortunately in other towns there were no riots, but the people left no doubt of their sullen attitude to the British *Raj*. Wherever the Prince went, parades, receptions and banquets were arranged in his honour by the authorities, but, as the memoirs of the Duke of Windsor record, he did not fail to notice 'empty streets, shuttered windows, brooding silence'.

The Prince of Wales was to visit Calcutta in the last week of December 1921. The Viceroy, anxious to avoid a *hartal* and hostile demonstration at Calcutta, encouraged Madan Mohan Malaviya's efforts for mediation between the Government and the Congress. Malaviya wired to Gandhi on December 16, 1921 that he proposed to lead a deputation to the Viceroy to urge the calling of a Round Table Conference. If the Viceroy accepted the proposal and released the leaders, would Gandhi call off the boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales and suspend the civil disobedience movement until the Conference was over? The same proposal had been simultaneously broached by Malaviya with C. R. Das, who was then serving a term in the Presidency Jail at Calcutta. C. R. Das thought, and Abdul Kalam Azad agreed with him, that the 'offer' brought by Malaviya was worth considering; in a telegram to Gandhi they urged him to accept Malaviya's proposal. Gandhi made his acceptance conditional on two assurances: that the date and composition of the Conference were settled in advance, and that the Ali brothers should be among the political prisoners to be released. Malaviya could not give these assurances and the negotiations, to the chagrin of C. R. Das, fell through.

In December 1921 and January 1922 nearly 30,000 people were imprisoned. Volunteer organizations were made illegal, meetings and processions were forcibly dispersed, midnight searches of Congress and Khilafat offices became the order of the day, and the treatment of political prisoners became harsher. The Indian National Congress met at Ahmedabad in December 1921 and appointed Gandhi as its sole executive authority. Within the Congress there was a growing pressure on him to intensify the struggle and launch mass civil disobedience. A mass struggle was, in Gandhi's armoury of Satyagraha, the most effective as well as the most dangerous weapon. He compared it to an earthquake, 'a sort of general upheaval on the political plane —the Government ceases to function . . . the police stations, the

courts, offices, etc., all cease to be Government property and shall be taken charge of by the people'.

Gandhi's plan was to launch civil disobedience in one district; if it succeeded in one district he proposed to extend it to the adjacent district, and so on until the whole of India was liberated. He gave a clear warning that if violence broke out in any form in any part of the country, the movement would lose its character as a movement of peace, 'even as a lute would begin to emit notes of discord the moment a single string snaps'.

The riots which had disfigured Bombay during the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921 had led Gandhi to postpone civil disobedience. Evidently the atmosphere did not appear too propitious for a drastic step. The wholesale arrests and prosecutions of Congress workers and volunteers in the next two months, however, made him review the position. The Government was preventing meetings and muzzling the Press. The choice, as Gandhi described it, was between 'mass civil disobedience with all its undoubted dangers and the lawless repression of the lawful activities of the people'. He decided to take the risk and to make a beginning with mass civil disobedience under his own supervision in Bardoli *taluk* in Gujerat. While selecting Bardoli as a spearhead of the mass civil disobedience, Gandhi warned its people that for refusing payment of land revenue their crops were liable to be auctioned, lands confiscated, cattle driven away, and that Bardoli *taluk* may even disappear from the map.

Gandhi communicated the step he contemplated to the Viceroy. The Government of India promptly issued a reply to the Mahatma's ultimatum and asserted that the issue before the country was 'no longer between this or that programme of political advance but between lawlessness with all its consequences on the one hand and the maintenance of those principles which lie at the root of all civilized governments'.

The Congress and the Government were now poised for a head-on collision.

CHAPTER XXI

Anticlimax?

THE 'open letter' to the Viceroy, which struck him as an ultimatum but was from Gandhi's view-point a sacred duty binding to a Satyagrahi, was dated February 1, 1922. Three days later a clash occurred between a procession and the police at Chauri Chaura, a small village in Gorakhpur district in the United Provinces. The facts were clear enough. The main body of the procession had passed in front of the police station when some constables jeered at the stragglers, who hit back. The constables opened fire, and when their ammunition was exhausted locked themselves inside the police station. The main procession then returned and in a mad fury set fire to the police station, hacking to pieces the hapless policemen as they rushed out of the burning building. Among the twenty-two victims of the tragedy was the young son of the sub-inspector of police.

The news of this outrage was a bolt from the blue to Gandhi. He inferred from it that the atmosphere in the country was too explosive for a mass movement, and decided to revoke the plans for civil disobedience in Bardoli which he had announced only a week earlier. He consulted such members of the Congress executive as were not imprisoned. The All-Indian Congress Committee met at Delhi on February 24th, and at his instance passed resolutions deploring the Chauri Chaura incident, suspending mass civil disobedience, and permitting only such activities of the Congress as were not designed to invite imprisonment. With the 'aggressive' part of the movement in abeyance, the emphasis was shifted to the constructive programme.

The sudden suspension of mass civil disobedience shocked and bewildered Gandhi's closest colleagues. Subhas Chandra Bose recalled many years later: 'I was with *Deshbandhu* (C. R. Das) at the time and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow at the way Mahatma Gandhi was repeatedly bungling.'[1] Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai wrote from gaol urging Gandhi not to halt the movement because of a stray incident.

[1] Bose, Subhas Chandra: *The Indian Struggle*, Calcutta, 1948, p. 108.

Gandhi had a feeling that many of those who had endorsed his proposals in the Congress Working Committee and the All-India Congress Committee had done so not out of real conviction, but out of deference to him. Some of his ardent followers were troubled by doubts and torn between loyalty to their leader and their own convictions. They were at a loss to see any logic in calling off the civil disobedience movement at Bardoli after an outbreak at Chauri Chaura. Was it not open to the government to thwart the non-violent rebellion by staging such 'incidents' through *agents provocateurs* and thus turn the Satyagraha struggle into a pious futility? Was the Congress a political institution or a testing ground for the inner conflicts of a Mahatma? Were the sacrifices of the nation to go in vain, and were the non-co-operators to continue to rot indefinitely in gaol? And was not the reversal of the 'aggressive' programme an invitation to the Government to pounce upon the non-co-operators and to turn their retreat into a rout?

Such were the angry questions shot at Gandhi by a bewildered and indignant following. Few of the critics could see that Chauri Chaura was not the cause, but only the occasion for the reverse gear which he had applied. From the moment he had come out against the Rowlatt Bills and presented Satyagraha to the country as a lever for the redress of political and social injustice he had stressed the paramount importance of non-violence; this was the one theme which had recurred in his speeches and articles. And yet, as the ugly violence in Ahmedabad, Viramgan and Amritsar had shown in 1919, it was not easy to prevent outbursts of mob frenzy altogether, particularly when the local authorities were not slow to feed it with provocative acts. 'I am sorry,' he had declared on April 18, 1919 at Bombay, 'that when I embarked upon a mass movement, I underrated the forces of evil.' He was fully aware of the undercurrent of violence in the country, and one reason why he had allowed himself to be placed at the head of the Khilafat movement in 1920 was that he hoped to divert this undercurrent into non-violent channels. Conscious of the risks, he had taken extraordinary precautions to graduate his movement and condition it to the political climate. The non-co-operation programme began with the surrender of titles and honorary offices by individuals, and was to end with the suspension of taxes and mass defiance of laws. Between these two extremes there were a number of activities, which not only asserted the nationalist feeling but also disciplined the people and prepared them for a

mass movement. The improvement in the condition of untouchables, the establishment of national schools, the settlement of disputes by arbitration boards outside the courts, the formation of volunteer corps, the picketing of liquor shops, the boycott of foreign cloth, and the promotion of *Khadi*, were practical methods of organizing the masses. Gandhi's programme was one of 'progressive non-co-operation' in which defiance of authority was to be extended according to the ability of the people to resist repression without retaliation.

While organizing the forces of nationalism against foreign rule, Gandhi had taken care not to rip open the latent fissures in Indian society. He advised tenants to pay rents to landlords even when payment of tax to the Government was suspended. He advised workers to obtain leave from their employers for joining 'hartals'. 'It is a most dangerous thing,' he wrote, 'to make political use of labour until the labourers understand the political condition of the country.' He gave much time and thought to the organization of Congress volunteers, and wrote at length in *Young India* on the technique of controlling crowds and conducting public meetings. Violence on the part of the Government he did not fear, as it could strengthen the hearts and swell the ranks of non-co-operators. Violence on the part of the people he dreaded, as it could dissolve the movement into chaos, besides provoking the superior violence of the Government.

No violent outbreak in any part of the country could escape Gandhi's notice. The Malegaon riots, in which policemen were victims of mob violence, and the Malabar outbreak in which Hindus suffered at the hands of the Moplahs, elicited his instantaneous and unqualified condemnation. He was in Bombay when the Prince of Wales arrived in November 1921, and a riot broke out in which fifty-eight persons were killed and 381 injured. In a message to the people of Bombay he said that the non-violence of the non-co-operators had been worse than the violence of the co-operators, 'for with non-violence on our lips we have terrorized those who have differed from us . . . The Swaraj that I have witnessed during the last two days has stunk in my nostrils.'

C. F. Andrews, who saw Gandhi on return from South Africa soon after the Bombay riots, found him 'haggard and emaciated, as one who had just passed through the valley of the shadow of death'. Andrews had noticed a spirit of violence enter the movement from the side of the people as the violence on the part of

the Government increased. The great masses of India had awakened to the sense of their own power, but they had not yet been trained to keep this power under control. Andrews criticized the 'subtle racial appeal' in public bonfires of foreign cloth. He had seen Satyagraha in action in South Africa during the years 1913-14; when he saw the movement in 1921 in India he felt 'it was something entirely new and less spiritual'.

So when the tragedy of Chari Chaura occurred it was more than a stray incident in an unknown village in a remote corner of the Indian sub-continent. It was, as Gandhi wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on February 19, 1922, 'the last straw'. He recalled the complaints he had received that the rank and file had been getting out of hand in many places, and that indiscipline had been increasing. 'I assure you,' he wrote to Jawaharlal, 'that if the thing had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle,'[1] Jawaharlal, who had received the news of the suspension of civil disobedience in gaol 'with amazement and consternation', after discussing the pros and cons of the suspension of civil disobedience, records in his autobiography that the 'decision was right; he (Gandhi) had to stop the rot and build anew'.

Gandhi noted that many of his colleagues, and the mass of non-co-operators, were burning with indignation and were anxious to deliver 'telling blows', albeit non-violent ones, against the Government. Now this was rather an imperfect appreciation of the technique of Satyagraha, which sought to prick the conscience, to melt the heart and to open the eyes of the opponent. The technique of non-violent warfare is essentially different from that of the other variety, which is almost uninhibited as to the means for achieving its objective. The common view of war and politics is that everything is fair, and that the protagonists should muster overwhelming pressure at as many points as possible to defeat the opponent; such a strategy was inapplicable to Satyagraha, in which there was no room even for excitement. Gandhi defined civil disobedience as preparation for mute suffering, 'with effects which may be marvellous, but unperceived and gentle'.

'It is dangerous to assemble' wrote Romain Rolland, 'all the forces of a nation and to hold the nation panting before a prescribed movement, to lift one's arm to give the final command, and then at the last moment, let one's arm drop and

[1] Quoted in Tendulkar's *Mahatma*, Vol. II, p. 118.

thrice call a halt just as the formidable machinery has been set in motion. One risks ruining the brakes, and paralysing the impetus."[1] If we may continue Rolland's metaphor, Gandhi was bringing the machinery not to a standstill but into third gear from a premature top gear. The suspension of the 'aggressive programme' did not affect the constructive programme, the positive aspect of the non-co-operation movement. Critics did not share Gandhi's faith that the non-co-operation movement, even without the last desperate step of mass civil disobedience, could prove effective.

It was not only Congressmen and Khilafatists who failed to understand Gandhi's action after Chauri Chaura. The Viceroy, Lord Reading, gleefully confided to his son that Gandhi 'had pretty well run himself to the last ditch as a politician by extraordinary manifestations in the last month or six weeks before his arrest'.[2]

On the evening of March 10th, Gandhi was arrested. He bade farewell to the inmates of his Ashram, heard his favourite song of the true *Vaishnava*, took his seat in the waiting car and was driven to gaol. The trial was held on March 18th, before C. N. Broomfield, the District and Sessions Judge of Ahmedabad. The prosecution relied upon three articles published in *Young India*, namely 'Tampering with Loyalty', 'The Puzzle and its Solution' and 'Shaking the Manes'. The other accused was Shankarlal Banker, the publisher of *Young India*. Sir J. T. Strangman, the Advocate-General, conducted the prosecution. The accused did not defend themselves. The judge behaved with exceeding courtesy, nodding respectfully to the accused in the dock before taking his seat. Gandhi made his task easy by pleading guilty. In a statement which would have been difficult to excel in dignified emotion or eloquence, he explained his transition from a staunch loyalist to a rebel:

'My public life began in 1893 in South Africa in troubled weather. My first contact with British authority in that country was not of a happy character. I discovered that as a man and as an Indian I had no rights. On the contrary I discovered that I had no rights as a man because I was an Indian. But I was not baffled. I thought this treatment of Indians was an excrescence upon a system that was intrinsically and mainly good. I gave the Government my voluntary and hearty co-operation, criticiz-

[1] Rolland, Romain: *Mahatma Gandhi*, London, 1942, p. 132.
[2] Reading, Marquess of: *Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading*, Vol. II, p. 249.

ing it fully where I felt it was faulty, but never wishing its destruction . . .'

He accepted responsibility for the violent outbreaks which had occurred, and asked for the highest penalty that could be inflicted upon him:

'The only course open to you Mr Judge is . . . either to resign your post or inflict on me the severest penalty if you believe that the system and law you are assisting to administer are good for the people.'

Gandhi was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. An observer noted that he was not only serene but 'festively joyful' during the 100-minute trial. 'So far as the sentence is concerned,' he told the judge, 'I certainly consider that it is as light as any judge could inflict on me; and so far as the whole proceedings are concerned, I must say that I could not have expected greater courtesy.'

Gaol-going was part of non-co-operation; in his articles and speeches Gandhi had often commented on its significance for the movement. 'Freedom is to be wooed only inside prison walls and sometimes on gallows,' he had once written. Thousands of non-co-operators had been arrested during the preceding eighteen months. The ideal non-co-operator, according to Gandhi, was to seek imprisonment not to embarrass but to convert the Government by suffering for a just cause. Arrests were to be courted 'not rudely, roughly, blushingly, certainly never violently, but peacefully, quietly, courteously, humbly, prayerfully, and courageously'. The non-co-operator was to observe gaol discipline; he was neither to seek nor to accept special privileges. The hardships of gaol life were to be borne cheerfully as 'such meek behaviour springing from strength and knowledge ultimately dissolves the tyranny of the tyrant—voluntary suffering is the quickest and best remedy for the removal of abuses and injustices'.

On entering the Yeravda prison he was told that he could not use his spinning-wheel nor sleep in the open. However, these restrictions were later removed. It was with considerable difficulty that the 'higher authorities' were persuaded to allow him to keep a few books on religion, an old dictionary and an Urdu manual. He was denied a pillow, but improvised one with his books and spare clothes. He could not be trusted with a pocket knife to slice his bread; when it was allowed, he had to deposit it with a gaol official after use. Banker, his fellow-prisoner, was taken to another cell and other prisoners were not permitted to meet the Mahatma. An African prisoner was attached to him

as an attendant; unable to talk to each other, they communicated by signs. Gandhi, however, knew the language of the human heart. One day, when the African was bitten by a scorpion, Gandhi washed his wound, wiped it, sucked off the poison, and treated him until he was cured. Won over by this kindness, the African became an apt pupil at hand-spinning.

Gandhi liked the enforced solitude in gaol; it gave him the quiet and the rest which he had missed during seven years of incessant activity in India. He kept up his daily routine of morning and evening prayers and spinning. His literary and religious studies, which had been neglected in the midst of other activities, were now resumed; he read no less than 150 books, including Henry James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Buckle's *History of Civilization*, Wells's *Outline of History*, Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Goethe's *Faust* and Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads*. There is no doubt that, in spite of occasional pinpricks, prison life proved for him, as Tagore once put it, 'arrest cure'.