

Rejuvenation of a Nation

1858 to 1920

The readers would recall that in “British Mutiny of 1857”, we sought to answer the first question raised by Tatyia- Savarkar namely “As the Institutes are more important than Personalities - What was India in 1857 – Nation State in a legal sense or a legal non entity. If it was a Nation State, who was its national sovereign?”

Our unmistakable conclusion was that India was indeed a Nation State in a legal sense and that its national sovereign was Bahadur Shah Zafar. As we all know that the Monarchy was the accepted form of Governance in the Nineteenth century, the world over.

In Elusive Search of Justice, we also covered the story of how the Government has stonewalled our every attempt to provide a reasoned answer to our representation that called for acceptance of this historical fact. We also saw how the Judiciary first gave orders to the Government to decide the issue and then turned to “No Order” when confronted with the necessity of uncomfortable job of deciding the issue itself. Not only the High Court issued the “No Order” but even the Supreme Court of India has choosen not to interefer with the “No Order’.

It is now time to move forward and seek answer to the second question raised by Tatyia - Savarkar:

“Can any person even if he be a Mahtma be called Father of the Nation and thereby considered bigger than the Nation itself? In any case, is it not true that many eminent Indians, whose portraits hang in the Parliament of Independent India, contributed to making of Modern Bharat?”

For more than half a century, generations of Indians have fallen victim to an insidious myth propogated by vested interests. It is widely believed that the Freedom Struggle really began only with the Khilafat movement led by Gandhiji in 1920. It is of course known that even then some form of movement for Freedom existed. Often, it is dismissed as a sporadic struggle of no major consequence.

Even in the Communist circles, one that would normally be expected to be least sympathetic to Gandhiji; the myth persists. I have been an incredulous audience to a die hard Communist follower holding forth that what happened before Gandhiji started his movement in the later half of the second decade of the Twentieth century; was of minor consequence.

If India had been so docile as to have no serious movement for freedom for over a century after the British seized political power, it would betray a serious flaw in national sense of purpose. Fortunately, facts are otherwise.

Surat, December 26,1907

Cries of ‘all..no,no’ rent the air at the 23rd annual session of the Congress ostensibly over the issue of the election of the new President. A general bedlam prevailed as the moderates declared their candidate Dr. Rash Behari Ghose elected brushing aside the opposition led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, denying him even the courtesy of being allowed to speak.

Tilak , who had an unparalleled mass following, was not one to take such an insult lying down. He walked over to the podium in slow and measured steps demanding that proceedings be suspended till all concerned were allowed to air their views. The response he got included chairs thrown at him in a vain attempt to intimidate him into giving up his just demand.

The lion who could not be tamed by the British Government itself, was not going to be so easily deterred. His enraged supporters, however, threw a protective cordon around him. The man responsible for this protective cordon was none other than Baba Savarkar, the elder brother of Savarkar. By now, moderates lost control over the meeting. Finding the going too tough for their liking, they took the easy way out by declaring the 23rd session of the Indian National Congress suspended sine die. Not content with this, they asked Police to come in and force Tilak led dissidents out of the hall. By now the stage was set for a split in the Congress. In what remains an episode that the Congress would like the people not to remember today, Tilak and his followers were expelled from the party.

At stake was not who should be the President of the Congress. If that was indeed the case, then Tilak was riding a losing horse, for his nominee, Lala Lajpat Rai went over to moderates. Now Aurobindo Ghose took his place. *The real battle was over the soul of the Congress.* On one side were moderates who believed that India's salvation was through benevolence of the British. On the other side were Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose and their legion of supporters, who were impatient to throw off the yoke of slavery by any means. Their argument was very simple. British rule in India rested on force and therefore violence was perfectly legitimate to get rid off them. Aspirations of Tilak camp are clear from the letter that the British intelligence discovered - written the very next day i.e. on 27th December 1907, by Barindra Ghose, younger brother of Arabindo Ghose, which declared that the time had come to send *Sweets* all over the country. Naturally, the *Sweets* were of fiery taste capable of blowing the British forces to bits.

1907 was no ordinary year. It was the 50th Anniversary year of the Great War of 1857. The memories of a past not too distant were fanning the embers of the struggle that had laid dormant for so long and flaming the passions of patriotic Bharatiya citizens

The Congress may have had succeeded in expelling Tilak and all other supporters of Independence from its ranks but it proved to be a loser in the bargain. Commenting on the incident, Nehru wrote "...in 1907 the clash came resulting in apparently a victory for the old moderate section. But this had been won because of organisational control and the then narrow franchise of the Congress. There was no doubt that the vast majority of politically minded people in India favoured Tilak and his group. The Congress lost much of its importance."

Open conflict served a bigger purpose. It became clear to the world at large that Bharat may be a subject nation but was not crushed. There were people who cherished the spirit of independence, who were prepared to face enormous odds to realise their dreams. No longer were the British going to be given the luxury of claiming that Indians welcomed their presence in the country.

With this backdrop, we would now cover the story of the revolutionary ferment upto 1920. The facts that one would come to learn during this journey leave one speechless. It is enough at this stage to state just one simple fact. By 1920 the Indian Freedom Struggle was a roaring fire lit by all communities in India, one that was set to devour the British jackal. From the pinnacle of secular struggle, we would then trace how the Gandhian era communalized the freedom struggle and laid the foundation for the bloody partition of the country by 1939. As each event becomes known, as we begun to remove the thick layer of ignorance, we would be faced with a reality that is far different from the one told to us thus far.

I am aware that this would be difficult to digest particularly for the Avtar driven Hindu mind. We have deluded ourselves to believe that the Mahatma was not a human being. He was a divine incarnation. He achieved something that was never before even dreamt of being in the realms of reality. Winning Independence by non violent means by causing a change of heart in the Imperialist Powers. As he was the God, we poor human beings need not even try and really understand his teachings.

It is not an accident that the most extreme anti Gandhi behaviour comes from his so called followers. Gandhi himself would have died thousand deaths when hundreds of houses of Brahmins were torched to avenge his killing by Godse by people, who claimed to be followers of the Apostle of Non Violence.

His own power hungry party politicians refused to heed his advice to disband the Congress after winning freedom. They went further and gave him the monopoly of appearing on the currency note as if there was no other freedom fighter of note. The question whether Gandhiji himself would have approved of this seems to have never stuck to them. After all, the purpose is not to honour him for doing so. The purpose is to project that he was the Patron Saint of the Indian State and his followers therefore had derived the divine right to rule the country. Was this what they learnt from the Mahatma ?

The level of venom with which the so called followers of Gandhiji attack the critics of Gandhiji is inverserly proportional to the level of true respect they have for him. As we will see later, Gandhiji did many things that deserve criticism. Indeed he was roundly criticized by many eminent leaders including Babasaheb Amedkar – in his own life time. The criticism does not affect his Greatness but crude behaviour of his so called followers surely does. Take for instance the issue of having only his photograph on the Indian currency notes to the exclusion of all other leaders of freedom struggle. On December 21, 2005, the Times of India carried a report that the British Government was considering a proposal to have the photo of Dadabhai Navroji on the British currency notes. Given that Dadabhai Navroji was a bitter critic of the British rule in India, this is almost like considering printing Jinnah’s photo on the Indian currency notes. Yet, the proposal has been mooted by Labour Party, as in their view having images of prominent Asians and Afro-Caribbean people who contributed to British Society is to create a new definition of Britishness.

Unlike the Indian State, the Parliament of India does honour Freedom Fighters of all hues – whether or not they followed the path shown by Gandhiji, by having their photos adorn the walls of Parliament. This is done by a process of consensus cutting across party divide.

That Indian State should follow the same standard and print photos of all freedom fighters so honoured by the Parliament on the Indian currency notes was one of the prayers in WP (lodg) 2947 of 2004 and WP 682 of 2005. As per Court order, the Government was required to dispose off the representation by a reasoned order within six weeks. More than ten years have passed with the Government not so much as even replying in violation of the Court Order. Interested readers may refer “In Search of Elusive Justice” in the book “The British Mutiny of 1857” This book has been written by someone who adores Savarkar, written in Savarkar Sadan, where he lived for many years, by someone who views Godse’s act of killing the Mahatma – as a dastardly act of cowardice. Yes, the book does find fault with the Gandhian policies. That does not, however, mean the Author has anything but highest regards for Gandhiji – the person. For him, neither Gandhiji nor Savarkar are Gods. To him, they both are Great human beings, with all the attendant human frailities.

Chapter I

Lokamanya Bal Gangdhar Tilak Stoking the Fire of Revolution

Let us get back to the aftermath of 1857. The wanton cruelty with which the struggle was put down could not but have caused a pause in the freedom struggle. Nevertheless, the manner in which the Indian elite supported the British quest for retaining control over India was nothing short of nauseating.

At the apex of social order was the so-called nobility. Canning described them as breakwaters in storm and were therefore to be preserved as useful relics, caught in a time wrap from which there was to be no escape save by death. After 1857, traitors to the Bharatiya cause were rewarded. The value of their loyalty became too important for British to pursue the Dalhousie policy of annexation. So long as British interests were not threatened, the rulers were free to lead a life of absolute decadence, depending on the paramount power i.e. the British to crush any incipient popular revolt against their misgovernance. Such Rulers were unknown in the long history of Bharat. Indeed, one does not know of such rulers being in existence in any part of the world for any length of time. It will not be an exaggeration to say that after 1857, they had forfeited the right to be considered persons of any consequence other than being British stooges. From time to time, some rulers showed sparks of life. A palace coup during 1890 replaced the Manipur King by his brother. Real power was exercised by Tikendrajit Singh, who was the Commander in Chief of the army. Resident British agent, Frank Grimwood informed his superiors that the new regime was sound and Tikendrajit Singh enjoyed great popularity. Furthermore, he quickly proved an energetic administrator, launching a programme to repair roads and bridges throughout the state. Tikendrajit Singh was distrusted in Calcutta, where he was suspected of being anti-British. A popular ruler, who was also anti British could not be tolerated. Chief Commissioner of Assam J.W. Quinton marched to Manipur with 400 troops on 22nd March 1891 to arrest Tikendrajit Singh, whose only fault so far seemed to be that he was well liked by people and was at the same time anti British. The imperial forces were soon routed. Now Manipur declared Independence, which proved to be short lived. By

27th April, the Raj had struck back and Tikendrajit Singh hanged in a public ceremony for the fault of being too popular for the British liking. Yet another Prince who became a thorn in British side was the ruler of Baroda, Sayaji Rao Gaikwad. He presided over what British themselves admitted was a 'thoroughly well governed native state'. But Sayaji Rao's concept of modernisation was not confined to the provision of proper drainage or funding a public museum, it embraced new ways of looking at Bharat. This placed him beyond the pale as far as British were concerned. Successive British residents were therefore ordered to keep him under the tightest surveillance. During 1912 and 1913, his arms were twisted to enforce anti-terrorist and sedition laws. He was forced into sacking all the employees, who were suspected to harbour any nationalist feelings.

The British found it easy to accept princely decadence. When Maharaja of Vizagapatnam was mildly rebuked for his drinking habits, he confessed, "I know, sir I am an idle, drunken fellow...but what can I do ? Your pax Britannica has robbed me of my hereditary occupation." Were he to make the mistake of following his hereditary occupation, he would soon have found himself bereft of the throne and his state. No wonder, most of the princes spent their time in the misty haze of alcoholic fumes seeking refuge in sexual perversion to prove their manhood. It is amazing that these ancient relics rose from their stupor to claim Independence in 1947 and succeeded in driving a hard bargain with the Congress Government. More of it later.

The Indian elite may have become fond of slavery but at the grass roots of the national life, the spirit of Independence refused to die down. Bapu (Mahatma Gandhi) has written about his experience of eating meat at the prompting of his friend as a child around 1880. He has confessed that he could overcome his scruples in deceiving his parents, for whom eating meat was a taboo, by prospect of becoming strong, "so that we might defeat English and make India free." It is startling that in a small place like Porbandar, such thoughts excited the children. Barrenness of so called metropolitan India is clear from the fact that when the same children moved to Metros from towns, they soon became devoid of such patriotic feelings. In case of Bapu himself, his quest for Independence died soon after meat eating experiment stopped and was not be reawakened till another four decades had lapsed.

It is no wonder then that the struggle for Independence was led not by the elite, who were far too busy keeping their British masters happy to even dream of freedom. The charge for freeing the country from the shackles of slavery had to be led from the unpolluted environment of the countryside.

The first struggle was initiated by Vasudeo Balwant Phadke who dared to dream of a free Republic of India, way back in 1879. His armed exploits revived the specter of 1857. By May 21, 1879, Statesman wrote "It is not strange that the recent incendiaryism at Poona should have excited the keenest interest and anxiety throughout the country..where conflagrations have come to be recognised as serious rebellion." By 20th July 1879, Phadke was caught. He was to die in Eden in 1883. The story of Manipur in 1891 has already been recounted.

It is to Bal Gangadhar Tilak, born on 23rd July 1856 at Ratnagiri, that the credit has to go for fanning the flames from dying embers of the freedom struggle in 1857. Unlike Gokhale, Dadabhai Navroji, Ranade, Surendra Nath Banerjee or Bapu; at no stage of his life was Tilak ever enamoured of British Rule. A brilliant student, he had upon graduation vowed never to serve in British Government. Seeds of the freedom struggle which ultimately forced British to leave their prized possession of India, lay in the political awakening initiated by Tilak. The medium chosen by him was annual public celebration , starting in 1895, of the birth and coronation of Shivaji. This was accompanied by a great deal of nationalist agitation in the Deccan, which was reflected not only in Tilak's newspaper but also in other local papers. To restrict the agitation to annual celebrations of the birth and coronation of Shivaji would have left long intervals during the year. Tilak devised an ingenious scheme. He took to the celebration of Ramdas, the reputed Guru of Shivaji and turned annual worship of Ganpati (Hindu Deity of Knowledge) into a political demonstration. Ramdas celebration came in February, birth of Shivaji in April, coronation in June and Ganpati worship around September, so that year was fairly well divided. Ramdas was popular in Deccan for having inspired Shivaji with his ideas of Independence, and was represented as prototype of the educated agitator and founder of secret societies. Ganpati is the most revered God in Hindu mythology and provided a most convenient platform to reach out to people. The

public meetings gave Tilak and his followers the opportunity to spread nationalist feelings. For instance, at one celebration he frankly admitted that “the festival’s political aspect cannot be ignored and we never ignored it.” On another occasion, he held forth that India should be bound together by ties of brotherhood, friendship so that in the hour of need the different people of India might come to each other’s help. He urged the people to work disinterestedly in the cause of the nation, Shivaji would then come forward to help them.

His followers were no less skilled in the art of oratory. S.M.Paranjpee told his audience that Penal codes were not applicable to men like Shivaji. Like Shivaji, it was necessary to resort to guerilla warfare, when the enemy was strong.

Tilak and Paranjpee became childhood heroes for generations of young men and women of Deccan. Savarkar became just one of them. It was no accident that led Savarkar to dedicate Mazzini’s autobiography to them.

The results of nationalist awakening were soon to become visible. Deccan youth lost their fear of British and thirsted for revenge when their sensibilities were hurt. It was on 22nd June 1897, that saw the outbreak of political terrorism that was to haunt British for the rest of their rule in India. It is on this day Rand and Ayerest, the hated British officers in Poona, were killed by Chapekar brothers. Informers who caused the arrest of Chapekar brothers were shot dead on 8th February 1898. It was widely believed that Chapekar brothers were the front for a wide ranging conspiracy. British Intelligence recorded that the father of Chapekar brothers, old Brahmin priest Hari Chapekar, went to Amravati in December 1898, soon after his sons were martyred. He held *religious* meetings in the town for about a fortnight. Meetings of 29th and 30th December 1898 were held in the house of G.S.Khapharde, who was a well known friend of Tilak. Khapharde later accompanied Tilak to the Shivaji celebrations in Calcutta in 1906. A visit that gave strong impetus to the cult of the bomb in Bengal. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was suspected as being the brain behind the actions of Chapekar brothers but this could never be proven. The lack of proof did not deter the Government. It went on to prosecute him for some *Verses* that had been printed in his paper and had him sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment.

The imprisonment did nothing to dampen Tilak's pronounced hostility to British rule. It only served to hasten his transformation from Bal Gangadhar to Lokmanya Tilak – the dreaded foe of the British imperialism. Soon after his release, he went on to relentlessly attack the British rule through the medium of his newspapers. What caused the authorities tremendous irritation was the fact that the articles contained just enough ginger to make them palatable to the Indian public without crossing the borders of law. Ingenious tricks employed by Tilak included championing the nationalist cause much more openly in Kesari, which was a Marathi paper and using a more restrained language in Mahratta, which was printed in English. This served two purposes. Marathi being local language, Kesari had a wide ranging audience. In the event of prosecution, Tilak could always quote Mahratta in defense and claim prosecution allegations were on account of errors in translation.

It was no wonder then that nationalist spirit began to spread beyond Deccan. In 1900, a paper called Kalidas began to come out in Benares immediately after a visit by Lokmanya Tilak. The unrestrained language of the paper in favour of Independence allowed the authorities to force its closure.

People like G.S.Khaparde, who were found hobnobbing with Chapekar clan, continued to stoke flames of freedom in the Central provinces. It was Khaparde, who had originally conceived the idea of boycotting the British goods way back in 1896. An idea he continued to pursue at every available opportunity. The British found him mixed up in many a dangerous matters. No doubt accounting for his sky rocketing popularity, which in Western India was soon second only to Tilak.

Baroda, ruled by the rare nationalist prince Sayaji Rao Gaikwad, was another nurturing ground for the freedom lovers. With the ruler himself daring to dream of a new Bharat – one without the corroding British influence, his state became the favourite meeting ground for nationalists of all hues. The prince was ever ready to provide employment to all patriotic citizens of Bharat much to the annoyance of the colonial masters. The memories of 1857 were too fresh and Baroda was too important a state for the British to ride rough shod over easily.

A prominent nationalist, who was employed in Baroda was Aurobindo Ghose, since 1893. By 1899, Jotindranath Banerjee had joined Baroda state services and became friends with M.B.Jadhav, in whose house Aurobindo lived. The trio was joined in 1901 by Barindra Ghose, Aurobindo's younger brother. Under influence of Shivaji celebrations in neighbouring Bombay presidency, they took to studying such political subjects as French Revolution, and Ranade's History of Marathas. Relationship of this group with Tilak camp, that became visible at Surat, was a natural result of the commonality of their aspirations. The Baroda group, as we shall see later, was to found to be the moving spirit behind famous Maniktola conspiracy. Tilak's inspiration to Savarkar's Abhinav Bharat is by now too well known to bear recounting.

By 1905, Lokmanya Tilak strode the national scene like a colossus. His influence was all pervading in all parts of the country. In 1917, British intelligence carried out a review of the events that had rocked their Indian rule in the preceding decade. They concluded; "Thus the centers of conspiracy in Calcutta, Dacca, London, Paris, and San Francisco, are taken up separately, and it will be observed that the lines of propagation of the revolutionary movement, leading to Bengal on one hand and to Europe and America on the other, both radiate *from Poona*." *Reference to Poona was no doubt to Tilak, being the place where he resided.*

Events on the international front excited the political life in India. There was the rise of Japan as a force to contend with. This was a remarkable turn around for a nation that had been forced to swallow its pride and open its port to international trade and commerce by the Gunboat blackmail of Commodore Perry of the US navy in 1853. By 1902, Japan had secured tangible recognition of its status as major international power by concluding a treaty with the Britain as an equal. Two years later, it went to war with Russia. The war was highlighted by the spectacular defeat of the Russian fleet in Straits of Tsushima in May 1905. Victory at land followed forcing Russia to accept Japanese claim. After a long long time, a White European power had been humbled by an Asiatic nation.

It is in this charged atmosphere, that the partition of Bengal was announced by Curzon in July 1905. It was implemented by October showing complete contempt to the Indian opinion. This was just the catalyst that the efforts of Tilak camp needed. Partition of Bengal was far from a mere division of an unwieldy province into more convenient administrative units. It was a deliberate attempt to create two separate provinces. A Hindu province to be kept in check by the adjoining Muslim part. One more colonial move to keep India divided. The resulting uproar caught administration unawares. The two main themes of the anti-partition movement - Swadeshi and Boycott caught popular imagination. They were aimed at economically crippling British interests by depriving them of the Indian market. After all if the Indians refused to buy anything from British industry, Bharatiya producers only stood to gain. Swadeshi had a political side which went much further. Not only Indians were exhorted to buy Indian goods; it also demanded Swaraj or self-government. The principal agency used to enforce the boycott in Calcutta and throughout the provinces of divided Bengal, was organisation known as 'National Volunteers' with Lokmanya Tilak as its President. University students and school children took part in the movement chanting *Bande Mataram*, which became the battle cry of the nationalist forces. Despite the undercurrents of Hindu-Muslim antipathy present in the agitation, outbreaks of sectarian violence were rare and localised.

The fire was well and truly lit. Now, there was no going back. By 1906, Bengal press was blessed by addition of a few more publications. One was 'Yugantar' - started by Barindra Ghose, Abinash Chandra and Bhupendra Nath Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekananda - in fluent colloquial Bengali. 'Bande Mataram' in English, was another fiery paper, started by Aurobindo Ghose and was meant to appeal to a more educated audience. Both were modeled after 'Kesari' and 'Maharatta' published by Tilak. 'Sandhya' was yet another publication sharing close links with 'Yugantar' and 'Bande Mataram'. Utter disdain for British rule and a burning desire to gain freedom was a common thread running through all these publications. They threw caution to the winds and were almost eager to provoke the wrath of authorities.

It is upon Bipinchandra Pal that rests the honour for being the first prominent Congress leader to issue the clarion call for British to quit India. In 'Bande Mataram' he openly called upon the British to leave India. He wrote, "Time has come to frankly call upon the British to leave India. The issue is neither the Partition of Bengal nor improvements in governance. We now want to exercise our fundamental right to govern our country. We are aware that begging would not get us autonomy. Our struggle is therefore aimed at making the administration of the country impossible for the British and compelling them to leave the country."

It was not until 1942 that is a good 36 years later that Bapu asked the British to leave the country in so blunt a manner.

In 1906, Shivaji celebration reached Calcutta. Administration was incredulous. The alleged depredations of the Marathas in Bengal were supposed to make Bengalis impervious to the legend of Shivaji. 'Yugantar's' appeal was permeating through all layers of society. A letter written to Yugantar and intercepted by the Police spoke for itself. " I, a schoolboy living in the hilly country, don't feel the oppression of the Feringhi (foreigner), and I give way before people for want of information. I am therefore in need of Yugantar, for it acquaints us to a great extent with the desire of driving away the Feringhis, and also make us alive to wrongs. I am in straitened circumstances, *hardly able to procure one meal a day*; nevertheless my desire for newspaper reading is extremely strong."

In Punjab, discontent was stoked by Lahore lawyers Lala Lajpat Rai and Munshi Ajit Singh. They built on the popular discontent caused by the proposal for higher charges to be levied on farmers living in the areas irrigated by waterways. The additional charges would have crippled the already hard pressed farmers. Popular grievance was the platform that the nationalists needed to spread their message. Orators fanned all over the province reminding their rural audience how the Sikhs had betrayed Bharat in 1857 and now had the chance to redeem themselves, which ought not to be missed.

Discontent in Punjab was something that British could ill afford. After all, the province accounted for over a quarter of the Indian army. Reports that the agitation was disturbing Sepoy morale could not but

cause British serious worry. At Ferozpur several hundred sepoys attended a meeting, held specially for them. Intelligence described the meeting as “most seditious.” By end of April 1907, Punjab Governor concluded that he was facing something far more sinister than protest movement against an unpopular law. The protests were the façade for a massive conspiracy, whose ultimate goal was a major uprising against the Raj. On 7th May, against the background of near panic in Lahore, where British officers and their families were openly hooted at, the Governor turned to instruments of coercion. Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were arrested and deported to Mandalay, to be released later in November.

The deportations forced Bipinchandra Pal to cut short his lecture tour in Madras, which “bid fair to put the whole of Southern India in an uproar.” On 2nd May, 1907, he is reported to have told a wildly cheering audience that, “We desire to make it (Government) autonomous, absolutely free of British Parliament.” Cries of Bande Mataram greeted the bold declaration.

“Bal – Bal Ganagadhar Tilak, Pal – Bipinchandra Pal and Lal- Lala Lajpat Rai” the trio from three different parts (Maharashtra, Bengal and Punjab) of the country became the Icons of the freedom struggle

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the first freedom struggle, Bharat was once again alive and getting ready to challenge the imperial power. Tilak, at 50, was now an elder statesman. Shivaji celebration initiated by him over a decade ago, had brought the results he sought. British had realised that ‘the masses were not inert as had been imagined’. He now worried for the revolutionaries, he had himself inspired. He knew more than anyone else that the assessment of Punjab Governor was right. The unseen hand of the revolutionaries was indeed at work behind the outburst of popular agitation that was fast spreading throughout the country.

A devout Hindu, he knew his scriptures well. Ramayan was the story of victory of Good over Evil – won on the battlefield by violence of Ram’s unfailing arrows. Gita advocated that even the near and dear ones deserved to be annihilated, if they took up the cause of the Unjust.

A Gandhi, who turned the scriptures on their head and advocated the cause of Absolute Non Violence, had not yet arrived on the Indian scene. Indeed, so long as Tilak was alive, Gandhiji had to rest content with being a poor second at best.

The practical Tilak had no quarrel with the Revolutionary methods that attracted his young followers. His only disagreement with the youngsters was over their timing. He tried his best to channelise the revolutionary fervour along the lines that would enable them to decisively attack the colonial power. Time and again, he warned them not to launch an adventure without being adequately prepared.

Even as the revolutionaries hunted for manuals to make Bombs, their spiritual Guru looked at ways and means to serve the national cause further. He knew well that Time and the Revolutions waited for no one. On December 6, 1907, an attempt had been made, at Kharagpur in Bengal to blow up the train; in which the Lieutenant-Governor was travelling; Tilak knew he could not wait any longer. Fully aware of the odds that faced him, he nevertheless launched an attempt to capture the Congress in order to provide just the shield that Revolutionaries needed; in order to be successful. No doubt the Government was also alive to the danger it faced. In what, at best, can be described as their naiveté, moderates played into the hands of British and drove Tilak out of the Congress folds.

The die was now cast. On April 11, 1908 an attempt was made to assassinate M. Tardival, the *Maire* of French Chandernagore. April 30th was the night of Amavasya, darkest night of the month, considered auspicious to offer sacrifice to Goddess Kali. This was the day chosen by Khudiram Bose to throw a bomb at Muzaffarpore. He had intended to kill Mr. Kingsford, the British Judge responsible for convicting persons connected with Yugantara and Bande Mataram in August 1907. The explosion claimed unintended victims but shook the Raj as never before.

Tilak moved quickly to the forefront in defending the Revolutionaries. He wrote two articles in Kesari. "The Country's Misfortune" on 12th May and "These Remedies are not lasting" on 9th June. The thrust of the articles was that while he disapproved bomb throwing as a means to secure Independence, he considered British

Government was a curse to the country. According to him, if it went on ruling as it was and did not give the people the rights they asked for, Indians would resort to bomb throwing like the people of Portugal and Russia. In an interesting and frank comment on his inability to keep pace with his young followers, he had added; “Old and experienced leaders can, so far as they themselves are concerned, keep this indignation (against the alien rule) permanently within prescribed bounds with the help of their experience and mature thought but it is impossible for all the people of the country thus to keep their feelings of indignation or irritability always within these bounds; *perhaps it may be said without hesitation that the inhabitants of any country in which it is possible for feelings of indignation to remain always within prescribed bounds are destined to remain perpetually in slavery.*”

Promptness with which Tilak defended his young friends offered a stark contrast to the studied silence that Bapu maintained over Jallianwala Bagh massacre of hundreds of unarmed civilians for well over a year, barely a decade later.

A prosecution was ordered in respect of these articles and Tilak arrested on 24th June. After a mock trial that lasted for less than a month, Tilak was sentenced on 22nd July 1908, to six years of transportation and exiled to Mandalay. Popular feelings ran high at this indignity imposed on the Bharatiya consciousness. Bombay witnessed Hartals that lasted for several days. Mill hands struck work. Shop keepers downed the shutters. Tilak’s sentence was greeted by violent protests. It took several instances of firing in which 15 people were killed as per the Government version, before the situation could be brought under control.

It is time to take note of a canard that has been spread about Tilak by his petty minded opponents. Tilak was a devout Hindu and certainly by standards of his followers like Savarkar, an orthodox Brahmin. He successfully used Hindu icons like Ganpati, Shivaji to arouse the patriotic feelings. More over, he championed the agitation against partition of Bengal and turned it into a national cause. A partition that was supposed to be beneficial to the Muslims. All this has been sometimes deliberately misinterpreted to portray Tilak as being anti Muslim and communal. This stupid charge would have infuriated

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Chagla has shed some light on the relations between Tilak and Jinnah, which is worth taking note of.

“I might mention here that during my long association with him, I found that Jinnah always showed greatest respect and regard for Tilak.

Even when he was in the process of changing his political stand and becoming more and more communal, I never remember his ever saying anything, which was derogatory of Tilak. Two persons in public life for whom Jinnah showed greatest respect were Gokhale and Tilak. He had hard and harsh things to say about Gandhiji, Nehru and others; but as far as Gokhale and Tilak were concerned, Jinnah had the most profound admiration and respect for them and for their views. It is surprising that there should have been so much in common between Jinnah and Tilak. I understand that the regard Jinnah had for Tilak was reciprocated by Tilak.

Jinnah told me that when he was a junior he was reading in the chamber of Lowndes-Sir George Lowndes, who afterwards became a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, and later still a member of the Privy Council - Lowndes' opinion was once sought regarding some speech Tilak had delivered. There was going to be a conference, and Lowndes asked Jinnah whether he had read the brief and what he thought about it. Jinnah replied that he had not touched the brief and would not look at it as he wanted to keep himself free to criticise the Government for prosecuting a great patriot like Tilak”.

Lokmanya Tilak had by 1908 attained a desire cherished by him since childhood. His nation had been aroused from its deep slumber. The fires lit in 1857 were now burning brightly. Independence had entered the vocabulary of the masses, though the Congress was to fight shy of this word for yet another two decades. Freedom lovers from all over the country were about to embark on their trial by fire inspired by the sight of their Guru thundering like a lion, unmoved by the prospect of a hard prison life at the ripe young age of 52 years. The fire was to consume many of his beloved Revolutionaries. It is their activities that we shall now look at.

Chapter II

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar The Swatantraveer

“The two men were welcomed to Savarkar Sadan with the same deference they had been shown on Wednesday evening. This time their stay was brief. Savarkar accompanied them back down the stairs to the grills of his Sadan. His most ardent disciples were setting to murder a man Veer Savarkar detested with all the fury of which his zealot’s soul was capable.

Despite that fact, there was nothing in his rigidly composed demeanor to indicate the enormity of that moment. Hardly, an emotion registered on his glacial regard, his taut, pursed lips. He laid a hand on Godse and Apte’s shoulder: ‘Be successful,’ he whispered,...and come back’

This testimony, dramatized in the above form in “Freedom At Midnight”, of a small time crook turned approver in the Gandhi Murder case was to haunt Savarkar for the rest of his life, as the reference it was claimed was to the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. Never mind the fact that the Court threw out this testimony but Congress Governments have continued to rely upon it without being able to produce a shred of evidence. The British had sentenced him to a fifty year term of hard labour, little realizing that the fire lit by this man would drive them out of Bharat much before they could make him serve the full term. Where the British could not succeed, his own countrymen did. For the last six decades, the man has been systematically neglected, his contributions to the cause of Independence have sought to be erased, his works of great national value have been banished to the fringes of the national consciousness. So much so that the place in Mumbai where he spent the last thirty years of his life, the place which should be a national monument, is available to anyone on rent. Where even the British failed, we Indians have succeeded, never mind the huge cost we are thereby incurring.

Why should anyone want to know about this man? Of what relevance is he to the nation in the Twenty First century. In this world of Globalisation, of free flow of capital, of societies owing their existence to free play of market forces, is this man - long dead, not best forgotten. Why wake the sleeping ghost?

The answers are many. First the simple economic truth. Economic growth, however essential cannot be had in a society torn by social conflict. A skyline rendered black from the bellowing clouds of a building set on fire by miscreants, is hardly the best advertisement for attracting investors, particularly in a place described as commercial capital of the country – as happened at Mumbai (Bombay) in 1992-93. A grim reminder that the communal question that Mahatma Gandhi tried best to resolve, continues to haunt us.

Why not give a chance to the Savarkar solution of recognizing that the Hindu-Muslim war ended a hundred years before the dawn of independence in 1947.

Mahatma Gandhi believed in equality amongst the castes. Savarkar wanted a casteless society. Mahatma Gandhi wanted the economic growth to focus on the villages. Savarkar believed in introducing modern technology in the society. Do we not now have enough accumulated evidence, to make a reasoned choice ?

As Alvin Toffler tells us in the “Third Wave”, today the issue is not either Villages or Modern technology. The best path today is growth in Villages through Modern technology - ‘Gandhi With Satellites’ as he calls it. Gandhiji and Savarkar after all can co-exist.

Finally, Savarkar is only a symbol of the revolutionary spirit that this country possessed much before Gandhiji came on the national scene. The Do or Die spirit that had countless people court ruin for the sake of their nation. The three Savarkar brothers were merely one of the many such families. It is the sacrifice of these countless unsung unhonoured people that had prepared the mood of the nation to readily accept the message of civil disobedience that Gandhiji gave to the nation at the Nagpur Congress in 1920. Unfortunately neither the Congress nor even Mahatma Gandhi really acknowledged the debt they owed to the Revolutionaries.

Why Savarkar, even Subhas Chandra Bose, the Congress President in 1938, has been virtually disowned by Congress for committing the sin of following the revolutionary path.

The story of the Savarkars' needs to be told because it is symbolic of the Spirit to Sacrifice for the sake of the Nation without which no nation can progress.

Why the Savarkars, why not somebody else, why not for instance Bhagat Singh or Khudiram Bose or Chandra Shekhar Azad or any one else who laid down their life ?? It can well be any one of them but these revolutionaries themselves would have been the first to tell us that the Story of Revolutionaries is not a zero sum game. The story of Savarkar is indeed their own story, possessed as they all were, of the same zeal to free their motherland at any cost. The revolutionaries can be criticized for many a faults. Certainly lack of Spirit to Sacrifice for the sake of the nation is something that the most perverted mind will not accuse them of.

Let us get back to our story at the point at which we had left it - in 1857. The Union Jack fluttered everywhere, true but even the British had no pretensions to carrying the White man's Burden at this stage. The Bharatiya people may have lost their power but they sat in sullen silence waiting for the first opportunity to drive the Firangi out of the country. The spirit of Independence was very much alive. Now survey the same country a hundred years later. What were the dreams of the elite now ?

“Hardly ever have I known anybody to cherish such loyalty as I did to the British constitution...I therefore vied with the Englishmen in loyalty to the throne. With careful perseverance I learnt the tune of the ‘national anthem’ and joined in loyalty to the throne. Whenever there was an occasion for the expression of loyalty without fuss or ostentation, I readily took part in it.. It was for me more in the nature of an obligation.”

This was Mahatma Gandhi writing about his mentality around the turn of the century. Nor was this sentiment an isolated phenomenon. For else, how would members of the Servants of India Society not blush, when asked to take the vow ‘ The members of the new society

frankly accept the British connection as ordained in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence for nation's good.' as penned by their founder Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the political Guru of Gandhiji, who died in 1915 without ever changing his views.

The most telling evidence of state of the mind of the Indian elite was demonstrated at the twenty-third meeting of the Congress, which opened at Surat on 26th December 1907. It is at this session that Lokmanaya Tilak was thrown out of the Congress as he and Aurobindo Ghosh were bold enough to ask for Swaraj. Those who believe otherwise would be well advised to read the comment of J.C. Ker, Personal Assistant to the Director of Criminal Intelligence from 1907-1913 on the Surat incident.

“ The session was however of special importance, for it was at this meeting that a definite and public cleavage took place between the Moderates and the Extremists.. The split took place ostensibly over the election of the President, but really, as will appear later over the general policy of the Congress. The question which really divided the Congress was whether the agitation for self-government was to proceed ..or not”

No wonder the British could legitimately claim “ while the Italians had always refused to accept the Austrian rule as the national rule, boycotted the Austrians so as to make the administration impossible, the Indians on the other hand far from boycotting the British, had offered their cooperation and accepted the British rule as their national rule, while the resolutions of the Congress showed how their grievances might be redressed and the people made prosperous and contented thus making the British rule popular, stable and strong.”

This was the politically sterile environment, when mention of the word Independence was considered an act of Sedition not only by the British Government but also by the Indian elite, that a young lad from Bhagur, a non descript village near Nasik, was to take the oath of dedicating his life to the cause of Independence. An oath for the sake of which he spent the best part of his life in prison doing hard labour, where even the possession of a scrap of paper was considered a punishable offense.

The Savarkars were Jagirdars (entitled to collect revenue from farmers) of a small village Rahuri since times of the last Peshwas. Damodar and Radhabai were a typical Brahmin couple of the day. Damodar being a good natured, religious minded man and Radhabai a pious beautiful lady. They had four children, three sons and a daughter while at Bhagur. The sons being Ganesh, Vinayak and Narayan, who were all to be devoted to the cause of independence.

Vinayak alias Tatyā was born on 28th May 1883. This was two years before the Indian National Congress was founded by Sir A.O.Humes for the perpetuation of the British Raj. A little known fact about Sir A.O.Humes is that during the War of 1857, he was posted as the District Collector at Etawah and had to run away in the disguise of a woman on 23rd May 1857 to save himself from the fury of the Bharatiya soldiers. No wonder that Savarkar's "The Indian War of Independence –1857" was always to remain anathema to the Congress. For the present, both the new born 'babies' were blissfully unaware of their future conflict.

The young Vinyak was sent to school at the age of six and soon showed early signs of his genius. At the age of ten, a Pune paper accepted his poem for publication, not being aware of the tender age of the contributor. The house of the Savarkars reverberated with the epics Mahabharata, Ramayan, Ballads and Bakhars of Pratap, Shivaji and the Peshwas, filling the young Vinayak with pride of his heritage that he was never to lose in his long life. Tragedy struck when Vinayak was barely ten. His mother, to whom he was passionately devoted, died leaving the children to the care of her husband. Quite remarkably, particularly for that period, Vinayak's father never remarried combining roles of both mother and the father for the young ones.

In everybody's life there are certain momentous incidents that leave an indelible mark. A frustrated and penniless mutineer from Piedmont asked alms of Mazzini in the name of the outlaws of Italy. This was the moment from which Mazzini dedicated his life to the cause of the regeneration of Italy. Vinayak was now about to undergo an experience that was to change the course of his life as well that of the countless others, who were to come under his spell.

On 22nd June, 1897, when Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's rule was being celebrated, the Plague Commissioner Rand and another British Officer, Mr. Ayerest, infamous for the severity of enforcing Anti-Plague measures, were shot dead by the Chapekar brothers in Pune. An act that electrified the country. The Government tried its best to implicate Tilak in the murder, failing which he was thrown behind the bars for publishing seditious articles. Chapekars were betrayed by Dravid brothers and were hung on the gallows on 18th April 1898. The betrayal by Dravid brothers was avenged by youngest of the three Chapekar brothers and his friend, who shot them dead, an act for which the gallows awaited them.

Young Vinayak was deeply influenced by the turn of events. He approached the family deity, Durga and swore that he would either die fighting like the Chapekar brothers or become victorious like Shivaji. The year was 1898, when the metropolitan India was fully content to be a British slave. This was to be the first and the last religious act of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. There is no record of his having ever again approached a deity for either taking a vow or seek blessings for fulfillment of a wish. Intensely proud of being a Hindu all his life, he did not fail to ridicule superstitions rampant in the name of the religion. Cow for him, for instance, was merely an animal important from an economic point of view, she had nothing else to do for him; consequently, eating beef was for him in later life; not a taboo. Such irreverence for sacred symbols was to provoke wrath of the orthodox sections but he could not care less. A born poet, he composed a ballad in honour of the Bharatiya martyrs. So emotional would he become on singing this, that his face would glow and tears roll down his cheeks even in sleep, deeply disturbing his father.

During the same year, he happened to visit Pune, a city he had expected to echo with discussions about Tilak and Chapekar at every corner. The young Dehati, as the villagers are derisively known in India, was bound to be disappointed. Fortunately, this disappointment was more than offset by his coming across weekly "Kal" edited by S.M.Paranjpe, which openly dared to call Chapekar brothers Martyrs instead of Murderers, an outrage for which the Editor was denied entry in Congress. Soon Vinayak became a regular reader of 'Kal' as well as 'Kesari' which was edited by Tilak, whom he always revered as his Guru.

Just when his political views were gaining maturity that was far ahead of the contemporary wisdom, once again the family was struck by a disaster. The dreaded Plague claimed his father. The Savarkar brothers were orphaned before the dawn of the Twentieth century. As if this was not enough, the younger brother Narayan alias Bal was also taken ill with Plague. It is then that the Savarkars decided to leave Bhagur for ever and went to Nasik for treatment, which in those days hardly amounted to much. The elder brother - Ganesh alias Baba decided to look after the orphaned youngster by staying with him in the Plague ward in utter disregard to his personal safety.

The inevitable happened. Baba was also affected by Plague. All seemed lost. Vinayak and his sister-in-law were thunder struck. Then a miracle happened. Both Baba and Bal survived. The orphaned children with Baba, the eldest - a youth barely in his twenties and married to boot, soon faced severe financial troubles. Baba had innate belief in the potential of his younger brother - Vinayak and resolved to ensure that the family financial troubles would not come in the way of Vinayak's education. In this, he had full support of his wife, Yesubai. The quest to support Vinayak cost her own ornaments that were sold off to fund his education. She served as a sounding board for his evolving political ideas during their discussions. In her devotion to the family, she even neglected her own health to the point of losing her only child born during this difficult period. No wonder Vinayak came to regard her as a mother, a sister, a colleague, a friend, a guide all rolled into one. This family of four struggled their way through innumerable odds but intensely happy to be together all the time, looking forward to a better future. By conventional standards, the education of the brightest of the family, Vinayak, was their passport to a comfortable life. How were they to know that the dreams of Vinayak were to lead them to a future that would be so different?

What was that future that awaited the Savarkars ? A peek ahead in time would not be out of place. Let us go to the year 1919. The Savarkar brothers were meeting together for the first time since 1906. The place - Cellular Jail at Andaman Islands. Time available for the family get together - all of one hour; but why had the beloved Vahini (Sister in Law) of Vinyak decided to keep away from this meet? She had waited in vain for around a decade, for a small glimpse of her husband sent away to the dreaded Andaman Isalnds, followed soon

after by Vinayak. The stark poverty that was her fate, did nothing to dampen her spirits but worries about Baba and Vinayak would not let her sleep. After all Andaman was a place that had a well deserved reputation for swallowing those sent away to toil there. If only she could see them once. The Imperial Government had, of course, more important matters to attend to, then worry about petitions from this poor woman surviving on the alms in Nasik, the back of beyond, to be allowed a visit to her husband. For Congress, the revolutionaries were only getting their just deserts. Their own civil disobedience movement was yet to take shape. Finally, the merciful Government relented. The long awaited permission for the visit was received. Only it was too late. Yesubai had already left for her heavenly abode.

We said that the Savarkars did not know the fate that awaited them but that is wrong. As we shall later see, young Vinayak was fully aware of the consequences of his actions. Soon after the vow before the family deity, he formed a club - Mitra Mela; a gathering of friends on the 1st of January 1900 when Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was still in his teens. This was the public face of a secret society "The Patriots Club" dedicated to obtaining complete national independence. Only trusted friends were admitted to the inner circle, where discussions crossed the legal limits of Sedition and could invite severe repercussions. This inner circle of Mitra Mela was to metamorphosis into its more famous form - Abhinav Bharat in 1904. It is to Abhinav Bharat that goes the credit for truly globalising Bharatiya political struggle.

Globalisation and the Level Playing Field - the catch words of all and sundry today on either side of the ideological divide If only people would study Savarkar's action, they would realise what true globalisation is all about. Level playing field is a myth. The very purpose of Strategy is to create an Uneven Playing Field to the disadvantage of the opponent. With the Will to succeed even a penniless youth from the dusty lanes of a small provincial town, full of petty squabbles, could go on to shake the mightiest empire the world has ever known to its roots. **This is what makes Savarkar relevant even today.**

The Mitra Mela became a forum where middle class youngsters from the town got together on a regular weekly basis and passionately debated future of the country. What was the tone of these debates? The issues that they hotly debated, in the words of Savarkar were “If the goal is complete political independence, how was this to be attained without armed revolution. Congress Moderates like Gokhale could get the British to give some jobs to the Indians - no more. The extremists like Tilak could grab some real powers from the colonial government but not complete independence. Both the Moderates and the Extremists have their uses in the national struggle for which we need to respect them but the need of the hour is to go beyond them and choose the revolutionary path for that alone can get us complete independence.” With this tenor of debates in the inner circle, it would come as no surprise to know that the Mitra Mela soon busied itself in public activities that tested the outer limits of the colonial legality. For instance, the then prevalent religious nature of celebrations of Shivaji Festivals was dramatically altered when Savarkar openly admitted that the objective of the festival celebration was political. As he said ‘After all, if the only objective was to gain some minor relief from the colonial powers, then the appropriate symbol would be Peshwa Baji Rao II, the man who lost the national independence and then spent next 48 years of his life content to get an annual pension.’ The sensation that this created in Nasik can be well imagined.

During 1901, the dreaded Plague reared its ugly head in Nasik once again. Mitra Mela took on the job of cremating the dead. This was no easy task. Caste restrictions had to be thrown overboard to carry dead bodies of all the people. This by itself, though revolutionary, was not the real problem, which was the risk of being infected. The inherent risk manifest itself in the death of one of Savarkar’s close associates due to Plague. During one such visit to the crematorium, a tired Savarkar fell asleep amidst the sweet scent of white flowers planted there to ward off stench of the dead. In his later life, whenever he saw those flowers, the memory of that night spent amongst the burning corpses would be revived

Events of the day attracted much notice in the Mela meetings. The death of Queen Victoria sparked off a lively debate. Was a resolution of condolence in order? The issue was discussed thread bare. Some members advocated the measure as a tactic to ward off any suspicion

of the police. Others rejected it all together pointing out she was just one of the many people who died in the world that day. Bharat was in no way indebted to her for anything and the lady had much to answer for many of the country's ills. There was no need to join the outpouring of the sympathy on display by the Congress leaders of all hues and make the British feel their presence was cherished in the country. The eyes lost and the British Empire was deprived of a resolution of condolence from Mitra Mela, Nasik in the province of Bombay.

Mitra Mela endeavored to ensure that their activities for the public cause would not affect the academic progress of their members. This was done by allotting members subjects of their choice, expecting them to study and disseminate the knowledge to others. Savarkar's own reading ranged from Mahabharata, the great Bharatiya epic to Herbert Spencer and Mazzini, the public library would find him engrossed in reading in all his spare time. The weekly meetings of Mitra Mela gave him the forum to sharpen the knowledge gained. Time and again, he stressed upon his friends that the path of patriotism was not easy or a bed of roses. He quoted instances from history of revolutions around the world to highlight the fate of revolutionaries. Utter ruin, lack of public acclaim and endless prison terms was their foreordained fate.

Mitra Mela members therefore attempted to steel themselves by rigorous physical and mental preparations, which were of immense use to them later for facing the wrath of the British Empire. Now, Savarkar had around him a nucleus of friends who were later to carry the flame of revolution. Indeed some of the associates were to later serve prison terms, have their entire property confiscated and even walk smilingly to the gallows. Teenage, the time for chocolates, roses and romance, in all a carefree time, was the time when Mitra Mela members spent in steeling themselves for the rigors of their future life. Not all of them, as can be expected, carried their actions to the extremes but each one of them carried the torch of liberty right through their life. In those days, that itself was no mean achievement. By today's standards of the youth, particularly in the metropolitan cities, even the least committed member of Mitra Mela was a positive revolutionary.

Savarkar's own final message to his beloved Vahini on eve of departure to the dreaded Andaman prison was in the form of a beautiful Marathi poem, he had himself composed – possible in no small measure due to the years of mental conditioning.

Here was a young man in the prime of his youth and being sent away to hard prison life for FIFTY years and yet he sang - “ We have not chosen this path blindly but in full realization of the consequences”. Rarely would one ever come across something more inspiring.

Around this time, the issue of Savarkar's marriage came up. Following the practice of the day, his uncle fixed up his marriage without consulting him. To obey the family or not was an issue which took up quite a bit of Mitra Mela time. It was not merely Savarkar's personal matter. The question was should youth with aspirations of becoming revolutionaries tie themselves up with bonds of marriage. Was it not Savarkar himself who kept on pointing out the life of trials and tribulations that awaited them. Considering this, was it fair to play with the life of an innocent girl, who may be interested only in a simple normal family life. Savarkar himself offered explanation that a person with a deep and abiding commitment to serve the nation is unlikely to be deterred merely by the fact of his marriage. A person who would claim to have given up the service to nation merely due to the fact of his getting married, was using marriage as an escape hatch. In reality, he could not be said to have any real commitment in the first place. This answered the first issue.

The second was more complicated. In those times, there was no question of the boy spending time with the girl before marriage to explain his views. So Savarkar expressed the confidence that a dedicated person would soon make his wife see the righteousness of his cause. Before this raises the hackles of today's Feminists, it should also be pointed out that Savarkar was also of the view that should a married revolutionary die in furtherance of his cause, his widow should get remarried. For a Brahmin, to even hold such thoughts in mind, let alone express them openly, in those days was by itself revolutionary. Savarkar was thus not merely a political but also a social revolutionary.

With this philosophical question out of the way, Savarkar was free to get married in April 1901, a bond that was to see him through next sixty-two years of life. Yamunabai, alias Mai, was a perfect foil to this volcanic personality. The marriage also solved the problem of funding his further education, which a loving Father-in-law agreed to look after. By December, he had passed matriculation and went to Pune in January 1902 joining the Ferguson College noted for moulding illustrious personalities. At a send off in Nasik, he promised his Mitra Mela friends that he would continue to carry their work further at Pune, which now offered him a wider canvass and a chance to infect the pick of Maratha brains with Seditious thoughts. A Savarkar Group was soon formed at Pune, which started publishing a hand written Weekly with Savarkar being the main contributor. The Group which dressed alike, studied together and went for regular evening walks soon reverberated with the woks of Kalidas, Bhavbhuti, Scott, Shakespeare and Milton, which cast their magnetic influence on these youth. Their special favourite was Milton's Paradise Lost. Here Savarkar got a chance to get acquainted with his childhood heroes, Paranjpee and Tilak. This only served to catalyze his thoughts further. Savarkar's fiery eloquence earned him the title of Devil from those who felt scared by his enthusiastic patriotism. The youth of course flocked to him. The success at Pune now boosted the Mitra Mela at Nasik, which became "Abhinav Bharat". In a meeting at Nasik in 1904, Savarkar explained that this new body would work on the lines of 'Young Italy' formed by Mazinni. The meeting was attended by youth from all over Maharashtra.

The flag adopted by this body had the three colours similar to our present day national flag. Only the middle colour, as can be expected of a revolutionary body was Red and not White and had 'Vande Mataram' written on it. Saffron colour at the top had Lotus while Crescent and the Moon found place on Green colour at the bottom. Thus Hindus and the Muslims were to be united in the revolutionary bond of blood in the quest for Independence. It is this flag that was waved as the flag of Independent India at Stuttgart in Germany on August 22, 1907 by Madam Cama during the meet of the International Socialists Congress, to the great discomfiture of the British delegates. About two hundred people participated in the Nasik meet and took the following Oath:

In the name of God - In the name of Bharat Mata – In the name of all the martyrs that have shed their blood for Bharat Mata.

By the love, innate in all men and women, that I bear to the land of my birth and wherein lie the scared ashes of my forefathers and which is the cradle of my children.

By the tears of the Hindi Mothers for their children whom the foreigner has enslaved, imprisoned, tortured and killed.

*I *** convinced that without Absolute Political Independence or Swaraj my country can never rise to the exalted position among the nations of the earth which is her due And convinced also that Swaraj can never be attained except by the waging of a bloody and relentless war against the foreigner,*

Solemnly and sincerely swear that I shall from this moment do everything in my power to fight for independence and place the Lotus Crown of Swaraj on the head of my mother;

And with this object, I join the Abhinav Bharat, the revolutionary society of all Hindustan, and swear that I shall ever be true and faithful to this solemn oath, and that I shall obey the orders of this body. If I betray this body the whole or any part of this solemn Oath or if I betray this body or any other body working with a similar object

May I be doomed to the fate of a perjurer.

This is reproduced for the awe inspiring language in an atmosphere, when the Congress was not even demanding Home Rule let alone Complete Independence.

The second important point which comes out is the secular nature of the oath making the body open to all without distinction of Caste, Class, Religion or Language; divisions which are the bane of our country. Those who accuse Savarkar out of ignorance or prejudice, of fermenting Communalism would do well to read this in its entirety and try to absorb its meaning

A little known fact is that the Congress sessions were used by Abhinav Bharat and other revolutionary societies such as Anushilan Society, as a common meeting ground and also for recruiting members from the sympathetic Congress Extremists. Indeed, the fourth annual convention of Abhinav Bharat was held secretly at Surat along with the Congress Session. 'The Lathi wielding volunteers who rushed to back up Tilak' noticed by the British Intelligence were none other than these members of Abhinav Bharat including Baba Savarkar. The British intelligence was thus fully justified of being deeply suspicious of the motives of the Extremist Group in the Congress led by Tilak.

Very soon, Abhinav Bharat had spread its web through out the country. A cardinal principle that was followed was that the members would not know each other in the interests of safety. Only some important leaders were aware of each other's identity. Different branches worked autonomously as a Confederation united very often by no more than ties of patriotism and study of common literature which included 'Forst's Secret Society of European Revolution' and later 'How the Russian Revolution is Organised'

The issue of resort to violence was one over which Savarkar agonized for a considerable time. As he says " In Abhinav Bharat we deliberated over many practical and philosophical issues. For instance, why did we want independence - We did so due to a firm belief that the progress of a nation is stunted in the absence of political freedom. Then the next issue that troubled us was whether the independence that we sought a bloodthirsty independence ? No ! For, it was not as if we were fond of advocating violence for the sake of violence. If someone had persuaded the British to leave Bharat without blood shed, if the Congress Moderates or the Extremists had any real chance of obtaining Independence through means legal to the British, we would have been most happy. After all, we were also humans. The attractions of life and particularly those of the youth were as alluring to us as anybody else. But the 'If' haunted us, as for us it was an impossible 'If'. Nevertheless, we considered all movements against the British, be those of the Moderates or the Extremists of the Congress as beneficial to the cause of Independence. Though our firm belief was that their methods were necessary but insufficient to attain Independence. Resort to arms was the inevitable

last step without which those attempts were bound to flounder. *We were not against the British race but we were against the British occupation of Bharat.* Some of us were also troubled by the inherent secrecy of our activities and the consequent need to be untruthful. A study of various incidents of the history convinced us that neither truth by itself is a virtue nor secrecy by itself is a sin. The truth which harms the mankind is a sin. Secrecy becomes necessary when the forces of tyranny make an open conduct for the good of people impossible. Our goal was not to seek private profit but to work for the good of the nation in an environment that was tyrannical. Thus, there was nothing wrong morally or sinful in our conduct of a secret society which advocated violence.

This also brought us to the realization that while violence was acceptable as a last resort against foreign forces of occupation, the resort to this extreme measure would be positively sinful when Independence is obtained and the country is ruled by a constitution ratified by the people”

These views were to be the bedrock of Savarkar’s beliefs throughout his life as is seen from his writings from time to time spread over more than sixty years of his public life. Indeed, the very public dissolution of Abhinav Bharat in May 1952, after the Independence was won, was the living proof that his actions matched his thought process.

By 1905, the political climate started changing. Partition of Bengal was announced which met with tremendous resistance. A wave of Swadeshi and boycott of all foreign goods started all over the country. The Japanese victory over Russia laid to rest the foolish notion of inherent European superiority over the Asiatic races. Lala Lajpat Rai appealed from Punjab to Indians to become arbitrators of their own destiny. From Bengal, Surendranath Banerjee encouraged the people to rise against the British. Tilak’s call from his base in Poona for Swaraj became more strident. In this charged atmosphere, how could Savarkar stand aloof?

The Savarkar group became ardent promoter of Bharatiya made goods. Representing the students at a meeting on 1st October, 1905, Savarkar urged his countrymen to abstain from purchasing foreign

goods and suggested that they make a bonfire of English and other Foreign goods on the Dassara Day, the holy day when Hindus all over the country burn effigies of Ravan, symbolizing the triumph of the Good over the Evil. Lokmanya Tilak was invited to the occasion. In his august presence, the city of Pune witnessed the first bonfire of foreign goods in Bharat on October 7, 1905. Its flame whirled high in the sky and singed the British sympathizers.

The leading role played by Savarkar earned him a fine and rustication from the college hostel. The moderates led by Gokhale including Gandhiji, who was then in South Africa, criticized the movement of Boycott and particularly the bonfire in the belief that it had its roots in hatred and violence. Sixteen years later, however, Gandhiji changed his opinion and made a public bonfire of foreign goods in Bombay on November 17, 1921. It was perhaps not a mere coincidence that Savarkar was born two years before the birth of the Congress. Perhaps it was a way of the fate to signal that Savarkar would always be ahead of the Congress in matters of nationalist thoughts and actions.

The turbulence of public activities was not to keep him from passing the year end examination. With graduation, it was now time to move to Bombay to study Law. The Bhagur typhoon now hit Bombay where he was to initiate people like B.G. Kher, who was to become Chief Minister of Bombay in 1935 and J.B.Kriplani destined to be the future President of the Congress, into Abhinav Bharat. The prolific writer Savarkar started contributing to 'Vihari' a local Marathi Weekly, which offered him a convenient platform for propagating the cause of Abhinav Bharat. Now his fame had spread through out Maharashtra and invitations to deliver public speeches came flooding in. The public activities and postures of Savarkar invited the attention of the British Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) as a potential troublemaker for the Raj. Abhinav Bharat, however, escaped their notice.

At this time Savarkar came to know of a scholarship for studies in London, being offered by Pandit Shymaji Krishna Varma, a wealthy Indian who, had left India since 1897, fearful of arrest for being in touch with Tilak, the man constantly out of favour with the authorities. After lying low for some time, he came to prominence with offer of a grant of £ 1,000 to Oxford University in memory of

Herbert Spencer in 1904. By January 1905, he started the “Home Rule Society” as well as a monthly magazine “Indian Sociologist”. The language used in the monthly magazine was far more seditious than that used by even the Congress Extremists, taking full advantage of the much greater personal liberty available in the U.K. than in the Indian colony. He also made a proposal to offer scholarship to Indian students for studying in London but with a provision that the scholarship holder should not ever take up a job in the Government. His proposal sent to the Congress was not even read out in its session as ‘it contained such severe denunciation of the Indian Government that it seemed inexpedient for me to read ...considering how important it is for the Congress, to maintain its character for loyalty and moderation’.

On July 1, 1905, he opened a hostel ‘India House’ at 65 Cromwell Avenue, Highgate, London. It is this India House that became the hub of revolutionary activities in Europe after Savarkar’s arrival in London. Pandit Varma was to shift his residence to Paris in September 1907, when the things became too hot, leaving the young Savarkar in charge of the India House.

However, all this was still in future. The experiences in Nasik, Pune and now Bombay had convinced Savarkar and his friends that Abhinav Bharat needed to go global. A dispassionate analysis made clear to them, their own limitations. The British had taken care to castrate the potential of Bharat to ever again pose a threat to their rule, as in 1857. The lessons of the ‘Mutiny’ were well learned. No Indian could become a commissioned officer in the army, the entry into which was restricted to a few so-called Martial races, a euphemism for those provinces, which had remained loyal to the Raj in 1857. On the side of the Civil Administration, though the iron frame, the Indian Civil Services, were thrown open to the Indians, the intake was restricted to the Indian elite, as the competitive exam was held only in the U.K.

The state of mind of the elite can easily be gauged by the utterances of the Moderates in Congress, who were no doubt rank revolutionaries compared to the Indian Elite; making sure that only the most loyal could even attempt an entry into the ICS. So thorough were they in their scrutiny of the candidates that throughout the

freedom struggle, no ICS officer ever resigned in support of the nationalist demand despite the heaven and earth moved by Mahatma Gandhi. Subhas Chandra Bose, being among the very few exceptions. To top it all, there was the Arms act, an unprecedented act of disarming an entire nation. Let alone the Revolutionaries, even the apostle of Non Violence Mahatma Gandhi found the act reprehensible. This is the way he has described his efforts to enlist people to join the British War effort during the World War I. “ One of the arguments I had used was distasteful to the Commissioner: ‘Among the many misdeeds of the British rule in India, history will look upon the Act depriving a whole nation of arms, as the blackest. If we want the Arms Act to be repealed, if we want to learn the use of arms, here is a golden opportunity.’”

With doors to even the access to corridors of power so firmly closed in India, who but a fool could dream of overthrowing the might of the British Empire on the strength of a few hundred unarmed members, however committed they might be. The rolls of Abhinav Bharat were full of people, who were anything but fools. They had already spent years in propagating the cause of political independence in an environment, where their own countrymen had done their best to ridicule and stop them. The seed of Independence was now firmly planted in many villages and towns of the country, unknown to the enemy. Hundreds of members were ready to sacrifice themselves; fully aware of the consequences, being trained both intellectually and physically. **Globalisation was now necessary to launch the final offensive.**

Savarkar grasped the outstretched hand of Shaymji Varma and won the scholarship on the strength of the recommendation of his childhood heroes, Tilak and Paranjpee. His own Father-in-law too promised financial help. With the flanks so secured, Savarkar set sail to London on the steamer ‘Persia’ on June 9, 1906.

The reason for traveling to the U.K. was, as he explained “ Ostensibly to become a Barrister but that is only the means. In England I would get a chance to influence those people who would later hold positions of great power, in their formative years. Thus, a small propaganda in favour of revolution in England will have the potential of soon spreading all over Bharat. Moreover, one Public Meeting in the heart

of London propagating revolution would have far more impact on the British people than thousands of such meetings in Bharat. One revolutionary act in London spreads the cause of Indian Independence throughout the continent of Europe. The Congress leaders of all the hues keep on repeating ad nauseum that ‘We are loyal to the British Crown. We desire British Rule. All we want are some improvements.’ Thus, the people in Europe and America genuinely believe that not only we want the British rule but are indeed fit only to live under their rule. We, the revolutionaries are now going to proclaim to the world from our base in the heart of the enemy camp that not only we do not want improvements in the British Rule; we do not want the British rule itself. Finally, the climate in Europe is much more conducive to gaining access to the means of the revolution, the much needed Arms, the skills to make Bombs, which is simply impossible under present circumstances in Bharat. The most important thing is that the stay in London can be fruitfully utilized to make contacts with the powers that are hostile to the British, so that the opportunity of a great war between them can be utilized for the cause of Indian Independence. *It is true that all this is but a dream but has anything worthwhile ever been achieved without a dream”*

What a shame that we, the heirs to these great revolutionaries, sixty years after Independence keep on either dreaming of foolish globalisation without regard to its consequences for us or demand a level playing field. Have we lost our will to succeed in the world on our own?

The revolutionaries failed in their first attempt. All of us know that. But do we not realize that this failure was more glorious than many of our so-called successes. And did they really fail? Had they not done the impossible of making the word ‘Independence’ so respectable in the nation that even the Congress was forced to recognise it in its vocabulary.

The British, who were forced to leave Bharat within forty years of Savarkar landing in London, certainly knew the worth of the revolutionaries very well and therefore had spared no efforts at demoralising them completely, an act that was doomed to fail.

Chapter III

Savarkar at India House in London

“We cannot control the spread of sedition in India, until its London connection had been eliminated’ admitted George Clark at the beginning of 1910. The Indian Viceroy, Minto, who had narrowly escaped in an attempt on his life at Ahmedabad on 13th November 1909; was worried that not enough was being done to keep track of London plotters.

On the face of it, it was inexplicable that the Raj should feel threatened in 1910. The Raj reprisal after the bomb thrown at Muzzafarpur in 1908 had been swift and merciless. Finding that the docile Indian was a myth and that the age of “the mute acquiescence” had passed forever, the Raj responded with a show of muscle and cunningness. Tilak was accordingly packed off to Mandalay. The instigators of Khudiram Bose had been tracked down, in what came to be known as Maniktola conspiracy, and dealt with in a harsh manner. Even as it bared its fangs, the Raj sought to draw the moderate Congressmen into the folds of power. The instrument was the Indian Councils Act, more commonly known as Morley-Minto reforms, announced in November 1908. This provided for election of sixty Indian representatives to the Viceroy’s Executive Council, though there was no pretence of giving the Indians any real power. Mischievously, it provided for separate electorates for the Muslims in a bid to keep the major communities apart.

That the so called reforms were nothing but a mask to hide the real intentions of perpetuating British rule for ever; was clear from the reply Lord Morley gave in the House of Lords on 17th December 1908. Responding to his critics that he was giving away far too much to Indians, he replied; “ If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one would have nothing at all to do with it.” Despite this disclaimer that showed the real face of Imperialism, Congress moderates were all too happy to welcome the measures, having got more than what they had ever expected. A sort of avowed entente grew up; the government and the nationalist opposition were more in accord with each other than at any time between 1888 and

1937, now that the Extremist section was locked away. Why then in 1910 did the Raj continue to feel more unsafe at anytime since the tumultuous days of 1857? Let us now go back to the story of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Savarkar's literary contribution to the cause of Independence in the form of his writing on Mazzini and 1857 is already documented in the "British Munitny of 1857". Savarkar was, however, not only a historian but himself a creator of history. In his short stay of less than four years in London, he went on to leave his mark in a manner that led the British Government to conclude that unless he was removed from London, their rule in India would not be safe. The amazing impact of this young man from Bhagur needs a little elaboration.

Free India Society

Savarkar, as we already know, had set sail for London on 9th June 1906 with the avowed intention of furthering the cause of Independence. A born organiser, he could not sit still and waste the one month long journey to London. It is on Steamer 'Persia' itself that he started his work. He made two new devoted members of Abhinav Bharat – Harnam Singh and one more person, who remains anonymous, as per his own request, Savarkar never named him but merely called him 'Shishtachar.' From an account of Savarkar's associate V.M.Bhat, he appears to be Mirza Abbas of the Nabha state.

Both – Bhat and Abbas went on to assist Savarkar in numerous ways through out his stay in London. 'Shishtachar' contributed generously to the cause of Independence. If in any meeting, there ever was a hint of danger, he made sure that a protective cordon was thrown around Savarkar.

In 1906, there were barely 2,000 Indian students in London. Most of them were sons of the Indian elite, who were as a class more loyal to the King than the King himself. The height of their aspirations was to be accepted as a true English Gentleman. In this quest, they went to ludicrous extent of adopting what they considered British life style. Gandhiji's own quest in this regard in 1888 is worth reading in his own words.

On reaching London, his (Gandhiji's) first task was "undertook the all too impossible task of becoming an English gentleman. The cloths after the Bombay cut that I was wearing, were I thought, unsuitable for English society, and I got new ones at Army and Navy stores. I also went in for a chimney-pot hat costing nineteen shillings-an excessive price in those days. Not content with this, I wasted ten pounds on an evening suit made in Bond street, the centre of fashionable life in London; and got my good and noble-hearted brother to send me a double watch-chain of gold....As if all this was not enough to make me look the thing, I directed my attention to other details that were supposed to go towards the making of an English gentleman. I was told it was necessary for me to take lessons in dancing, French and elocution...so I invested £ 3 in a violin and something more in fees. I sought a third teacher to give me lessons in elocution and I paid him a preliminary fees of a guinea..."

Nehru's life in London was not very different. Unlike Gandhiji, he did not have to take any special efforts to integrate in English society. His very western upbringing had already taken care of this. Interestingly, Nehru reached London by end of May 1905, a year before Savarkar did - at an impressionable age of fifteen. Throughout his seven-year stay, which more or less coincided, with Savarkar's own stay in London, he keenly followed the political developments in India. At one stage, he even had the cheek to upbraid his own father on reading an article of his. "I wrote to him rather an impertinent letter in which I suggested that no doubt the British Government was greatly pleased with his political activities. This was just the kind of suggestion, which would make him wild, and he was very angry. He almost thought of asking me to return from England immediately." In his own words again, "It is curious that in spite of my growing extremism in politics, *I did not then view with any strong disfavour the idea of joining the ICS and thus becoming a cog in the British Government's administrative machine in India.* Such an idea in later years would have been repellent to me".

If this was the state of mind of the two people, who were to later become leading lights of the freedom struggle, the British influence on minds of the ordinary Indian students can easily be imagined. It is in this sterile environment that Savarkar set out to sow the seeds of a freedom struggle.

By December 1906, he had influenced enough like minded people to form Free India Society. Gyanchand Verma, Harnam Singh, Khan, Jaiswal, Sen, Madanlal Dhingra, Koregaokar, Bhai Paramanand, Baba Joshi, Bapat, Maheshcharan Singh, Hardayal - all joined hands with Savarkar in setting up the Society. They were to be soon joined by Hemchandra Das, who was specifically sent by Aurobindo Ghose to learn skills of making bombs. Many others like Madam Cama, Sardar Singh Rana soon joined the India House gang. Savarkar was now to embark on a career that continues to dazzle, a century later.

Under the Free India Society's banner; India House became meeting ground for nationalists of all hues. By 10th May 1907, the Free India Society had enough members to celebrate the 50th anniversary of 1857. The meeting has been thus described by Indulal Yagnik, "The 10th May, however, did not pass unnoticed in London. Vinayak Savarkar had not spent a year at the India House in vain. He had already carried an intensive propaganda among the wide circle of Indians in London, just as he had carried on thorough-going research in the events of the great war with the help of classical works on the subject, fully equipped with historical material on the subject, Savarkar held a private celebration of the fiftieth anniversary which was attended by a small but determined group of young enthusiasts at the India House."

In the meanwhile, Pandit Shaymji Varma, the patron of India House decided to leave London and settle in Paris. No doubt the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai to Mandalay in 1907, had deeply unsettled him. Savarkar was now fully in charge of the India House. The halls of India House reverberated with discussions on Mazzini and 1857, the revolutionary literature that Savarkar was actively working on. The story of Mazzini had already created a sensation in Maharashtra by middle of 1907. Free India Society decided to popularise the cause of Indian freedom on an international level. As a part of this quest, Savarkar wrote political articles on Indian affairs for a New York publication and got them translated in German, French, Italian, Russian, and Portuguese. The translated articles were printed in the respective countries by the Society members. Madam Cama and Sardar Singh Rana attended International Socialist Congress, which was held on 22nd August 1907 at Stuttgart in Germany.

Their attempt to get a resolution passed in favour of Indian Independence was blocked by the British delegates. This could not either stop Madam Cama from unfurling the flag of Independent India at the Conference, nor deter her from making an impassioned speech calling for Indian freedom. Society's attempts to make the cause of Indian freedom a live international issue bore fruit when the German Emperor Kaiser clearly told the American President Wilson that Absolute Political Independence of India was one of the indispensable conditions for world peace.

Abhinav Bharat

Free India Society was merely the public face of the secret revolutionary society. Soon after the May 1907 function, P.M. alias Senapati Bapat, Hemchandra Das, Mirza Abbas set out in search of the technology to make bombs. They established a contact with a Russian revolutionary, Safranski, an ex officer of Engineers Corps and then a student at Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris. It is through Safranski that Bapat could obtain a copy of the manual at Berlin. Language now appeared as a stumbling block for the manual was in Russian. Bapat once again provided a solution. He got it translated in English by his Russian girl friend - Miss Annya, a medical student at Berlin. Finally, a few usable copies were ready. In an age when Photocopying was yet to be invented, the revolutionaries guarded the precious copies with missionary zeal. This did not stop them from sending one copy to Tilak as a mark of their gratitude. The copy was handed over by Hotilal Verma. Other people who got these prized copies included Sikender Hyat Khan.

The revolutionaries now took to making bombs as described in the manual. It is during one such an experiment that the valour of Madanlal Dhingra came to Savarkar's notice. During one late night experiment, he realized to his horror that the chemicals that were being heated had reached their flash point. There was nothing around to lift the pot from the burner. Time was running out. Possibility of an explosion was very real. Every body was frantically looking around for something to hold the burning hot pot containing the chemicals. It is at this critical juncture that Madanlal, stepped forward and coolly lifted the pot with his bare hands.

Hem Chandra Das soon returned to India with his newly acquired skills and a copy of the manual. With this, the Maniktola conspiracy soon came to haunt the British. By December 1907, The Commissioner of Police in Paris informed British intelligence that Indian revolutionaries had acquired the dreaded skill to make bombs. No headway could be made till the blasts of Muzzafarpur rocked the Raj in April 1908. In a swift action, Police were then able to trace the blasts back to Calcutta and raid the head quarters of Bengali revolutionaries by 2nd May 1908. What they found in a house located in Maniktola Gardens caused their eyes to bulge.

The house owned by the Ghose family was a veritable institute to impart practical instructions in revolutionary methods and manufacture of explosives. The police were able to recover a large cache of guns, revolvers, dynamite and material for making bombs. In this raid the revolutionaries also lost one of their prized copies of the Bomb manual.

On 12th May 1908, when Tilak wrote the article in defense of Khudiram Bose, the full dimensions of the Maniktola conspiracy were well known. He well knew the fate that awaited him, when he penned his thoughts. Such reckless disregard to consequences is usually the prerogative of an impetuous youth and not of a reasoned mature statesman, 52 years of age. One can not but bow in reverence to this courageous act. No wonder, Jinnah had nothing but the highest regard for Tilak throughout his life.

As many as thirty freedom fighters were committed to trial on 19th August 1908 and seven more were added to the list on 14th September. In between, on August 31st, Kanai Lal Dutt and Satyendra Nath Bose shot an approver dead. This approver had disclosed the part played by Bapat in the Bomb manual episode, forcing him to go underground for years. Dutt and Bose were executed for their deed but their act enabled Bapat to see an independent India. A relatively protracted trial followed. First judgement was delivered on May 6th 1909. Four – Barindra Kumar Ghose, Ullaskar Dutt, Hemchandra Das and Upendra Nath Banerjee were sentenced to transportation for life, while ten others were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. On November 23rd, the convictions were upheld by High Court. By 18th February 1910, final part of the legal farce was over.

The case of Aurobindo Ghose caused considerable excitement. He was widely perceived as the moving spirit behind the whole conspiracy. For instance, the School for Revolution in Maniktola was organised along the lines laid down by him in his pamphlet, Bhawani Mandir. Overwhelming sentiment, cutting across all shades of political opinion, however, favoured his acquittal. The revolutionaries let it be openly known that the Judge who convicted him would have to pay for his act with his life. Want of direct evidence, fear of life, the need of the Establishment not to offend the Indian sentiment beyond a point; all played a role in his acquittal.

Whatever the Congress moderates professed to believe, the Raj knew the trials were not criminal in nature but were essentially political. It is this knowledge that caused acquittal of Aurobindo and also made the Raj refrain from subjecting Tilak to physically rigorous prison life. It rested content with removing him from the political scene and subjecting him to a solitary confinement that was no less inhuman. More proof of the Raj intentions, if ever needed, were laid bare in the telegram that Savarkar's associates in Abhinav Bharat intercepted during Tilak trial. Sent to Viceroy by Justice Davar, who was trying Tilak, it read "Defence grave, depending Jury". So much for the famed separation of Judiciary and Executive during the British Rule.

Maniktola was not the only revolutionary act that the London based Savarkar was involved in. Even as he wrote the History of 1857, he conspired to cause an uprising in Punjab, the province that had let the country down in 1857. Savarkar took to learning Gurumukhi enabling him to prepare the revolutionary literature for the Sikh soldiers in their native language. He also read the Sikh scriptures. Indeed, he also wrote a book 'History of Sikhs'. Unfortunately, no copy of this has survived the turmoil of the revolutionary ferment.

With the help of the man, we know only as Shishtachar, he started sending the revolutionary literature to various parts of Punjab. This anonymous freedom fighter appears to have belonged to well to do family of a trading community. This is evident not only from the generous contribution made by him to the cause but also organising the dispatch of the material hidden inside the goods being imported by merchants in Punjab. This lends credence to the belief that Shishtachar was indeed Mirza Abbas of Nabha state.

No doubt Harnam Singh, who belonged to a prestigious Sikh family, also lent his full weight to the effort in a bid to wipe stigma on the fair name of Sikhs. This appears to have played no small part in the wide spread discontent that erupted in Punjab during 1906-1907 and caused the British endless worries.

By now, Savarkar was a revolutionary in his own right and no blind follower of Tilak. This did not mean that there ever existed any antipathy between the two. Indeed, yet another telegram intercepted by Abhinav Bharat between the Secretary of State, Morley and the Viceroy shows their relationship in true light.

It said “G.K. informs that Savarkar and Bapat are close associates of Tilak. Kindly therefore keep strict watch on Savarkar.” Reference to G.K. was taken to mean Gopal Krishna Gokhale infuriating the Abhinav Bharat members. Though Savarkar himself never believed the accusation (of being police informer) against Gokhale.

In 1908, even as the bomb explosions were rocking Muzzafarpur, Free India Society was busy arranging to organise the 51st anniversary of 1857 on a grand scale in London itself. This was an audacious challenge to the might of the Raj, particularly intolerable in view of the ongoing disturbances back in India.

On this occasion, Savarkar prepared a pamphlet entitled “Oh Martyrs!!” It was a clear and unambiguous clarion call for Independence. The inspiring piece of penmanship, in the age when the ‘Sun never set on the Empire’; was bearding the devil in its own lair.

The tone and tenor can be glimpsed from the very first sentence,

*“The War of Freedom Once Begun,
And Handed Down from Sire to Progeny,
Though Often Lost
Is Ever Won”*

It went on to champion the cause of freedom in firm and clear language and went on to end with the following;

“For, the bones of Bahadur Shah are crying vengeance from their grave! For, the blood of the dauntless Laxmi is boiling with indignation! For, the shahid Peer Ali of Patna when he was going to the gallows for having refused to divulge the secrets of the conspiracy whispered defiance to the Firungee said in prophetic words “You may hang me today, you may hang such as me every day but thousands will still arise in my place. Your objectives will never be gained. Indians, these words must be fulfilled! Your blood oh Martyrs shall be avenged!”

Bande Mataram!”

The function itself was a grand success. For days before hand, a festive environment pervaded the Indian society. A big crowd gathered at India House on the 10th May. Savarkar himself has thus described the setting of the function. “The hall of India House was well decorated. A huge blood red cloth decorated with flowers was hung in front of the audience. The names of Bahadur Shah, Nanasahib Peshwa, Rani Laxmibai, Molvi Ahmedshah, Raja Kunwar Singh and the names of other heroes of 1857 were written in half a foot high letters on the cloth in golden, green, white and pink colours. Pictures of various patriots were hung around the hall.

Celebrations of dreaded 1857, language adopted in the pamphlet, publication of Mazzini’s Autobiography, the now no longer secret connections of Maniktola revolutionaries with India House Group meant that the revolutionary nature of their activities were no longer hidden from the British Intelligence. Free India Society and Abhinav Bharat were now merged together for all practical purposes. Much as they would have liked to, the Raj authorities could not move against them without causing serious loss of face for the English in Europe. the celebrations of 1857 reverberated through out London. Principal of the college, where Harnam Singh and M.R.Khan, were studying abused the Bharatiya heroes of the Great War. This infuriated them. They choose to quit the college rather than swallow the insult.

The conviction of Tilak in July 1908 was condemned by all sections of the society. A protest meeting was held in London. Gokhale, who was in London, chose not to attend the meeting. By end of 1908, India House had played host to a number of nationalist leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipinchandra Pal, Har Dayal and Dadasahib Khaparde.

In the charged atmosphere that prevailed in the latter half of 1908, the revolutionary fervour in the India House Group increased considerably. Any proposal to have any truck with the government brought forth only jeers. Monte-Moreley reforms were scoffed at. On 8th of November 1908, Savarkar spoke on “Are we really disarmed”. He pointed out that in spite of the Arms Act there was considerable warlike material in India. He instanced the Native states and Native troops, which he said, would be sufficient to overpower and drive the British out of India. What was wanted was active work in the Native states and among the native troops, and it would be the duty of every Indian leaving these shores for India to work in that direction. Savarkar for one; was certainly working tirelessly for the cause.

On this occasion , he also defined Secularism when he spoke of Hindus as heart of Bharatiya society and added that different religions like Muslims, Christians, Zorastrians etc were like different colours of rainbow, which added to the beauty of the society.

Thus respect for all religions and abhorance of violence in an independent country were two fundamental pillars of the philosophy of Abhinav Bharat.

Unfortunately, it appears that some members of a group that called itself Abhinav Bharat, allegedly carried out terrorist acts that killed scores of Muslims at Malegaon and other places in and about 2008. This defamed the sacred term **Abhinav Bharat** as never before. Many have talked about so called involvement of Savarkar in the murder of the Mahatma. But no one – just no one had ever before even whispered that Abhinav Bharat was in any way involved in the 1948 murder of the Mahatma. It was therefore a tragedy of colossal proportions that sixty years later, for the first time ever Abhinav Bharat became a dirty word for many. Our Abhinav Bharat registered in 2002 fought a long legal battle to remove this unjustified taint.

More of it later. Meanwhile back in India, growth of Abhinav Bharat picked up pace. Branches were being set up all over the Bombay presidency, penetrating as far as Gwalior in the north. Bapat had returned by March 1908 to disseminate the skills to make bombs.

Poverty was no deterrence to the cause. V.M.Bhat, his mother and grandmother were living on a monthly income of Rs seven and a half. Aba Darekar, poet Govind, could sustain themselves only because their mother was working as a maidservant. Bengal revolutionaries were no better off. Half cut coconuts were used by them as utensils to eat. Yet, none of them was prepared to dilute the ideal. Any money that they could lay their hands on was immediately utilised for buying arms, and material to make bombs. Attempts were being made to coordinate the efforts with the other revolutionary groups such as the Anusilan Samiti of Dacca. By 1908, Abhinav Bharat had set up a secret unit at Vasai, near Bombay, to manufacture bombs. This unit was never to be discovered by police.

By early 1909, Savarkar arranged for a consignment of 21 Browning pistols and thousands of rounds of ammunition to be sent to his associates in India. The courier was Chaturbhuj Amin, then employed as a cook at the India House. The plan was to rock the Raj to its roots by simultaneous assassination of 21 District Collectors – the symbol of the might of the Raj.

By this time, Baba Savarkar was already under watch following the telegraphic warning received by the Viceroy. In February 1909, tragedy struck the Savarkar family. Savarkar's young son died of smallpox. This did not stop Baba from coming to Bombay to receive the pistols. It appears that the Intelligence had already received information about the consignment that was on its way. In a bid to stop him from receiving the pistols, he was arrested at Bombay on 28th February 1909. A nationalist police officer, Rambahu Ballal, ensured that Baba would have a chance to talk to Bhat, who was then free. Unfortunately, Baba did not avail of the opportunity to inform Bhat about the location of the secret papers. As a result, in the ensuing raid on Baba's house, the police discovered one copy of the Bomb manual and several other papers about the activities of Abhinav Bharat.

The prosecution harped on the crime committed by Baba for having published some verses by poet Govind. These Marathi verses meant that history teaches that no one has got independence without war. Those who desire Independence must wage a war. These were taken as incitement to violence. By 8th June 1909, he was sentenced to transportation for life. The discovery of the Bomb manual no doubt came in very handy for the prosecution. The arrest of Baba Savarkar did not prevent the consignment of the pistols from safely reaching the hands of the Abhinav Bharat members. The police investigations intensified following his arrest, leaving Abhinav Bharat no choice but to lie low for some time.

Back in London, Savarkar was heart broken by the untimely death of his only son. Baba's arrest caused him deep anguish. He knew his family in Nasik now faced utter ruin with the only earning member behind the bars. All for a cause that seemed hopeless. A lesser man would have given up the impossible struggle. Savarkar's resolve only hardened. Abhinav Bharat now decided to strike in London itself.

The British Empire was rocked by the assassination of Colonel William Curzon –Wyllie, Political Aide-de-Camp, at the India office on 1st July 1909. The assassin was Madan Lal Dhingra. It was no ordinary murder driven by personal grievance but, a political statement of Abhinav Bharat. During the course of the trial, Madan Lal Dhingra made his stand very clear.

“I maintain that if it is patriotic for an Englishman to fight against the Germans if they occupy the country, it is much more justified and patriotic in my case to fight against the English. I hold the English responsible for the murder of eighty million of Indian people in the last fifty years”

Those who find this a figment of imagination would well to recall Eric Hobsbawm , who has noted that “Of all the territories under administration of European governments...even including Tsarist Russia, India continued to be haunted by most gigantic and murderous famines...increasingly so as the century wore on”.

Nor was the choice of a British civil servant as a target on account of any personal grievance. As Madan Lal added “The Englishman who goes out to India and gets £ 100 a month, that simply means he passes a death sentence on a thousand of my poor countrymen, because those thousand people could easily live on £ 100 which the Englishman spends mostly on his frivolities and pleasures.”

Once again the statement was not one to be dismissed lightly. As we have seen Bhat’s family of three was at this time living on what amounted to an income of half a £ per month. Moreover, the just and fair Government of India, under the benevolence of the British parliament had no problem in spending as much as four times the money on pensions of British civil servants alone; than the money made available for famine relief.

The reality of British loot during the colonial era can not be wished away by lamenting about the present day corruption. It is quite likely that the revolutionaries like Madan Lal would have meted out the same treatment to the present day corrupt.

In the final part of the statement, Madan Lal appealed to the world at large. He said; “I put forward this statement to show the justice of my cause to the outside world and especially to our sympathisers in America and Germany.” This was really rubbing salt on to the British wounds.

It was widely believed, though never proven, that it was Savarkar who not only sent Madan Lal on his mission but had also drafted his statement. Indeed, he went even further. Immediately after the assassination, a meeting was held at Caxton Hall in London. Attended by several prominent Indians, it attempted to pass a resolution condemning Madan Lal. Savarkar rose to oppose the motion on the ground that since the matter was subjudice, the meeting could not arrogate to itself the right to condemn an undertrial. This created a commotion. In the ensuing melee, Savarkar was stuck on the head and started bleeding. This enraged his associates. A Sikh associate of Savarkar rained blows on his attacker. Another associate, Aiyyar, was on the point of drawing a revolver to shoot the man but Savarkar restrained him.

The point was made and Madan Lal could not be condemned. Let no one sing praises of English fairness on account of this. The incident had its fall out. The point made by Savarkar was within the English law but the incident was used to deny him recognition as a Barrister. The Madan Lal trial was brought to a speedy conclusion. He was sentenced to be hanged on 17th August 1909. The Raj was to have one more shock. Madan Lal had one statement on his person, when arrested. The police suppressed it. Court supported the police action. Yet, to their shock, they found it published in all the British newspapers on 16th August. It boldly stated:

“I attempted to shed English blood intentionally and of purpose, as a humble protest against the inhuman transportations and hangings of the Indian youth....I believe that a nation unwillingly held down by foreign bayonets is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible, I attacked by surprise - since cannon could not be had, I drew forth and fired a revolver.”

The British humiliation was complete. Now, the Raj was fully convinced of Savarkar’s complicity in Madan Lal affair. By this time, Shyamji Verma had sold off the India House. It became difficult for Savarkar to find a roof over his head as his reputation preceded him everywhere he went to look for a place. For some time he stayed with Bipinchandra Pal. He spent some time at Bryton in the first half of August 1908 with Nirenjan Pal.

It is while sitting desolately on the seashore of Bryton one evening that the poet in Savarkar came to fore. A young man in an alien land, with near and dear ones thousands of miles away; who was facing tragedies galore. Death of a son, imprisonment of a father like brother; improvisation of his family to the point of starvation, imminent death of a friend, hunted by an Empire that was the strongest and the biggest the mankind has ever known. This was Savarkar that memorable evening. As he watched the waves, a haunting song sprang forth his lips.

Niranjan Pal has thus described the creation of the song.

“Presently, he commenced to hum a song. He sang as he composed. It was a Marathi song, describing the pitiable serfdom of India. Forgetful of all else, Savarkar went on singing. Presently tears began to roll down his cheeks. His voice became choked. The song remained unfinished. Savarkar began to weep like a child.”

I had the good fortune to listen to this song in the immortal melodious voice of Lata Mangeshkar at Mumbai nearly ninety years later, with my family. It is an appeal to the ocean to take the singer back to his motherland. As the magic of the song cast its spell on us, I looked around. It was clear that the vast gathering of about 50,000 people, many of whom did not know Marathi, could feel the agony of Savarkar, who was reaching out to us across the barriers of time and space.

It is time that we now look at the interaction of Gandhiji with the India House group. It is during 1906 that he had first visited the India House, while on a visit to London to protest against Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance. His meeting with Savarkar was cordial, as he himself later confirmed in a letter to S.D.Deo on 20th July 1937. It appears that this contact was maintained subsequently. The meetings served to provide a platform to hold discussions on the relative merits and demerits of Non violence. Ideological gap was too wide to be bridged. By October 1909, Savarkar was keen to regroup the nationalist forces, which were somewhat in disarray following the closure of the India House and the prosecution of Madan Lal. For this purpose, he decided to organise Dassara celebrations. None of the established Indian leaders could be persuaded to preside over the Dassara meeting.

Gandhiji, who was then in London was approached. Savarkar was the acknowledged leader of Revolutionary party, while Gandhiji was still enamoured of the virtues of the Raj. Discussions were held and a compromise was reached, when it was agreed that neither parties would refer to Madan Lal. With this, Gandhiji agreed to preside over the meeting. Savarkar and Gandhiji came together on a public platform for the first and last time on 14th October 1909. Gandhiji was full of praise for the fact that even though the occasion was a Hindu festival, people from all communities were participating in the function. He went on to add that though he had a difference of

opinion with Savarkar, he was proud to share the dais with him and prayed that the country would benefit from his selfless sacrifice and patriotism for a long time to come.

Next meeting of Gandhiji with Savarkar was to take place eighteen years later, on 1st March 1927 at Ratnagiri. The world had changed in between. Gandhiji was now a Mahatma, while Savarkar was the Swatantraveer. Ideological gap had widened beyond reconciliation. **They were never to meet again.**

Gandhiji has himself referred to these meetings. In a 1938 article published in Hind Swaraj, he wrote: “ I came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their bravery impressed me but I feel that their zeal was misguided, I feel that violence was no remedy for India’s ills and that her civilisation required the use of a different and higher weapon for self protection.”

There is no record of any meeting of Nehru with Savarkar. For a politically conscious young man that Nehru was during his stay in London from 1905 to 1912; his silence on the activities of India House Group, is strange to say the very least. In his autobiography, all he has to say on the subject is a terse short sentence: “In London we used to hear also of Shyamji Krishnavarma and his India House but I never met him or visited him. Sometimes we saw his Indian Sociologist.” This was the same young man, who was at this time upbraiding his own father for being pro British. Nor was he unaware of Savarkar, as is clear from his lamenting over the ban on Savarkar’s account of 1857 in ‘Discovery of India’. Strange indeed are the ways of the High and Mighty.

Unknown to anyone but the destiny, by December 1909 Savarkar’s work in London was nearing its final phase. Back in India, the members of Abhinav Bharat were getting restless. Impatience to be a Martyr like Khudiram Bose, Madan Lal Dhingra was growing. Harsh sentences on Tilak, heroes of Maniktola, Baba Savarkar were fuelling the fires of revenge. Attempts by leaders like Bhat to introduce restraint in the ranks were not being very successful as was clear from the attempt to assassinate Lord Minto in Ahmedabad on 13th November 1909. The youngest brother of Savarkar was caught as a suspect but was later let off. Finally, the dam burst. Anant Kanhere, a

young lad of 16, assassinated Jackson, the District Collector of Nasik on 21st December 1909 with the pistol sent by Savarkar earlier in the year. The trail was to lead back straight to Savarkar and snare him in the imperial trap.

This was still in the future. For the moment, people like George Clark could not but lament that unless the London terrorists were caught, India would not have peace. They were now to have their chance but peace in India would nonetheless elude them.

The torch of freedom would now find fresh pair of hands every time the bearer fatigued. The Sun would set on the Empire.

Chapter IV

Globalisation of Bharatiya Freedom Trial of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar

Abhinav Bharat had by 1909 spread its web throughout the Marathi speaking areas of the Bombay presidency. Nasik, Pune, Pen, Mumbai, Vasai, Kolhapur, Satara, had active branches. Its work had spread beyond the confines of Bombay presidency to Aurangabad, Hyderabad, Baroda, Gwalior. The international branch headed by Savarkar is by now already well known to the readers. It followed the pattern of Russian and Irish secret societies. Each branch was independent. Only the heads of the branches knew each other. There was no contact between the members of different branches. The membership was strictly by invitation. A passionate desire to work for freedom of the country was a prerequisite. Intelligence, education and moderate to poor financial resources were the other common attributes shared by all. None suffered from the debilitating concepts of the essential goodness of the Raj. Its strict secrecy norms enabled them to escape the notice of the British intelligence till the assassination of Jackson. Even then Bomb making centers at places like Vasai escaped detection.

The objectives of Abhinav Bharat were quite clear. These included developing a dedicated core team of members working in tandem with other similar groups supported by its sympathisers in different wings of the Government so that at an opportune time, a massive blow in the cause of freedom could be struck. Incipient signs of a major struggle in Europe were clearly visible. The Society was therefore making preparations to take advantage of such a power struggle for the cause of Bharatiya freedom, just as Mazzini had done in what was then, in the living memory. The reference to Germany and America in the last part of Madan Lal's statement was no accident.

Dr. Vishnu Mahadev Bhat was a close associate of Savarkar and was one of the major leaders of the branch in Bharat. It was he who together with Patankar, Thatte and Gore arranged for the safe distribution of the pistols received from Savarkar during March 1909. He was acutely aware of the haste with which the Abhinav Bharat

members were prepared to attack the symbols of the Raj, in what they perceived as the cause of freedom. Bhat knew better and advocated patience. Things became very difficult by October 1909. Bombs were under preparation, Pistols were already at hand. Government was providing one provocation after the other. Transportation for life awarded to Baba, Maniktola heroes, hanging of Madan Lal all made the young revolutionary blood boil. Conviction of 20 members of the Gwalior branch in August was the veritable last straw. Bhat realised the danger. In a meeting of the branch heads, he got them to commit to a specific plan of simultaneous uprising in Bengal and Maharashtra. Karve, the head of Nasik branch, was among those who agreed to this plan of action.

The unexpected news of the Jackson assassination came as a thunder bolt not only to the Raj but also to the leaders of Abhinav Bharat. Anant Kanhere was an unknown entity to all except the members of Nasik branch. His arrest did not therefore ring alarm bells. A few days later, when the name of Karve figured in those arrested that the seriousness of the situation became apparent. With remarkable presence of mind, they eliminated all traces of Bomb making at Vasai. So successful was this, that the chief of Vasai center, Rambahu Bhatt, remained undetected and indeed later joined and retired from Government service. Police investigations became swift and merciless, when they stumbled upon the news of 21 pistol consignment from London. By 1st week of January 1910, all the major leaders of Abhinav Bharat were under arrest. Chaturbhuj Amin had confessed that Savarkar was the dispatcher of Pistols, nine months earlier, from London. This was the opportunity that the Raj was waiting for to wreck its vengeance on the upstart young man.

The hitherto secret existence of Abhinav Bharat came to the knowledge of the Raj. George Clarke, Governor of Bombay, appointed Montgomerie, a special magistrate at Nasik and decided to prosecute Savarkar. A complaint was filed on January 17, 1910 before Montgomerie, who dutifully issued a warrant for arrest of Savarkar as sought by the Government of Bombay. A telegraphic warrant was issued under the Fugitive Offender Act of 1881. The warrant was granted by Bow Street Court, London on February 22nd, 1910.

Meanwhile, in London, ever since the closure of the India House, Savarkar was keeping indifferent health on account of irregular meals. Like other Abhinav Bharat members in India, he was also taken by surprise by the developments in Nasik. The pistols were after all in India for more than nine months. In any case, the plan had been to launch a simultaneous attack and not cause an isolated incident. The strain proved too much and his health broke down and he became seriously ill. His friends advised rest in Paris, where he would be out of the harm's way. The news of the intentions of the Government of Bombay following confessions of Chaturbhuj Amin reached him in London. By the time, the complaint was filed against him on 17th January 1910; he was already safe in Paris since 6th January 1910. His return to London of his own volition on Sunday, the 13th March 1910, less than two months later, to virtually get himself arrested; remains till date, an unresolved mystery.

Savarkar himself never shed any light on the incident. Keer has compared it to Shivaji going to Agra. This comparison does not stand a moment's scrutiny. For one, Shivaji was forced to go to Agra following his comprehensive defeat by Mirza Raje. Moreover, the Rajputs had sworn to defend Shivaji from any harm. Neither was Savarkar under any compulsion to go to London nor had any one given him the slightest assurance of safety. Karandikar has attributed it to his desire to make sure that the London activities of the revolutionaries remain on track. He also claims that Savarkar did not want himself to be subjected to the kind of criticism that was being heaped on Shaymji Varma for inciting violence while he himself remained in safety in Paris. There may be some truth in this but, surely Savarkar was too intelligent to not realise that a two month absence could not attract the kind of criticism that Shaymji Varma attracted, being away from London for over two years. Bhat has severely criticised Savarkar for his reckless act. This criticism, made openly in a book recommended by Savarkar himself, remained unanswered by him.

There has been some talk of Scotland Yard having lured Savarkar to London by false letters written in the name of a girl. A charge that has been indignantly but rather unconvincingly rejected by his biographers. He would certainly not be the first revolutionary to have had an extra-marital affair. It is not unknown for either a pretty young

girl to fall in love with a handsome young man of 27 nor for the young man to reciprocate the love. The mystique of a revolutionary would have only added to the attraction. Did this really happen to Savarkar ? One can only speculate. There is the curious and real case of one English woman Miss Hilda Howsin, who was arrested during the World War I, in 1915, for maintaining contact with the India House Group, which by then had shifted to Berlin. What was motivating this girl to act against the interests of her own nation? Was it love - was Hilda the lady love of Savarkar – a question that remains unanswered. Even if Savarkar was in love and fell into the police trap, it does not in any way diminish the value of his work. On the other hand, it only adds to the glamour of a romantic revolutionary. It provided proof if any was ever needed; that he was no blood thirsty monster motivated by racial hatred against the British but a human being with inherent fragilities.

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that Savarkar left Paris on the fateful morning of Sunday, the 13th March 1910; despite, all advice to the contrary. He was accompanied by a lady – Perin Ben Captain. This was to be his last day of freedom for the next quarter century. He reached Victoria station at 8 in the evening. Inspector Macarthy and Parker of the Scotland Yard were waiting to receive him with the warrant of arrest. Their presence on the platform proved that they were aware of Savarkar's plans to come back to London.

Over three and a half months, Savarkar's associates waged a battle to ensure that his trial would take place in England. The British could scarcely afford yet another public trial involving a challenge to their rule in India; in the heart of Europe, so soon after the Madan Lal episode. It was going to be very difficult to establish Savarkar's complicity in the Jackson killing. Time gap of nine months between the pistol consignment and the actual killing of Jackson would have tilted the balance in favour of Savarkar. Nasik was far too convenient. The Raj could be as harsh with him as it desired, away from the glare of European press. Round two also went in favour of the Raj. All the efforts of his friends came to naught. The rag tag Bharatiya army was no match for the might of the Raj. Finally, on 1st July 1910, S.S.Morea set sail for Bombay carrying a forlorn Savarkar in its holds. The brain of the London terrorists was snared.

The Raj could breathe a sigh of relief. On its way, it developed engine trouble and anchored at the French port of Marseilles on 7th July 1910.

Now began the drama that was to allow Savarkar to internationalise the cause of Bharatiya freedom like nothing else had done since 1857. The events of next few days turned Savarkar into a living legend. Even today, if there is one thing that people recall about Savarkar, it is his daring jump into the French sea and the dash for freedom. In the process the liberal mask of imperialism was to be ripped off and its true ugly face was there for everyone in the world to see.

As the ship docked at the French port, Savarkar's hopes rose. Gone was the mood of despondence. A burning desire to free himself of the British clutches rose in his heart. In a momentary weakness, he had allowed himself to be trapped. This was the moment to force open the jaws of the prison. It is in France that he could hope for some help from his friends. If this moment passed, there was little to hope for. The French soil was visible from the ship but the presence of guards everywhere offered no possibility of escape. Freedom was so near but so far. The prospects of freedom were receding with every passing moment. By early hours of the 8th July, his mind was made up. It was better to die in a bid to escape rather than rot in the cells. It was now or never. He entered the toilet. The sentries stood guard at the door. Losing no more time, he divested himself of his sleeping suit and squeezed through the narrow porthole, scraping his body very severely in the process. Just as his legs went over, guard noticed the escape and set off alarm. As Savarkar fell into the sea, salty water seemed to burn through his bleeding body. There was no time to worry about the burning sensation that ripped through every pore of his being. Desperately, he began to swim towards the shore with the guards hot in pursuit. Childhood spent in swimming in Godavari at Nasik proved helpful. Savarkar won the race and climbed over the jetty. He was now on the French soil. The British police had no jurisdiction to lay their hands on him. The decision if any to hand him back to the British authorities, could only be taken by an authority competent to do so under the French laws.

Savarkar had no faith in the so called fairness of the English. Quite rightly, as it turned out. He kept on running. It was a strange sight. A half naked bleeding man running wildly with the British police close behind. After running for about 500 meters, he noticed a French policeman. In broken French, he demanded to be taken to the Commissioner of Police.

By this time, his pursuers caught up with him. In a bid to save their skin, they said Goodbye to the famed English fairness and bribed the policeman, who then allowed them to lead Savarkar back to the ship. At the earliest possible moment, it set sail for India - on the 9th July. This was not the arrest of a fugitive. It was kidnapping of a man from the French soil by force. A man who had broken no French laws. As long as it suited the British, they always went by the rules. When it came to the crunch, it was a different matter altogether. The whole incident was too serious to be hushed up. The news spread like a wild fire in the port city and reached his associates like Madam Cama, Aiyar etc. The daring escape could not have been pre planned for none of his associates were at hand to receive him on the shore. Nevertheless, they put up a relentless pressure on the French Government to protest against the flagrant violation of the French sovereignty and demand the return of Savarkar from illegal British custody. A jump, a daring swim and Savarkar was now an international celebrity. More importantly, so was the cause of Indian freedom.

This was 1910. The war clouds had already gathered over Europe. France was getting wary of the German might and therefore reluctant to annoy its powerful neighbour across the Channel. Nevertheless, by 19th July 1910, it had to yield to the popular outrage over violation of its sovereignty and demand suspension of any trial of Savarkar. Abhinav Bharat did not let up the pressure. On 25th October 1910, the two governments decided to refer the matter to the International Tribunal at the Hague. As per the first article of the agreement, the tribunal was charged with deciding the following question: "Ought Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, in conformity with the rules of international law to be surrendered by the Government of his Britanic Majesty to the Government of the French Republic." Decision on this question was expected by 14^h March 1911. The wily British managed to keep any representative of a powerful nation like Russia, Italy or

Germany out of the tribunal. Savarkar in London or Savarkar even when safely locked up in a Nasik jail, continued to be a thorn to the Raj. The extent of its irritation can be gauged from the following editorial in London Times. "It is to be deeply regretted that the fate of such a prisoner should in the event of his conviction in the Indian courts, be dependent upon the decision of another tribunal on points of international law, which however important in themselves, are wholly irrelevant to his actual guilt".

In plain English, Times was really saying that it was more important to punish the crime against the Raj than to uphold international law. The real ugly face of imperialism was to come to the fore again and again.

Even as Savarkar's jump into the French sea at Marseilles was creating waves in Europe, our hero was locked up in the cage like an animal, once the ship sailed for India. The heat in the cell became unbearable. As it sailed past Eden, Savarkar was haunted by the thoughts of committing suicide but soon his indomitable spirit revived, putting such thoughts out of the way. The steamer docked at the Bombay port on 22nd July 1910 and the prized prisoner was taken to Nasik. A little over four years ago, the young man had sailed to London, as it appeared to the world, to seek fame and fortune. Fame was certainly his now. Far beyond the wildest imagination of any one, who had then saw him off. Fortune was never to be his in his long life time. Yet, he remained rich in a manner that most of us would never understand.

In India, the Raj was safely away from the prying nose of the European newspapers. Ignoring the French demand for suspension, the famous Nasik Conspiracy Case hearing began on Thursday, the 15th September 1910 before the Special tribunal. The Police filed three cases in all. In the first, there were 38 accused. In the second, there were two. In the third, there was only one. Needless to add, it was Savarkar, whose name figured in all the three. Savarkar refused to take part in the trial. His stand was forthright. He stated that he was eligible for protection of France, the land of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, where he had gone to seek asylum. The British police had illegally kidnapped him from the French soil and as such he refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the Indian Court to try him. Right

through the trial, he refused to budge from this stand. The shameless Raj pressed on with trial even after the British Government had agreed to submit Savarkar's case to International Tribunal in October. As was to become evident, there was a purpose in this madness.

A word about Karve , the head of Abhinav Bharat Nasik branch, would not be out of place here. It was his impatience that had led to the failure of this phase of revolution. In a bid to atone for his mistake, he chose to sacrifice his life. During the last phase of the trial, he willingly testified that the ultimate responsibility for assassination of Jackson rested with him though the information available in the course of the trial did not bring this out. In an act that amounted to signing his own death warrant, he admitted that he had incited Deshpande and Kanhere to kill Jackson as a reply to the unjust British rule in India and lastly that it was he who was present in the theatre to kill Jackson if Kanhere had failed. With this testimony, the Raj had no hesitation in hanging him along with Anant Kanhere, and Deshpande on 19th April 1910. Karve knew he had blundered and willingly paid the price with his life. This was the stern stuff that members of Abhinav Bharat were made of.

The result of trial before the Special Tribunal was a forgone conclusion. The formal judgement in the first case was pronounced on Saturday, the 23rd December 1910. Savarkar was sentenced to transportation for 25 years. Twenty six other accused were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. This was not the end of the matter. The second case had been withdrawn. The third opened for hearing on 23rd January 1911. Judgement was pronounced within a week on the 30th January 1911. Sentence was yet another term of transportation for 25 years. The sentences were to run separately. That is Savarkar was to spend a total of 50 years behind the bars.

By the time the International Tribunal began its work on 16th of February 1911, Savarkar was pronounced as a dangerous hard core convicted criminal. A more blatant attempt to bias the deliberations is difficult to imagine. Its judgement on the 24th February 1911 was on the predictable lines. It held that irregularity was committed while arresting Savarkar in France but there was no international law that compelled Britain to hand him back to France particularly since Savarkar was a convicted hard core criminal. *Now the reason for the*

British haste in pressing on with the trial without waiting for the Tribunal judgement was there for every one to see. What judicial credence can be given to this so-called judgement is best left to the imagination of the Readers.

His incarnation in the cells of Andaman, where he was banished following this verdict, inspired legions of freedom fighters. The poet and the writer within him refused to give way to despair, even in an environment that provided encouragement to nothing but thoughts of committing suicide.

Readers are best advised to read his account of this phase of his life in his own words, which is fortunately available to us today. A book, that like all his other nationalist literature remained banned by the Raj till its very end.

Recently, I went on a business visit to Madras by the morning flight from Mumbai. As I had some time to spare before returning by the evening flight, I took a walk on the famous Marina beach. Andaman lay right across the sea. A chill went through my body. Here I was staying in the same house that Savarkar once lived in. How easy it was for me to leave the same premises in the morning and come back in the evening after a glimpse of the seas surrounding Andamans. The place where this great revolutionary was once imprisoned for years with nary a thought of returning alive to the shores of the mainland. How many of his ilk gave their all so that we have today the freedom that we take for granted. How often do we remember them, let alone dream of following their footsteps?

One can go on and on about Savarkar. Let me stop here or the story will never end. We are following the Torch of freedom and not an individual however great he was. The British had snatched the Torch from Savarkar's hands. The torch did not fall. The flame did not dim. Several others, as we shall now see, rose to take his place. The struggle went on. No doubt that Savarkar spoke for all Martyrs of the freedom struggle, when on hearing the judgment pronouncing harsh penalties, he remarked.

“I am prepared to face ungrudgingly the extreme penalty of your laws in the belief that it is through sufferings and sacrifices alone that our beloved Motherland can march on to an assured, if not a speedy triumph.”

This was reported in a biographical Narathi book “Savarkar’s Charitra” by S.L.Karendikar. Published in May 1943, it was banned by the Government in October 1943. Much has been said of Savarkar’s refusal to back the 1942 Quit India movement, going to the extent of accusing him of collaboration with the Government. How come the Government banned the book on the Life of a man who had allegedly helped it just a year before?

Chapter V

The Ghadar Party

23rd December 1912

Delhi

The second anniversary of the judgement pronounced in Nasik sentencing Savarkar to first term of transportation for life. The London base of the revolutionaries had been in disarray since the arrest of Savarkar. Strenuous efforts made by Aiyar, Madam Cama, Rafik Mahomed Khan, Vishnu Prasad Dube, Niranajan Pal to revive fortunes had not borne desired results. Partition of Bengal had been undone in the Imperial durbar of King George V to blunt the edge of Bengali opposition. Delhi, which since 1911 was once again the capital of the country, was all decked up. Princes and nobility all vying with each other to show their loyalty to the Raj were present in the Capital. The new Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, was riding on a splendidly decorated elephant sitting in howdah. No expense had been spared to recreate all the trappings of a Moghul emperor making a triumphant state entry into the Capital in a procession. The Raj was out to prove that the British ascendancy over the revolutionaries was complete.

Suddenly, the procession was rocked by a loud blast and a pale of smoke filled the atmosphere. When it cleared, the horror stricken officers found a bleeding and badly shaken Viceroy thrown to the ground. The procession had to be wound up midway. The revolutionaries had once again seriously dented the prestige of the Raj. Ras Bihari Bose, who threw the bomb, was never to be caught. Har Dayal, who was then in Berkeley, claimed responsibility. The blast was to echo its way into the Andamans, giving some solace to Savarkar. The gauntlet thrown by the Raj had been picked up, Har Dayal now embarked on a whirl wind tour to spread the cause of freedom. By November 1913, 'Gadhar' newspaper was started in San Francisco to appeal to the Indians. Printed in Urdu and Gurmukhi, its' initial target audience were the masses in Punjab, the traditional recruiting ground for the Imperial army.

It frankly called itself 'the Enemy of the British Raj'. There was plenty of real information to be given to the people. The Delhi durbar of King George had cost US \$ 5 million even as millions of Indians went hungry. This – the Raj could afford to ignore. Ostentatious display of wealth was something that was hardly unique to the British. What hurt the Raj where it counted, was when 'Gadhar' put its finger on the discrimination not only in the promotion opportunities but also in the pay of an Indian and a White soldier. The latter was worth \$ 25 as against a mere \$ 4 paid to the 'nigger'. Excerpts from Savarkar's book on 1857 began to be serialised. 'Gadhar' went on to question the tall claim of the Raj that the citizens of the Empire were free to reside and travel to any part of the Empire. It articulated the real difficulties faced by Sikhs when they took this claim at its face value and attempted to settle in places like Canada. The Raj had refused to intervene on the specious plea that Canada was Self-governing dominion and could not be forced to do anything by London. It was embarrassing for the Raj to be hoist with its own petard. Hundreds of copies of 'Gadhar' found their way into India defying the ban on its import. The alarmed authorities managed to persuade United States to arrest Har Dayal by end March 1914 with a view to arrange his deportation. Fortune favoured Har Dayal. He was released on a bail of \$ 1,000 allowing him to escape to Switzerland. 'Gadhar' publication did not cease. On the other hand, it began to be printed in Gujrati and later in Hindi as well.

The voyage of Komagatamaru was to give a big fillip to the 'Gadhar'. Some facts of this forgotten voyage need to be recalled. By itself, the voyage was a business transaction and had nothing to do with politics. Canada in a bid to bar the Sikh immigration had passed a law that only those who performed a continuous voyage from their land of residence to Canada were to be permitted entry. As there existed no direct ship plying between India and Canada, the Indians were effectively barred entry. But Canada had not reckoned for the Sikh ingenuity.

They chartered a ship Komagatamaru, which sailed on April 4, 1914 and reached Victoria on May 22. Arrival of the boat-load of Sikhs aroused passions in Canada and a whirlwind propaganda was soon underway to deny them entry. For two months the ship anchored in the harbour with no one allowed to get off. The Sikhs refused to

depart. The stalemate continued till 19th July 1914, when the Police attempted to board the ship. Encountering fierce resistance, they had to beat a hasty retreat with broken noses and ribs, not to talk of seriously bruised pride. Finally, the 352 unfortunate souls agreed to turn back and started on their return journey on 23rd July to reach Calcutta on 26th September. On their return, their belongings were searched and arrangements were made to herd them off to Punjab. This was resented by the passengers who had lost a fortune in their travel to Canada. During a prayer meeting, an officer went to speak insultingly to their leader. Now the matters went out of hand. The police fired 177 rounds killing unknown number of the people present.

The episode highlighted as nothing else would have done that while the Sikhs were useful in 1857 to put down the ‘Mutiny’ but to give them equal rights was out of question. They were British subjects and not British citizens. To the embittered Sikhs, the ‘Gadhar’ acquired a new appeal.

Meanwhile, World War I had broken out following the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne by Serbian nationalists at Sarajevo on 28th June 1914. Posing as an injured party, Austria-Hungary made aggressive demands on Serbia, which looked to its Russian protector for help. Russian involvement dragged France in the conflict as the two were in military alliance since 1894. On the other hand Germany was allied with Austria-Hungary since 1879. Imperial interest ruled out British neutrality since an Austro-German victory over France and Russia would lead to shift the balance of power against Britain, and a redistribution of overseas colonies in Germany’s favour. As Germany overran Belgium to attack France, Britain got the excuse it needed to enter the war since by a treaty of 1839, it had guaranteed Belgium neutrality. Thus by 4th August 1914, the major nations of Europe were at war with each other.

At stake was nothing more than what each nation considered its vital national interests. **There was no lofty moral principal involved.** It is in this charged atmosphere, ‘Gadhar’ line advocating the principal of an Enemy’s enemy being one’s friend, was no more than what all European nations were themselves following.

Naturally, as it advocated courting Germany in the cause of Indian nationalism, it drew the Raj's ire as never before.

Alarming for the Raj, the actions of 'Gadhar' were no longer confined merely to printing a newspaper. The outbreak of war in August 1914 generated a great deal of excitement amongst the Sikhs in San Francisco. Meetings began to be held, which called upon the Indians to go home and fight in the revolution. Ram Chandra, Mahomed Barakatullah and Bhagwan Singh addressed the meetings. Armed revolt incited by a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh. The portents for Raj could not have been more ominous.

The great exodus to India began. Sikhs were sailing for India in large numbers not only from West coast of Canada and the United States but from Japan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Manila, Honolulu, and other places round the world. They were proving Savarkar right. He had written seven years before in 1907, that in 1857 the Sikhs "would certainly not have tolerated the slavery under the English if they had realised the nature of English rule. The revolution of 1857 broke out before they had enough time to understand it fully. And therefore, the Sikhs and Jats could not conceive the idea and help in the realisation of a United State of Bharat". Now that they were aware of the British perfidy, they were rising to wipe the stigma of 1857.

The stark difference in the reaction of the Indian elite to the outbreak of the World War in 1914 could not have been more pronounced. The Princes vied with each other to contribute to the imperial cause offering men, material and money.

The Government of India headed by the Viceroy gave £ 100 million to the war cause as a token of appreciation for being ruled by Britain. £20 –30 million were given annually for the duration of the war. Out of a total of 8.5 million troops, who were involved in the war effort, as many as 1.2 million were Indians.

A large part of the Indian troops were imperial service troops, which were trained and led by the British but maintained by the Princes. Thus, a large number of Indian troops were available at little cost to Britain. No wonder then that the Viceroy described Indian princes as 'helpers and colleagues in the great task of Imperial rule.'

The declaration of war had found Gandhiji enroute to London from South Africa. He had no hesitation in offering his services to the war effort as a non-combatant. As he explained later, that as he then held views favourable to the British rule of India, he felt it was his duty to do his bit in the war. In a logic difficult to fathom, he reconciled his participation in the war effort with his philosophy of Ahimsa by arguing that he participated in the war on the side of the Empire to acquire the capacity and fitness for resisting the violence of war. It is only the mind of a Mahatma that can understand this rationale. Ordinary mortals would find it beyond their comprehension.

By the time, the great exodus to take up the arms ended, the Government was to know of at least 8,000 emigrants who returned to Punjab to take up arms against the British. Many more naturally remained undetected. One can safely assume the correct figure to be in excess of 10,000. Today, the Government of free India keeps on devising various schemes to attract the Non Resident Indians. NRIs as they are called. Quite a few of these are those who have studied at tax payer's money in the elite Indian institutes and then left for greener pastures without ever repaying the debt. They keep on demanding one thing or the other in order to help their motherland. It is time we realised that any NRI, who is putting preconditions to helping his motherland is merely parading his own self interest as Patriotism. He is merely a shrewd businessman intent on driving a hard bargain and needs to be treated as such. After all, what concessions had been offered to these brave souls inspired by the Gadhar to return back to their roots ! All that made them come back to suffer severe hardships was sheer love for their country. Nor was this exodus a lemming like rush. At the end of November 1914, at least two serious attempts were made to start an uprising. A large gathering collected at Lahore cantonment on November 25th 1914 and moved to Ferozpur with the intention of attacking the arsenal there on the 30th. An encounter with the police on the 27th November 1914 foiled their plan. Meanwhile, on 26th, 23rd November 1914 Cavalary at Mian Mir was about to rise in revolt. Leakage of the plot gave enough time for the Raj to avert the calamity. The revolutionaries remained unfazed. Vishnu Pingle from Poona held a meeting at Kapurthala towards the end of December 1914. He informed the returnees that a Bengali bomb expert was on his way to give them revolutionary training. By the middle of January 1915, Ras Bihari Bose, who had thrown a bomb at

the Governor General Hardings in 1911, had made his appearance in Punjab. Now the brain and the brawn of the revolutionary party had combined their forces resulting in a spurt in the revolutionary activities. 21st February 1915 was fixed as the day an Uprising was to begin from Lahore. This was to be the signal for the entire Punjab province to go up in flames. One again the Revolution was to be betrayed. The police had been able to introduce a spy in the revolutionary circle. On 15th February 1915, he informed his masters of the plot. Meanwhile, the revolutionaries became suspicious of Kirpal Singh - the spy and hastily antedated the rising to 19th February 1915. But it was too late and the police succeeded in foiling yet another quest for freedom.

Pingley and Bose were undeterred. On 30th March 1915, Pingley was caught in the lines of the 12th Cavalary at Meerut with a box containing 10 bombs. His hanging was then a matter of time. Ras Behari Bose was to keep on haunting the British. The Lahore trail led the Police to catch Bhai Parmanand, who was caught with one copy of the Bomb Manual and evidence of having done the ground work for the revolution after returning to India ahead of the exodus in December 1913. He went on to serve transportation for life. As was to be expected, the fate of the Sikhs caught by the Imperial power was harsh. 36 of them were hanged to death, 77 were sentenced to transportation for life and yet another 15 were given sentences of varying terms. As many as 1,723 were interned in their villages.

What a tragedy, that today, we do not even know the names of these heroes. They did not win freedom for the country. They however washed with their blood, the stigma attached to the Sikh community since 1857. Why did they fail ?. It is not an odd informer, who was the cause of their failure. When more than 10,000 people get together, attracted by nothing more than ideals and no prospect of any material gain; a few black sheep are inevitable.

The gravest unrest in India during the World War I collapsed due to German ineptitude. The Raj was relieved that their foes had allowed a golden chance to slip by. If the Germans had supplied these determined revolutionary bands with money and arms, the outcome could well have been very different. By contrast, the 1916 Arab revolt against Turkey, the German ally, masterminded by British Foreign

Office and military intelligence agencies, was kept alive by regular injections of cash, arms, aircraft and troops, which were delivered by sea. The Ghadar party cader had no such help. They had landed in the country when its political life was at its lowest ebb. Moderates ruled the roost in Congress, having expelled the Extremists from its ranks years ago. Police repression in Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra had kept the Revolutionary ferment in check. Landing on a ground that was not prepared to help them, having no money or arms, all they had was a passion to see their motherland free of the British slavery. They faced all the odds and succeeded in posing a challenge to the might of the Empire, the gravity of which was only too well recognised by the Punjab Governor – Micheal O'Dwyer. Only he knew how close was the call.

Impressed with the unflinching devotion of the Sikhs, the Germans kicked themselves hard for letting an excellent opportunity slip by. They now tried to make some amends. The Gadhar leaders were taken much more seriously. By this time, what remained of the India House Group flocked to Berlin. Once more, plans were afoot to take up the cause of freedom.

A scheme that was to cause the Raj considerable worry revolved around the Eastern front using conduit through Bangkok and Java. A ship load of arms was sent by S.S.Maverick, which sailed from California on 22nd April 1915. This was to land arms in the Sunderbans in Bengal. This operation failed due to problems in logistics and as the ship could come nowhere near the Indian coast. Bengali revolutionaries, who waited in vain for the consignment, were apprehended on 9th September 1915. Soon thereafter, one more German effort to help revolutionaries strike the Raj came to light. It was disclosed by Kraft, a German spy, who double crossed. A coup was planned in Calcutta for Christmas day of 1915. German agents in the Dutch East India were to hire a ship, fill it with arms, land on the Andaman Islands, liberate Savarkar brothers as well as the heroes of the Maniktola case and convey them to Calcutta for a surprise revolt. The Raj had known about an earlier attempt of German submarine Edmens to attack the Andaman Islands and set the revolutionaries free. The Raj had been able to breath freely only after its destruction on November 14, 1914.

With this history, Kraft was taken seriously and the Raj was able to protect its flanks, even as it was engaged in the struggle for life and death in Europe.

The manner in which the Andaman authorities had responded to the threat of Edmens deeply impressed Savarkar. Hundreds of miles away from the Mainland with meager forces at command, their rule could evaporate at a moment's notice. Yet, they had not allowed the smallest change to creep in the daily routine of the prisoners. As ever, every prisoner had to fulfill the daily quota of making three pounds of ropes. There was no let up. The experience remained etched on his conscious and was, as we shall see later, to guide his actions in 1942.

The Germans had also tried to ferment trouble on the Afghan border. They tried to fish in the troubled waters that the Britain had landed itself in on account of its war with Turkey. Many Muslims had regarded the Sultan of Turkey as the head of Islam. Thus Turkey tried to put a religious gloss to its fight with Britain and called for Jihad. The cause of Pan-Islam was sought to be promoted by Germany. This had its impact on the army morale. The 130th Baluchis mutinied twice during the winter of 1914-15. The 5th Light Infantry, an all Muslim regiment, mutinied at Singapore on 15th February 1915. From India, leaders like Abul Kalam Azad contributed to the cause. He is believed to have provoked 15 Muslim students in Lahore to run away to Kabul and join the Jihad against the British. A provisional Government was set up at Kabul nominating Kunwar Mahendra Pratap as the President and Barkatullah as the Prime Minister. This leadership openly declared itself to be friends of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims. Their plan was to induce Afghanistan to join the war as a German and Turkish ally. With Kabul on their side, they felt an insurrection in India could be well supplied with arms and ammunition. Not much came out of it as the Amir of Afghanistan cold shouldered the project and adopted strict neutrality.

The Empire had survived by the skin of its teeth. Next time it would not be so lucky. The end of the Empire was now a matter of time.

I shuddered when I read this. Caught up in the rat race to go ahead in life, running after seeking one material comfort after the other, I wondered if these men and women were real. They were running after a dream that appeared impossible. Fighting an Empire that had endless resources. A fight that offered no tangible rewards. Failure after failure stared back at every corner. Yet, if one stumbled, the other took the place.

Khudiram Bose, Madan Lal Dhingra, Karve, Pingley and the tens of brave Sikhs all followed the other to the gallows. Hanging or transportation for life, the chain never ended, no matter what was the extent of repression let loose. I hung my head partly in gratitude to these known and unknown Martyrs, and partly in shame.

True, the torch of liberty was brightest in Punjab; Bengal and Maharashtra but it had cast its glow through out the length and the breadth of the nation. The word Independence had been brought out from the long forgotten shelves. The blood of Martyrs had rejuvenated the nation. Bharat was once more a living entity.

Chapter VI

Tilak – the Last Hurrah

It is time to go back to Lokmanya Tilak, who had been removed from the national scene in 1908. The British made him serve a six year jail term at Mandalay, in Burma while the revolutionary cauldron boiled over in the country. The story of these tumultuous years has been covered so far. We shall now take up the story of this spiritual mentor of the revolutionaries once again.

Even in the enforced isolation of the prison, Tilak had not been idle. He used the time to write a treatise on Gita, the sacred book for Hindus. Greeting from all over the country poured when he was released on 17th June 1914. It became an occasion to be celebrated. His popularity, always very high, scaled new peaks. A mass leader with unparalleled following in every nook and corner of the country, six long years away from Bharat - spent in jail, had done nothing to dim his vigour or love for freedom.. In an interview with an Officer of the Criminal Intelligence Department, he set out his views clearly. He pointed out that anarchism arose from a feeling of hopelessness, from bad treatment of Indians by Europeans. A shallow system of education, the general poverty of the people, the high-handedness of the police, the apathy of Government and a policy of injustice were causes which contributed to its growth. In conclusion, he praised the Bengal politicians for their uncompromising attitude towards the Government, and found fault with the Bombay moderates, who were always consulting officials and moulding their opinions as per the wishes of the Government.

This was a 58 year old man, unbent after six years of imprisonment, setting out his views when the World War I had already started and the Sikh exodus to India had begun. The Government could not but recognise him as *the most important extremist agitator in the country*.

In the manner of a Chankya, the Brahmin who had single handedly brought down the mighty Empire of the Nandas around 324 BC, Tilak had confronted an Empire so huge that ‘it ruled countries that Caesar knew not’. In 1895, when he started Shivaji celebrations, the word Independence did not exist in the vocabulary of the country’s elite.

It was proud to pass resolutions which said “We Indians believe that our highest patriotism and best interest demand the continuance of the British rule.” The embers of 1857 were slowly turning into coal. It is at this crucial juncture, that Tilak arrived on the scene. Always testing the limits of open criticism, he set out the agenda of freedom before the country. By his words and deeds, he inspired thousands of youth to take up the cause of freedom.

So powerful was the Tilak magic, that it did not fail to cast its spell on government officers either. The approver in Jackson case, Ganu Vaidya had confessed that, Tilak had attended a secret meeting of Abhinav Bharat in 1906. This was the kind of proof the Government was looking for to implicate Tilak, who at this time was already in Mandalay. The confession was to be recorded before the magistrate – Palshikar. On hearing this, Palshikar became very angry and made Ganu retract the statement. The same magistrate, earlier had so blatantly gone out of his way to help the police that his pro – police ways had drawn the ire of the Tribunal.

Tilak inspired youth were to outrace him on many an occasion. This was natural considering their generation gap. Tilak applauded the youth who went ahead of him. For he knew that in the process, the nationalists forged a challenge that would defy every trick employed by the Raj to defeat them. As a public leader, he had many a times taken a stand mildly critical of the Revolutionaries. Both the revolutionaries and the Government knew better.

Bhat has narrated the help Tilak was always prepared to extend to the revolutionaries. Bhat had been released in 1915 after serving five years of rigorous imprisonment in Jackson case. On release, Bhat had no money. His family was on the verge of starvation. A convicted criminal and that too on account of revolutionary activities, he found all doors closed. It is in these circumstances that he went to meet Tilak in December 1915, who immediately offered a job in his newspaper. It is Tilak’s help that enabled him to survive and later become a doctor. Nor was he alone. Other revolutionaries like Bapat and Joshi were also supported by Tilak.

Tilak's contribution to the cause of freedom between 1895 and 1915 was second to none. This did not satisfy him. The lion was not to rest till the goal was fully achieved. As he studied the events that had taken place in his absence, he found that the British were up to their old game of Divide and rule. They were actively widening the Hindu-Muslim gap to perpetuate their rule. Ever the realist, he decided to take counter measures.

The Muslim League had been started in 1906 to counter the growth of nationalism amongst the Muslims. On his release, Tilak watched with growing interest the change in the outlook of the League under the growing influence of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It had begun to imbibe the nationalist spirit, which animated the country. In 1913, it had adopted 'Self Government within the Empire' as its goal. This was a truly remarkable development. Tilak well knew the trouble, it had caused him to get a similar resolution adopted by Congress in 1906. The 1914 League Conference had stressed upon Hindu-Muslim unity. Congress and the League had held their 1915 conference at the same time in Bombay. Many of the delegates were common. Tilak decided to seize the opportunity and reach out to the League. His ally in the quest was none other than Jinnah.

1916 was a landmark year. Not only did the Congress and the League held their sessions at the same time in Lucknow but under the influence of Tilak and Jinnah concluded the famous "Lucknow Pact". By this, the Congress agreed to separate electorate for the Muslims and, in return, the League agreed to jointly frame a constitutional scheme for the Dominion status. Such friendly cooperation between the League and the Congress for the common cause of the country was never to be seen again. For the time being, the so called Hindu – Muslim question had been resolved. The Congress moderates were soon to fade into oblivion. This was the pinnacle of Tilak's political career and the essence of his contribution to the cause of freedom - Setting the country firmly and unitedly on the road to Swaraj.

Tilak was a man of action even at the age of 60. Soon after concluding the Lucknow pact, he threw himself whole heartedly into the struggle for Swaraj. He formed Home Rule League in association with Annie Besant and set off to propagate the cause of freedom. Expectedly, he soon ran foul of the law. Prosecution was launched

against him for his speeches at Belgaum on May 1st, and at Ahmednagar on 31st May and 1st June 1916. In a surprising outcome, he was found Not Guilty by the Bombay High Court in November 1916, which set aside the judgement of the lower court that had gone against Tilak. Court was persuaded by the learned counsel of Tilak that though his speeches were bad in places, they could not be wholly condemned on that account. The lawyer who caused this miracle to happen was none other than Jinnah, who had pleaded the cause of Tilak without charging any fees. In 1917, the League Session reverberated with the following clarion call by Raja of Mahamudabad “The interests of the nation are supreme. It is meaningless to discuss whether we are first Indians or Muslims. We are both. The Muslim league has taught the Muslims to sacrifice for both the nation as well as the religion.”

Tilak died at the age of 64 on 1st August 1920. Till the last day of his life, the country remained firmly on the path chalked out by him. In a political career spanning over a quarter of a century, Tilak changed the very course of public debate in the country. In 1895, Independence was a taboo. By 1920, the real issue was how soon to get Swaraj. The only failure of Tilak was his inability to get a formal resolution passed by the Congress in favour of the Complete Independence. Given the overall composition of the Congress, it was a titanic achievement to have got the Congress to demand Immediate Swaraj. Most importantly, despite the best efforts of the Raj, Tilak had managed to ensure that the demand for Swaraj was supported by the Muslims.

This was the glorious legacy that Tilak left behind. Given the upsurge of Revolutionary ferment that he inspired, by 1920, Bharat’s march to freedom was unstoppable. What is surprising is that it took us over another quarter of a century after his death to become independent. The most shocking part is that the Independence was accompanied not only by partition but also by a massacre that was truly horrendous. A turn of events that would have been completely incomprehensible to both Tilak and Jinnah in 1920. Yet, there is no getting away from the fact that the terrible tragedy happened. The poison of which is still to be exorcised from our body polity. For years, we Indians have kept on demonising Jinnah and Jinnah alone for being responsible for the partition and also the accompanying massacre.

At the same time, we have also eulogised his arch political rival Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. By elevating him to the status of Father of the Nation, we have placed him on a pedestal that makes him beyond any critical scrutiny.

Gandhiji's title of Father of the Nation needs some discussion. There are enough and more reasons to call him Mahatma, which he undoubtedly was. To call him the Father of the Nation is to do injustice to the souls of all Martyrs in the cause of freedom, who sacrificed their all; much before he came on the national scene.

If Gandhiji is to be called the Father of the Nation, then it stands to reason that the nation that he is credited to have created came into being after 1920, when he assumed the reins of freedom struggle. In case this is true, naturally the logical question would be - Which was then the nation that Khudiram Bose, Madan Lal Dhingra, Karve, Pingley and scores of other people gave up their life for? Did they give up their life for a nation that had not been then in existence? Or was it a different nation than what we are living in today?

The sheer absurdity of this notion boggles the mind. The truth is that Bharat as a living nation has existed for thousands of years. During a particularly bad phase of its national life, it became a colony of the British. A massive attempt to awaken the country failed in 1857. The same effort made starting from 1895 was much more successful. By 1920, when Tilak died, the nation was once again awake and struggling hard to break free of its bondage. This struggle was no doubt carried forward by Gandhiji. There are many debts that we owe to him. Creation of the nation is certainly not one of them.

In 1947, Gandhiji was the preeminent leader of India. His only rival was Jinnah. If Jinnah can be blamed for partition, there is no way that Gandhiji can escape the blame either. True, his intent was pure but in this world we are all judged by the results of our actions and not merely by purity of the intent. Mahatmas of the world are no exception. By blaming Jinnah alone for the tragedy of partition and absolving Gandhiji from all the blame, we start the discussions with our neighbour from a viewpoint that is diametrically opposite to theirs.

No wonder, we are unable to have any discussion with them. We only seem to talk at each other. Never with each other. An expensive luxury of conflict that none of us can afford is all that we seem to be indulging in for the last sixty years. In the twenty first century, it is the crying need of the time to take a relook at the past, build on the right lessons, so that our future can be very different, from what is a most dismal present for many of our countrymen living outside the IT revolution and the euphoria of rising Sensex.

One lesson that Tilak taught us seems to have been forgotten today. With all the power and prestige of the Empire at their command, the British were unable to prevent him from winning over the Muslims into the nationalist camp. All their machinations and persistent hostility could not prevent the Tilak coup.

India and Pakistan are both independent sovereign nations today. There is no hostile third party that can prevent our friendship with Pakistan. Our own failure to come to terms with the past and incompetence is all that is preventing us from being able to follow in Tilak's footsteps.

Let us first dispassionately understand what went so horribly wrong between 1920 and 1947. What turned Jinnah, who was an ally of the Congress so long as Tilak was alive, turn into its sworn enemy after Gandhiji took over; thus sowing the seeds of a conflict that has not ended even today. If in the process of our enquiry, we have to demolish some myths so be it. No one, however great, can ever be greater than the nation

Unmaking of a Nation

1920 to 1939

By now, it is clear that the central reality of 1920 was that the Indian Freedom Struggle was a roaring fire lit by all communities in India, one that was set to devour the British jackal.

I am sure many of you would then ask me if the reality was as stark as I have made it out to be, why did it take another 27 years for India to become Independent. After all, we had a Mahatma at the helm of affairs and not a corrupt power hungry politician who abound today. On this count alone, I am sure some of you would be tempted to ignore the compelling evidence that I presented earlier. Nor would you normally be wrong to do so. For, it is entirely possible that I may be presenting one side of the story and leaving out some evidence to the contrary – by design or out of ignorance.

We therefore need to seriously examine the events of 1915 to 1939. What is it that went wrong? Why did it take us more than a quarter of the century to become Independent?

And when we did get what we wanted, why did it come smeared with the blood of the many, amidst the acts of animal savagery that remains a blot on our civilization. If this is not Unmaking of a Nation, then what is?

This is what we shall now seek to understand. In the process, if we end up with conclusions that are once again far different from the conventional wisdom, so be it. If it does not enhance the reputation of some of the most respected leaders of the time, so be it. If it causes acute discomfort, so be it. Our only concern is a quest for truth. This would be the sole guiding principle that we would follow.

It is with great sadness that I come to the conclusion that the greatest tragedy of the time was the relentless quest for power exhibited by none other than Gandhiji during this period.

The single largest contributing factor to the tragedy that was to unfold in 1947. I say this with great sorrow. For I am no admirer of Godse, whose violence I condemn.

Yet, I say this with full sense of responsibility. I say this as this painful truth is necessary to understand that Jinnah was no devil who stabbed a God like Gandhiji in the back by insisting on Partition. If Jinnah was really a devil as many of us believe, we would have been right to ignore the Pakistani sentiments on the issue. The reality is that this is not even true. So, why hold on to false beliefs that only antagonise our neighbours?

Read on, dear readers and make up your mind.

Chapter VII

Mahatma's Quest for Power

I am fully aware of the fact that the very title of this chapter will raise hackles of many. Yet, I have chosen the words carefully. During the course of writing this book, I have been discussing my drafts with my wife. Naturally enough, some of the conversation had been overheard by my daughters. One day, I was startled to find my twelve year old daughter, asking me if I was really writing that Gandhiji was not a Mahatma. I could see that she was deeply disturbed. Gently, I tried to explain to her that Gandhiji was indeed a Mahatma. He was a great man. He did great things for the country but he was also human and had many failings. Some of them cost the country dearly.

A Mahatma, who wanted to be The Leader, wherever he went, is the best way to describe him.

This has not been an easy conclusion to arrive at. Like the most of my countrymen, I have been in the thrall of the Mahatma's charisma for long. As a Hindu, my religion teaches me that whenever the powers of the Evil becomes dominant, Vishnu takes birth in a human form – an Avatar, to ensure that the forces of the Evil are routed.

In Gandhiji, there have been every signs of an Avatar. A penniless lawyer, who was thrown out of a train in South Africa to a saint who could melt even the most bitter mind filled with communal animosity in the riot torn Delhi during the winter of 1948. Spanning over a half century of public life, this has remained one of the most extraordinary journey, of a human being, in the modern times.

A career which witnessed clash of the so called civilised world, not once but twice in Great wars that caused unprecedented misery and destruction of life and property. All within a short time of two decades. No wonder, his message of truth and non violence was a welcome relief, in a world torn apart by Greed, Hate and Cruelty.

Quest for Power are words, one would therefore normally never associate with a person like Gandhiji. They amount to blasphemy in India. After all, did this Mahatma ever aspire for any position of state power. Did he even remain a four anna member of the Congress, the very organisation that he took to the remote corners of the country? Did accumulation of money hold any fascination for him? The answers to these questions must remain firmly in the negative. Few would seriously dispute Albert Einstein's tribute on his death – "Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a man ever walked in flesh and blood on this earth".

Yet, I maintain, he was involved in lifelong quest for power. True, Power that flows from gun, Power that flows from coercive apparatus of the State, Power that flows from Moneybags did not hold him in thrall like most of us. That is the reason why no one can dispute that he was a Mahatma.

His works are too well known to bear repetition here. Suffice it to say that the legend of Gandhiji, has been very easy for the Avatar driven Hindu mindset to accept. Jinnah, everyone knows, did not like Gandhiji and therefore it has always been easy to dismiss his opinion about Gandhiji. I read and even rejected the intense and bitter criticism of Gandhiji by Savarkar, after his release in 1937, as the outpouring of a frustrated man.

I was therefore shaken to read the scathing attack by Babasaheb Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, on Gandhiji in 1945, in the evening of the Mahatma's life. Suddenly, it was no longer possible to dismiss out of hand, the opinions of Jinnah and Savarkar about Gandhiji. I began to take a relook at this phenomenon called Gandhiji. Then I realised that Bharatiya history or mythology as my Secularist friends would call it; is full of instances of Saints who loved power. Power that flows from adulation of people. Power that flows from hundreds of thousands of people outbidding each other to follow the command. Power that comes from willing acceptance of every Wish as a Command by the people at large. Intoxicating, exhilarating feeling that comes from being universally admired. Saints, who strayed into the realm of Power Politics and consequently caused untold damage.

Mahabharat, the great Bharatiya epic is all about one such saint. Bhishma, the Prince, who not only renounced his claim to the throne but also remained a *Bhramachari*, a virgin, life long. All for the sake of ensuring that his own father was able to marry a girl half his age. A saint, who stayed in the Palace and protected the King and all his successors at any cost. This is the vow that the girl's father had demanded as a price from Bhishma for permitting the King to marry his daughter. The Prince won universal acclaim for his sacrifices. His greatest tragedy was that he became a prisoner of his own fame. Nothing else can explain the fact that Bhishma, the Great, remained a mute spectator to the disrobing of his own Grand Daughter in Law in an open Durbar. The shameful episode that sowed the seeds of the Great Bharatiya War. His own regard for his **Personal and Private reputation** once again prevented him from making his King accept the most reasonable peace terms that Lord Krishna, Avatar of Vishnu, had proposed before commencement of hostilities. The same trap of reputation also lead him to accept the position of Commander-in-Chief of the forces he knew represented Evil and fight his own beloved grand children, whose cause was just and fair. Not only did he take up Arms but fought so ferociously that the forces of the Truth were nearly annihilated and Krishna had to intervene, breaking his own vow in the process. *Bhishma was truly a Saint, who loved power, the Power of One's Own reputation.*

Mahabharat took place in *Dwaper Yug*, the end of which saw the beginning of *Kali Yug*. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in Kali Yug was to the society, what Bhishma, the Great was in Dwaper Yug. Immensely inspirational but also immensely harmful. Kali Yug is the age of Evil. No wonder, Gandhiji's sacrifices by themselves were not adequate to propel him to the position of Power. He had to use every trick in the book and also those outside it. Right through his public life in India, the politician in the Mahatma did not, as we shall see, fight shy of this. It is startling to realise that some facts are beyond dispute and yet are often overlooked, while assessing the impact of Gandhiji's leadership on the national life. These facts though obvious, need to be stated.

By 1919, before Gandhiji could leave a mark on the national scene:

- Swaraj was already the battle cry of the Congress. Freedom struggle was intense enough to force the Raj to make three major conciliatory gestures to the nationalist opinion. The Montague-Morley Reforms of 1908, annulling of the partition of Bengal in 1911 and the Montagu - Chelmsford reforms of 1918. All within a short time of 15 years from launch of Swadeshi movement following the partition of Bengal in 1905.
- Hindus and Muslims were at reasonable peace with each other.
- Yet, it was not until three decades later that Independence was finally won.
- By the time, independence was in sight, the communal peace of 1919 was a distant dream and partition was the only practical alternative left. Indeed, the two communities were at each other's throat as never before in history.
- The savage manner in which the country was partitioned, an event that itself was unimaginable in 1919, has left wounds that continue to fester. India and Pakistan are about the only two countries in the world that are bleeding each other to death for control of inhospitable terrain at Saichen and Kargil, where even normal human life is impossible. All this in the Twenty First century, when most countries are engrossed in attaining higher economic growth and bettering the standards of life of their citizens.

Somebody has to owe the responsibility for this. As the most prominent leader of the era, Gandhiji must shoulder major portion of the responsibility. There is no denying the efforts made by Gandhiji to make sure India attains Ram Rajya – an ideal state. A leader must however be judged by the results of his actions, not his intentions.

Let us take a dispassionate look at results of his life long quest and do a reality check on the three pillars of his legend. His life long contribution to the cause of communal harmony. The fight to eradicate the curse of Untouchability. Finally the dream like act of winning Independence by the pure path of Satyagraha. A half naked Fakir, who won the heart of a mighty Empire and persuaded a ruling race to peacefully relinquish power.

He intended to eradicate the curse of Untouchability from the Hindu society. The harsh reality is that railways, that Gandhiji derided, have done more to remove Untouchability, than all the efforts of Gandhiji. He considered himself as the foremost leader of the so called Untouchables. Unfortunately, they did not share his perception. Today, if at all they remember him, it is with anger and not veneration. It is not that they are ungrateful. It is simply the fact that the educated amongst them distrusted Gandhiji even in his life time. Even today, they bristle at the mention of the Poona Pact that Gandhiji forced on an unwilling Ambedkar in 1932.

Shivaji Park, the place I live in Mumbai becomes a place of pilgrimage twice a year. The people considered Untouchables in a bygone era, come by the droves from all over the country to pay homage to their leader Babasaheb Ambedkar. As any other pilgrimage spot in India, the place becomes unbelievably dirty. For a week, elite residents of the place have to endure about the same filth that is the lifetime fate of an average slum dweller. Rajghat, the government memorial of Gandhiji, in New Delhi by contrast; is a sterile show piece, visited only by state dignitaries.

He intended that Hindus and Muslims should live like brothers. Yet, he lived to see the worst ever communal conflagration in history accompanied by a mass migration that was truly horrendous. Price of which continues to be paid in the form of loss of precious human life, in the prime of their youth, at the freezing heights in Saichen, where even the animals can not live.

All that is then left of the Gandhiji legend in terms of the hard quantifiable results is that he intended to induce a change of heart of the British through his unique non violent method of Satyagraha and thereby win Independence. This is what he achieved. The change of

heart of British not only gave us Independence but also gave rise to a wave of decolonisation that started after the end of the Second World War. It is for this legacy that he has bequeathed, that we should remember him as the *Father of the Nation*. So comforting is this belief that we have always shied away from looking at it with anything other than complete reverence. Alas ! Facts are otherwise. On a critical examination, this legacy turns out to be no more than a myth.

Up to 1975, a little known memo by Lord Keynes, the noted Economist and Treasury Advisor to the British Government during the Second World War remained hidden from public gaze under the secrecy rules. Paul Kennedy referred to it in 1980 but has continued to remain completely unknown in India. Written on the eve of the Japanese surrender in August 1945 for the benefit of the incoming Labour Government, this explosive memo is a '*Must read*' document for any student of forces that shape affairs of the world. This memo lays bare the entire rationale behind the process of decolonisation; that led not only to the independence of India but also of Sri Lanka and Burma; besides a hasty withdrawal of the British forces from Palestine in 1948. Sad to say, the rationale was entirely Economic and had nothing to do with any change of heart due to Satyagraha. It is only in India, amongst the Avatar driven Hindu mindset, that this revelation would cause any surprise.

The memo "Our Overseas Financial Prospects" was circulated within the British Cabinet on 14th August 1945 by the Chancellor of Exchequer with a comment that "I am anxious that my colleagues should be informed, without delay of this most grim problem". This was amongst the first documents that the new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee saw on the assumption of Office.

What is this "most grim problem" that the Chancellor was referring to? As an eminent economist, Lord Keynes was fulfilling his duty in drawing attention of the new Government to the fact that economic condition of the United Kingdom was such that "there would have to be an indefinite postponement of the realisation of the best hopes of the new Government." In a remarkably forthright language, full of candor, Keynes pointed out, that though victorious, the British nation was bankrupt and needed new strategies to survive. The figures

provided by him, as can well be seen, were chilling to the most ardent of the Imperialists. An eminent economist and not a mere bean counter, Keynes could not stop with a mere statement of facts. He proposed a radical financial strategy involving projections up to 1949, being well aware of the implications.

Lord Keynes on State of the British Economy in August 1945
Government Expenditure in Million Sterling Pounds

	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
Imports, food and raw materials	1,250	1,300	1,400	1,400	1,450
Keynes pointed out that imports of £ 1,700 million at 1945 prices were needed to keep import volumes at pre war level.					
War Related Imports	850	0	0	0	0
Total Imports	2,100	1,300	1,400	1,400	1,450
Overseas Gov. Expenditure					
<i>Military Services</i>					
SE Asian Command	100	50	0	0	0
<i>Normal</i>	325	325	250	200	150
Keynes was clear that a reduction of this scale called for ‘Major Policy Changes’ in other words <i>Selective decolonisation for there was no way to reduce military expenditure and yet retain control of the colonies</i>					
Total Military services	425	375	250	200	150
War Supplies and Munitions	300	75	0	0	0
	725	450	250	200	150
In 1945, out of £ 725 million, as much as £ 410 million were being spent in India, Burma and Ceylon, while the Middle East accounted for another £ 110 million. So the areas of Selective decolonisation were beyond dispute.					
Aid	75	0	0	0	0
Total Overseas Expenditure	800	450	250	200	150
Debt repayment					
			75	75	0
Total Expenditure	2,900	1,750	1,725	1,675	1,600

Keynes pointed out that “In the third place (and above all) a substantial part of our existing Government expenditure overseas has no direct or obvious connection with the Japanese war; and will therefore not come to an end merely because the Japs have packed up”. Indeed, as much as 50% of the Overseas Government Expenditure had nothing to do with the war and was a *Normal* expenditure for a colonial power like U.K. As if this realisation was not frightening enough, the sources of Income for meeting this kind of expenditure were drying up with the end of the war.

Government Income in Million Sterling Pounds

	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
Exports	350	600	1,000	1,300	1,450
Net Invisible Income	100	50	100	100	150
War related Income	350	150	0	0	0
Lend Lease / Mutual Aid (U.S.A.& Canada)	1,350	0	0	0	0
Credit from Colonies	750	300	50	0	0
Sale of Gold		250			
Total Income	2,900	1,350	1,150	1,400	1,600

The figures vividly bring out the horrifying truth that by 1947, the drop in War Related Income would be far more than savings in the war related expenditure, causing a severe imbalance in financial stability of the country. It was expected that the **Income would drop by £ 2,450 million**. This comprised of £ 1,350 million of Lend Lease assistance from the United States of America, which stood suspended with cessation of hostilities with Japan, War related Income of £ 350 was also expected to cease with end of hostilities. Colonies, which had been “induced to lend to us”; could also not be expected to continue giving credits with the fig leaf of the War excuse withdrawn; resulting in a drop of £ 750 million.

As against, this drop of £ 2,400 million in income, the **expenditure was expected to reduce by only £ 1,250 million.** War related imports of £ 850 and War supplies and Munitions expenses £ 300 million were expected to be saved together with a saving of £ 100 million with disbanding of the South East Command after victory over Japan. Keynes therefore called for a focussed export drive, dramatic measures like Sale of 50% of the Gold reserves.

In respect of the Overseas Government expenditure, he pleaded that

“ We have got into the habit of maintaining large and expensive establishments all over the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia to cover communications, to provide reserves for unnamed contingencies and to police vast areas eastwards from Tunis to Burma and northwards from East Africa to Germany. None of these establishments will disappear unless and until they are ordered home; and many of them have pretexts for existence which have nothing to do with Japan”.

He then proceeded to point out that India, Burma and Ceylon accounted for £ 410 million expenditure, while Middle East share was £ 110 million; out of a total of £ 800 million and went on to add :

“To an innocent observer in the Treasury very early and very drastic economies in this huge cash expenditure overseas seem an absolute condition for maintaining our solvency. There is no possibility of our obtaining from others for more than a brief period the means for maintaining any significant part of these establishments.” He was well aware of the implications as he himself noted “substantial reduction (in Overseas Government expenditure) will require drastic revisions of policy which do not automatically ensue on V-J”

Meanwhile, cup of woes of the new administration was not yet full. Keynes noted that selling gold, obtaining a dramatic increase in exports and a drastic cut in Overseas Government expenditure would still leave the country begging U.S.A. for a Grant of as much as US \$ 5,000 million.

The Deficit in Million Sterling Pounds

	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
Total Expenditure	2,900	1,750	1,725	1,675	1,600
Total Income	2,900	1,350	1,150	1,400	1,600
Deficit	0	400	575	275	0
Total deficit = £ 1,250 or US \$ 5,000					

He concluded; “It seems, then, there are three essential conditions without which we have not a hope of escaping what might be described, without exaggeration and without implying that we should not eventually recover from it, a financial Dunkirk. These conditions are (a) an intense concentration on the expansion of exports, (b) *drastic and immediate economies in our overseas expenditure*, and (c) substantial aid from the United States on terms which we can accept. *They can only be fulfilled by a combination of the greatest enterprise, ruthlessness and tact.*” (italics mine)

Thus, without using the word decolonisation, he had effectively called for Independence to be given to India, Burma and Ceylon and withdrawal from Palestine; latest by 1948. *This is, as we are all aware - exactly what happened.*

Thus if Gandhiji is to be called ‘Father of the Nation’ for his contribution to the Freedom of India, Lord Keynes can easily lay claim to title of ‘Grand Father’ of the Nation.

It will take an extremely naïve mind to contend, after reading this document that Independence of India had anything to do with a Genuine change of heart due to Peaceful and Non Violent Satyagraha launched by Gandhiji from time to time.

Nor had this anything to do with “Consummation and fulfillment of the historic traditions and democratic ideals of the British race” as stated by Dr. Rajendra Prasad on the eve of the Independence.

A sentiment later echoed by Majumdar, when he approvingly recorded this statement with a comment that “ This is a great truth, which is not always realized nor remembered by the Indians”.

In the final analysis, it was the hard kick of Nazi Jack boots in the British butt coupled with political awareness in India initiated by Tilak, furthered by revolutionary fervor and of course also by Gandhiji led mass agitation, is what got us the Freedom. Cost of keeping the Empire was now, simply not sustainable. It is this cost benefit analysis that prevented Churchill, for all his fulmination and ranting, from blocking the Independence of India Act in the House of Lords, where the Conservatives still had majority in 1947.

A single minded focus on the Economy is what had got the British in India in the first place. Single minded focus on the Economy is what got them to leave this country. When, oh, when shall we ever understand this fact and more importantly learn from this?

Once we confront these hard facts, what do we find left of the Gandhiji legend? Very little, I am afraid. Intuitive and sharp minds of Jinnah, Savarkar and Ambedkar did not have to wait for a Keynes to tell them that getting British out of the country was not a moral dilemma for a Mahatma to solve but simply a matter of Realpolitik. Once this understanding sinks in, it becomes easier to understand what was it in Gandhiji style of leadership that Jinnah, the unabashed admirer of Tilak, found so repulsive. It certainly was not communal animosity. For that matter, forget, Savarkar, why even Ambedkar was so critical of Gandhiji. Last but not the least, why, even Subhas Chandra Bose found it impossible to work with the Mahatma.

These are issues that need to be examined critically. They are not academic but very real. Perhaps, the answers would provide the key to a lasting rapprochement between present day hostile states of Pakistan and India, armed to teeth with nuclear weapons that can only cause a holocaust. States that were a very much an integral part of the same nation at the dawn of Gandhiji era in Indian polity.

What we seek to know is not whether Mahatma had feet of clay. Like any other human being, he had his share of faults. That can hardly come as a surprise to anyone but the most blind of his followers. Nor would that detract an iota from his greatness.

What we need to understand is whether in 1920, we needed a cool headed Statesman rather than a Mahatma to guide our destiny. Let us therefore first examine the manner in which Mohanchand Karamdas Gandhi acquired control over the destiny of this nation by 1920.

Chapter VIII

Gandhiji's Rise to Prominence in India

1915-1918

Gandhiji set sail for London on the 18th July 1914 after almost two decades of stay in South Africa, where he had emerged as the undisputed leader of Indians – both the Hindus and Muslims. He arrived on the 6th August 1914, in a country that was embroiled in World War from the 4th August 1914. About this time, Gandhiji was still a great believer in the essential goodness of the British Empire and considered his duty to help the Empire in its days of distress. The war confronted this votary of Ahimsa, with a dilemma. Knowing fully well that “those who confine themselves to attending to the wounded in battle can not be absolved from the guilt of war”, he volunteered to serve in the Medical corps as a “matter of duty”. Thus, participating whole heartedly as an active participant, in the terrible violence unleashed by the War. Once back in India, he never gave the same moral freedom to the Revolutionaries to participate in the War that the Indian nation was fighting against British occupation.

Meanwhile, even while being an enlist in the Army, he insisted on being treated as Unofficial representative of the Volunteer Corps. Such an absurd proposition was rejected out of hand by the Commanding Officer as being completely repugnant to Military discipline. Whereupon, Gandhiji began a Satyagraha and began shooting off letters to the high and mighty protesting against the hapless Commanding Officer. The matter did not come to head due to fortuitous circumstances and Gandhiji left for India, much to the relief of the people, he had sought to help. He reached India on the 9th January 1915 to a rousing reception. The more discerning had already noted, two things in the episode that jarred:

- Gandhiji was willing to be an active party to the violence, his convoluted logic, making this participation consistent with principles of Ahimsa, notwithstanding
- He had a compelling desire to be accepted as The Leader, even in a place like the Army, where he could not legitimately demand this.

Soon after his arrival, Gandhiji was politically orphaned with the death of his mentor, Gokhale on 19th February, 1915. In South Africa, he had a poor opinion of Gokhale's Servants of India Society. Curiously, soon after arrival in India, he made a futile attempt to become a member of the same society. However, his attempt to find a space for himself came to naught due to the resistance of some members.

Before the end of the year, he had set up his famed Ashram on the banks of Sabarmati in Ahmedabad aided with a donation of Rs 13,000 from the industrialist Ambalal Sarabhai. His inclination to join Politics was evident from his attendance of the 1915, Annual Convention of the Congress, where he witnessed first hand, enthusiasm generated by reentry of Tilak in the Congress after a gap of eight years.

The political pace quickened with the entry of Tilak in Congress. Gandhiji could only watch from the sidelines. The 1915 Convention of the Congress had been held in Bombay along with that of the League. Several Congress leaders were lustily cheered as they joined the League session.

Meanwhile, the Home Rule Movement started by Annie Besant on 25th September 1915 gathered steam and worked in close co-operation with the Tilak led Home Rule League, started on 28th April 1916. The united and untiring activities of Mrs. Besant and Tilak propagated the idea of Home Rule far and wide, and made it practically the only living issue in Indian politics. A "Home Rule Special" train carried Tilak and his party to Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916, receiving ovation all along the way. When he arrived at the pandal of the Congress he was carried by his admirers on their shoulders and greeted with deafening cheers. This session held along with that of the Muslim League sealed Hindu-Muslim pact, a scheme of political reforms jointly drawn up by the committees of the Congress and the Muslim League and under preparation since 1915. The Hindu-Muslim pact was hailed with delight by all sections of Indians as a significant milestone in the march towards Freedom. The British Government was more surprised than anybody else, for the pact seemed to deprive them of the one trump card they held in their hands to stem the tide of Indian nationalism.

Gandhiji had little to do with these developments. His contribution at this time included an interview, in which he was critical of the Congress resolution in favour of Swaraj on the specious pleas that it was based on ill feelings and hence morally unsound. The general feeling of the British towards the developments in the Congress is aptly captured as “It will be seen that the proceedings at this session constitute a remarkable leap forward from the position taken by Mr. Sinha in the previous year, and a remarkable triumph for Mr. Tilak and Mrs. Beasnt. They did more. They showed that **absolute political independence had become the professed ideal of Moderate and Extreme politicians alike**”

It will not be out of place here to note the goal of Absolute Political Independence was actively resisted by Gandhiji, once he acquired mastery over the Congress in 1920. Young Turks, led by Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, had to move heaven and earth to get the resolution formally adopted in 1929. In this sense, without being factually incorrect, it can be said that Gandhiji actually set the clock back by well over 15 years, in respect of Independence.

Home Rule movement got a boost after the Congress session. Participation of women and prominent Muslim leaders like Jinnah and the family of Muhammad Ali were some of its highlights. As the movement spread like a wild fire all over India, the Government became worried. On 17th January 1917, the Home Member of the Government of India wrote : “The position is one of great difficulty. Moderate leaders can command no support among the vocal classes who are being led at the heels of Tilak and Besant.”

The appeal of the Home Rule movement was not confined within the frontiers of India. Sir Subrahmaniya Aiyar, K.C.I.E., retired Judge and Acting Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, was the President of the Indian Home Rule League, Madras and in this capacity wrote a letter to President Wilson of United States of America on 24th June 1917. He described the intolerable condition of India under alien rule and made a moving appeal to the President to apply his war message of democracy and self-determination of nations to India. The publication of this letter created a furore in England and making Aiyer so angry that in protest he renounced his titles. The letter, however, was warmly received in U.S.A. and England itself strongly criticised.

On 15th June, 1917, the Government of Madras issued orders of internment against Mrs. Besant. A storm of indignation swept India from one end to the other. Protest meetings were held all over the country and even those, who had hitherto held aloof from the movement joined the League campaigns. Under the inspiration of Tilak, All India Congress Committee strongly protested against the internment of Mrs. Besant. By now, the Government had come to the conclusion that their game of playing the Muslims against the Hindus had failed. Moderates had been wiped out. Political India was united as never before. The Home Rule movement had stirred people as was earlier witnessed only in Bengal at the height of Swadeshi movement in 1905. The Government had even then found it difficult to cope with the national awakening though, it was confined mainly to Bengal, They therefore dreaded the prospect of containing such an awakening all over the country. To make matters worse, the fortunes of the war were steadily going against the British. On 20th August 1917, an announcement was made that consultations would be held with Indians for a fresh set of Constitutional reforms. The announcement was cautiously welcomed by Tilak, who, however, did not suspend or relax the Home Rule agitation.

Montagu received a series of depositions on his arrival in India. He met Tilak on 27th November 1917. As he later wrote: “Then, after lunch, we saw Tilak, the politician, who probably has the greatest influence of any person in India, and who is very extreme. His procession to Delhi to see me was veritable triumphant one. He was really the author of the Congress-League scheme. It was quite obvious that he was not going to be satisfied with anything but what the Congress asks for. **‘We shall take whatever the Government gives us’, he said, ‘but it will not satisfy us, unless it is at least what the Congress asks.’**”

This last statement sums up the practical approach of Lokmanya Tilak. This could only come from a cool headed Statesman. He knew what he had. Followers, who were largely Hindu. He knew, what he wanted – Freedom of India. He, therefore, had no ego problems in coming to an agreement with Jinnah to forge a united front against the British. His was a language that others of his age, could relate to and therefore do business with. Not for him was the moral posturing of a Mahatma, which left everyone cold.

What is it that the Congress wanted at this stage? Let us move on to December 1917. Calcutta session of the Congress was a great triumph for the Home Rule movement. It was the Congress of Mrs. Besant and Tilak. Mrs. Besant, elected as the Congress president; moved a resolution demanding that India be given the status of a Self-Governing Dominion latest by 1928. Soon she made clear that this was only the beginning. "I once said in England : The condition of India's loyalty is India's freedom. I may now add : The condition of India's usefulness to the Empire is India's freedom."

Never before had the Indian National Congress heard such seditious language from its President.

Meanwhile, as the epoch making events were taking place in Indian polity, where was the Mahatma? He had studiously kept away from the Home Rule movement, which offered him no possibility of taking over the leadership. Nor was he idle. At the repeated requests of Brajkishore Prasad, he left on 9th April 1917, for Champaran in Bihar to study first hand the oppression faced by the Indigo cultivators.

This led to a Satyagraha that was unique in Gandhiji's career and showed the greatness of the man. It was a rational agitation which called for specific remedies to a demonstrable set of injustices. Free from any emotional or religious appeals, it was a truly secular movement led by Gandhiji – first and sadly as it turned out, also amongst the last.

Champaran was a district famed for Indigo cultivation. Once the British rule took roots, the British Zamindars made it a matter of compulsion on the cultivators to keep aside best part of their land for the Indigo crop. The system came to be known as 'Teen Kathia'. Once, synthetic Indigo came into the world market, the prices dropped. Teen Kathia was relaxed and cultivation of Indigo no longer remained compulsory. This relaxation came at a price. The farmer was made to pay Rs 100/- per bigha of land. Those, who could not pay were made to sign equivalent loan deeds @12% p.a. Some Zamindars, were more merciful. They did not insist on a cash compensation but replaced Indigo by other cash crops in Teen Kathia.

Oppression was not limited to Teen Kathia. Farmers were also expected to provide carts for transportation of material for the benefit of Zamindar's tannery factories. The hides of their dead cattle automatically became the property of the tannery. The farmer and his family were expected, as a matter of routine to work in conditions of slavery on the farms of the Zamindars without regard to their sex or age. There was no question of any payments. Those, who resisted were fined, boycotted by the community and had to face false police cases.

Once Gandhiji had carried out a study on the spot, he concluded : "having studied these cases, I have come to the conclusion that we should stop going to law courts. Taking such cases to the court does little good. Where the ryots are so crushed and fear-stricken, law courts are useless. The real relief for them is to be free from fear. We can not sit still until we have driven Teen Kathia out of Bihar. I had thought I should be able to leave here in two days, but I now realize that the work might even take two years. I am prepared to give that time, if necessary but I want your help." Even as he prepared to organise the work, he met the Zamindars and Commissioner of the Division, Tirhut, to know their side of the story. As can be expected, the Zamindars told him to get lost. An advice, which was soon given legal shape by the Commissioner.

Gandhiji refused to budge his ground. He wired the Viceroy and the Governor. They already had their hands full with the Home Rule movement and did not want yet another problem on their hands. The local administration was therefore directed to cooperate with Gandhiji, who proceeded to conduct a semi official but an impartial enquiry. Soon, it became an official affair with Gandhiji as one of the members. A unanimous report was submitted on 3rd October 1917 recommending scrapping of Teen Kathia.

The recommendations were accepted by a beleaguered government, out to prove that it was open to reasonable demands of Indians provided they co-operated and did not make a nuisance of themselves as the Home Rulers were doing. Most importantly, there was no issue of substantial revenue loss involved for the Government to worry about. The fact remains that the relief the Champaran farmers got was substantial and very real.

At the same time, no one knew better than Gandhiji that his real work had only begun. As he himself wrote, “As I gained more experience of Bihar, I became convinced that work of a permanent nature was impossible without proper village education...but I did not want to stop at providing for primary education. The villages were insanitary, the lanes full of filth, the wells surrounded by mud and stink and the courtyards unbearably untidy...they were all suffering from various skin diseases....so it was decided to penetrate every department of their lives.” Even for a Mahatma, this was a life time’s work. The beginning was encouraging. “The volunteers with their school, sanitation work and medical relief gained the confidence and respect of the village folk, and were able to bring good influence upon them.” As the work progressed, new difficulties came to light. A poor peasant woman told him to provide a second sari so that she could wash the only one she was wearing. Faced with such seemingly insurmountable problems, the initial enthusiasm soon waned and Gandhiji had to “confess with regret that my hope of putting this constructive work on a permanent footing was not fulfilled.”

Bihar could well have been the arena of his life long quest for transforming the life of these poor peasants. Amazingly, he gave up the cause as lost, even before making a serious sustained effort. All he offers by way of an explanation is a halfhearted excuse; “it did not please God, as often before to allow my plans to be fulfilled. Fate decided otherwise and drove me to take up work elsewhere”

Not a word of explanation on which area of public life so sorely needed his attention that he had to ditch the very people, whose cause had brightened the halo around him. As we have already seen, political life of the country was getting along fine and needed no Mahatma to meddle around. *Nothing and nothing but a Mahatma’s quest for power led him away – certainly not fate or the God.*

Champaran agitation for Gandhiji was over, the moment Teen Kathia was abolished. With his moral halo suitably enhanced, he was on to the next cause. This time, it was a dramatic labour dispute in Ahmedabad. Mill owners, being led by Ambalal Sarabhai, the very man who had contributed so generously to setting up of the Sabramati Ashram. Workers being led on the other hand by his own sister – Anusuyaben. At stake was the age-old dispute over pay. Workers

demanding 50% increase, the mill owners being ready to offer only 20% rise. It is at this stage that Gandhiji stepped in and decided a 35% increase was Just and Fair, for the sake of which a Satyagraha was in order. He alone knew, why 35 and not 20 or 50 was the right number. Meanwhile, the Mill Owners declared a Lock Out on 22nd February 1918 and the Satyagraha commenced. By 12th March, the Workers were despondent. Sensing victory, the Mill Owners opened the gates and invited the Workers to join accepting the 20% increase, they had originally offered. Several workers responded. The Gandhiji led struggle was in tatters. The politician was alarmed at the prospect of defeat and resorted to fast, the first of the many to follow. The Mahatma's life could not be endangered. The mill owners relented partially and offered a 27.5% increase. Shrewdly sensing this was as far as they would go, Gandhiji had no hesitation in pronouncing victory and advising the workers to accept an Increase, which was **Less** than what he himself had considered **Fair**.

It is during this struggle that he gave vent to his animosity against Tilak. Ahmedabad strike was a local issue, being led by Gandhiji and had nothing to do with the Home Rule movement. This did not stop him from criticising Tilak. He claimed that though Tilak was immensely popular and was author of the classic, *Gita Rahasya* (Secrets of Gita), he (Tilak) had not understood the soul of India. *No one other than Gandhiji, not even Lokmanya Tilak, was ever to be given the freedom to understand the true soul of India.* Tilak's fault, according to Gandhiji, was that Tilak wanted India to attain the prosperity level of Europe. *What a crime!!* Not content with this, Gandhiji even choose to belittle Tilak's prison sentence of six years (1908-14) by claiming that Tilak had undergone the sentence merely to prove that Indians could be as courageous as the Europeans. One would have thought that to be courageous was a virtue that Gandhiji would admire. But no – according to Gandhiji, there was no moral or philosophical base for Tilak's courageous stand and the prison term was therefore without any use for the nation !!

This is not a statement worthy of Gandhiji. The less said about this statement the better. More curious is the fact that these utterances find no mention in his "Experiments with Truth" published ten years later.

It appears that Gandhiji was well aware that to utter such nonsense about Tilak in front of Mill Hands, wearied by a long struggle, was one thing but to do so in front of a national audience, was to seek a quick banishment to political exile.

This was no Mahatma; this was a Politician waiting in the wings to take over political leadership from Lokmanya Tilak. Champaran farmers, now Ahmedabad workers were all strategic tools to be used to enhance the moral halo won in South Africa. They also provided useful platforms for chipping away Tilak's popularity. Classic Guerrilla tactic to usefully utilise the time before a bid for toppling Tilak could be made at the opportune time. Meanwhile, the plight of the Kheda farmers beckoned the Mahatma. A severe drought had devastated the country in 1917-18. Kheda was no exception. Farmers claimed that the revenue reduction due to them as per the Government rules was not being given by the Administration. Gandhiji had become convinced that the farmers were right. When appeals to the Government failed, he once again began a Satyagraha on 22nd March 1918. Neither Champaran nor the Ahmedabad experiments had tested the might of the Government. Nor had they affected its power to collect Revenue. For the first time, Gandhiji had launched a struggle that affected a key function of the State – its power to loot the country. It could hardly allow this to happen. Full force of the state coercion was let loose. It is not surprising that it won the trial of strength. For the Satyagraha ended in a compromise. By June 1918, the Collector accepted the principle that only those farmers, who were rich enough, would be required to pay the land revenue. It would be waived for the poor. With this, the struggle was called off. Soon Gandhiji came to realise that it was not the people, who had any say in deciding who could afford to pay and who could not. The power belonged to the Government. The end result was; most ended up being required to pay. The people also saw through the gimmick and the Mahatma's popularity waned. When Gandhiji toured Kheda for supporting War recruitment, the same people who, a few months earlier had considered him their saviour; now turned their back.

Thus, on three different occasions spread over a twenty-year period, Gandhiji was a willing participant in Violence of War. Boer War in South Africa (1898), World War I in London (1914), and now again in World War I in Kheda (1918). Gandhiji had kept aside Ahmisa and

lent full weight to the War effort. So deeply ingrained was his belief that the British Empire on the whole was beneficial to Indians. A belief, he sustained at least up to the age of 50. Did he ever get rid of this regard for the Empire? An interesting question that we shall attempt to answer by our study.

Champaran, Ahmedabad and now Kheda, Gandhiji had tried the weapon of Satyagraha and met with diminishing success. Nevertheless, these three agitations bore his stamp and immensely enhanced his popular standing. Even as Gandhiji immersed himself in endeavors outside the main political current of the day – Home Rule, tide of events continued to accelerate.

Home Rule movement was sought to be extended to the isle of England itself. A delegation had sailed for England in two batches on 10th and 18th March 1918. They were forced to disembark at Gibraltar and return to India. Meanwhile, Tilak himself had left Bombay on 27th March 1918 to go to England via Madras and Colombo. The proposed visit generated tremendous enthusiasm. Tilak made it clear that he was not going to appeal to the generosity of the British but rather to tell them that it was in their own interest that India should be granted immediate Home Rule. Colombo was as far as he was allowed to travel. Once back in India, the Government tried to belittle him by not inviting him to a Conference of prominent Indians to discuss Indian support to the War effort. The exclusion was widely resented. Gandhiji joined the chorus of protest but allowed himself to be persuaded by the Viceroy to attend the conference. **His actions spoke louder than his words regarding his professed regard for Tilak.**

The Montagu-Chelmsford report was published on 8th July 1918. It was a document, which failed to enthuse, even the Moderates, but they nonetheless welcomed it. The Home Rulers were scathing in their criticism. The Indian Civil Services, fearing the whittling down of their untrammelled authority lobbied against the proposed reforms, showing that the so called Iron Frame of the Raj could become soft as a jelly, when its vital interest were threatened. As usual, the ever pragmatic Tilak had the last word, aptly characterizing it as a ‘Sunless dawn’.

A special the Congress was held in Bombay on the 29th August 1918 under the Presidentship of Hasan Imam, to finalise its approach towards the Report. The Moderates knew they had little influence left in the Congress. Fearing that they would be meted out the same shabby treatment that they had given to Tilak ten years earlier, decided to boycott the session. Their fears were unfounded.

Tilak, the Great statesman knew that there were many ways to reach the goal of freedom. Even the moderates had their uses. A split would only benefit the British. He, therefore, made sure that the Congress adopted a very conciliatory attitude. It reaffirmed the Hindu-Muslim Lucknow pact of 1916 and called for setting up of a full Self-Government within a period not exceeding 15 years. Several changes were suggested in the Report but the door for working within the given reforms was left open. This was Tilak at his best. He had told Montagu. **‘We shall take whatever the Government gives us’, he said, ‘but it will not satisfy us, unless it is at least what the Congress asks.’** He was being as good as his word.

Moderates were made of a different clay. They held a separate session of their own in Bombay on 1st November 1918. On the face of it, the resolutions, they passed differed little from the ones in the Congress session. The real difference was in the spirit. For Tilak, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were one step towards the real goal – Absolute Political Independence. The very words frightened the Moderates, who were basically content with crumbs thrown by the Raj but only wanted some more.

The separate session of the Moderates marked their exit from the Congress and with also from the national scene. The annual session of the Congress was held at Delhi in December. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was the President. Freed from the restraints of keeping the Moderates in good humor, Congress now demanded full responsible government **at once**.

At this time, Savarkar was battling for maintaining his sanity in the cells of the cellular Jail at Andaman. Years of toiling like an animal were telling on him. Ravaged by the dreaded tuberculosis, the body was nearly broken. Lonely solitude of the Jail, broken only by unceasing insults of the Warders, began to haunt and fleeting thoughts

of suicide crossed the mind. Savarkar was to overcome this ordeal, suffer another six years of such inhuman torture and amazingly live on to see his beloved motherland become an Independent Sovereign Republic, a good thirty two years later. Meanwhile, the torch of revolutionary fire had not fallen. **It had made its way to the center stage of the national polity.** In his own unique manner, Tilak was bowing in reverence to his younger comrade and toiling to fulfill his dreams.

Where was the Mahatma at this time? He was laid low by dysentery following irregular meals during the War recruitment campaigns. In the first prolonged illness of his life, he came close to death but survived by breaking his vow against consuming milk. The Doctor, as the Viceroy earlier, managed to persuade him that he could consume Goat milk to rebuild his constitution, as his vow was limited to Cow or buffalo milk. This was self-deception and Gandhiji knew it. As he himself says, “The will to live proved stronger than devotion to truth”

Some letters written by Gandhiji during this period, one on 17th August to his associate, and the other on 25th August to Tilak, who had inquired about his health, are interesting. They throw light on the nature of the fundamental conflict between the Tilak and the Gandhiji way.

To Tilak there were many paths leading to the goal. Each useful in its own way, even the Satyagraha, which to Tilak was the Weapon of the Weak. It was this broad practical outlook that allowed Tilak to unhesitatingly help Savarkar’s comrades in arms like Bhatt, a core member of *‘dreaded criminal gang of Savarkar.’* At the same time, without fear of contradiction, he could also do his best to bridge the gap with the Moderates, who would have recoiled in horror by the very shadow of Bhatt.

To Gandhiji, Satyagraha was the only true path. All others were false.

In the war that the Indian nation was fighting against the British occupation, Tilak's motto was "Do unto others as they do to you". Where as Gandhiji believed in "Do unto others as you would want them to do to you" as an inviolate cardinal principal of life. One was a practical Statesman; the other was a Mahatma.

In a Kargil like situation, who do we follow – the Statesman or the Mahatma. The answer is fairly obvious. No wonder, Tilak was by far the most popular leader of the day. Gandhiji knew and acknowledged the wide gap that divided them. Yet, this did not stop him from hoping that one day, Tilak would accept that he was wrong and that Satyagraha was the only right weapon. This was a hope in vain. For Tilak died without changing his beliefs.

A most unfortunate event took place during this crucial period. Tilak had to leave for England on 19th September 1918, soon after the special session of the Congress, in connection with a case, which he had bought against Sir Valentine Chirol for libel. He could therefore not accept the Presidentship of the Congress to which office he was elected on the eve of his departure. In a surprising turn of events, Mrs. Besant came to fully support the Montagu-Chelmsford report and departed from the Tilak line.

It is during this absence of Tilak that momentous events – The passing of Rowlett Act and Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place in India. Now was the time that Gandhiji was waiting for. While the Lokmanya was away, the Mahatma launched a blitzkrieg to grab the political power.

Chapter IX

Communalisation of the Freedom Struggle 1919-20

The year 1919 is a watershed year in the history of this country. It is in this period that Gandhiji became a major political leader. It is in this period that for the first time in hundreds of years, Pan-Islamism became a dominant force in the country. The effect of which has continued to poison the body polity, to this date, a good nine decades later. The man responsible for this was none other than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In his quest for power, he turned the Wheel of History back by hundreds of years and communalised Indian politics as never before.

It is this sad story – The story of a Mahatma's Quest for Power that shall now engage our attention. It is hard to believe that a Mahatma would resort to cynical manipulation of popular aspirations for the sake of promoting his own political agenda. Unfortunately, this is exactly what seems to have happened in that fateful spring of 1919.

By the dawn of 1919, the country was politically alive and throbbing with anticipation of great things to happen. The murderous World War I had ended on 11th November 1918 with the Raj having won complete and decisive victory. The Congress was rightly demanding returns on the national resources invested to make the victory possible. India had gifted £100 million to the United Kingdom, an amount that exceeded the annual revenue of Government of India. By 31st March 1918, India had spent £130 million on the war. The supplies included 1,874 miles of railway track, 6,000 vehicles, 13,073 L.ft of girders, 237 locomotives, 883 steamers and barges and ten million cubic ft of timber. The war was fought with 1.2 million Indian soldiers, of whom about 10% died.

As the War consumed valuable national resources, millions of Indians died of hunger and diseases without even pricking the conscience of the White rulers. Of what use were the *Nigger* lives, if not spent for the sake of their masters?

Not only was the Congress merely demanding returns, the people at large were readily supporting the clarion call for Home Rule- by now a barely disguised term for Independence. Thousands of Revolutionaries, from Bengal, from Punjab, from Maharashtra and indeed all over the country had laid down their lives for the sake of the nation. Leaders like Tilak, Mrs. Besant, Jinnah had made sure that these sacrifices would not go waste. The political awareness that sprang in hundred breasts with the death of one Madanlal Dhingra or Khudiram Bose was stoked by these leaders so that a mighty fire now roared. A fire that called out for the sacrifice of the British Raj in India. The Raj was only too well aware of the precarious nature of its hold on the country. The Governor of Punjab, Michael O' Dwyer, with unpleasant memories of the Ghadar Party was particularly wary. With good reason too, as was soon to become evident.

Alarmed at the extent of the revolutionary activities in India that had continued unabated despite repression, Viceroy Chelmsford had appointed Seditious Committee on 10th December 1917. Justice Rowlatt was its President. As the name suggests, the Committee was charged with the responsibility of drafting a special legislation that would curb the seditious activities. It submitted its report in April 1918. On 6th February 1919, the Government decided to give effect to the recommendations of the Committee. By 21st March 1919, the Rowlatt act had been placed on the Statute Book.

In hindsight, this Act was no more draconian than many such Acts in Independent India. Even in 1919 far more draconian acts were on the Statute book for the Frontier Provinces. Nevertheless, in the generally expectant atmosphere of the time it deeply disturbed people. This was the opportunity Gandhiji appeared to be waiting for. From 1915 to 1919, for four long years, he had waited, taking up causes that were outside the political domain. Four long years in which he had waited on the sidelines while political activities had taken shape without the benefit of his guiding hand. This seems to have been a difficult thing to swallow for one who was used to be the center of lime light in South Africa. The goal of being acknowledged as the undisputed leader of the Indian masses had remained beyond his reach. At last, the destiny beckoned. Lokmanya Tilak was out of the country. Mrs. Besant seemed to have mellowed with age.

The Government had presented him the chance to become a leading political light on a platter. Here was the time to strike.

6th February 1919 to 18th April 1919 – a span of less than three months, Gandhiji's organisational genius came to the fore. Rising quickly from a prolonged illness, he quickly established a Satyagraha Sabha, "as all hopes of any existing institutions adopting a novel weapon like Satyagraha seemed to me to be in vain". Naturally, none other than Gandhiji could be the President. "From the very beginning, it seemed clear to me that the Sabha was not likely to live long". A curious way of stating that the Sabha owed its existence only to the fact that a Tilak dominated Congress, even in his absence, was not likely to adopt Satyagraha as its weapon. No sooner than the Congress could be captured, the Sabha would cease to exist.

Moving with an energy that would have been the envy of a man, half his age, Gandhiji undertook tours across the country with lightening speed. Delhi, Lucknow, Alhahabad, Bombay, Madras, Tanjovur, Tuticorin, Gandhiji had covered the country from North to South within less than three weeks spreading the gospel of Satyagraha. 30th March was fixed as the day for observing *Hartal*, unique Indian phenomenon of suspending all normal activities. This was later changed to 6th April. In the confusion that resulted due to change in dates, Delhi and Amritsar observed Hartal on the original date. The event was marred in Delhi by police firing in which a few people were killed. British nurses in the Police hospital refused to treat the wounded rebels.

6th April, 1919 was observed as Black Sunday all over the country, even in Peshawar, where laws far more draconian than the Rowlatt Act were already in operation. Gandhiji was in Bombay, where it was observed with full decorum that a peaceful Satyagraha demanded. The government too co-operated by turning the Nelson's eye to such illegal activities as sale of books that were banned. On 7th April, Gandhiji started for Delhi and Amritsar. On his way to Punjab, he was made to return back to Bombay, under Police custody. The arrest of the Mahatma incensed the people and riots erupted first in Bombay and then in Ahmedabad.

Gandhiji's arrest was just the spark that the dry timber in Punjab needed to burst forth in a blazing fire. Lahore, Gujranwala, Kasur, Jalandhar, Multan, everywhere the story was the same. All were rocked by riots over the arrest of Gandhiji leading to police firing and death of the innocents. At Guranwala, events took a dangerous turn and an airplane was used to strafe and bomb the rioters. Chelmsford informed Montagu, " Punjab is in open rebellion". Things were peaceful in Amritsar up to the 9th April. Agitation grew, when two local leaders, Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Kitchlew were deported even as the news of Gandhiji's arrest was filtering in. Police resorted to firing, which served to madden the people. There were several acts that brought live uncomfortable memories of 1857. There were enthusiastic displays of Hindu-Muslim unity. There were attacks on Europeans and five were even murdered. Signs were ominous for the Raj.

By the time Brigadier General Rex Dyer arrived in Amritsar on the 11th April, the city had passed out of British control and all attempts to restore order had been suspended. His contingent of 1100 troops, a third of whom were British, was greeted with derision. They marched to the Gobindgarh fort and comforted 100 terrified European women and children, who had escaped to safety from the violence of the mob. By 12th April, General Dyer established a de facto Martial Law, though it was not officially proclaimed till the 15th April. A series of indiscriminate arrests and a ban on public meetings followed. The roused people of Punjab were not to be cowed down so easily. In defiance of the ban, a Public meeting was organised on the fateful day – the 13th April 1919 at 4.30 p.m.

Some 15,000 people had gathered, in a city of barely 150,000. Peaceful or otherwise they were as much Rebels to the Raj as they remain Patriots and freedom fighters to the people of Bharat. Dyer was straightforward military man. Not for him was the hypocrisy of his superiors. He knew the truth about the Raj. It was won at the tip of the sword and would only exist so long as the natives did not overcome their fear of the British gun. He was determined to make a horrible example of the *Rebels*. If it called for the brutality that was displayed in 1857, so be it.

He arrived at the scene of the meeting just after 5.00 p.m. with two armoured cars. In a cool unhurried manner, he deployed his men facing crowd and ordered them to open fire. This was war. No prisoners were to be taken. It was a methodical, directed fusillade with Dyer ordering volleys. A total of 1,650 rounds were fired, leaving about 379 people dead and 1,200 dying.

The British nurses were spared the indignity of being asked to treat the rebels. For none were carried to the hospital. They were left to the tender care of the vultures. The nasty natives who survived the massacre were given liberal dose of flogging in the days to come so that they could never again dream of threatening the Raj.

Elsewhere in Punjab, repression was equally severe. Machine Guns, bombs and even airplanes were liberally used to quell an incipient revolt. The province was treated as worse than enemy territory. In all more than a 1,000 people were killed. A veil of secrecy was drawn over the Government repression in Punjab under the cover of Martial Law. If ever any one doubted that Indian nation was at a State of War with the British nation, treatment of Punjab in 1919 was enough to provide the clinching evidence. If anyone ever again doubted the moral basis of any act of violence against the British, he was either being naïve or a hypocrite or blinded by quest for power.

The Mahatma was shaken by the turn of these events. He suspended the Satyagraha on 18th April calling it a *Himalayan miscalculation*. He refused to make any public announcement about Punjab since no authentic information was available, as he himself admitted in a letter dated 30th May to the Viceroy. This lack of information seems to have been confined to Gandhiji alone. For, the great poet Rabindra Nath Tagore relinquished his Knighthood as measure of protest on 30th May itself. By 31st July, Gandhiji came to the conclusion that on account of indications of goodwill on part of the Government as also his desire not to embarrass the Government, he had decided not to resume the Satyagraha. It was not until the 4th of November, more than six months later, that the word Jallianwala Bagh was uttered from his mouth. Once again, with moralization, that even if all the people present in the Bagh on that fateful day were killed, revenge would not be a proper course of action.

One fails to understand the rationale of the great urgency behind launching an all India struggle of this magnitude. A struggle that was launched without even the pretence of consultation with the Congress or Tilak, the foremost political leader of the day, under aegis of a body that was known to have short life. Neither Home Rule nor Self-Government were its aims.

The only stated objective was the repeal of the Rowlatt act. An objective that was not attained and yet the movement was tamely withdrawn. For what cause then did people all over the country struggle? Little wonder that Gandhiji noted “some irate young Punjabis...went the length of threatening me with assassination.”

One thing did happen from the turmoil. Gandhiji had arrived on the national scene, as major political leader. The blitzkrieg had succeeded.

Let us now examine what kind of “good intentions”, the Raj displayed. Hunter Commission set up by the Government concluded that Rex Dyer had committed a grave error of judgement. Due to a display of intolerance by Lord Hunter, the relations between him and the Indian members of the Commission became so strained that they ceased to talk to each other. Following this censure, he was discharged from the Military. It was Churchill, who swung the debate in House of Commons in favour of Dyer’s discharge. This was despite the fact that Churchill, “believed that Dyer had been right to shoot hard...what stuck in his craw and that of the army’s high command was Dyer’s repeated assertion that he would liked to have killed more”. The poor soldier did not know the value of hypocrisy. His boss, who allowed use of airplane strafing of unarmed civilian population, Michael O’ Dwyer was allowed to go scot-free. A grateful British public would not allow their Hero to suffer a hardship. They collected a fund of £ 26,000 for his use. The House of Lords deplored the removal of Dyer from army as unjust and establishing a dangerous precedent.

If the anti - Rowlatt Act agitation brought Gandhiji to the political forefront, the Khilafat movement provided him the platform to emerge as the leader of the Muslims as well. Let us first try and understand, what Khilafat movement was all about.

The Afgan rulers of Delhi, especially, Mohammad Bin Tughlaq had acknowledged the Khalifa (Caliph) at Cairo. This was way back in the fourteenth century. The Ottoman emperors at Constantinople subsequently became the Khalifa but they were not recognised as such in India. The Moghul Emperors in India recognised no Khalifa or spiritual superiors outside India. Thus for well over five hundred years, the Indian Muslims had looked within India for their roots.

It was only after the collapse of the Moghul power in the nineteenth century that the name of the Turkish Sultan began to be mentioned in the Indian mosques as the Khalifa. The Muslims seemed to derive some psychological satisfaction from continuance of Turkey as an independent power. In the early years of the twentieth century, two trends appeared in the Indian Muslim mind. The inclination of the younger element was towards nationalism, while the older lot tended to gravitate towards the seat of Khilafat in Turkey. Its entry in the World War as an ally of Germany against Britain put these elements in a quandary. Not willing to take any chance, the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George as well as the American President Wilson assured the Muslims that the allied forces would not deprive Turkey of its territorial integrity so far as the Asiatic dominions were concerned. With complete victory in the War, there appeared no reason for the allied forces to pay heed to the sentiments of the Muslims. They then proceeded to carve up the Turkish Empire as it suited them the most. The conservative Muslims in India launched a movement demanding the restoration of Turkish Sultan as the Khalifa and to restore the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire. This movement, entirely limited to India, came to be known as the Khilafat movement.

The very ethical basis of the movement was suspect. For the Turks themselves did not want the Sultan. They wanted a Republic and they were soon to have it. To insist upon the integrity of the Turkish Empire was to mean perpetual subjugation of the Arabs by that Empire. Yet, Gandhiji took up the cause with a tenacity and faith that surprised many Muslims themselves. Many people tried to dissuade him from taking up a cause that was suspect morally but he would not yield.

In his quest for power, he failed to see that he was contributing to reversing a process that was hundreds of years old. The process of Indianisation of the Muslims.

As we have seen earlier, Moghuls began their rule as aliens but then became a part and parcel of this soil. They came to recognise no one outside the land as being their Sovereign. So much so that the last Moghul – Bahadur Shah Jaffar remains brightest symbol of the true Hindu-Muslim unity over a period of nearly one thousand years.

Without fear of contradiction, it can be safely said that by 1857, the Indian Muslim had become a completely indigenous element of the Bharatiya soil. They followed Islam as a religion but shared in equal measure the joys and sorrows of their Hindu brethren.

It is this fact that was brought to light by Savarkar in his epic – “The Indian War of Independence”. The book which earned him a place in Andaman and an everlasting notoriety with the Raj. So why was this wholly indigenous episode of Hindu – Muslim unity consigned to dustbin after Savarkar was jailed in 1909? Tilak understandably never needed it. His pragmatic approach had enabled him to come to an understanding with Jinnah on a secular basis and did not need to delve into the history for a solution. The case of Gandhiji is curious. He chose to ignore the history, which then was only seventy years old. Was Gandhiji unaware of Savarkar? That can hardly be the case as he had written an article on the Savarkar brothers in *Young India* on 26th May 1920 calling for their freedom. The article even referred to his book on 1857. So why did the Mahatma ignore its message and instead choose to travel back in time by over five hundred years and come up with the Khilafat ?

Even, Nehru fails to enlighten us. Instead, he has been bitterly critical of it, “the movement itself had no solid basis in social and economic conditions or in the needs of the masses”

Khilafat movement propagated the obnoxious idea that the joys and sorrows of the Indian Muslims were not tied to their fellow Hindus, who shared the same soil with them. Their destiny was tied with the despotic Sultan of a faraway land, who was not loved by even his own people. Poor Bahadur Shah Zafar was to lie forgotten in his tomb at

Rangoon. This was blessed by Gandhiji. As he said: “We talk of Hindu – Muslim unity. It would be an empty phrase if the Hindus hold aloof from the Muslims when their vital interests are at stake.” The most charitable explanation that one can offer for such a stand is that the emotional Mahatma did not understand the logical implication of what he said. The plain fact is that the pan-Islamic idea, which inspired the Khilafat question, cut at the very root of Indian nationality.

If the real sympathy and vital interest of a large section of the Indians were tied with the political destiny of a land far beyond its borders, they could never form a political unit of the Indian nationality. By his irrational support to the Khilafat movement, Gandhiji was really telling the Muslims that they were in India but not of India. *It was thus the Mahatma and not Jinnah, who was the original propounder of the two-nation theory, that has continued to haunt us for last ninety years.*

The movement began in right earnest on 27th October 1919 when the day was celebrated as the Khilafat day all over the country. On 24th November, Gandhiji was elected as the President of All India Khilafat Conference at Delhi. Finally, the long cherished dream of being a leader of both the Hindus and the Muslim was close to being fulfilled. Never mind the cost that the nation was to pay for this venture.

The release of Ali brothers from internment after four years on the eve of Annual session of the Indian National Congress at Amritsar in December 1919 gave a great fillip to the Khilafat agitation. Meanwhile, the British Government had pressed ahead with its scheme of Constitutional reforms. A Parliamentary act giving effect to Montagu-Chelmsford report was passed by the House of Commons on December 5, 1919, which received Royal assent on 23rd December 1919.

Amritsar session of the Congress- was the last that the Great Tilak, who returned from England in November 1919, would ever attend. The proceedings clearly brought out the fact that Tilak remained the most popular leader despite his year long absence from the country. C. R. Das, wanted the Congress to completely reject the reforms. Gandhiji took the opposite view. He said, “The Reforms Act coupled

with the Royal proclamation is an earnest of the intention of the British people to do justice to India...Our duty therefore is not to subject the Reforms to carping criticism but to settle down quietly to work so as to make them a success". It was in the same city, eight months earlier, the British had given a live demonstration of their intentions when well and truly cornered – at Jallianwala Bagh and the good Mahatma was willing to trust the same hand tainted with the blood of his fellow citizens. A hand that was not yet even wiped clean.

Ultimately, the line that prevailed was neither the pacifist voice of Gandhiji nor the violent rejection of Das but "Responsive Co-operation" of Tilak.

1920 was to mark a turning point in the Indian history. As the year started, Khilafat movement was not a part of the Congress programme. This did not dim Gandhiji enthusiasm. He continued to promote its dubious cause. On 10th March 1920, the Khilafat Conference met at Calcutta and accepted the principle of Non-cooperation as the best way to further its cause. The terms offered to Turkey by the Allied Powers were announced on 15th May 1920. There was to be a complete dismemberment of the Turkish Empire. Events now moved fast. On 28th May, Hunter Commission report was published stoking discontent. Gandhiji urged Muslims to initiate Non-cooperation for Khilafat. By July, the Khilafat Committee sent a notice to the Viceroy. Gandhiji returned all his War medals. Khilafat had moved him to an extent that Jallianwala Bagh had not.

Non-cooperation for the cause of Khilafat began on the 1st August 1920. It is on this day that Bal Gangadhar Tilak; the Lokmanya, breathed his last. An era had come to an end. The Statesman was no more. The national polity was now going to be held hostage to the emotional impulses. No nation has progressed by relying on the emotions alone. India has proved to be no exception.

Special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta on 4th September 1920. Gandhiji held the field now that Tilak was no more. The Mahatma, who had pleaded for giving the Reforms a real try a mere seven months before, now spoke eloquently in favour of Non-cooperation. The Congress resolution called upon the Government to

redress wrongs done in Khilafat. It also spoke of Punjab atrocities and establishment of the Swaraj was added on. In case the Government failed to respond, people were called upon to practise Non-cooperation. The debate generated considerable heat. Mrs. Besant was heckled as she got up to oppose the resolution. Gandhiji graciously asked people not to interrupt the lady. The resolution was carried by 1,886 votes against 884. Within a month of the death of Lokmanya, his rational policy of “Responsive Co-operation” was given up by the Mahatma.

Ambedkar has noted that,

“Swaraj was not the primary object, it was Khilafat and that Swaraj was added as secondary object to induce the Hindus to join it”.

A view seconded by Mrs. Besant when she said:

“It will be remembered that Mr. Gandhi, in March 1920 had forbidden the mixing up of non-cooperation in defense of Khilafat with other questions; but it was found that the Khilafat was not sufficiently attractive to Hindus..., so Punjab atrocities were added to the list of provocative causes.”

The resolution had to be ratified at the Annual session to be held at Nagpur in December 1920. There was unprecedented enthusiasm at Nagpur. More than 14,000 delegates attended the session. When Calcutta Resolution was put to vote, it was apparent that the overwhelming majority was in its favour. Yet a solitary soul got up to oppose it. “Mr. Gandhi,” he began only to be hooted by the delegates, who would not allow him to address their Mahatma as a mere ‘Mr.’. This would not deter the man. He made his stand clear. He was opposed to the resolution. Now the boos became shrill and finally the insulted soul had to leave the meeting in humiliation. A bemused Mahatma made no attempt to stop this farce. The nation was to pay a heavy price for this insult. Indeed, a price that we continue to pay even today. For that insulted humiliated soul was none other than Jinnah. The man who had stuck a deal with the Great Tilak as a co-equal four years back; had come to be completely unwanted in Gandhi Congress for the sin of being opposed to the Mahatma’s views.

If 1915 – 1918 was the time for preparation, 1919-20 was the time to strike for power. Tilak's absence during most of 1919 was very handy. Rowlatt agitation could be launched. Unrestrained by the wise counsel of Tilak, it was a disaster. Passions in Punjab were very high. The martyrdom of the Gadhara party was too recent to be forgotten. Local Congress leaders had warned in 1918 that they were sitting on a volcano, waiting to erupt. It is on the author of the Rowlatt agitation that the responsibility of the Punjab disturbances lay. Rex Dyer did, what to him was his duty in killing people at the Jallianwala Bagh.

What duty did Gandhiji fulfill when he provoked the people to defy the Raj without any preparation? What was the burning urgency in launching the agitation? No such urgency was in evidence later in condemning the Government. It is difficult to escape the feeling that the object was to exploit the absence of Tilak.

Nothing much different can be said about the support for Khilafat movement. Everything suddenly became subordinate to the cause of the Sultan of Turkey. In this Gandhiji allied himself with the most reactionary elements of the Muslim society for a cause that was not only anti-national but also morally dubious. All for the sake of brushing aside the secular leadership of nationalist Jinnah.

Let us for a moment concede that Gandhiji wanted to forge an emotional unity between Hindus and the Muslims. Let us grant that he was not happy with merely a political unity that had been brought about by Tilak and Jinnah in 1916. What he wanted was something far more enduring. When Gandhiji looked around to find a symbol to forge the emotional unity between Hindus and Muslims, 1857 itself was then in living memory. The ban on Savarkar's book as well as inhuman treatment being meted out to him at Andaman were both well known. Gandhiji had also read the Kaye and Malleon's History of Indian Mutiny of 1857/8, while in South Africa. It contains the entire concluding statement of the Attorney General, parts of which are quoted in "The British Mutiny of 1857". Curiously, Gandhiji throws no light on the impact that this book left on him. Did he ever read Savarkar's account of 1857? Once again, we meet with a wall of silence in "My Experiments with Truth"

As a symbol of national and emotional unity, Bahadur Shah Zafar was unsurpassed. For he was a Bharatiya Muslim, for whom the Hindus too had fought. For in his own way, he had tried to forge national unity back in 1857 and nearly succeeded. For he was the rightful national sovereign, who was wrongly deposed. His cause was rooted in the Bharatiya soil. Yet, Gandhiji ignored him and took up the cause of the alien Turkish Sultan. Someone whom the Moghuls had disowned more than four hundred years ago. The poison of Separatism that Khilafat represented; injected by Gandhiji in the polity of the nation continues to give bitter fruits, ninety years later.

In the heights of Kargil and Saichen, the descendents of Bahadur Shah Zafar find themselves locked in brutal hand to hand combat tearing each other's guts out. The poor Emperor lying forgotten in his tomb in Rangoon can only weep at the senseless loss of life – of young blood in its prime soaking the soil red, in defense of a cause that belies his comprehension.

Why did Gandhiji do this? Was it because he wanted to invent a new and unique way in everything that he did and did not want to pollute his hands by taking up a cause that somebody had already taken up? Was it the fear of mortally offending the British? For, the moment, something like 1857 was mentioned, the kids' gloves came off and the Raj bared its fangs. Or was it simply because like most of his countrymen to date, he did not truly understand the Real Story of 1857?

Only the Mahatma can tell. The fact remains that a truly wonderful opportunity to forge national unity was lost. Not only was an Opportunity was lost but the ship of the nation was made to sail in a direction that had no connection with historical reality. The Khilafat sowed the seed of fanaticism, that has now mushroomed in a poisonous tree with ever spreading tentacles. If this is not Quest for Power, what else is? It is by Machiavellian strategy, not by Satyagraha that by 1920, Gandhiji came to acquire a vice like grip over the Indian polity, one that was to last for nearly two decades.

Chapter X

The Flawed Approach of a Mahatma 1920 – 1939

The men and women, who fell under the spell of the Mahatma and their numbers, were considerable; Gandhiji inspired to great heights. For them, his charms were simply irresistible. As Nehru confessed: “For the moment I hear him speak I am smitten by a kind of a sacred rage..my heart jumps into my mouth and the tears start into my eyes- Oh, and not only me, but also lots of other men...I know I ought to do things he tells me to; and yet the moment I’m out of his sight I don’t care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I set off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can..” This extraordinary confession tells the whole story about Gandhiji’s influence on the people who came under his spell. The appeal was to the heart and not the head.

The appeal was to the emotions and not to rationality. He was the ultimate answer to people looking for a spiritual Guru – an Avatar, who would lead them out of the morasses, if only they would do as he told them to do. Things he asked them to do were in any case simple and straight forward. His insistence on Truth, emphasis on the right means, deep rooted concern for the poorest of the poor complimented by his own personal life style that seemed to live up to his message, how could his magic not hold any one spell bound!

Much is written and known about this aspect of Gandhiji to once again dwell upon. Let us look at the other side. What of the people who refused to be ‘smitten by kind of a sacred rage’?

People like Jinnah, Savarkar, Ambedkar, were they somehow Sinners or simply fools, for they refused to follow the Prophet? The question does not merit an answer. These intellectual giants were well aware that destinies of nations could not be decided on emotional outbursts but required cool headed rational approach so that the welfare of the people could be assured. Spiritual, emotional approach of Gandhiji could therefore hold no charm for them.

The manner of Gandhiji's rise to political leadership between 1915 to 1920 showed them clearly that the Mahatma also had hidden deep within him, the spirit of Niccolo Machiavelli, the 15th century Italian, whose treatise "Prince" is a classic on Realpolitik. The Spirit, which made him, do strange things that were not comprehensible even to those 'smitten by a kind of a sacred rage', not to talk of those who remained unaffected by it. This awareness made them very wary of the Mahatma. Ambedkar even wrote a signed article in Free Press Journal dated 14th April 1944 "Beware of Mr. Gandhi"

In the modern times, the unfortunate assassination of Gandhiji in 1948 by a devoted follower of Savarkar has somehow tarred all those who seek to reassess contribution of Gandhiji to the national polity with the same brush. If you dare to question his contribution, you must be a follower of Nathuram Godse, the self confessed assassinator of Gandhiji, goes the reasoning. It is time we accept that many, who refuse to be charmed by the Gandhi magic, simply prefer the Statesman like approach of Tilak. They are in no way seeking to condone the crime of Nathuram Godse. If the readers accept this premise underlying the analysis offered, they would be able to read on without worrying about a bias on my part.

The Legend of the Mahatma rests on four pillars. His contribution to Communal Harmony. His contribution to the cause of Upliftment of the Untouchables. His contribution to the cause of Independence. His concern for the poorest of the poor – the Daridrarayan - as he called them.

We now know that for all the contribution of the Mahatma, the end result was a spectacular failure.

For, all the work of the Mahatma, communal harmony was at a low during 1920 – 1939 reaching a nadir in 1947, as we all so painfully know. Despite the work done by the Mahatma, the former Untouchables remain most unwilling to accept him as their Saviour.

The Memo of Lord Keynes, laying bare the British economic bankruptcy as being the main cause for their withdrawal from India, explodes the reassuring theory of Independence being the result of a British change of heart on account of Gandhiji's Satyagraha.

The poorest of the poor were the worst sufferers under the British raj. Every delay of even a day in kicking out the British caused them acute misery.

It could well be a case of a glorious failure for reasons beyond his control. Once again, a critical examination shows that the failure was inherent in the very approach of the Mahatma. Conclusion that one can not reach without the deepest of regret.

I took each of these pillars of the Gandhi legend for detailed examination. On an unbiased study of the history of 1920-1939, four questions arose in my mind. Let me share them with the readers but beware, these questions are not for the faint hearted.

- (a) *Did the Mahatma's Approach Improve Communal Harmony?*
- (b) *Did the Mahatma Really Work for the Welfare of the Untouchables?*
- (c) *Did the Mahatma Ever Really Intend to Drive the British out of the Country ?*
- (d) *Did the Mahatma's Approach Benefit the Daridrinarayan*

I am well aware that the answer to all these questions would be a most unqualified 'Yes', in any conventional narration of history that is taught in the schools. Does this historical version pass the test of Facts?

Let us put it to a rigorous analysis of hard Facts and see the results.

Chapter XI

Did the Mahatma's Approach Improve Communal Harmony?

On 26th March 1940, Hindu India was startled to attention as never before. It is on this day that the Muslim League formally demanded Pakistan by passing its now famous Lahore resolution. The moving force for this was none other than the once nationalist Jinnah. It is convenient to paint Jinnah as the villain of the piece from the Indian point of view. The devious Muslim, who spurned all the pious appeals of the Mahatma and demanded a new nation to satisfy his own craving for power.

It is indeed a reality that if there is one thing that Gandhiji never tired of promoting, it was the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. From 1919, the tumultuous days of Rowlatt agitation to the resignation of the Congress ministries in 1939, the entire two decade period is full of his efforts in this direction. Yet, he was rewarded by this Muslim perfidy. For all that he did for them, they ditched him. That too by a man who had once been an equally ardent promoter of the same cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. Generations of Indians have grown up nurturing this sense of betrayal.

The facts, are a little more complex than this simplistic reasoning would have us believe.

Let us first understand that the Lahore Resolution of the Muslim League was simply carrying Gandhiji's own argument to its logical conclusion. In 1920, the Mahatma had Jinnah humiliated, when he had tried to oppose supporting Khilafat movement. By insisting on supporting this dangerous movement, Gandhiji provided the cloak of legitimacy to the divisive concept that a Muslim had to look outside the soil of the nation for political salvation.

It would be understandable that a Muslim would look to Mecca and Madina for spiritual salvation. Khilafat was not about spiritual salvation. It was about political aspirations. The political fate of the Sultan of Turkey.

By supporting the political cause of this alien ruler, Gandhiji was proclaiming that it was right and proper for Indian Muslims to treat the question of the destiny of this Sultan with the same importance as the Hindus attached to the concept of Swaraj. The difference in the political outlook was accepted and legitimized. Now, through the Pakistan resolution, Jinnah was merely demanding a separate political home for a group of people who differed in their political outlook. If Gandhiji could use the Khilafat as the vehicle to attain political power, why was Jinnah wrong in following his example?

It is time we realize that Jinnah was as wrong in demanding Pakistan as Gandhiji in supporting the Khilafat movement. The fact remains, it was Gandhiji who committed the original sin. Nor did Jinnah walk out of the Nagpur Congress and immediately demand Pakistan. He waited for a good twenty years. A good part of these twenty years, he remained resolutely secular. It appears that it is only when his patience with Gandhiji and the Hindu society that had reposed such a blind faith in this Mahatma, ran thin that he crossed the Rubicon. One more thing, let us not hurry to the conclusion that by demanding Pakistan, Jinnah merely wanted to repay Gandhiji in the same coin. Let us look at the ground realities first.

Communal (Dis)Harmony in 1920-1939

The Facts

The history of communal relations between 1920 – 1939 is one long tale of communal conflict in which the loss of life and property reached levels that would put any civilization in any part of the world to shame. Indeed, a veritable civil war raged, interrupted by brief intervals of armed peace.

If the term Civil War sounds exaggerated, look at what happened in the city of Bombay. The first riot in its history took place in 1893. This was followed by a long period of communal peace, which lasted up to 1929. In the next nine years that followed, there were no less than 10 communal riots of horrific dimensions.

Communal Riots in Bombay
1929-1938

Year	Duration	Dead	Injured
1929	36 days	149	739
1929	22 days	35	109
1930	Two riots, details not available		
1932	49 days	217	2,713
1933	One riot, details not available		
1936	65 days	94	632
1937	21 days	11	85
1938	3 hours	12	100

Thus in this nine year period, the Hindus and Muslims were engaged in a Warfare for about 210 days killing 550 people and wounding another 4,500. Nor was this situation unique in India. Let us start with 1920 itself.

What happened on the ground with the onset of Khilafat movement? Let the noted Jurist Chagla speak in his restrained judicial voice:

“The alliance between Mahatma Gandhi and the Khilafatists considerably accentuated the communal and religious aspects of Indian public life.” The deadly impact of the spread of virus of communalism was soon visible for everyone to see.

1921/22

The Moplah Outrage

The Moplahs were a band of fanatic Muslims, poor and ignorant, about a million in number. They descended from the Arabs who settled in the Malbar coast, in eighth or ninth century. They lived in Malabar with about 2 million Hindus and had acquired notoriety for their religious frenzy.

During 1921, there was a great deal of excitement in the area. Fiery speeches of Ali brothers - close associates of Gandhiji, the prophecies of the coming of Swaraj led to collection of arms. Knives, swords and spears were secretly manufactured. Preparations were made to proclaim the Kingdom of Islam. On 20th August, an encounter took place between the Moplahs and the British forces at Pirunangdi. Roads were blocked, telegraph lines cut and the railways destroyed in a number of places. Moplahs now declared that Swaraj was established. A certain Ali Mudaliar was proclaimed Raja, Khilafat flags were flown and Ernad and Wallurana were declared Khilafat kingdoms. As a rebellion against the British, it was understandable but what was cause for serious concern was the manner in which the Hindus came to be treated.

Massacres, forcible conversions, desecration of temples, foul outrages upon women, not only rape but also such heinous crimes as ripping open pregnant women, pillage, arson, rape and destruction- in short, all the accompaniments of brutal and unrestrained barbarism, were freely perpetrated upon the Hindus till the Government succeeded in restoring order. If this were a taste of Swaraj for which Gandhiji supported Khilafat movement, not only the Malabar Hindus, any sane person would have none of it.

By the end of 1921, the Moplahs were defeated after 3,000 were killed in pitched battles. The wave of revulsion against the Moplahs came to be seen in an incident on 19th November 1921, when seventy Moplah prisoners were packed in a closed coach, killing all of them.

Gandhiji spoke of 'brave God fearing Moplahs' who were fighting for what they considered as religion, and in a manner, which they considered religious. Khilafat leaders passed resolutions of congratulations to the Moplahs on the brave manner in which they were fighting for the sake of religion. There was of course no question of suspending the ongoing Civil Disobedience movement. That decision was waiting for the Chauri Chaura incident.

1922/23

Punjab and Bengal witnessed serious riots during the Muharram. Communal situation became very tense in Multan.

1923/24

This was a tense but fortunately a peaceful year.

1924/25

Terrible riots broke out in Kohat on the 9th and 10th September leading to 155 killed and wounded. Riots became fairly widespread. Delhi, Nagpur, Lahore, Mordabad, Bhagalpur, Gulbarga, Lucknow, Shahjahanpur, Kankinarah and Allahabad witnessed Hindu-Muslim clashes.

1925/26

The year marked two rounds of savage riots in the metropolis of Calcutta. The two communities freely indulged in desecrating places of worship of the other community leading to unprecedented bitterness. Several properties were set to torch. 110 cases of fire were reported. By the time riots were controlled, 44 lives were lost and 584 lay injured. A second round of blood letting soon followed leaving 66 dead and 391 injured. Suspicion was strong that several hooligans were hired hands and money was being freely used to keep the riots going.

United Province, Central Province and Bombay Presidency were all scenes of riots affecting in some cases small villages as well.

1926/27

As many as 40 cases of riots were registered with death toll rising to 197 and the injured being 1,598. Bengal, Punjab and United Province were the most affected areas.

Communal tensions were so high in Delhi that on 24th June, a pony bolted in a crowded market. Hot heads on both the sides assumed that a riot had started. Soon both the sides set upon each other with brickbats and staves.

1927/28

The warfare now spread to scurrilous attacks on the holy figures. *Sitaka Chinala* was written by a Muslim alleging Sita, the wife of Lord Ram, was a prostitute. In reply, Hindus wrote two articles *Rangila Rasul* and *Risala Vartman* containing most vile attacks on Prophet Muhammad. No wonder, feelings remained inflamed. From April to September 25 incidents of riots were reported. The toll being 103 killed and 1,084 wounded.

After Delhi, it was the turn of Lahore now. With tempers on edge, a chance collision between a Muslim and two Sikhs set off a murderous riot in Lahore in May leaving 27 killed and 272 injured. The second half of the year was somewhat quieter with only four riots taking place.

A new feature of the communal disturbances was the exodus of 450 Hindu families from Peshawar, where they had lived for generations. About 330 were to return and the rest migrating forever.

1928/29

In terms of numbers, the riots declined to 22 but number of people killed rose to 204 with another 1,000 wounded. Disturbing feature was Bombay, which had remained free from the communal contagion so far became trapped in the religious frenzy. This was to haunt the city for a long time, as we have already seen.

1929/30

Passions were at a lower pitch and only 12 riots were reported. Of these, only that in Bombay was really serious. Rajpal, who had written *Rangila Rasool*, was murdered in Lahore. Fortunately, wiser counsel prevailed and the city was spared a round of savagery.

1930/31

The launch of Civil Disobedience gave rise to riots and disturbances all over the country. The political struggle soon took communal twist at a number of places. Muslims had by far and large kept away. The

Congress methodology of forcing people to close the shops and paralyse the trade came to exasperate the Muslims. The relations became extremely strained between the two communities. Hindus feeling that the Muslims were not joining them in the Freedom struggle. Muslims, on the other hand, had serious reservations on the manner of the struggle and always apprehensive that any small pretext may be used to call off the fight. Trouble spots were spread all over the country.

Bengal

Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district on 12th July 1930. Nilphamar on 25th January 1931. Dhanbad in March 1931. All witnessed rioting

United Province

1930 was relatively peaceful except in Ballia. The tempers rose in the first three months of 1931. Rioting was widespread in Agra, Mathura, Azamgarh, Mainpuri, Dehra Dun, Bulandshahr, and Benras. The worst case of rioting occurred in Kanpur, three weeks after the signing of the Gandhi - Irwin pact. For three days, the city witnessed murder and mayhem leaving more than 300 dead.

Madras

Rioting was no longer confined to Hindus and Muslims. Now the fight spread to the Christians as well. A Hindu-Christian riot was reported from Tiruchendur (Madras) on 31st October. Vellore had already seen serious disturbances in June. Salem and Kurnool became embroiled in the communal frenzy.

Bombay

In the first week of September, Bombay and Nagpur were engulfed in riots.

Punjab and Sind

On 4th August very serious outbreak of violence was reported from about 100 villages of Sakkur District in Sind. Fighting was reported from Rawalpindi on 31st January 1931. In February, Amritsar went up in smoke to keep on smoldering till March.

1931-32 / 1932-33

After a long time, the situation remained peaceful.

1933-34

It was soon realized that the two-year peaceful interlude was only a *Comma* and not a *Full Stop* in the communal madness. Religious festivals no longer remained occasions of joy and celebration. A petty cause in any festival was enough to bring out in full the medieval savagery that seemed to be lurking just beneath the surface. Benaras, Kanpur in United Province, Lahore (Punjab), Peshawar (NWFP) were rocked by communal fights during the Hindu festivals of Holi. Ayodhya (United Province) Bhagalpur (Bihar), Cannore (Madras) witnessed riots during the Muslim festival of Bakri Id. Agra had a long drawn communal riot.

1934-35

Serious trouble broke out in Lahore as a result of dispute between Muslims and Sikhs about a mosque situated within the precincts of a Sikh temple known as Shaidganj Gurudwara. Police firing left 12 people dead. The incident continued to cause anxiety through out the year. On 19th March, Abdul Quayum, the murderer of Nathulal Sharma – who had written a scurrilous pamphlet about the Prophet, was executed. Riots broke out as his dead body was being taken out in a procession, leaving 47 people killed and 134 injured.

1935/36

Four riots took place. Firozabad (Agra), Poona, Monghyr district and Bombay had communal disturbances, leaving several dead. In a gruesome incident, 11 Hindus, including 3 children, were roasted alive. Savagery seemed to recognise no borders of reason.

1936/37

Many incidents of communal enmity were reported. The worst was the one on 27th march at Panipat leaving 14 people dead.

1937/38

Rioting continued unabated in Central Province and Punjab. Sikkarpur and Amritsar were also affected.

1938/39

Some eight cases of serious rioting were reported. Allahabad, Bombay, Asansol, Kanpur, Benaras and Calcutta and Sukkar in Sind were the affected places.

Riots, Communal disturbances, police firing, murders, deaths, injured; after a time these words lose their meaning. A deathly chill creeps on the senses. The warfare was sadly not limited to these horrors. In a male dominated Indian society, the women have always been treated as commodities. The raging war could then not leave them untouched. Dr. Ambedkar estimated that in Bengal alone some 35,000 women were abducted in a short period between 1922-27. The majority of them being Hindus. The less said about their fate the better. Who was more savage ? The Hindus or the Muslims. Dr. Ambedkar feels that the Muslims were the more aggressive people. This is not to say that the Hindus lagged far behind.

We are talking about a time when a Mahatma was at work for twenty long years and this was the result. These heart rending facts bely denial. This was a time we like to imagine was much better than the present, when all kinds of nasty politicians are ruling us. Glibly, we yearn for the return of the Mahatma.

If only, we had a Gandhiji in our midst today, our lives would be so much better. Perhaps! But the facts and only the cold facts first.

In the period 1920-39, a state of communal anarchy prevailed in the country, when the Gandhiji era was in full flow. The full horror of this reality needs to be squarely faced. As 'Hindustan', a Congress paper, itself said in utter despair:

“There is an immense distance between the India of to-day and India as a nation, between an uncouth reality which expresses itself in murder and arson and that fond fiction which is in the imagination of patriotic if self-deceiving men. To talk about Hindu-Muslim unity from a thousand platforms or to give it blazoning headlines is to perpetuate an illusion whose cloudy structure dissolves itself at the exchange of brickbats and desecration of tombs and temples. To sing a few pious hymns of peace and goodwill...will not benefit the country. The President of the Congress has been improvising on the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity...The millions in India can only respond when the unity song is not only on the tongues of the leaders but in the hearts of the millions of their countrymen.”

By end of 1939, it was clear that the Gandhi approach had miserably failed to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. The failure was neither accidental nor foreordained. It was inherent in the very approach itself. All sections of the society harboured suspicion that Government was never serious about putting down the riots as quickly as possible. A tell tale evidence being that that almost all riots were only in British India. The Indian states were islands of peace. Yet, he rejected the option of driving the British out – Independence, time and again.

In 1920, Gandhiji had supported the Khilafat movement, which clearly was an unprincipled naked power game to capture the Congress. He had sowed the whirlwind. The nation was reaping the bitter harvest.

Chapter XII

The Communal Frenzy of 1920-39 What Went Wrong??

Hindu-Muslim unity. Very nice words but what do they really mean. No community is a monolith. There are the Good, the Not So Good and the Undesirable elements. Unity with the Good is essential in a multi-religious society like India. Unity with the Not So good is desirable from a practical point of view. To seek Unity with the Undesirable is to court disaster. Mahatma's life long quest for the so-called Hindu-Muslim unity was a desperate cry for Unity with the Undesirables and therefore led to a national disaster. If it sounds unpalatable, let us look at some of the facts.

Fact 1

It was Jinnah, who represented the Good elements of the Muslim society in 1920 and for a long time thereafter.

By Lucknow pact Lokmanya Tilak had already forged Hindu-Muslim unity, particularly with the Good and also to a certain extent Not So Good sections of the Muslim society. This was unpalatable to Gandhiji, as these elements did not care much for his leadership.

Driven with the quest for power, the Mahatma chose to forge an alliance with the Undesirable section of the Muslim society longing for a return of the Caliph. It is impossible to understand his desperation for Hindu-Muslim unity in 1919 when the Lucknow pact was very much alive. There was no pressing need for Hindu-Muslim unity, for it already existed by the efforts of Tilak and Jinnah. If this sounds harsh, look at what followed the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920.

The Khilafat Conference became so powerful an organisation that the Muslim League went almost into an oblivion and was in a suspended animation till 1924. During these years no Muslim leader could speak to the Muslim masses from a Muslim platform unless he was a member of the Khilafat Conference. That was the only platform for the Muslims to meet the Muslims. Even then Mr. Jinnah refused to

join the Khilafat Conference as he was opposed to the Indian Muslims engaging themselves in extra-territorial affairs relating to Muslims outside India. Jinnah left Congress but remained resolutely nationalist. On 30th December 1924 in the Muslim League session he explained that: “The object was to organise the Muslim community, not with a view to quarrel with the Hindu community, but with a view to unite and cooperate with it for their motherland.” He was sure once they had organised themselves they would join hands with the Hindu Maha Sabha and declare to the world “*that Hindus and Mahomedans are brothers.*”

He became a bitter critic of the Congress but his criticism was strictly secular. He never accused it of being a Communal Hindu body. He protested when such a statement was attributed to him by his opponents. His letter published in the Times of India dated 3rd October 1925 makes this abundantly clear:

“I wish again to correct the statement which is attributed to me and to which you have given currency more than once and now again repeated by your correspondent ‘Banker’ in the second column of your issue of the 1st October that I denounced the Congress as ‘a Hindu Organisation’. I publicly corrected this misleading report of my speech in your columns soon after it appeared; but it failed to find a place in the columns of your paper and so may I now request you to publish this and oblige.”

In 1928, Mr. Jinnah joined the Congress in the boycott of the Simon Commission. He did so even though the Hindus and the Muslims had failed to come to a settlement and he did so at the cost of splitting the League into two. Even when the ship of the Round Table Conference was about to break on the communal rock, Mr. Jinnah resented being named as communalist who was responsible for the result and said that he preferred an agreed solution of the communal problem to the arbitration of the British Government.

As he said on the 8th August 1931: “I am for a settlement and peace between the Hindus and the Mahommedans. This is not a time for argument, not a time for propaganda work and not a time for embittering feelings between the two communities, because the enemy is at the door of both of us and I say without hesitation that if

the Hindu-Muslim question is not settled, I have no doubt that the British will arbitrate and that he who arbitrates will keep to himself the substance of power and authority.”

In December 1931, he left for England following the tragic death of his young wife. He was to return to India only in 1934 and revive the Muslim League. Chagla pleaded with him to set up a party equidistant from the Congress and the Hindu Maha Sabha as Jinnah had a considerable non-Muslim following in Bombay. Jinnah replied that he (Chagla) was an idealist while he, on his part, must work with such material as he had.

The Congress was not alone in criticizing the Government of India Act of 1935. Muslim League did so with a caveat that “having regard to the conditions prevailing in the country the provincial scheme of the Government be utilised for what it is worth”. This was, by now the long forgotten Tilak line, that Jinnah advocated. The Congress on the other hand chose to first reject the Act totally and then proceeded to participate in the Elections and make it work, contradicting its own stand.

The 1936/37 elections were contested by the Muslim League on a secular platform. The League could hardly said to have been successful in the conventional sense of the term. However, it was clear that even at this low point, the League commanded far more Muslim support than the Congress. Take the case of the United Province. Of the 228 seats in the Provincial assembly, 64 were reserved for the Muslims. Of these 64, 26 were won by the League, 28 by Independent Muslims, 9 by the National Agricultural Party and *only one by a Congress Muslim*. There seems to have been a tacit understanding before the elections that two places in the Joint Ministry would be allotted to the Muslims. The Congress, however, now agreed to induct the League in the Ministry **only if the League decided to merge into the the Congress**. This betrayal of the Congress came to haunt the nation in the years to come.

Political power is the most precious thing in the life of a community. It is one means of sustaining its position. Yet, the Congress, knowing fully well that it was not representing the Muslims in the United Province chose to put forward such terms to the Muslim League

which leaves one staggering at their arrogant tone. Would today, the Congress dare ask the regional parties to merge into it, if they wanted to share the power?

Even as late as in December 1938, the Muslim League had not lost the will to live together in a United India. Its resolution no. 10 passed at Patna said: “The President of the All India Muslim League to adopt such course....which will safeguard the interests of the Musalmans and other minorities in India.”. Thus, for long after 1920, Jinnah represented that element of the Muslim society with which an understanding was eminently desirable, nay one may even say essential for national welfare. It is these elements with which Gandhiji had no truck. For they were his political foes. He pursued his chimera of Unity with the most Undesirable elements of the Muslim society, for they were prepared to accept his leadership.

So long as Jinnah was a nationalist, Gandhiji chose to belittle him. When, he turned communalist, Gandhiji ran after him, now ignoring other nationalist Muslims. As Chagla complains : “One Grievance about which I feel deeply arose from the indifference shown by the Congress and even Mahatma Gandhi to the Muslim nationalists, Jinnah and his communalist following seemed all important.” What a thing to do.

Fact 2

It was the Khilafat Leadership that represented the Undesirable element of the Muslim society in 1920 and ever thereafter

Let us first understand the definition of *Communalism*. It is defined in the dictionary as “strong allegiance to one’s own ethnic group rather than to the society as a whole.” The Khilafatists were certainly the most rabid communal elements of the Muslim society. For, not only were they holding strong allegiance to their own religious group but were prepared to sacrifice the interests of their fellow citizens at the altar of their religious belief. These were the fellow travelers that Gandhiji chose in his quest for power.

What was the framework they were using to look at the events in national life? It was entirely religious in a manner that did not take into account the interests of their fellow citizens, who did not share their religion.

The Muslim Cannon law divided the world in two parts, *Dar-ul-Islam* (abode of Islam) and *Dar-ul-Harb* (abode of war). Once the British overthrew the Moghul rule, the Muslim community was divided into two camps. One professing that India was *now Dar-ul-Harb* and therefore it was the holy duty of the Muslims to escape from this by *Hirjat* (emigration) or by engaging in *Jihad* (the holy war to establish Dar-ul-Islam).

It took all ingenuity of Sir Sayyed Ahmed, the founder of the Aligarh movement, to persuade the Indian Muslims not to regard India under the British as *Dar-ul-Harb* merely because it was not under Muslim rule. He urged the Muslims to regard it as Dar-ul-Islam because the Muslims were perfectly free to exercise all essential rites and ceremonies of their religion. If the Muslims and Hindus were to live together in peace and harmony, it could only be by following the lead of Sir Sayyed Ahmed.

The dangerous doctrine that India was Dar-ul-Harb had to be nipped in the bud, the moment it raised its ugly head. Indeed, not all the Muslims had been persuaded by Sir Sayyed Ahmed. And it had not been given up. It began to be preached by the Muslims supporting the cause of Khilafat in 1920-21. Gandhiji did an enormous disservice to the nation by supporting the cause of the Khilafat and also the doctrine of India being Dar-ul-Harb.

This distinction was not an exotic philosophical debate as the Hindus in Malabar soon found out. The Moplahs drove the British out established what they called *Dar-ul-Islam* and subjected the Hindus to untold atrocities. Both the Khilafat Committee and Gandhiji took on cudgels on behalf of the Moplahs, conveniently ignoring the plight of the Hindus.

Nor were the Moplahs alone in advocating the cause of Dar-ul-Harb. As inhabitants of an enemy territory, the Muslims were enjoined by their religion to call in their fellow Muslims to establish Dar-ul-Islam

in their native land. Accordingly, some in the Khilafat Committee proceeded to negotiate with the Amir of Afghanistan to invade India. How far the negotiations went is not known but that such a project was entertained is beyond doubt. Dr. Ambedkar is categorical in his views: "It needs no saying that the project of an invasion of India was the most dangerous project and every sane Indian would dissociate himself from so mad a project. What part Mr. Gandhi played is not possible to discover. Certainly he did not dissociate himself from it. On the contrary his misguided zeal for Swaraj and his obsession on Hindu-Muslim unity as the only means of achieving it, led him to support the project. Not only did he advise the Amir not to enter into any treaty with the British Government but declared:

‘ I would, in a sense certainly assist the Amir of Afghanistan if he waged war against the British Government. This is to say, I would openly tell my countrymen that it would be a crime to help a Government which had lost the confidence of the nation to remain in power.’

Can any sane man go so far, for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity? But, Mr. Gandhi was so attached to Hindu-Muslim unity that he did not stop to enquire what he was really doing in this mad endeavor.”

For all the *mad* support that the Mahatma was willing to extend to the Khilafatists, what were their views on him? In 1923, Mr. Mahomed Ali presided over the session of the Indian National Congress. He had this to say about Gandhiji: "Many have compared the Mahatma's teachings and lately his personal sufferings to those of Jesus....Be that it may, it was just as peculiar to Mahatma Gandhi also; but it was reserved for a Christian Government to treat as felon the most Christ like man of our time and to penalize as disturber of the public peace the one man engaged in public affairs who comes nearest to the Prince of Peace...the prescriptions that he offered to those in search of a remedy for the ills of India was the same that Jesus had dispensed before in Judea....have seen what a remarkable and rapid change he wrought in the thoughts, feelings and actions of such a large mass of mankind.”

A year later, the same Mr. Mohamed Ali speaking at Aligarh said:

“However pure Mr. Gandhi’s character may be, he must appear to me from the point of view of religion inferior to any Musalman, even though he may be without character.”

This created stir and at Lucknow, Mr. Mohamed Ali was asked if the sentiments attributed to him were true. Without hesitation or compunction, he replied:

“Yes, according to my religion and creed, I do hold an adulterous and a fallen Musalman to be better than Mr. Gandhi”

In a manifesto on Hindu-Muslim relations issued in 1928, Khwaja Hasan Nizami declared:

“The Musalmans are separate from Hindus; they cannot unite with the Hindus. After bloody wars, the Musalmans conquered India and the British took India from them. The Musalmans are one united nation and they alone will be the masters of India... They have ruled India for hundreds of years, and hence have a prescriptive right over the country...What capacity have they for ruling over men? The Musalman did rule, and the Musalman will rule.”

It is with such people that Gandhiji was trying to forge Unity at the expense of people like Jinnah !!!

Fact 3

Gandhian creed called for appeasement of the worst elements amongst the Khilafatists

The blood cuddling atrocities committed by the Moplahs in Malabar against the Hindus were indescribable. All over Southern India, a wave of horrified feeling had spread among the Hindus of every shade of opinion, which was intensified when certain Khilafat leaders were so misguided as to pass resolutions of ‘congratulations to the Moplahs on the brave fight they were conducting for the sake of their religion’.

With Gandhiji describing the Moplahs as ‘brave god fearing’, even the Moderate Muslims went to extremes. A nationalist Muslim like Maulana Hasart Mohani opposed in the Subjects Committee of the

Congress, condemning the Moplahs for killing Hindus, burning their homes and for their forcible conversion to Islam. He did not even bother to deny the reality of the incidents. According to him, Malabar was Dar-ul-Harab. In this land of war, the Moplahs suspected the Hindus of collaborating with the British and therefore the Moplahs were right in presenting alternative of the Quran or the Sword to Hindus.

Anybody could see that this was too high a price to pay for Hindu-Muslim unity. A Gandhi led Congress, which invented the fiction that there were only three cases of forcible conversion in Malabar, by a gang opposed to Khilafat; paid this price.

This was not all. Many prominent Hindus were murdered by Muslim fanatics, for they had offended the Muslim susceptibilities. Swami Shradhanand was murdered by Abdul Rashid on 23rd December 1926. Rajpal, the author of Rangila Rasool on 6th April 1929. Nathulal Sharma was murdered by Abdul Qayum in September 1934. The list is long. As Dr. Ambedkar rightly points out:

“But whether the number of prominent Hindus killed by fanatic Muslims is large or small matters little. **What matters is the attitude of those who count towards these murders.** The murderers paid the penalty of law where law is enforced. The leading Moslems never condemned these criminals. On the contrary, they were hailed as religious martyrs and agitation carried on for clemency being shown on them...This attitude of the Moslems is quite understandable. What is not understandable is the attitude of Mr. Gandhi.

Mr. Gandhi has been very punctilious in the manner of condemning any and every act of violence and has forced the Congress much against its will to condemn it. But Mr. Gandhi has never protested against such murders. Not only have the Musalmans not condemned these outrages but **even Mr. Gandhi has never called upon the leading Muslims to condemn them. He has kept silent on them.**”

This spineless silence was only to embolden the Muslim fanaticism and aggression. Once again let us go back to Dr. Ambedkar: “The second thing noticeable about the Muslims is the spirit among the Muslims is the spirit of exploiting the weakness of Hindus. If the

Muslims object to anything, the Muslim policy seems to be to insist upon it and give it up only when the Hindus show themselves ready to offer a price for it by giving the Muslims some other concessions”

Muslims in India demanded the right to slaughter Cow on Id, notwithstanding the fact the Cow slaughter is not an integral part of Islam. They demanded that no music be played in front of the Mosques, a ban that other Muslim countries were unaware of.

Most regrettably, this Gandhian weakness was the cause of ever shifting demands of the Muslims in the political field. The Lucknow pact of 1916 was full and final settlement of all the just demands of the Muslims. On one hand, Gandhiji’s Flip Flop show over critical issues like Independence failed to inspire confidence about his resolve in the minds of all those who were not his followers. On the other hand, his willingness to please the Muslims at any cost enabled shrewd negotiators like Jinnah to keep on enlarging their demands in the hope of getting a better and better deal for their community.

The Lucknow pact was based on one fundamental premise that a community is entitled to protection only where it is a minority. The Muslim community in Bengal and Punjab was not a minority and therefore was not entitled to the same protection it got in other provinces, where it was a minority. In Punjab and Bengal, they could get separate electorate only by agreeing to a minority of seats.

It is only when this basic premise was thrown overboard by the Gandhi Congress that the Muslim League could keep on shifting the goal post further and further all the time all in the name of that illusive Hindu-Muslim unity. It ended only when Pakistan was demanded, in other word protection in provinces, where the Muslims needed no protection in the first place.

Things had become progressively so bad that at one point, Dr. Ambedkar was forced to observe that the Undesirable Muslims even adopted what he called: “gangster methods in Politics. The riots are a sufficient indication that gangsterism has become a settled part of their strategy in Politics”

*We can now answer the first Question. **The Mahatma's approach lead only to Communal Disharmony and nothing else.** He focussed on ignoring the Good and encouraging the Undesirable elements of the Muslim society. He did not think twice before making worst compromises with the worst of the Communalists. Thus his approach could lead only to Communal Disharmony.*

Let us now move on to the second question.

Chapter XIII

Did the Mahatma Really Work for the Welfare of the Untouchables?

Much as the most Hindus would today like to forget, of all the social evils that had crept in the Hindu society, the curse of Untouchability was the worst. That the Hindus are socially organised in four castes is well known. Brahmin, the accumulator of Knowledge, Kshtriya, the warriors, Vaishya, the trader and Shudra, the provider of services. Untouchables, the Ati Shudras or the scavengers were outside the pale of this social structure. They were considered so filthy, that even their sight was considered polluting by the Brahmins. They were supposed to walk on the roads with bells in the neck to announce their presence so as to enable the pious Brahmin to maintain his purity by not looking at these wretched souls. They were encouraged to worship the same Gods as the Hindus but even the Gods could not bear their dirty presence and hence they were denied entry into the Temple. If an Untouchable girl was of some beauty, it was but in the natural scheme of things that she had to spend her first wedding night, not with her Untouchable husband but with a Brahmin, who took a fancy for her. When the Sun rose in the morning, the Brahmin who had lain night long in an amorous embrace with the girl, was now deemed to be polluted by her very shadow. By these hideous practices, about a quarter of Hindu population was kept outside its fold in virtual serfdom. Not even the Shudras, the lowest in the caste hierarchy could ever be persuaded to do the work assigned by custom to the Untouchables. The prejudices were so deep that they would not be dropped even when the Hindus converted to Islam, which has no place for such practices. An incident in Delhi at the height of 1947 partition riots, brought this out.

“Some 25,000 Muslims were huddled together in wretched conditions fearful for their safety from the Hindu attacks in Purana Qila. The same pool of water was used for all purposes – washing cooking pots, vomiting, defecating. Sanitation was by open latrine. The stink was unbearable but the Muslims would not be persuaded to clean the place. The Government had to send 100 Hindu sweepers to clean the place.

They were provided with armed guard lest some mad Muslim decided to chop off their head, once they had fulfilled their duty of cleaning up the place.”

Nor was this an isolated incident. The Untouchables were shunned not only by their co-religionist but by the entire society. This was the ordained fate of these unfortunate people, *not for one or two years but well over two thousand years*. At the turn of the twentieth century, there was no sense of shame at this brutal and hideous practice. On the contrary, it was brazenly defended as being sanctified by the religion and those who took up the cause of the Untouchables were ostracized. If well meaning Hindus today hang their head in shame at this barbarous treatment of their fellow citizens, if Untouchability is a criminal offense in India today, it is in no small measure due to the attitudinal revolution brought about by Gandhiji goes the conventional thinking.

Did the Mahatma Really Work for the Welfare of the Untouchables? This sounds as the strangest, if not the silliest question, to ask of the Mahatma. Gandhiji was amongst the first to take up the broom and publicly perform the work of a scavenger. As he noted of the Calcutta Congress session in 1921:

“There was no limit to insanitation. Pools of water were everywhere. There were only a few latrines, and the recollection of their stink still oppresses me. I pointed it out to the volunteers. They said point blank: ‘That is not our work. It is the scavenger’s work.’ I asked for a broom. The man stared at me in wonder. I procured one and cleaned the latrine. But that was for myself. The rush was so great, and the latrines were so few, that they needed frequent cleaning; but that was more than I could do. So I had to content myself with simply ministering to myself. And the others did not seem to mind the stench and the dirt. But that was not all. Some of the delegates did not scruple to use the verandahs outside their rooms for calls of nature at night. In the morning I pointed out the spots to the volunteers. No one was ready to undertake the cleaning, and I found no one to share the honour with me of doing it.”

With Gandhiji, this was not a flash in the pan but a life long crusade. Even before, in 1898, he had adopted the practice of cleaning

chamber pots of all the visitors to his house at Durban in South Africa and made his wife do the same. The refusal of his wife in one instance so enraged him that he drove her out of the house, as he shamefacedly admitted later.

When Gandhiji came to hold full sway over the Congress, all leaders had to take to do their own scavenging work or else face his rebuke. By his private as well as public conduct, he ceaselessly sought to drive home the point that neither Scavenging nor a Scavenger was dirty. It was therefore a sin to practice Untouchability. He began to call them *Harijans* or the children of the God rather than the insulting *Untouchables*. In 1917, he was present at the Congress session at Calcutta, which adopted a resolution, which said:

“This Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed upon the Depressed classes, the disabilities being a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience.”

In February 1922, he was instrumental in the Congress adopting a constructive programme of social amelioration, which called for improving the lot of the Untouchables, amongst the other things. On Untouchables, the resolution read:

“(4) To organise the Depressed Classes (Untouchables) for a better life, to improve their social, mental and moral condition, to induce them to send their children to national schools and to provide for them the ordinary facilities which other citizens enjoy.”

In an ‘Epic Fast’ that he began on 20th September 1932, he fought against a devious plan to separate the Untouchables from the Hindu society. He fought to enhance their political representation and got the Council seats reserved for them increased from a mere 78 to 151. The Poona Pact, which achieved all this, was signed on 24th September 1932. The very next day, a movement was started, which came to be known as the Temple Entry movement and was blessed by Gandhiji. It sought to ensure that:

“No one shall be regarded as an Untouchable by reason of his birth, and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads and all other public institutions”

Temple after Temple, school after school was thrown open to the Untouchables as the Mahatma put his full moral weight behind this social reform. On 30th September 1932, an All India Anti Untouchability League was set up:

“To remove every vestige of Untouchability...main line of work will be mainly constructive such as Uplift of Depressed Classes educationally, economically and socially, which itself will go a great way to remove Untouchability.”

Gandhiji later changed its name to Harijan Seva Sangh. To provide funds for the work of the Sangh, Gandhiji started an All India campaign. It began on November 7, 1933 and ended on July 29, 1934. Harijan Seva Sangh and Temple Entry, so preoccupied had he become with these two movements that all else became of secondary importance.

In the evening of his life, the welfare of the Harijans became a cause that was dearer to the heart of the Mahatma than even Swaraj, to the dismay of his many ardent followers. He missed no opportunity to berate the practice of Untouchability as a Sin. He lost no opportunity to live amongst the Untouchables to the eternal shame of those who continued to practice Untouchability. By his own example, he compelled his followers to undertake at least their own scavenging; laying down the principle that there is dignity in labor, even if it is labor of scavenging.

It would take anyone to make just one revolting trip to a public lavatory at any place in India to realize that this is one principle that the Indians have not learnt even in the twenty first century. Surely, however, Gandhiji can not be faulted for this. Even a Mahatma can do only so much.

The Mahatma's contribution to the cause of the Untouchables is as real as the sunlight around us. Yet, I seek to ask 'Did the Mahatma really work for the Welfare of the Untouchables?' Have I taken leave of my senses? Show me a little more indulgence, dear readers and judge for yourself.

Congress Resolution of 1917

In 1917, as we have already seen, Lokmanya Tilak was busy forging a united national front against the British putting aside his own prejudices and biases in the national cause, the test of a real Statesman. All of us have our own private and personal outlook conditioned by our upbringing and the environment that we choose to live in. This is only human. It is very few of us who can set aside our own opinions in the interest of a larger cause. Lokmanya Tilak was one of these very few.

He was a political reformer. To paint him as a social reformer would be a travesty of truth. Nor is such a foolish attempt necessary in any way to add to his undisputed greatness. In his times, in his opinion, the biggest evil confronting the society was the illegal British occupation of the country. He wanted no diversion of energy to fight the social evils. There was enough and more time to do so, once Swaraj was attained. His concept of ideal political rule was that of Shivaji and not that of the later day Peshwas. It is interesting to understand the reasons.

Lest anyone is unaware, Shivaji's rule was supported by all classes of the people. Indeed, his staunchest followers were from the lower social strata. So deep and abiding was their belief in Shivaji that years after his death, they kept up the fight and broke the back of the Aurangzeb led campaign to eliminate the Maratha rule. This part of the story, we have already covered. The later day Brahmin Peshwas controlled a territory far larger than that ruled by Shivaji. In terms of geography, Shivaji's rule was primarily confined to a small part of Maharashtra. The Peshwa writ, on the other hand, ran in all corners of the country. Yet, it is the rule of Shivaji that inspires pride not that of the Peshwas – even in Maharashtra. The Peshwa rule, while being far more successful politically and militarily, was socially regressive. It is today remembered more for Brahminical domination of the society

than for its all India reach. Thus, the Brahmin Tilak, by choosing the symbol of Shivaji's rule over that of the Peshwas, was signaling that he wanted an egalitarian Swaraj, not that dominated by his own community. All he wanted was attainment of the Swaraj first before taking on the Cause of Social reforms.

This was his view, call it bias, prejudice, what you will. The important thing is he kept it aside. By 1916, he had already forged the Lucknow pact, thereby forging a united front with the Muslims. By 1917, the Home rule agitation had awakened the political consciousness of the Depressed Classes. A meeting held on 11th November 1917 under the Chairmanship of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar called for requesting Indian National Congress to:

“Pass at its forthcoming session a distinct and independent resolution declaring to the people of India at large the necessity, justice, and righteousness of removing all the disabilities imposed by religion and custom upon the Depressed Classes, those disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconveniences”

Tilak was keen to ensure that the Congress-League scheme, as per the Lucknow pact, should have a national character. This could happen only if the scheme had the backing of all communities in India. The support of the now awakened Depressed classes was essential. Thus keeping aside his own views, biases or prejudices, if you will, Tilak made sure that the Congress passed a resolution as requested by the Depressed Classes. The astute readers will no doubt notice that even the language of the Congress resolution was identical to that of the Depressed Classes' resolution.

The integrity of the Tilak led Congress in adopting this resolution was never in question, even to those who were not enamoured of it. As Dr. Ambedkar notes: “As the Congress did not then (in 1917) practise-it had not learnt it then-the art of corrupting people as it does now (in 1945)...it enlisted the support of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar...and the Depressed classes agreed to give support to the Congress-League scheme”

Gandhiji had no role to play in this as his own silence over the episode shows.

Bardoli Constructive Programme of 1922

In accordance with the Bardoli programme of social amelioration, the Congress decided to set up a Committee to formulate practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition of the Untouchables. A sum of Rs 200,000/- was earmarked for this activity. This was later increased to Rs 500,000/-. In the meanwhile, one of the Committee members, Swami Shradhanand, resigned from the Committee.

Now, who was Swami Shradhanand and why did he resign? He was in the words of Dr. Ambedkar 'the greatest and most sincere champion of the Untouchables'. Pray, then why did he resign? Therein lies a tale of subterfuge, deceit and sabotage. A testimony to the insincerity of the Gandhi Congress in its approach to the question of Untouchability.

Swami Shradhanand had been appointed as the Convenor of the Committee. His credentials were unimpeachable. He was the President of *Dalitodhar* Sabha, dedicated to the betterment of the Untouchables, which was carrying out appreciable work around Delhi. On his appointment, people from all over the country began to send him requests to visit their provinces and study the problems of the Untouchables first hand. These visits were critical for formulating practical steps for eradication of Untouchability but he found himself strapped for cash for this activity. The Congress accepted his plea that a sum of Rs 500,000 should be kept at the disposal of the Committee. The sting came in the tail. Rs 100,000/- was to be given by the Congress, while the balance was to be raised by appeals. It was given out that the Congress had very little cash to spare.

The Swami knew the real problems of the Untouchables. He knew that for eradicating the curse of Untouchability, it was important to ensure that the following demands of the Untouchables were immediately met:

- They are allowed to sit on the same carpet as the other people.
- They get the right to draw water from common wells

- Their children get admission to national schools and colleges
- Their children get to mix freely with other students in the educational institutes

The approach of the Swami was entirely in line with the Bardoli resolution but there was a critical difference. Bardoli resolution was full of platitudes. Swami wanted clear identifiable objectives to be set for attainment. In Swami's approach, there was no scope for obfuscation. With this, the Congress developed cold feet. Swami found himself removed from his position as the Convenor and he resigned in disgust as he found that "the question of raising the Depressed Classes had been relegated to an obscure corner."

The reconstituted Committee carried on its work till 1923. By May 1923, the Congress washed its hands off the issue by requesting the All India Hindu Maha Sabha to take up the work of eradication of the evil of Untouchability from the Hindu society. Perhaps, it was the lack of funds that had compelled the Congress to abandon the cause of Untouchables. Perhaps! But the fact is that the Congress had managed to collect a sum of Rs 13,019,415, 15 annas and 7 paise by 1923 in the name of Lokmanya Tilak for implementing the Gandhi policies. Or may be, the Committee was not doing anything useful, so it was disbanded and some other organisation took up the cause of the Untouchables. Surely, the Mahatma would have ensured that the Congress spared at least 50% of the available funds for the cause of the Untouchables. Or perhaps 25% or a little less but certainly not less than 10% in any case.

Perhaps! But the fact is a total sum of Rs 4,950,000/- was spent for carrying out the Bardoli programme. A sum of Rs 200,000 had been earmarked for the amelioration of the Untouchables. The amount actually appropriated was as follows:

• Rajamuhendry Depressed Class Mission	Rs 1,000
• Antyaj Karyalaya, Ahmedabad	Rs 5,000
• Antyaj Karyalaya, Ahmedabad	Rs 17,381
• Depressed Classes work in Andhra	Rs 7,000
• National Conference for Depressed Classes Work	Rs 3,000
• Tamil District P.C.C. for Depressed Classes Work	Rs 10,000
• Total	Rs 43,181

The Congress collects Rs 13 million, spends Rs 4.95 million on Constructive programmes and has by 1923, just Rs 43,181 available for the Untouchables. Perhaps, there is something wrong. For huge sums amounting to Rs 2.6 million had been allotted to Gujrat without appropriation to any purpose without naming the guarantee. But the fact remains that by 1945, Dr. Ambedkar had not discovered anything otherwise. These findings were published without any correction by a Congress Government in 1990. So by then, even the Congress itself had also not discovered any errors in the findings of Dr. Ambedkar. Perhaps in last twenty five years, somebody has discovered the right figures. Perhaps! We wait with bated breath.

Where was the Mahatma? On 3rd November, 1921, he had thundered: “Untouchability can not be given a secondary place on the programme. Without the removal of the taint, Swaraj is a meaningless term. Workers should welcome social boycott and even public execration in the prosecution of their work. I consider the removal of Untouchability as a most powerful factor in the process of attainment of Swaraj.”

When it came to the crunch, his thunder became a weak squeak and the Untouchables were left high and dry. After safely handing over the burden of removing Untouchability to the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1923, his act of scavenging continued, in what the educated perceptive Untouchables now saw as a mere farce. A strange aspect of his attitude towards the Untouchables came to the fore in 1924. A Satyagraha was going on at Vaikom for getting a public road in Travancore opened to the Untouchables. The large hearted Sikhs, as is their wont, opened *langar*, community kitchen for the Satyagrahis. Gandhiji objected to this.

In 1929, while Gandhiji was inactive, the Untouchables had started a movement to establish their right to take water from public wells and enter public temples. One in Mahad of district Kolaba in Bombay Presidency came to be called *Chavdar Tale* movement for drawing water from a common source. The other was in Nasik, again of Bombay Presidency for entering the Kala Ram temple.

The din and noise of the movements created an All India awareness. Thousands of men and women took part in them courting insult, injury and jail. The movement was a major land mark in the awareness campaign of the Untouchables. After thousands of years, the social outcasts were making themselves heard. No longer were they going to accept their cruel fate without a murmur of protest. It was a movement completely indigenous to the Untouchables. *Led, organised, financed and participated by the Untouchables.* Expecting full support from the Mahatma, they went to him to seek his blessings. **Not only did he NOT give his support but condemned the Satyagraha in strong terms.**

The reasoning given by Gandhiji was truly bizarre. Satyagraha was a weapon to be used only against the foreigner, he decreed. It was he, who had invented the weapon of the Satyagraha. It was he alone who knew when, where, how and against whom it was to be used. All others, who attempted to do so without his guidance, were unauthorised, illegitimate users. By this time, Gandhiji had turned sixty. As a true Hindu, he should have gone into *Vanprastha*, retirement from the hustle and bustle of the daily life and receded into the background for the youngsters to take over. His was to offer a sage advice, if asked for and no more.

This was not to be. Driven by Quest for Power, he soldiered on, leading the country not to Ram Rajya but to unprecedented disaster.

Political Power for the Untouchables

We shall now study the struggle of the Untouchables for Political power. Politics has today become a tainted word. Something that signifies nothing better than an unprincipled struggle for illegitimate gains that a public office affords an opportunity to earn.

It is therefore necessary to reiterate what it really means. Political power is the most precious thing in the life of a community. For it alone determines the distinction between a Ruling race and a Subject race. It is because of this that even those who believed that the British were providing Good Governance, nevertheless wanted an increased Indian participation in Governance. Good Governance can never

substitute Self-Governance. For the Untouchables, participation in political power was critical to their well being. For thousands of years, they had been treated as a Subject race by the orthodox Hindus. The age-old prejudices against them were carried into every walk of life. Thus, a Public service manned only by the Orthodox Hindus was not going to make sure that they would be able to enjoy whatever meager benefits that the existing laws provided.

Dr. Ambedkar felt that this hostility could be curbed only if more and more Untouchables gained entry into the Services. This was a long drawn process. In the meanwhile, the atrocities against the Untouchables could not be allowed to go unchecked. He therefore, fought for Political Power, representation of Untouchables in the Councils and more importantly in the Provincial cabinets. This was the nature of struggle for political power that Dr. Ambedkar was involved in.

Let us now see why the mention of the Poona Pact is enough to make the Depressed Classes see red some seven decades after the event. Gandhiji was in London between September to December 1931 to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. This very act of one man attending the Conference on behalf of the entire Congress movement is itself inexplicable. Gandhiji was a leader, who inspired legions of followers, one better than the other. In the realm of Realpolitik, many of the followers were far more capable than the Mahatma himself. Neither their integrity, competence nor dedication to the cause of India was in any way suspect. Yet, the Mahatma left without anyone, leaving himself open to the charge that he could not share the lime light with anyone else. *A tendency that is also called Quest for Power.*

Be it as it may, what did he achieve at the end of his stay in London? By his Machiavellian manoeuvres, he earned himself the enmity of all other delegates. We have already seen how critical Ambedkar became of his conduct. We need now to see if his criticism was justified. What is that happened at the Round table Conference that provoked the wrath of Dr. Ambedkar?

From the very beginning, Gandhiji took a stand that the Untouchables could not be regarded as a separate entity for political purposes. This was a very queer stand for as Gandhiji was once to himself admit:

“I have endeavoured to show that there is no such thing as real minorities whose rights can become endangered by India becoming independent. **With the exception of the Depressed classes, there is no minority which is not able to take care of itself.**”

Now by his own logic, it were only the Depressed Classes that needed special protection and not anyone else. Yet, Gandhiji was bent on denying them special treatment. Muslims who needed no such special treatment, were being offered a treatment that they did not need. If this is not appeasement – what is?

Why was this? Gandhiji’s convoluted argument was that the cause of the Depressed classes had been taken up by the Congress since 1920 and therefore any special treatment was unnecessary. It was for their own good that he was saving them from themselves. We have seen with what sincerity the cause of the Untouchables had been served by the Congress since 1920. After having spent less than 1% of the available funds on the cause of eradication of Untouchability, after having ousted Swami Shradhanand from the Committee, after having condemned the Untouchable Satyagraha in Nasik and Mahad; the credentials of both the Mahatma and the Congress to speak in the name of Untouchables were very very suspect.

With this declaration, Gandhiji proceeded to bypass the Untouchables and close the Communal question by bringing about a settlement between the three parties, Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs. This was really rubbing the salt in the wound. How could Dr. Ambedkar be faulted for suspecting that the special treatment for the Muslims and the Sikhs had everything to do with the fact that they both were ruling races in India, in a past, then not too distant. Whereas, the Untouchables who were always trodden beneath the feet of the Caste Hindus could be safely ignored under one specious plea or the other.

On the issue of the Untouchables, Gandhiji took up a most obdurate attitude and even went to the extent of trying to strike a deal with the Muslims behind the backs of everyone. In this deal, Gandhiji offered the Muslims, everything they wanted provided they would back him in his stand against the Untouchables. To their eternal credit, the Muslim delegates refused to oblige him.

Many, who participated in the Round Table Conference, were intellectual giants in their own rights, having a concern for the nation that was no less genuine than that of Gandhiji. This did not stop him from belittling them for being Government nominees. He did not tire of telling them that he alone, as the sole representative of the Congress, had come to the Conference representing the people. Gandhiji forgot that in any election Jinnah or Ambedkar could win on their own merits. The fact that they were in London as the Government nominees did not detract from their personal standing. The composition of the delegates was not a state secret, when Gandhiji decided to attend the Round Table Conference. So if he was so unhappy with the presence of the Government nominees, why, one wonders, did he decide to attend it in the first place? Was it only to show to his Hindu devotees in India, that even the mighty Raj was forced to deal with him as an equal and thereby enhance his own personal aura?

Fed up with his recalcitrant attitude, the Minorities agreed to a pact between themselves. This was submitted in the Minorities Committee meeting of the 13th November 1931. Gandhiji was furious at being ignored. He attacked everyone, who had taken part in producing the Minorities pact. He reserved his special venom for the part relating to the Untouchables. In an outpouring that is the clearest demonstration of his quest for power, his naked desire to be regarded as the Undisputed Leader of India came out in his own voice, when he said:

“I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast masses of the Untouchables. Here, I speak not only on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their votes, and that I would top the poll...and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.”

Gandhiji had concentrated so much of his energy and attention on the question of the Untouchables that it appeared that the main purpose for which he had attended the Round Table Conference was to oppose the demands of the Untouchables.

Faced with this stalemate, the Minorities Committee was adjourned *sine die*. The Prime Minister, MacDonald suggested that the delegates put in a signed requisition authorising him to arbitrate and give his decision on the communal issue. Many delegates did so including Gandhiji. Dr. Ambedkar was one of the few who did not give anything in writing to the Prime Minister. Now, they could only return home and wait for the Award.

Thus far, it is possible to see this as a matter of genuine difference of opinion between the two titans. To a certain extent, there was also jockeying for the leadership of the Untouchables. A perfectly legitimate political power play, though not certainly befitting a Mahatma. There was hardly an issue of morality.

Things have to be seen in a different light, once the principle of Arbitration was willingly accepted. Then on, it was patently immoral to try and wriggle out of a commitment given under no duress. For Gandhiji, to do so, after giving this in writing was doubly unethical from the standards of ordinary mortals, let alone the high standards of a Mahatma. Amazingly, this is exactly what he set out to do. It is important to record this immoral, unethical behaviour of Gandhiji in 1932, as we shall later see while studying the fateful events of January, 1948.

Even as his followers were courting arrest in their fight for freedom, Gandhiji's mind was occupied by other thoughts. On 11th March 1932, he wrote to the Secretary of State, Sir Samuel Hoare, reminding him of his opposition to the claim of the Untouchables. As a lawyer, he knew, once the arguments in the open court are over, any attempt to influence the Judge as he sits to write the judgement amounts to an act of bribery or blackmail. This is what he did, by holding out a threat of fast unto death in case, the award did not meet his expectations. The threat was dismissed and rightly so. In a stinging rebuke, Sir Hoare replied ending with "More than this I can not say. Indeed, I do not imagine you would expect me to say more."

The Government appointed Lothian Committee toured the provinces to ascertain the condition of the Untouchables. In what remains a shameful episode, now the caste Hindus brazenly resorted to lying. As if by magic, India seemed to have eradicated Untouchability. In the United Province, the 1931 census had estimated population of the Untouchables at 12.6 million, the Provincial Government at 8.8 million but the Provincial Franchise Committee at 0.6 million!!!. In Bengal too, a dramatic decline in the population of the Untouchables was noticed. It fell from 10.3 million in the census to 0.07 million!!

On 17th August 1932, the decision of the Prime Minister on communal question was announced. In essence, it gave 78 reserved seats for them in the Councils, *in which only the Untouchables were to be entitled to vote*. A double vote was also given by which they were qualified to vote in a general constituency as well.

The very next day, Gandhiji fired his salvo, announcing his intention to start a fast unto death from the 20th September unless the award was modified to his satisfaction. A more blatant piece of blackmail could not be forthcoming.

The Prime Minister responded on 8th September rebutting each and every charge of Gandhiji. He pointed out that the unity of the Hindu society was in no way affected. The Depressed classes were to vote jointly with the general electorate. A special advantage was given to them by reserving a limited number of special constituencies, where only the Untouchables could contest and vote. The right to vote in these constituencies was in addition to their normal voting rights. Moreover, these special constituencies were far less than what would have been warranted by the population of the Depressed classes. Surely, the Mahatma was not going to grudge his unfortunate brothers, this one special advantage.

This reasoned appeal fell on deaf ears. The ruthless Mahatma was indeed going to grudge the special advantage given to the Untouchables. But, even as he started his fast unto death, which caused consternation all around, Gandhiji found that he had overplayed his hand. The British Cabinet refused to budge. They would not alter the Award, unless there was an agreement between the concerned parties. With this, the entire burden of saving

Mahatma's life fell on Dr. Ambedkar's shoulders. The self-proclaimed topmost leader of the Untouchables had soon to beg for his life from this *lowly* leader. Gone was the pretence that Dr. Ambedkar did not know what was good for his community or that he did not represent his community. His position as the leader of the Untouchables was accepted as a fact by everyone, placing him in the unenviable position of sacrificing the interests of his community for the sake of this scheming blackmailer.

Finally, acutely conscious of the vulnerability of the Untouchables to the attacks of the caste Hindus, Dr. Ambedkar had to bow down. Nor was his fear unfounded. After the assassination of Gandhiji in 1948, Brahmin homes were the target of vicious attacks simply because Nathuram Godse was a Brahmin. If Gandhiji was to die, the blame would have been attached to Dr. Ambedkar and the plight of the Untouchables would have been pitiable beyond compare. It is thus that the Poona Pact came to be signed.

The number of seats was increased to 151 but the Untouchables were now going to be elected by joint electorate. An arrangement that took away their right of Double vote – a vote for their own candidate as well as that for the candidate in general electorate. This right to Double vote was a priceless political asset. Dr. Ambedkar felt its loss was not compensated by an increase in the number of seats. Neither the Hindus nor the Untouchables were happy at the outcome. It was generally felt that too heavy a price had been paid for saving one life.

Apart from the merits or demerits of the Pact, the whole episode shows a very unsavory side of the Mahatma. He had resorted to Satyagraha against his own kin and not against the foreigners, going against his own advice to the Untouchables in 1929. It was he who refused to abide by an Award, he was pledged to honour. It was he who decided what was right for the Untouchables. If it was he who was right and it was he who represented the Untouchables, what was the *locus standi* of Dr. Ambedkar to sign the pact? If it was Dr. Ambedkar, who represented the Untouchables, as he was made to sign on behalf of the Untouchables, whom was Gandhiji representing?

A more blatant case of political blackmail, lack of ethics and full of immorality is difficult to find in the entire history of the Freedom struggle and Dr. Ambedkar felt that:

“There was nothing noble in the fast. It was a foul and filthy act. The fast was not for the benefit of the Untouchables. It was against them and was the worst form of coercion against a helpless people...It was a vile and wicked act.”

No wonder then that eight decades later, the Poona Pact still rankles.

This was not the end of the story. Elections were held in 1936/37. In general, the Congress made spectacular gains. Most gratifying to it, was the fact that it won 78 seats out of a total of 151 seats reserved for the Untouchables. Thus, satisfying Gandhiji that it was he who represented the Untouchables. As a Member of the Viceroy Council, Dr. Ambedkar was later in a position to analyse the nature of this electoral victory, which was touted by the Congress as a validation of its claim that it alone represented the Indian people. Facts were:

Thus in a situation, when only 11% of the population was enfranchised, when 67% of the electorate had cast vote, the Congress had secured 46% of the votes. The Congress thus represented the dominant voice of nationalism but it could hardly claim a monopoly when as much as 54% of the electorate had voted against it.

The number of Untouchable seats won by it was no indication of its standing in the community as is evident from facts given below:

It appears that Dr. Ambedkar has made a small error. He has taken into account only the votes secured by the victorious Congress candidates. The 73 Congress candidates, who lost must also have secured some votes. Even if they were taken into account, the Congress tally would not exceed 500,000; leaving more than 1 million or 66% of the Untouchables ranged solidly against it. Thus this error, if this is an error, does not invalidate his conclusion that *the majority of the Untouchables were Against the Congress, Gandhiji and the Poona Pact*. As a matter of interest, Dr. Ambedkar had floated a party, Independent Labour Party, a few months before the Elections. Lacking the money and the organisational power of the Congress, it could contest only in Bombay Presidency, where 15 seats were assigned to the Untouchables. It managed to win 13 of these seats. Nor was its appeal limited to the Untouchables, as it also won 2 general seats.

The nature of this electoral victory should have cautioned the Congress but now it became almost dead drunk with the success. Its arrogance knew no bounds. It forgot its own objectives in fighting elections as explained by Nehru on 27th December 1936. He had said: “ It seems to me that the only logical consequence of the Congress policy, as defined in our resolution and in the election manifesto, *is to have nothing to do with office and Ministry*. And deviation from this would mean a reversal of that policy. It would inevitably mean a kind of partnership with British imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people.”

It accepted Office and thereby became a partner with British imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people. It refused to share power with the Muslim League as we have already seen. Its insistence that it could not share power with the League unless they took the Congress pledge was a sham. For the Congress also refused to share power with the Untouchables, even when as many as 78 elected Untouchables were elected on the Congress ticket, who unlike the League had taken the Congress pledge.

It is not right that the Congress did not give any representation to the untouchables. One Untouchable, Mr. Agnibhoj was included by Dr. Khare in the Congress Ministry of the Central Province. For his pains, he was told by Gandhiji that it was wrong on his part to have raised

such aspirations and ambitions in the Untouchables and it was such an act of bad judgement that he would never forgive him. Dr. Khare was to repeat this from many a public forum, without being contradicted.

As a matter of interest, Dr. Khare was the only Premier of the Congress Ministries in the provinces to be sacked by the Congress High Command. Gandhiji was of the view that a Cabinet minister should be a topmost man commanding universal confidence by his intrinsic merit. Therefore, no reservation for Untouchables could be made in the Cabinets. They had to secure entry on their merits. If none of the 78 elected Untouchables were worthy of inclusion in the Cabinet on their merits, tough luck. Gandhiji naturally did not have the courage to extend the same principle of merit that he applied to the Untouchables; to the Muslims as well.

What principles and what a stand! Did Gandhiji really understand the problems of the Untouchables – one can only wonder.

Temple Entry of the Untouchables

As in the case of his attitude towards Swaraj, Gandhiji started as a rank reactionary towards the issue of the rights of the Untouchables to enter the Temples. He said: “How is it that the Untouchables should have the right to enter all the existing temples? As long as the law of the caste and ashram has chief place in the Hindu religion, to say that every Hindu can enter every temple is a thing that is not possible today.”

This attitude changed after the Poona Pact and he supported the cause of the Untouchables to enter the temples. Let us grant that the Mahatma had come to realise that his attitude was wrong and that he wanted to make amends for his past mistakes. It is with this premise that we shall proceed to study the results of Gandhiji’s Temple Entry Movement. For all the hype that was generated once the Temple Entry Movement got a boost in the post Poona Pact days, what were the results? Far from encouraging, I am afraid. On 17th March 1939, one Mr. Gaikwad, a member of the Depressed Class in the Bombay Legislative Assembly, sought to know how many temples had been thrown open to the Untouchables since 1932, when Gandhiji began his Temple Entry Movement. The answer given by the Congress

Ministry was shocking. A total of 142 temples were thrown open, of these, as many 121 were wayside temples, which were ownerless. Not a single temple was thrown open to the Untouchables in Gujrat, the home state of Gandhiji.

The fate of Satyagraha in the case of Guruvayur Temple in Malabar is equally revealing. It began on the very day; Gandhiji had started his fast, which led to the Poona Pact. On 20th September 1932, one Mr. Kelappan also began a fast demanding entry of the Untouchables into this temple. This fast was suspended on 1st October 1932, at the insistence of Gandhiji. On 5th November 1932, Gandhiji issued a statement that unless the temple was thrown open by 1st January 1933, he would himself advise Mr. Kelappan to begin a fast and he himself would join the fast. Meanwhile, a referendum was conducted in the Ponnani Taluka, where the temple was situated. The results showed a majority support to the Temple entry. The Trustee of the Temple refused to yield. The Mahatma changed his stance and declared on 29th December 1932, that the fast that was to begin on 1st January 1933 was indefinitely postponed to await decision of the Viceroy in respect of introduction of a bill for Temple Entry, in the Madras Legislative Assembly.

The permission for introduction of this bill was refused on the 23rd January 1933 but at the same time permission was given for introduction of another bill seeking abolition of Untouchability. Mr. Ranga Rao formally introduced this bill on the 24th March 1933. He managed also to introduce the Temple Entry bill on 30th July 1933. Initially, the Congress made a show of support to the bill. Meanwhile, Government dissolved the Assembly. With the announcement of elections, the Congress took up the plea that the bill could be discussed only after receiving the mandate of the people. The real reason being, some of the Orthodox Hindus were seeking an undertaking that the Congress would not support the bill. The fear of antagonizing an influential portion of the electorate proved to be greater than the zeal for the cause of Untouchables. Gandhiji fully supported the Congress move. On 31st August 1934, he issued a statement blaming the mover of the bill for the lack of the Congress support.

What happened to the cause of the Guruvayur Temple entry Satyagraha? The Temple continued to bar the entry of the Untouchables in the lifetime of Gandhiji. He forgot his commitment to fast. No, no, he did not forget! The Mahatma had more important things to do.

By the way, what was the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar to this great social cause. When approached by Gandhiji for the cause, he posed a simple but fundamental question:

“That argument is argument of self-respect.... Is temple entry to be the final goal of advancement in the social status of the Depressed Classes in the Hindu folds? Or is it only the first step and if it is the first step, what is the ultimate goal? Temple entry as final goal, the Depressed classes will never support”

The ultimate goal was very clear to Dr, Ambedkar. It was, as he said:

“To purge it (Hinduism) of the doctrine of Chaturvarna. That is the root cause of all inequality and also the parent of the caste system and Untouchability, which are merely forms of inequality...Chaturvarna and the caste system are incompatible with the self-respect of the Depressed classes. So long as they stand to be its cardinal doctrine, the Depressed Classes must continue to be looked upon, as low...It is true that my right to agitate for the abolition of Chaturvarna and caste system will not be lost if I accept Temple Entry now. But the question is on what side will Mahatma Gandhi be at the time when the question is put. If he will be in the camp of opponents, I must tell him that I cannot be in his camp now. If he will be in my camp, he ought to be in it now.”

Gandhiji's reply was blunt. **He opposed Untouchability but supported the Chaturvarna and the Caste System.** He seemed to take Temple Entry as the final goal for the Untouchables to aspire for. This made the Temple Entry Movement entirely regressive. It is then no wonder that let alone Dr. Ambedkar, but no self-respecting educated Untouchable could support it.

Harijan Sevak Sangh

From the very start, the Sangh patrons made it clear that it was not going to be a disruptive, revolutionary organisation. It was going to be devoted to removing Untouchability by adopting Constructive work as its main line of work. Radical social reforms like abolition of the Caste System or Inter Dining were not going to be on its agenda.

With the help of Gandhiji, the Sangh collected some funds. The constructive works that it undertook were:

- Maintaining schools, running hostels for the Untouchable students and also giving them scholarships.
- Maintaining dispensaries to extend Medical aid to the Untouchables.
- Providing water to the untouchables by sinking new wells and repairing existing ones.
- Providing industrial training to the artisans.

These activities can hardly be faulted. They may be criticized as inadequate but not as redundant to the cause of the Untouchables. Yet, the Untouchables came to resent it. Let us try and understand, why this came about.

The first Central Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh had eight members. Of these three, including Dr. Ambedkar, were untouchables. One by one, all three quit their positions. It can be contended that the resignations may have been due to personality clashes. What passes comprehension is that here after the Untouchables came to be excluded from the management of the Harijan Sevak Sangh as a matter of policy. As always, Gandhiji had an explanation to offer that offends sensibilities:

“The welfare work for the Untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do for the sin of Untouchability. The money has been contributed by the Hindus. From both points of views, the Hindus alone must run the Sangh. Neither ethics nor rights would justify Untouchables in claiming a seat on the Board of the Sangh.”

Pray then, why were three Untouchables taken in the first Central Board. Really, the argument is so self serving and sickening that it merits no discussion. How can one then fault Dr, Ambedkar, when he suspected that all that the Sangh sought to achieve was to make the Untouchables a pliant tool of the Congress.

Time and again, a common theme comes to fore. Gandhiji staked his life to secure the Poona Pact but ensured that the Untouchables found no place in the Provincial Cabinets. He supported the Temple Entry Movement but only as a final goal of the Untouchables. He founded the Harijan Sevak Sangh but took care to exclude the very people, who were supposed to be its beneficiary from its management.

His attitude reeks of Condensation and Pity; not Empathy. The Sangh could not but arouse hostility of the very people, it was supposed to serve.

Gandhiji and The Untouchables

There was a deep and fundamental flaw in the philosophy of Gandhiji towards the Untouchables. He considered Untouchability as a sin. **He, however, supported the Chaturvarna and the Caste System based on birth.** One can seek to rationalise by pointing out the reality that any society needs division of labour and duties. There is no society in the world that does not have such divisions. The so called socialist utopia, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic that was held up as a symbol of a Classless wonder, disintegrated like a pack of cards in our own life time.

This comparison is of course misleading. For, in no society other than the Hindu society, the division of labour and duties is so rigidly frozen by the accident of birth. In no society other than the Hindu, have a set of people been so brutally treated as the Untouchables, in the name of their own salvation. For all the while, the Untouchables were told to submit to all the heartless indignities as the only way to ensure that the sins of their past birth would be wiped away. Their hardships, they were told, were the price for a better life in the next birth. No other society other than the Hindu, kept for itself an army of 60 million slaves for the service of 240 million people in the name of religion.

It is time to see, if this was a practice sanctified by religion or was a perversion of Hindu religion. Bhagwat Gita, the holy Hindu scripture, does propound the Caste system but with two important riders. The first being that it makes a special point of holding that each man's Caste is determined by his innate qualities. The second logically being that the profession of a person shall also be as per his innate qualities. By these reasoned religious dictum, it follows that the practice that had evolved in the Hindu society of freezing everyone's caste and profession by the accident of birth was a perversion of the real Hindu religion. As a devout Hindu, Gandhiji claimed to have been deeply influenced by Bhagwat Gita. It was, therefore, his duty both as a man of religion and a Mahatma to point out the path of the true religion. He did neither. He accepted the perverted practice of Chaturvarna and the Caste System based on birth and sought to introduce his own peculiar modifications. He decreed that the practice of denying knowledge to all other than the Brahmins was not correct. Everybody had equal right to education.

So far so good. Now comes the peculiar Gandhiji logic. He says that while everyone may learn the trade of his liking, he could not make them a way of earning a livelihood.

In other words, Dr. Ambedkar was free to learn the vocation of a lawyer but he could not practise law. He, according to the Gandhi decree, had to confine himself to scavenging for earning a living; for that was his hereditary profession.

The perverted Caste System imposed some senseless restrictions. Two of them being designed to perpetuate division on a permanent basis. One was a bar on Inter-Caste dining. The second being a bar on Inter-Caste marriage. A Brahmin was deemed to become polluted if his food was touched by a member of another caste. Gandhiji supported this concept as he was against the practice of Inter Caste dining. In support of this obnoxious ban, he went to the ridiculous extent of stating that: "Taking food is as dirty an act as answering the call of the nature. The only difference is that after answering the call of the nature we get peace while after eating we get discomfort. Just as we perform the act of answering the call of the nature in seclusion so also the act of taking food must be done in seclusion"

On the ban of Inter-Caste marriage, Gandhiji had these gems of wisdom to offer:

“In India children of brothers do not intermarry.”

Pray, what is so uniquely Indian about this, one wonders.

He went on to ask

“Do they cease to love each other because they do not intermarry?”

And concluded by giving his verdict:

“The Caste System can not be said to be bad because it does not allow interdining or intermarriage between the different castes, Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as interdining and intermarriage.”

It is difficult to argue with a man holding such views. For as Dr. Ambedkar says: “It is not enough to say that it is an argument of a cave man. It is really an argument of a mad man.”

Gandhiji kept on saying that the Caste System or the Varna System, if you will, by birth was a natural scheme of things. Such divisive practices as bar on Interdining, Intermarriages were right and proper. A person had to follow his hereditary profession, irrespective of what he may have learnt. But he held that Untouchability was a Sin. In effect, he was really saying that the Untouchables or the Ati Shudras, should be treated as Shudras, who suffered many disadvantages but did not suffer from this one curse. Thus in the Gandhi scheme of things for the Untouchables, no fundamental change was envisaged. All that was to happen was that they would suffer from one disadvantage less. That is all.

We have seen how he was willing to wound the Imperial demon but never really prepared to slay it. In the very same manner, he was willing to give offense to the Orthodox Hindu beliefs but never really prepared to antagonise them to the point of making them reject his leadership.

It is worth examining if given the state of the Hindu society, was this the most, a Hindu leader could do in that milieu. Is that one consideration that we can extend to the Mahatma?

Let us see what Savarkar was up to after his release from the jail in 1924. After his release, he was confined to Ratnagiri, a small town on the western coast in Maharashtra, upto 1937. How did he utilise his time up to 1937, when all his restrictions were finally removed and he became a free man after 27 long years? What did he do in this interval of 13 years during his stay at Ratnagiri? He too worked for eradication of Untouchability. His approach was far more humane. He not only supported the cause of Temple Entry but also himself led Untouchables into the precincts of Vitobha temple. Not content with this, he had one new temple built, the Patit Pavan temple. In this temple Hindus, regardless of their caste, could come together for prayers. Unlike Gandhiji, he had no hesitation in supporting the cause of Kala Ram Temple Satyagraha. Several social functions were organised where the Untouchable ladies were invited to participate. It was in Ratnagiri, under the leadership of Savarkar that the first All Hindu public dinner was held in 1930. All castes were invited to come and eat together in one place. Savarkar also promoted the cause of Inter-Caste marriages. In this, he proceeded cautiously as some Untouchables were demanding Brahmin girls in marriage almost by force.

For Savarkar, there was no question of a belief in a Caste System, by birth or otherwise. He felt that the demolition of the Caste System itself was an essential prerequisite for progress of the Hindu society. He held views that were far more socially progressive than that of the Mahatma. Not only did he hold them but he also worked for their realization. Thereby demonstrating that even a man who faced several restrictions on his personal freedom could then do far more socially beneficial work.

Thus, it is not possible to extend even the consideration to the Mahatma, that what he did was the most that could be then done.

In conclusion, what answer shall be give to our question: “Did the Mahatma Really Work for the Welfare of the Untouchables?”

One is left wondering, what is the Real Work that he did for the Untouchables!! Indeed, by sanctifying Tokenism and avoiding the real issues of Genuine Empowerment of the Untouchables, he has left behind a legacy that erupts into a “Kherlanji” incident even in Twenty First Century.

What is “Kherlanji”, you may ask. That is precisely **the point**. If an incident, which involves rape and murder of a bright teenager only **the** ground of her birth determined caste, **does not burn itself into the national psyche, is the Elite, ably guided by the Father of their Nation, not guilty of tokenism?**

Take another case so illustrative of Tokenism as against Genuine Empowerment. Universal Primary Education would certainly without doubt constitute a sustentative element of Genuine Empowerment.

That all children must get universal primary education has been an article of faith in India since 1935. Yet, the Indian State remains far from providing fulfilling this basic need of its people. The apathy runs across the party divide.

An NDA Government was pleased to state in response to an unstarred question number 1908 in Rajya Sabha on March 10, 2003 that the number of out of school children in the state of Maharashtra was ZERO. If the Honourable Minister was to make this statement on affidavit in a Court of Law, she would have been sued for perjury. A UPA Government is very chary of disclosing whether or not the Education Cess that it has levied on the tax payers to fund Universalization of Primary Education, is used only for the purpose for which it is intended and not for any other purposes.

The deadlines set for ensuring 100% enrollment of children in the schools has come and gone without the Parliament, Executive, Judiciary and the Media being in the least perturbed about it.

Dr. Pankaj K Phadnis

Is there a prize for guessing which segment of the Society needs Universal Primary Education the most??

Gandhiji is long dead and can not be blamed for failure of the Indian State to meet the requirements of its citizens. However, he certainly has to bear the responsibility for sanctifying Tokenism that is the hall mark of the State, which calls him Father of the Nation.

Chapter XIV

Did the Mahatma Ever Really Intend to Drive the British Out of the Country ?

One of the articles of faith of the Indian psyche is that Independence would not have been possible had Gandhiji not come back to India from South Africa. So deeply is this ingrained that there is a violent emotional reaction, the moment someone says Gandhiji is NOT the Father of the Nation. I propose to go further and even state that it is possible that Independence would have been attained earlier, had Gandhiji not abandoned the Tilak strategy of “Responsive Co-operation” that was accepted by the Congress at Amritsar in 1919

Let us recap the chain of events from 1905. The Revolutionaries, Savarkar being one of the more prominent ones, were demanding Absolute Political Independence starting from 1905 itself. Neither the hard prison life nor the gallows deterred them. In this time of revolutionary ferment, the Congress dreaded the word Independence. Gandhiji at this time, considered that the British connection was beneficial to India and would no doubt have considered the fight for Independence as an immoral activity that a Mahatma could not support. The British locked up the Sinners fighting for Independence; the Congress threw out their patron Tilak from its ranks. Soon thereafter, he was packed off to Burma. Yet the Raj magic was not broken for Gandhiji. On his return, Tilak mounted a campaign to capture the Congress and further the cause of Swaraj – Home Rule. As was his wont, Tilak refrained from openly demanding Absolute Political Independence but the British were under no illusions about what the Indians led by the Lokmanaya really wanted.

Chimanlal Setalvad, a member of the Hunter Commission, has recounted: “During one of the discussions I had with Lord Hunter, he lost his temper and said: You people want to drive the British out of the country”. Thus by 1919, even the moderates were suspected by the British to desire Absolute Political Independence.

By 1920, the Congress came around to accept Swaraj as its goal. Gandhiji defined Swaraj to mean self-government within the Empire, if possible, and outside, if necessary. Thus far, it was an important

evolution for a man who had always wished the Empire well. Those, who thought that by thus defining Swaraj, Gandhiji was in favour of Absolute Political Independence, were rudely shaken to find that this was not the case.

It is this strange story that we shall now study. It makes one wonder, whatever Gandhiji's public postures, did he ever really give up the feeling that on the whole, the connection of the Empire was beneficial for the Indians.

Let us proceed with the story after the stormy exit of Jinnah from the Nagpur Congress. The policies of Tilak had been thrown overboard but his name carried great value. The Mahatma was not slow in capitalising on the regard that people at large had for Tilak. A fund raising campaign called Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund was launched with the object of collecting Rs 10,000,000/-. Such was the veneration people had for this great soul that the Fund was to reach 13,000,000/-. This was a huge sum of money. To put the matters in perspective, it was more than 10% of the total annual revenue from a rich state like Punjab. Tilak Swaraj Fund came to be the backbone of Gandhiji's various campaigns.

It would have been befitting his status as the Mahatma, if Gandhiji had refrained from the use of Tilak's name for collecting money. For the money collected was being used for policies that Tilak disapproved. A wide gulf had divided Gandhiji and Tilak's approach to Swaraj. It had never been bridged despite, all the pious hopes of Gandhiji. By collecting a fund in the name of Tilak to further his own policies which had been rejected by Tilak, Gandhiji must be said to have committed a fraud on the nation.

1921 witnessed political activities on a scale that had not been seen earlier even in the hey days of Home Rule movement. As a movement in mobilising people, Non-cooperation was a great success. Boycott of legislature, law-courts, educational institutions, foreign cloth was resorted to with great gusto. Soon Government titles came to be regarded as badges of slavery. A prominent find of the movement was Subhas Chandra Bose, who resigned from the coveted Indian Civil Services, one of the very few ever to do so in the nationalist cause, on 22nd February 1921 to join the struggle. This young man was now to

carry the revolutionary torch in a manner that was to dazzle the nation. This was the young man, who was to support the cause of Independence, much to the annoyance not only of the Raj but also of the Mahatma. For, the Gandhi magic did not work on him, unlike his senior colleague Jawahar Lal Nehru. By the time, he died in an air crash/ murdered in 1945 at an age of 49; he had become the biggest threat to the Raj, far more than Gandhiji himself and joined the ranks of Tilak and Savarkar. Back in 1921, the hot headed Bose soon came to be known as a supporter of the Revolutionary cause

The scale of activity was large enough to cause serious alarm to the Raj. At a moment when the nation was roused and supported the movement cutting across the barriers of religion, the Mahatma, who had done so much to make this happen, developed cold feet. Following outbreak of violence at Chauri Chaura, a small village in UP, on 5th February 1922, he unilaterally suspended the Non-cooperation movement. Not one of the objective of the movement had been met. Khilafat, Punjab or Swaraj – all the causes remained unresolved. The nationalists, all over the country were staggered. People at large grew frustrated. The Muslims felt let down. A series of Hindu-Muslim riots were soon to rock the country as we now know.

Nehru writes about this emotional impulsive decision: “ we in prison learnt, to our amazement and consternation, that Gandhiji had suspended civil resistance. We were angry....The sudden suspension of our movement after Chauri Chaura incident was resented, I think by almost all the prominent Congress leaders...My father was much upset about it. The younger people were naturally even more agitated. Our mounting hopes tumbled to the ground”

The popularity of the Mahatma was in great peril. Government came to his rescue. It had him removed from the political scene with a simple imprisonment of six years, by 18th March 1922. The suspension of the movement may have served the belief in Non-Violence of the Mahatma but it was certainly nothing short of betrayal of the cause of Independence. Rowlatt agitation and now the first Civil disobedience, both the movements of Gandhiji ended tamely with none of the stated objectives being anywhere in sight.

The Mahatma could arouse the passions of the people and make them act defying the fear of the all mighty Empire but where in the name of the heaven, one is compelled to ask, was he leading them?

Chauri Chaura is well known and has been taken by an indulgent people as an eccentric act of an emotional Mahatma. What is less well known is the manner in which Gandhiji treated the question of Independence at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress in December 1921. It is difficult to be so indulgent towards the Mahatma after reading about this incident that had taken place, barely a month before Chauri Chaura.

In a long and impassioned speech in Urdu, Maulana Hasarat Mohani moved the Resolution for Independence in the Congress session of 1921. He said although they had been promised Swaraj, the redress of the Khilafat and Punjab wrongs within a year, they had so far achieved nothing of the sort. Quoting the immortal words of Lokmanya Tilak, 'Liberty is my birthright and I shall have it', the Maulana called upon the Congress to define object of the Congress as Swaraj or complete Independence free from all foreign control by all legitimate and peaceful means.

One would have thought that the words '*by all legitimate and peaceful means*' would have satisfied the Mahatma and he would willingly support the cause of Independence. But no! After several delegates spoke in favour of the resolution, he got up to *Oppose the Resolution*. The reasons given by him leaves one gasping. He said: "An hour ago we passed a resolution which contemplates a final settlement of Khilafat....Are you going to rub the whole of that position from your mind by raising a false issue and by throwing a bombshell in the midst of Indian atmosphere?... Let us not go into waters whose depths we do not know, and this proposition of Mr. Hasarat Mohani lands you into depths unfathomable, I therefore ask you in all confidence to reject his proposition."

In 1921, Gandhiji was not even prepared to dream of Independence. No wonder, the resolution when put to vote was declared lost.

With Gandhiji in prison and a general level of frustration in the country following unwarranted reprieve to the Raj, the annual session of the Congress at Gaya in 1922 became a battleground for the conflicting ideologies in the Congress. The Pro-changers who wanted to bring back the Tilak policy of Responsive Cooperation and No-changers, who were the blind followers of the Mahatma. The No-changers won. The victory was temporary. The Pro-changers set up a party of their own and launched a nation wide campaign. Finally, in a special session of the Congress in September 1923, the Pro changers were permitted to contest November elections. Swaraj party of the Pro-changers was to do considerable good in the Councils, even with the limited autonomy available. The question of Independence was once again raised but once again the dream was scoffed at.

Following a major illness, Gandhiji was released unconditionally on 6th February 1924. Savarkar, who had by now served 14 years of hard imprisonment was also released. The political atmosphere in the country deeply disturbed him but there was little that he could do. For his release was subject to the condition that he would confine himself to Ratnagiri, a small district in Maharashtra and refrain from participating in any political activity. The only thing of note that had happened in Ratnagiri was that it was the place where the King of Burma was exiled to die in frustration. Evidently, the Government hoped that Savarkar would follow the example. This was a futile hope, for far from being downcast, Savarkar tested the limits of these restrictions time and again. With the result that the conditions that were originally to last for only five years, ended only after thirteen years, in 1937. A convicted extremist and a social reformer, none could be found to even rent a small house to this 'mad' man in Ratnagiri, the conservative backyard of the country. Finally, a gentleman, Patankar agreed to give shelter. Thus housed, this long period of internment was fruitfully utilised by Savarkar in working for removal of caste restrictions in the Hindu society. Gandhiji suffering from no constraints, remained beholden to the Raj. Presiding over the 1924 Congress session held in Belgaum said:

“In my opinion, if the British Government mean what they say and honestly help us to equality, it would be a greater triumph than a complete severance of the British connection”.

By this time the British had ruled for well over 121 years and the equality that Gandhiji dreamt of, was no where in sight. Yet, Gandhiji did not stop hoping for the impossible. Truly, only a Mahatma could be so naïve.

Subhas Chandra Bose got the same hard treatment that the Lokmanya got. This was hardly surprising. Gopinath Sahai had attempted to shoot the Calcutta Police Commissioner, Charles Tragort on 12th January 1924. By mistake, he shot one Mr. Dey. The hangman's noose welcomed Gopinath on 1st March. Bose paid public tribute to the martyr on the next day itself in a public meeting. Gandhiji by contrast became deeply distraught, when his resolution condemning the act of Gopinath could be passed by only a small margin (73 for 67 against) on 27th June in the Congress meeting at Ahmedabad.

It was just a matter of time before the wrath of the Government would fall on Subhas, the unabashed admirer of the Revolutionaries. He was arrested on unspecified charges in October and removed to Mandalay on 26th January 1925, the same place that was instrumental in the premature death of the Lokmanya after his six-year stay. Subhas was to be released only in May 1927.

His release gave just the support that Jawahar Lal needed to *launch a coup*. In the Madras session of 1927, he got the Congress to declare that the goal of the Indian people was to have Complete National Independence. The first time ever in its history. Gandhiji kept himself aloof from these developments but his silent disapproval was more than apparent. Nehru wrote: "I do not know how far the resolutions I put before the Congress met his approval. I am inclined to think that he disliked them". This dislike is surprising, considering that Independence resolution received all-round support. Surprising or otherwise, the dislike was real and it soon became evident for all to see.

1928 was marked by the famous boycott of Simon Commission. A great deal of tension was also generated in the Congress over the acceptance of Motilal Nehru Committee report which rejected Independence and accepted Dominion status as a basis for framing Indian constitution. In fact, the report did not even ask for a Dominion status.

Dominion status meant that India would have remained within the British Empire. King of England would have continued to remain the national sovereign of the country. The Prime Minister of the country would have reported to the Governor-General appointed by the King. Most importantly, the King would have continued to have unfettered prerogative powers. These would have included the power to issue Instrument of Instructions to the Governor General, which could have overridden any advice of the Prime Minister. In other words, the White lackeys of the King would have been replaced by the Browns.

No wonder a battle royal erupted with Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru on one side and Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose on the other, bitterly opposed to a climb down from the ideal of Independence. The pressure of the young lobby was far too strong for even the Mahatma to resist. A compromise was reached and the final version of the resolution said that the Congress would accept Dominion status if given before 31st December 1929, if not it would demand Absolute Political Independence.

Chapter XV

The Unholy Alliance of Gandhiji and the British

It was in December 1929 at Lahore, that the Congress had demanded *Absolute Political Independence* finally accepting the Revolutionary credo that had already then been in vogue for more than quarter of a century. What followed was not a Congress sponsored 'Quit India Movement' with the rallying cry of Do or Die. This was not to happen till 1942, a wait of another thirteen years. What followed was a Demand for Substance of Independence. When that was not conceded, the headline grabbing famous Dandi Yatra followed – not for attaining Independence but for breaking the Salt Law. Civil Disobedience, the pact with Irwin, Round Table Conference, efforts for eradication of Untouchability, participation in Elections, holding office, all followed as the Congress programmes with the full blessings of Gandhiji. In none of these campaigns did Gandhiji demonstrate any sign of either urgency or ruthlessness for forcing the British out of India. Indeed, how could he - for the main plank of the Gandhi campaign was the force of moral persuasion. Non-violence was incompatible with such fascist techniques. It is another matter that while the British could be tolerated till their hearts underwent a conversion, a Congress President like Subhas Bose, who refused to bow down to Gandhiji could not be accepted even for a few months. An urgent, ruthless campaign had to be undertaken to force him out of the Office.

Even, if we chose to ignore the unsavory Bose episode, the fact remains that between 1929 to 1939; the Gandhi led Congress puffed and panted but failed to dent the British capacity to loot the country. This much is an undeniable historical fact in view of the facts that we now know about the British conduct in the War and thereafter. Many a misguided soul may quarrel with the choice of description of the Congress effort. My apologies to them for hurting their sensibilities. Let me be more specific. My comments are limited to that section of the Congress, which never looked beyond Gandhiji for salvation. For their activities, this description is a charitable description. If this sounds shocking, the readers are invited to arraign at their own conclusions, after reading what I now have to present.

First of all, it is worthwhile to reacquaint ourselves with some historical facts. Unlike, what seems to be propagated today, even at the height of the Gandhi era, there was considerable opposition to Gandhiji within the Congress.

The Congress was an Umbrella organisation. Jockeying for its control were the Pro-Independence lobby consisting of the Congress Socialists, the Forward Block of Subhas Bose and the Communists. The so called the Congress Left. Opposing them were the Pro-Dominion lobby, seeking to largely maintain the Status quo, replacing the White British Masters by the Brown Indians; swearing allegiance to the British Crown. The so-called Congress Right. Falling in between were the people like Jawahar Lal Nehru, who had their head in the Left and the heart in the Right. The Right Wing won the battle but not without considerable help from the British.

It was not as if the British liked the Congress Right but it was, naturally, far more preferable to them than the Congress Left. It is this unholy alliance of the British and the Congress Right that betrayed the cause of Independence with a leading role played by none other than Mr. Gandhi himself.

Now is the time to devote our attention to the story of this Unholy Alliance that has unfortunately been so successful in shaping our history. The story begins in January 1929. On 23rd January 1929, in London, the Secretary of State was rather gloomily informing his Cabinet colleagues that ‘the political situation in India has swung considerably to the left in the last year.’

He had based his conclusions on the report given to him by the Viceroy on the 19th January – both in an official telegram as well as in a private letter. In his official telegram, the Viceroy reported: “Developments in the political situation in India during the last month have been very marked. The most important event was the meeting of the Congress in Calcutta attended by popular demonstrations on a very large scale. The principle subject of the discussion was the issue between Dominion status as recommended in the Nehru report and Independence. Motilal Nehru, the President of the Congress, was committed to the Dominion status ideal by the report which bears his name. The independence movement was supported.... mainly by the

younger men led by Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, who have converted independence from a mere phrase into a definite movement.”

Both - Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose - would have been quick to protest against being credited with, had they known this in their lifetime, converting Independence from a phrase into a definite movement. They would have pointed out that from 1905 itself hundreds of people had courted death and thousands more had suffered inhuman punishment for the cause of independence. They were only forcing the Congress to follow the path already soaked with the blood, toils and tears of their more illustrious co-patriots. A path that was then already more than two decades old.

The Viceroy went on: “Motilal Nehru, finding himself in danger of defeat...invoked the aid of Gandhi, who drafted compromising resolution.”

So strong was the urge for Independence that the Gandhiji drafted compromise resolution also failed to find favour. This defeat forced Mr. Gandhi to introduce a resolution further modifying the compromise resolution. The modified Compromise resolution called for full dominion status by end of 1929, failing which the Congress was committed to launch non violent civil disobedience to secure Independence. Yes! Independence, not substance of Independence, not abolition of Salt Tax but Full and Absolute Independence.

The Country's youth were impatient to attain Independence. Even a year's wait to demand independence was not acceptable to them. As the Viceroy continued: “Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose had never attempted to conceal their view that even this (the modified compromise resolution) was inadequate and finally in the open Congress session Subhas Bose opposed the resolution and moved an amendment repudiating Dominion status and laying down independence as India's goal. This was lost by 973 against 1,350 votes.”

The Congress Right prevailed but just about. The Raj knew this.

The Viceroy shrewdly noted: “Though the supporters of independence profess not to have been satisfied by the result of the Congress meeting, there is no doubt that the Congress was a great triumph for extremism. An ultimatum which everybody knows can not be complied with has been given to the British Government, and the Congress have decided unanimously that if it is not complied with after the end of December next they will revive non co-operation. This is a definite declaration from which the Congress will find it difficult to go back. It may be that Gandhi and Motilal Nehru and their followers are not anxious to see these developments; but in view of the commitment they have made, they will find it very difficult to avoid participating in them without a complete break with the extremists, which they are reluctant to face. In any event the more extreme leaders are unlikely to modify their demand.”

Dear readers, read this very carefully. Mr. Gandhi had committed to *demand Absolute Political Independence* by end of 1929 if full dominion status was not given. It was well known that when this commitment was given, there was no chance of India getting Full Dominion status by end of 1929. Thus, the demand of *Absolute Political Independence* and the revival of non co-operation was inevitable. It was therefore incumbent upon Mr. Gandhi to prepare for the struggle ahead. And what did he actually do? Hardly had the ink dried on the paper, for the resolution was passed in late December 1928 and the Viceroy’s telegram being quoted here was dated 19th January 1929, Mr. Gandhi was already looking around for a way to wriggle out of his own solemn commitment. The Viceroy reported: “Gandhi has since tried to tone down his ultimatum and explains that he would be satisfied if the British Government made some serious and sincere move to meet them within the year.”

The question was not what would satisfy Mr. Gandhi. The issue was what would satisfy the Congress. The only serious and sincere move that the British Government could make within 1929 to satisfy the Congress resolution prepared by Mr. Gandhi himself, was the grant of Full dominion status to India before the end of 1929. The Viceroy rightly went on to note that: “but this does not really get him and those who think with him out of the difficulty into which the desire for compromise with the extremists had got them. He knows no practical step could be taken which would give a plausible excuse,

having regard to the actual terms of the resolution, for calling off the non-co-operation movement, and that he could not recede without breaking the Congress and stultifying himself.”

Mr. Gandhi's hide had been nailed on the wall by the *extremist* – pro Independence lobby. There was no way for him to get off the hook without making himself completely useless and ineffective as a political leader. The only honorable way out for him was to disassociate himself with the Resolution and walk out of the Congress into the political wilderness.

At least that was what the Viceroy thought – rather naively; as it turns out. For he had not yet reckoned with the machinations of Mr. Gandhi.

It was clear to the Viceroy that the British Parliament was not going to accede to any request from him, should he be so foolish to make one, to grant full dominion status to India in 1929. He, therefore, now turned to looking at the ways to meet the challenge of dealing with the inevitable Congress sponsored Independence movement in 1930. The challenge could not be met unless the battlefield was mapped. So he noted: “The result of the Congress meeting would seem to leave the Congress divided into three sections : (a) Those who desire independence and are prepared to take active measures towards the goal (*the Congress Left*); (b) a considerable number who have no real objection to independence as ultimate goal, or are afraid to dissociate themselves from the demand (*the Congress Right*).....(c) a comparatively small number of persons, whose opposition to independence is open and genuine (*the Congress Irrelevants*)”

The Viceroy then went on to explain the growth of the idea of Independence *in the Congress*.

“When the idea of Independence first emerged last year, it was generally considered visionary and did not seem likely to develop into a practical issue. In the last few months, however, independence has ceased to be an academic ideal. We are now faced with a party, at present small in number, but active, who, it would seem mean to attempt to translate independence into a definite policy, and to organise themselves with a view to attaining their objective by force,

or at least, to create such widespread unrest in the country that the Government will be intimidated into making sweeping concessions. Youth movements and volunteer organisations are being discussed and supported.”

So who was behind these seditious conspiracies. The answer was well known. It was the Nehru-Bose duo, who, the Viceroy knew: " ... do not mean to stop at words, but are prepared for action. It does not at present appear that they are anxious to launch any large-scale anti-government movement in the nature of direct action until next year. Their present policy, so far as can be judged, is to spend the coming year in preparation for rousing anti-government feeling in every possible way, foster in their own words, a revolutionary mentality, organise volunteers, exploit, on the lines of Bardoli, any specific grievances that may occur in any part of the country and generally create an atmosphere favourable to launch of a big mass movement against the Government next year.”

In other words, they were only being faithful to the Congress resolution. The Viceroy’s problem was to find a way of dealing with these *extremists*. The typical Nazi response would have been to create a small hole between the two eyes of the troublesome duo. That would have been brutal and we all know, the British always took great care to show that they were not brutal. So he noted: “We are at present considering in consultation with the Local Government concerned, whether it is possible, expedient to prosecute Jawahar Lal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and perhaps one or two other leaders in respect of the recent speeches”.

Prosecution of Nehru and Bose was a troublesome matter. The Viceroy had already pointed out the difficulties in so doing, in his earlier private letter dated 2nd January 1929: “I am very doubtful about the wisdom of doing this unless (*the Independence speeches*) .. so preached as to advocate violent methods, when, of course, it would clearly expose itself to our attack. On one side, of course, there are the evils flowing from unchecked speech-making in favour of Independence, which are doing great harm; on the other hand there is the complete certainty, as it seems to me, that you can not fill your jails with everybody who proclaims his belief in Independence.”

Thus, the Viceroy admitted that the support for Independence was widespread in the country. In the winter of 1929, it was clear that those, who would attempt to stand in the way of the national fervor for Independence, were going to be swept aside like twigs in a raging torrent.

It is for this reason that Mr. Gandhi had made the show of supporting the Calcutta Congress resolution, even while he was going to be satisfied with a mere move by the British towards – not independence but Dominion status. Nehru and Bose were the symbols of the national desire for Independence, were they to be prosecuted: “..the only effect of trying to do so at this juncture would be rapidly to enhance the popularity of the cause”

The Nazi solution, was therefore, merely too inefficient and therefore not the British way of dealing with the problem. The British way, we shall study in more detail but in the meanwhile, Nehru and Bose were not the only torchbearers of Independence. “To complete the picture of extreme anti-government movement it is necessary to say something of Communist activity. The Indian Communists are perhaps not very clear about their ultimate object.”

This was being ingenious by Lord Irwin. He knew the Communist may or may not have been very clear about their ultimate objective in life – which one of us dare say, he is; they were very clear about their immediate objective. That was to send the British packing out of India as soon as possible. Their actions deserved even more serious attention than those of Nehru and Bose. The Communist threat to the Imperial domination was on a global level, while that of Nehru and Bose was merely on local level.

Thus, he recorded: “What they (*the Communists*) have concentrated on with considerable success is rousing a spirit of discontent and lawlessness in the industrial labour population. In Bombay, they have succeeded in creating a situation which requires a very careful consideration, and it is believed that they contemplate trying to organise a general strike...about May next. In Calcutta, though they have not succeeded in creating the same general unrest among labour, they have been able to prolong for some months a strike at important Fort Gloster Mill, which has no clear reasoned basis. *The large*

demonstration of labourers under Communist auspices which invaded the Congress premises during the Congress sitting in Calcutta is significant (italics mine).....”

The readers would recall that the telegram that we are studying had started with the acknowledgement that “the most important event was the meeting of the Congress in Calcutta attended by popular demonstrations on a very large scale.” Now we learn that *the popular demonstrations on a very large scale* that created a pressure of their own on the proceedings of the famous 1928 Calcutta Congress were Communist led.

No wonder, then that the Viceroy was worried about the growing Communist influence in India. His response was very clear. In dealing with the Communist, the velvet gloves were off. They were to be hammered out of existence. “We believe that the most effective blow that could be struck against the Communist movement would be a conspiracy case against some 20 of the leaders. No new legislative measures would be likely to be so effective as a successful prosecution of this character...We are about to take the best legal opinion available on the material collected, and if that opinion is favourable it is anticipated that the case might be launched about the beginning of April.”

For the record, the prosecution was indeed launched in what came to be known as the Meerut Conspiracy case. On 20th March 1929, 31 Communist leaders were arrested. The British were successful in putting 27 of these most important Communist leaders behind bars. An action that was to throw the Communist movement into a complete disarray for the next five years. Thus the British made sure that the most important component of the Pro-Independence lobby – the Communists, were in no position to launch a challenge to the Gandhiji’s domination of the Congress during the critical years of Civil Disobedience. The Communist led Calcutta demonstrations were not to be allowed to be repeated. It was this popular outrage that had put the pressure on the Dominion lobby to propose a compromise to the Independence lobby and when it did not work – propose a modified compromise. It was best to lock up these trouble makers, so that the Gandhi leadership could continue to hold sway over the Congress.

As a matter of interest, when the Communist leaders, who were so interned, were released and attempted to regroup; the Communist Party itself was banned in 1934. Mr. Gandhi's leadership of the Congress continued to be insulated against the Communist threat.

In the meantime, in 1929 mere internment of the Communist leaders was not enough. The situation was worrying. Bhagat Singh and his comrade Batukeshwar Dutt threw bombs in the Central legislative assembly on 8th April 1929. An act that was widely acclaimed in the country. Huge bomb factories were discovered in Lahore and Saharanpur in May. The Secretary of State was to inform his Cabinet colleagues on 3rd of October 1929:

“The excited and unhealthy state of public opinion may be judged from the general approval given to the hunger strike of two men, Dutt and Singh, who had already been convicted of throwing bombs in the Assembly.

The Administrative outlook, therefore, is not bright. On the other hand...the older leaders of Congress (whose, influence is, however rapidly declining) are not in their hearts sympathetic with extremists plans. In view of this a statement is needed which will re-establish faith in the sincerity of the British promise.”

The British now feared that India was now on the path not only to demand Independence but demand it by force. Their only hope was to ensure that Mr. Gandhi retained his preeminence. His mortal enemies, the Communists, had been safely sent behind bars. The challenge of Nehru-Bose duo was still to be met. It could only be overcome by Mr. Gandhi if he could be given a pretext, a statement, a promise – that is all that he wanted. Armed with this, he could get off the Independence hook without losing face. Without, such a pretext, Nehru and Bose would have made a mince meat of the Gandhi leadership if it persisted in opposing Independence at Lahore that was to be held in December 1929.

The problem of finding a suitable pretext for Mr. Gandhi, who was desperately looking for a way to get out of his commitment of supporting the cause of Independence now became very urgent. The British mandarins, therefore, went to work. They seemed to have kept

open their channels of communication with the Congress Right. In his personal letter of the 2nd January 1929, the Viceroy had spoken of meeting Motilal Nehru to; “persuade him that, from his (i.e. from Motilal Nehru’s) point of view, the policy of the Congress Resolution is the last word in folly”

Now the Secretary of State talked of their heart not being sympathetic with the extremist’s plan. The Unholy Alliance was now beginning to take shape.

The problem was under what pretext could a Statement be issued that would be good enough ammunition for Mr. Gandhi, as well as pass the muster of British opinion. The Simon Commission appointed by the British Government on 8th November 1927, now came handy. As is known, the appointment of an all White Commission had outraged the Bharatiya opinion. The Commission had been boycotted by the Hindus and the Muslims alike. A leading part in the Muslim boycott had been played by Jinnah. The Bharatiya consensus in favour of the Simon Commission boycott was so complete that even an Indian member of the Governor - General’s Council had refused to give evidence before it on grounds of principle. The members of the Commission had returned to England in 1929 after having what amounted to a completely sterile hearings.

A truly bizarre maneuvering now took place between 13th July 1929 to 2nd November 1929. Events that conclusively establish beyond a shadow of doubt, the existence of an Unholy Alliance between the British and the Congress Right led by Mr. Gandhi. The whole purpose of which was to ensure the continuation of the leadership of Mr. Gandhi in the Congress, so that the demand for Independence could be scuttled. Very strong statement but one which is backed by incontrovertible evidence.

Read on my friends, the manner in which the British went about trampling the so called Parliamentary ethics with the noble objective of ensuring the defeat of Bharatiya demand of Independence.

Read on my friends, the shameless manner in which Mr. Gandhi collaborated with the British, not only to keep the reins of power in his own hands but also to sabotage the demand for Independence struggle.

Read on my friends, the dark secrets that are finally coming to light after eighty years.

As you read this, no doubt the picture of Bhagat Singh and his comrade Batukeshwar Dutt, waiting anxiously for the hangman's noose, will flash before your eyes, as it did before mine, when I wrote this. Young men, not yet two score and half old, in the prime of their youth staking their lives to advance the cause of Independence. You would also see a sixty One year old man, who had lived his life, secretly conferring with the enemies of his nation, all for the sake of satisfying his own vanity.

Read on my friends and make up your mind, if after reading this episode, you would chose to address M.K.Gandhi as the 'Mahatma' or 'Gandhiji' or 'Mr. Gandhi' or something else.

Let us study the narrative of events leading up to the publication of the Viceroy's Statement on 31st October 1929 submitted for the consideration of the Cabinet by the Secretary of State on 4th October 1929. "On 13th July Lord Irwin arrived in England. He brought with him certain documents....The documents included drafts of imaginary letters to be exchanged between the Chairman of the Statutory Commission and the Prime Minister which had been prepared in India *after* the Statutory Commission returned to India."

To cut the story short, the Chairman of the Statutory Commission, Mr. Simon, was to write a letter to the Prime Minister addressing him with an Enquiry and a Suggestion:

- The enquiry was in respect of the willingness of the Government and the opposition parties to extend the scope of the Commission's report to include future relationship of British India with the Princely states.

- The suggestion was to be in respect of Government calling for setting up of some sort of Conference to consider constitutional proposals put before it by the Government. The Conference was to be attended by representatives of British India and the Princely states.

The Prime Minister was to respond agreeing to the extension of the scope of the Commission's report after consulting all the parties and accepting the suggestion in respect of the Conference. The Prime Minister's reply was to contain something else. The Ammunition desperately needed by Mr. Gandhi. As the narrative put it: "In the suggested reply from the Prime Minister to Sir John Simon (not discussed with any members of the Commission)...the opportunity was to be taken of disposing off the doubts which had been expressed...on the intentions of the British Government in enacting the Statute of 1919.

The definite pronouncement was suggested that 'it is definite policy of His Majesty's Government that India shall, through the realisation of responsible government, be enabled to obtain in *due season* (italics mine) recognition as a self-governing Dominion.'

Informal discussions on the subject matter of these draft letters took place between Lord Irwin and the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India immediately after his arrival. It appears that Lord Irwin mentioned it also to Lord Reading, who, at that stage at any rate expressed no objection."

As a matter of interest, it is worthwhile to recall that Lord Reading was the Viceroy of India in 1920, when Gandhiji had launched the Khilafat movement

On 25th July Lord Irwin made a statement to the Cabinet. The Cabinet's conclusion was in favour of the proposal of the Governor-General 'that at an early date there should be an interchange of letters between the Chairman of the Statutory Commission and the Prime Minister, in the course of which that latter should make clear (1) that Dominion Status was the ultimate aim of the Government's policy which they were trying to help the peoples of India to achieve by stages.....Following this decision, further informal discussions took

place between Lord Irwin, the Secretary of State for India and Sir John Simon, to consider the terms of the suggested letters to be exchanged between the latter and the Prime Minister.”

The entire correspondence that was to take place had been conceived by Lord Irwin, while being in India is of course very clear. Also clear is the very objective of the whole correspondence – to make a statement about the Ultimate object of the British being Full Dominion Status for India. Otherwise, there was no point in suggesting that the Prime Minister, in his reply, make a reference to a matter that was not to be touched upon in the letter being replied. Up to this point, Lord Irwin had succeeded in getting the concurrence of the Cabinet as well as Sir Simon and Lord Reading to his proposals. On 12th August, the Prime Minister also concurred with the following comment: “The Prime Minister is willing to sign this letter provided he is advised that it will improve the position. If it does not, it will make the matters worse. I gathered from Lord Irwin that it would make a difference. A final draft for me to sign should be prepared, provided the Secretary of State still thinks that it will be effective.”

It appears that Lord Irwin was in constant touch with his advisers in India, who in turn seem to have been in close contact with the Congress Right. Now, they informed Lord Irwin that the declaration about Dominion status should be more explicit. Moreover, the Conference that the Government was to call should have freedom to formulate its own proposals for the consideration of the Government. A parallel Simon Commission was in effect to be set up. It appears that the quality of ammunition was being subjected to a quality check by the end user, even as it was being prepared.

Lord Irwin accepted the advice coming from India and made proposals on the lines to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. Such was the level of British anxiety to support the Dominion status lobby of the Congress and thereby derail the Independence movement. The draft correspondence, as now modified, was sent by the Prime Minister to Mr. Baldwin, then in France, on 19th September with a view to enlist his support for the proposals. The Prime Minister pointed out that Sir John Simon would be laying the matter formally before his Commission on the following Tuesday, 24th September. It is important to stress that at this time only Sir Simon had consented to

the draft reply of the Prime Minister containing the declaration about the Dominion Status. Other members of the Commission were in the dark about it. They so far knew only about the draft letter they were supposed to send. Realising this, the Prime Minister said: "I can not of course predict what their attitude may be. If they feel difficulty about the role assigned to them, it may be that we should have to seek other though less convenient, means of obtaining the same end. I am therefore sending these papers to you at the present stage on the supposition that the Commission will, in fact, agree to the course proposed, and on the understanding that should they fail to do so, a new situation would be created which may necessitate other treatment."

The Prime Minister appears to have been quite sure that the Commission would agree to play the *role assigned to them* and no *new situation would be created*. Or else, he would have waited for another five days and written to Mr. Baldwin only after the attitude of the Commission was known. The thought that the Commission would dissent does not appear to have struck Mr. Baldwin either. For by 21st September, he had communicated his concurrence without having been in a position to contact his colleagues like Mr. Churchill, who was then in America.

By now, many Britons were getting angry that India could be told that the Ultimate Object of the British Raj was to see that she would get Full Dominion status. Forget Independence or Immediate grant of Dominion status, she could not even dream of Dominion status as an Ultimate Object. She was a slave race and would remain so. The opposition was voiced by Lord Reading on 20th September. On 24th September, the Commission decided it could not take part in the proposed correspondence if the Prime Minister's reply were to make any reference to the Dominion Status as an Ultimate object.

The Cabinet was undeterred by the opposition. On 25th September, it decided that the declaration in respect of the Dominion Status would be made by Lord Irwin and not in the proposed reply of the Prime Minister to the Commission. Strong opposition by Lord Reading, Sir Simon, Mr. Lloyd George made the Cabinet reconsider its decision on the 7th October but, nevertheless, decided to hold their ground. It however decided that the word 'guarantee' should not be used. On 8th October 1929, Lord Irwin made two changes in the declaration that he

was now going to make. The first change was in respect of the sentence: “I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty’s Government to state clearly that, in their judgement, it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 *that the attainment of Dominion Status must be regarded as natural issue of India’s constitutional progress.*”

The words in the italics were to be replaced by ‘that the natural issue of India’s constitutional progress *as there contemplated* is the attainment of Dominion status.’ By this change Lord Irwin was trying to project that he was making no new statement of policy and therefore not encroaching on the territory of the Simon Commission but merely reiterating what was the declared policy of the British Government since 1917.

The second change was also related to the same purpose. The sentence, ‘His Majesty’s Government have opened the door to a more excellent way’ was deleted.

The changes failed to mollify Lord Reading, who held the view that he could not see within any measurable distance of time India being put on the same footing as other self governing Dominions such as Canada. In order to soothe the ruffled feathers of Lord Reading, Lord Irwin prepared a note on his statement. This very revealing note needs a full study for it exposes the utter futility of negotiating with the British as well to prove the existence of an Unholy Alliance between the British and the Congress Right.

1. “The Statement attempts to distinguish (and I hope succeeds in doing so) between *Purpose and Method or Policy*.
2. It limits Dominion Status to the sphere of *Purpose*, and, therefore, the question is whether or not it is dangerous to proclaim Dominion Status as the purpose.
3. The objection taken is that explicit announcement of Dominion Status as purpose will inevitably suggest to the Indian mind that its attainment as a practical policy is both less remote than in fact it is likely to be, and that political pressure on Great Britain from India will be intensified.

4. As regards the last point, it is axiomatic in the present Indian situation that Nationalist pressure will be as strong as the quasi-democratic equipment of the 1919 Act assisted by a Press almost entirely anti-government can make it. In these quarters this pressure will be maintained in any case. But the more important point is whether this pressure should be maintained upon the lines of demanding the *fullest development within the Empire*, or whether it will gradually become a demand for *independence outside the Empire*. A declaration of Dominion Status as our ultimate purpose will, I believe greatly strengthen the hands of those who want the first in the battle that they are waging with those who want the second; without it there is a danger of Indian opinion developing on separatist lines.”

What a battle the Congress Right was waging. Bhagat Singh, his comrades, the Communists, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose were all battling against the British. The worthies in the Congress Right were waging a battle **against their own kith and kin and that too with the help of the British**. Truly fascinating is the manner in which the Congress Right had defined Patriotism.

5. “As regards the objection that such a declaration as it is proposed to make will have the effect of suggesting that the *Purpose* can be earlier or more easily attained than the facts of India render probable, and that, therefore, while it is prudent to speak of Responsible Government it is rash to speak of Dominion Status, does not this argument really rest upon a reluctance to admit as *your Purpose for India* anything more than a restricted Responsible Government?.....

If, on the other hand, it is sought to distinguish between full Responsible Government and Dominion Status, as your Purpose for India, I suggest the distinction is not substantial. The problems that evidently have to be surmounted by India before she attains Dominion Status have not less certainly got to be surmounted before she can attain full Responsible Government, and I suggest that *when* she has got the latter (and British India can't get it except in association with the States) she will in practice have attained Dominion Status, or at least this will be the inevitable sequence in her constitutional development.

6. It is clear that either will take a long time, and meanwhile, with an India encouraged to think politically on Western lines, the compulsory partnership between Great Britain and India is not likely to be free from difficulty and friction. I should feel it a task of even greater difficulty than in our case it is bound to be if by refusal, in face of alleged doubts, to make our ultimate purpose plain, we were to afford ground to our enemies to say that we intended India to occupy permanently subordinate place in an Empire of white nations.”

Who can doubt that the intention of Lord Irwin was to offer some niggardly concessions in his Declaration that was the subject of so much discussions. To be fair, Lord Irwin was going to make it very clear that Dominion Status was the Ultimate purpose of the Raj in India. No false hopes were going to be offered that the Dominion status was around the corner. The Statement of 20th August 1917 made by the Secretary of State that Irwin was referring to made it very clear that there was to be ‘the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.’ All that Irwin wanted to do was to substitute the words *responsible government* by *Dominion status*. No time frame was even contemplated for this Nirvana. Indian Independence was a word that had been deleted from the British dictionary. She was to forever remain a part of the British Empire. In the meanwhile, for a long long time to come, India was to occupy a *subordinate place in an Empire of white nations*. Thus, it fell far far short of coming anywhere near the Congress Resolution of 1928 that demanded Full Dominion Status **in 1929 failing which the Congress was committed to launch a Do or Die struggle for Independence**. This could not be the basis of any discussion. Yet, the discussions were on. Deals had been struck behind the back of the people. Stage was being set for sabotaging the demand for Independence.

Irwin appears to have been very keen to fulfill his part of the bargain for the Lahore Congress was only a few months away. After submitting his note, which failed to satisfy Reading, he left for India on 10th October. On 27th October 1929, Reading wrote to Secretary of State pointing out: “the making of declaration now and without waiting for the report of the Simon Commission is evidence of a new policy.”

Baldwin also wrote to protest against the fact that the Prime Minister had sought his concurrence by holding out the implied expectation of an approval of the Simon Commission to the declaration of Dominion Status. He did not fail to point out that the Prime Minister had agreed that should the Commission not agree with the declaration,

“ a new situation would be created which may necessitate other treatment”. And he went on to record: “That new situation has, in fact, arisen”

This strong protest unsettled the Cabinet. Midnight oil was burned. In the wee hours of 29th October, 3.00 a.m. to be precise the Secretary of State telegraphed Irwin. By this wire, Irwin was informed that it would be prudent to accept the request of Baldwin to postpone the proposed Declaration for a few days till the Prime Minister, who was on high seas at the time, returned. Too late, boss, Irwin seems to have replied the same day. He explained that the engines were fired, the plane was rolling on the tarmac at full speed. To abort the flight at this late juncture would be disastrous. His telling words that once again prove close co-ordination between him and the Congress Right:

“From the information which has just reached me, I have now little doubt that the Congress, as well as other more moderate opinion, will be disposed to accept it and I see a real possibility of the thing coming off as well as the Cabinet have always hoped.”

He urged the Secretary of State to take Baldwin into confidence and even show him the telegram. The Viceroy’s reply failed to move Baldwin. On 30th October, he informed the Acting Prime Minister, Mr. Snowden that the Viceroy had not been acquainted with full facts. The full facts being the proposed Declaration was completely unacceptable to the Tories, the Liberal party and the Simon Commission. He, therefore, pressed upon the Government to call off the proposed Declaration.

The urge to kill the Indian Independence Movement was stronger than the need to keep the Opposition or even the Statutory Commission in good humor. The Government went ahead and ‘a grave responsibility’ of Ultimately granting Dominion Status to India was assumed by the Government of the day. The Viceroy was permitted to make his

famous Declaration as scheduled. On 31st October, Irwin made the completely useless Declaration that promised Dominion Status at some distant unspecified date in future. Sorry, the word Promise or Guarantee was not used. Some kind of possibility of Dominion Status was all that was indicated. The Revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, who were in jails, facing death at this very time, would not have defiled their body by using the paper on which this Declaration was printed as toilet paper. The Congress Right lapped it up and held it in reverence.

A Meeting of Leaders was held in Delhi on the 1st and 2nd November 1929. Mr. Gandhi was a principal participant. The result of the meeting was a joint manifesto addressed to the Viceroy agreeing to help the Government to prepare a constitution for the Country based on Dominion Status. Let Nehru himself speak about this shabby episode: “ And yet that joint manifesto was a bitter pill for some of us. To give up the demand for independence, even in theory and even for a short while was wrong and dangerous; it meant that it was just a tactical affair, something to bargain with, not something which was essential and without which we could never content. So I hesitated and refused to sign the manifesto (Subhas Bose had definitely refused to sign it), but, as was not unusual with me, I allowed myself to be talked into signing.” Who else but Gandhiji could have talked him into signing the document. “I came away in great distress...A soothing letter from Gandhiji and three days of reflection calmed me”. That the Joint manifesto was a bitter pill for Jawahar Lal Nehru and he came away in great distress after signing it is well known. Now, we know that it was something far more sinister than a bitter pill. It was a cold calculated attempt to sabotage the Indian Independence movement. It was nothing but an Unholy Alliance between Lord Irwin and Mr. Gandhi.

Why else was Irwin in such a rush to make the Declaration disregarding a ‘reasonable request’ from Baldwin to postpone it for a few days?

Why else was the So-called Leaders Conference held immediately a day after the Declaration?

An Unholy Alliance that was to derail the Independence Movement for years and cause the Murder of thousands of patriots like Bhagat Singh.

Yes! A Murder – a Murder committed not by the Raj but We all now know by Whom.

The Declaration set in motion a train of events that need to be studied. On 7th November 1929, the Director of Public Information had this to say: “At the end of the first day’s meeting, that is, Friday, November the 1st, nobody could have predicted that such a statement would be issued the next day, signed by everybody present except rigid, extremist and opportunist, Subhash Chandra Bhoosh.

For on Friday, Mr. Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and his son Jawahar Lal Nehru, who has hitherto been identified with the most extreme elements in Indian politics, stood out for acceptance by the Indian Government of certain conditions precedent to their co-operation in the Conference...if they had stuck to their conditions it would have been no more than consistent with their previous actions and declarations. But on Saturday afternoon they waived these conditions and agreed to put them into the statement as recommendations. That Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru are prepared to co-operate on any terms whatever is a development of highest significance...We may take it as fairly certain that the civil disobedience planned for 1st January will be postponed, and also that for the present, at any rate, the independence movement which has been gaining steadily of late months is completely immobilised....”

In the British Parliament, the ruling Labour Party did not have a majority by itself. It was dependent on the Liberal Party. The Declaration which had become the bone of contention, even prior to its issue now came to be hotly contested in both the Houses of Parliament. This forced the Government to reject the conditions that the Indian statement of 2nd November 1929 had attached as recommendations. On the other hand, the battle between the Pro – Independence and Anti – Independence lobby intensified. Despite, the leadership of Mr. Gandhi, despite the ammunition provided to him by the Raj, Mr. Gandhi found the going tough. The Viceroy was forced to report on 17th November in a private telegram that: “Congress are

having a committee meeting today and on Monday, and it is uncertain what they will do. But, if under the influence of Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhash Bose they issue too uncompromising a statement against the announcement, moderates will probably break with them. I shall not be surprised if the majority of the Congress ends up by going wrong, but I am sure there are many elements that will do their best to make it go right.”

One can sense, the element of desperation in the Viceroy’s writing. He had done his best to provide his ally – Mr. Gandhi, the best possible ammunition he could find, to enable him to control the Left. So far, it seemed, Mr. Gandhi was fighting a losing battle. The exultation that the Raj had felt, once Mr. Gandhi had signed the statement on 2nd November welcoming the crumbs thrown by Irwin, had been premature.

The Independence movement was far from immobilised despite all the tricks of the Raj and Mr. Gandhi. The revolutionary spirit was not so feeble as they had imagined. Their sacrifices were not to go in vain. On 26th November, the Viceroy once again sent a latest update on the see-saw battle that was being staged between Mr. Gandhi and his cohorts against the Congress resolution in a blatant betrayal of Independence:

“So far as Congress is concerned, decision has merely been postponed till Christmas, but issue will have to be fought out then.... Liberal and other Moderate elements appear to be quite determined to maintain their attitude of genuine co-operation... At the other extreme come Jawahar Lal and Subhas Bose depending for their position on the young men who could be satisfied by no conceivable concessions. I fancy that Jawahar Lal and Subhas Bose feel they must insist as minimum on amnesty to those whom they encouraged to violent courses. They also presumably realise that whoever weakens now will lose support of the young men.

Between these two extremes come the main body of older Congressmen represented by Motilal and Gandhi. They probably realise that if Government offer is rejected, revolutionary policy of civil disobedience &... will probably follow and this they are anxious to avoid. At the same time, they will do everything possible to avoid a

split in Congress ranks. They will probably, therefore, try to avoid closing door to co-operation with Government, while at the same time uttering sufficient threats to satisfy young men. If they fail in this difficult task, they will either have to surrender to young men or split Congress. Which course they would adopt it is impossible to foretell.”

The Viceroy need not have worried. Mr. Gandhi was to manage both – avoiding door to co-operation with Government, while at the same time uttering sufficient threats. A performance that was to enable him to hijack the Congress agenda, nay the national agenda of Independence for over a decade. The consequences for the nation were tragic. How much of the loot that the British carried away in the latter years, particularly during the Second World War, could have been avoided if and if only Mr. Gandhi had not betrayed the cause of Independence in 1929 and thereafter. One can only speculate.

Mr. Gandhi’s game plan included meeting the Viceroy on 23rd December along with the others to seek a definite assurance regarding the grant of Dominion status. This was out of question.

Now Mr. Gandhi, wholeheartedly supported the Independence Resolution or made a show of doing so.

The malleable Jawahar was co-opted as the Congress President. *The rigid, extremist and opportunist, Subhash Chandra Bhosh* was carefully kept out of the Working Committee.

Civil Disobedience was duly postponed till March. Substance of Independence, Abolishing Salt tax, Eradication of Untouchability, making the 1935 Act work, was to keep the Congress occupied over the next ten years till the outbreak of the War.

Where was the time to fight for Independence or even smaller things like causing embarrassment to the British by demanding amnesty for such trouble makers like Bhagat Singh?

It had taken a decade for the Gandhi Congress to even demand Absolute Political Independence. Those, who thought that, with this, the Mahatma was irrevocably committed to the cause of Absolute Political Independence, were in for few surprises. In the meanwhile,

Subhas Bose paid a price for his intransigence in not signing the Joint manifesto. He found himself removed from the Congress Working Committee. The wishes, likes and dislikes of the Mahatma were not to be taken lightly. By the 23rd January 1930, the Government presented him a birthday gift. He was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in a case filed in 1929.

The historic Lahore Congress called for celebration of 26th January 1930 as the Independence Day. On this day, every Indian was asked to make a declaration of complete independence and take a pledge to support the sacred fight for India's liberty. The day was observed all over the country with great enthusiasm.

No sooner were the celebrations over, Mr. Gandhi once again showed that Independence was not his goal.

The Myth and Reality of the Dandi Yatra

Now Gandhiji put forward eleven specific demands, which, if met by the Government, in his opinion amounted to the *Essence of Independence*. However, important the demands of Gandhiji, the fact remains that those who call for Independence can not ask the rulers, they wish to drive away, for meeting some administrative demands. This was completely inconsistent with the Congress resolution, which he had himself supported. Let alone Independence, the Government was not about to concede even the *Essence of Independence*. It promptly rejected the demand.

Now Gandhiji began his famous Dandi yatra. On 12th March, he left Sabarmati Ashram with 78 male members on foot. Covering a distance of 240 miles, he reached the sea coast at Dandi on 5th April. The foot march was extensively covered by the press and created tremendous excitement in the country. He began the Civil Disobedience campaign on 6th April by making Salt, thus breaking the hated Salt tax. An act that was soon echoed throughout the country. The master communicator, it seemed had found a practical manifestation of Liberty which was conceivable to the masses, unlike Independence, which seemed a vague concept.

On 10th April, he made a special appeal to the Women of India to take up the work of picketing of liquor shops and spinning. They responded with such energy that left the men breathless.

The imprisoned Subhas grew restless in his cell. Not content with locking him up, the Government had him badly beaten up in the jail on 23rd April, with the help of its henchmen. A similar attempt made on Savarkar during his term in Ratnagiri had been foiled due to his alertness. A wave of revolutionary activity rocked the Bengal province. Gandhiji himself was locked up by 4th May 1930.

Devotion of followers of Gandhiji scaled new heights and he inspired them with messianic zeal.

Consider the incident that took place on 21st May 1930 and reported to the world by the American correspondent Miller.

“The salt-deposits were surrounded by ditches filled with water and guarded by 400 native Surat Police in khaki shorts and brown turbans. Half a dozen British officials commanded them. The Police carried lathis-five foot clubs tipped with steel. Inside the stockade twenty-five men were drawn up. In complete silence the Gandhi men drew up and halted a hundred yards from the stockade. A picked column advanced from the crowd, waded the ditches, and approached the barbed-wire stockade, which the Surat Police surrounded, holding clubs at the ready. Police officials ordered the marchers to disperse under recently imposed regulation, which prohibited gathering of more than five persons in any one place. The column silently ignored the warning and slowly walked forward, I stayed with the main body about a hundred yards from the stockade.

Suddenly, at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod lathis. Not one of the marchers, even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten pins. From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow.

Those stuck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies. Great patches of blood widened on their white clothes. The survivors, without breaking ranks silently and doggedly marched on until struck down. When everyone of the first column had been knocked down, stretcher-bearers rushed up unmolested by the Police and carried off the injured.... There was no fight, no struggle; the marchers simply walked forward until struck down. There were no outcries, only groans after they fell. There were not enough stretcher-bearers to carry off the wounded; I saw eighteen injured being carried off simultaneously; while forty-two still lay bleeding on the ground-awaiting stretcher-bearers. The blankets, used as stretchers were sodden with blood.”

Sir Richard Attenborough has brought this blood-cuddling scene to life in his award winning film ‘Gandhi’. No one who has watched this come alive on the celluloid screen can come away without being deeply moved.

This awe-inspiring happening was real enough. What was all too real was despite all the heat and dust raised by the struggle, a key function of the Government remained unaffected. Its ability to collect salt tax against which the whole effort was directed. In 1929-30 the income from Salt tax was 67 million Rupees. It actually increased to 68 million Rupees next year, when an agitation against it was at its height. This ballooned to 102 million Rupees by 1932-33. Once again one is forced to wonder at the real and effective impact of Gandhiji’s campaign. No wonder, it could afford to be indulgent and conciliatory towards him, which only added to his image in the eyes of the poor and the ignorant.

Much has been made of the Dandi Yatra of Gandhiji as a way of demonstrating that he knew the concerns of the poor much better than anyone else. Virtually nothing is said about the fact that despite the Dandi Yatra, the Salt Tax revenues continued to increase. So what was the net impact of the Yatra on the British ?

There is one more untold tale. The Export of Gold from India amounted to Rs 3,000 million between 1931 to 1936. It is yet another sad tale of exploitation, which does not seem to have touched Gandhiji's conscience.

The Sale of Mangalsutras (Gold chains worn by Indian women to indicate they were married) **by the Farmers**

The manner in which Great Depression of 1930 was tackled by an ex colony and now an Independent nation – the United States of America and a once Independent nation and now a colony – India, provide glaring contrast. The contrast in the approach taken by United States, which became Independent just as Bharat was slipping into slavery, is illuminating. President Roosevelt of the United States of America took U.S. Dollar off the Gold standard and devalued it. He prohibited export of Gold and used the large gold reserve as a backing for an expanding currency, with which he reflatd the economy.

What did a slave Indian administration do? U.K. had also gone off the Gold standard. Gold appreciated by about 20%. This was the signal for the moneylenders in India to force their poor debtors to surrender their gold ornaments.

Their capacity to do so, can be gauged by the fact that the agricultural indebtedness of India (including Burma) was Rs 8,600 million. Thus, almost every second person, who had any debt, was made to surrender her gold ornaments at extortionist rates. Misery that it would have caused in countless homes across the country can well be imagined.

The 'distress gold' soon flooded London. The Raj refused to intervene in what it called a Free Market transaction. Most ardent of ardent supporters of a Market economy would today be outraged at this description. This Gold flow had increased the Creditworthiness of India, making it possible for the Government to raise large-scale funds for development.

Indeed, such a course of action was recommended by Schuster, the Finance Member of Government of India but was turned down. The dehoarding of Gold only bolstered the position of London as the financial center of the new Sterling bloc, which emerged as a substitute for international gold standard.

Independence Abandoned: The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

To get back to our narrative, Subhas Bose was released on the 30th September and was back in the prison, where he was locked up by 26th January 1931, after being brutally beaten by the Police.

The Simon Commission report had been published on 7th June 1930. It led to the First Round Table Conference at London between 12th November 1930 – 19th January 1931. The Congress did not participate in this. Gandhiji and other Congress leaders were released on the day Subhas Bose was beaten and imprisoned. On 16th February, Gandhiji began discussions with Lord Irwin leading to the Gandhi-Irwin pact on 4th March 1931.

This pact immeasurably increased the mystique of the saint. For the first time, the mighty Viceroy had condensed to conclude a pact with a mere mortal Saint. The act, which seemed to put Gandhiji at par with the Government, was bitterly criticised by the conservative elements in England. This much is well known. What is known and glossed over was that this pact represented two things.

One was that the cause of the Independence was betrayed once again.

The second was that it amounted to collusion with the Government in its murder of the famed revolutionary trio – Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru. Gandhiji seemed to have sold his soul to the Devil for earning some crumbs of popularity. If they sound harsh words, look at what Nehru said about this episode:

“On the night of the 4th of March, we waited till midnight for Gandhiji’s return from the Viceroy’s house. He came back about 2 a.m., and we were woken up and told that an agreement had been reached. We saw the draft. I knew most of the clauses, for they had been often discussed, but at the very top, clause 2 with its reference to safeguards etc., gave me a tremendous shock. I was wholly unprepared for it. I said nothing then, and we all retired.”

Why was Nehru so shocked? The clause 2 gave up not only the demand for Independence but also definitely and substantially receded from the demand for a dominion status.

A basic national principle was compromised at the whim of one person. Nehru continued:

“ The other and vital question of our objective, of independence, remained. I now saw in that Clause 2 of the settlement that even this seemed to be jeopardized. Was it for this that our brave people had behaved so gallantly for a year? Were all our brave words and deeds to an end in this?

The independence resolution of the Congress, the pledge of January 26, so often repeated? So I lay and pondered on that March night, and in my heart, there was a great emptiness as of something precious gone, beyond recall.

‘This is the way the world ends,
Not with a bang, but with a whimper.’

The next morning.... we had a long talk, and he tried to convince me that nothing vital had been lost, no surrender of principle made. He interpreted Clause 2 of the agreement so as to make it fit in with our demand for independence... The interpretation seemed to me to be a forced one, and I was not convinced....I told him that his way of springing surprises upon us frightened me, there was something unknown about him which, inspite of the closest association for fourteen years, I could not understand at all and which filled me with apprehension.”

If something about Gandhiji filled Nehru *with apprehension* despite *closest association for fourteen years*, how could Jinnah be asked to trust him or the Hindu society?

A society which continued to repose its absolute loyalty in such a man in preference to a frank and straightforward person like Savarkar.

On one hand we have Gandhiji who kept on compromising on basic issue of Independence time and again to the dismay of his most ardent followers.

On the other hand, we had Savarkar, who chose to spend a lifetime in prison rather than compromise on Independence. Yet, the Hindu society kept on lionizing Gandhiji and cold shouldering Savarkar. With what face we feel that Jinnah should have trusted the fate of Muslims on the words of such a leader and his superstition-ridden society?

Betrayal of Bhagat Singh

Betrayal of the cause of Independence was bad enough. What was worse was the manner in which the life of Bhagat Singh and his friends was bartered away in this pact. Not a word was said about them. They were hanged within a fortnight of this pact – on 23rd March 1931.

Bhagat Singh was no ordinary revolutionary, if any revolutionary can ever be ordinary. As per the official history of the Congress, “at that moment Bhagat Singh’s name was as widely known all over India and was as popular as Gandhi’s. As Gandhiji proceeded to Karachi for the Congress session, he was met with hostile black flag demonstration and at some places an attempt was even made to assault him. So strong were the emotions against the Mahatma.

In a bid to assuage the popular feelings a resolution was moved at the Karachi Congress on 29th March 1931, to place on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Bhagat Singh and his comrades. According to the official history of the Congress, “it is really a point of doubt...as to which resolution was more arresting at Karachi – that relating to Bhagat Singh or that relating to the ratification of Gandhi – Irwin Agreement.

Time had indeed taken its revenge. The man who was dismayed when his resolution condemning the martyrdom of Gopinath Sahai passed with a small majority; had to be a party to resolution eulogizing Bhagat Singh. Not even seven years had passed in between. Even in this turmoil, the Mahatma could not overcome his pettiness. Subhas Bose was once again excluded from the Congress Working Committee.

Gandhi – Irwin Pact Exposed

With the Gandhi – Irwin pact, the Congress was now committed to participating in the Second round of the Round Table Conference. The general opinion was to send 15-20 delegates. Finally, it was decided to send only one. Who else could it be but the Mahatma ? After some hitches, he left for London on 29th August 1931. He was to return empty handed four months later. Empty handed is not the right words. There was an impressive blitz of publicity. People seem to be awed by the *half naked fakir* walking up with a bamboo stick to meet the King Emperor. In India, anything that has the stamp of approval in the West, is eagerly lapped up as the Gospel. A colonial mentality, that continues to date. How much more powerful, it must have been in 1931 can only be imagined. Thus the respect that Gandhiji commanded amongst the European intellectuals immeasurably added to his stature in India. No one bothered to notice that none of those who sang his praises embraced either vegetarianism or Non Violence as a creed.

In Europe, he was a good show case piece. To be admired from a distance. This is not all. He came back with something more. What was it?

Let us see what Ambedkar has to say:

“Everybody was therefore looking forward to the Congress to lead the Conference to success. Unfortunately, the Congress chose Mr. Gandhi as its representative. *A worse person could not have been chosen to guide India's destiny.* As a unifying force he was a failure. Mr. Gandhi presents himself as man full of humility. But his behavior at the Round Table Conference showed that in the flush of victory, Mr. Gandhi can be very petty minded. As a result of his successful compromise with the Government just before he came, Mr. Gandhi treated the whole Non-Congress delegation with contempt. He insulted them whenever an occasion furnished him with an opportunity by openly telling them that they were nobodies and that he alone, as the delegate of the Congress, represented the country. Instead of unifying the Indian delegation, Mr. Gandhi widened the breach. From the point of view of knowledge, Mr. Gandhi proved himself to be a very ill-equipped person. On the many constitutional and communal questions with which the Conference was confronted,

Mr. Gandhi had many platitudes to utter but no views or suggestions of a constructive character to offer. He presented a curious complex of a man who in some cases would threaten to resist in every possible way any compromise on what he regarded as a principle though others regarded it as pure prejudice but in other cases would not mind making the worst compromises on issues which appeared to others as matters of fundamental principle on which no compromise should be made.”

Well! Well! Well! If the man regarded as the Father of Indian Constitution makes these remarks about the *Father of the Nation* and a Congress Government is forced to publish this unedited some six decades after the incident, something, some where is seriously wrong.

As we know the good Doctor had good reasons to be so critical. Worst compromise on fundamental issues, none other than Nehru has been so critical of this trait of Gandhiji, who time and again, compromised on the core issue of Independence. For the time being, let us leave behind this unsavory incident and take a look at the situation in India.

Lord Wellington as Viceroy succeeded Lord Irwin on 17th April 1931. The new Viceroy appeared critical of the manner in which an ordinary Indian had signed a pact as a co-equal with the representative of a mighty empire. The Government attitude hardened. Bengal continued to be the cradle of the Revolutionaries. A desperate Government even chose to beat up prisoners locked up in Hijli Jail. Subhas Bose resigned as the Mayor of Calcutta on 18th September 1931 in protest. He was turned back, when he tried to visit his injured comrades in the Hijli jail. On 7th November, he was barred from visiting Dacca. Now he became increasingly critical of the Gandhi-Irwin pact and termed it as a trap set up to ensnare the Mahatma.

Nehru found no change of heart in the Government and was soon in the middle of an agrarian campaign in his home state, Uttar Pradesh. **The wheat prices had fallen by over 50%.** Falling prices made reduced the capacity of the farmers to pay rents rendering them liable for eviction from the land that they tilled – their only source of livelihood. Soon, the Government machinery, paying no heeds to the demands for remission threw out thousands of farmers, who had

nowhere to go. They flocked to the office of the Congress. Nehru's own house came to be surrounded by these poor wretched souls. In the middle of these helpless fellow citizens, the sensitive soul of Nehru was distressed to find that he was at a total loss to deal with the situation.

In the Frontier Province, as in Bengal or Uttar Pradesh, the Pact brought no peace. The permanent state of military siege continued. By the end of the year, Nehru came to the same conclusion as Bose. The Gandhi-Irwin pact was, in the eyes of the Government, now, a worthless piece of document. The Mahatma may have chosen to give up the core national demand of Independence but the Imperial monolith would go on relentlessly. Pact or no Pact.

The matters came to a head in December. By 3rd January 1932, Subhas Bose was again put behind bars. Gandhiji, Nehru and other Congress leaders were similarly arrested the next day. From January 1932 to 17th March 1937, for over five years Subhas Bose was kept away from the political life of India. From 3rd January 1932 to 23rd February 1933, he was in various Indian prisons. During this period, he became seriously ill. No provincial Governor could be persuaded to accept this dangerous prisoner. Finally, he was put on a boat to Europe. He was to return only on 8th April 1936 to spend yet another year in confinement, before being freed in 1937. His stay in Europe was fruitful. It is to this interesting story that we shall later turn.

In the meanwhile, did Gandhiji realise his folly in compromising with the issue of Independence and now make amends? It would be nice to say yes but, unfortunately, the facts tell us otherwise.

The second phase of the Civil Disobedience began in January 1932. It was put down by a ruthless Government smarting under the indignity of the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

Even Bertrand Russel was constrained to observe: “There has been no lack of interests in the **misdeeds of the Nazis in Germany**; they have been fully reported in the Press and have been commented on with self-righteous indignation. Few people in England realise that **misdeed quite as serious are being perpetrated by the British in India.**”

Even as the people were fighting this evil, around one hundred thousand had courted arrest dreaming of being free; Gandhiji's gaze was fixed elsewhere. On 16th August 1932, the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald announced the 'Communal Award'. Notwithstanding the fact that Gandhiji had agreed in writing to accept the Award, he reacted violently. From 20th September, he commenced yet another of his *Fast unto Death*. An emotional blackmail, he soon perfected to an art.

He broke this on September 26 after concluding what is known as Poona Pact. Something, as we know, that still rankles the very people, who were supposed to be its beneficiary.

Once again, it is time to read Nehru: "And then I felt annoyed with him for choosing a side-issue for his final sacrifice-just a question of electorate. What would be the result on our freedom movement? Would not the larger issue fade into the background, for the time being atleast?... Was this consistent with Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience? After so much sacrifice and brave endeavour, was our movement to tail off into something insignificant? I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it...What a terrible example to set!" What were the views of Dr. Ambedkar who was forced at the gun point to sign the Poona Pact much against his wishes? We have already seen this sordid saga.

The fast marked the end, for all practical reasons, of Gandhiji's connection with the Freedom struggle for around a decade. Henceforth, he devoted his energy to eradication of Untouchability and other social issues. Even as the captain abandoned the ship in the mid stream, the people continued their struggle. 26th January 1933 was celebrated with great gusto and belief in Independence was reiterated. People continued to harass the Government, till Gandhiji came to its rescue.

For reasons that remain obscure, Gandhiji began a 21-day fast on 8th May 1933. The reason given was that the purpose of the fast was for self-purification. Government did not want the Mahatma dead on its hand and released him. In an inexplicable move, immediately on his release, Gandhiji suspended Civil Disobedience for six weeks.

By 12th July, the Congress had also watered down the struggle. Gandhiji's command over the Congress was total. As was to be expected, the Government remained unmoved by the unwarranted magnanimous gesture. This was clear in the manner in which Gandhiji's attempt to meet the Viceroy was rebuffed.

A vain attempt was made to revive the struggle by Individual Satyagraha. Gandhiji was the first to be arrested on 31st July 1933. On 16th August, Gandhiji decided to go on yet another fast as he was not being given the facilities to conduct Untouchability campaign within the Jail. He was released on 23rd August 1933, as his condition became critical. By now the people had become disheartened by this 'Stop-Go' approach of Gandhiji. Passionate commitment to a cause is not like tap water to be turned on and off at will. The hard fact is that the Civil Disobedience Movement was dead like a door nail and soon faded into oblivion due to strange manner in which Gandhiji led the struggle. For the record, the Congress officially called off the Movement on 20th May 1934. Gandhiji now ceased being even a *Four anna* member of the Congress and now became the 'permanent super-President of Congress. Even for a Mahatma, it was not possible to relinquish his power.

Over 120,000 people in jail, 29 cases of police firing leading to 80 deaths and 329 injured. 325 cases of Lathi Charge, 633 cases of house searches and 102 cases of confiscation of properties. For what cause did the people struggle?

For what reason were their dreams of Independence betrayed by none other than the Mahatma? If eradication of Untouchability was the core issue, then why was the Civil Disobedience against the British launched in the first place. Curse of Untouchability is an evil that can hardly be blamed on them.

An angry Bose castigated the Mahatma as a failed political leader. Joining him was Vitthalbahi Patel; the elder brother of Sardar Patel, a devoted follower of the Mahatma. In India or in exile, Subhash Bose was always to remain passionately committed to the cause of Independence. So was Nehru, at least so we have always thought but he always allowed his love for Gandhiji overshadow his passion for Independence.

In a serene unaffected manner, the Raj proceeded with its pace of reforms. By 2nd August 1935, it proceeded with the next step of Constitutional Reforms by passing the Government of India Act. This was the first step after seventeen long years, the last being Montagu-Chelmsford reform of 1918. All the pressure of Satyagraha had barely moved the Raj. Gandhiji took over the reins of freedom struggle in 1920. Fifteen years of his moral leadership furthering the political awakening by way of the pure path of Satyagraha. In terms of hard quantifiable results, this was all that he had to show.

What has been forgotten is that the 1935 Act separated Burma from India to evolve a separate destiny of its own. This process needs to be understood. There was a strong current in Burma to evolve a federation with India. They saw it as the best way of ensuring that Britain would not perpetuate their hold over Burma and Singapore, by reason of the presence of oil and its strategic position. For this very reason, the Pro separationists were encouraged to enable the British Government to carry out their scheme of separation. The process of Indian partition had begun and not a whimper of protest was heard.

Undeterred by the dilution of the ideal of Independence, undeterred by loot of the gold, undeterred by betrayal of Bhagat Singh, the Congress participated in the elections held during 1936-37. The story of its holding power in the provinces is too well known to detain us. Suffice it to say that from 1934 to 1939, the Congress had taken a break in the struggle for Independence.

During this period, it could said to have been aspiring at the most for the Dominion status and had seemed to kissed its own historic Lahore resolution of 31st December 1929 good bye.

The five-year period 1934 – 1939 appeared to find the Congress licking its wounds. Content to grab the crumbs thrown at it by the Raj. Elections were contested and offices taken up in 1937 with no assurance of Independence. If this was right, what was the reason for ignoring this option in 1920? Only the Mahatma seemed to know. By end of 1939, the Congress was in the limbo. It could ignore the Bose led call for an Independence struggle at the peril of losing its popularity. Gandhiji's pacifism would however, not allow it take advantage of the British difficulties. It then found itself in an

unenviable position of neither responding to the Bose call to launch a new struggle nor cooperating with the Government. It is this position that aptly sums up the Congress dilemma in these two decades and the essence of Gandhiji's leadership. He could whip up emotions and enchant his followers but he did not know where to lead them. The Great Flip Flop show that continued to hurt the cause of Independence. The Congress held office for over two years and then in a fit of moral pique, resigned the offices by 15th November 1939 so as to press for its demand of Independence. The resignation was God sent opportunity to the Viceroy who could now work towards harnessing the full resources of India towards the British war cause. At a time, the Congress should have stayed in office, and ensured that India was not looted, it chose to bow out and sulk in the corner.

Let there be no illusions that in 1939, it was Gandhiji who had pressed for Independence. When the war broke out on 5th September 1939, he said:

“I am not just now thinking of India's deliverance. It will come, but what will it be worth if England and France fall, or, if they come out victorious over Germany ruined and humbled?”

So for Gandhiji – the fate of England, France or Germany was by his own admission more important than the Daridrinarayan.

Look at the key features of the Gandhi era. He came to power by rejecting the Tilak line in 1920 claiming to win Swaraj within a year. The cause was given up as lost due to violence in a small village Chauri Chaura.

The Swaraj wing of the party did some useful work 1923 to 1929, the manner of which was not to the liking of the Mahatma.

The cause of Independence was taken up with great enthusiasm in 1930.

Once again, by 1931, it was severely compromised by the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

By 1932, the flag of Independence was once again unfurled. Gandhiji said: “Civil Disobedience, once begun this time cannot be stopped and must not be stopped so long as there is a single civil resister left free or alive.”

All of a sudden, Gandhiji was to discover that the curse of Untouchability was a more important issue than the cause of Independence.

By 1934, even the pretence of the struggle was given up.

This forced even Nehru to conclude: “With a stab of pain I felt that the chords of allegiance that had bound me to him for many years had snapped...Of the many hard lessons that I had learnt, the hardest and most painful now faced me: that it is not possible in any vital matter to rely on anyone”

*One can not study this period without coming to the conclusion that the Mahatma was willing to wound but always fought shy of even attempting to slay the Imperial demon. **He never intended to drive the British out of the country.***

Chapter XVI

Did the Mahatma's Approach Benefit the Daridrinarayan

That the British presence in India was illegal occupation by a race alien in blood, in colour, in habits, in feelings and in everything to the inhabitants of the country, is a fact that I hope, has been established beyond doubt.

It is possible that notwithstanding the illegal nature of its origin, the Rule was Good. From the perspective of westernized Indian middle class, the British rule introduced the rule of law, eradicated several social evils like Sati, unified the country politically, constructed railways and most importantly spread English language. So on the balance, to them, the British Rule in India was Good. If this were true, it would explain the half hearted attempts of Gandhiji to drive them away, lock, stock and barrel from this country.

There is no doubt that the Bharatiya society as it was in the late eighteenth century stood to gain in several ways by an interaction with the dynamic English society. They have several good habits that we have not learnt despite a close interaction for well over two hundred years. For this, we have no one else to blame but ourselves. The fact remains that any interaction between two societies can be mutually beneficial only if it happens on equal footing. The British rule in India was an interaction between a Ruling Race and a Subject Race. It could bring nothing but ruin to the Subject race.

True, before 1857, several well-meaning social measures were enacted, This zeal for social reformation ended after the upheaval of 1857. So during the period of illegal occupation that started from the 11th of May 1857, there are no social reforms to talk of.

Political unity is another much touted benevolent result that is talked about. Well upto 1857, there was at least the notion of One National Sovereign accepted universally – the Moghul Emperor. True, the British brought the Indian Subcontinent and even Burma and Aden under one administrative unit for their own convenience. When it suited them, they were quick to cut off the parts.

For instance, Burma was separated in 1935. Aden in 1947. That is not all, one must not lose sight of the fact that in 1947, the British India was partitioned into two self governing domains – India and Pakistan. In addition as many as five hundred sixty five Maharajas, Nawabs, Princes and Zamindars were also given Paramountcy that they had never enjoyed. So what the British left behind were some 567 independent states. **What a political unity!!**

If the newborn 565 states, the relics of 1857, did not mushroom into independent ulcers, it is to no credit of the Raj. The credit goes the mature leadership of India and Pakistan. Nor would they have waited, if our leaders had not solved the problem fast enough. As Attlee himself had announced, they were not going to stay in India beyond June 1948 –come what may. There was one State where the Indian and Pakistani claims clashed. It is this state – the state of Jammu and Kashmir, that has remained a festering wound, contributing much to the poisonous relations between the neighbours. Imagine then, what would have been the state of this subcontinent, if we had lived with 565 Independent states, for that is what the British had left behind. The British claim that they caused Political unity of the Indian sub continent is thus demonstrably false claim

Construction of Railways. Let us get one thing straight. It was constructed out of Indian revenue without the British Government contributing a farthing. The British capitalists who invested their money were guaranteed returns in excess of the interest that they would have otherwise got by keeping their money in London banks. The guarantees were met purely out of Indian revenue.

There is more to the Railway story but for the time being let us realise one thing. The British did us no favour by constructing railways. Would we still have had the Railways if the British rule had not been established? Well. I am typing this on the latest computer, which came to India without the benevolent presence of the British rule. Nor were the nuclear tests conducted by British scientists, neither have the Indian Satellite launches got anything to do with the British brains. So why did we had to have the British rule to get the railways??

Ah, ha! The English language. Don't the Indians use this to communicate even with each other? Well – Yes, I must admit. But I also know that some of the most dynamic economies in the world, Japan, Korea and China have very low levels of English literacy. In any case, the 1941 census in India showed an overall literacy level of only 12%. Those, who knew English probably not numbered more than 1%. So even assuming that knowing English is beneficial, the benefit was restricted to a miniscule elite. hardly the basis to say that the British rule was Good.

Lest my friends jump on me and accuse me of ignoring the beneficial impact of the introduction of the rule of law, that I had myself put as the first item on the list. Rule of law is something, I would be the last person to ignore being the son of a Judge.

I have fond memories of my father wearing a smart looking black coat complete with a tie and pedaling off to the Court on the single bicycle we had. The same cycle that I later used to go to the school. This sounds like another world today even to my own daughters, which would have scandalized my poor father if he had been alive today. For him, scarcity of resources was the necessary evil that an honest judge had to face- something to be proud of.

Coming back from this little personal detour to the issue of the rule of law. The British did unify the law of the land and the British courts proliferated. Even in this, the core objective of making money was not lost sight of. The officials collected court fees that did not only pay for the judicial establishment but yielded handsome revenue to the Government. If in the process, the Poorest of the Poor got excluded from the legal process, that was their bad luck. For nothing comes free in life.

It is not a coincidence that the most powerful British Officer at the grass root was the “Collector” who also doubled up as the “District Magistrate”. The “Collector’s” principle job was to collect taxes and who also had the authority of the “District Magistrate” to deal with those who sought to default on payment of taxes.

The unescapable fact is that anything and everything that the British introduced in the country was geared to meet their economic objective. If the Indians got any benefit, it was purely incidental. What the westernized Indian middle class believes are the beneficial effects were merely the unintended by-products and not always very useful either.

Let us turn to the Mahatma himself to judge whether or not the British rule was Good and use the the criterion that Gandhiji himself used to judge anything. Its impact on the poorest of poor – the Daridrinarayan.

In 1770, soon after the assumption of the Diwani, by Clive i.e. becoming the Chief Minister, Bengal was affected by a most severe famine in which some 10 million people died of hunger. In all during the entire ninety year period from 1765 to 1858, when the East India company was legally the Diwan of the Moghul Emperor, the country experienced some twelve famines and four severe scarcities, which took a heavy toll of human life. The numbers are not known but the deaths have been large enough to have caused a check on the population.

Death by hunger, these words do not convey the agony of slow and painful lingering death, one of the worst ways for anyone to die. Picture, yourself watching this:

“The young woman of twenty looked old far beyond her age. Her face turned pale as she felt life ebbing out of the baby, who was clinging to her. In desperation, she thrust the baby’s lips towards the wrinkled nipples of her shrunken breast. It made some feeble attempts to suck a few drops of milk. The breast would not yield a drop. How could it, when not a morsel of food had entered the skeleton on which it hung, during the last fifteen days? Gradually, the sucking sound stopped and with a spasm of final agony, the baby went limp. The mother wanted to cry but the effort was too much. In soundless agony, she looked at her husband, who averted her gaze and then motioned her to move on. Grief was a luxury, they could not afford. They still had two more children and their own body to feed. They had to find food. Wordlessly, the woman got up.

Her child had been so alive a few months ago. His laughter echoed in her ears. His playful gestures swam before her now empty eyes. All that remained of him was a skeleton and she was not in a position to even arrange for a decent burial.

Suddenly a shriek brought her to life. In the distance, she could see her other two children grappling with a street dog for a chapati that had been thrown out of a house. The snarling, growling dog went for the jugular vein. She dropped the dead body and ran, partly to save her children, partly animated by sight of the food. Later, she remembered her dead baby and became desolate with the thought that his body had been devoured by the vultures and dogs. She need not have worried. There were enough dead bodies going around. The baby's small shrunken body with hardly a piece of flesh on it, did not interest even the vultures."

This is no piece of fiction. This was the way some 50 million, 100 million, God alone knows how many people died in the run up to 1857. Who were these people, who died? Who, but the poorest of the poor. Only the poorest of poor could die this death. They had always lived on the edge of starvation. All they could do was to work in the day and buy food with money earned in the evening. The famine robbed them of their livelihood even as the traders drove up the price by hoarding. Caught in the pincer of declining income and increasing prices, they had to, as the managers would call it, optimize their resources. In other words, stop feeding all the hands, which could not contribute to getting food. In simple English, murder the Infants.

Where was the Diwan, who had by now also usurped the function of Nizamut – the Chief Justice ? He ensured that the full heavy hand of the Law fell on any one, who demanded any remission of revenue demands due to these calamities. He also ensured that in line with the principles of Free Trade, no one dared to interrupt the market forces. Food prices had to be determined by the market mechanism, Law of Demand and Supply alone. Nor could of course, he provide food at lesser prices to the hungry millions. For that would have meant leakage of revenue for unproductive purposes. The most ardent of free market forces and proponents of lessening the role of Government would today feel embarrassed by this behavior. Not so, the East India Company. Not so, those, who hold the British rule as Good.

Oh, yes! It is to stop this rapacious loot that the British Crown took over the reins. Surely, the things got better. Just, how much better did the things get, can be seen from the table given below:

**Famine Deaths in India
1860 - 1920**

Year	Affected Region	Area in sq miles	Affected		Number of Deaths	
			Population	%	No.s	
1860-61	N.W.Province, Punjab, Rajesthan, Kutch	27,427	13,000,000	15		2,000,000
1862	Deccan	N.A.	N.A.			N.A.
1866-67	Orissa	7,649	3,015,826	27		814,469
	Bihar	26,191	7,739,717	2		135,676
	Ganjam	6,400	1,100,000	1		10,898
			11,855,543	8		961,043
1868-70	N.W. Province	29,013	10,269,200	1		62,772
	Rajasthan	2,671	426,000	25		106,500
	Central Province	N.A.	N.A.			250,000
	Total		21,000,000	2		419,272
1873-74	Bengal, Bihar, Bundelkhand	N.A.	17,000,000	7		1,253,182
1876-8	Madras, Mysore, Bombay & Hyderabad	204,355	49,590,147	9		4,300,000
1877-78	N.W. Province, Kashmir	N.A.	N.A.			1,250,000
1888-9	Ganjam	3,000	515,625	29		150,000
	Orissa		1,250,000	8		100,516
	North Bihar	3,000	886,532	8		71,288
			2,652,157	12		321,804
1896-97	N.W. Provinces, Bengal, Bombay, Madras	504,940	96,931,000	5		5,150,000
	Central Provinces, Berar, Hyderabad					
	Delhi, parts of central India, N.W.					
	Rajasthan					
1899-1900	Central Provinces, Bombay, Berar	475,000	59,500,000	7		4,034,893
	Hydrabad, Rajasthan, central India					
	Baroda, Kutch, Kathiawar, E. Punjab					
1905-6	Bombay	N.A.	N.A.			235,062
1905-6	Bundelkhand	N.A.	N.A.			N.A.
1906-7	North Bihar	2,855	13,000,000	7		881,573
1907-8	N.W. Province, Madras, Bengal, Central	N.A.	50,000,000	7		3,390,667
	Province and Bombay					
			334,528,846	7		24,197,496

Figs in Italics are derived figures based on the past trends.

By the time, Gandhiji era started in India, some 24 million people had died of hunger in merciful reign of the British Crown. But even this list is not complete. For many famine deaths were put off as death due to diseases.

Take 1918, when the Mahatma was very much in India. Some 15 million people were said to have died of the Influenza. This was the year when food grain production dropped from 57 million tons to a mere 39 million, in other words a drop of 18 million tons or almost by a third. The prices of Wheat and Rice increased by 66%, while that of Jowar, the staple food of the poor, increased by – hold your breath - 127%. 15 million people died. Not because of hunger but because they were dirty and therefore died of Influenza.

What a story and what a Mahatma, who alone knew the soul of India, who, believed this tale.

Even then, did the number of famine deaths not drop dramatically? After all, some 100 million people had died of hunger in the rule of the East India Company. British rule killed only half the number.

What an improvement, what a Good Rule!! What could the Crown do, if this country was so poor? Well, for one, it could reduce the home charges, that were being debited to this country.

It was in 1909 that Madan Lal Dhingra shot Colonel Wylie. In his statement, that is widely known to have been drafted by Savarkar, he said; “I hold the English responsible for the murder of eighty million of Indian people.” He shot Wylie because, “The Englishmen who goes out to India and gets £ 100 a month, that simply means he passes a death sentence on a thousand of my poor countrymen”.

Let us look at the Home Charges to see if he was exaggerating.

The Home Charges 1861-1920

Figs in Rs Million

	Interest on Railways & Irrigation	Other Interest	Military	Pensions	Other Civil	Stores	Total
1861-1875							
Annual in Pounds	3.5	2.2	2.6	0.9	0.2	1.1	10.5
Annual in Rupees	35.0	22.0	26.0	9.0	2.0	11.0	105.0
Total in Pounds	52.5	33.0	39.0	13.5	3.0	16.5	157.5
Total in Rupees	525.0	330.0	390.0	135.0	30.0	165.0	1,575.0
1876-1898							
Annual in Pounds	5.3	2.6	3.5	1.7	0.6	1.2	14.9
Annual in Rupees	53.0	26.0	35.0	17.0	6.0	12.0	149.0
Total in Pounds	121.9	59.8	80.5	39.1	13.8	27.6	342.7
Total in Rupees	1,219.0	598.0	805.0	391.0	138.0	276.0	3,427.0
1899-1913							
Annual in Pounds	6.9	2.5	4.2	2.3	0.2	1.6	17.7
Annual in Rupees	103.5	37.5	63.0	34.5	3.0	24.0	265.5
Total in Pounds	103.5	37.5	63.0	34.5	3.0	24.0	265.5
Total in Rupees	1,552.5	562.5	945.0	517.5	45.0	360.0	3,982.5
1914-1920							
Annual in Pounds	9.6	3.5	4.7	2.4	0.2	2.9	23.3
Annual in Rupees	144.0	52.5	70.5	36.0	3.0	43.5	349.5
Total in Pounds	67.2	24.5	32.9	16.8	1.4	20.3	163.1
Total in Rupees	1,008.0	367.5	493.5	252.0	21.0	304.5	2,446.5
Grand Total in Pounds	345.1	154.8	215.4	103.9	21.2	88.4	928.8
Grand Total in Rupees	4,304.5	1,858.0	2,633.5	1,295.5	234.0	1,105.5	11,431.0

The Indian Middle Class that became ardent followers of Mr. Gandhi, a decade later, would perhaps have rationalize the imposition of Home charges on the following grounds:

- If the British repatriated Rs 11,431 million from this poor country, it is because they did such a wonderful job in building up the infrastructure in this country such as the Railways and Canals.

- If the Crown spent Rs 1,295 million on the pension, it is because its servants did a wonderful job of maintaining peace, law and order.
- It spent Rs 330 million on Famine relief. The important thing is that it spent the money. The principle is more important than small details like the fact that this sum was only a quarter of the money spent on pensions.

What a wonderful Government. Both Madan Lal and his Guru Savarkar were stark raving mad, who were not fit to live in a civilised society. They deserved to be either hanged or locked away for life, in Andaman.

What about those poor 24 million or may be 50 million souls who died of hunger while the benevolent Government was so busy in dealing with the mad men like the Savarkar, Dhingra duo. That was their Karma. Nothing more.

Were Savarkar, Dhingra mad? We already know of the 24 million deaths by hunger, add to it those by malnutrition and diseases, such as those in 1918 and the figure would easily reach 50 million. So, the statement of the *mad* Savarkar-Dhingra duo, that eighty million Indians were killed by the British presence in India, was indeed very close to the Truth. An unpalatable truth that the Indian Middle Class has never acknowledged.

How was the Karma of Bharat shaped during the British rule?

Take for instance the construction of the Great Indian Railways. As we noted earlier, the Government of Great Britain did not spend a farthing. The whole project was funded by the Indian revenues. British capital was attracted by offering guarantee of 5% on the capital invested. The interest rate in Great Britain was 3% at the time and therefore a minimum of 5% was a very attractive proposition indeed.

By 1869, a total of 4,225 miles were constructed at a cost of Rs 890 million for which 44 million Rupees of interest had to be paid annually. Thus for every mile of track laid, India paid over Rs 200,000/- by way of cost and over Rs 10,000/- per year as interest.

The network increased to 25,000 miles by 1900. This massive expansion left little money for other things like Irrigation projects, which could have provided a lasting protection against Famine.

The construction of the rail network that was being funded by Indian money did not lead to industrialization of the country for all the items were procured from England. Between 1865 to 1945, the Railways needed some 12,700 steam engines. Of these 12,000 were imported from England.

The freight rates of Indian railways were high and had some peculiar features. There were three different types of rebates, which allowed for substantial reductions in the freight rate. These were:

- Shipments over long distances
- Shipment to or from one of the big ports
- Shipments that did not need to be transferred from one line to another (e.g. from East Indian railways to Great India Peninsular Railways)

Thus long distance grain shipment from Northern India to Calcutta or shipments of imported industrial goods from Calcutta to Northern India benefited from favourable rates, whereas short hauls in the interior would be much more expensive, as none of the rebates were applicable. The freight-rate structure therefore encouraged linkages with the world market and worked against regional integration within India.

The Railways made it possible for an increase in the export of grains, which increased from 3 million tones per year in 1880 to 10 million tones in 1900. The export of Rice increased from an average of Rs 60 million in 1870 to Rs 176 million in 1900. Even as 24 million people died of hunger between 1860 –1920, Railways allowed India to export rice worth Rs 7,000 million. Much of this was a forced sale. For the Indian farmer was perennially in debt. This enabled the money lender to force him to sell the rice stored for a rainy day, for the Railway provided the money lender with an easy and cheap way of transporting it out to the world market. As the moneylender was in most cases, also the local grain merchant, he could then jack up his prices, knowing well that the Farmer had to buy it, for he had none in

the house. **No wonder, with the introduction of Railways, the prices of essential commodities increased.** The impact of Railway on the local price levels can be seen in the Table below:

Influence of the Railway Connection on Rice Prices

	Average Price (Seers per Rupee)		% Increase in Price
	Before Railway	After Railway	
Dinajpur/Sadar	30.8	20.2	52
Mymensingh/Nasirabad	20.3	13.7	48

The expansion of the Railway network greatly boosted the Indian exports. Now, that should have been a cause for rejoicing. But these were not normal exports. No country in the world that cared even a bit for the welfare of its people would export food grains, when million were dying of hunger within its borders. But that is what the British Government encouraged. For India's foreign trade was primarily a mechanism for the transfer of Indian money abroad, so that Sterling Pounds could be obtained for payment of the Home charges.

This is the only reason; India under the British always had an export surplus. Indeed, the very word Export came to be associated with Exploitation.

There was one way that the Government in India could have raised resources to do something more for the purpose of famine relief. That is to have raised duties on imports. That was a taboo, for this would have hurt the economic interests of the British Exporters. On this, there was a complete unanimity in the Governing Class of Great Britain. Once the Viceroy in India had been silly enough to do so. Promptly, in July 1877, the House of Commons passed a resolution *without Division* calling for repeal without delay of duties levied upon cotton manufactures imported into India. The measure called for a revenue loss of £ 200,000; a loss that could scarcely be borne by the Indian Administration.

The economic situation was so precarious that measures for protection of the country against famine had to be suspended. As Fawcett commented:

“No one for a moment will even pretend to say that in the present state of Indian finances, the idea would have been entertained of remitting these duties if the finances of India were administered in the interest of this country alone....It may be urged that India in the present state of her finances cannot possibly do without the additional revenue which is obtained from the taxes imposed for the creation of a Famine Fund. But if this be so, then it is far better at once to recognise the fact that these taxes have not been applied for the creation of a Famine Fund but that they are required for the general purposes of the Indian Government; and amongst these purpose, it is particularly to be noted that the one which is considered of most pressing urgency is to reduce duties on Cotton Goods.”

The issue created such a furore that the Viceroy found himself faced with a virtual rebellion from his Council. Undeterred, he granted the exemption under Section 23 of the Sea Custom Act. Some 5 million people died of hunger in India during this period. But that was their Karma – to lay down their life for the lofty cause of the mill owners in Manchester.

The Famine Relief Fund created out of a special tax on the Indian taxpayers, was to have a chequered history. Some Rs 500 million had been put in this fund by 1924. Of this 47% were spent on direct relief, 28% on retiring public debt, 21% on irrigation and balance 4% on Railways. The Surplus of Income over Expenditure that this fund allowed the Government to show, came in very handy to remove the duty on Cotton Goods completely by 1882. A deficit forced the Government to impose some duties in 1884 but Cotton Goods remained exempt.

Such was the tender care that the Government was extending to its beloved British exporters. Where was the energy or money left to take care of such small things as deaths of the Niggers in thousands by hunger?

By 1881, the real face of the British Rule in India was visible to all. Dadabhai Navrorji had once welcomed the British rule in India for the safety and peace that it had created in India. On 4th January 1881, he bitterly attacked the British Rule.

He said: “From England’s own grasp, there is no security of property at all, and as a consequence no security of life. India’s property is not secure. What is secure and well secure is, that England is perfectly safe and secure, and does so with perfect security, to carry away from India and to eat up in India, her property at the present rate of some £ 30,000,000 or £ 40,000,000 a year.

Yet despite this biting criticism, the British Government is considering putting the photograph of this very man on its own currency note to promote a new British identity even as we ignore our own leaders for such distinction.

Anyway, the reality therefore is, that the policy of English rule as it is (not as it can and should be) is an everlasting, unceasing and everyday invasion, utterly, though gradually, destroying the country....a course which has made England the worst foreign invader she had the misfortune to have...I therefore venture to submit that India does not enjoy security of her property and life and also moreover of ‘Knowledge’ or ‘Wisdom’. To millions in India, life is simply ‘half feeding’ or starvation, or famines and disease.”

In 1881, Dadabhai, still believed that the British rule in India was UnBritish. He, therefore, left for England to convince its people of the terrible injustice that was being done to India. He spent 25 years of his life, only to come back disappointed. As Tilak said on 2nd January 1907:

“He has come here at the age of 82 to tell us that he is bitterly disappointed...to convert the whole electorate of England to your opinion and then to get indirect pressure to bear upon the Members of Parliament, they turn to return a Cabinet favourable to India and the Cabinet to bring pressure on the bureaucracy to yield - we say this is hopeless... We shall not assist them fighting beyond the frontiers or outside India with Indian blood and money. We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice.

We shall have our own courts, and when time comes we shall not pay taxes. Can you do that by your united efforts? **If you can, you are free tomorrow.**”

Absolute Political Independence became the battle cry of the revolutionaries for the simple reason that **nothing else was not in the interests of the Daridrinarayan**, the Poorest of Poor. It was not a lofty ideal that no one could understand. It was something that was of great relevance in the day to day life of Poorest of the Poor.

It was Absolute Political Independence alone that was going to free them from the curse of death by hunger. It was for this cause that the revolutionaries gave their all. They died with a smile on their face confident in the belief that their sacrifice would help the cause of the Poorest of the Poor.

Why was Gandhiji so soft on the British? Why did he keep on resisting the demand for Absolute Political Independence? For, as we have seen by 1907, itself the moderate and truly great leaders like Dadabhai Navrorji, had seen through the British game. By 1920, when Gandhiji era started, many more things had happened. The gifting of £ 100 million pounds from the Indian revenue to the British even as the Indian Government had no money to help the 15 million people, who were dying of hunger in the famine of 1918. Jallianwala Bagh massacre, use of airplanes to gun civilian population in Punjab.

How could anyone be so naïve, so foolish as not to see that the British rule in India was not only illegal but also inherently evil? The Famine deaths were not a state secret. The drain of home charges was a fact for all to see. Fat salaries being paid to the Crown servants were well known. The close connection between the deliberate British policies and the misery, starvation and death of millions of the Poorest of the Poor was for anyone to see.

The tragic fact remains that a Mahatma, a half-naked fakir, who liked to believe that he alone knew the soul of Bharat, remained blind to the cause of Daridrinarayan.

Or else, he would not have put roadblocks in the path of Absolute Political Independence.

Or else, he would not have insisted that the true salvation of Bharat lay only along the path of Absolute Non Violence.

Or else, he would not have condemned the Revolutionaries as Sinners, merely because they were advocating use of selective violence to attain the Goal of Absolute Political Independence.

A Violence that was to further the cause of the Poorest of the Poor. The violence that they unleashed was in any case far far less than that let loose by the tyranny of the British rule.

So who then knew the Soul of Bharat. Tilak, Savarkar, Subhas Bose and the legion of Revolutionaries who fought for the cause of Absolute Political Independence.

Or was it Gandhiji, who kept on fighting shy of demanding it. The answer is all too evident.

Dear readers, I have one confession to make about the four questions that I raised and the answers that I provided. I make no claim that these represent my original contribution to the Intellectual Capital of the country. These arise as a natural consequence of reading Dr. Ambedkar's writings, published in 1990 by a Congress Government in Maharashtra.

If what Dr. Ambedkar has written is false, he can have no claim to our affection as the Father of the Indian Constitution. If what he has written is right, at the very least Gandhiji can not be called the Father of the Nation. It can not be that Dr. Ambedkar can be called the Father of the Indian Constitution, a Bharat Ratna and also Gandhiji be called the Father of the Nation. Only one can be true.

I would unhesitatingly vote in favour of Dr. Ambedkar, for he provides reasons I can understand. For his devotion to the cause of the Untouchables has withstood the test of time. Whom would you vote for, dear friends? I leave you to decide.

Chapter XVII

Quest for Power Exposed Mahatma's Treatment of Subhas Bose

By 1939, it was not the Great Flip Flop show of the Mahatma but the uncompromising support of Subhas Bose to the cause of Independence that now held sway. Gandhi era that had begun in 1920 was now coming to a close. Hence forth, it was going to be this bright star, Subhas Bose, in the firmament of the Freedom struggle, whose lead the country was going to follow. The Mahatma was soon to find that he had to match the mood of the people set by Bose or risk political oblivion. It is to this fascinating story, we shall now turn.

The last we talked about Bose was that he had been exiled to Europe to recover from the dreaded tuberculosis, that had become his companion in the British prison. He returned in 1936 to become the President of the Congress in 1938. By 1939, he had become a *Persona non grata* in the very same organisation.

What did Subhas Bose do? Did he sell his soul to the devil? Did he betray the cause of Independence? Did he commit a crime? We all know that the worst enemies of Subhas Bose would not dream of levying these allegations. Then what did he do? Why did the full wrath of the Mahatma fall on this immensely popular public hero? If there is one part of the Gandhi era that leaves even the die hard Gandhiji's followers fumbling for a coherent answer, it is his treatment of Subhas Bose in 1939. So much so that the much acclaimed film 'Gandhi' sidestepped the issue by pretending that Subhas Bose did not exist.

Movies can take these liberties with the facts. We can not. Let us now take a look at this part of the story. This sorry episode shows the Mahatma's Quest for Power as nothing else does so clearly.

On 9th May 1933, the political elite in the Congress was deeply perturbed by the stinging rebuttal of the very efficacy of the Gandhiji's style of leadership. The criticism cut to the wound for it came from Vitthalbahi Patel, the elder brother of Sardar Patel, a close associate of Gandhiji and himself a veteran of the freedom struggle.

Subhas Bose had co-signed the letter debunking Gandhiji's claims that Independence could be obtained by Change of Heart of the British. With both these leaders convalescing in Europe, there was little that the Congress leadership could do but to gnaw its teeth in frustration.

By 22nd October 1933, Vitthalbhai Patel had passed away, leaving Subhas Bose alone to face the pain of exile. In December, Bose attended a function of the Italian Oriental Institute. Mussolini took keen interest in this young foe of the British. Subhas Bose was keen to enlist as many allies as possible in fight against the British Imperialism, which to him was inherently evil for the Indian people. Three meetings took place between them. In his trip to Europe, Jawahar Lal Nehru refused to meet the Italian dictator. He refused to sully his sensibilities by meeting a man he abhorred even if he could be of some help in the cause of Independence. Only those like Gandhiji, who were content to live in the make believe world of the utility of the British rule for India, could afford to put their personal preferences before the interests of the nation. The divergence in the ways of Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Bose was to become more and more pronounced as the time went by. The erstwhile comrades in pursuing the cause of Absolute Political Independence were to drift apart irrevocably. In 1934, Bose published his book, "The Indian Struggle, 1920-1934". During the writing of his book in Germany, he got engaged and married to his secretary Emily. They were to have an only child, a daughter born on 29th November 1942, now a middle aged lady settled in Germany. She was named after the daughter of the famed Italian revolutionary Garibaldi – Anita.

This was then still in future. For the time being, a personal tragedy awaited Subhas. His father died on 2nd December 1934, before the son could reach him. He was allowed to spend a bare seven days with his grieving family in India, bound by all kinds of restrictions before being forced to go back to Europe.

In 1935, he kept on meeting prominent people in Europe in his bid to garner support for the Indian cause. He is reported to have met Hitler in this period, though this has not been authenticated. The reconstruction of a war torn Germany deeply impressed him but at no stage was he ever enamoured of its racist ideology. Fascist Duke, the

Nazi Fuherer, Subhas Bose would travel to the Devil himself if he could be of any use in freeing India. Before, we turn hyper critical of this, it is worth recalling that as late as 1938, the British themselves were bent on wooing the Germans. How could it be right when the British did this and suddenly become wrong and immoral when done by Subhas Bose, is a puzzle that is best left for the Mahatma and his devoted followers to solve.

Ideological differences apart, Subhas Bose remained emotionally close to Nehru. He was in Badenwayer looking after the ailing Kamala Nehru, who was in her last leg of the journey on earth. He was at hand to console the distraught Nehru and his daughter Indira at the untimely death of this brave lady on 28th February 1936.

By now, Subhas had become tired of being in exile. He had been away from his beloved Motherland for long. Right through his stay, the Congress had persistently refused to give him the approval to be considered as its Official Representative. Nor did he have any reservoir of money to back up his activities. He had done what he could in Europe. Now, he announced his intentions of returning to India disregarding the medical opinion to the contrary, for he was still not too well.

The announcement threw the Raj in a tizzy. It began to give out that Subhas Bose could not be allowed to return as he was closely allied with the Revolutionaries. Paying no heed to the popular outrage, Subhas was interned on the day that he returned to India – 8th April 1936. He was freed only a year later, on the 17th April 1937.

A free tiger, Subhas came to haunt not only the Raj but also the Congress. Gandhiji had renounced his membership of the Congress in 1934 itself but, remained its 'Permanent Super President'. Nothing of note happened without his approval. Subhas had to be tamed. What could be better than to make him the President of the Congress so that the 'Permanent Super President', could keep a close watch on his activities. The man who was not considered worthy of being even a member of the Working Committee in Lahore and Karachi, a man who was denied the privilege of being considered its representative in Europe, was now suddenly became fit to be its President.

On 19th February 1938, he came to be anointed as the President under the watchful eyes of the Mahatma in Haripur.

Gandhiji's hope that Subhas would mellow under the weight of the throne was soon belied. The tiger would not be caged but began to roar as few Congress Presidents had even dreamt of before. The cause of Absolute Political Independence received a big boost after a long time. The war clouds in the skies of Europe could be seen by all. This was not an opportunity to be missed. Subhas Bose was soon in touch with Italy and Germany through their diplomats in India reviving his contacts made while in Europe.

The moralist Mahatma was appalled. The new Congress President moved fast to appoint a national Planning Committee for industrialization of the country. The Mahatma's dream of a self reliant village republic came to be formally abandoned by the Congress.

Worse was to follow. Ras Bihari Bose, the famed revolutionary in exile in Japan since the late 1910s, was in touch with the Congress President advising him to make the Congress give up the notion of attaining Independence solely through the moral force of Non Violence. The last straw for the Mahatma must have come when Subhas Bose had no hesitation in meeting Savarkar, the arch rival of the Mahatma since the days of India House in 1905. He had been released after 27 years of confinement, on 10th May 1937 and had become the President of Hindu Maha Sabha on 30th December 1937. Fortunately, a photograph of the meeting has survived to authenticate the event.

The Mahatma well realized that Subhas Bose was made of sterner stuff than Nehru, who could be emotionally blackmailed, into doing things that he did not intellectually agree with. This was one President, who could not be tolerated. As his term came to an end, Gandhiji made it clear that he did not favour his re-election. There was nothing in the Congress constitution or history, which made a re-election bid by an incumbent Congress President immoral. A bid that was not supported by the Mahatma was, however, unheard of since the dawn of The Gandhi era in 1920.

Subhas Bose would not be deterred by the open opposition of the Mahatma. In the election that was held on 29th January 1939, he trounced the Mahatma's candidate, Pattabhi Sitaramayya by 95 votes. Nehru remained neutral in the contest. Gandhiji proved to be a very poor loser.

The naked Quest for Power came to the fore. An atmosphere of intrigue, deception and Machiavellian cunning came to envelop the Congress for the noble aim of hobbling its own democratically elected President. The battle for unseating of Subhas Bose was fought with a ferociousness worthy of nobler causes such as throwing the British out of India. Gandhiji fired the first salvo and drafted a resignation letter for the Congress Working Committee members to sign. 12 out of 15 toed the line.

A reluctant Nehru was compelled to fall in line. In an attempt to defuse the atmosphere, Subhas Bose went to meet Gandhiji on 15th February 1939. The insulted Mahatma refused to yield. Subhas had the audacity to challenge his might. He had to be taught a lesson.

The first trial of strength took place in Tripuri session of the Congress held between 10th – 12th March. A distraught Subhas Bose was severely ill. His illness was mocked at as an attempt to garner sympathy. The Mahatma shrewdly kept away. He had laid the battle plan. His trusted followers could be counted on to turn the knife in. There was no need for him to dirty his hands.

Govind Vallabh Pant moved a resolution expressing confidence in the old Working Committee, the majority of which had resigned at the instance of Gandhiji. The resolution also called for the new Working Committee to be appointed as per the wishes of the Mahatma. This rendered the position of the President of the Congress completely redundant. He was to do the bidding of a man who was not even prepared to be its ordinary member. Subhas camp naturally opposed the move. Subhas Bose was himself so ill that he could not even move from his sick bed that was within meters of the Convention hall, where his capacity to act as the rightful President of the Congress was being undermined. Tempers were frayed and Nehru, who had not yet taken a firm stand one way or the other, found himself heckled as he rose to speak.

An irate Nehru lost his cool and threw his weight against his old comrade. His weight tilted the balance against the absent Subhas and the resolution was carried.

The Congress President now found his hands tied by the victorious Mahatma, who was to be satisfied with nothing, less than the resignation of this defiant rebel. He demanded and obtained the scalp of Subhas on 29th April 1939. Within three months, a mortal challenge to the authority of the Mahatma was ruthlessly crushed.

So what if the cause of Independence suffered. That was a small matter of no consequence.

Nehru made a vain bid to make amends, when he refused to become member of the new Working Committee appointed by the new President, Rajendra Prasad on 1st May 1939. It was too late. Subhas refused to cow down. His dissent was snuffed out by debarring him from being a member of any elective Congress Committee for three years as from August 1939. It was widely believed that the decision was inspired, not by a sense of justice or discipline but by a personal bias against Subhas Bose, who had shown the impertinence to defy the Mahatma himself.

The conduct of Gandhiji in the entire sorry episode is reminiscent of the machinations of a power hungry politician that abound in India today rather than that of a Mahatma guiding the destiny of a nation through moral principle of Non Violence. It is this shameful behaviour that contributed in no small measure to the sorry state that the Mahatma found himself towards the end of his life. As Ambedkar said on 24th June 1945:

“ As a matter of fact the Hindus should cogitate over the question and ask: why no community trusts Mr. Gandhi although he has been saying he is a friend of the Muslims, Sikhs, and the Scheduled Castes and what is the reason for this distrust? In my judgement, there can not be a greater tragedy for a leader to be distrusted by everybody as Mr. Gandhi is today.”

Gandhiji had won the battle to unseat Subhas Bose. In the process, he lost the War to win the minds of people. The Gandhi era truly ended, the day Subhas Bose was made to resign. The tide of events in the affairs of human beings were not going to wait for the machinations of a Mahatma to end. On 3rd September 1939, the World War II began. India found itself battling against Germany for a cause that had nothing to do with its own interests.

It is in this War that she was to be bled white. It is in this War, that Bharat was to lose another 5 million of its people to pangs of hunger. It is this War that was to make the British bankrupt. It is this War that finally left the British with no other alternative but to quit the country. The torch of the Freedom Struggle lit by Tilak and carried through the thick and thin by Savarkar, Subhas Bose and innumerable other patriots had already sapped the vitality of the Raj. The Jackboots of the Gestapo delivered the final kick.

The manner in which the British quit the Empire, taking care of all their vital interests deserves a detailed study. Not merely to marvel at the way they turned a necessity into a virtue and earned undeserved kudos. More importantly, it is this study that can perhaps throw up an antidote to the poison that has seeped into our body polity.

A poison that is holding us back from attaining our rightful place in the League of Nations. A place worthy of our great ancestors. When I say We, I mean all the inhabitants of the erstwhile Undivided Bharat.

However, before we can discover the Antidote, we must painfully come to terms at the manner in which the Great Dream of Independence was betrayed between 1939-47. Permit me to say that this we will cover in another book – Abhimanyu Betrayed”

One final comment – faced with this mountain of evidence it is clear that for all his Greatness, there is little doubt that Gandhiji also committed many blunders which has cost the nation dearly.

Contribution to the cause of Independence has come from many sources – that were either indifferent to the casue of Absolute Non Violence preached by Gandhiji or even hostile to the ideology. Yet no one can deny that they sacrificed their all for the Nation.

Should the photographs of such leaders like Lokmanya Tilak, Savarkar, Bhagat Singh, Subhas Chandra Bose, Babasaheb Amedkar, amongst others, then not also grace the currency note along with that of Gandhiji?

If their portraits are good enough for the Walls of the Parliament then why not also on the Currency Notes

The Government of India is under an order of the Division Bench of the High Court at Mumbai to dispose off a representation demanding this, by a reasoned order within six weeks, which ended in February 2005. The Court repeated its order on April 20, 2005.

For more than eight years, the Government refused to utter a word in this regard preferring to commit Contempt of the Court rather than abide by its order? And even the Highest Court in the Country has refused to take cognizance of the defiance by the Government of the orders of the Court??

Finally, years after the order, it seems a Committee of the Reserve Bank of India has come to the conclusion that it is Gandhiji and Gandhiji alone who can uniquely represent the Indian ethos and therefore only his Photo should be printed on the currency notes.

“What else can an Avatar driven Hindu mind think” would have been the caustic remark of Jinnah.

The case now rests in the e Court of the People.