

# EDEN IAS

MODERN HISTORY

UPSC PREP





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# UNIT-I

## CLIMAX AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

### NORTH INDIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

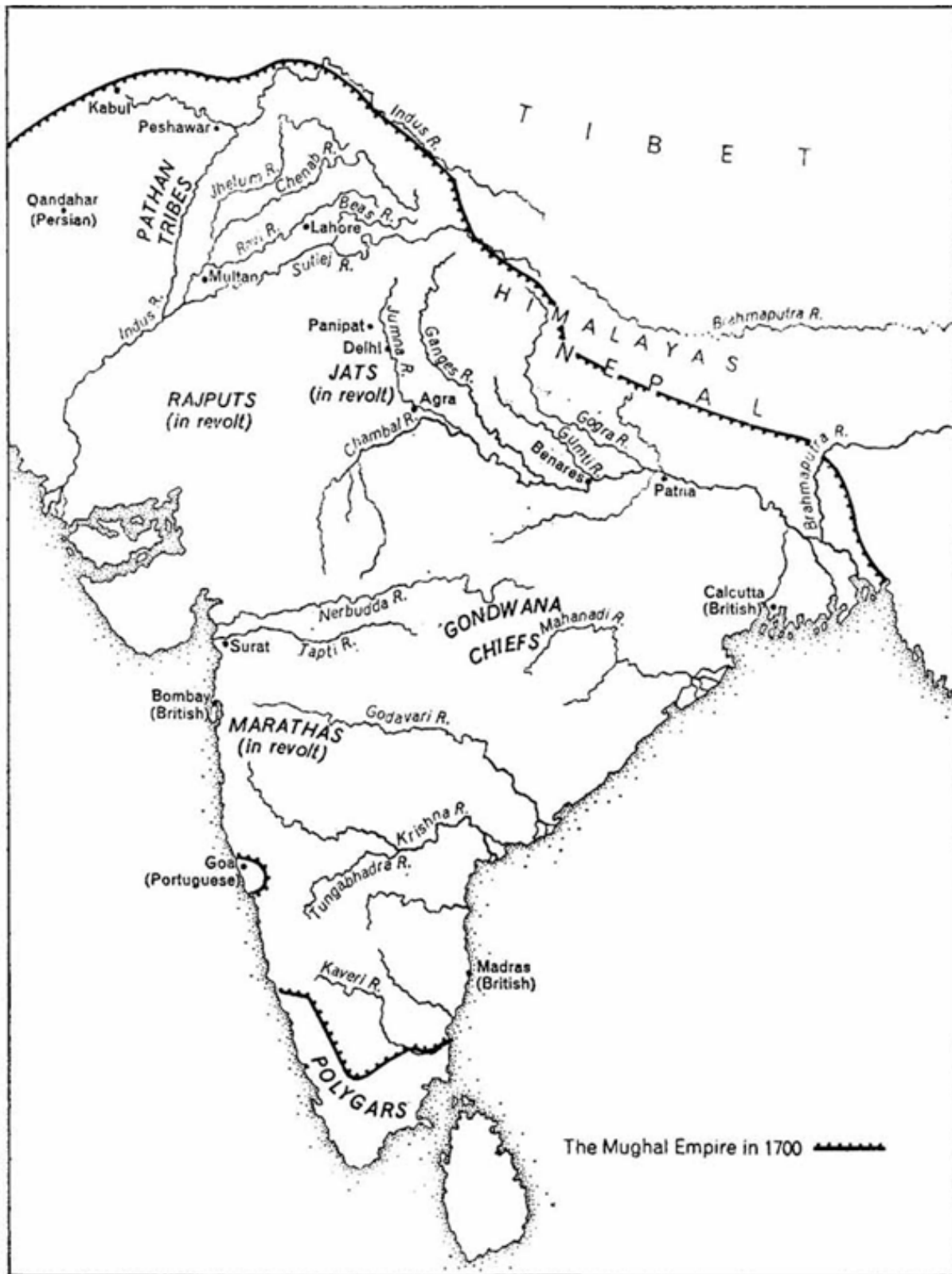
The period following the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 saw growing factionalism in the nobility, the rapid decline in the power and prestige of the Mughal Emperor and the Imperial Centre, the further accentuation of the jagirdari crisis, and the rise of regional states which were either breakaway provinces, or rose in defiance of the Mughal state but were prepared to pay token allegiance to the Mughal Emperor: The Marathas sweeping out of Maharashtra, set up a series of regional states, and made a bid for all-India supremacy which climaxed at the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761. The invasions of Nadir Shah and of Ahmad Shah Durrani opened the north-west for foreign invasions. After the death of Muhammad Shah in 1748, the Mughal Emperor shrank to a shadow, though nominal allegiance continued to be paid to him.

### BAHADUR SHAH I AND THE STRUGGLE FOR WIZARAT (1707-12)

The death of Aurangzeb at Ahmadnagar in the south led to the inevitable civil war among his sons. The main contestants were considered to be the eldest son, Muazzam, entitled Shah Alam, and his younger brother, Prince Azam. The youngest, Kam Bakhsh, though the favourite of Aurangzeb in his old age, was not considered a serious rival. The imprisonment of Shah Alam in 1687 on a charge of conspiring with the Deccan states, his release in 1695 and virtual banishment to Jamrud near Peshawar as Governor of Kabul to watch over the movements of the rebel Prince Akbar, who had taken shelter at the Persian Court, cleared the way for Prince Azam to emerge as the natural successor to the throne. In preparation of the impending conflict Azam tried to win over to his side the leading nobles. But he was arrogant, and hot and hasty in behaviour. He had the greatest contempt for Shah Alam whom he called a baqqal or a grain-dealer in derision. However, despite his meek attitude and colourless behaviour, Shah Alam, by constant marching, had disciplined his soldiers, and with the help of his man-of-affairs, Munim Khan, collected boats etc. for crossing the rivers for a rapid march to Agra when the need arose. Apart from Kabul and Lahore which were under his charge, one of Shah Alam's son was governor of Multan, and another of Bengal. Thus, Shah Alam had considerable resources at his disposal, and his way to Agra which contained the hoarded treasurers of Shah Jahan was more open and shorter than the road Prince Azam had to travel from the south.

Thus, the advantages which Prince Azam enjoyed by virtue of the support of the most powerful nobles in the empire, and the veterans of the Deccan and the royal artillery were more apparent than real. He was also harassed by lack of money, many of the soldiers being in arrears of salary for three years. Hence, when faced with demands of money he made harsh answers. For their own reasons, many of the powerful nobles, such as Muhammad Amin Khan Chin and Ghaziuddin Khan refused to accompany him to Agra for the civil war.

When Azam reached Gwalior, he learnt that Shah Alam had already occupied Agra. Azam had left most of his artillery behind in the Deccan in order to hasten his movement. Faced with a larger and better equipped army, Azam's fight with Shah Alam at Jaju (June 1707) near Agra was in the nature of a gamble which failed. Shortly after his accession at Agra, Bahadur Shah marched to the Deccan via Rajasthan with an army of 30,000 and easily defeated Kam Bakhsh near Hyderabad in January 1709. He then returned to North India and for the next year and a half, till his death early in 1712, he was busy dealing with the rebellion of the Sikhs led by Banda Bahadur.



**THE MUGHAL EMPIRE IN 1700**

During Bahadur Shah's brief reign of five years, although the empire remained united, factionalism in the nobility reached a new height. On this account, and due to Bahadur Shah's inability to formulate a clear policy, multiple foci of power and policy emerged, further weakening Imperial authority.



## PARTY FACTIONALISM

From the beginning, Bahadur Shah faced two major problems -the political and religious issues bequeathed to him by Aurangzeb, and the growing factionalism within the nobility which had acquired certain new features during the latter years of Aurangzeb's reign.

During the latter years of Aurangzeb's reign, two groups of nobles had come to the forefront. The first of these was headed by Asad Khan who came from a well-known family of Iran, his grandfather Zulfiqar Khan being the Beglar Begi (Governor) of Shirwan in the time of Shah Abbas I. After the execution of Zulfiqar Khan, the family had come to India in 1600-01, and rose gradually. Asad Khan, a favourite of Shah Jahan and then of Aurangzeb, married the daughter of Asaf Khan, brother of Nur Jahan. In 1669, at the young age of 46, he was appointed naib wazir, following the death of the wazir, Jafar Khan. No one was appointed as wazir till, in 1676, he was formally appointed wazir, to the consternation of many of the nobles senior to him. Asad Khan continued to hold the post of wazir till 1707 - one of the longest spell of office of any wazir. We are told that Aurangzeb had a very high regard for his capacities and capabilities, though his role in shaping Aurangzeb's policies is uncertain. However, he combined administrative skill with military capabilities, leading large armies and taking active part in siege operations. He held the rank of 7000 / 7000 since 1687.

Asad Khan's son, Zulfiqar Khan, was married to the daughter of Amirul Umara, Shaista Khan, who was the maternal uncle of Emperor Aurangzeb. Getting his first mansab in 1660 at the age of eleven, he gradually advanced, making his mark in 1689 by the capture of the powerful fort of Rajgarh in which the treasure and families of Sambhaji had been lodged. The following year he was placed in charge of the campaign against Jinji to which Rajaram had escaped. In 1702 he was made the Mir Bakshi. The combination of the two most powerful posts of wazir and Mir Bakshi in the hands of one family was unusual, and needs explanation. Aurangzeb had a poor opinion of his sons, frequently upbraiding them for their acts of omission and commission. Thus, in a letter to Azam he had accused him of being too bitter (lit. "too salty") to be palatable to his subjects, and Shah Alam to be colourless (lit. "Saltless"). Perhaps, Aurangzeb hoped that whichever of his son succeeded, he would be guided by and would rely on Asad Khan and Zulfiqar Khan.

Thus, in his will he recommended that whichever son succeeded to the throne should retain Asad Khan as the wazir. Such a concept of sharing power between the monarch and the wazir was fraught with danger. However, it was a new measure which could have worked in some circumstances. That Aurangzeb was serious in this attempt is indicated by the fact that on more than one occasion, he had used Asad and Zulfiqar Khan for trying to work out a settlement of the intractable Maratha problem. Thus, in 1706, Shahu was transferred to Zulfiqar Khan's army for the purpose of negotiating a settlement with the Marathas. Zulfiqar Khan wrote conciliatory letters to the Marathas inviting them to join Shahu, but the Maratha sardars were too suspicious. Earlier, Zulfiqar had suggested a settlement with Rajaram at Jinji. Some observers were of the opinion that Zulfiqar was trying to cultivate the Marathas because he had the ambition of carving out a separate area of power for himself in the Deccan. Such an ambition was, apparently, also nursed by the "Chin" group.

The "Chin" group was led by Ghaziuddin Khan Firuz Jang and included his son Chin Qulich Khan (later Nizam-ul-Mulk) and his cousin, Muhammad Amin Khan Chin and other relations. The family traced its descent from the famous saint of Bukhara, Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. Ghaziuddin Khan had earned his spurs in the Marwar War. He was given the main credit for the capture of Bijapur in 1687, and rewarded by his mansab being raised to 7000 / 7000. Though he was blinded in an epidemic plague the same year, he continued to hold important positions. Thus, from 1695 he was governor of Berar. He entertained mainly Turanis as soldiers, and kept a strong part of artillery, far beyond the requirements. Aurangzeb inspected his artillery in 1707 and confiscated much of it, saying: "He has all the things that he should have, or rather that he should not have".

Chin Qulich Khan had become a favourite of Aurangzeb after his role in the capture of Wakinkhera in 1706. Muhammad Amin Khan Chin was the *sadr*.

This family, though known for its orthodoxy and high in Imperial favour, appears to have felt outclassed by the family of Asad Khan in any future set up, and hence had began toying with the idea of having its own sphere of influence. Thus, after the death of Aurangzeb, the "Chin" group showed great reluctance in leaving the Deccan in order to take part in the civil war. Although Azam tried to conciliate this powerful group by raising the mansab of Chin Qulich Khan to 7000 / 7000, and that of Muhammad Amin Khan to 6000 / 6000, Chin Qulich Khan, who had also been made governor of Khandesh, did not proceed beyond a stage or two beyond Aurangabad, and left on the pretext of looking after his charge. Muhammad Amin, too, deserted, and repaired to Aurangabad where he and Chin Qulich took possession of several districts. Ghaziuddin Khan Firuz Jang, too, remained at Daulatabad and made no move to join Azam. Thinking it better to leave Firuz Jang behind as a friend rather than a foe, Azam made Firuz Jang governor of Aurangabad and Viceroy of the Deccan, also giving him many rewards.

The struggle among the nobles came to the surface as soon as Bahadur Shah was proclaimed King at Agra. Bahadur Shah had wisely adopted the policy that all those nobles who had supported Azam would be restored to their mansabs and positions if they came and submitted to him immediately. This gave him the services of many experienced Alamgiri nobles, and also helped to undercut the support of his remaining rival, Kam Bakhsh. As soon as Asad Khan and Zulfiqar Khan came and submitted, Asad Khan, in view of Aurangzeb's recommendation in his will, as well as his connections, experience etc. asked for the post of wazir for himself, and that of Mir Bakhshi for Zulfiqar Khan. Bahadur Shah had no difficulty in appointing Zulfiqar Khan as Mir Bakhshi along with his old mansab of 6000 / 6000, but he had promised the post of wazir to his friend and supporter, Munim Khan. Ultimately, a solution was found. Munim Khan was appointed wazir, his rank of 1500 being raised to 7000 / 7000. He was also appointed (absentee) governor of Lahore. Thus, the days of Akbar when the wazir was primarily a financial expert, with many nobles out-ranking him in his mansab, no longer prevailed. The wazir was now seen as the leading noble and the lynch-pin of the system. Asad Khan was made *wakil-i-mutlaq* with the rank of 8000 / 8000, the title of Asaf-ud-Daulah and the right to see all papers of appointments, promotions etc. and reports from the provinces. Munim Khan found this to be tedious and humiliating, and soon an excuse was found to post Asad Khan to Delhi. Zulfiqar Khan was made his father's deputy, but with the exception that the seal of Asaf-ud-Daulah was placed upon revenue and civil *parwanas* and *sanads* after the seal of the wazir, he had no part in the administration of the government.

Chin Qulich and Muhammad Amin Khan were also recalled from the Deccan. They were given small positions which did not satisfy them. Hence, after some time, Chin Qulich resigned his mansab and title of Khan-i-Dauran, and led a retired life at Delhi, waiting better opportunities. Ghaziuddin Khan was appointed governor of Gujarat, and asked to take charge without coming first to court as was the custom. His death at Ahmedabad in 1710 further weakened the position of this group. Thus, the main struggle remained one between Zulfiqar Khan and Munim Khan, with the "Chin" group on the margin.

## RELATION WITH THE RAJPUTS

The struggle between Zulfiqar Khan and Munim Khan had policy implications as well. As a newly risen noble, Munim Khan was not in favour of any bold, new departures. Although Bahadur Shah, unlike Aurangzeb, was not puritanical in nature, and was even accused of dabbling in shiism, he like Munim Khan was cautious in nature, whether it concerned the Rajputs or the Marathas. While Azam was on the march to Agra, at the instance of Zulfiqar Khan, he had awarded the mansabs of 7000 / 7000, and the titles of Mirza Raja and Maharaja to Jai Singh and Ajit Singh, and the Rajas were asked to join Azam with large armies. Negotiations were also started for restoring Jodhpur to Ajit Singh.

There are two phases in Bahadur Shah's Rajput policy - the earlier phase till 1709 when he not only tried to maintain Aurangzeb's settlement with the Rajputs, but to go further. On the excuse that Ajit Singh had neither attended the court, nor sent a customary letter of congratulations on his accession, and that he



had occupied Jodhpur and was opposing practice of Islam there and restoring temples, Bahadur Shah decided to move to the Deccan via Ajmer. When the Imperial army reached near Ajmer, the Rana offered his submission which was accepted. Ajit Singh also applied for pardon, which was accepted after Ajit Singh had suffered a defeat at the hands of Mihrab Khan, the faujdar-designate of Jodhpur. Ajit Singh was restored to his previous mansab of 3500 / 3000, and the title of Maharaja, but his capital Jodhpur, remained under imperial control. Earlier, on the ground that there was a dispute about succession between Jai Singh and his brother, Vijay Singh, the latter having helped Bahadur Shah at Jaju, Bahadur Shah had instructed the subedar of Ajmer to bring the state of Amber under khalisa and appoint a Mughal faujdar there. On reaching Amber, Bahadur Shah stayed there for three days, and renamed the city Islamabad. The property of Jai Singh was confiscated, and the state was entrusted to Vijay Singh, with an imperial faujdar remaining at Amber.

Bahadur Shah and his wazir, Munim Khan, soon found that they were not capable of upholding these policies. When the imperial camp reached Mahabaleshwar on the Narmada, Ajit Singh and Jai Singh, who had accompanied the imperial camp in the hope of the reversal of the earlier orders, escaped and repaired to Udaipur where they made an agreement with the Maharana for joint resistance against the Mughals.-However, in practice, there was little coordination among the Rajputs. Jai Singh recovered Amber, and Ajit Singh ousted the Mughal faujdar from Jodhpur. The Maharana recovered the parganas of Pur, Mandal, and Bidnur sequestered by Aurangzeb in lieu of jizyah. The Rajputs over-ran Didwana, and gained a notable victory over Saiyid Husain Khan Baraha, the faujdar of Sambhar, when he was accidentally killed in the course of the battle. After the rainy season, Ajit Singh invested Ajmer with a force of 20,000 but received no help from Jai Singh and the Maharana. He raised the siege on a payment of Rs.80, 000/- from the governor, Shujaat Khan, though the latter sent a lying report to Bahadur Shah claiming a victory.

Meanwhile, news about the victory of Bahadur Shah over Kam Bakhsh, and his returning to North India, resolved to lead an army to punish and chastise the Rajputs became current. In alarm, the Rajputs sought the mediation of their old friends, Asad Khan and Prince Azim-ush-Shan. At their instance, Jai Singh and Ajit Singh were restored to their mansabs. Asad Khan who had been placed in over-all charge of Lahore, Delhi and Ajmer subahs, offered to the Rajas sanads for the grant of their homelands, provided they raised their thanas from Sambhar and Didwana, and accepted appointments to the provinces of Kabul and Gujarat.

There was thus a sharp difference of opinion about the Rajputs between Bahadur Shah and Munim Khan on the one hand, and Asad Khan and Zulfiqar Khan on the other. The latter wanted to conciliate the Rajput rajas by not only returning their homelands, but readmitting them to the position of being partners in the kingdom by assigning them high administrative positions. On return to North India, Bahadur Shah and Munim Khan made a typical compromise. In June, 1710, Ajit Singh and Jai Singh were granted audience "during the march", i.e. not in a regular court, and their homelands, Jodhpur and Amber, restored. They were permitted to go home provided they came with a force within six months to serve wherever asked to do so. Since news of the uprising of Banda Bahadur had already reached Bahadur Shah, he was anxious to use the Rajputs in the campaign against him. As a sweetener, Munim Khan revived Asad Khan's proposal of appointing the Rajas to Gujarat and Kabul an idea which the Rajputs construed as a device to separate them, and deal with them individually. After considerable pressure, and after a lapse of fifteen months, Ajit Singh and Jai Singh appeared at Bahadur Shah's court in October 1711, and were appointed to Sadhaura to guard the foot-hills from the raids of Banda's followers. By this time Munim Khan had died, and all power had passed into the hands of Prince Azim-ush-Shan. Although Azim-ush-Shan had been a friend of the Rajputs, he had broken with Zulfiqar Khan, and was anxious to win over the old Alamgiri nobles to his side in preparation for the inevitable civil war. The Alamgiri nobles, apparently, were not in favour of a compromising policy towards the Rajputs. The contemporary writer, Mirza Muhammad Harisi, representing their point of view, called the earlier agreement with the Rajputs as "being inconsistent with good policy as well as the dignity of the sovereign." This, it seems, was the reason why after serving for two and a half months with "a large army", Jai Singh was appointed faujdar of Chitrakut, and Ajit Singh of Surat in Gujarat. These were far below the expectations of the Rajput rajas, and they petitioned for leave to go home. This was agreed to provided they left chaukis (outposts) behind.

## THE MARATHAS AND THE DECCAN

The reign of Bahadur Shah not only saw the emergence of sharp difference of opinion regarding the policy to be followed towards the Rajputs but also towards the Marathas and the Deccan. When Azam Shah was proceeding towards North India, at Dauraha near the Narmada, Shahu was allowed to escape along with about 50 - 60 of his followers. There was both policy and calculation in this. Shahu's release, it was felt, would weaken Tara Bai and safeguard the Mughal possessions from Maratha incursions during Azam's absence while the Marathas fought among themselves. Also, Shahu was considered the rightful successor of Sambhaji and the one with whom some agreement could be arrived at. According to the contemporary historian, Khafi Khan, the release of Shahu was done at the instance of Zulfiqar Khan "who was very intimate with Shahu and had for long been interested in his affairs." However, there is no support for the contention put forwards by some Maratha sources that Azam Shah had made an agreement with Shahu, granting him Shivaji's swarajya, the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the six subahs of the Deccan, and other concessions.

After defeating Tara Bai in a battle, and crowning himself at Satara, Shahu tried to strengthen himself by securing from the Mughal due confirmation of his position, and the grant of chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan. Shortly after Bahadur Shah's accession, Shahu had sent him a letter of congratulations and asked for forgiveness of his "sins". In return, he was restored to his mansab of 7000 / 7000, and asked to render military help against Kam Bakhsh. Shahu expressed his inability to attend in person, but sent one of his best known sardars, Nimaji Sindhia, with a large force to join Bahadur Shah, which did good service.

After the defeat of Kam Bakhsh (January 1709), Bahadur Shah offered the post of Viceroy of the Deccan to his son Prince Azim-ush-Shan who was gradually gaining favour with him. But Azim-ush-Shan preferred the (absentee) governorship of the Eastern provinces, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which had been under his charge earlier. Unlike the Deccan these areas were peaceful and productive. The viceroyalty of the Deccan was then offered to the next most powerful person, Zulfiqar Khan. We are told that Zulfiqar Khan was granted full authority in all the revenue and administrative matters pertaining to the Deccan, and allowed to remain at the court to combine his new post with his previous post of Mir Bakhshi. His old associate and protege, Daud Khan Panni, was made his deputy in the Deccan, with the rank of 7000 / 5000 du-aspasih-aspas, and the governorships of Bijapur, Berar and Aurangabad. His headquarters were fixed at Aurangabad, near Daultabad in the old Nizam Shahi kingdom of Ahmadnagar.

These concessions which made Zulfiqar Khan's position far stronger than that of the wazir, Munim Khan, would have made sense if Bahadur Shah was also prepared to be guided by Zulfiqar Khan regarding the political affairs of the Deccan which he knew intimately. However, Bahadur Shah was reluctant to strengthen Zulfiqar Khan's position any further. After the victory over Kam Bakhsh, Zulfiqar Khan introduced Shahu's wakil to the emperor. He presented an application for the grant of chauth and sardeshmukhi of the six subahs of the Deccan on condition of restoring prosperity to the ruined land. Munim Khan presented Tara Bai's wakil who requested for a farman in the name of her (minor) son, Shivaji II. She asked only for sardeshmukhi of the Deccan, without any reference to chauth, and also offered to suppress other insurgents and to restore order in the country.

A great contention on the matter arose between Munim Khan and Zulfiqar Khan. Matters worsened because Munim Khan wanted to detach Khandesh and Pain-Ghat in Berar from the Deccan, create a separate subah out of them, and appoint his son, Mahabat Khan, as its governor with full powers of appointment, dismissal and transfer of officials. Unwilling to displease either, Bahadur Shah did not approve the idea of the partitioning of the Deccan, and ordered that sanad for sardeshmukhi only be given in accordance with the requests of both Munim Khan and Zulfiqar Khan.

Whatever the motives of Bahadur Shah, his decision was an invitation to both Shahu and Tara Bai to plunder the imperial territories to enforce their claims. As soon as Bahadur Shah left the Deccan, Shahu came out of fort Rajgarh, and issued an order to his sardars: "The Emperor has granted me (sar) desh mukhi of these parts, but not yet the chauth. You should, therefore, raid the imperial territories and create disorder



(till he agrees to do so)." Soon, bands of Marathas invaded and plundered Burhanpur in Khandesh and defeated and killed the governor, Mir Ahmad Khan. They also invaded Bijapur and Ahmadnagar, appeared near Aurangabad and plundered the surrounding area. The Mughals were powerless to check these inroads, though Daud Khan Panni moved about with a large army chasing the Marathas. He also tried to sow dissensions among the Marathas, winning over to his side a number of powerful Maratha sardars, such as Rao Rambha Nimbalkar, Paima Raj Sindhia and even Chandrasen Jadhav. But the Maratha raids continued.

Ultimately, early in 1711, Daud Khan made a pact with Shahu. According to this pact, the chauth and sardeshmukhi was promised to Shahu. But the amounts were to be collected not by Maratha agents, but by Daud Khan's deputy, Hiranman, who would pay the Marathas a lump sum. The jagirs of the princes were to be exempt from any charge.

No written confirmation of the grant was given but the agreement could hardly have been made without the active support of Zulfiqar Khan, and the tacit consent of the Emperor. This was easier since Munim Khan had died by then. Even this pact could not secure peace since the Maratha sardars had by now become free agents, not answerable to anyone and eager to plunder on their own. However the scale of Maratha attacks diminished.

### ACCENTUATION OF THE PARTY CONFLICT

The Sikh uprising which began towards the end of 1708 under Banda Bahadur, beginning with the defeat of the faujdars of Sonapat and Sirhind, and the establishment of virtual Sikh control "from a few days march from Delhi to the outskirts of Lahore", kept Bahadur Shah busy from the middle of 1710 to his death at Lahore in February, 1712. Banda was besieged at Lohgarh, but managed to escape to the hills when the fort was stormed towards the end of the year. Mughal operation slackened thereafter. Bahadur Shah returned to Lahore and left it to the nobles to conduct operations against Banda.

In February, 1711, Munim Khan died after a short illness. His death had been hastened by Bahadur Shah's charges of negligence in the escape of Banda from Lohgarh. Zulfiqar Khan now resumed the demand for wizarat. Prince Azim-ush-Shan who was close to Bahadur Shah was prepared to accommodate Zulfiqar Khan, provided he relinquished the posts of Mir Bakhshi and Viceroy of the Deccan, which he proposed, should be given to the sons of Munim Khan. Bahadur Shah did not like the proposal because he did not consider the sons of Munim Khan to be competent for the posts. Zulfiqar Khan, too, stoutly opposed the proposal because he was not prepared to relinquish the posts of Mir Bakhshi and Viceroy of the Deccan. Hence, he proposed that the post of wazir should be given to Asad Khan. Bahadur Shah and Prince Azim-ush-Shan felt that the combination of the posts of wazir, Mir Bakhshi and Viceroy of the Deccan in the hands of one family would be dangerous for the dynasty. Ultimately, no wazir was appointed. Sadullah Khan was made the chief diwan, and asked to work under the "supervision and control of Prince Azim-ush-Shan" (Khafi Khan).

Thus, the most energetic and capable prince and the most powerful and ambitious noble whose objective was the concentration of all power in his hands to reshape imperial policies were put on a collision course.

Bahadur Shah made a cautious departure from Aurangzeb's policies. While ban on wine drinking and singing and dancing in open court was continued, Bahadur Shah hardly shared Aurangzeb's orthodox views. Like his wazir, Munim Khan, he was a liberal sufi in outlook, and incurred the displeasure of the orthodox elements by assuming the title "Saiyid". Claiming to be a mujtahid or interpreter of Holy Laws, Bahadur Shah ordered at Lahore that the word "wasi" or successor be inserted after the name of Ali in the Friday prayers. This outraged the Sunni elements since it placed Ali in a higher position than the other three Caliphs, and led to widespread rioting. The order had to be withdrawn, but from this time onwards, there was a definite breach between the orthodox elements and the Mughal emperor.



## ZULFIQAR KHAN AND JAHANDAR SHAH (1712-13)

The civil war among the sons of Bahadur Shah following his death was, in essence, a struggle between Azim-ush-Shan, the most energetic prince with the largest resources, and the most powerful noble, Zulfiqar Khan. In order to counter Azim-ush-Shan, Zulfiqar had brought the other three princes into a pact according to which the empire was to be divided among them, but sikka and khutba would remain in the name of the eldest, Jahandar Shah. Zulfiqar would be the common wazir who would reside at the court of Jahandar Shah, with deputies at the courts of the others. The idea of a partitioning the empire is supposed to have been bequeathed by Aurangzeb, and Bahadur Shah had professed to abide by it before the Battle of Jaju, as also before the tussle with Kam Bakhsh. But the idea never seems to have been entertained seriously by anybody. After the defeat of Azim-ush-Shan, which was due to the efforts and energy of Zulfiqar Khan, the latter lost no time in defeating the other two brothers, Rafi-ush-Shan and Jahan Shah.

After the accession of Jahandar Shah at Lahore, Zulfiqar Khan became wazir almost as a matter of right. He also retained the Viceroyalty of the Deccan which he continued to govern through his deputy, Daud Khan. He was granted the unprecedented rank of 10,000 / 10,000 du-aspa sih-aspa and the title of yar-wafadar (faithful friend.). His father, Asad Khan, remained Wakil-i-Mutlaq, and was granted the (absentee) governorship of Gujarat, and the mansab of 12,000/12,000. Although Jahandar called him "uncle" out of respect, Asad Khan refrained from taking interest in public affairs, and seldom went to the court. Thus, all power remained in the hands of Zulfiqar Khan, and Jahandar Shah was guided by his advice.

Zulfiqar Khan utilised his powers and position to institute a broad liberal, inclusionist policy. First and foremost, only nine days after the formal accession of Jahandar Shah, and at the suggestion of Asad Khan, jizyah was abolished. Although jizyah had been suspended in the Deccan by Aurangzeb in 1704 for the duration of the war, and had generally fallen in disuse, it was asserted on occasions under Bahadur Shah. Thus, jizyah was levied in Jodhpur after Ajit Singh had been forced to abandon it. Zulfiqar Khan's step was obviously designed to win general Hindu opinion to his side.

Next, Jai Singh and Ajit Singh were raised to the ranks of 7000/7000, and granted the titles of Mirza Raja Sawai and Maharaja respectively. Soon afterwards, Jai Singh was granted the subedari of Malwa and Ajit Singh of Gujarat, along with other concessions. These cannot be considered paper appointments. Ajit Singh had just started for Gujarat when he received news that the rebellion in the East by Farrukh Siyar, son of Azim-ush-Shan, had reached serious proportion. Hence, he put off his departure.

In the case of the Marathas, the earlier accord made by Daud Khan was continued. A new step taken by Zulfiqar Khan was the grant of an imperial mansab of 3000/2000 to Shivaji II, son of Raja Ram. A khilat and a farman granting him the (sar) desh mukhi of subah Hyderabad was also sent to him. Thus, Zulfiqar Khan postulated a division of the swarajya of Shivaji, and the chauth and sardesh mukhi of the Deccan between Shahu and Shivaji II.

The major problem facing Zulfiqar Khan, however, was the growing crisis of the jagirdari system, and his relations with the nobles as also those considered close to the young Emperor. The jagirdari crisis had worsened under Bahadur Shah due to his reckless grant of mansabs and inams. According to the contemporary, Bhimsen, even clerks had received high mansabs. To check the Emperor's excessive liberality, with the support of Munim Khan, an official, Mustaid Khan, was appointed to examine the suitability of new appointees as well as the promotions. He was also to examine the grants given for the support of holy and learned men. This led to inordinate delays and seems to have been resented by the khanazads who had been waiting for a long time for the lifting of Aurangzeb's ban on new appointments. It seems that they approached two of the queens who put great pressure on Mustaid Khan. The Emperor told the officials that his signature was a formality, and the Arz Muqarrar or the official incharge of confirmation of jagirs could do as he liked. In consequence, the imperial signature lost its value and jagir continued to be awarded liberally.

Another reform measure adopted at the time was to defer the charge for the upkeep of the royal transport or khurak dawwab. It was now to be deducted from the assigned salary of a mansabdar after a jagir had been granted to him. This saved the nobles from much harrassment and, in the words of Khafi Khan, meant that "the charge for the maintenance of animals was remitted." But this implied additional strain on the Imperial khalisa. An idea of the acute financial situation which forced Bahadur Shah may be gauged from the remark of agent Chabela Das, in 1711 during the Sikh uprising "battles are fought with the army and provisions of the army requires money, but money is not seen anywhere. Let us see how God wins." Khafi Khan says that at the time of the conquest c. Agra fort, Bahadur Shah had found thirteen crores of coined and uncoined gold and silver. These had been exhausted by the end of his reign. In consequence, great parsimony was shown in the government establishments, especially the royal household, so much as that money was received every day from the treasury of Prince Azim-ush-Shan to keep things going.

This was the situation Zulfiqar Khan inherited, and which explains the charge of parsimoniousness brought against him by many contemporary writers. We are told that unlike the earlier tradition, Zulfiqar Khan flatly refused to give any employment to the supporters of the defeated princes. Thus, two to three thousand old servants were made unemployed.

The properties of some of the leading supporters of these princes were confiscated - a departure from Bahadur Shah's policy. One of those who was denied employment, Iradat Khan, charges Zulfiqar Khan with stinginess and reluctance to give jagirs to others while he appropriated enormous revenues and emoluments for himself, and of harrasing and plotting to ruin old nobles. Zulfiqar Khan issued an order that no sanads for jagirs was to be granted to any mansabdar till his claim had been checked and confirmed. Nor were any increments in ranks to be granted till then. He also attempted to compel the mansabdars to maintain their stipulated quota of troops, and to enforce regulations regarding muster and dagh. We do not know to what extent these measures effected the old nobles. However, it was difficult to maintain economy and enforcement of regulations in an atmosphere of competitiveness. Soon the rules of Zulfiqar Khan were thrown to the winds and mansabs began to be given to royal favourites with a free hand.

In matter of revenue administration, Zulfiqar Khan left everything in the hands of his former diwan, Sabha Chand, a kayastha, who was given the title of Raja and appointed diwan of the crown lands. We are told that during Jahandar Shah's time, the old rules of business were thrown to the winds, and ijara (revenue farming) became universal.

Zulfiqar Khan tried to win over the old Alamgiri and Bahadur Shahi nobles. It was due to his efforts that many of these nobles continued to hold important posts and positions at the centre as well as in the provinces. He resisted the elevation of new men considered to be low born, and on more than one occasion defended the old nobles against the pretensions of the friends and relations of the queen, Lal Kunwar, who came from a family of kalawants or professional musicians. We are told that it was a fine time for musicians and ministrals who would swagger round the streets of Delhi in a noisy manner, making themselves obnoxious to high and low by their high-handedness. On one occasion Zuhra, a vegetable seller by profession and friend of Lal Kunwar, insulted Chin Qulich Khan by blocking his way in a narrow street, and calling him "the son of that blind man". Where upon Chin Qulich Khan's men belaboured Zuhra's men. Her appeal to Lal Kunwar for redressal had no effect because the wazir backed Chin Qulich Khan.

At the beginning of Jahandar's accession, Zulfiqar Khan had contemplated getting rid of his old rival, Chin Qulich Khan, who had been won over by Azim-ush-Shan, by promises of high office. After the death of Bahadur Shah, Chin Qulich had recruited an army but had moved only a few stages out of Delhi when he received news of Azim-ush-Shan's defeat. Hence, he had dismissed his soldiers and returned to Delhi. Zulfiqar Khan was dissuaded from proceeding against Chin Qulich by Abdus Samad Khan, a Turani who was married in the Chin family but had actively helped Zulfiqar Khan in the civil war as Superintendent



of Artillery. He had been made Sadr with the rank of 7000. When Jahandar Shah reached Delhi, Chin Qulich met him outside the city. Chin Qulich was restored to his mansab of 5000, and was appointed governor of Malwa. But he remained dissatisfied, and resigned his post and mansab, ostensibly as a protest against the rise of new nobles and the neglect of the khanazads.

Thus, a powerful section in the old nobility remained dissatisfied, not only because of the neglect of the old Turani nobles, or khanazads, but because they disliked all power and authority slipping into the hands of one of them, Zulfiqar Khan.

Two internal centres of opposition to Zulfiqar Khan emerged. One of these consisted of Kokaltash Khan the Mir Bakhshi, and his relations and friends. Kokaltash Khan, the foster-brother of Jahandar Shah, had been his main man of affairs for a long time, and been his deputy at Multan with the rank of 2500/2250. Jahandar Shah had promised him the wizarat should he become the Emperor. Kokaltash bitterly resented the elevation of Zulfiqar Khan to wizarat, though it was inescapable. Kokaltash was given the post of Mir Bakhshi, with the mansab of 9000 / 9000, and made governor of Multan and Thatta, along with the faujdari of Bakkhar. His family members also prospered - one brother being made governor of Agra with the rank of 8000, and a son-in-law appointed second bakhshi with the rank of 8000/ 8000. Among the dissatisfied nobles who joined this group, the most important was Sadullah Khan, a Kashmiri, who had been used to exclude Zulfiqar Khan from the wizarat after the death of Munim Khan, and now feared his ire.

This group not only began to interfere in administration, but tried to effect a break between Jahandar Shah and the wazir by suggesting to him that the wazir was too ambitious, and that to fulfil his ambitions, he would put a new prince on the throne. However, for the time being, this game did not succeed. In fact, in a dispute between Zulfiqar Khan and Kokaltash Khan regarding the post of Arz Mukarrar, Jahandar Shah upheld the wazir. On another occasion he told Kokaltash Khan that the wazir had full authority to do what he liked and that he, the Emperor, could not interfere in anything, or even utter a word in protest.

The second group consisted of Lal Kunwar, and her relations and friends. Though called a "dancing girl", Lal Kunwar was not a concubine. She came from the class of people called kalawant or professional musicians. Her father, Khasusiyat Khan, was a descendant of Tansen, the famous musician of Akbar. After being made queen, she was allowed to march with drums beating like the Emperor, and five hundred gentlemen troopers (ahadis) followed in her train. Coins are said to have been issued in her name, but none have been found. She was the constant companion of the Emperor, and became another avenue for those seeking Imperial favour. This was annoying to the wazir who lost perquisites because every job seeker had to give him a commission and presents. Members of Lal Kunwar's family received mansabs, at least three of her brothers receiving mansabs between 5000 to 7000, and jagirs and sinecures. We are told that due to Lal Kunwar, many kalawants received high mansabs of 5000 to 7000. However, the wazir did not permit any of Lal Kunwar's brothers to hold posts such as governorships on the ground that it would lead to discontent among the old nobles. On another occasion, Khush-hal Khan, a brother of Lal Kunwar, was arrested by the order of the wazir on the charge of molesting a married woman. His property was confiscated and he was sent to the fortress prison of Samugurh. Lal Kunwar was powerless to intervene.

Thus, there can be no comparison between Lal Kunwar and Nur Jahan. Lal Kunwar seems to have had no interest in politics, but had a childish fondness for festivities and illuminations.

Contemporaries who were shocked that a person from a demeaning profession should be raised to the status of a queen, relate many stories as to how in his infatuation for her, Jahandar violated traditions of propriety and decorum. Thus, he is accused of going shopping on a "moving throne"; having drunk in a rath and found asleep in it the following morning - a story which it is hard to credit. However, the prestige and fear of the Emperor had declined so much that when he went out for a hunt or festivities, no nobles or army followed him. The breach between the old nobility and Jahandar Shah was the main reason for his defeat only thirteen months after his accession, by Farrukh Siyar, the second son of Azimush-Shan, backed by Saiyid Abdullah Khan and Husain Ali Baraha.



On the march from Lahore to Delhi in May 1712, Jahandar Shah heard of the movement of Farrukh Siyar in the East. Although his attempt was considered to be ridiculous, the eldest son Prince Azzuddin was placed at the head of an army, and asked to proceed to Agra to watch the situation. Without consulting Zulfiqar Khan, the over all control of the army was given to Khan-i-Dauran, the brother-in-law of Kokaltash Khan. He was totally inexperienced of battle, and according to a contemporary, "had never even killed a cat."

During the next six months at Delhi, Jahandar Shah made merry. Hearing of the arrival of Farrukh Siyar at Allahabad after being joined by the Saiyid Brothers, Prince Azzuddin advanced to Khajwa (near Kora) but was easily routed. Jahandar Shah now awoke to his danger. The army had not been paid for the last eleven months, and frantic efforts were made to find money. The zamindars of the area had withheld money, and all stored money had been exhausted long ago. Hence, vessels of gold and silver stored since the times of Akbar were broken up and the karkhanas opened up to pay the soldiers. Even the gold roofs of the palaces were taken down. Thus, the task of vandalism was started by the Mughal princes long before the Jats, Marathas and Nadir Shah arrived on the scene. In this way, an army of 100,000 and a strong artillery were collected, and it was decided to move to Agra.

The events were too important for Chin Qulich Khan (the future Nizam-ul-Mulk) to be neglected. At the instance of Zulfiqar Khan, he was propitiated with a rank of 7000. His cousin, M. Amin Khan, who had been engaged in fighting desultory battles with Banda Bahadur, was also recalled. These two powerful nobles were asked to join the army at Agra.

Although Jahandar Shah had a much larger army than Farrukh Siyar's, divided counsel between Zulfiqar Khan and Kokaltash Khan, the neutrality of the "Chin" group of Turani nobles and the intrepidity of the Saiyid brothers secured a complete victory for Farrukh Siyar (January 1713).

The brief duration of rule by Jahandar Shah and Zulfiqar Khan led to the emergence of a number of important tendencies. It was shown that in the absence of a masterful ruler with sufficient competence and capacity, the only alternative was a masterful wazir who had sufficient experience of administration, could maintain law and order, and keep the nobility under control. But an all-powerful wazir was likely to arouse the distrust of the king and the envy of the nobility. In such a situation the wazir could maintain his position only by organising a bloc powerful enough to defeat any rival or combination of rivals, as also try to secure the support of elements outside the court (Rajputs, Marathas, etc.). This, in turn, posed a threat to the dynasty. The logical culmination was the establishment of a new dynasty and a new nobility, as during the Sultanat or the complete subordination of the ruler to the wazir. During Jahandar Shah's rule, the situation did not lead up to this, but all the factors for such a development were present.

In the second place, the reign of Jahandar Shah saw the rapid abandonment of the policies associated with Aurangzeb. Thus, jizyah was abolished, and large concessions given to Rajputs and Marathas. It would appear that Zulfiqar Khan was keen to revive the liberal traditions of Akbar, and to develop a state based on the broad support of Muslims and Hindus. This underlined the failure of Aurangzeb's attempt to keep the empire together by emphasizing Islam and the Islamic character of the state.

### **THE SAIYID BROTHERS' STRUGGLE FOR WIZARAT**

Farrukh Siyar, the second son of Azim-ush-Shan, had been his father's deputy in Bengal since 1707. Perhaps in anticipation of a civil war following the death of Bahadur Shah, in 1711, he had been recalled to the court. He had been at Patna for some months when he heard of the news of Bahadur Shah's death, and immediately proclaimed his father, Azim-ush-Shan, as king.

Hussain Ali Baraha, who had been deputy of Azim-ush-Shan in Bihar since 1708, and had clashed with Farrukh Siyar on a number of points since his arrival at Patna, did not like the precipitate action of the prince. When news arrived of the defeat and death of Azim-ush-Shan at Lahore, Husain Ali wanted to

draw back, but was persuaded by the Emperor's mother not to do so since it would be of lasting infamy for him. Promises of high office if Farrukh Siyar ascended the throne were also held out. However, the relations between the two continued to be strained, Husain Ali being distrustful of Farrukh Siyar who had earned a reputation for low-down cunning as he had earlier captured fort Rohtas by a farman and assurance of safety to the commandant, but had violated the assurance after he had vacated the fort. The combined armies of Farrukh Siyar and Husain Ali reached Allahabad by November, 1712 where Abdullah Khan, the elder brother of Husain Ali, who had been Azim-ush-Shan's deputy in the province joined. Abdullah Khan soon became the chief person in the coalition, and used his influence to resolve the prevailing ill-will between Husain Ali and Farrukh Siyar.

The victory of Farrukh Siyar at Agra (January, 1713) was entirely due to the efforts of the Saiyid Brothers. Farrukh Siyar had, therefore, little option but to appoint Abdullah Khan as wazir and Husain Ali as Mir Bakhshi. They were raised to the rank of 7000/7000, and granted governorships of Multan and Bihar respectively and allowed to govern them through deputies. The maternal uncle of Abdullah Khan, Saiyid Muzaffar Khan Baraha, was made governor of Ajmer, and a few relations and kinsmen of the Saiyids admitted to mansabs. Apart from these, the Saiyids did not claim any special positions for their kinsmen. In fact, they were keen to conciliate and win over old Alamgiri and Bahadur Shahi nobles. At the outset, a general policy was laid down that all the Alamgiri nobles were to be confirmed in their previous ranks, and all promotions of 300 and above in the zat rank given by Bahadur Shah were to be scrutinized. Chin Qulich Khan was accorded the mansab of 7000/7000 and the title of Nizam-ul-Mulk and appointed viceroy of the Deccan, with powers to select the lands to be allotted in jagir to him and to his followers, and to suggest the mansabs to be granted to the chief zamindars there, i.e. Marathas and others. Abdullah Khan used to say that he considered Nizam-ul-Mulk to be his "elder brother", and visited him and exchanged costly gifts before he left for the Deccan. Muhammad Amin Khan, the cousin of Nizam-ul-Mulk, was made second bakhshi with the title of Itimad-ud-Daulah. Abdus Samad Khan, who had been the chief lieutenant of Zulfiqar Khan in the civil wars at Lahore, was granted the rank of 7000/7000, and appointed governor of Lahore. However, the efforts of the Saiyids to win the old nobles to their side were only partially successful. Many of the old nobles were envious of the Saiyids and looked down upon them as Hindustani upstarts.

The Saiyids also tried to follow a broad, liberal policy. Thus, while Farrukh Siyar was still in Bihar, at the instance of Husain Ali, jizyah had been abolished. This order was reiterated six days after the defeat of Jahandar Shah at Agra. Pilgrim tax levied at a number of places was abolished, and restrictions on the Hindus using palkis and Arabi and Iraqi horses imposed by Aurangzeb and continued by Bahadur Shah, were eased, and abolished altogether a few years later.

The Saiyids were also keen to conciliate the Rajputs. Thus, at their instance, Rana Sangram Singh II was accorded a mansab of 7000/7000 with 8 crore dams in inam. Jai Singh and Ajit Singh sent letters of congratulations to Farrukh Siyar, but avoided coming to pay personal allegiance. Through their wakils they reiterated their old demand for the grant of high mansabs and appointment to the subahs of Malwa and Gujarat respectively. This was not to the liking of Farrukh Siyar who wanted to teach a lesson to the Rajputs. He was particularly annoyed with Ajit Singh who had assassinated two sons of Indra Singh who had been Mughal mansabdars. Jai Singh and Ajit Singh were raised to the rank of 7000/7000 but in order to disrupt the alliance of the Rajput Rajas, Jai Singh was appointed as governor of Malwa, and Ajit Singh to Thatta. Although Jai Singh moved towards Malwa, Ajit Singh refused to go to Thatta, and Husain Ali was asked to lead an expedition against him.

Husain Ali led a large army against Ajit Singh early in January 1714. Meanwhile, relations between the Saiyids and Farrukh Siyar had deteriorated to the point that Farrukh Siyar sent secret letters to Ajit Singh promising rewards if he would defeat and kill the Mir Bakhshi. However, these moves were soon known to Husain Ali who had kept close and cordial relations with the Rajput Rajas. After a few months of campaigning, in which Husain Ali was assisted by a contingent of 4000 sawars sent by the Rana, a treaty

was patched up whereby Ajit Singh agreed to send his daughter in marriage to Farrukh Siyar, to send his son Abhai Singh to the court with the Mir Bakhshi, to give peshkash and to accept appointment to Thatta. According to a secret codicil, as soon as Ajit Singh marched a few stages towards Thatta to demonstrate his loyalty, he would be appointed governor of Gujarat. Husain Ali personally issued a rescript appointing Ajit Singh to Gujarat even without obtaining the formal approval of the Emperor.

### FIRST TRIAL OF STRENGTH BETWEEN THE SAIYIDS AND FARRUKH SIYAR

In the absence of the Mir Bakshi, Abdullah Khan had found it difficult to maintain his position in the face of opposition of the Emperor's favourites, chiefly Mir Jumla and Khan-i-Dauran. Both of these had been close to Farrukh Siyar, and although lacking any capacity or experience of high office, wanted to exercise supreme power by ousting the Saiyids. Like Zulfiqar Khan earlier, the Saiyids wanted to keep all the principal levers of power in their hands, and wanted that "no business should be transacted or mansabs and appointments made without their advice and consultation." (Khafi Khan) The favourite of the Emperor, argued that the wazir and the Mir Bakhshi should recognize the limits of their power, and not act without obtaining the approval and concurrence of the Emperor.

These two contradictory concepts of the nature of the wizarat resulted in a series of crises in which the Saiyids steadily gained till they were powerful enough to displace Farrukh Siyar and to put their own nominee on the throne. All issues became a subject to this struggle which also further aggravated the crisis of the jagirdari system and strained the loyalty of the nobles to the Mughal throne.

The immediate cause of the crisis was the interference of the royal favourites in the wazir's sphere of administration. Farrukh Siyar authorized Mir Jumla to sign all papers on his behalf, declaring that "the word and seal of Mir Jumla are my word and seal." Mir Jumla started entertaining proposals for mansabs and promotions and put the imperial seal without passing them through the office of the diwan-i-wizarat. This was contrary to all rules of procedures, and also meant financial loss to the wazir, depriving him of the perquisites for appointments.

Matters were worsened because Abdullah Khan who was primarily a soldier had left all affairs of state in the hands of his deputy, Ratan Chand. Ratan Chand was not incompetent, but he was haughty and overbearing, and would do nothing without a suitable bribe for himself and his master, Abdullah Khan. Mir Jumla refrained from these practices, and was also prompt in business.

Another factor which was a cause of complaint by Farrukh Siyar was Ratan Chand's resort to ijara (revenue farming). Even khalisa lands were farmed out. Whenever an amil was appointed, Ratan Chand would take from him a contract or lease in writing and realize the money from his banker, i.e. one who had stood surety for the contract. According to custom and tradition, ijara was considered ruinous and Farrukh Siyar had forbidden it. However, ijara, which had become general under Jahandar Shah, was in part a response to the growing breakdown in administration. The zamindars were withholding revenue, and there was a famine at the beginning of Farrukh Siyar's reign which afflicted the area around Delhi. In the words of a contemporary, "the scarcity of food-grains reached a limit that nobody had ever seen or heard in the past."

Mir Jumla took advantage of these factors to impress upon Farrukh Siyar that the Saiyids were unfit for high office, and that there would be no peace and prosperity in the empire as long as they had a hand in the administration. He also accused them of being haughty and ease-loving and of lowering the Emperor's prestige by disregarding his authority.

Hoping to overawe the Saiyids and make them retire from their offices voluntarily, Farrukh Siyar began to augment the military power of his favourites, Mir Jumla and Khan-i-Dauran. A number of their relatives were also pushed forward till each of them had over 10,000 men at their command.



This was the situation which Husain Ali found on his return from Marwar. After due deliberations, the Saiyids came to the conclusion that they would not be able to maintain their position at the court unless they had the control and resources of one of the more important subahs. Hence, Husain Ali demanded and secured for himself the post of Viceroy of the Deccan in place of Nizam-ul-Mulk. His intention was to nominate a deputy like Zulfiqar Khan had done earlier and to remain at the court himself. Farrukh Siyar and his favourites rightly objected that the combination of three such powerful posts - the wazir, mir bakhshi, and viceroy of the Deccan in the hands of one family would be dangerous and undesirable. Hence, Farrukh Siyar asked Husain Ali to proceed to the Deccan personally. He also delayed issuing a farman appointing Ajit Singh as governor of Gujarat.

A crisis now developed. Fearing an attack by the Emperor's supporters, the Saiyids retired to their houses, and military preparations began on both sides. But the royal favourites, Mir Jumla and Khan-i-Dauran, shrank from measuring sword with the Saiyids because, in the words of a contemporary, they "were only carpet knights, not true fighters". An attempt was made to induce M. Amin Khan, the second bakhshi and cousin of Nizam-ul-Mulk, to undertake the task. M. Amin Khan was willing but wanted the wizarat in reward. The Emperor and his friends felt that it would be still more difficult to get rid of him afterwards. Finally, a compromise was arrived at with the intervention of the Emperor's mother. It was agreed that Husain Ali would proceed to the Deccan to take personal charge of it. Mir Jumla who had been appointed governor of Bihar and, perhaps also of Bengal, would also take personal charge of the province. The Saiyids also agreed that one of the Emperor's favourite, Khan-i-Dauran, be made acting Mir Bakshi. Husain Ali left for the Deccan in the middle of May 1714. He carried with him the authority to appoint and dismiss all jagirdars and office holders in the Deccan, as also the right to transfer commandants of forts. These rights had previously been zealously held by the Emperor as his prerogative. The transfer of these rights to the Viceroy of the Deccan must be considered the first step in its detachment from the Empire.

As soon as Husain Ali's back was turned, Farrukh Siyar sent secret instructions to Daud Khan Panni, then governor of Gujarat, transferring him to Burhanpur, and asking him to resist Husain Ali. Daud Khan reached Burhanpur by forced marches, and met Husain Ali on the field of battle. Husain Ali won easily and obtained the secret letters sent to Daud Khan by Farrukh Siyar, thus giving the Saiyids further proof of the duplicity of their master.

### **FINAL CRISIS LEADING TO THE DEPOSITION OF FARRUKH SIYAR**

Thus, the first trial of strength did not settle any issues. If anything, it made the Saiyids conscious of the weakness of their position, and led them to busy themselves in recruiting allies wherever they could. Farrukh Siyar turned to the old nobles, especially to the group consisting of M. Amin Khan, Nizam-ul-Mulk and their associates. He also tried to enlist Ajit Singh, Jai Singh, Maharaja Sangram II to his side. Thus, at the instance of Jai Singh, Banswara, Dungarpur, etc. were once again placed under the overlordship of the Rana. The Rana requested permission from Farrukh Siyar for helping his mother making a pilgrimage to Garh Mukteshwar. In reply, Farrukh Siyar sent a gracious farman, assuring safe conduct to the Maharana's mother. Other concessions were also made to the Rana.

Although Jai Singh had been appointed governor of Malwa at the instance of the Saiyids, he had steadily moved away from them. This was on account of the Saiyid intervention in the Kota-Bundi dispute against Budh Singh, the protege and son-in-law of Jai Singh, and the Saiyid support to Churaman Jat who was trying to carve out a principality on the borders of Amber, areas on which Jai Singh had his own eye. Jai Singh's ambitions had grown after he had gained a significant victory against the Marathas in 1714, driving the Marathas across the Narmada at great loss. Also, as per tradition, he wanted to deal directly with the Emperor rather than the wazir. In the middle of 1716, at the repeated and urgent summons of Farrukh Siyar, Jai Singh appeared at the court. First, Bhim Singh was expelled from Bundi, and Budh Singh was restored to it. Next, Jai Singh was nominated to lead an expedition against the Jats. Abdullah Khan was not even consulted on the subject.

Meanwhile, the internal crisis deepened. Inayatullah Khan Kashmiri, who had worked under Aurangzeb, but had gone to Mecca following the execution of his son, Sadullah Khan at the beginning of Farrukh Siyar's reign, returned. Farrukh Siyar who was now keen to win over the old Alamgiri nobles to his side, appointed Inayatullah as diwan of tan (salaries) and khalisa. For some time, Inayatullah Khan worked closely with the wazir, Abdullah Khan, but soon the two fell apart. At Inayatullah Khan's instance, who produced a letter from the Sharif of Mecca that the levying of jizyah on the non-Muslims was "obligatory", jizyah was reimposed, much to the displeasure of Abdullah Khan.

Inayatullah Khan next tried to tackle the problem of jagirs about which there was a growing dissatisfaction among the khanzads i.e. the scions of the old nobles. He examined the salaries and the yields of the jagirs, and proposed to set aside the mansabs of those who by force and cunning had accumulated mansabs beyond their deserts laying their hands on the most productive jagirs. These were identified as "Hindus and eunuchs and Kashmiris" and men of low ranks, whether of the diwani, or the bakhshi, or the khan samani offices. In consequence, in the words of contemporary historians, Khafi Khan and Mirza Muhammad, "there was a scarcity of jagirs for the others. People belonging to old families had been reduced to the dust."

The problem of shortage of jagirs and the dissatisfaction of the khanazads had become marked during the latter years of Aurangzeb, and had steadily worsened, as we have seen. Hence, party struggle at the court also revolved around the question of the grant of jagirs, specially the productive one. Since Ratan Chand had the support and backing of the subordinate officials of the administration, and of Hindustani as distinct from the Turanis and Iranis, or the old nobles, he opposed these reforms, and at his instance Abdullah Khan refused to implement them.

Meanwhile, after fourteen months of the close investment of the Jat stronghold, Thun, Jai Singh was unable to gain a decisive victory. Abdullah Khan negotiated a settlement with the Jat leader, Churaman, over the head of Jai Singh. The Jat leader agreed to pay 50 lakhs of rupees in cash and goods to the state, besides a private gift of 20 lakhs to the wazir. He also surrendered his strongholds, Thun, Dig etc. In return, his mansab and his domination over many areas in the neighbourhood was tacitly accepted.

The agreement with Churaman was of doubtful benefit to the Saiyids. Churaman was a fair weather friend, as they were to discover later. At Lahore, Churaman had been a partisan of Azim-ush-Shan, but his role was to plunder. At Agra, he was with Jahandar Shah, but was the first to plunder when the tide of battle turned against him. Further, the agreement made Jai Singh feel that he had been cheated of success. This meant a definite rift between him and the Saiyids - something which the Saiyids regretted, and tried to reverse later on but of little avail.

The Saiyids, however, gained a considerable advantage by Husain Ali's agreement with Shahu. After his arrival in the Deccan, Husain Ali, following the policy of Nizam-ul-Mulk, had refused to accept Daud Khan Panni's agreement for payment of chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan to the Marathas in a lump sum. The result was a revival of the war with the Marathas who appeared everywhere and plundered and devastated every place. The Marathas had built small mud-forts (garhis) in each pargana to which they retired when pressed. It was impossible for the imperialists to destroy these garhis. The matters were made still more difficult by the underhand opposition of Farrukh Siyar, who wrote letters to Shahu and to zamindars and diwans in the Karnataka to oppose Husain Ali. As a result Husain Ali's authority in Bijapur, Haiderabad, and the Karnataka had been "reduced almost to a cypher". (Khafi Khan).

It was in these circumstances that in the middle of 1717, Husain Ali opened negotiations with Shahu through Shankarji Malhar, who had worked under Shivaji and was a sachiv (minister) under Raja Ram and after settling down at Banaras, and had joined Husain Ali at Delhi. After protracted negotiations, in February 1718, an agreement was reached whereby Shahu was given the right to collect chauth and sardeshmukhi in the Deccan through his own agents. He was also given the swarajya of Shivaji, and recent

Maratha conquest in Berar, Gondwana and the Karnataka were also confirmed to him. In return, Shahu agreed to pay a peshkash of rupees ten lakhs, to maintain a body of 15,000 horse to be displaced at the disposal of the Viceroy Deccan and to make the country populous and to punish malfactors. In return for the grant of sardeshmukhi, Shahu agreed to pay over one crore rupees as customary fees.

Husain Ali granted sanads to Shahu in conformity with this agreement even without the approval of the Emperor. When approached Farrukh Siyar rejected the agreement, arguing that "it was not proper for the vile enemy (i.e. the Marathas) to be over-bearing partners in matters of revenue and government." The objection was valid, but Farrukh Siyar had brought the troubles on his head by his intrigues against his erstwhile wazir and Mir Bakhshi. In desperation, to stem a likely move of Husain Ali against him, Farrukh Siyar took a number of steps. M. Amin Khan, cousin of Nizam-ul-Mulk and a leader of the Turanis, was appointed to Malwa to help Jai Singh and check the "oppressors", in reality to bar the path of Husain Ali to Delhi.

Contrary to the agreement with Husain Ali, a number of appointments were made to Burhanpur to weaken Husain Ali's hold over the area. Finally, he summoned to court Ajit Singh, Nizam-ul-Mulk, and Sarbuland Khan who was the Emperor's maternal grand-uncle and was governor of Bihar and a noted warrior. These old nobles were asked to come "with a large following". It is estimated that the combined strength of the various Rajas and nobles, and the personel following (walashahis) of the Emperor came to 70 - 80,000 horse. Abdullah Khan had been continually adding to the soldiers at his disposal, every time the Emperor went out on a hunt, and it was rumoured that it would be used as an occasion to attack Abdullah Khan. However, his strength including Barahas and non-Barahas, is estimated to have been between fifteen and thirty thousand men. Thus, Farrukh Siyar could have ousted the wazir if he could have held this coalition together. But this did not happen because of the pusillanimity and short-sightedness of Farrukh Siyar, and his fear that if he ousted the Saiyids with the help of these powerful nobles, it would be even more difficult to get rid of them afterwards. Hence, Farrukh Siyar chose for the post of wazir a newly risen favourite, Muhammad Murad Kashmiri, who was rapidly raised to the rank of 7000/7000 and the best jagirs in the provinces of Gujarat, Delhi and Agra were allotted to him. By this time, his old favourites Mir Jumla and Khan-i-Dauran had been discarded. Mir Jumla had totally failed in Bihar, and come to Delhi without royal permission after having failed to pay his soldiers and controlling the turbulent zamindars of the province. His mansab and jagirs had been resumed by Farrukh Siyar and restored only at the intervention of Abdullah Khan. He was made sadr of Lahore with Abdullah Khan backing. Khan-i-Dauran, it was suggested, was in secret league with the Saiyids and revealed to them all the secret plots of the Emperor against them.

Muhammad Murad had a bad reputation for his association with young boys. The old nobles were intensely jealous of his rise, and withdrew their support to Farrukh Siyar. Meanwhile, Abdullah Khan won over Nizam-ul-Mulk and Sarbuland Khan by obtaining high offices for them. Even Ajit Singh was alienated because Farrukh Siyar removed him from Gujarat on a charge of oppression. Hence, on arrival at court, Ajit Singh sided with the wazir.

Thus when Husain Ali left Aurangabad for Delhi towards the end of 1718 accompanied by 10,000 Maratha troops under the command of the Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath, Farrukh Siyar was completely isolated, except for the support of Jai Singh. Husain Ali's excuse for coming to Delhi was that he had obtained a (fictitious) son of Prince Akbar from Shahu and wanted to Hand him over to Farrukh Siyar.

We need not go into the detailed events which led to the deposition of Farrukh Siyar in February 1719, and his assassination in captivity a few months later. In the deposition, Husain Ali was supported by M. Amin Khan and Ajit Singh. Even Khan-i-Dauran favoured it. On the other hand, Abdullah Khan was of the opinion that since the fort was completely under the control of the Saiyids' men, and all posts close to the Emperor were held by their nominees, or were to be handed over to them soon, there would be no



harm in keeping Farrukh Siyar on the throne. However, public opinion in the city was restive, and in the process 2,000 Marathas troopers had been killed, and the rest compelled to leave town. Jai Singh was loitering 20 kos from Delhi with 20,000 horsemen, and if some of the nobles in the city joined, it would be hard to control the situation. Meanwhile, Farrukh Siyar delayed handing over to the nominees of the Saiyids all the posts demanded by them.

Whatever the problems, the deposition and subsequent assassination of Farrukh Siyar was both a mistake and a crime from which the Saiyids could never recover. From being looked upon as brave individuals, who were fighting against an ungrateful master for the preservation of their lives and honour, after the deposition they began to be looked upon as tyrants and traitors to the salt. It also cleared the way for the "Chin" group of Turani nobles to stand forth as champions of the Timurid monarchy and the faith which was in danger of being subverted.

### THE SAIYID 'NEW' WIZARAT

After deposing Farrukh Siyar, the Saiyids set up a new monarch, the 20 year old Rafi-ud-Darjat. However, he was consumptive and died after four months. He was succeeded by his brother, Rafi-ud-Daulah, who also succumbed to the same disease in three months time. This showed the inability of the Saiyids to persuade most of the royal princes to accept their offer of kingship. During the seven months rule of these two princes, the Saiyids reserved for their nominees all the posts, such as Daroghas of the Diwan-i-Khas or the Ghusalkhana, or the Superintendent of the haram. Even the eunuchs and personal attendants of the rulers were hand-picked by the Saiyids. Saiyid Himmat Khan Baraha was appointed the guardian of the Emperor, and it was said that without his orders, the Emperor could not even be served with food! Thus, the Emperor lost all personal liberty. After the accession of Muhammad Shah, the grandson of Bahadur Shah, the hereditary door-keepers and attendants etc. were allowed to return to their former posts. But in all matters of state the Emperor continued to be powerless.

Apart from the posts which gave access to the Emperor, the Saiyids made as few changes as possible. Thus, in the provinces most of the previous governors and office-holders were continued. At the court, except for some of the disreputed favourites of Farrukh Siyar, such as Muhammad Murad Kashmiri and a few others, most of the others, including Khan-i-Dauran and Mir Jumla, were not deprived of their mansabs and jagirs and given employment. In general, the Saiyids made no effort to monopolize high offices of state. Thus, M. Amin Khan continued to be the second bakhshi; another Turani Roshanuddaulah Zafar Khan was made third bakhshi, and even Inayatullah Khan whose proposed reforms had angered Abdullah Khan was continued as Khan-i-Saman, and as the absentee governor of Kashmir. Apart from the posts of wazir, Mir Bakhshi and Viceroyalty of the Deccan which the Saiyids considered theirs by right, the only new posts given to the Barahas, or dependents of the Saiyids were the governorships of Agra and Allahabad, and the faujdari of Moradabad - all areas of strategic importance.

Despite their conciliatory policies, two centres of resistance to the Saiyids developed at Agra and Allahabad. At Agra, an adventurer named Mitr Sen, and some of his associates, proclaimed a rebel prince, Neku Siyar, as Emperor. The Allahabad rebellion was led by Chhabela Ram, a protege of Farrukh Siyar. The Saiyids were afraid that Neku Siyar might become a rallying point for all their opponents. Rumors were rife that Nizam-ul-Mulk who had been appointed governor of Malwa, Chhabela Ram and Jai Singh were coming to the aid of Neku Siyar. However, he did not receive any support from the old nobles, and the Saiyids were able to crush his rebellion soon. The rebellion at Allahabad proved to be more protracted. Ultimately, at the threat of Husain Ali's personal intervention, Chhabela Ram's nephew, Girdhar Bahadur, agreed to vacate the fort in return of the grant of governorship of Awadh and all the jagirs including some of the important faujdaris, and rupees thirty lakhs in cash. These terms, and the fact that it took fourteen months to deal with these two rebellions, showed the limitations of the power and support of the Saiyids: their subordinates were not experienced and powerful enough, and the Saiyids were themselves loth to leave the capital.

The Saiyids continued their earlier policy of consolidating their alliance with the Rajputs and the Marathas, and to appease Hindu opinion as far as possible. Immediately after the deposition of Farrukh Siyar, jizyah was abolished once again, credit for it being given to Ajit Singh. As a further gesture of goodwill, Ajit Singh's daughter who had been converted to Islam before being married to Farrukh Siyar, was allowed to renounce her new faith and return to her home, taking all her wealth and property with her. The Saiyids ignored the opposition to this step by the qazis who argued that renunciation of Islam was illegal.

Through Ajit Singh, the Saiyids also tried to win over Jai Singh and Maharana Sangram Singh II. With the help and backing of the Rana, and a number of disaffected nobles who had resorted to Amber, Jai Singh had moved to Toda Bhim, 80 kos from Agra, watching the situation there. After the fall of Agra, and under the threat of an invasion of his territory, Jai Singh withdrew from Toda Bhim. In an effort to appease Jai Singh, he was granted the important faujdari of Surat in Gujarat and granted a large sum of money. Ajit Singh was granted the subah of Ajmer along with Gujarat. The two Rajput rajas, who had the support of the Rana of Mewar, formed a powerful group which could have played a decisive role. The returning confidence of the Hindus is reflected in Khafi Khan's "complaint" that "from the environs of the capital to the banks of the Narabada, the infidels were engaged in repairing temples and attempting to forbid cow-slaughter."

The pact with the Marathas was strengthened by the formal Imperial grant of chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan which Balaji Vishwanath took, along with some members of Shahu's family who had been in captivity. Although no Maratha troops remained in the North, Alam Ali, Husain Ali's deputy in the Deccan, was instructed to follow the advice of Shankarji Malhar in all matters as the latter had close connections with Shahu.

Churaman Jat was also appeased by being given charge of the royal highway between Delhi and Gwalior, and other concessions. In return, Churaman sided with the Saiyids in the siege of Agra.

Despite the sullenness of a large section of the nobles, and the underhand opposition of the Turanis, the Saiyids might have been able to consolidate their position given time, and if differences about power, policies and self had not risen between the two brothers. Thus, differences arose between the brothers regarding the spoils from the fort at Delhi after the deposition of Farrukh Siyar which had been seized by Abdullah Khan, and the bulk of the treasures at Agra estimated to be two to three crores had been seized by Husain Ali after the fall of Farrukh Siyar. Ratan Chand managed to evolve a compromise by pointing to the "Turani" danger though neither side was satisfied. There was also a subtle struggle for power between the brothers. Husain Ali was much more energetic than Abdullah Khan, and he rapidly out-classed the latter in the exercise of real power. But Husain Ali was of a hot and hasty temperament and failed to weigh the situation carefully before coming to a decision. As Khafi Khan says "He (Husain Ali) deemed himself superior in military and government matters to his brother, though he was forgetful of the real matter, and unacquainted with stratagem."

Aware of the importance of the old nobles, especially of Nizam-ul-Mulk and the Chin group, Abdullah Khan had paid special attention to this group. He used to say, "We are three brothers of whom Nizam-ul-Mulk is the eldest, and Husain Ali the youngest." In a letter to Nizam-ul-Mulk, Abdullah Khan explained his policy in the following words:

"The high and mighty task of administering Hindustan is not one that can be accomplished singlehanded, without the help of prominent nobles and officers of state. Under the circumstances, is it better that I should bring forward new (untried) men and become dependent on them, or that I should continue to take the help of one like you who has ever been a friend?" However, careful not to allow Nizam-ul-Mulk to become too powerful, Abdullah Khan wanted to appoint him as governor of Bihar which had notoriously turbulent zamindars, and yielded little money. But Husain Ali, confident of the position of his deputy, S. Alam Ali in the Deccan and his own position in the North, insisted on sending Nizam-ul-Mulk to Malwa.

Nizam accepted on the promise that it would not be transferred from him soon. He also refused to leave his son behind at the court as his wakil, despite repeated requests from the Saiyid. He was accompanied to Malwa by more than one thousand mansabdars who also took their families with them.

Thus, a show-down between the 'Chin' group led by Nizam-ul-Mulk, and the Saiyids appeared inescapable. Husain Ali precipitated matters by transferring Nizam from Malwa, offering him Agra, Allahabad, Burhanpur or Multan, whichever he chose. The Saiyids had been receiving news that Nizam-ul-Mulk had been collecting men and materials of war in excess of his requirements as the governor, and that he had his eyes on the Deccan. Nizam justified these by pointing to the depredations of the Marathas who were harrying the province with 50,000 horses. Dissatisfied, Husain Ali had instructed his Bakhshi, S. Dilawar Ali, who had been deputed with a strong force to deal with a dispute in Kotah-Bundi to keep a watch on the Malwa border. After issuing orders for the transfer of Nizam from Malwa, Dilawar Ali was asked to be alert, and letters were sent to S. Alam Ali to be vigilant in the Deccan. Having taken these precautions, the Saiyids sent a mace-bearer to escort Nizam-ul-Mulk to the court.

There is little doubt that the Saiyids over-estimated their power in throwing the gauntlet to Nizam-ul-Mulk. The latter had been warned by his cousin, M. Amin, that the Saiyids intended to move against him after the conclusion of Girdhar Bahadur's rebellion at Allahabad. He had also received messages from the Emperor and from the Queen Mother asking him to liberate them from the grip of the Saiyids. Hence, Nizam-ul-Mulk was fully prepared. He disregarded the orders for recall to the Court, and crossed the Narmada into the Deccan where he was immediately joined by the governors of Khandesh and Berar. Many other nobles including many of those considered close to the Saiyids also threw in their lot with Nizam-ul-Mulk who sedulously preached that whatever he was doing was for the prestige of the royal house, the Saiyids having decided to subvert the Timurid dynasty; that the Saiyids were determined to ruin and disgrace all Irani and Turani families beginning with his destruction, and that the Saiyids were allied with the Hindus and were pursuing policies which were anti-Islamic and detrimental to the Empire.

Thus, defence of king, race, religion and empire were the slogans raised by Nizam-ul-Mulk which the Saiyids found difficult to counter. Last minute efforts by Abdullah Khan to conciliate Nizam by granting him the Viceroyalty of the Deccan were not productive and not acceptable to Husain Ali. Even more disastrous was the decision of the Saiyids to divide their forces, with Husain Ali leading an army to the Deccan, taking the Emperor with him. Earlier, Nizam had defeated Alam Ali who had been joined by a force of 15 - 16,000 Marathas led by Balaji Vishwanath. Nizam had then turned north, and defeated Dilawar Ali Khan. Before Husain Ali could confront Nizam-ul-Mulk, he was assassinated in a conspiracy hatched by Haidar Quli Khan, the Mir Atish, helped by M. Amin Khan and others. Efforts of Abdullah Khan to raise a new puppet, and gather a new army proved futile. He was defeated near Delhi by M. Amin Khan and Emperor Muhammad Shah in November, 1720.

Thus ended the "new" wizarat of the Saiyids which lasted less than two years. The effort of the Saiyids, to make the wizarat the hub of affairs, and to tread their way back to the type of liberal, inclusive state associated with Akbar was a significant step. It failed, partly due to the narrow social base of the Barahas, but even more to the deep divisions among the nobility, and the strong desire of the old nobles, the Mughals, who considered themselves the upholders of the dynasty and the empire, not to allow power to pass into the hands of the despised Hindustanis. The growing shortage of productive jagirs, and the growing turbulence of the zamindars heightened party strife. The Saiyids also made a number of political mistakes including their internal discord which hastened their downfall.



## THE WIZARAT OF MUHAMMAD AMIN & NIZAM-UL-MULK

After the fall of the Saiyids, M. Amin Khan was made wazir with the title of Itimad-ud-Daulah, and a mansab of 8000-8000 du-aspa, sih-aspa, and the absentee governorship of Multan. His son, Qamaruddin Khan, was appointed second bakhshi with the rank of 7000 and the faujdari of Moradabad which was as large as a subah. He was also made darogha of the Ghusalkhana which regulated access to the Emperor, and darogha of the Ahadis (gentlemen trooper). Khan-i-Dauran was made chief Bakhshi, and Saadat Khan who had taken part in the conspiracy against Husain Ali was rewarded with the governorship of Awadh. Abdus Samad Khan retained Lahore, with the addition of Kashmir in the name of his son. Muhammad Amin continued the Saiyids policy to make the wazir the real hub of affairs, and of trying to win the support of Rajputs, Marathas and the Hindus generally. Thus, Muhammad Amin Khan, showed no inclination to relax the wazir's control over the Emperor. According to a contemporary, Warid, the only share of Muhammad Shah was to sit on the throne and to wear the crown. The Emperor was afraid of the wazir and gave him full authority.

A proposal to revive jizyah was abandoned due to the opposition of Raja Jai Singh and Raja Girdhar Bahadur. The agreement made with the Marathas for the grant of chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan was confirmed by the grant of fresh sanads, something to which Nizam-ul-Mulk had also agreed to in a secret meeting with Peshwa Baji Rao soon after the downfall of the Saiyids. Ajit Singh was removed from Gujarat due to his mal-administration, but the wazir was suspected of wanting his restoration to either Gujarat or Ajmer; However, Muhammad Amin Khan died after a year and three months (Jan. 1721). The way was now open for the assumption of wizarat by Nizam-ul-Mulk. Nizam-ul-Mulk did not show any eagerness to assume the office, and even after the receipt of royal summons went to the Karnataka in order to settle the affairs there. Appearing at Delhi in February 1722, almost a year after the death of Muhammad Amin, Nizam-ul-Mulk found that the administration had deteriorated and made worse due to factional strife at the court. It soon became apparent that Nizam's real interest was to hold on to the Deccan and, if possible, to retain Malwa and to add Gujarat to it. Hence, he had Gujarat transferred to his son, Ghaziuddin Khan, and moved towards Gujarat with a large army to oust the existing incumbent, Haider Quli Khan. On the way, he met Baji Rao, a second time near Jhabua in Malwa. Baji Rao had invaded Malwa with a large force. In the Deccan, Mubariz Khan, Nizam-ul-Mulk's deputy, had repudiated the treaty for the grant of chauth and sardeshmukhi with the Marathas. The secret accord between Nizamul-Mulk and Baji Rao shows that Nizam-ul-Mulk's tirade against the Marathas and the Rajputs was subject to modification when it suited his interests.

After ousting Haider Quli from Gujarat, Nizam returned Delhi. Nizam now put forward a scheme of reforms of the administration. Its main emphasis was that only fit nobles and soldiers should be employed, as in the time of Aurangzeb; that the jagirs should be redistributed and khalisa lands given in jagir should be resumed. He also wanted a ban on farming of crown-lands, and denounced bribe taking. He wanted the restoration of jizyah as in the time of Aurangzeb.

Nizam-ul-Mulk's hope of rallying the old nobles to his side in this manner was not very successful. The new nobles, including the Hindustanis who were entrenched in the administration, were strongly opposed to any review of the jagir holdings. They seized upon Nizam's proposal for the revival of jizyah, denouncing it as "inopportune". Even Abdus Samad Khan, governor of Lahore, who was related to Nizam, opposed the revival of jizyah.

It is not clear how sincere Nizam-ul-Mulk was for implementing his scheme of reforms. Towards the end of 1723, he left for his jagir in Moradabad for "a change of air", but moved towards Malwa on hearing of renewed Maratha incursions into that rich and strategically placed province.

On his way to Malwa, Nizam-ul-Mulk heard the news that he had been superseded in the Viceroyalty of the Deccan by his deputy, Mubariz Khan. Efforts were also made by the Emperor to enlist Shahu, and some of the leading Maratha sardars against Nizam.

In October, 1724, in a battle at Shakar Khera, Nizam-ul-Mulk defeated Mubariz Khan with the aid of Maratha troops led by Baji Rao, From this battle may be dated the de facto independence of Haiderabad. The break up of the Mughal empire had begun. The defenders of the dynasty and of the empire had turned around fully and became the chief instruments of their destruction.

## RISE OF REGIONAL STATES AND FOREIGN INVASIONS OF INDIA

The decade following the departure of Nizam-ul-Mulk from the court and his establishment as a semi-independent ruler in the Deccan, saw a rapid shrinkage of the area under the direct control of the Mughal Emperor. In Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan had been effectively in charge since 1703. Efforts to remove him from Bengal had failed, and from 1710 he was in effective charge of Bengal, and Orissa. Bihar was added to his charge later on. His son-in-law, Shujaat Khan, succeeded him in 1727. In Awadh, Saadat Khan was appointed governor in 1723, and proclaimed his de facto independence when in 1726 he refused to be transferred to Malwa. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, Safdar Jung, in 1739. In Punjab, Abdus Samad Khan got the governorship in 1713 and was succeeded by his son, Zakariya Khan.

The dismemberment of the Empire by the emergence of these states did not adversely affect the political and economic development of the areas because in each case the governors who took charge were exceptionally able persons who were able to govern their domains effectively on the whole. They also maintained the outward sanctity of the Imperial crown by paying formal allegiance to the Emperor, and securing his formal approval to the succession by gifts etc. However, the rise of the Ruhelas in the north west of Awadh, and of the continued though covert opposition of the Jats in the Agra - Mathura region, and of the Sikhs in the Punjab created difficulties and led to the rise of new independent states or sub-states.

The biggest danger to all these states, however, was the growing power and sweep of the Marathas. The foreign danger also appeared in 1739 in the shape of Nadir Shah. Although Ahmad Shah Abdali was defeated in 1748, it was not long before Punjab and areas upto Agra and beyond became subject to recurrent foreign invasions, while the English established themselves in Bengal.

During this period, the Mughal court remained supine, and subject to factionalism. Although Muhammad Shah had been freed from the thralldom of the wazir with the departure of Nizam-ul-Mulk from the Court, he showed little capacity for governance and administration, though all the outer routine of court life set up by Akbar and the established forms of government were continued. Muhammad Shah never led a military campaign during his twenty-nine years of reign, even his excursions being confined to visiting the gardens in the neighbourhood, and occasionally to see the annual festivals of Garh Mukteshwar. He was, however, liberal in his religious views, and freely participated in the festivals of Holi, Dasher, etc.

Unfortunately, he chose as his main advisors not men who were energetic and capable commanders, but carpet knights who were adept in witty conversation and were soft in their behaviour. Thus, he chose as wazir Qamaruddin Khan who was slothful and a drunkard, and as Mir Bakhshi Khan-i-Dauran, a Hindustani who had never led a campaign. As a contemporary, Warid, says, "... Emperor and wazir alike lived in total forgetfulness of the business of the administration, the collection of the revenue, and the needs of the army." The noted historian Jadunath Sarkar says: "With a foolish, idle and fickle master on the throne, the nobles began to give free play to the worst forms of selfishness." Bribery became rampant, and jagirs were freely sold. The leading role in this was played by Kukijiu, daughter of a geomancer who had predicted the succession of Muhammad Shah to the throne, and a holy man, Abdul Ghafur who claimed magical powers. These were joined by Roshanuddaulah Zafar Khan Panipati, the third bakhshi. This group enriched itself by means of presents made at the time of appointment or grant of jagirs, and shared their proceeds with the Emperor. Although this gang fell from power in 1732-33, administration did not improve, the smaller mansabdars suffering the most. They found it almost impossible to collect their dues from their jagirs on account of the growing lawlessness. The growing distancing of the nobles from the Emperor, and lack of money to pay the army left the Empire a hollow trunk.



It was in this situation that a new danger arose in the north-west in the shape of Nadir Shah. The Safavid empire had entered into a state of decline from the second half of the seventeenth century. In 1709, the Ghilzai Chief, Mir Waiz, rose against the Persians and seized Qandahar fort. In 1722, his son deposed the Safavid monarch, and had himself crowned. Iran now came under the domination of the Afghans, while the Ottoman Turks and Russia seized the opportunity to capture the western and northern parts of Iran.

Nadir Quli Beg, later Nadir Shah, rose to power by leading a Persian war of national resistance against the Afghans. By 1730, Nadir had expelled the Ghilzais from the heart of Persia, and also captured Herat from the Abdalis. He then turned against the Ottomans. In a series of campaigns he ousted the them from the western part of Iran, but failed to recapture Baghdad. Exhaustion forced the two sides to conclude a truce in 1736. Having gained his reputation as an intrepid commander, and gathering a band of faithful followers, Nadir had no difficulty in ousting the Safavid ruler who was a minor, and ascending the throne in 1737.

The Delhi court watched these developments in a mood of benign neglect. For Nadir Shah the invasion of India was a logical step after the expulsion of the Ghilzais and Abdalis from Persia, and the stalemate in the war with the Ottoman Turks. It was only from India that he could replenish his treasury for a renewal of the war against the Ottomans. The weakness of the Delhi government was also no secret after the set backs they had suffered in Malwa and Gujarat at the hands of the Marathas, and the appearance of a Maratha army outside Delhi in 1737.

The Mughals had tried to safeguard India from an invasion from the north-west by using diplomatic means to see that a combination of powers hostile to India did not arise in West Asia, by maintaining a strong administration at Kabul and if possible, keeping control of Qandahar. Kabul and Qandahar were considered the two gateways to India. The Mughals also sought to control the Afghan tribesmen by giving economic subsidies to the tribesmen and by employing them in their armies. When Nizam-ul-Mulk was at Delhi in 1724, he vaguely talked of leading a campaign to Isfahan to restore the Safavids with whom the Mughals had an old tradition of friendship despite clash over the control of Qandahar. But the Court had neither the power nor the desire to do so. Instead, it sought to establish friendly relations with the Ghilzai chief, Mahmud, by an exchange of letters. As early as 1730, Nadir Shah had sent an embassy to Muhammad Shah, announcing his intention to march on Qandahar. Recalling old ties of friendship between the two countries, and their common interest in dealing with the Afghans, he asked the Emperor to close the frontier to all Afghan refugees once the operations had begun. Muhammad Shah replied that the subahdars of Kabul and Sindh were being instructed to comply, and that the Kabul army would be reinforced for the purpose. However, instead of attacking Qandahar, Nadir Shah turned his attention to the tussle with Turkey, and the Mughal court became engrossed with the threat posed by the Marathas in Malwa and Gujarat, and forgot about the north-west.

From the time of Aurangzeb, a sum of rupees twelve lakhs used to be sent to the Governor of Kabul for disbursement amongst the Afghan tribesmen and for the defence of the hill forts. Kabul had an able governor in the person of Nasir Khan, but Roshanuddaulah Zafar Khan, the third bakhshi who was in charge of making the payment, kept half of the subvention. When Zafar Khan fell from power in 1732-33, he was ordered to pay back to the treasury two crores of rupees he had defalcated. The charge of paying the subsidy was entrusted to Khan-i-Dauran, the Mir Bakhshi. Khan-i-Dauran was not corrupt but he distrusted Nasir Khan who was an Irani and had been appointed through Zafar Khan. Although the danger of an Iranian invasion of Kabul and India was discussed widely, and was even a subject of bazar gossip, Khan-i-Dauran pooh poohed the danger, and even charged Nasir Khan of being in league with Nadir Shah. In consequence, the subsidy was either paid irregularly, or paid only in part. In desperation, Nasir Khan wrote that out of the five years' salary due to the soldiers, at least one year's salary should be paid to him so that he could satisfy the creditors and have a little left over at his disposal. Khan-i-Dauran termed it as an excuse to extract large sums of money, and said, "Our houses are built on the plains, and we do not fear anything what we see with our eyes. Your house stands on the Bhochla hill and you have probably sighted Mongol and Qizalbash armies from the roof of your house."



It would appear that Nadir Shah was using the flight of Afghans to Afghanistan as an excuse for interference there. In 1732, he sent a second embassy making the same charge. The Delhi court excused itself on the ground of preoccupation with the "Deccan infidels", and repeated the earlier assurances. In 1737, Nadir Shah sent a third envoy announcing his coronation, and his preparations for the conquest of Qandahar. He repeated earlier demands for preventing the Afghans from entering into Kabul and Peshwar. The envoy was asked to return in forty days. Though an answer was given by the Court circles, the envoy tarried at Delhi for a year because he liked the comforts of the life there, and because of his infatuation for a courtesan. Again, the demands of Nadir Shah were merely a pretext for invading India.

After the fall of Qandahar in early 1738, Nadir Shah marched on Kabul. No attempt had been made by the Mughal Court to strengthen the position of the governor. Even after the capture of Kabul, Nadir Shah wrote to Muhammad Shah disavowing any intention against Indian territory. The Governor of Kabul, Nasir Khan, had strongly fortified the Khyber Pass to block Nadir Shah's entry into the Punjab. Nadir outflanked and defeated him, and besieged Lahore. The governor of Lahore, Zakariya Khan, sent urgent appeals to Delhi for reinforcements but none arrived, and after a valiant resistance, Zakariya Khan was forced to lay down arms. The way to Delhi was now open. We need hardly dwell on the utter imbecility of the Court in dealing with the impending invasion. It could not even decide who should lead the army - a prince of blood, or Nizam-ul-Mulk who had reached Delhi a little earlier, or the wazir, or the Mir Bakhshi or the Emperor himself. It was popularly believed that Nadir Shah was invited to India by Nizam-ul-Mulk and Saadat Khan, the governor of Awadh, to stem the growing Maratha danger. We have no documentary proof to support this charge. Nor did Nadir Shah need any such invitation.

The Mughal defeat at Karnal, the death of Mir Bakhshi, Khan-i-Dauran, while fighting to aid Saadat Khan, the capture of both Nizam-ul-Mulk and Saadat Khan, the surrender of the Mughal Emperor, the execution and atrocities perpetrated by Nadir Shah at Delhi which are still etched in public memory, need not detain us. However, the consequences of Nadir Shah's invasion need to be assessed. Nadir Shah's invasion, and the loss of Kabul and of areas west of the Indus opened the doors of India to recurrent foreign invasions from the north-west. The province of Thatta and the forts and fortresses belonging to it were also annexed by Nadir Shah. The defeat of the Mughal Emperor publicized still further the declining power of the Mughals. This was an encouragement to all types of local rajas and zamindars and others to assert themselves. However, the impact of the wealth and treasures carried away by Nadir Shah - estimated to be seventy crores of rupees including the peacock throne and the legendary kohinoor, has generally been over estimated. The Indian economy was still strong and vibrant, and the loss was rapidly made up. Till 1772, Delhi was a flourishing city, and the centre of trade and industry and finance.

An indirect result of Nadir Shah's invasion was that the old factions at the court disappeared, with the death of Khan-i-Dauran and Saadat Khan, and the departure of Nizam-ul-Mulk for the Deccan. Even the wazir, Qamaruddin Khan, was discredited. This was a wonderful opportunity for Muhammad Shah to select a set of new, able advisors so that he could consolidate what has been called "the state of Delhi", i.e. the area extending in an arc roughly from Saharanpur to Nagor in the west, Farrukhabad in the east, and from the line of the Ganges to the south of the Chambal. As it was the old factions were replaced by new factions, and there was a complete neglect of administration so that in the words of a contemporary, Ashub, "every zamindar became a Raja, and every Raja a Maharaja." However, even in this diminished state, the Mughal armies were able to meet and inflict a defeat on the Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali, who had succeeded as the Afghan king after the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747. Ahmad Shah advanced on India to loot it to pay his Afghan followers. The Delhi Court awoke to its danger only after the fall of Lahore. In the battle at Manupur (1748) the Mughals gained a victory due to the intrepid efforts of Muin-ul-Mulk, the son of Qamaruddin Khan, and of Safdar Jung, the son-in-law and successor of Saadat Khan. This shows that character and will to fight was not lacking among the nobles and the soldiery. What was lacking was organisation and leadership which implied selecting the right men for the right jobs. While facing the danger from the north-west, the court and the rising independent states had to face another danger, the Maratha attempt to establish a Maratha domination in the name of the Peshwa.

## UNIT-II

# THE MARATHA BID FOR SUPREMACY

### CLASSIFICATION OF THE MARATHA PERIOD

The development of the Maratha movement, beginning with Shahji's establishment of a de facto independent kingdom in the Karnataka, and Shivaji's establishment of a swarajya in defiance of both Bijapur and the mighty Mughal Empire leading up to the conquest of Delhi by the agents of the Peshwa in 1759 and the bid for the establishment of an all-India empire is one of the most remarkable as well as puzzling phenomenon in medieval Indian history.

The development of the Maratha movement can be divided into three phases. The first phase was struggle for the establishment and defence of Shivaji's swarajya, and recognition of Maratha claim for the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan. This phase ended with Balaji Vishwanath's journey to Delhi in 1719, and the issue of the formal rescripts by the Mughal Emperor for the grant of swarajya, and chauth and sardeshmukhi in the Deccan to Shahu. The second phase began with Baji Rao's accession to the post of Peshwa in 1720, and the Maratha bid for the conquest of Malwa and Gujarat. This phase ended in 1741 with the virtual transfer of these two provinces to the Marathas. The third phase, beginning in 1741 saw the Maratha bid for the domination of Rajasthan, parts of doab, and Punjab upto Attack. It climaxed in the third battle of Panipat in 1761. Although our study concludes with the death of Muhammad Shah in 1748, the trend of politics between 1741 and 1761 have a vital bearing on developments in the earlier period.

### THE MARATHAS AND THEIR POLICY OF EXPANSION

The Maratha movement was a complex movement, combining an earlier movement for socio-religious reform with the movement for regional independence led by the Maratha sardars. There were contradictions between the political, socio-religious, and the economic aspects of the movement, these contradictions being rooted ultimately in the interests of different social groups. The Maratha sardars, who were the dominant element in Maratha society, had little interest in socio-religious reform, or in securing the welfare of the peasantry unless their own interests were involved. After the death of Shivaji, the peasantry was neglected, and the links between the political and the socio-religious reform movement were weakened. The Mughal assault shattered the state structure built by Shivaji, and enabled the various Maratha sardars to engage themselves in a kind of a guerilla warfare often acting on their own behalf. Recent studies show that these sardars were generally not drawn from the powerful desh mukhi families of Maharashtra, but were often men of humble origin who forged ahead on the basis of their own ability in the expanded type of warfare, and their ability to attract a following. This openness of Maratha society was in sharp contrast to the hierarchical kin-based society of Rajasthan, and a hierarchical set up under the Mughals.

It was hardly likely that these powerful sardars would subordinate themselves to Shahu after his return from Mughal captivity following the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. In fact, the Maratha sardars played between Shahu and his rival, Tara Bai, for preserving their powers and status. A seal was set on this process by Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath who made a complex division of the revenues between Shahu and his sardars in 1719. Broadly speaking, his system implied placing on the Maratha sardars the entire responsibility for the collection of chauth and sardeshmukhi. Out of these collections, a fixed share was to be paid to the Raja - sardeshmukhi plus 34% of the chauth. The Raja thus became largely dependent on his sardars for his finances. Care was also taken to divide the responsibility for the collection of chauth and sardeshmukhi in such a way that no individual Maratha Sardar could easily dominate a large, compact area. Inside the areas directly controlled by the Peshwa a centralized system of administration under the care and supervision of the Peshwa slowly grew up.

The arrangements made by Balaji Vishwanath have often been criticized, and their defects are obvious enough. While the Maratha sardars were given an added incentive for the plundering and over-running of the Mughal territory, they were made practically independent of the King. The hope of effective political unity among the Marathas centred more and more in the institution of the Peshwaship which became a prime factor in Maratha politics from this time onwards.

The real founder of the institution of the hereditary Peshwa was Baji Rao. In 1720, Shahu appointed Baji Rao to the vacant office of his father, in recognition of the signal services of the latter. There is no clear evidence that at this juncture Shahu regarded the post as hereditary in the family of Balaji Vishwanath though the incumbents of the various leading posts at Shahu's darbar already regarded them as their hereditary preserves. Baji Rao placed the issue beyond doubt by his success in the field of battle, and by steadily arrogating authority to his office till it became the focal point in the Maratha political system.

Baji Rao's accession to Peshwaship saw a change in the character of the Maratha movement from defensive to offensive, from one of struggle for national survival to empire building. This change did not come about over-night. The change in the character of the struggle was becoming apparent during the last years of Aurangzeb's reign when the Marathas began regular raids into Gujarat and Malwa. But the new trend was given the shape of a definite policy only with the coming of Baji Rao to the scene. A prolonged controversy at the Maratha court between Baji Rao and the Pratinidhi Shripat Rao preceded the adoption of the new policy. From the near-contemporary account of Chitnis, a rough idea may be formed of the approach and general line of argument adopted by the two men, though it would be dangerous to accept literally the purple passages and the long speeches put by Chitnis in the mouth of the protagonists. Apparently, the main issues posed were: (i) the direction and timing of Maratha expansionist activities, (ii) the attitude of Nizam-ul-Mulk and the possibility of maintaining friendly relations with him, and (iii) internal administration, and particularly the problem of controlling the Maratha sardars and of putting the finances and the army etc. in order. Lastly there was the question of power - who was to dominate the councils of the King, the Peshwa or the Pratinidhi?

The Pratinidhi was not opposed to an expansionist policy as such, but he wanted that attention should first be given to the over-running of the Konkan where the Sidi of Janjira had recovered many areas, and the completion of the conquest of the Karnataka begun by Shivaji. After consolidating Maratha positions in the Deccan, they could think of conquest further afield in northern India. The Pratinidhi emphasised the necessity of caution, and of not provoking the Mughals too far lest it bring another invasion of the Maratha homeland. Above all, he was keen to be-friend the powerful Nizam-ul-Mulk. Hence, he wanted that large scale expansionist activities should be deferred till the finances had been placed on a sound basis, and a strong army and a stable administrative system created.

On the other hand, Baji Rao dwelt upon the weakness and imbecility of the Mughal Court which was torn by factions and internecine feuds so that Maratha aid was sought, and by its means kings were made and unmade. He dismissed the conquest of the Karnataka as a domestic affair which could be left to the Hazarat (house-hold) troops. Pointing to Shivaji's dream of a Hindu domination, he dwelt upon the (alleged) friendship of the Hindu powers to the Marathas, and discounted the power of the Nizam, offering to hold him in check as well as to effect a northward drive. Finally, he appealed to the predatory instincts of the Maratha sardars by pointing to the riches of northern India, the Deccan having been reduced to ruin by prolonged warfare. He is supposed to have ended with the famous words, "Strike, strike at the trunk and the branches will fall of themselves. Listen but to my counsel and I shall plant the Maratha banner on the walls of Attack"

It does not seem correct to imagine that Baji Rao's policy of northward expansion implied that he was disinterested in the south. As early as the year 1724, when the Emperor had asked for Maratha help against Nizam-ul-Mulk, Baji Rao had demanded the cession of the subah of Hyderabad, and the virtual right to nominate the Mughal viceroy of the Deccan.



Thus, Baji Rao too, was interested in Maratha supremacy over the Deccan. But he did not share the Pratinidhi's facile optimism that the Marathas could over-run the Karnataka without the bitter opposition of the Nizam, or that they could obtain the mastery of the Deccan in the face of a clever and determined foe like Nizam-ul-Mulk with the resources of Maharashtra alone. Hence his fixed determination of over-running and bringing under Maratha domination the rich and flourishing provinces of Malwa and Gujarat. Maratha sardars had raided and regularly exacted contributions from these provinces since the early part of the century. Baji Rao gave to these sporadic raids a systematic form and political content, for he perceived as well the political and strategic value of these provinces. With the Marathas securely established in Malwa and Gujarat, a wedge would be interposed between the Nizam and Delhi. The Marathas would then surround the Nizam's territories on three sides, and could at their convenience, turn against the Nizam without fear of his getting succor from Delhi, or raid the doab and the regions to the east and west of it.

Thus, the establishment of a Maratha domination in Malwa and Gujarat was the first step to the establishment of a large and powerful Maratha empire. It seems historically inaccurate to think that Baji Rao set himself any tasks beyond this. His peroration about the planting of the Maratha flag on the Attack was only a politician's hyperbole. The task was clearly beyond Maratha strength for a long time and Baji Rao was too much of a practical statesman to set before himself any such impossible objectives.

### THE MARATHAS AND NIZAM-UL-MULK

Maratha relations with Nizam-ul-Mulk passed through a number of phases, and had a considerable bearing on Maratha activities in Malwa and Gujarat.

As the Viceroy of the Deccan, from 1715 to 1717, Nizam-ul-Mulk resisted the Maratha claims for the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan, and was almost constantly at war with them - though with little lasting success. After his successful rebellion against the Saiyids, Nizam-ul-Mulk respected the Imperial farman granting the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan to the Marathas, but resisted the stationing of Maratha agents in the neighbourhood of the capital, Aurangabad. Shortly afterwards, on January 4, 1721, he had his first personal meeting with Baji Rao. Though Nizam-ul-Mulk established friendly relations with the young Peshwa, no lasting agreement resulted. The most important point of conflict between the Marathas and Nizam-ul-Mulk was the Karnataka. Nizam-ul-Mulk looked upon the Karnataka as his by right of succession to the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda. However, scant attention was paid to his claims by the Marathas who had been interested in the Karnataka at least since the time of Shahji, and had always regarded it as a kind of a happy hunting ground which they were determined to plunder and lay under contribution.

During Nizam-ul-Mulk's absence at Delhi between 1721 and 1724, his deputy Mubariz-ul-Mulk repudiated the agreement for chauth and sardeshmukhi, leading to a resumption of hostilities with him. Nizam attempted to maintain good relations with the Marathas. He met Baji Rao in Malwa in 1723 on his way to Gujarat. When Mubariz-ul-Mulk attempted to block Nizam from reestablishing himself in the Deccan in 1724, Nizam checkmated the move by arranging another meeting with Baji Rao. A Maratha contingent fought with Nizam at the battle of Shakar Khera in 1725.

In 1728, affairs between Nizam-ul-Mulk and the Marathas moved towards war. Nizam-ul-Mulk was uneasy and apprehensive at the growing sweep of Maratha operations in Malwa and Gujarat. He also resented Maratha encroachments in the Karnataka. Though he joined in the two expeditions to the Karnataka launched by Shahu in 1725-26 and 1726-27, he issued secret orders to his commander to oppose the Marathas. Hostility between the courts of Satara and Kolhapur, and the differences between Baji Rao and the Pratinidhi helped him. While the bulk of the Maratha armies were in the Karnataka, he suspended payment of chauth and sardeshmukhi on the ground of a dispute upon the matter between Shahu and Sambhaji (the Kolhapur Raja), and, posing as the representative of the Mughal Emperor, invited Shahu to submit the dispute to his arbitration. He also sent him messages suggesting the dismissal of Baji Rao. In the meantime, he effected a junction with the armies of the Kolhapur Raja.

Shahu was dumb-founded and was almost persuaded to accept Nizam-ul-Mulk's claim for arbitration. But he quickly recovered, and sent express messages of recall to the Maratha forces, alerting the commanders of the Maratha forts for defence. Hurrying back from the Karnataka, Baji Rao decided on immediate war, rejecting the peace overtures made by Nizam-ul-Mulk who had no real desire for war. After a brief but brilliant campaign, Baji Rao brought Nizam-ul-Mulk to bay at Palkhed. By the treaty of Mungi Shivgaon in 1728, Nizam-ul-Mulk re-affirmed Shahu's claim for the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan, and agreed not to offer any protection to Sambhaji of Kolhapur.

While it is historically wrong to imagine that the treaty established Maratha supremacy in the south, it did place the claims of Shahu to the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan beyond dispute. It also enabled Baji Rao to finally supplant the Pratinidhi at Shahu's court, and to devote his undivided attention to the affairs of Malwa and Gujarat. But it was not long before Nizam-ul-Mulk recommenced his intrigues. The presence of Nizam-ul-Mulk in the Deccan and his constant intrigues made Baji Rao tread warily, and rendered more difficult his task of establishing a Maratha hegemony in Malwa and Gujarat.

### THE MARATHA ADVANCE INTO GUJARAT AND MALWA

Gujarat had been raided by the Marathas intermittently since 1705, and Malwa since 1699; but it was only after 1720 that the Maratha raids in these provinces became a regular and organised feature. Although claims to the chauth of Malwa and Gujarat had been advanced as early as the reign of Shivaji, they do not seem to have been officially put forward in any negotiations with the Mughals till 1717. In that year, in the course of his negotiations with Husain Ali, Shahu asked for the recognition of the Maratha claims over Gujarat and Malwa. At the time of his visit to Delhi in 1719, Balaji Vishwanath was instructed to try and secure the chauth of these two provinces also.

These claims were not conceded, and Maratha raids into the two provinces assumed larger and larger proportions. In 1724, when Nizam-ul-Mulk rebelled, both he and the Emperor bid for Maratha support. The Marathas once again demanded the recognition of their claims over Malwa and Gujarat. But in view of the financial and strategic importance of these provinces, neither Nizam nor the Emperor were prepared to hold out any such promise to the Marathas. However, after his defeat by Baji Rao in 1728, Nizam-ul-Mulk was compelled for some time to disregard the Maratha advance in Malwa and Gujarat, and even to connive at the passage of their armies across his territory. Thus, it was not till 1728 that the Mughals felt the full brunt of the Maratha strength in Malwa and Gujarat.

The Maratha conquest of Gujarat and Malwa proceeded in three stages. The first stage was the establishment of the Maratha claim for chauth and sardeshmukhi. Next, this claim was substituted by a demand for the cession of territory, and the provinces were divided into spheres of influence among the Maratha sardars. The final step was outright annexation.

In Gujarat, the Maratha claim for the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the subah were accepted by the Imperial governor, Sarbuland Khan, in May 1726. The principle of chauth and sardeshmukhi having been once conceded in the Deccan, there could be little moral objection to a similar arrangement for Gujarat, if it was demonstrated that the Marathas were too strong to be successfully resisted by force of arms. But the grant of chauth and sardeshmukhi did not mean the end of the plundering activities of the Maratha sardars. The chief lieutenants of the Dabhade, Pilaji Gaekwar and Kantha Kadam, fell out among themselves over the division of the chauth resulting in constant fights between them. Further, Baji Rao contested the claim of the Pratinidhi who had been assigned the chauth of Gujarat by Shahu. But Baji Rao was too busy in the Deccan and then in Malwa. Meanwhile, the Maratha sardars gradually seized 28 districts of south Gujarat. In 1730, Baji Rao entered Gujarat politics again. Abhai Singh, then governor of Gujarat, signed a pact with Baji Rao in 1731, by which he agreed to pay a fixed sum of 13 lakhs, in lieu of chauth, on condition that Baji Rao expelled Gaekwar and Kantha Kadam from Gujarat.

Thus, by 1732 the Marathas had not only secured recognition of their right of chauth and sardeshmukhi of Gujarat from the governor, but also obtained control of the districts from which they could effectively realise their claims. The defeat of the Dabhade at the hands of Baji Rao at Tilo in 1731 led to an agreement between the two sardars, whereby the greater part of Gujarat went to the Dabhade. But in course of time, Gaekwar ousted his master, Dabhade, from Gujarat.

Despairing of ousting the Marathas by force of arms, in 1733 Abhai Singh invited Pilaji Gaekwar to a conference, and treacherously murdered him. However, this was of little avail to him. The Marathas rallied under Uma Bai Dabhade to avenge the death of one of their prominent sardars. Abhai Singh soon found the situation beyond his control, and withdrew into Marwar. The stage was now set for the next step, annexation of the rest of the province. It only remained to legalise the position by a formal grant from the Emperor. A last effort was made by the Imperialists to recover Gujarat in 1749 by appointing Fakr-ud-Daulah, the brother of Roshan-ud-Daulah, as the governor of Gujarat. But the governor designate did not even leave for his charge. The last traces of Mughal rule in Gujarat disappeared with the fall of Ahmedabad in 1753.

The first concerted move for the enforcement of the claim for chauth from Malwa was made under the leadership of Baji Rao in 1723. In 1725, regular Maratha officials, such as Keso Mahadeo, Keso Vishwanath, Godaji Deokola and Udaiji Pawar were appointed to collect chauth from south Malwa.

In June, 1725, Girdhar Bahadur was appointed the Mughal subahdar of Malwa. He was a man of courage and determination and refused to surrender to the Marathas. He turned out the Maratha kamavishdars, and disregarded the representation of Shahu not to disturb the collection of chauth. Daya Ram, the cousin of Girdhar Bahadur, moved about the province with a well-equipped army, and showed great activity in chasing out the Maratha sardars. Thus began a conflict which ended only with the death of Girdhar Bahadur and Daya Ram at the battle of Amjhara in November, 1728. Baji Rao then swept into Bundelkhand, and besieged M. Khan Bangash at Jaitpur, forcing the latter to relinquish all his conquests in Bundelkhand. In return, the grateful Raja agreed to pay chauth. The Maratha armies camped in Malwa throughout the summer. Three years later, Baji Rao divided the province into spheres of influence among his sardars.

The ever-extending sweep of the Maratha operations, and their growing demands and aspiration caused serious concern to the Delhi Court and to the various semi-independent or autonomous princes and nawabs of north India, such as the Kachhwahas of Amber, the Rathors of Jodhpur, the Bundelas, Saadat Khan of Awadh, etc. None of these had any desire to see the Delhi government regain its power and authority. At the same time, they could not ignore the Maratha threat, or hope to repel it by their individual efforts. The need of the hour was a united front. But their mutual jealousies and suspicions made the forging of such a front a difficult task. Much depended on the attitude of the Emperor and his advisors. If they followed a well-defined and firm policy, many of the princes and the nawabs could perhaps be induced to help. Lack of firmness at the Delhi court led to wavering in their ranks, and they made efforts to make individual deals with the Marathas, thereby accelerating the process of the disintegration of the political and moral authority of the Emperor. Thus, the Maratha advance towards north India accentuated the inner problems of the empire and hastened its internal decay.

In 1728, Jai Singh was appointed governor of Malwa in a bid to sort out the problems with the Marathas. Jai Singh proposed to the Emperor grant of a mansab worth 10 lakh rupees a year in the name of Shahu's adopted son, Khushhal Singh, on condition that he prevents any future disturbances in Malwa, and send a contingent to serve the Mughal mansabdar. "This will give peace to the land and save us from the expense of campaigning (every year)," he said.

The Mughal Emperor agreed, then changed his mind. Jai Singh was removed, and efforts were made to stem the Maratha advance. The climax was reached by the three campaigns undertaken between 1732 and 1735. In 1732-33, the wazir, Qamar-ud-Din Khan, advanced upto Gwalior with 80 - 90,000 men,



and sent bands to chase the Marathas who avoided battle in their usual fashion. After a victory over Pilaji, a lieutenant of Baji Rao, forcing him to retreat across the Narmada, the Imperial forces returned. But no attempt was made to hold the river Narmada against future Maratha incursions. A similar effort was made in 1733-34, with Muzaffar Khan, brother of the Mir Bakhshi, Khan-i-Dauran, advancing upto Sironj.

The climax of the Imperial efforts was reached in 1734-5 when two huge armies under the Wazir Qamar-ud-Din, and the Bakhshi-ul-Mamalik Khan-i-Dauran respectively were got ready in order to drive the Marathas beyond the Narmada. Khan-i-Dauran was joined by all the Rajput Rajas, including Jai Singh, Abhai Singh and Durjan Sal of Kotah. Holkar's raid into Rajputana the previous year had opened their eyes, and in 1734, at the instance of Jai Singh, the Rajas had met in a conference and taken a pledge of united resistance to the Marathas. The wazir commanded a force of 25,000, and Khan-i-Dauran upward of 50,000 men. But this mighty host found itself helpless once more in the face of the Maratha light cavalry. Khan-i-Dauran and Jai Singh were surrounded and cut off at Toda Tank, and Jaipur lay defenceless before the Marathas. At last, at the instance of Jai Singh, Khan-i-Dauran opened negotiations and agreed to give 22 lakhs annually to the Marathas as the chauth of Malwa. Qamar-ud-Din Khan had a light skirmish with Pilaji Jadav near Narwar, but he could not inflict any serious damage on the Maratha forces. These campaigns demonstrated once again the failure of the Mughals to find an answer to the Maratha light cavalry tactics. Their failure opened up Rajasthan, and even the doab and Delhi to Maratha raids.

The failure of three years of campaigning, and the growing sweep of the Maratha incursions, led to the development of a "war" and "peace" party at the Mughal court. The "war" party was led by Saadat Khan of Awadh, backed by the wazir, Qamar-ud-Din Khan. It was supported by Nizam-ul-mulk from the Deccan whose policy was to engage with the Marathas, and also try to limit their power as far as possible. He was aware that a Maratha conquest of Malwa would snap his ties with Delhi, and leave him alone in the Deccan to deal with the Marathas. The "peace" party consisted of the Mir Bakhshi Khani-i-Dauran, Jai Singh and some of the other Rajput rajas. Jai Singh argued that the Marathas could not be effectually subdued by fighting. He said: "By friendly negotiations, I shall induce either the Peshwa or his brother to come and meet Your Majesty. If his demands are accepted, there will be no disturbance in the Imperial domains in the near future. If, on the other hand, Saadat Khan and the Nizam combine, they will set up another monarch".

To check-mate the "War" party, the Peshwa launched a diplomatic offensive in 1734-5. His mother went on a pilgrimage to Northern India. She visited the capitals of all the great Rajas, and the Maratha wakils utilised the opportunity to sound their opinions. Jai Singh was friendly, as also the Bundelas. The Maharaja of Udaipur was hesitant, while the attitude of Abhai Singh was uncertain. Jai Singh invited the Peshwa to Northern India, offering to bear his expenses which came to Rs.5000 a day, and to secure for him the chauth of Malwa, and to introduce him to the Emperor (after assurances of safe custody) for the settlement of all his other claims.

In the peace negotiations of 1735-36 during which hostilities were suspended by both sides, and for which Baji Rao travelled to North India, Baji Rao demanded chauth of Malwa and Bundelkhand, the subahdari of Malwa and Gujarat including control over all the forts; mansabs and jagirs for himself and his chiefs, but also the grant of the hereditary office of the sardeshpande of the Deccan which implied a charge of five percent on the revenue. These demands were accepted. But the Peshwa put forward fresh demands which included the virtual handing over of the Deccan to him. The Peshwa demanded a jagir of fifty lakhs in Khandesh, Aurangabad and Bijapur, and the appointment of the crown-Prince as the Viceroy of the Deccan with himself (Baji Rao) as the Prince's deputy. All the administration was to be conducted through the latter, and any additional collections made in the Deccan were to be shared half and half.

These excessive demands threw the Emperor into the arms of the "War" party. All this time, daily messages were being received by the Emperor from Nizam-ul-Mulk asking him to stand firm, and offering help against the Marathas. Some lurking hope of saving Malwa and Gujarat from the Marathas may also

have influenced the attitude of the Emperor who was never long of one mind.. Bajji Rao waited in Malwa in vain for a reply to his demands, and then left for Maharashtra with the determination of getting all his demands accepted next year, or carrying the war into the heart of the Empire.

Baji Rao was anxious not to annoy the Emperor or to damage his prestige, much less to replace the Mughal Emperor by a Hindu or a Maratha King. Although the Marathas often talked of a Hindu-padpadshahi, the Peshwa knew that they could not displace the Timurids from the throne and set up a Maratha or even a Rajput prince in his place without uniting the rest of India against themselves. Hence, the objective of the Peshwas was to leave the Timurids on the throne of Delhi, and to utilise their prestige and the halo of their name to spread Maratha authority over the whole of India.

The immediate aims of Bajji Rao, it would appear, were to secure the Emperor's recognition of the Maratha conquest of Malwa and its neighbouring areas, and to completely dominate the Deccan with the Emperor's sanction. There were other sundry demands, too, which had been put forward in 1736. A notable demand was for the grant of a large cash subsidy to enable the Peshwa to clear off his mounting debts. But these objectives could not be realised unless the "War" party at the court had been defeated or thoroughly cowed down. With this object in view, the Peshwa left the Deccan on the Dashera day in 1736, resolved to raid the doab and to show his invincible power to the Emperor.

By February 1737, the Peshwa had reached Agra. At Delhi, the "War" party had made grand preparations. Two armies were to be sent out under Qamar-ud-Din Khan and Khan-i-Dauran. Saadat Khan was to join at Agra, as also Abhai Singh. The combined army was then to proceed against the Marathas. M. Khan Bangash had actually joined Khan-i-Dauran with 12,000 horse.

The campaign began badly for the Peshwa. A raid into the doab by Holkar was repelled by Saadat Khan with serious losses to the Marathas. Two royal armies were converging on Agra, and Bajji Rao had to move fast. Deciding to make a bold stroke, he slipped past the approaching Mughal armies and suddenly appeared before Delhi. His object was not to damage the prestige of the Emperor or alienate him by sacking Delhi, but, as he himself says in a letter to his brother, Chimnaji, "I was resolved to let the Emperor know the truth, to prove that I was still in Hindustan, and to show him the Marathas at the gates of the capital... Saadat Khan sent a message that Bajji Rao's army had been dispersed; that he had fled beyond the Chambal, and it was no longer necessary to honour his envoy; he should be dismissed forthwith. Dhondo Pant was therefore sent away and arrived in my camp... I now changed my plan of sacking the capital. I knew that the Emperor and Khan Dauran were inclined to grant my demands, but the Mughal faction was opposed to this conciliatory policy. I did not want to drive our friends to an extremity for committing sacrilege on the capital. I therefore sent letters assuring the Emperor..."

Baji Rao succeeded in his objective of discrediting the "War" party. The Emperor was greatly incensed at Saadat Khan, arguing that it was his haste in precipitating a fight with Holkar which had brought about the Delhi raid. But Bajji Rao failed to induce the Emperor to make peace with him. His raid had inspired universal alarm. The Emperor was now more prepared to listen to the overtures of Nizam-ul-Mulk than to any peace offers, and farmans were sent summoning the latter to the court.

Nizam-ul-Mulk had been closely following the progress of the Maratha armies in Northern India. He was desirous of evolving a balance of power between the Marathas and the Delhi Court, and was not averse to purchasing a respite for himself occasionally by conniving at Maratha aggrandizement at the expense of the Empire. But Nizam-ul-Mulk had no wish to see the Marathas establish a dominating position in the North. He might also have hoped to utilise the opportunity to gain further advantages for himself. If he could defeat the Marathas with the help of the Imperial armies, he would be the real arbiter of India.

Thus, the struggle between the Marathas and Nizam-ul-Mulk now was virtually a struggle for the domination of India both northern and southern. Bajji Rao was aware of the issues at stake. For him it



was even more a battle for the domination of the Deccan than of Northern India. "Let every Maratha join", he wrote to Chimnaji, on the eve of the battle of Bhopal in 1736, "and one grand united push may make us masters of the Deccan." "If the Nawab (Nizam-ul-ulk) is taken care of, the entire Deccan will be freed of danger".

Even before Nizam-ul-Mulk reached Delhi, he was substantively appointed the subahdar of Agra and Malwa on condition of driving out the Marathas from there. It was reported that Allahabad, Gujarat and Ajmer were also promised to his friends and nominees after the successful termination of the campaign against the Marathas. It was clear that the Emperor could no longer avoid being dominated by one or the other of the protagonists, unless something unexpected supervened.

Nizam-ul-Mulk reached Delhi in July, 1737, and was royally received. In August, he was formally appointed the Governor of Malwa in place of Baji Rao, and after the rains were over, he advanced into Malwa determined "to cure the Maratha disease once for all". He had 30,000 troops and detachments from all the prominent chiefs of Rajasthan and Bundelkhand who had joined him willy-nilly. The Peshwa countered this with an army of 80,000 horse. The Nizam was hoping for reinforcements from Saadat Khana and from the Deccan. A contingent under Safdar Jang joined, but the Marathas succeeded in preventing the Deccan troops from joining. The Nizam's heavily armed and slow-moving troops were soon surrounded by the numerically superior Marathas, and hemmed in at Bhopal. It was a repetition of the old tale of the slow-moving Imperial armies being unable to cope with the swift, lightly armed Maratha cavalry. The Nizam's plight was worsened by his suspicion of his Rajput allies. The suspicions were unfounded since the Rajputs took the brunt of the fight that took place. But when famine began in the camp of the Nizam, the Rajputs like many others escaped. The Nizam could not move except at a snail's pace, nor come out and fight, and his provisions were running low. On the other hand, the Marathas could not storm his camp due to his superior artillery. Therefore negotiations were set afoot, and after much hard bargaining, in January, 1739, Nizam-ul-Mulk agreed to hand over the entire Malwa, including all jagirs to the Peshwa, and to procure for the Peshwa fifty lakhs of rupees as war expenditure. The Marathas might have asked for more, but as Baji Rao wrote to Chimnaji, "Fortified as the Nizam was with strong artillery and with the Bundelas and Rajput Rajas as his staunch allies, I accepted your advice and agreed to much lower terms than might have been exacted".

After the defeat of the most powerful general in the Empire, it is more than probable that the Emperor would have resigned himself to the loss of Malwa and Bundelkhand and confirmed the agreement made by Nizam-ul-Mulk, especially as Jai Singh and, Khan-i-Dauran had been urging such an agreement for a long time. It is not possible to visualise how the situation would have shaped after that. Baji Rao may have used Malwa as a base for advancing into the Gangetic doab, or he might have concentrated on the realisation of his unfulfilled demands regarding the Deccan, i.e. the achievement of complete supremacy in the Deccan, including the transfer to him of the administration (nizamat) of the provinces. Sooner or later, the whole of India seemed destined to come under Maratha domination.

This development was interrupted and given a new direction by the invasion of Nadir Shah, which came as a bolt from the blue to most Indian observers, so used had they become to the safeguarding of the north-west passes by Mughal power.

For the Marathas, the invasion of Nadir Shah was an unpleasant intrusion by an outsider in a field which they had come to regard as their own. If Nadir Shah was to stay in India and found a new dynasty subverting that of the Chaghtais - and reports spoke of his having declared himself Emperor of India and of his intention of marching south - it would be a big blow against Maratha ambitions, and their new conquests beyond the Narmada would be imperiled. In the circumstances, a new approach became necessary. Shahu instructed Baji Rao to hurry to the aid of the Emperor "in accordance with our undertaking to Aurangzeb that whenever the Empire was in any difficulty, we would help". Prospects of a coalition of the forces of the Rajputs and the Bundela princes with those of the Peshwa began to be discussed. Nasir Jang was



written to. But the Maratha army was engaged in the siege of Bassein. Raghuji Bhonsle was engaged in his own projects, the Dabhade was sulkily withholding cooperation, and without a large army Baji Rao refused to move.

While the Peshwa's troops were still engaged in the siege of Bassein, Nadir Shah turned back towards Iran. He contended himself by sending a threatening letter to Baji Rao, bidding him to be loyal to the Mughal Emperor else he would come back and punish him. Baji Rao replied in diplomatic terms and sent a nazr of 101 muhars.

Nadir Shah's invasion did no more than reveal the real weakness of the Mughal Empire to the whole world - the Marathas had long been aware of it. But it brought home to the latter the danger of a foreign conquest of India. This called forth an interesting proposal from Baji Rao. He proposed that all the nobles, high and low, should join together with their armies in a kind of confederation as it were to reduce the affairs of the Timurid line to a better order, and to oppose "the enemy", i.e., the foreign invader. M. Khan Bangash was one of the nobles to whom he broached this proposal.

While the proposals of Baji Rao did not meet with any success, Baji Rao, it seems, had dimly begun to realise the need of enlisting the cooperation of the Emperor and his ministers and of the leading "powers" in north India to safeguard against the likely recurrence of foreign raids from the north-west.

### **FINAL CEDING OF MALWA AND BUNDELKHAND**

The invasion of Nadir Shah resulted in far-reaching changes in the position and influence of the various groups at the Court. Saadat Khan, one of the pillars of the anti-Maratha faction, died, while both Nizam-ul-Mulk and Qamar-ud-Din Khan were discredited in the eye of Muhammad Shah. Nizam-ul-Mulk left the court, and reached an understanding with the Marathas again. In the opposite faction, Khan-i- Duaran also was killed. This left Jai Singh Sawai as the most influential of the old nobles. However, the Emperor made one last effort to recover Malwa and Gujarat, and failed. Faced with the renewed threat of invasion by the new Peshwa, Balaji Rao, and at the instance of Jai Singh peace was made with the Marathas in 1741.

The final terms negotiated with the Marathas were similar to those demanded by Baji Rao in 1736 and 1738. Malwa was ceded - though to save the prestige of the Emperor, the Peshwa was only granted the naib-subahdari of the province, an Imperial prince remaining the formal Governor. The grant to the Peshwa included all faujdaris, i.e. complete jurisdiction over the province including the states. The demand about the right of levying chauth on all states south of the Chambal seems also to have been accepted. In place of the cash demand of 50 lakhs by the Peshwa, the chauth of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was ceded to him. No agreement seems to have been made about the Deccan, however, perhaps because Nizam-ul-Mulk and the Peshwa were on good terms again. Fifteen lakhs in cash were to be given to the Peshwa in three installments. In return, the Peshwa gave a written undertaking, (i) to visit the Emperor, (ii) to see that no Marathas crossed the Narmada, holding himself responsible for the acts of anyone who did cross; (iii) not to disturb any province except Malwa, (iv) not to ask in future for any money in addition to what was granted; and (v) to depute one Maratha general with 500 horse to serve the Emperor, and (vi) to join the Imperial army with a contingent of 4000 men whenever the Imperialists undertook a campaign - any additional help to be paid for.

These terms might be said to constitute a tacit alliance between the Emperor and the Marathas. The Marathas were virtually left a free hand in the Deccan and, in return, promised not to molest the northern possessions of the Emperor and to render him aid in case of need, i.e. in case of renewed foreign danger. Henceforth, an accredited Maratha representative, Mahadev Bhatt Hingane, with a jagir in the Bulandshahr and Meerut regions, lived at the Delhi court, and became an influential factor in the Imperial politics.

## THE MARATHA ADVANCE INTO THE DOAB AND PUNJAB

The period between 1741 and 1761 can be divided into two phases. The First phase was from 1741 to 1752. Its beginning coinciding with the death of Baji Rao and the final Mughal cession of Malwa and Gujarat, while 1752 saw a new turn in the politics of Northern India with the entry of the Marathas in the doab and of Ahmad Shah Abdali into the Punjab. The phase between 1752 and 1761 was really one of the preparation of the show-down between the Marathas and the Abdali for mastery of North India.

### First Phase (1741-52)

During the first phase (1741-52), the Marathas concentrated on establishing their claim to the chauth of what have been called "frontier" areas. Thus, in 1741-42, Raghuji Bhonsle raided Bengal, Bihar and Orissa for chauth. These raids became annual features from 1743 onwards when Shahu "allotted" Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to Raghuji. In the face of stout opposition from the side of Nawab Alivardi Khan, in 1751 an agreement was made with him whereby chauth of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was fixed at Rs.12,000 annually and areas of south Orissa were given to Raghuji in lieu for it. Raghuji Bhonsle was also authorized to appoint a governor to the province. Thus, in effect Orissa passed into the hands of the Marathas.

In the Deccan, the Marathas clashed with Nizam (Asaf Jah) and his successor, Nasir Jang, for the control of the Karnataka and Khandesh. Karnataka was raided by Raghuji Bhonsle, but on account of Raghuji's involvement with Bengal and Orissa, the Nizam was able to establish his domination in the Karnataka for the time being.

The contest between the Peshwa and Bussy, the Frenchman who had dominated Haiderabad state since the death of Asaf Jah in 1748, led to a war in which neither side prevailed, but Bussy was forced to hand over the remaining parts of the revenues of Khandesh, the western half of Berar and the small province of Baglana. This was by the Treaty of Bhalke (1751).

A third area in which the Marathas gained was Rajasthan. By intervening in the internal affairs, including succession disputes of the various Rajput states, the Peshwa's lieutenants, Holkar and Sindhia, were successful in forcing most of the states to agree to pay chauth, and sometimes campaigning expenses (khandani) to the Marathas. It may be noted that earlier, succession disputes among the Rajputs were sorted out by the Mughal Emperors. The entry of the Marathas into this area was also an index of the declining power and prestige of the Mughal Emperor.

From a tactical point of view, the Maratha entry into Rajasthan can only be explained as a first step towards preparing the ground for control of Agra, Delhi and the Punjab area. In that case, the Rajput rajas needed to be made friends rather than taxed in the name of chauth. Rajasthan was more or less a deficit area, and many of the rulers had depended in a large degree on the income of the jagirs outside Rajasthan. Many Rajput sardars and soldiers had found employment with Mughal nobles. The growing exasperation and resentment of the Rajputs at the incessant demands of the Marathas led to the murder of about 5000 Marathas at Jaipur by the citizens and followers of Madho Singh in 1751. According to Jadunath Sarkar, "The shock of this blow spread to outside the capital. The Rajputs rose in the villages and killed the couriers of the Marathas wherever they could catch them" This "explosion of Rajput hatred", was not the first instance of this type. Earlier, Vijai Singh, the grandson and successor of Abai Singh of Marwar, had treacherously killed Jayappa Sindhia. These instances show the negative results of the narrow and selfish Maratha attitude towards Rajasthan for which the Peshwa and his lieutenants, Sindhis and Holkar, must be held responsible.

## The Second Phase (1752-61)

Balaji Rao or Nana Sahib Peshwa as he has been called was a humane and cultured man who set up fine building at Poona, and did much to make it a centre of culture. He also attracted many brahman bankers to settle in the city. He gave careful attention to building up an administration in the territories which had been ceded to the Peshwa. Kamvisdars were appointed in every district who started sending detailed reports on the state of agriculture. These reports which were on the Mughal model, giving names of the farmer the amount of land and crops cultivated, ploughs, oxen and wells in the village, etc. enabled the levying of land tax on a more realistic basis, and also encouraged a policy of resettling . ruined villages, and expanding cultivation. Both zamindars and village headmen were employed for collecting and assessing land revenue.

The impact of these sound measures on state and economy is still a matter of controversy. Baji Rao had left behind a debt which has been estimated from seventeen lakhs to a crore. The modern historian, G.S. Sardesai, puts it at fifty lakhs. This amount consisted of loans taken from the bankers of Poona who constantly dunned the Peshwa for repayment, and made his life hell. This was the reason why Baji Rao had demanded 50 lakhs from Nizam-ul-Mulk at the battle of Bhopal. Although Nizam agreed to pay this amount, it was never paid, either by Nizam or by the Mughal Emperor. Despite his financial skills, Balaji had to cope with a country which had not get recovered from the aftermaths of prolonged war and breakdown of administration, and was relatively less productive or developed. He had also to provide campaigning funds for his bloated army. In consequence, the Maratha army almost became a mercenary force which could be hired or was always out for plunder. This made difficult the pursuit of a consistent political policy which could have promoted larger Maratha interests.

It would appear that the Maratha polity needed a period of consolidation, and eschewing war of expansion over distant regions. Almost taking a leaf out of the Pratinidhi's programme during the time of Baji Rao, Balaji Baji Rao devoted his energies for the settling of the administration and of consolidating Maratha conquests in the Deccan. From 1753, the Peshwa led annual expeditious into the Karnataka to free it of the control of the Haiderabad state. Taking advantage of the departure of Bussy, the French advisor, the Peshwa attached the Haiderabad state, and at Udgir (1761) forced it to surrender the four northern cities of Ahmadnagar, Daultabad, Burhanpur and Bijapur, and territory worth sixty lakh rupees.

However, Balaji combined this policy of consolidation with an aggressive, forward policy in North India. This is the puzzle because according to G.S. Sardesai, "The new Peshwa (Balaji Baji Rao) was no soldier either by inclination or profession, and managed to execute military operations through loyal and trusted subordinates of his own." The limits of such a policy are obvious. It was compounded by the fact that the new Peshwa had little knowledge of the politics of North India. His fourth and last visit to the North was to Rajasthan in 1747-48. He never visited the north thereafter till his death. Perhaps Balaji Baji Rao was unable to forsake even for a limited time an aggressive, forward policy in the North because a source of the Peshwa's strength were the capable and ambitious leaders such as Ranoji Sindhi and Malhar Rao Holkar. These ambitions leaders could not be kept idle lest it imperil the Peshwa's own position. In other words, with the conquest of Gujarat and Malwa, the Peshwa had mounted on a tiger from which it was difficult to dismount.

With the rise of Ahmad Shah Abdali and his invasion of India in 1748, which was followed by many others in regular succession, a new political situation had risen in North India. On hearing of the Abdali's capture of Lahore, the Emperor had appealed to the Peshwa for help. The Peshwa was willing and had deputed Sindhia and Holkar to leave from Poona to aid the Emperor. Balaji's action was on lines with Baji Rao's call at the time of Nadir Shah's invasion for a united front of Marathas and Mughal nobles against the external foe. But the Abdali had been defeated before the Marathas reached North India. Shortly after this, after visiting Jaipur, Balaji came to Delhi and had a cordial meeting with Emperor Muhammad Shah. The question, however, was: were the Marathas prepared to abandon or modify their declared intention of subverting the Mughal empire to cope with this new situation? The Marathas may not have posed the question this way, but it came increasingly to the fore with every new Abdali invasion.



Perhaps the best illustration of Maratha ambitions in the North is the settlement brought about by Shahu in 1743 regarding the claims of Raghuji Bhonsle and the Peshwa by which the right of chauth and sardeshmukhi in Bengal, Bihar (except 12 lakhs) Orissa and Awadh were assigned to Raghuji and the Peshwa was given "campaigning" right and chauth and sardeshmukhi of Malwa, Ajmer, Agra and Allahabad. Although the Peshwa did not stake for many of these areas for almost a decade, and another half a dozen years elapsed before he staked a claim on Punjab, Shahu's 'award' was never forgotten and coloured the Peshwa's political thinking. However, lacking the military qualities of Baji Rao, the new Peshwa had to lean on new untried men. This, and the constant bickerings among the Maratha sardars were partly responsible for the Maratha policy during this period being erratic and fumbling. In 1748, after the death of Emperor Muhammad Shah, the new emperor Ahmad Shah appointed Safdar Jung, the governor of Awadh and Allahabad, as wazir. Safdar Jung deemed it a golden opportunity to deal with two of his biggest internal enemies, the Ruhela Afghans of Shahjahanabad and Bareilly who had usurped many new areas in the districts of Badaun, Pilibhit etc., and the Bangash Afghans of Farrukhabad, who, likewise, had extended their control to Kora-Jahanabad on one side, and upto Aligarh on the other. In the complicated struggle which followed, Safdar Jung, unable to cope with the Ruhelas, turned on the Bangash Afghans. But he suffered a sharp defeat at the hands of Ahmad Khan Bangash. Safdar Jung now appealed to the Marathas for help. The Marathas under Sindhia and Holkar, responded with alacrity, deeming it a good opportunity not only to curry favour with the Imperial wazir, as also to establish themselves in the doab. The wazir promised them campaigning expenses at the rate of Rs.25,000 per day. The Jat Raja, Suraj Mal, was also employed for the purpose.

The Marathas gained a big victory over Ahmad Bangash. But before they could crush him, the wazir received urgent summons from Emperor on account of a renewed invasion by Ahmad Shah Abdali. Hence, a treaty was patched up with the Ruhela and Bangash Afghans. Safdar Jung transferred on to the shoulders of the Afghan chief, Ahmad Bangash, the payment of the campaigning expenses due to the Marathas. It would appear that in satisfaction of their claims the Marathas acquired the parganas of Phapund, Shikohabad and Etawa, in addition to Kora and Jahanabad in the name of the Peshwa. These were managed by Maratha agents. Thus, the Marathas got an entry into the doab.

Safdar Jung appears to have gained a high opinion of the Marathas and came to the conclusion that the Abdali menace could only be countered with their help. He was also conscious of the close links between his internal enemies, the Ruhela and Bangash Afghans with the Abdali. This may explain why he lent a sympathetic ear to some far-reaching demands and promises the Marathas put forward at this time. According to a document dated 12 April 1752, it was stipulated that the Marathas should protect the Emperor from internal enemies, such as Pathans, Rajputs and other rebels, and external foes like the Afghan King Abdali; that the Emperor should pay to the Marathas 50 lakhs for their help, and that the Peshwa be granted the subahdaris of Agra and Ajmer. The document also mentions that the Peshwa was to be given right to levy chauth from Punjab, Sindh and the doab. These perhaps were the Maratha demands and proposals. Safdar Jung could hardly agree to pay chauth in the doab out of his dominions. In any case, these demands were not considered by the Emperor because he agreed to the Abdali demand for the grant of the subahdari of Lahore and Sindh before Safdar Jung and his Maratha allies could reach Delhi.

These proposals show once again the scale of Maratha ambitions, as also their inherent contradictions. The Marathas could not fight the Abdali and realize these far reaching demands without meeting and overcoming the resistance of the Nawab of Awadh, the Jats, the Afghans as well as the Rajputs -precisely the sections whose help they needed to fight the Abdali.

No attempt seems to have been made by the Peshwa and his advisors to resolve these glaring contradictions. A key occasion arose in 1753 when the wazir, Safdar Jung, fell out with the Emperor Ahmad Shah, and a civil war ensued. The opposition to the wazir was led by Ghazi-ud-Din Imad-ul-Mulk (then only 16 years old), son of the former wazir, Qamaruddin Khan. He was joined by Najib Khan Ruhela, a determined

enemy of the wazir and an ally of the Abdali. Both sides bid for Maratha support. Imad-ul-Mulk offered to the Peshwa to pay one crore of rupees and allot the subahs of Awadh and Allahabad to him if he was helped to become wazir. The Peshwa deputed Sindhia and Holkar to help Imad. But before they could arrive, Safdar Jung had been defeated. He was allowed to continue to hold Awadh and Allahabad as governor and retire to his charge. He died a year later. Imad-ul-Mulk became wazir and Najib Mir Bakhshi.

We do not know what considerations made Balaji Baji Rao to refuse support to an old friend like Safdar Jung and choose an immature youth backed up by the Ruhela chief who could never be a friend or be trusted. Perhaps, the Peshwa felt that a weak wazir would be more convenient for the fulfilment of the Maratha ambitions for the chauth of the doab. It left a deep sense of suspicion towards the Marathas on the part of Awadh Nawabs for which the Marathas had to pay already later on. Interestingly, the Jat Raja, Suraj Mal, who had joined the Marathas in Safdar Jung's campaign against the Afghans, refused to abandon his erstwhile friend.

The alliance with the wazir Imad-ul-Mulk from 1753 to 1759 was the period during which Maratha power in North India reached its climax but during which the Marathas alienated all their potential friends and allies, and paved the way for the disaster at the field of Panipat in 1761. During this period, the Mughal Emperor's prestige reached a very low ebb, with successive rulers, Ahmad Shah in 1754, and Alamgir II in 1759 being assassinated by the wazir Imad-ul-Mulk. By virtue of their alliance with Imad, the Marathas, too, had to suffer the ignominy of being parties to such dark deeds.

During the period, the Peshwa launched three major campaigns to North India, the first two by his younger brother, Raghunath Rao, a youth of 18 who had never been to North India, and the third by his nephew, Sadashiv Bhau, a reputed general and administrator and the victor of Udgir. It has been usual to blame Raghunath Rao for worsening the political and financial crisis which faced the Marathas in North India, and creating a situation which it was impossible for the Bhau to resolve later on. However, both Raghunath Rao and the Bhau faced the same set of problems for which there was no solution: they were asked to collect money to liquidate the huge debt of the Peshwa, and, at the same time, hunt for allies against the Abdali. In consequence during his first expedition, Raghunath Rao's first action was to demand one crore rupees from the Jat raja, and restoration of the areas he had encroached upon, Imad-ul-Mulk having cleverly granted the subahdari of Agra and Ajmer to the Peshwa. The four months long Maratha investment of the powerful Kumbher fort could only lead to a compromise in the absence of the Marathas possessing siege guns. The Jat raja agreed to pay 50 lakhs in three yearly installments which were never paid, being always in arrears. The only other area from which money could be gained was the doab which meant war with Safdar Jung and the Afghans. Since this was not feasible, Raghunath Rao made only feeble raids in the doab. He then marched into Rajasthan which had already come under the sway of Holkar and Sindhia. Thereafter he returned without adding any territory, or acquiring money.

During Raghunath Rao's absence, in 1756-57 Ahmad Shah not only ravaged Delhi, but extended his marauding activities upto Mathura, Gokul and Vrindavan. In the absence of the Marathas, Imad-ul-Mulk had to make peace with the Abdali who left after appointing Najib-ud-Daula as Mir Bakhshi and as his virtual representative. The only opposition the Abdali faced was from the Jat raja who stood behind his strong forts of Dig, Bharatpur, etc.

### THE THIRD BATTLE OF PANIPAT

Returning to North India early in 1757, no effort was made by Raghunath Rao to bring together a coalition of Northern powers to fight the Abdali. This could only have been possible if the Peshwa had been prepared to drastically modify, or at least defer his ambitions in the North till the Abdali danger had been met with. In fact, even at this time the Peshwa had grandiose plans which is evident from his letter to Ramaji Anant, manager of the Sindhias, written on 23 February, 1759. The Peshwa postulated a plan for the conquest of Bengal and Bihar to collect a crore or a crore and a half in order to liquidate his debt. For the purpose, Shuja-ud-Daula the Nawab of Awadh, was to be induced to join by offering him



the post of Imperial Wazir. In return, he was to cede Banaras and Allahabad and pay 50 lakhs. Najib-ul-Daulah who was untrustworthy was to be destroyed. There is no reference to utilizing Shuja's support against the Afghans.

It is clear that what was at stake was not just the battle against the foreigner, Ahmad Shah Abdali, but the establishment of the Maratha, specifically the Peshwa's supremacy in North India. That is why neither Suraj Mal Jat nor Shuja were eager to join the Marathas, In fact, both offered to negotiate with the Abdali inducing him to withdraw from India if the Marathas promised to withdraw to the Deccan.

Blissfully ignoring the sentiments of either the Nawab of Awadh nor of the Jat raja, Suraj Mal, Raghunath Rao went about asserting and establishing Maratha "supremacy" in North India. Reaching Delhi early in 1757, after the departure of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Marathas made little effort to win over the Awadh Nawab, Shuja, to their side by removing Imad-ul-Mulk and destroying the Ruhela chief, Najib-ul-Daula. They did help Shuja to counter the invasion of Awadh and Allahabad by the armies equipped and prepared by the Abdali and backed by Imad-ul-Mulk. They also opposed successfully Imad's attempt to deprive Shuja of the province of Allahabad. But they were not prepared to ally themselves with Shuja for fear of annoying Imad-ul-Mulk.

Without befriending Shuja or dealing with the Ruhelas, Raghunath Rao moved into the Punjab. At the instance of Imad-ul-Mulk, a new Mughal official was appointed as Governor Lahore, the previous governor Muin-ul-Mulk having died. It was not difficult to do so and to oust the Abdali officials in the absence of the Abdali. Although the Marathas marched up to the Attock, it was obvious that the line of the Indus could not be held against Abdali without a strong, well-knit-army in the Punjab, headed by a leader of repute. Such an army would have to be duly supported from the doab and Delhi With none of these conditions existing, Raghunath Rao's Punjab adventure was bound to fail. It was only after the advance into Punjab that the need was realised of protecting the Maratha rear by taking action against Najib-ul-Daula, the Ruhela chief. However, little effort was made to do so in conjunction with the Awadh Nawab who had hereditary enmity with the Ruhelas. In consequence, the Maratha chief, Dattaji Sindhia, received no support from the Nawab. In fact, Shuja moved to support Najib in his siege at Shukratal, on the philosophy that if the Ruhelas were destroyed, the turn of Awadh could come next.

In this situation, the hope of Sadashiv Bhau to win over, or at least neutralize the Awadh Nawab in the coming contest with the Abdali was extremely difficult to realize. Much has been made of the Maratha agent, Govind Ballal's inability to gather boats near Etawah due to untimely rains so that the Bhau could not enter the doab, and exert pressure on the Awadh Nawab Shuja to join him or remain neutral. Negotiations between Shuja, the Marathas and the Abdali backed by Najib-ul-Daula had been in progress for a long time. The Marathas had emphasized the alliance of their hereditary, enemies, the Ruhelas, with the foreign invader, and the hereditary friendship of the Marathas and Safdur Jung. They were also willing to accept Shuja's demand for the wizarat, and to make Ali Gauhar, the enemy of Imad, king at Delhi. The Abdali through Najib-ul-Daulah, also offered the wizarat to Shuja, and making Ali Gauhar the king at Delhi. But he shrewdly argued that the Maratha policy, which required no elucidation even to a layman, was one of enslaving the whole of Hindustan. The communal argument was also used.

Shuja's joining the Abdali was certainly a tactical and psychological help to him. The Marathas failed to exploit the long standing differences between Shuja and Najib-ud Daulah on account of their errors of judgement during the proceeding half-a-dozen years, as we have shown.

Even if Shuja had remained neutral, the Bhau would not have been able to prevail over the Abdali, saddled as he was with heavy artillery and women folk. In this context, the best course for Bhau would have been to accept the suggestion of Holkar not to cross the Chambal but to make the area around Gwaliyar-Dholpur as his base, or of the Jat Raja, Suraj Mal, to leave the heavy artillery and the women and children in the territories of the Jat ruler, and engage the Abdali in a war of movement in which the Marathas had always

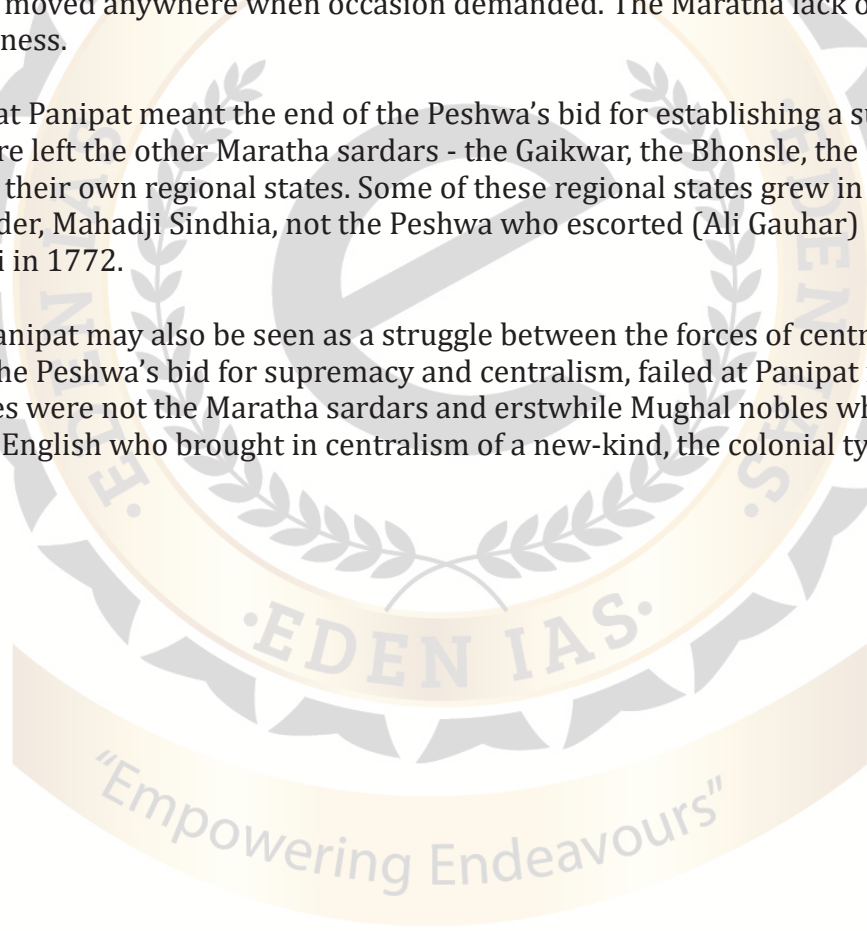


been adept. This would not have adversely effected the second wish of the Peshwa - to collect funds from north India to liquidate his huge debt of one crore. However, Bhau not only advanced to Delhi (July 1760) and reinstated Imad-ul-Mulk as wazir which resulted in Suraj Mal abandoning his side, he went further and entrenched himself at Panipat (Nov. 1760) exposing his flank in the doab to the Abdali.

The defeat of the Marathas at Panipat (14 Jan 1761) also showed the weaknesses in the Maratha mode of warfare, and their inability to cope with new developments. The mobile Maratha mode of warfare had been slowly changing to the cumbersome Mughal mode of warfare in which the administration and the royal ladies moved with the camp. However, the Mughal camp was protected by a highly mobile artillery, called artillery of the stirrup. Peshwa Balaji Rao had been highly impressed by the artillery and disciplined soldiers of Bussy, and had deployed a detachment of such soldiers under Ibrahim 'Gardi'. While the artillery had improved under the Peshwas, we do not know the extent to which the mobile artillery loaded on camels etc., had been adopted. It seems that the Maratha soldiers still depended on the lance and sword, while the Afghans had been shifting to quick firing flint-lock muskets. Ibrahim Gardi's artillery at Panipat was a largely immobile artillery which became useless unless protected by gun-firing cavalry. Ahmad Shah Abdali's artillery, on the other hand, was highly mobile mounted on camels and could be moved anywhere when occasion demanded. The Maratha lack of coordination was also a factor of weakness.

The Maratha defeat at Panipat meant the end of the Peshwa's bid for establishing a supremacy in North India. Its failure left the other Maratha sardars - the Gaikwar, the Bhonsle, the Holkar, the Sindhia etc. free to carve out their own regional states. Some of these regional states grew in size and power. It was the Maratha leader, Mahadji Sindhia, not the Peshwa who escorted (Ali Gauhar) Emperor Shah Alam II back to Delhi in 1772.

Thus, the battle of Panipat may also be seen as a struggle between the forces of centralism and regionalism. While the Peshwa's bid for supremacy and centralism, failed at Panipat in 1761, the ultimate beneficiaries were not the Maratha sardars and erstwhile Mughal nobles who stood for regionalism, but the English who brought in centralism of a new-kind, the colonial type.



## UNIT-III

# INDIAN STATES AND SOCIETY IN THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

### INTRODUCTION

On the debris of the Mughal Empire and its political system arose a large number of independent and semi-independent powers such as Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, Mysore and the Maratha Kingdom. It is these powers which challenged the British attempt at supremacy in India in the second half of the 18th century. Some arose as a result of the assertion of autonomy by governors of Mughal provinces, others were the product of rebellion against Mughal authority.

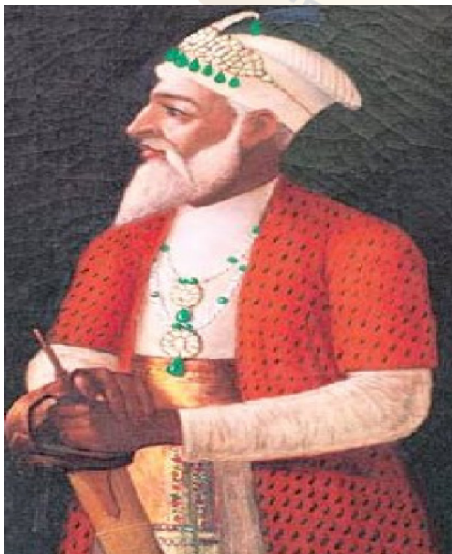
The rulers of these states established law and order and viable economic and administrative states. They curbed, with varying degrees of success, the lower local officials and petty chiefs and Zamindars who constantly fought with higher authorities for control over the surplus produce of the peasant, and who sometimes succeeded in establishing local centres of power and patronage. The politics of these states were invariably non-communal or secular, the motivations of their rulers being similar in economic and political terms. These rulers did not discriminate on religious grounds in public appointments, civil or military; nor did the rebels against their authority pay much attention to the religion of the rulers.

None of these states, however, succeeded in arresting the economic crisis. The zamindars and jagirdars, whose number constantly increased, continued to fight over a declining income from agriculture, while the condition of the peasantry continued to deteriorate. While these states prevented any breakdown of internal trade and even tried to promote foreign trade, they did nothing to modernise the basic industrial and commercial structure of their states,

### HYDERABAD AND CARNATIC

The state of Hyderabad was founded by Nizam-ul-Mulk Asafjah in 1724. He was one of the leading nobles of the post-Aurangzeb era. He played a leading role in the overthrow of the Saiyid brothers and was rewarded with the viceroyalty of the Deccan. From 1720 to 1722 he consolidated his hold over the Deccan by suppressing all opposition to his viceroyalty and organising the administration on efficient lines.

From 1722 to 1724 he was the wazir of the empire. But he soon got disgusted with that office as the Emperor Muhammad Shah frustrated all his attempts at reforming the administration. So he decided to go back to the Deccan where he could safely maintain his supremacy. Here he laid the foundations of the Hyderabad State which he ruled with a strong hand.



**NIZAM-UL-MULK ASAF JAH**



**Murshid Quli Khan**

He never openly declared his independence from the central government but in practice he acted like an independent ruler. He waged wars, concluded peace, conferred titles, and gave jagirs and offices without reference to Delhi. He followed a tolerant policy towards the Hindus. For example, a Hindu, Puran Chand, was his Dewan. He consolidated his power by establishing an orderly administration in the Deccan on the basis of the jagirdari system on the Mughal pattern. He forced the big, turbulent zamindars to respect his authority and kept the powerful Marathas out of his dominions.

He also made an attempt to rid the revenue system of its corruption. But after his death in 1748, Hyderabad fell a prey to the same disruptive forces as were operating at Delhi. The Carnatic was one of the subahs of the Mughal Deccan and as such came under the Nizam of Hyderabad's authority. But just as in practice the Nizam had become independent of Delhi, so also the Deputy Governor of the Carnatic, known as the Nawab of Carnatic, had freed himself of the control of the Viceroy of the Deccan and made his office hereditary.

Thus Nawab Saadutullah Khan of Carnatic had made his nephew Dost Ali his successor without the approval of his superior, the Nizam. Later, after 1740, the affairs of the Carnatic deteriorated because of the repeated struggles for its Nawabship and this, provided an opportunity to the European trading companies to directly interfere in Indian politics.

## BENGAL

Taking advantage of the growing weakness of the central authority, two men of exceptional ability, Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan, made Bengal virtually independent. Even though Murshid Quli Khan was made Governor of Bengal as late as 1717, he had been its effective ruler since 1700, when he was appointed its Dewan. He soon freed himself from central control though he sent regular tribute to the Emperor. He established peace by freeing Bengal of internal and external danger. Bengal was now also relatively free of uprisings by zamindars. The only three major uprisings during his rule were first by Sitaram Ray, Udai Narayan and Ghulam Muhammad, and then by Shujat Khan, and finally by Najat Khan. After defeating them, Murshid Quli Khan gave their zamindaris to his favourite, Ramjivan. Murshid Quli Khan died in 1727, and his son-in-law Shuja-ud-din ruled Bengal till 1739. In that Year Alivardi Khan deposed and killed Shuja-ud-din's son, Sarfaraz Khan, and made himself the Nawab.

These three Nawabs gave Bengal a long period of peace and orderly administration and promoted its trade and industry. Murshid Quli Khan effected economies in the administration and reorganized the finances of Bengal by transferring large parts of jagir lands into khalisah lands by carrying out a fresh revenue settlement, and by introducing the system of revenue-farming. He recruited revenue farmers and officials from local zamindars and merchant-bankers. He also granted agricultural loans (taccavi) to the poor cultivators to relieve their distress as well as to enable them to pay land revenue in time. He was thus able to increase the resources of the Bengal government. But the system of revenue-farming led to increased economic pressure on the zamindars and peasants.

Moreover, even though he demanded only the standard revenue and forbade illegal cesses, he collected the revenue from the zamindars and the peasants with utmost cruelty. Another result of his reforms was that many of the older zamindars were driven out and their place was taken by upstart revenue-farmers. Murshid Quli Khan and the succeeding Nawabs gave equal opportunities for employment to Hindus and Muslims. They filled the highest civil posts and many of the military posts with Bengalis, mostly Hindus. In choosing revenue farmers Murshid Quli Khan gave preference to local zamindars and mahajans (money-lenders) who were mainly Hindus. He thus laid the foundations of a new landed aristocracy in Bengal.

All the three Nawabs recognised that the expansion of trade benefited the people and the government and, therefore, gave encouragement to all merchants, Indian and foreign. They provided for the safety of roads and rivers from thieves and robbers by establishing regular thanas and chowkies. They checked private trade by officials. They prevented abuses in the customs administration. At the same time they made it a point to maintain strict control over the foreign trading companies and their servants and prevented them from abusing their privileges.



They compelled the servants of the English East India Company to obey the laws of the land and to pay the same customs duties as were being paid by other merchants. Alivardi Khan did not permit the English and the French to fortify their factories in Calcutta and Chandernagore. The Bengal Nawabs proved, however, to be short-sighted and negligent in one respect.

They did not firmly put down the increasing tendency of the English East India Company after 1707 to use military force, or to threaten its use, to get its demands accepted. They had the power to deal with the Company's threats, but they continued to believe that a mere trading company could not threaten their power.

They failed to see that the English Company was no mere company of traders but was the representative of the most aggressive and expansionist colonialism of the time. Their ignorance of, and lack of contact with, the rest of the world was to cost the state dear. Otherwise, they would have known of the devastation caused by the Western trading companies in Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America.

The Nawabs of Bengal neglected to build a strong army and paid a heavy price for it. For example, the army of Murshid Quli Khan consisted of only 2000 cavalry and 4000 infantry. Alivardi Khan was constantly troubled by the repeated invasions of the Marathas and, in the end, he had to cede a large part of Orissa to them. And when, in 1756-67, the English East India Company declared war on Siraj-ud-Daulah, the successor of Alivardi, the absence of a strong army contributed much to the victory of the foreigner.

The Bengal Nawabs also failed to check the growing corruption among their officials. Even judicial officials, the qazis and muftis, were given to taking bribes. The foreign companies took full advantage of this weakness to undermine official rules and regulations and policies.

## AWADH

The founder of the autonomous kingdom of Awadh was Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk who was appointed Governor of Awadh in 1722. He was an extremely bold, energetic, iron-willed, and intelligent person. At the time of his appointment, many rebellious zamindars had raised their heads everywhere in the province.

They refused to pay the land tax, organised their own private armies, erected forts, and defied the Imperial Government. For years Saadat Khan had to wage war upon them. He succeeded in suppressing lawlessness and disciplining the big zamindars and thus, increasing the financial resources of his government.

He won over the chieftains and zamindars through various concessions. Moreover, most of the defeated zamindars were also not displaced. They were usually confirmed in their estates after they had submitted and agreed to pay their dues (land revenue) regularly.

Saadat Khan also carried out a fresh revenue settlement in 1723. He is said to have improved the lot of the peasant by levying equitable land revenue and by protecting him from oppression by the big zamindars. Like the Bengal Nawabs, he too did not discriminate between Hindus and Muslims.

Many of his commanders and high officials were Hindus; and he curbed refractory zamindars, chiefs, and nobles irrespective of their religion. His troops were well-paid, well-armed, and well-trained. His administration was efficient.

He too continued the jagir system. Before his death in 1739, he had become virtually independent and had made the province a hereditary possession. He was succeeded by his nephew Safdar Jang, who was simultaneously appointed the wazir of the empire in 1748 and granted in addition the province of Allahabad. Safdar Jang gave a long period of peace to the people of Awadh and Allahabad before his death in 1754. He suppressed rebellious zamindars, won over others and made an alliance with the Maratha sardars so that his dominion was saved from their incursions. He was able to win the loyalty of Rajput chieftains and shaifyzadas.

He carried on warfare against the Rohelas and the Bangash Pathans. In his war against the Bangash Pathans in 1750-51, he secured Maratha military help by paying a daily allowance of Rs 25,000 and Jat support by paying Rs 15,000 a day.

Later, he entered into an agreement with the Peshwa by which the Peshwa was to help the Mughal empire against Ahmad Shah Abdali and to protect it from such internal rebels as the Indian Pathans and the Rajput rajas.

In return the Peshwa was to be paid Rs 50 lakhs, granted the chauth of the Punjab, Sindh, and several districts of northern India, and made the Governor of Ajmer and Agra. The agreement failed, however, as the Peshwa went over to Safdar Jang's enemies at Delhi who promised him the governorship of Awadh and Allahabad.

Safdar Jang also organised an equitable system of justice. He too adopted a policy of impartiality in the employment of Hindus and Muslims. The highest post in his government was held by a Hindu, Maharaja Nawab Rai. The prolonged period of peace and of economic prosperity of the nobles under the government of the Nawabs resulted in time in the growth of a distinct Lucknow culture around the Awadh court.

Lucknow, for long an important city of Awadh, and the seat of the Awadh Nawabs after 1775, soon rivalled Delhi in its patronage of the arts and literature. It also developed as an important centre of handicrafts. Crafts and culture also percolated to towns under the patronage of local chieftains and zamindars.

Safdar Jang maintained a very high standard of personal morality. All his life he was devoted to his only wife. As a matter of fact all the founders of the three autonomous kingdoms of Hyderabad, Bengal and Awadh, namely Nizam-ul-Mulk, Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan, and Saadat Khan and Safdar Jang, were men of high personal morality. Nearly all of them led austere and simple lives.

Their lives give lie to the belief that all the leading nobles of the eighteenth century led extravagant and luxurious lives. It was only in their public and political dealings that they resorted to fraud, intrigue and treachery.

## **MYSORE**

Next to Hyderabad, the most important power that emerged in south India was Mysore under Haidar Ali. The kingdom of Mysore had preserved its precarious independence ever since the end of the Vijayanagar Empire and had been only nominally a part of the Mughal Empire. Early in the eighteenth century two ministers Nanjaraj (the Sarvadhikari) and Devraj (the Dulwai) had seized power in Mysore reducing the king Chikka Krishna Raj to a mere puppet. Haidar Ali, born in 1721 in an obscure family, started his career as a petty officer in the Mysore army. Though uneducated, he possessed a keen intellect and was a man of great energy, daring and determination. He was also a brilliant commander and a shrewd diplomat.

Haidar Ali soon found his opportunity in the wars which involved Mysore for more than twenty years. Cleverly using the opportunities that came his way, he gradually rose in the Mysore army. He soon recognised the advantages of Western military training and applied it to the troops under his own command. He established a modern arsenal in Dindigal in 1755 with the help of French experts.



**Tipu Sultan**

In 1761 he overthrew Nanjaraj and established his authority over the Mysore state. He extended full control over the rebellious poligars (warrior chieftains and zamindars) and conquered the territories of Bidnur, Sunda, Sera, Canara and Malabar. A major reason for his occupation of Malabar was the desire to have access to the Indian Ocean. Though illiterate he was an efficient administrator. He was responsible for introducing the Mughal administrative and revenue system in his dominions.

He took over Mysore when it was a weak and divided state and soon made it one of the leading Indian powers. He practiced religious tolerance and his first Dewan and many other officials were Hindus.

Almost from the beginning of the establishment of his power, he was engaged in wars with the Maratha sardars, the Nizam, and the British. In 1769, he repeatedly defeated the British forces and reached the walls of Madras. He died in 1782 in the course of the second Anglo-Mysore War and was succeeded by his son Tipu. Sultan Tipu, who ruled Mysore till his death at the hands of the British in 1799, was a man of complex character. He was, for one, an innovator. His desire to change with the times was symbolized in the introduction of a new calendar, a new system of coinage, and new scales of weights and measures.

His personal library contained books on such diverse subjects as religion, history, military science, medicine, and mathematics. He showed a keen interest in the French Revolution.

He planted a '**Tree of Liberty**' at Srirangapatam and he became a member of a **Jacobin Club**. His organisational capacity is borne out by the fact that in those days of general indiscipline among Indian armies, his troops remained disciplined and loyal to him to the last. He tried to do away with the custom of giving jagirs, and thus increase state income.

He also made an attempt to reduce the hereditary possessions of the poligars and to eliminate the intermediaries between the state and the cultivator. However, his land revenue was as high as that of other contemporary rulers—it ranged up to one third of the gross produce. But he checked the collection of illegal cesses, and he was liberal in granting remissions.

His infantry was armed with muskets and bayonets in the European fashion which were, however, manufactured in Mysore. He also made an effort to build a modern navy after 1796. For this purpose he established two dockyards, the models of the ships being supplied by the Sultan himself. In personal life he was free from vices and kept himself free from luxury. He was recklessly brave and, as a commander, brilliant. He was fond of saying that it was "better to live a day as a lion than a lifetime as a sheep". He died fighting at the gates of Srirangapatam in pursuance of this belief. He was, however, hasty in action and unstable in nature.



As a statesman, he more than any other eighteenth-century Indian ruler, recognised to the full extent the threat that the English posed to South India as well as to other Indian powers. He stood forth as the steadfast foe of the rising English power. The English, in turn, looked upon him as their most dangerous enemy in India.

Though not free from contemporary economic backwardness, Mysore flourished economically under Haidar Ali and Tipu, especially when seen in contrast with its immediate past or with the rest of the country. When the British occupied Mysore after defeating and killing Tipu in 1799, they were surprised to find that the Mysore peasant was much more prosperous than the peasant in British occupied Madras. **Sir John Shore, Governor-General** from 1793 to 1798, wrote later that **“the peasantry of his dominions are protected and their labour encouraged and rewarded”**.

Another British observer wrote of Tipu’s Mysore as “well cultivated, populous with industrious inhabitants, cities newly founded and commerce extending”. Tipu also seems to have grasped the importance of modern trade and industry. In fact, alone among the Indian rulers, he understood the importance of economic strength as the foundation of military strength. He made some attempts to introduce modern industries in India by importing foreign workmen as experts and by extending state support to many industries. He sent emissaries to France, Turkey, Iran and Pegu Myanmar to develop foreign trade. He also traded with China.

He even tried to set up a trading company on the pattern of European companies and thus sought to imitate their commercial practices. He tried to promote trade with Russia and Arabia by setting up state trading institutions in the port towns.



**A FOOT-SOLDIER IN TIPU SULTAN'S ARMY**

Some British historians have described Tipu as a religious fanatic. But this is not borne out by facts. Though he was orthodox in his religious views, he was in fact tolerant and enlightened in his approach toward other religions. He gave money for the construction of the image of goddess Sarda in the Shringeri Temple after the latter was looted by Maratha horsemen in 1791. He regularly gave gifts to this temple as well as several other temples. The famous temple of Sri Ranganath was situated barely a hundred yards from his palace. But while he treated the vast majority of his Hindu and Christian subjects with consideration and tolerance, he was harsh on those Hindus and Christians who might directly or indirectly aid the British against Mysore.

## KERALA

At the beginning of the eighteenth century Kerala was divided up among a large number of feudal chiefs and rajas. The four most important states were those of Calicut, under the Zamorin, Chirakkal, Cochin and Travancore.

The kingdom of Travancore rose into prominence after 1729 under King Martanda Varma, one of the leading statesmen of the eighteenth century. He combined rare foresight and strong determination with courage and daring.

He subdued the feudatories, conquered Quilon and Elayadam, and defeated the Dutch, thus ending their political power in Kerala. He organised a strong army on the Western model with the help of European officers and armed it with modern weapons. He also constructed a modern arsenal.

Martanda Varma used his new army to expand northwards and the boundaries of Travancore soon extended from Kanyakumari to Cochin. He undertook many irrigation works, built roads and canals for communication, and gave active encouragement to foreign trade.

By 1763, all the petty principalities of Kerala had been absorbed or subordinated by the three big states of Cochin, Travancore and Calicut. Haidar Ali began his invasion of Kerala in 1766 and in the end annexed northern Kerala up to Cochin, including the territories of the Zamorin of Calicut.

The eighteenth century saw a remarkable revival in Malayalam literature. This was due in part to the rajas and chiefs of Kerala who were great patrons of literature. Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore, became in the second half of the eighteenth century, a famous centre of Sanskrit scholarship.

Rama Varma, successor of Martanda Varma, was himself a poet, scholar, musician, renowned actor, and a man of great culture. He conversed fluently in English, took a keen interest in European affairs, and regularly read newspapers and journals published in London, Calcutta and Madras.

## THE RAJPUT STATES

The principal Rajput states took advantage of the growing weakness of Mughal power to virtually free themselves from central control while at the same time increasing their influence in the rest of the empire. In the reigns of Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Shah, the rulers of Amber and Marwar were appointed governors of important Mughal provinces such as Agra, Gujarat, and Malwa.

The Rajputana states continued to be as divided as before. The bigger among them expanded at the cost of their weaker neighbours, Rajput and non-Rajput. Most of the larger Rajput states were constantly involved in petty quarrels and civil wars. The internal politics of these states were often characterised by the same type of corruption, intrigue, and treachery as prevailed at the Mughal court. Thus, Ajit Singh of Marwar was killed by his own son.

The most outstanding Rajput ruler of the eighteenth century was Raja Sawai Jai Singh of Amber (1681-1743). He was a distinguished statesman, law-maker, and reformer. But most of all he shone as a man of science in an age when Indians were oblivious of scientific progress. He founded the city of Jaipur and

made it a great seat of science and art. Jaipur was built upon strictly scientific principles and according to a regular plan. Its broad streets are intersected at right angles.

Jai Singh was above everything a great astronomer. He erected observatories with accurate and advanced instruments, some of them of his own invention, at Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi, and Mathura. His astronomical observations were remarkably accurate. He drew up a set of tables, entitled *Zij Muhammadshahi*, to enable people to make astronomical observations. He had Euclid's "Elements of Geometry" translated into Sanskrit as also several works on trigonometry, and Napier's work on the construction and use of logarithms.

Jai Singh was also a social reformer. He tried to enforce a law to reduce the lavish expenditure which the Rajputs had to incur on their daughters' weddings. This had given rise to the evil practice of female infanticide. This remarkable prince ruled Jaipur for nearly 44 years from 1699 to 1743.

## THE JATS

The Jats, a caste of agriculturists, lived in the region around Delhi, Agra and Mathura. Oppression by Mughal officials drove the Jat peasants around Mathura to revolt. They revolted under the leadership of their Jat zamindars in 1669 and then again in 1688. These revolts were crushed but the area remained disturbed. After the death of Aurangzeb, they created disturbances all around Delhi. Though originally a peasant uprising, the Jat revolt, led by zamindars, soon became predatory. They plundered all and sundry, the rich and the poor, the jagirdars and the peasants, the Hindus and the Muslims. They took active part in the Court intrigues at Delhi, often changing sides to suit their own advantage. The Jat state of Bharatpur was set up by Churaman. The Jat power reached its highest glory under Suraj Mal, who ruled from 1756 to 1763 and who was an extremely able administrator and soldier and, a very wise statesman. He extended his authority over a large area which extended from the Ganga in the East to Chambal in the South, the Subah of Agra in the West to the Subah of Delhi in the North. His state included the districts of Agra, Mathura, Meerut, and Aligarh. After his death in 1763, the Jat state declined and was split up among petty zamindars most of whom lived by plunders.

## THE BANGASH PATHANS AND ROHELAS

Muhammad Khan Bangash, an Afghan adventurer, established his control over the territory around Farukhabad, between what is now Aligarh and Kanpur, during the reigns of Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Shah. Similarly, during the breakdown of administration following Nadir Shah's invasion, Ali Muhammad Khan carved out a separate principality, known as Rohilkhand, at the foothills of the Himalayas between the Ganga in the south and the Kumaon hills in the north with its capital first at Bareilly and later at Rampur. The Rohelas clashed constantly with Avadh, Delhi, and the Jats.

## THE SIKHS

At the end of the eighteenth century, Ranjit Singh, chief of the Sukerchakia Misl, rose to prominence. A strong and courageous soldier, an efficient administrator, and a skillful diplomat, he was a born leader of men. He captured Lahore in 1799 and Amritsar in 1802. He soon brought all Sikh chiefs west of the Sutlej under his control and established his own kingdom in the Punjab. Later, he conquered Kashmir, Peshawar, and Multan.

The old Sikh chiefs were transformed into big zamindars and jagirdars. He did not make any changes in the system of land revenue promulgated earlier by the Mughals. The amount of land revenue was calculated on the basis of 50 per cent of the gross produce.

Ranjit Singh built up a powerful, disciplined, and well-equipped army along European lines with the help of European instructors. His new army was not confined to the Sikhs. He also recruited Gurkhas, Biharis, Oriyas, Pathans, Dogras, and Punjabi Muslims. He set up modern foundries to manufacture cannon at Lahore and employed Muslim gunners to man them. It is said that he possessed the second best army in Asia, the first being the army of the English East India Company.



Ranjit Singh had great capacity for choosing his ministers and officials. His court was studded with outstanding men. He was tolerant and liberal in religious matters. He patronized not only Sikh but also Muslim and Hindu holy men. Many of his important ministers and commanders were Muslims and Hindus.

The most prominent and trusted of his ministers was Fakir Azizuddin, while his finance minister was Dewan Dina Nath. His was a state based on equal opportunities for all. Political power was not used for exclusive Sikh benefit. On the other hand, the Sikh peasant was as much oppressed by Sikh chiefs as was the Hindu or Muslim peasant. In fact, the structure of the Punjab as a state under Ranjit Singh was similar to the structure of the other Indian states of the eighteenth century. When the British forbade Ranjit Singh in 1809 to cross the Sutlej and took the Sikh states east of the river under their protection, he kept quiet for he realised that his strength was no match for the British. Thus by his diplomatic realism and military strength he temporarily saved his kingdom from English encroachment.

But he did not remove the foreign threat, he only left it for his successors. And so, after his death, when his kingdom was torn by an intense internal struggle for power, the English moved in and conquered it.

## **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE**

India of the 18th century failed to make progress economically, socially, or culturally at a pace which would have saved the country from collapse. The increasing revenue demands of the state, the oppression of the officials, the greed and rapacity of the nobles, revenue-farmers, and zamindars, the marches and countermarches of the rival armies, and the depredations of the numerous adventurers roaming the land during the first half of the 18th century made the life of the people quite wretched.

India of those days was also a land of contrasts. Extreme poverty existed side by side with extreme riches and luxury. On the one hand, there were the rich and powerful nobles steeped in luxury and comfort, on the other, backward, oppressed and impoverished peasants living at the bare subsistence level and having to bear all sorts of injustices and inequities. Even so, the life of the Indian masses was by and large better at this time than it was after over 100 years of British rule at the end of the 19th century.

Indian agriculture during the 18th century was technically backward and stagnant. The techniques of production had remained stationary for centuries. The peasant tried to make up for technical backwardness by working very hard. He, in fact, performed miracles of production; Moreover, he did not usually suffer from shortage of land. But, unfortunately, he seldom reaped the fruits of his labour. Even though it was his produce that supported the rest of the society, his own reward was miserably inadequate. The state, the zamindars, the jagirdars, and the revenue-farmers tried to extract the maximum amount from him. This was as true of the Mughal state as of the Maratha or Sikh chiefs or other successors of the Mughal state.

Even though Indian villages were largely self-sufficient and imported little from outside and the means of communication were backward, extensive trade within the country and between India and other countries of Asia and Europe was carried on under the Mughals. India imported pearls, raw silk, wool, dates, dried fruits, and rose water from the Persian Gulf region; coffee, gold, drugs, and honey from Arabia; tea, sugar, porcelain, and silk from China; gold, musk and woollen cloth from Tibet; tin from Singapore; spices, perfumes, arrack, and sugar from the Indonesian islands; ivory and drugs from Africa; and woollen cloth, metals such as copper, iron, and lead, and paper from Europe. India's most important article of export was cotton textiles which were famous all over the world for their excellence and were in demand everywhere. India also exported raw silk and silk fabrics, hardware, indigo, saltpetre, opium, rice, wheat, sugar, pepper and other spices, precious stones, and drugs.

Since India was on the whole self-sufficient in handicrafts and agricultural products, it did not import foreign goods on a large scale. On the other hand, its industrial and agricultural products had a steady market abroad, consequently, it exported more than it imported and its trade was balanced by import of silver and gold. In fact, India was known as a sink of precious metals.

Constant warfare and disruption of law and order in many areas during the 18th century harmed the country's internal trade and disrupted its foreign trade to some extent and in some directions. Many trading centres were looted by the contestants for power and by foreign invaders. Many of the trade routes were infested with organised bands of robbers, and traders and their caravans were regularly looted. Even the road between the two imperial cities, Delhi and Agra, was made unsafe by the marauders. Moreover, with the rise of autonomous provincial regimes and innumerable local chiefs, the number of custom houses or chowkies grew by leaps and bounds. Every petty or large ruler tried to increase his income by imposing heavy customs duties on goods entering or passing through his territories. All these factors had an injurious effect on trade though much less than generally believed. The impoverishment of the nobles, who were the largest consumers of luxury products in which trade was conducted, also injured internal trade.

Political factors which hurt trade also adversely affected urban industries. Many prosperous cities, centres of flourishing industry, were sacked and devastated. Delhi was plundered by Nadir Shah; Lahore, Delhi and Mathura by Ahmad Shah Abdali; Agra by the Jats; Surat and other cities of Gujarat and the Deccan by Maratha chiefs; Sarhind by the Sikhs, and so on.

Similarly, artisans catering to the needs of the feudal class and the court suffered as the fortunes of their patrons declined. The decline of internal and foreign trade also hit them hard in some parts of the country. Nevertheless, some industries in other parts of the country gained as a result of expansion in trade with Europe due to the activities of the European trading companies.

Even so India remained a land of extensive manufactures. Indian artisans still enjoyed fame all the world over for their skill. India was still a large-scale manufacturer of cotton and silk fabrics, sugar, jute, dye-stuffs, mineral and metallic products like arms, metal wares, and saltpetre and oils. The important centres of textile industry were Dacca and Murshidabad in Bengal, Patna in Bihar, Surat, Ahmedabad and Broach in Gujarat, Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, Burhanpur in Maharashtra, Jaunpur, Varanasi, Lucknow, and Agra in U.P., Multan and Lahore in the Punjab, Masulipatam, Aurangabad, Chicacole and Vishakhapatnam in Andhra, Bangalore in Mysore, and Coimbatore and Madurai in Madras. Kashmir was a centre of woollen manufactures. Shipbuilding industry flourished in Maharashtra, Andhra, and Bengal. Writing about the great skill of Indians in this respect, an English observer wrote: "in shipbuilding they probably taught the English far more than they learnt from them."

The European Companies bought many Indian-made ships for their use. In fact, at the dawn of the 18th century, India was one of the main centres of world trade and industry, Peter the Great of Russia was led to exclaim:

**"Bear in mind that the commerce of India is the commerce of the world and... he who can exclusively command it is the dictator of Europe."**

## EDUCATION

Education was not completely neglected in 18<sup>th</sup> century India, but it was on the whole defective. It was traditional and out of touch with the rapid developments in the West. The knowledge which it imparted was confined to literature, law, religion, philosophy, and logic, and excluded the study of physical and natural sciences, technology, and geography. Nor did it concern itself with a factual and rational study of society. In all fields original thought was discouraged and reliance placed on ancient learning.

The centres of higher education were spread all over the country and were usually financed by nawabs, rajas, and rich zamindars. Among the Hindus, higher education was based on Sanskrit learning and was mostly confined to Brahmins. Persian education being based on the official language of the time was equally popular among Hindus and Muslims.

Elementary education was quite widespread. Among the Hindus it was imparted through town and village schools while among the Muslims through the Maulvis in maktabs situated in mosques. In those schools the young students were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. Though elementary education was mostly confined to the higher castes like Brahmins, Rajputs, and Vaishyas, many persons from the lower castes also often received it.

Interestingly enough, the average literacy was not less than what it was under the British later. Though the standard of primary education was inadequate by modern standards, it sufficed for the limited purposes of those days. A very pleasant aspect of education then was that the teachers enjoyed high prestige in the community. A bad feature of it was that girls were seldom given education, though some women of the higher classes were an exception.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Social life and culture in the 18th century were marked by stagnation and dependence on the past. There was, of course, no uniformity of culture and social patterns all over the country. Nor did all Hindus and all Muslims form two distinct societies. People were divided by religion, region, tribe, language, and caste. Moreover, the social life and culture of the upper classes, who formed a tiny minority of the total population, was in many respects different from the life and culture of the lower classes.

Caste was the central feature of the social life of the Hindus. Apart from the four varnas, Hindus were divided into numerous castes (Jatis) which differed in their nature from place to place. The caste system rigidly divided people and permanently fixed their place in the social scale. The higher castes, headed by the Brahmins, monopolised all social prestige and privileges. Caste rules were extremely rigid. Inter-caste marriages were forbidden. There were restrictions on inter-dining among members of different castes. In some cases persons belonging to higher castes would not take food touched by persons of the lower castes. Castes often determined the choice of profession, though exceptions did occur. Caste regulations were strictly enforced by caste councils and panchayats and caste chiefs through fines, penances (prayaschitya) and expulsion from the caste. Caste was a major divisive force and element of disintegration in the India of 18th century. It often split Hindus living in the same village or region into many social atoms. It was, of course, possible for a person to acquire a higher social status by acquisition of high office or power, as did the Holkar family in the 18th century. Sometimes, though not often, an entire caste would succeed in raising itself in the caste hierarchy.

Muslims were no less divided by considerations of caste, race, tribe, and status, even though their religion enjoined social equality. The Shia and Sunni nobles were sometimes at loggerheads on account of their religious differences. The Irani, Afghan, Turani, and Hindustani Muslim nobles and officials often stood apart from each other. A large number of Hindus converted to Islam carried their caste into the new religion and observed its distinctions, though not as rigidly as before. Moreover, the sharif Muslims consisting of nobles, scholars, priests, and army officers, looked down upon the ajlaf Muslims or the lower class Muslims in a manner similar to that adopted by the higher caste Hindus towards the lower caste Hindus.

The family system in the 18th century India was primarily patriarchal, that is, the family was dominated by the senior male member and inheritance was through the male line. In Kerala, however, the family was matrilineal. Outside Kerala, women were subjected to nearly complete male control. They were expected to live as mothers and wives only, though in these roles they were shown a great deal of respect and honour. Even during war and anarchy women were seldom molested and were treated with respect. A European traveller, J.A. Dubois, commented, at the beginning of the 19th century:

**“A Hindu woman can go anywhere alone, even in the most crowded places, and she need never fear the impertinent looks and jokes of idle loungers... A house inhabited solely by women is a sanctuary which the most shameless libertine would not dream of violating.”**



But the women, of the time possessed little individuality of their own. This does not mean that there were no exceptions to this rule. Ahilya Bai administered Indore with great success from 1766 to 1796. , Many other Hindu and Muslim ladies played important roles in 18th century politics. While women of the upper classes were not supposed to work outside their homes, peasant women usually worked in the fields and women of the poorer classes often worked outside their homes to supplement the family income. The purdah was common mostly among the higher classes in the North.

It was not practised in the South. Boys and girls were not permitted to mix with each other. All marriages were arranged by the heads of the families, Men were permitted to have more than one wife, but, except for the well-off, they normally had only one. On the other hand a woman was expected to marry only once in her life-time. The custom of early marriage prevailed all over the country. Sometimes children were married when they were only three or four years of age.

Among the upper classes, the evil customs of incurring heavy expenses on marriages and of giving dowry to the bride prevailed. The evil of dowry was especially widespread in Bengal and Rajputana. In Maharashtra it was curbed to some extent by the energetic steps taken by the Peshwas.

Two great social evils of the 18th century India, apart from the caste system, were the custom of sati and the condition of widows. Sati involved the rite of a Hindu widow burning herself along with the body of her dead husband. It was mostly prevalent in Rajputana, Bengal and other parts of northern India. In the South it was uncommon; and the Marathas did not encourage it. Even in Rajputana and Bengal it was practised only by the families of rajas, chiefs, big zamindars and upper castes. Widows belonging to the higher classes and higher castes could not remarry, though in some regions and in some cases, for example, among non-brahmins in Maharashtra, the Jats and people of the hill-regions of the North, widow remarriage was quite common. The lot of the Hindu widow was usually pitiable. There were all sorts of restrictions on her clothing, diet, movements, etc. In general, she was expected to renounce all the pleasures of the earth and to serve selflessly the members of her husband's or her brother's family, depending on where she spent the remaining years of her life. Sensitive Indians were often touched by the hard and harsh life of the widows. Raja Sawai Jai Singh of Amber and the Maratha General Prashuram Bhau tried to promote widow remarriage but failed.

Culturally, India showed signs of exhaustion during the 18th century. Cultural continuity with the preceding centuries was, of course, maintained. But at the same time culture remained wholly traditionalist. Cultural activities of the time were mostly financed by the Royal Court, rulers, and nobles and chiefs whose impoverishment led to their gradual neglect. The most rapid decline occurred precisely in those branches of arts which depended on the patronage of kings, princes, and nobles. This was true most of all of Mughal architecture and painting. Many of the painters of the Mughal School migrated to provincial courts and flourished at Hyderabad, Lucknow, Kashmir, and Patna. At the same time new schools of painting were born and achieved distinction. The paintings of Kangra and Rajput Schools revealed new vitality and taste. In the field of architecture, the Imambara of Lucknow reveals proficiency in technique but a decadence in architectural taste. On the other hand, the city of Jaipur and its buildings ate an example of continuing vigour. Music continued to develop and flourish in the 18th century. Significant progress was made in this field in the reign of Muhammad Shah.

A noteworthy feature of the literary life of the 18th century was the spread of Urdu language and the vigorous growth of Urdu poetry. Urdu gradually became the medium of social intercourse among the upper classes of northern India. While Urdu poetry shared, in common the weaknesses of the contemporary literature in other Indian languages, it produced brilliant poets like Mir, Sauda, Nazir, and in the 19th century, that great genius Mirza Ghalib.

Similarly, there was a revival of Malayalam literature, especially under the patronage of the Travancore rulers, Martanda Varma and Rama Varma. One of the great poets of Kerala, Kunchan Nambiar, who wrote popular poetry in the language of daily usage, lived at this time. The 18th century Kerala also witnessed the full development of Kathakali literature, drama and dance. The Padmanabhan Palace with its remarkable architecture and mural paintings was also constructed in the 18th century.

Tayaumanavar (1706-44) was one of the best exponents of sittal poetry in Tamil, in line with other poets he protested against the abuses of the caste system.

In Assam, literature developed under the patronage of the Ahom kings. Dayaram, one of the great lyricists of Gujarat, wrote during the second half of the 18th century. Heer Ranjha, the famous romantic epic in Punjabi, was composed at this time by Warris Shah. For Sindhi literature, the 18th century was a period of enormous achievement. Shah Abdul Latif composed his famous collection of poems, Risalo. Sachal and Sami were the other great Sindhi poets of the century.

The main weakness of Indian culture lay in the field of science. Throughout the 18th century India remained far behind the West in science and technology. For the last 200 years Western Europe had been undergoing a scientific and economic revolution that was leading to a spate of inventions and discoveries.

The scientific outlook was gradually pervading the Western mind and revolutionising the philosophic, political, and economic outlook of the Europeans and their institutions. On the other hand, the Indians who had in earlier ages made vital contributions in the fields of mathematics and natural sciences, had been neglecting the sciences for several centuries. The Indian mind was still tied to tradition; both the nobles and the common people were superstitious to a high degree. The Indians remained almost wholly ignorant of the scientific, cultural, political, and economic achievements of the West. The 18th century Indian rulers did not show any interest in things western except in weapons of war and techniques of military training. This weakness in the realm of science was to a large extent responsible for the total subjugation of India by the most advanced country of the time.

Struggle for power and wealth, economic decline, social backwardness, and cultural stagnation had a deep and harmful impact on the morals of a section of the Indian people. The nobles, in particular, degenerated in their private and public life. The virtues of loyalty, gratitude, and faithfulness to their pledged word tended to disappear in the single-minded pursuit of selfish aims. Many of the nobles were prey to degrading vices and excessive luxury. Most of them took bribes when in office. Surprisingly enough, the common people were not debased to any marked extent. They continued to exhibit a high degree of personal integrity and morality. For example, the well known British official **John Malcolm** remarked in 1821:

**I do not know the example of any great population, in similar circumstances, preserving through such & period of changes and tyrannical rule, so much virtue and so many qualities as are to be found in a great proportion of the inhabitants of this country.**

In particular, he praised "the absence of the common vices of theft, drunkenness, and violence."

Friendly relations between Hindus and Muslims were a very healthy feature of life in 18<sup>th</sup> century India. Even though the nobles and chiefs of the time fought each other incessantly, their fights and their alliances were seldom based on distinctions of religion. In other words, their politics were essentially secular. In fact, there was little communal bitterness or religious intolerance in the country. All people, high or low, respected one another's religion and a spirit of tolerance. The mutual relations of Hindus and Muslims were those of brothers among brothers." This was particularly true of the common people in the villages and towns who fully shared one another's joys and sorrows, irrespective of religious affiliations.

Hindus and Muslims cooperated in non-religious spheres such as social life and cultural affairs. The evolution of a composite Hindu-Muslim culture, and of common ways and attitudes, continued unchecked. Hindu writers often wrote in Persian while Muslim writers wrote in Hindi, Bengali, and other vernaculars, often dealing with subjects of Hindu social life and religion, such as Radha and Krishna, Sita and Ram, and Nal and Damayanti. The development of Urdu language and literature provided a new meeting ground between Hindus and Muslims.

Even in the religious sphere, the mutual influence and respect that had been developing in the last few centuries as a result of the spread of the Bhakti movement among Hindus and Sufism among Muslims continued to grow. A large number of Hindus worshipped Muslim saints and many Muslims showed equal

eneration for Hindu gods and saints. Muslim rulers, nobles, and commoners joyfully joined in the Hindu festivals such as Holi, Diwali, and Durga Puja just as Hindus participated in the Muharram processions. It is noteworthy that Raja Rammohun Roy, the greatest Indian of the first half of the 19th century, was influenced in an equal measure by the Hindu and the Islamic philosophical and religious systems.

It may also be noted that religious affiliation was not the main point of departure in cultural and social life. The ways of life of the upper class Hindus and Muslims converged much more than the ways of life of upper class and lower class Hindus or of upper class and lower class Muslims. Similarly, regions or areas provided points of departure. People of one region had far greater cultural synthesis irrespective of religion than people following the same religion spread over different regions. People living in the villages also tended to have a different pattern of social and cultural life than that of the town dwellers.

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## UNIT-IV

# THE BEGINNINGS OF EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

INDIA'S trade relations with Europe go back to the ancient days of the Greeks. During the Middle Ages trade between Europe and India and South-East Asia was carried on along several routes. One was by sea along the Persian Gulf, and from there overland through Iraq and Turkey, and then again by sea to Venice and Genoa. A second was via the Red Sea and then overland to Alexandria in Egypt and from there by sea to Venice and Genoa. A third, less frequented overland route lay through the passes of the North-West frontier of India, across Central Asia, and Russia to the Baltic. The Asian part of the trade was carried on mostly by Arab merchants and sailors, while the Mediterranean and European part was the virtual monopoly of the Italians. Goods from Asia to Europe passed through many states and many hands. Every state levied tolls and duties while every merchant made a substantial profit. There were many other obstacles, such as pirates and natural calamities on the way. Yet the trade remained highly profitable. This was mostly due to the pressing demand of the people of Europe for Eastern spices which fetched high prices in European markets. The Europeans needed spices because they lived on salted and peppered meat during the winter months, when there was little grass to feed the cattle, and only a liberal use of spices could make this meat palatable. Consequently, European food was as highly spiced as Indian food till the 17th century.

The old trading routes between the East and the West came under Turkish control after the Ottoman conquest of Asia Minor and the capture of Constantinople in 1453. Moreover, the merchants of Venice and Genoa monopolised the trade between Europe and Asia and refused to let the new nation states of Western Europe, particularly Spain and Portugal, have any share in the trade through these old routes.

But the trade with India and Indonesia was too highly priced by the West Europeans to be so easily given up. The demand for spices was pressing and the profits to be made in their trade inviting. The reputedly fabulous wealth of India was an additional attraction as there was an acute shortage of gold all over Europe, and gold was essential as a medium of exchange if trade was to grow unhampered. The West European states and merchants therefore began to search for new and safer sea routes to India and the Spice Islands of Indonesia, then known as the East Indies. They wanted to break the Arab and Venetian trade monopolies, to bypass Turkish hostility, and to open direct trade relations with the East. They were well-equipped to do so as great advances in ship-building and the science of navigation had taken place during the 15th century. Moreover, the Renaissance had generated a great spirit of adventure among the people of Western Europe.

"Empowering Endeavours"

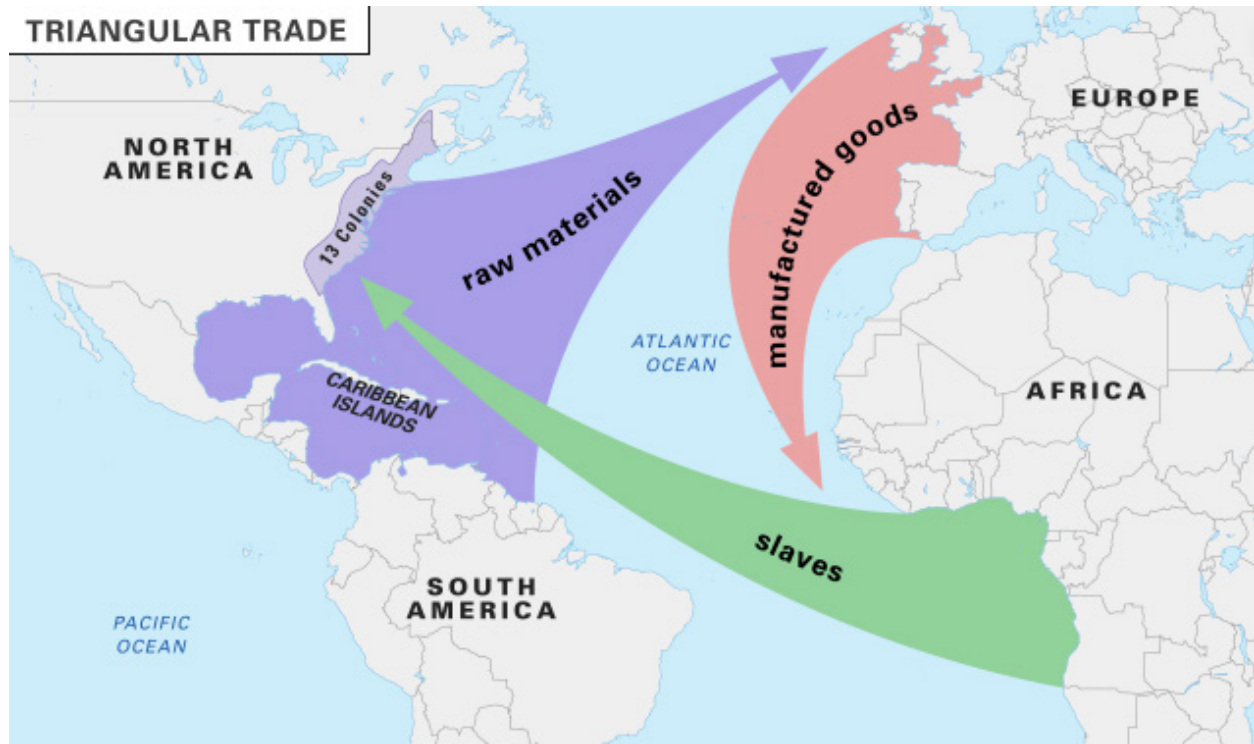


The first steps were taken by Portugal and Spain whose seamen, sponsored and controlled by their governments, began a great era of geographical discoveries. In 1494, Columbus of Spain set out to reach India and discovered America instead. In 1498, Vasco da Gama of Portugal discovered a new and all-sea route from Europe to India. He sailed round Africa via the Cape of Good Hope and reached Calicut. He returned with a cargo which sold for 60 times the cost of his voyage.

These and other navigational discoveries opened a new chapter in the history of the world. Adam Smith wrote later that the discovery of America and the Cape route to India were "the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind." The 17th and 18th centuries were to witness an enormous increase in world trade. The vast new continent of America was opened to Europe and relations between Europe and Asia were completely transformed. The new continent was rich in precious metals. Its gold and silver poured into Europe where they powerfully stimulated trade and provided some of the capital which was soon to make European nations the most advanced in trade, industry and science. Moreover, America was to provide an inexhaustible market for European manufacturers.

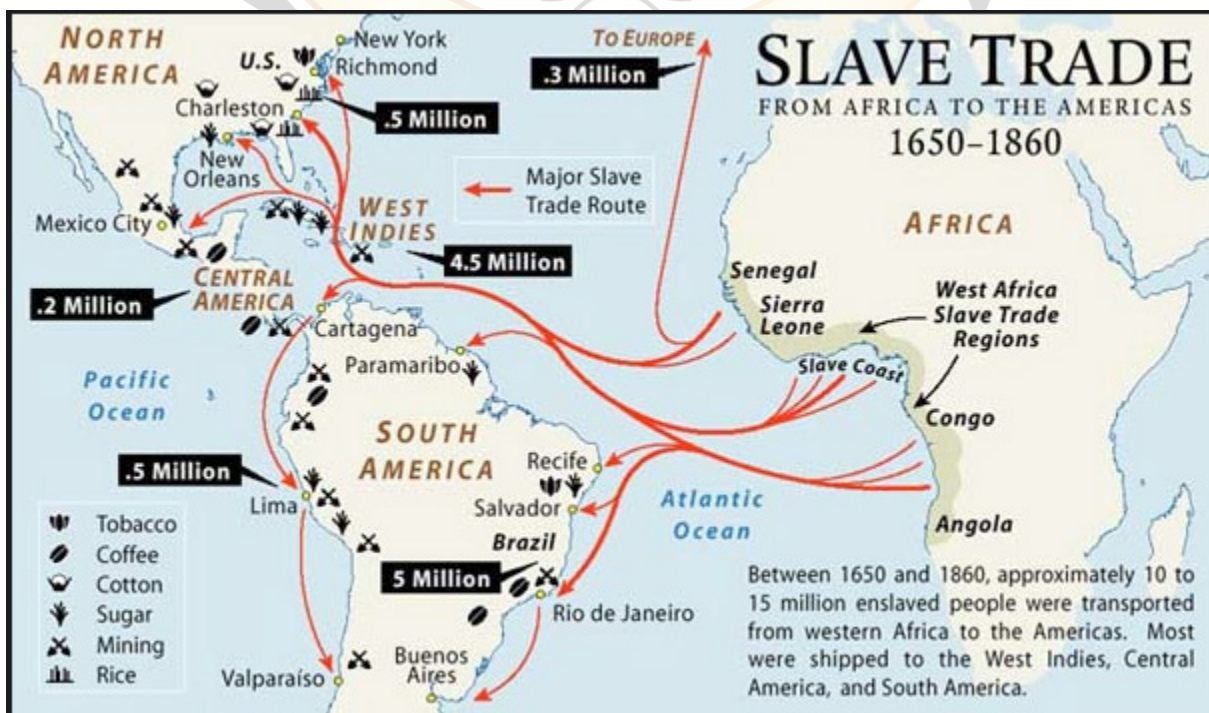
Another major source of early capital accumulation or enrichment for European countries was their penetration of Africa in the middle of the 15th century. In the beginning, gold and ivory of Africa had attracted the foreigner. Very soon, however, trade with Africa centred around the slave trade. In the 16th century this trade was a monopoly of Spain and Portugal. Later it was dominated by Dutch, French and British merchants Year after year, particularly after 1650; thousands of Africans were sold as slaves in the West Indies and in North and South America. The slave ships carried manufactured goods from Europe to Africa, exchanged them on the coast of Africa for Negroes, took these slaves across the Atlantic and exchanged them for the colonial produce of plantations or mines, and finally brought back and sold this produce in Europe. It was on the immense profits of this triangular trade that the commercial supremacy of England and France was to be based.





The demand for slaves on the sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations and mines of the Western hemisphere was inexhaustive as the hard conditions of work and inhuman treatment of the slaves led to high mortality. Moreover, the limited population of Europe could not have supplied the cheap labour needed for the full exploitation of the land and mines of the New World. While no exact record of the number of Africans sold into slavery exists, historians estimate has ranged between 15 and 50 millions.

While loss of people on a massive scale led to the crippling of African countries and societies, a great deal of West European and North American prosperity was based on the slave trade and the plantations worked by slave labour. Moreover, profits of slave trade and slave-worked plantations provided some of the capital which financed the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. A similar role was later played by the wealth extracted from India.





Slavery was later abolished in the 19th century after it had ceased to play an important economic role, but it was openly defended and praised as long as it was profitable. Monarch, ministers, members of Parliament, dignitaries of the church, leaders of public opinion, and merchants and industrialists supported the slave trade. For example, in Britain, Queen Elizabeth, George III, Edmund Burke, Nelson, Gladstone, Disraeli and Carlyle were some of the defenders and apologists of slavery.

In the 16th century, European merchants and soldiers also began the long process of first penetrating and then subjecting Asian lands to their control. In the process, the prosperity of the Italian towns and merchants was destroyed as commerce and then political power gradually shifted westward towards the Atlantic coast.

## THE PORTUGUESE AND THE DUTCH

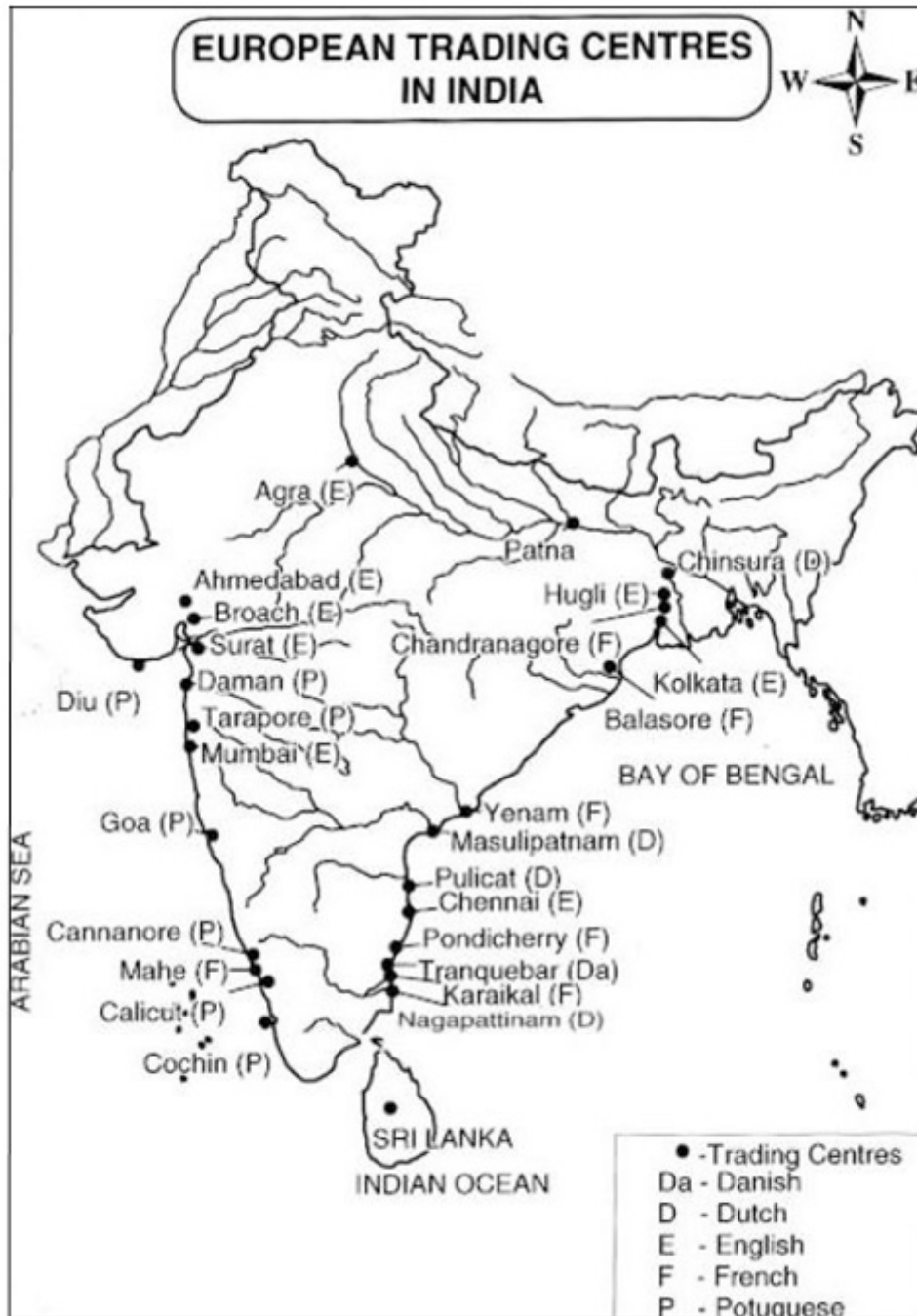
Portugal had a monopoly of the highly profitable Eastern trade for nearly a century. In India, she established her trading settlements at Cochin, Goa, Diu, and Daman. From the beginning the Portuguese combined the use of force with trade. In this they were helped by the superiority of their armed ships which enabled them to dominate the seas. A handful of Portuguese soldiers and sailors could maintain their position on the seas against the much more powerful land powers of India and Asia. Besides, they also saw that they could take advantage of the mutual rivalries of the Indian princes to strengthen their position. They intervened in the conflict between the ruler of Calicut and Cochin to establish their trading centres and forts on the Malabar Coast. From here they attacked and destroyed Arab shipping, brutally killing hundreds of Arab merchants and seamen. By threatening Mughal shipping, they also succeeded in securing many trading concessions from the Mughal Emperors.

Under the viceroyalty of Afonso de Albuquerque who captured Goa in 1510, the Portuguese established their domination over the entire Asian coast from Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to Malacca in Malaya and the Spice Islands in Indonesia. They seized Indian territories on the coast and waged constant war to expand their trade and dominions and safeguard their trade monopoly from their European rivals, nor did they shy away from piracy and plunder. In the words of James Mill, the famous British historian of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "The Portuguese followed their merchandise as their chief occupation, but like the English and the Dutch... of the same period, had no objection to plunder, when it fell in their way."

The Portuguese were intolerant and fanatical in religious matters. They indulged in forcible conversion, offering people the alternative of Christianity or sword. "Their approach in this respect was particularly hateful to people of India where religious tolerance was the rule". They also indulged in inhuman cruelties and lawlessness. In spite of their barbaric behaviour their possessions in India survived for a century because they enjoyed control over the high seas, their soldiers and administrators maintained strict discipline, and they did not have to face the might of the Mughal Empire as South India was outside Mughal influence. They clashed with the Mughal power in Bengal in 1631 and were driven out of their settlement at Hugli. Their hold over the Arabian Sea had already been weakened by the English and their influence in Gujarat had become negligible by this time.

Portugal was, however, incapable of maintaining for long its trade monopoly or its dominions in the East. Its population was less than a million, its Court was autocratic and decadent, its merchants enjoyed much less power and prestige than its landed aristocrats, it lagged behind in the development of shipping, and it followed a policy of religious intolerance.

The Portuguese and the Spanish had left the English and the Dutch far behind during the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century. But, in the latter half of the 16th century, England and Holland, and later France, all growing commercial and naval powers, waged a fierce struggle against the Spanish and Portuguese monopoly of world trade. Portugal had become a Spanish dependency in 1580. In 1588 the English defeated the Spanish fleet called the Armada and shattered Spanish naval supremacy forever. This enabled the English and the Dutch merchants to use the Cape of Good Hope route to India and so to join in the race for empire in the East. In the end, the Dutch gained control over Indonesia and the British over India, Ceylon, and Malaya.



The Dutch had for long been dealing in Eastern produce which they bought in Portugal and sold all over Northern Europe. This had led them to develop better ships, scientific sailing techniques, and efficient business methods and organisation. Their revolt against the Spanish domination of their homeland, the Netherlands, and Portugal's merger with Spain made them look for alternative sources of spices. In 1595, four Dutch ships sailed to India via the Cape of Good Hope. In **1602**, the **Dutch East India Company** was formed and the Dutch States General—the Dutch parliament—gave it a Charter empowering it to make war, conclude treaties, acquire territories and build fortresses.

The main interest of the Dutch lay not in India but in the Indonesian Islands of Java, Sumatra, and the Spice Islands where spices were produced. They soon turned out the Portuguese from the Malay Straits and the Indonesian Islands and, in 1623, defeated English attempts to establish themselves there. It appeared at the time that the Dutch had successfully seized the most important profitable part of Asian trade. They did not, however, entirely abandon Indian trade. They also established trading depots at Surat, Broach, Cambay, and Ahmedabad in Gujarat in West India, Cochin in Kerala, Nagapatam in Madras,

Masulipatam in Andhra, Chinsura in Bengal, Patna in Bihar, and Agra in Uttar Pradesh. In 1658 they also conquered Ceylon from the Portuguese. They exported indigo, raw silk, cotton textiles, saltpetre, and opium from India. Like the Portuguese they treated the people of India cruelly and exploited them ruthlessly.

The English merchants too looked greedily on the Asian trade. The success of the Portuguese, the rich cargoes of spices, calicoes, silk, gold, pearls, drugs, porcelain, and ebony they carried, and the high profits they made inflamed the imagination of the merchants of England and made them impatient to participate in such profitable commerce. But, till the end of the 16th century, they were too weak to challenge the naval might of Portugal and Spain. For over 50 years they searched without success for an alternative passage to India. Meanwhile they gathered strength on the sea. In 1579, Drake sailed around the world. In 1588, the defeat of the Spanish Armada led to the opening of the sea-passage to the East.

## THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY

An English association or company to trade with the East was formed in 1599 under the auspices of a group of merchants known as the Merchant Adventurers. The company was granted a Royal Charter and the exclusive privilege to trade in the East by Queen Elizabeth on 31 December 1600 and was popularly known as the **East India Company**. From the beginning, it was linked with the monarchy-Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) was one of the shareholders of the company.

The first voyage of the English East India Company was made in 1601 when its ships sailed to the Spice Islands of Indonesia. In 1608 it decided to open a factory, the name given at the time to a trading depot, at Surat on the West coast of India and sent Captain Hawkins to Jahangir's Court to obtain Royal favours.

Initially, Hawkins was received in a friendly manner. He was given a mansab of 400 and a jagir. Later, he was expelled from Agra as a result of Portuguese intrigue. This convinced the English of the need to overcome Portuguese influence at the Mughal Court if they were to obtain any concessions from the Imperial Government. They defeated a Portuguese naval squadron at Swally near Surat in 1612 and then again in 1614. These victories led the Mughals to hope that in view of their naval weakness they could use the English to counter the Portuguese on the sea. Moreover, the Indian merchants would certainly benefit by competition among their foreign buyers. Consequently, the English Company was given permission by a Royal farman to open factories at several places on the West coast.

The English were not satisfied with this concession. In 1615 their ambassador Sir Thomas Roe reached the Mughal Court. They also exerted pressure on the Mughal authorities by taking advantage of India's naval weakness and harassing Indian traders and shipping to the Red Sea and to Mecca. Thus, combining entreaties with threats, Roe succeeded in getting an Imperial farman to trade and establish factories in all parts of the Mughal Empire. Roe's success further angered the Portuguese and a fierce naval battle between the two countries began in 1620. It ended in English victory.

Hostilities between the two came to an end in 1630. In 1662 the Portuguese gave the Island of Bombay to King Charles II of England as dowry-for marrying a Portuguese Princess. Eventually, the Portuguese lost all their possessions in India except Goa, Diu and Daman. The Dutch, the English, and the Marathas benefited, the Marathas capturing Salsette and Bassein in 1739.

The English Company fell out with the Dutch Company over division of the spice trade of the Indonesian Islands. Ultimately, the Dutch nearly expelled the English from the trade of the Spice Islands and the latter were compelled to concentrate on India where the situation was more favourable to them- The intermittent war in India between the two powers, which had begun in 1654, ended in 1667, when the English gave up all claims to Indonesia while the Dutch agreed to leave alone the English settlements in India. The English, however, continued their efforts to drive out the Dutch from the Indian trade and by 1795 they had expelled the Dutch from their last possession in India.



The English East Company had very humble beginnings in India. Surat was the centre of its trade till 1687. Throughout this period the English remained petitioners before the Mughal authorities. By 1623 they had established factories at Surat, Broach, Ahmedabad, Agra, and Masulipatam. From the very beginning, the English trading company tried to combine trade and diplomacy with war and control of the territory where their factories were situated. In fact, already Roe had given to the English authorities the advice that was to lay the pattern of future British relations with India.

**“Assure you”, he wrote, “I know these people are best treated with the sword in one hand and the Caducean (a rod carried by a messenger) in the other.”**

In 1625 the Company’s authorities at Surat made an attempt to fortify their factory but the chiefs of the English factory were immediately imprisoned and put in irons by the local authorities of the Mughal Empire which was still in its vigour. Similarly, when the Company’s English rivals made piratical attacks on Mughal shipping, the Mughal authorities imprisoned in retaliation the President of the Company at Surat and members of his Council and released them only on payment of £ 18,000.

Conditions in the South were more favourable to the English as they did not have to face a strong Indian Government there. The great Vijayanagar Kingdom had been overthrown in 1565 and its place taken by a number of petty and weak states, It was easy to appeal to their greed or overawe them with armed strength.

The English opened their first factory in the South at Masulipatam in 1611. But they soon shifted the centre of their activity to Madras the lease of which was granted to them by the local Raja in 1639. Madras was then a strip of coastal territory six miles long and one mile broad. The Raja authorised them to fortify the place, to administer it, and to coin money on condition of payment to him of half of the customs revenue of the port. Here the English built a small fort around their factory called Fort St. George.



**Fort St. George, Madras**

By the end of the 17th ‘ Century the English Company was claiming full sovereignty over Madras and was ready to fight in, defence of the claim. Interestingly enough, from the very beginning this Company of profit-seeking merchants was also determined to make Indians pay for the conquest of their own country.

The Island of Bombay was acquired by the East India Company from Portugal in 1668 and was immediately fortified. In Bombay the English found a large and easily defended port for that reason, and because English trade was threatened at the time by the rising Maratha power, Bombay soon superseded Surat as the headquarters of the Company on the West Coast.

In Eastern India, the English Company had opened its first factories in Orissa in 1633. In 1651 it was given permission to trade at Hugli in Bengal. It soon opened factories at Patna, Balasore and other places in Bengal and Bihar.

It now desired that in Bengal too it should have an independent settlement. Moreover, their easy success in trade and in establishing independent and fortified settlements at Madras and at Bombay, and the preoccupation of Aurangzeb with the anti-Maratha campaigns led the English to abandon the role of humble petitioners. They now dreamt of establishing political power in India which would enable them to compel the Mughals to allow them a free hand in trade, to force Indians to sell cheap and buy dear, to keep the rival European traders out, and to make their trade independent of the policies of the Indian powers. Political power would also make it possible for them to appropriate Indian revenues and thus to conquer the country with its own resources, such plans were explicitly put forward at the time. The Governor of Bombay, Gerald Aungier, wrote to the Directors of the Company in London,

**“The time now requires you to manage your general commerce with the sword in your hands”**

In 1687, the Directors advised the Governor of Madras to establish such a policy of civil and military power and create and secure such a huge revenue to maintain both as may be the foundation of a large, well-grounded, secure English dominion in India for all time to come.

Hostilities between the English and the Mughal Emperor broke out in 1686 after the former had sacked Hugli and declared war on the Emperor. But the English had seriously miscalculated the situation and underestimated Mughal strength. The Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb was even now more than a match for the petty forces of the East India Company. The war ended disastrously for them. They were driven out of their factories in Bengal and compelled to seek refuge in a fever-stricken island at the mouth of the Ganga. Their factories at Surat, Masulipatam, and Vizagapatnam were seized and their fort at Bombay besieged. Having discovered that they were not yet strong enough to fight the Mughal power, the English once again became humble petitioners and submitted “that the ill crimes they have done may be pardoned.” They expressed their willingness to trade under the protection of the Indian rulers. Obviously, they had learnt their lesson. Once again they relied on flattery and humble entreaties to get trading concessions from the Mughal Emperor.

The Mughal authorities readily pardoned the English folly as they had no means of knowing that these harmless-looking foreign traders would one day pose a serious threat to the country, instead they recognised that foreign trade carried on by the Company benefited Indian artisans and merchants and thereby enriched the State's treasury. Moreover, the English, though weak on land, were, because of their naval supremacy, capable of completely ruining Indian trade and shipping to Iran, West Asia, Northern and Eastern Africa and East Asia. Aurangzeb therefore permitted them to resume trade on payment of Rs. 150,000 as compensation. In 1691 the Company was granted exemption from the payment of custom duties in Bengal in return for Rs. 3,000 a year. In 1698, the Company acquired the zamindari of the three villages Sutanati, Kalikata, and Govindpur where it built Fort William around its factory.

The village Boon grew into a city which came to be known as Calcutta. In 1717 the Company secured from Emperor Farrukh Siyar a farman confirming the privileges granted in 1691 and extending them to Gujarat and the Deccan. But during the first half of the 18th century Bengal was ruled by strong Nawabs such as Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan. They exercised strict control over the English traders and prevented them from misusing their privileges. Nor did they allow them to strengthen fortifications at Calcutta or to rule the city independently. Here the East India Company remained a mere zamindar of the Nawab.

Even though the political ambitions of the Company were frustrated, its commercial affairs flourished as never before. Its imports from India into England increased from £ 500,000 in 1708 to £ 1,795,000 in 1740. This increase was recorded in spite of the fact that the English Government forbade the use of Indian cotton and silk textiles in England in order to protect the English textile industry and to prevent export of silver from England to India. Thus at a time when the English were pleading for free trade in India they were restricting freedom of trade in their own country and denying access to Indian manufactures.

British settlements in Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta became the nuclei of flourishing cities. Large numbers of Indian merchants and bankers were attracted to these cities. This was due partly to the new commercial opportunities available in these cities and partly to the unsettled conditions and insecurity outside them, caused by the break-up of the Mughal Empire. By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Madras had increased to 300,000, of Calcutta to 200,000 and of Bombay to 70,000. It should also be noted that these three cities contained fortified English settlements; they also had immediate access to the sea where English naval power remained far superior to that of the Indians. In case of conflict with any Indian authority, the English could always escape from these cities to the sea. And when a suitable opportunity arose for them to take advantage of the political disorders in the country, they could use these strategic cities as spring-boards for the conquest of India.

### THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF THE COMPANY

The Charter of 1600 granted the East India Company the exclusive privilege of trading East of the Cape of Good Hope for a period of 15 years. The Charter provided for the management of the Company by a committee consisting of a Governor, a Deputy-Governor, and 24 members to be elected by a general body of the merchants forming the Company. This committee later on came to be known as the, “**Court of Directors**” and its members as Directors. The East Indian Company soon became the most important trading company of England. Between 1601 and 1612 its rate of profit came to nearly 20 per cent per annum. Its profits were derived both from trade and from piracy, there being no clear dividing line between the two at the time. In 1612 the Company made a profit of £ 1,000,000 on a capital of £ 200,000. During the entire 17th century the rate of profit was very high.

But the Company was a strictly closed corporation or a monopoly. No nonmember was allowed to trade with the East or to share in its high profits. However, from the very beginning English manufacturers and those merchants who could not secure a place in the ranks of the monopoly companies carried on a vigorous campaign against royal monopolies like the East India Company. But the monarchs threw their influence behind the big companies who gave heavy bribes to them and to other influential political leaders. From 1609 to 1676, the Company gave loans amounting to £ 170,000 to Charles II, In return, Charles II granted it a series of Charters confirming its previous privileges, empowering it to build forts, raise troops, make war and peace with the powers of the East, and authorising its servants in India to administer justice to ail Englishmen and others living in English settlements. Thus the Company acquired extensive military and judicial powers.

Many English merchants continued to trade in Asia in spite of the monopoly of the East India Company. They called themselves Free Merchants while the Company called them Interlopers. These Interlopers in the end compelled the Company to take them into partnership. A change of fortunes occurred in 1688 when Parliament became supreme in England as a result of the Revolution of 1688 which overthrew the Stuart king James II and invited William III and his wife Mary to be the joint sovereign of Britain. The “Free Merchants” now began to press their case on the public and the Parliament. The Company defended itself by giving heavy bribes to the King, his ministers, and members of the Parliament. In one year alone it spent £ 80,000 on bribes, giving the King £ 10,000. In the end, they secured a new Charter in 1693.

But time was running against the Company; its success was short-lived. In 1694, the House of Commons passed a Resolution that “all subjects of England have equal rights to trade in the East Indies, unless prohibited by Act of Parliament.” The rivals of the Company founded another Company known as the New



Company. It gave a loan of £ 2,000,000 to the Government at a time when the Old Company could offer only £ 700,000. Consequently, the Parliament granted the monopoly of trade with the East to the New Company. The Old Company refused to give up its profitable trade so easily. It bought large shares in the New Company to be able to influence its policies. At the same time its servants in India refused to let the servants of the New Company carry on trade there. Both companies faced ruin as a result of their mutual conflict. Finally, in 1702, the two decided to join forces and together formed a united company. The new company entitled- The Limited Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies-came into existence in 1708.

### **THE GOVERNMENT & ORGANISATION OF THE COMPANY'S FACTORIES IN INDIA**

As the East India Company gradually grew in power and tended to acquire the status of a sovereign state in India, the organisation of its factories in India too changed and developed accordingly. A factory of the Company was generally a fortified area within which the warehouses (stores), offices, and houses of the Company's employees were situated. It is to be noted that no manufacture was carried on in this factory.

The Company's servants were divided into three ranks: writers, factors, and merchants. They all lived and dined together as if in a hostel and at Company's cost. A writer was paid 10 pounds (100 rupees) a year, a factor 20 to 40 pounds (200 to 400 rupees), and a merchant 40 pounds (400 rupees) or a little more. Thus, they were paid Very low salaries. Their real income, for which they were so keen to take service in India, came from the permission the Company granted them to carry on private trade within the country while the trade between India and Europe was reserved for the Company.

The Factory with its trade was administered by a Governor-in-Council. The Governor was merely the President of the Council and had no power apart from the Council which took decisions by a majority vote. The Council consisted of senior merchants of the Company.

### **THE ANGLO-FRENCH STRUGGLE IN SOUTH INDIA**

The English East India Company's schemes of territorial conquests and political domination, which had been frustrated by Aurangzeb at the end of the 17th Century, were revived during the 1740's because of the visible decline of the Mughal power. Nadir Shah's invasion had revealed the decay of the central authority. But there was not much scope for foreign penetration in Western India where the vigorous Marathas held sway and in Eastern India where Alivardi Khan maintained strict control, in Southern India, however, conditions were gradually becoming favourable to foreign adventurers. While central authority had disappeared there after Aurangzeb's death, the strong hand of Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah was also withdrawn by his death in 1748. Moreover, the Maratha chiefs regularly invaded Hyderabad and the rest of the South collecting chauth. These raids resulted in politically unsettled conditions and administrative disorganisation. The Carnatic was embroiled in fratricidal wars of succession.

These conditions gave the foreigners an opportunity to expand their political influence and control over the affairs of the South Indian states. But the English were not alone in putting forward commercial and political claims. While they had, by the end of the 17th century, eliminated their Portuguese and Dutch rivals, France had appeared as a new rival. For nearly 20 years from 1744 to 1763 the French and the English were to wage a bitter war for control over the trade, wealth, and territory of India.

The French East India Company was founded in 1664. It made rapid progress after it was reorganised in the 1720's and soon began to catch up with the English Company. It was firmly established at Chandernagore near Calcutta and Pondicherry on the East Coast. The latter was fully fortified. The French Company had some other factories at several ports on the East and the West coasts. It had also acquired control over the islands of Mauritius and Reunion in the Indian Ocean.

The French East India Company was heavily dependent on the French Government which helped it by giving it treasury grants, subsidies, and bans, and in various other ways. Consequently, it was largely con-

trolled by the Government which appointed its directors after 1723. Moreover, big shares in the Company were held by the nobles and others were more interested in quick dividends than in making the Company a lasting commercial success. So long as the loans and subsidies from the Government enabled the directors to declare dividends, they did not care much about the success or soundness of its commercial ventures. State control of the Company proved harmful to it in another way. The French state of the time was autocratic, semi-feudal, and unpopular and suffered from corruption, inefficiency, and instability.

Instead of being forward-looking it was decadent, bound by tradition, and in general unsuited to the times.

In 1742, war broke out in Europe between France and England. One of the major causes of the war was rivalry over colonies in America. Another was their trade rivalry in India. This rivalry was intensified by the knowledge that the Mughal Empire was disintegrating and so the prize of trade or territory was likely to be much bigger than in the past. Anglo-French conflict in India lasted for nearly 20 years and led to the establishment of British power in India. The English Company was the wealthier of the two because of its superiority in trade. It also possessed naval superiority. Moreover, its possessions in India had been held longer and were better fortified and more prosperous. Materially, therefore, the advantage lay with the British.

The war in Europe between England and France soon spread to India where the two East India Companies clashed with each other. In 1745, the English navy captured French ships off the South-east coast of India and threatened Pondicherry. Dupleix, the French Governor-General at Pondicherry at this time, was a statesman of genius and imagination. Under his brilliant leadership, the French retaliated and occupied Madras in 1746. This led to a very important event of the war. The British appealed to the Nawab of Carnatic, in whose territory Madras was situated, to save their settlement from the French. The Nawab agreed to intervene as he wanted to convince the foreign merchants that he was still the master of his territories. He sent an army against the French to stop the two foreign trading companies from fighting on his soil. And so the 10,000 strong army of the Nawab clashed with a small French force, consisting of 230 Europeans and 700 Indian soldiers trained along Western lines, at St. Thome on the banks of the Adyar River. The Nawab was decisively defeated.

This battle revealed the immense superiority of Western armies over Indian armies because of their better equipment and organisation. The Indian pike was no match for the Western musket and bayonet, nor the Indian cavalry for the Western artillery. The large but ill disciplined and unwieldy Indian armies could not stand up against the smaller but better disciplined Western armies.

In 1748, the general war between England and France ended and, as a part of the peace settlement, Madras was restored to the English. Though war had ended, the rivalry in trade and over the possessions in India continued and had to be decided one way or the other. Moreover, the war had revealed to the full the weakness of Indian government and armies and thereby fully aroused the cupidity of both the Companies for territorial expansion in India.

Dupleix now decided to use the lessons he had learnt in the recent war with the Nawab of Carnatic. He evolved the strategy of using the well-disciplined, modern French army to intervene in the mutual quarrels of the Indian princes and, by supporting one against the other, securing monetary, commercial, or territorial favours from the victor. Thus, he planned to use the resources and armies of the local rajahs, nawabs, and chiefs to serve the interests of the French Company and to expel the English from India. The only barrier to the success of this strategy could have been the refusal of Indian rulers to permit such foreign intervention. But the Indian rulers were guided not by patriotism, but by narrow-minded pursuit of personal ambition and gain. They had little hesitation in inviting the foreigners to help them settle accounts with their internal rivals.

In 1748, a situation arose in the Carnatic and Hyderabad which gave full scope to Dupleix's talents for intrigue. In the Carnatic, Chanda Sahib began to conspire against the Nawab, Anwaruddin, while in Hyderabad the death of Asaf Jah, Nizam-ul-Mulk, was followed by civil war between his son Nasir Jang and his grandson Muzaffar Jang. Dupleix seized this opportunity and concluded a secret treaty with Chanda Sahib and Muzaffar Jang to help them with his well-trained French and Indian forces. In 1749, the three allies defeated and killed Anwaruddin in a battle at Ambur. The latter's son, Muhammad Ali, fled to Trichinopoly. The rest of the Carnatic passed under the dominion of Chanda Sahib who rewarded the French with a grant of 80 villages around Pondicherry.

In Hyderabad too, the French were successful. Nasir Jang was killed and Muzaffar Jang became the Nizam or Viceroy of the Deccan. The new Nizam rewarded the French Company by giving it territories near Pondicherry as well as the famous town of Masulipatam. He gave a sum of Rs. 500,000 to the Company and another Rs. 500,000 to its troops. Dupleix received Rs. 2,000,000 and a jagir worth Rs. 100,000 a year. Moreover, he was made honorary Governor of Mughal dominions on the East coast from the river Krishna to Kanyakumari. Dupleix stationed his best officer, Bussy, at Hyderabad with a French army. "While the ostensible purpose of this arrangement was to protect the Nizam from enemies, it was really aimed at maintaining French influence at his court. While Muzaffar Jang was marching towards his capital, he was accidentally killed. Bussy immediately raised Salabat Jang, the third son of Nizam-ul-Mulk, to the throne. In return, the new Nizam granted the French the area in Andhra known as the Northern Circars, consisting of the four districts of Mustafanagar, Ellore, Rajahmundry, and Chicacole.

The French power in South India was now at its height; Dupleix's plans had succeeded beyond his dreams. The French had started out by trying to win Indian states as friends; they had ended by making them clients or satellites.

But the English had not been silent spectators of their rival's successes, to offset French influence and to increase their own; they had been intriguing with Nasir Jang and Muhammad Ali. In 1750, they decided to throw their entire strength behind Muhammad Ali. Robert Clive, a young clerk in the Company's service, proposed that French pressure on Muhammad Ali, besieged at Trichinopoly, could be released by attacking Arcot, the capital of Carnatic. The proposal was accepted and Clive assaulted and occupied Arcot with only 200 English and 300 Indian soldiers. As expected, Chanda Sahib and the French were compelled to raise the siege of Trichinopoly; The French forces were repeatedly defeated. Chanda Sahib was soon captured and killed. The French fortunes were now at an ebb as their army and its generals had proved unequal to their English counterparts.

Dupleix made strenuous attempts to reverse the tide of French misfortunes. But he was given little support by the French Government or even by the higher authorities of the French East India Company. Moreover, the high French officials and military and naval commanders constantly quarrelled with one another and with Dupleix. In the end, the French Government, weary of the heavy expense of the war in India and fearing the loss of its American colonies, initiated peace negotiations and agreed in 1754 to the English demand for the recall of Dupleix from India. This was to prove a big blow to the fortunes of the French Company in India.

The temporary peace between the two Companies ended in 1756 when another war between England and France broke out. In the very beginning of the war, the English managed to gain control over Bengal.

After this event, there was little hope for the French cause in India. The rich resources of Bengal turned the scales decisively in favour of the English. Even though the French Government made a determined attempt this time to oust the English from India and sent a strong force headed by Count de Lally, it was all in vain. The French fleet was driven off Indian waters and the French forces in the Carnatic were defeated. Moreover, the English replaced the French as the Nizam's protectors and secured from him Masulipatam and the Northern Circars. The decisive battle was fought at Wandiwash on 22 January 1760, when the English General Eyre Coot defeated Lally. Within a year the French had lost all their possessions in India.



The war ended in 1763 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The French factories in India were restored but they could no longer be fortified or even adequately garrisoned with troops. They could serve only as centres, of trade; and now the French lived in India under British protection. Their dream of Empire in India was at an end. The English, on the other hand, ruled the Indian sea. Freed of all European rivals they could now set about the task of conquering India.



**Indian Sepoys in the British Army**

During their struggle with the French and their Indian allies; the English learnt a few important and valuable lessons. Firstly, that in the absence of nationalism in the country, they could advance their political schemes by taking advantage of the mutual quarrels of the Indian rulers. Secondly, the Western trained infantry, European or Indian, armed with modern weapons and backed by artillery could defeat the old style Indian armies with ease in pitched battles, thirdly, it was proved that the Indian soldier trained and armed in the European manner made as good a soldier as the European. And since the Indian soldier too lacked a feeling of nationalism, he could be hired and employed by anyone who was willing to pay him well. The English now set out to create a powerful army consisting of Indian soldiers, called sepoy, and officered by Englishmen. With this army as its chief instrument and the vast resources of Indian trade and territories under its command, the English East India Company embarked on an era of wars and territorial expansion.

## UNIT-V

# THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF INDIA

### BRITISH OCCUPATION OF BENGAL

The beginnings of British political sway over India may be traced to the battle of Plassey in 1757, when the English East India Company's forces defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal. The earlier British struggle with the French in South India had been but a dress rehearsal. The lessons learnt there were profitably applied in Bengal.

Bengal was the most fertile and the richest of India's provinces. Its industries and commerce were well developed. As has been noted earlier, the East India Company and its servants had highly profitable trading interests in the province. The Company had secured valuable privileges in 1717 under a royal farman by the Mughal Emperor, which had granted the Company the freedom to export and import their goods in Bengal without paying taxes and the right to issue passes or dastaks for the movement of such goods. The Company's servants were also permitted to trade but were not covered by this farman. They were required to pay the same taxes as Indian merchants.

This farman was a perpetual source of conflict between the Company and the Nawabs of Bengal. For one, it meant loss of revenue to the Bengal Government. Secondly, the power to issue dastaks for the Company's goods was misused by the Company's servants to evade taxes on their private trade. All the Nawabs of Bengal, from Murshid Quli Khan to Alivardi Khan, had objected to the English interpretation of the farman of 1717. They had compelled the Company to pay lump sums to their treasury, and firmly suppressed the misuse of dastaks. The Company had been compelled to accept the authority of the Nawabs in the matter, but its servants had taken every opportunity to evade and defy this authority.

Matters came to a head in 1756 when the young and quick-tempered Siraj-ud-Daulah succeeded his grandfather, Alivardi Khan. He demanded of the English that they should trade on the same basis as in the times of Murshid Quli Khan. The English refused to comply as they felt strong after their victory over the French in South India. They had also come to recognise the political and military weakness of Indian states. Instead of agreeing to pay taxes on their goods to the Nawab, they levied heavy duties on Indian goods entering Calcutta which was under their control. All this naturally annoyed and angered the young Nawab who also suspected that the Company was hostile to him and was favouring his rivals for the throne of Bengal. The breaking point came when, without taking the Nawab's permission, the Company began to fortify Calcutta in expectation of the coming struggle with the French, who were stationed at this time at Chandernagore. Siraj rightly interpreted this action as an attack upon his sovereignty.



**Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula**

How could an independent ruler permit a private company of merchants to build forts or to carry on private wars on his land? Moreover he feared that if he permitted the English and the French to fight each other on the soil of Bengal, he too would meet the fate of the Carnatic Nawabs. In other words, Siraj was willing to let the Europeans remain, as merchant but not as masters. He ordered both the English and the French to demolish their fortifications at Calcutta and Chandernagore and to desist from fighting each other. While the French Company obeyed his order, the English Company refused to do so, for its ambition had been whetted and its confidence enhanced by its victories in the Carnatic. It was now determined to remain in Bengal even against the wishes of the Nawab and to trade there on its own terms. It had acknowledged the British Government's right to control all its activities, it had quietly accepted restrictions on its trade and power imposed in Britain by the British Government; its right to trade with the East had been extinguished by the Parliament in 1693 when its Charter was withdrawn; it had paid huge bribes to the King, the Parliament, and the politicians of Britain (in one year alone, it had to pay £ 80,000 in bribes). Nevertheless the English Company demanded the absolute right to trade freely in Bengal irrespective of the Bengal Nawab's orders. This amounted to a direct "challenge to the Nawab"-s sovereignty. No ruler could possibly accept this position. Siraj-ud-Daulah had the statesmanship to see the long-term implications of the English designs. He decided to make them obey the laws of the land.

Acting with great energy but with undue haste and inadequate preparation, Siraj ud-Daulah seized the English factory at Kasimbazar, marched on to Calcutta, and occupied the Fort William on 20 June 1756. He then retired, from Calcutta to celebrate his easy victory, letting the English escape with their ships; this was a mistake for he had underestimated the strength of his enemy.

The English officials took refuge at Fulta near the sea protected by their naval superiority. Here they waited for aid from Madras and, in the meantime, organised a web of intrigue and treachery with the leading men of the Nawab's court. Chief among these were Mir Jafar, the Mir Bakshi, Manick Chand, the Officer-in-Charge of Calcutta, Amichand, a rich merchant, Jagat Seth, the biggest banker of Bengal, and Khadim Khan, who commanded a large number of the Nawab's troops. From Madras came a strong naval and military force under Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive. Clive reconquered Calcutta in the beginning of 1757 and compelled the Nawab to concede all the demands of the English. The English, however, were not satisfied, they were aiming high.





**Mir Jafar**



**Robert Clive**

They had decided to install a more pliant tool in Siraj-ud-Daula's place. Having joined a conspiracy organised by the enemies of the young Nawab to place Mir Jafar on the throne of Bengal, they presented the youthful Nawab with an impossible set of demands. Both sides realised that a war to the finish would have to be fought between them. They met for battle on the field of Plassey, 20 miles from Murshidabad; on 23 June 1757. The fateful battle of Plassey was a battle only in name. In all, the English lost 29 men while the Nawab lost nearly 500. The major part of the Nawab's army, led by the traitors Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh, took no part in the fighting. Only a small group of the Nawab's soldiers led by Mir Madan and Mohan Lai fought bravely and well. The Nawab was forced to flee and was captured and put to death by Mir Jafar's son Miran.

The English proclaimed Mir Jafar the Nawab of Bengal and set on to gather the reward. The Company was granted undisputed right to free trade in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. It also received the zamindari of the 24 Parganas near Calcutta. Mir Jafar paid a sum of Rs, 17,700,000 as compensation for the attack on Calcutta to the Company and the traders of the city. In addition, he paid large sums as „gifts“ or bribes to the high officials of the Company. Clive, for example, received over two million rupees, Watts over one million. Clive later estimated that the Company and its servants had collected more than 30 million rupees from the puppet Nawab. Moreover, it was understood that British merchants and officials would no longer be asked to pay any taxes on their private trade.

The battle of Plassey was of immense historical importance, it paved the way for the British mastery of Bengal and eventually of the 'whole of India. It boosted British prestige and at a single stroke raised them to the status of a major contender for the Indian Empire. The rich revenues of Bengal enabled them to organise a strong army. Control over Bengal played a decisive role in the Anglo-French struggle. Lastly, the victory of Plassey enabled the Company and its servants to amass untold wealth at the cost of the helpless people of Bengal. As the British historians, Edward Thompson and G.T. Garrett have remarked: To engineer a revolution had been revealed as the most paying game in the world. A gold lust unequalled since the hysteria that took hold of the Spaniards of Cortes and Pizarro's age filled the English mind.

Bengal in particular was not to know peace again until it had been bled white. Even though Mir Jafar owed his position to the Company, he soon repented the bargain he had struck. His treasury was soon emptied by the demands of the Company's officials for presents and bribes, the lead in the matter being given by Clive himself. As Colonel Malleon has put it, the single aim of the Company's grasp all they could; to use Mir Jafar as a golden sack into which, they could dip their hands at pleasure." The Company itself was seized with unsurpassable greed. Believing that the Kamdhenu had been found and that the

wealth of Bengal was inexhaustible, the Directors of the Company ordered that Bengal should pay the expenses of the Bombay and Madras Presidencies and purchase out of its revenue all the Company's exports from India, The Company was no longer to merely trade with India, it was to use its control over the Nawab of Bengal to drain the wealth of the province.

Mir Jafar soon discovered that it was impossible to meet the full demands of the Company and its officials who, on their part, began to criticise the Nawab for his incapacity in fulfilling their expectations. And so, in October 1760, they forced him to abdicate in favour of his son-in-law, Mir Qasim who rewarded his benefactors by granting the Company the zamindari of the districts of Burdwan, Midnapore, and Chittagong, and giving handsome presents totalling 29 lakhs of rupees to the high English officials.

Mir Qasim, however, belied English hopes, and soon emerged as a threat to their position and designs in Bengal. He was an able, efficient, and strong ruler, determined to free himself from foreign control, He believed that since he had paid the Company and its servants adequately for putting him on the throne, they should now leave him alone to govern Bengal. He realised that a full treasury and an efficient army were essential to maintain his independence. He therefore tried to prevent public disorder, to increase his income by removing corruption from revenue administration, and to raise a modern and disciplined army along European lines. All this was not to the liking of the English. Most of all they disliked the Nawab's attempts to check the misuse of the farman of 1717 by the Company's servants, who demanded that their goods whether destined for export or for internal use should be free of duties. This injured the Indian merchants as they had to pay taxes from which the foreigners got complete exemption. Moreover, the Company's servants illegally sold the dastaks or free passes to friendly Indian merchants who were thereby able to evade the internal customs duties. These abuses ruined the honest Indian traders through unfair competition and deprived the Nawab of a very important source of revenue, In addition to this, the Company and its servants got intoxicated by „their new-found power" and 'the dazzling prospects of wealth and, in their pursuit of riches, began to oppress and ill-treat the officials of the Nawab and, the poor people of Bengal. They forced the Indian officials and zamindars to give them presents and bribes. They compelled the Indian artisans, peasants, and merchants to sell their goods cheap and to buy dear from them. People who refused were often flogged or imprisoned. These years have been described by a recent British historian, Spear, as "the period of open and unashamed plunder." In fact the prosperity for which Bengal was renowned was being gradually destroyed.

Mir Qasim realised that if these abuses continued he could never hope to make Bengal strong or free himself of the Company's control. He therefore took the drastic step of abolishing all duties on internal trade, thus giving his own subjects a concession that the English had seized by force. But the alien merchants were no longer willing to tolerate equality between themselves and Indians. They demanded the reimposition of duties on Indian traders. The battle was about to be joined again.

The truth of the matter was that there could not exist two masters in Bengal. While Mir Qasim believed that he was an independent ruler; the English demanded that he should act as a mere tool in their hands, for had they not put him in power? Mir Qasim was defeated in a series of battles in 1763 and fled to Avadh where he formed an alliance with Shuja-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Avadh, and Shah Alam II, the fugitive Mughal Emperor. The three allies clashed with the Company's army at Buxar on 22 October 1764 and were thoroughly defeated. This was one of the most decisive battles of Indian history for it demonstrated the superiority of English arms over the combined army of two of the major Indian powers. It firmly established the British as masters of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and placed Avadh at their mercy.

Clive, who had returned to Bengal in 1765 as its Governor, decided to seize the chance of power in Bengal and to gradually transfer the authority of Government from the Nawab to the Company. In 1763, the British had restored Mir Jafar as Nawab and collected huge sums for the Company and its high officials. On Mir Jafar's death, they placed his second son Nizam-ud-Daulah on the throne and as a reward made him sign a new treaty on 20 February 1765. By this treaty the Nawab was to disband most of his army and to administer Bengal through a Deputy Subahdar who was to be nominated by the Company and who could



not be dismissed without its approval. The Company thus gained supreme control over the administration (or nizamat) of Bengal. The members of the Bengal Council of the Company once again extracted nearly 15 lakhs of rupees from the new Nawab From Shah Alam II, who was still the titular head of the Mughal Empire, the Company secured the Diwani, or the right to collect revenue, of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Thus, its control over Bengal was legalised and the revenues of this most prosperous of Indian provinces placed at its command. In return the Company gave him a subsidy of 26 million rupees and secured for him three districts of Kara and Allahabad.

The Nawab of Avadh, Shuja-ud-Daulah, was made to pay a war indemnity of five million rupees to the Company. Moreover, the two signed an alliance by which the Company promised to support the Nawab against an outside attack provided he paid for the services of the troops sent to his aid. This alliance made the Nawab a dependent of the Company. The Nawab welcomed the alliance in the false belief that the Company, being primarily a trading body, was a transitory power while the Marathas and the Afghans were his real enemies. This was to prove a costly mistake for both Avadh and the rest of the country. On the other hand the British had very shrewdly decided to consolidate their acquisition of Bengal and, in the meanwhile, to use Avadh as a buffer or a barrier state between their possessions and the Marathas.

### **DUAL SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATION IN BENGAL**

The East India Company became the real master of Bengal at least from 1765. Its army was in sole control of its defence and the supreme political power was in its hands. The Nawab depended for his internal and external security on the British. As the Diwan, the Company directly collected its revenues, while through the right to nominate " the Deputy Subahdar; it controlled the Nizamat or the police and judicial powers. The virtual unity of the two branches of Government under British control was signified by the fact that the same person acted in Bengal as the Deputy Diwan on behalf of the Company and as Deputy Subahdar on behalf of the Nawab.

This arrangement is known in history as the Dual or Double Government. It held a great advantage for the British: they had power without responsibility. They controlled the finances of the province and its army directly and its administration indirectly. The Nawab and his officials had the responsibility of administration but not the power to discharge it. The -weaknesses of the Government could be blamed on the Indians while its fruits were gathered by the British. The consequences for the people of Bengal were disastrous, neither the Company nor the Nawab cared for their welfare. In any case, the Nawab's officials had no power to protect the people from the greed and rapacity of the Company and its servants. On the other hand, they were themselves in a hurry to exploit their official powers.

This Company's servants had now the whole of Bengal to themselves and their oppression of the people increased greatly.

The Company's authorities on their part set out to gather the rich harvest and drain Bengal of its wealth. They stopped sending money from England to purchase Indian goods. Instead, they purchased these goods from the revenues of Bengal and sold them abroad. These were known as the Company's Investment and formed a part of its profits. On top of all this the British Government wanted its share of the rich prize and, in 1767, ordered the Company to pay it £ 400,000 per year.

In the years 1766, 1767, and 1768 alone, nearly £ 5.7 million were drained from Bengal. The abuses of the Dual Government and the drain of wealth led to the impoverishment and exhaustion of that unlucky province. In 1770, Bengal suffered from a famine which in its effects proved one of the most terrible famines known in human history. People died in lakhs and nearly one-third of Bengal's population fell victim to its ravages. Though the famine was due to failure of rains, its effects were heightened by the Company's policies.



**WARS UNDER WARREN HASTINGS (1772-85) AND CORNWALLIS (1786-93)**

The East India Company had by 1772 become an important Indian power and its Directors in England and its officials in India set out to consolidate their control over Bengal before beginning a new round of conquests. However, their habit of interfering in the internal affairs of the Indian States and their lust for territory and money soon involved them in a series of wars.

In 1766 they entered into an alliance with the Nizam of Hyderabad to help him in attacking Haidar Ali of Mysore in return for the cession of the Northern Circars. But Haidar Ali was more than a match for the Company's armies. Having beaten back the British attack, he threatened Madras in 1769 and forced the Madras Council to sign peace on his terms. Both sides restored each other's conquests and promised mutual help in case of attack by a third party. But when Haidar Ali was attacked by the Marathas in 1771, the English went back on their promise and did not come to his help. This led Haidar Ali to distrust and dislike them. Then, in 1775, the English clashed with the Marathas. An intense struggle for power was taking place at that time among the Marathas between the supporters of the infant Peshwa Madhav Rao II, led by Nana Phadnis, and Raghunath Rao. The British officials in Bombay decided to take advantage of this struggle by intervening on behalf of Raghunath Rao. They hoped thus to repeat the exploits of their countrymen in Madras and Bengal and reap the consequent monetary advantages. This involved them in a long war with the Marathas which lasted from 1775 to 1782.

In the beginning, the Marathas defeated the British forces at Talegaon and forced them to sign the Convention of Wadgaon by which the English renounced all their conquests and gave up the cause of Raghunath Rao. But the war was soon resumed.

This was a dark hour indeed for the British power in India, All the Maratha chiefs were united behind the Peshwa and his chief minister, Nana Phadnis. The Southern Indian powers had long been resenting the presence of the British among them, and Haidar Ali and the Nizam chose this moment to declare war against the Company.

Thus the British were faced with the powerful combination of the Marathas, Mysore and Hyderabad. Moreover, abroad they were waging a losing war in their colonies in America where the people had rebelled in 1776. They had also to counter the determined design of -the French to exploit the difficulties of their old rival.

The British in India were, however, led at this time by their brilliant, energetic, and experienced Governor-General, Warren Hastings. Acting with firm resolve and determination, he retrieved the vanishing British power and prestige. A British force under Goddard marched across central India in a brilliant military manoeuvre and after a series of victorious engagements reached Ahmedabad which he captured in 1780. The English had found in the Marathas a determined enemy, with immense resources. Mahadji Sindhia had given evidence of his power which the English dreaded to contest. Neither side won victory and the war had come to a standstill. With the intercession of Mahadji, peace was concluded in 1782 by the Treaty of Salbai by which the status quo was maintained. It saved the British from the combined opposition of Indian powers.

This war, known in history as the First Anglo-Maratha War, did not end in victory for either side. But it did give the British 20 years of peace with the Marathas, the strongest Indian power of the day. The British utilized this period to consolidate their rule over the Bengal Presidency, while the Maratha chiefs frittered away their energy in bitter mutual squabbles. Moreover, the Treaty of Salbai enabled the British to exert pressure on Mysore as the Marathas promised to help them in recovering their territories from Haidar Ali. Once again, the British had succeeded in dividing the Indian powers.

War with Haidar Ali- had started in 1780- Repeating his earlier exploits, Haidar Ali inflicted one defeat after another on the British armies in the Carnatic and forced them to surrender in larger numbers. He soon occupied almost the whole of the Carnatic. But once again British arms and diplomacy saved the day.

Warren Hastings bribed the Nizam with the cession of Guntur district and gained his withdrawal from the anti-British alliance. During 1781-82 he made peace with the Marathas and thus freed a large part of his army for use against Mysore. In July 1781 the British army under Eyre Coote defeated Haidar Ali at Porto Novo and saved Madras. After Haidar Ali's death in December 1782, the war was carried on by his son, Tipu Sultan. Since neither side was capable of overpowering the other, peace was signed by them in March 1784 and both sides restored all conquests. Thus, though the British had been shown to be too weak to defeat either the Marathas or Mysore, they had certainly proved their ability to hold their own in India. Not only had they been saved from extinction in the South, they had emerged from their recent wars as one of the three great powers in India.

The third British encounter with Mysore was more fruitful from the British point of view. The peace of 1784 had not removed the grounds for struggle between Tipu and the British; it had merely postponed the struggle. The authorities of the East India Company were acutely hostile to Tipu. They looked upon him as their most formidable rival in the South and as the chief obstacle standing between them and complete domination over South India. Tipu, on his part, thoroughly disliked the English, saw them as the chief danger to his own independence and nursed the ambition to expel them from India.

War between the two again began in 1789 and ended in Tipu's defeat in 1792. Even though Tipu fought with exemplary bravery, Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor-General, had succeeded through shrewd diplomacy in isolating him by winning over the Marathas, the Nizam, and the rulers of Travancore and Coorg. This war again revealed that the Indian powers were shortsighted enough to aid the foreigner against another Indian power for the sake of temporary advantages. By the treaty of Seringapatam, Tipu ceded half of his territories to the allies and paid 330 lakhs of rupees as indemnity. The Third Anglo-Mysore war destroyed Tipu's dominant position in the South and firmly established British supremacy there.

## EXPANSION UNDER LORD WELLESLEY

The next large-scale expansion of British rule in India occurred during the Governor Generalship of Lord Wellesley who came to India in 1798 at a time when the British were locked in a life and death struggle with France all over the world.

Till then, the British had followed the policy of consolidating their gains and resources in India and making territorial gains only when this could be done safely without antagonising the major Indian powers. Lord Wellesley decided that the time was ripe for bringing as many Indian states as possible under British control. By 1797 the two strongest Indian powers, Mysore and the Marathas, had declined in power. The Third Anglo-Mysore war had reduced Mysore to a mere shadow of its recent greatness and the Marathas were dissipating their strength in mutual intrigues and wars. In other words, political conditions in India were propitious for a policy of expansion: aggression was easy as well as profitable. Moreover, the trading and industrial classes of Britain desired further expansion in India. Hitherto they had favoured a policy of peace in the belief that war was injurious to trade. But by the end of the 18th century they had come to think that British goods would sell in India on a large scale only when the entire country had come under British control. The Company too was in favour of such a policy provided it could be pursued successfully and without adversely affecting its profits. Lastly, the British in India were determined to keep French influence from penetrating India and, therefore, to curb and crush any Indian state which might try to have dealings with France. The security of the Company's dominion in India was threatened by the impending invasion of Zaman Shah, the ruler of Kabul, who could expect support from the Indian chiefs in northern India and who was invited by Tipu to join in a concerted effort to oust the British from this country.

To achieve his political aims Wellesley relied on three methods: the system of Subsidiary Alliances, outright wars, and assumption of the territories of previously subordinated rulers. While the practice of helping an Indian ruler with a paid British force was quite old, it was given a definite shape by Wellesley who used it to subordinate the Indian States to the paramount authority of the Company. Under his Subsidiary Alliance system, the ruler of the allying Indian State was compelled to accept the permanent stationing of



a British force within his territory and to pay a subsidy for its maintenance. All this was done allegedly for his protection but was, in fact, a form through which the Indian ruler paid tribute to the Company. Sometimes the ruler ceded part of his territory instead of paying annual subsidy. The Subsidiary Treaty also usually provided that the Indian ruler would agree to the posting at his court of a British Resident, that he would not employ any European in his service without the approval of the British, and that he would not negotiate with any other Indian ruler without consulting the Governor-General. In return the British undertook to defend the ruler from his enemies. They also promised non-interference in the internal affairs of the allied state, but this was a promise they seldom kept.

In reality, by signing a Subsidiary Alliance, an Indian state virtually signed away its independence. It lost the right of self-defence, of maintaining diplomatic relations, of employing foreign experts, and of settling its disputes with its neighbours. In fact, the Indian ruler lost all vestiges of sovereignty in external matters and became increasingly subservient to the British Resident who interfered in the day to day administration of the state. In addition, the system tended to bring about the internal decay of the protected state. The cost of the subsidiary force provided by the British was very high and, in fact, much beyond the paying capacity of the state. The payment of the arbitrarily fixed and artificially bloated subsidy invariably disrupted the economy of the state and impoverished its people. The system of Subsidiary Alliances also led to the disbandment of the armies of the protected states. Lakhs of soldiers and officers were deprived of their hereditary livelihood, spreading misery and degradation in the country. Many of them joined the roaming bands of Pindarees which were to ravage the whole of India during the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the rulers of the protected states tended to neglect the interests of their people and to oppress them as they no longer feared them.

They had no incentive to be good rulers as they were fully protected by the British from domestic and foreign enemies. The Subsidiary Alliance system was, on the other hand, extremely advantageous to the British. They could now maintain a large army at the cost of the Indian states. They were enabled to fight Wars far away from their own territories, since any war would occur in the territories either of the British ally or of the British enemy. They controlled the defence and foreign relations of the protected ally, and had a powerful military force stationed at the very heart of his lands, and could, therefore, at a time of their choosing, overthrow him and annex his territories by declaring him to be inefficient.

As far as the British were concerned, the system of Subsidiary Alliances was in the words of a British writer, "a system of fattening allies as we fatten oxen, till they were worthy of being devoured." Lord Wellesley signed his first Subsidiary Treaty with the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1798. The Nizam was to dismiss his French-trained troops and to maintain a subsidiary force of six battalions at a cost of £ 241,710 per year. In return, the British guaranteed his state against Maratha encroachments. By another treaty in 1800, the subsidiary force was increased and, in lieu of cash payment, the Nizam ceded part of his territories to the Company. The Nawab of Avadh was forced to sign a Subsidiary Treaty in 1801. In return for a larger subsidiary force, the Nawab was made to surrender to the British nearly half of his kingdom consisting of Rohilkhand and the territory lying between the Ganga and the Jamuna. Moreover, the Nawab was no longer to be independent, even within the part of Avadh left with him. He must accept any „advice“ or order from the British authorities regarding the internal administration of his state. His police was to be reorganised under the control and direction of British officers. His own army was virtually disbanded and the British had the right to station their troops in any part of his state.

Wellesley dealt with Mysore, Carnatic, Tanjore, and Surat even more sternly. Tipu of Mysore would, of course, never agree to a Subsidiary Treaty. On the contrary, he had never reconciled himself to the loss of half of his territory in 1792. He worked incessantly to strengthen his forces for the inevitable struggle with the British. He entered into negotiations for an alliance with Revolutionary France. He sent missions 'to Afghanistan, Arabia and Turkey to forge an anti-British alliance.

Lord Wellesley was no less determined to bring Tipu to heel and to prevent any possibility of the French re-entering India. The British army attacked and defeated Tipu in a brief but fierce war in 1799, before



French help could reach him. Tipu still refused to beg for peace on humiliating terms. He proudly declared that it was "better to die like a soldier, than to live a miserable dependent on the infidels, in the list of their pensioned, rajas and nabobs." He met a hero's end on 4 May 1799 while defending his capital Seringapatam. His army remained loyal to him to the very end.

Nearly half of Tipu's dominions were divided between the British and their ally, the Nizam. The reduced kingdom of Mysore was restored to the descendants of the original rajas from whom Haidar Ali had seized power. A special treaty of Subsidiary Alliance was imposed on the new Raja by which the Governor-General was authorised to take over the administration of the state in case of necessity. Mysore was, in fact, made a complete dependency of the Company. An important result of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War was the complete elimination of the French threat to British Supremacy in India.

In 1801, Lord Wellesley forced a new treaty upon the puppet Nawab of Carnatic compelling him to cede his kingdom to the Company in return for a pension. The Madras Presidency as it existed till 1947 was now created, by attaching the Carnatic to territories seized from Mysore, including the Malabar. Similarly, the territories of the rulers of Tanjore and Surat were taken over and their rulers pensioned off.

The Marathas were the only major Indian power left outside the sphere of British control. Wellesley now turned his attention towards them and began aggressive interference in their internal affairs. The Maratha empire at this time consisted of a confederacy of five big chiefs, namely, the Peshwa at Poona, the Gaekwad at Baroda, the Sindhia at Gwalior, the Holkar at Indore and the Bhonsle at Nagpur, the Peshwa being the nominal head of the confederacy. But all of them were engaged in bitter fratricidal strife, blind to the real danger from the rapidly advancing foreigner.

Wellesley had repeatedly offered a Subsidiary Alliance to the Peshwa and Sindhia. But the far-sighted Nana Phadnis had refused to fall into the trap. However, when on 25 October 1802, the day of the great festival of Diwali, Holkar defeated the combined armies of the Peshwa and Sindhia; the cowardly Peshwa Baji Rao II rushed into the arms of the English and on the fateful last day of 1802 signed the Subsidiary Treaty at Bassein.

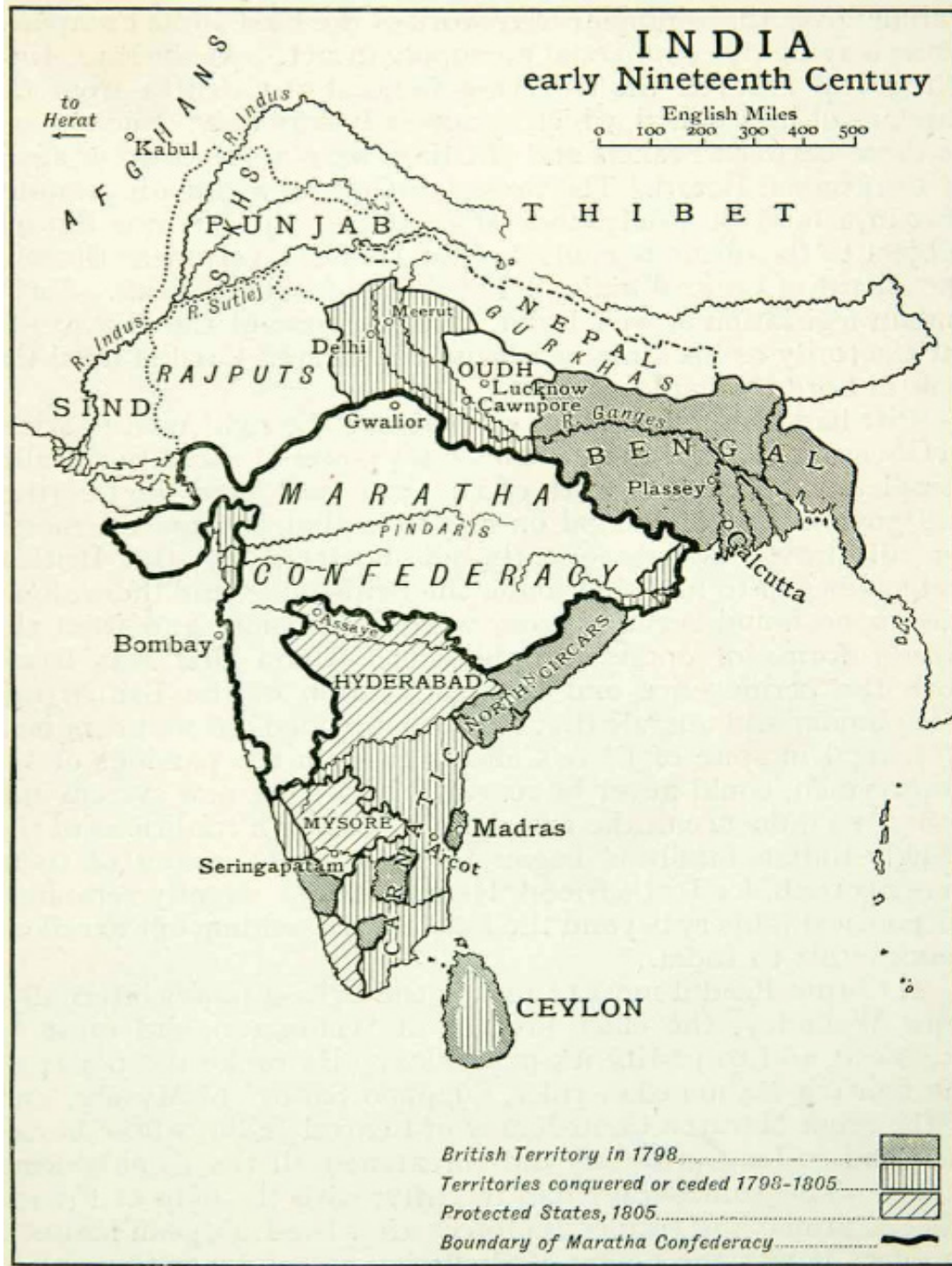
The victory had been a little too easy and Wellesley was wrong in one respect: the proud Maratha chiefs would not surrender their great tradition of independence without a struggle. But even in this moment of their peril they would not unite against their common enemy. When Sindhia and Bhonsle fought the British, Holkar stood on the sidelines and Gaekwad gave help to the British. When Holkar took up arms, Bhonsle and Sindhia nursed their wounds.

In the south, the British armies led by Arthur Wellesley defeated the combined armies of Sindhia and Bhonsle at Assaye in September 1803 and at Argaon in November. In the north, Lord Lake routed Sindhia's army at Laswari on the first of November and occupied Aligarh, Delhi and Agra. Once again the blind emperor of India became a pensioner of the Company. The Maratha allies had to sue for peace.

Both Sindhia and Bhonsle became subsidiary allies of the Company. They ceded part of their territories to the British, admitted British Residents to their courts and promised not to employ any Europeans without British approval. The British gained complete control over the Orissa coast and the territories between the Ganga and the Jamuna. The Peshwa became a disgruntled puppet in their hands.

Wellesley now turned his attention towards Holkar, but Yeshwant Rao Holkar proved more than a match for the British and fought British armies to a standstill. Holkar's ally, the Raja of Bharatpur, inflicted heavy losses on Lake who unsuccessfully attempted to storm his fort. Moreover, overcoming his age-old antagonism to the Holkar family, Sindhia began to think of joining hands with Holkar.

On the other hand, the shareholders of the East India Company discovered that the policy of expansion through war was proving costly and was reducing their profits. The Company's debt had increased from £17 million in 1797 to £31 million in 1806. Moreover, Britain's finances were getting exhausted at a time when Napoleon was once again becoming a major threat in Europe.



British statesmen and the directors of the Company felt that time had come to check further expansion, to put an end to ruinous expenditure, and to digest and consolidate Britain's recent gains in India. Wellesley was, therefore, recalled from India and the Company made peace with Holkar in January 1806 by the treaty of Raighat, giving back to the Holkar the greater part of his territories. Wellesley's expansionist policy had been checked near the end. All the same, it had resulted in the East India Company becoming the paramount power in India. A young officer in the Company's judicial service, **Henry Roberclaw**, wrote (about 1805):

**An Englishman in India is proud and tenacious; he feels himself a conqueror amongst a vanquished people and looks down with some degree of superiority on all below him.**

## EXPANSION UNDER LORD HASTINGS

The Second Anglo-Maratha War had shattered the power of the Maratha chiefs but not their spirit. They made a desperate last attempt to regain their independence and old prestige in 1817. The lead in organising a united front of the Maratha chiefs was taken by the Peshwa who was smarting under the rigid control exercised by the British Resident.

The Peshwa attacked the British Residency at Poona in November 1817. Appa Sahib of Nagpur attacked the Residency at Nagpur, and Madhav Rao Holkar made preparations for war. The Governor-General, Lord Hastings, struck back with characteristic vigour.

He compelled Sindhia to accept British suzerainty, and defeated the armies of the Peshwa, Bhonsle and Holkar. The Peshwa was dethroned and pensioned off at Bithur near Kanpur. His territories were annexed and the enlarged Presidency of Bombay brought into existence.

Holkar and Bhonsle accepted Subsidiary forces. To satisfy Maratha pride, the small Kingdom of Satara was founded out of the Peshwa's lands and given to the descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji who ruled it as a complete dependent of the British. Like other rulers of Indian states, the Maratha chiefs too existed from now on at the mercy of British power.

The Rajputana states had been dominated for several decades by Sindhia and Holkar. After the downfall of the Marathas, they lacked the energy to reassert their independence and readily accepted British supremacy. Thus, by 1818, the entire Indian subcontinent excepting the Punjab and Sindh had been brought under British control.

Part of it was ruled directly by the British and the rest by a host of Indian rulers over whom the British exercised paramount power. These states had virtually no armed forces of their own, nor did they have any independent foreign relations. They paid heavily for the British forces stationed in their territories to control them. They were autonomous in their internal affairs, but even in this respect they acknowledged British authority wielded through a Resident. They were on perpetual probation. On the other hand, the British were now free to „reach out to the natural frontiers of India.

## THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE BRITISH POWER (1815-57)

The British completed the task of conquering the whole of India from 1818 to 1857. Sindh and the Punjab were conquered and Avadh, the Central Provinces and a large number of other petty states were annexed.

### The Conquest of Sindh

The conquest of Sindh occurred as a result of the growing Anglo- Russian rivalry in Europe and Asia and the consequent British fears that Russia might attack India through Afghanistan or Persia. To counter Russia, the British Government decided to increase its influence in Afghanistan and Persia. It further felt that this policy could be successfully pursued only if Sindh was brought under British control. The commercial possibilities of the river Sindh were an additional attraction.

The roads and rivers of Sindh were opened to British trade by a treaty in 1832. The chiefs of Sindh, known as Amirs, were made to sign a Subsidiary Treaty in 1839. And finally, in spite of previous assurances that its territorial integrity would be respected, Sindh was annexed in 1843 after a brief campaign by Sir Charles Napier who had earlier written in his Diary: “We have no right to seize Sind, yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, useful humane piece of rascality it will be.” He received seven lakhs of rupees as prize money for accomplishing the task.



## The Conquest of the Punjab

The death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in June 1839 was followed by political instability and rapid changes of government in the Punjab. Selfish and corrupt leaders came to the front. Ultimately, power fell into the hands of the brave and patriotic but utterly indisciplined army.

The political instability in Punjab led the British to look greedily across the Sutlej upon the land of the five rivers even though they had signed a treaty of perpetual friendship with Ranjit Singh in 1809. The British officials increasingly talked of having to wage a campaign in the Punjab. The Punjab army let itself be provoked by the warlike actions of the British and their intrigues with the corrupt chiefs of the Punjab. In November 1844, Major Broadfoot, who was known to be hostile to the Sikhs, was appointed the British agent in Ludhiana. Broadfoot repeatedly indulged in hostile actions and gave provocations.

The corrupt chiefs and officials found that the army would sooner or later deprive them of their power, position, and possessions. Therefore, they conceived the idea of saving themselves by embroiling the army in a war with the British. In the autumn of 1845, news reached that boats designed to form bridges had been dispatched from Bombay to Ferozepur on the Sutlej. The Punjab Army, now convinced that the British were determined to occupy the Punjab, took counter measures. When it heard in December that Lord Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, and Lord Harding, the Governor-General, were marching towards Ferozepur, the Punjab army decided to strike. The war between the two was thus declared on 13 December 1845.

The danger from the foreigner immediately united the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. The Punjab army fought heroically and with exemplary courage. But some of its leaders had already turned traitors. The Prime Minister, Raja Lal Singh, and the Commander-in-Chief, Misar Tej Singh, were secretly corresponding with the enemy. The Punjab Army was forced to concede defeat and to sign the humiliating Treaty of Lahore on 8 March 1846. The British annexed the Jalandhar Doab and handed over Jammu and Kashmir to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra for a cash payment of five million rupees.

The Punjab army was reduced to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalries and a strong British force was stationed at Lahore. Later, on 16 December 1846, another treaty was signed giving the British Resident at Lahore full authority on over all matters in every department of the state. Moreover, the British were permitted to station their troops in any part of the state. In 1848, freedom loving Punjabis rose up in through numerous local revolts. Two of the prominent revolts were led by Mulraj at Multan and Chattar Singh Attariwala near Lahore. The Punjabis were once again decisively defeated. Lord Dalhousie seized this opportunity to annex the Punjab. Thus, the last independent state of India was absorbed in the British Empire of India.

## DALHOUSIE AND THE DOCTRINE OF LAPSE

Lord Dalhousie came out to India as the Governor-General in 1848. He was from the beginning determined to extend direct British rule over as large an area as possible. He had declared that "the extinction of all native states of India is just a question of time".

The underlying motive of this policy was the expansion of British exports to India. Dalhousie, like other aggressive imperialists, believed that British exports to the native states of India were suffering because of the maladministration of these states by their Indian rulers. Moreover, they thought that their 'Indian allies' had already served the purpose of facilitating British conquest of India and could now be got rid of profitably. The chief instrument through which Lord Dalhousie implemented his policy of annexation was the 'Doctrine of Lapse'. Under this Doctrine, when the ruler of a protected state died without a natural heir, his state was not to pass to an adopted heir as sanctioned by the age-old tradition of the country.

Instead, it was to be annexed to British India, unless the adoption had been clearly approved earlier by the British authorities. Many states, including Satara in 1848 and Nagpur and Jhansi in 1854, were annexed by applying this doctrine.

Dalhousie also refused to recognise the titles of many ex-rulers or pay their pensions. Thus, the titles of the Nawabs of Carnatic and of Surat, and the Raja of Tanjore were cancelled. Similarly, after the death of the ex-Peshwa Baji Rao II, who had been made the Raja of Bithur, Dalhousie refused to extend his pay or pension to his adopted son, Nana Saheb.

Dalhousie was keen on annexing the kingdom of Awadh. But the task presented certain difficulties. For one, the Nawabs of Awadh had been British allies since the Battle of Buxar. Moreover, they had been most obedient to the British over the years. The Nawab of Awadh had many heirs and could not therefore be covered by the Doctrine of Lapse. Some other pretext had to be found for depriving him of his dominions. Finally, Lord Dalhousie hit upon the idea of alleviating the plight of the people of Awadh. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was accused of having misgoverned his state and of refusing to introduce reforms. His state was therefore annexed in 1856.

Undoubtedly, the degeneration of the administration of Awadh was a painful reality for its people. The Nawabs of Awadh, like other princes of the day, were selfish rulers absorbed in self-indulgence who cared little for good administration or for the welfare of the people. But the responsibility for this state of affairs was in part that of the British who had, at least since 1801, controlled and indirectly governed Awadh.

In reality, it was the immense potential of Awadh as a market for Manchester goods which excited Dalhousie's greed and aroused his 'philanthropic' feelings. And for similar reasons, to satisfy Britain's growing demand for raw cotton, Dalhousie took away the cotton-producing province of Berar from the Nizam in 1853. It needs to be clearly understood that the question of the maintenance or annexation of native states was of no great relevance at this time. In fact, there were no Indian states in existence at that time. The protected native states were as much a part of the British Empire as the territories ruled directly by the Company. If the form of British control over some of these states was changed, it was to suit British convenience. The interests of their people had little to do with the change.

## **TOOLS OF EXPANSION OF THE BRITISH IN INDIA: WAR AND DIPLOMACY**

Of all the European East India companies which came to India as traders in different periods of the 15th and 16th centuries, only the British and the French East India companies remained as dominant ones by the beginning of the 18th century.

In the first decade of the 18th century, the fortunes of the then mighty Mughal Empire began to decline and there emerged a number of successor states or regional powers or country powers in different parts of India.

The two European trading companies after realizing the weakness of the then country powers decided to make sincere efforts to become a strong political power and to expand and consolidate their sway in India. It is the trade interest that made the two European companies chart out this process of territorial expansion.

The European trading companies established their factories on the western, eastern and southern coastal areas and in this process they extended their influence into the mainland territories of the Indian subcontinent.

The expansion and consolidation of the British influence was achieved in a span of one hundred years, i.e., 1757 to 1857 by using the tools of war and diplomacy. Rabindra Nath Tagore, very aptly in a poetic way described this as "darkness settled on the face of the land then the weighing scales in the merchant's hand changed into the imperial sceptre". The British fought several wars viz. The wars of Carnatic, The Battles of Plassey and Buxar, The Anglo-Mysore and Anglo-Maratha Wars, The Anglo-Sikh wars etc. However they also made use of diplomatic tools to achieve their objectives in India

**The two important policies of diplomatic nature are:**

- (a) The subsidiary alliance of Wellesley, and
- (b) The Doctrine of Lapse of Dalhousie.

**The Subsidiary Alliance of Wellesley:**

Besides the tool of war, the British East India Company, like a hungry wolf was anxiously waiting to use any means to expand its territorial holdings in India. Of such means Subsidiary Alliance is one. It is Wellesley, the Governor General of Bengal, who vigorously implemented this policy for the advantage of the company. Though, Wellesley is associated with Subsidiary Alliance, the author and originator was not Wellesley but Dupleix, the French Governor. Dupleix devised it and implemented it and later the same was followed by the British from Clive to Wellesley.

Alfred Lyall notices four stages in the evolution of this system. In the first stage, the British East India Company supplied weapons and armies to the native ruler, as we notice the supply of arms and armies to the Nawab of Avadh against Rohillas during the tenure of Warren Hastings. In the second stage, the British with the help of the native ruler took the field. In the third stage, the British took money from the native ruler for the maintenance of the army separately for the defence of such state, e.g., Oudh in 1797.

In the fourth stage, the British agreed to maintain a permanent and fixed subsidiary force within the territory of its ally in return for a payment of a sum or ceding certain territory permanently to the British. Further, Wellesley by this Subsidiary Alliance system made it mandatory for the ally to keep a British Resident in the court of the native ruler, not to employ any other European nationals in this service, not to maintain relations with any other native ruler without the prior approval of the British. The British agreed to protect the territory of such allies from foreign aggression and not to intervene in the internal affairs of such native ally who entered into this alliance.

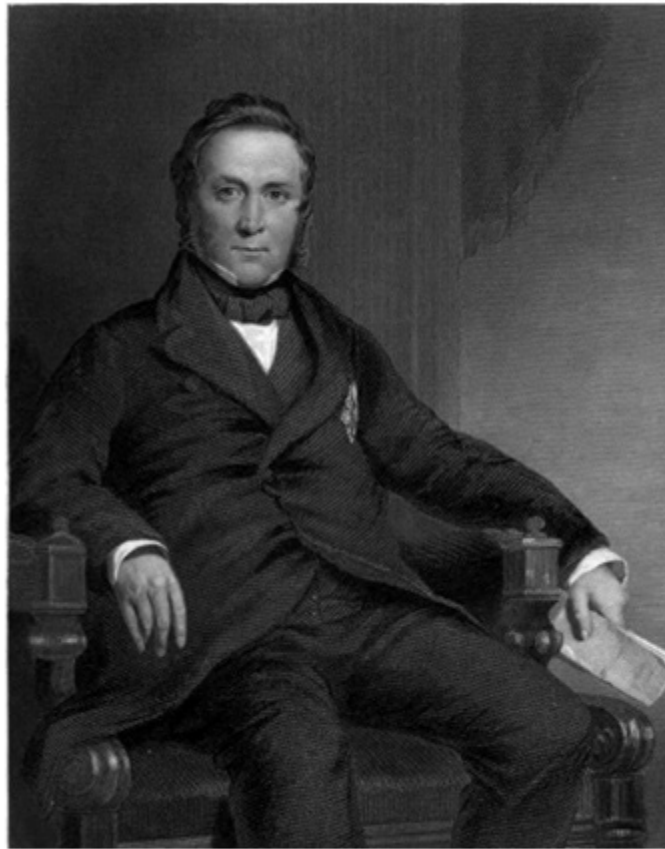
A critical review of this policy clearly reveals that this is advantageous to the British and disadvantageous to the native ruler. The policy was designed in such a way that it served the main interest of the British East India Company in expanding its hold in new territories of its allies without spending money from its coffers and to make these allies its dependencies.

**The Doctrine of Lapse of Dalhousie:**

Dalhousie, the last of the Governors General of the time of the Company was associated with this policy of the Doctrine of Lapse. By using this policy as a means, Dalhousie annexed the native states like Satara, Nagpur, Jhansi, Jaitpur and Sambhalpur. By denying the right of adoption to a Hindu native state as legitimate one, the British Governor General Dalhousie annexed the above native states to the British Empire in India.

His policy resulted in a political upheaval which threatened to destroy the solid foundations of the Company's rule in India in 1857, because his annexationist policy based on the Doctrine of Lapse has no legal, moral or expediency justification. The British East India Company expanded its control over a vast territory and also extended its influence beyond India in Sri Lanka in the south, Mauritius in the south-west, Afghanistan in the north-west, Nepal in the north to Andamans and Nicobar, Burma, Malaya, and Philip-pines in the south-east.





**Lord Dalhousie**

It can be said without any hesitation that it was mainly at the cost of India that England became the dominant power in the whole of South Asia and Asian lands on the Indian ocean by using the Indian sepoy like cannon fodder and draining the Indian treasury through unnecessary wars and diplomacy.

EDEN IAS  
"Empowering Endeavours"

## UNIT-VI

# THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMIC POLICIES (1757-1857)

### INTRODUCTION

Having acquired the vast empire of India, the East India Company had to devise suitable methods of government to control and administer it. The administrative policy of the Company underwent frequent changes during the long period between 1757 and 1857. However, it never lost sight of its main objects which were to increase the Company's profits, to enhance the profitability of its Indian possessions to Britain, and to maintain and strengthen the British hold over India; all other purposes were subordinated to these aims. The administrative machinery of the Government of India was designed and developed to serve these ends. The main emphasis in this respect was placed on the maintenance of law and order so that trade with India and exploitation of its resources could be carried out without disturbance.

### THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

When the officials of the East India Company acquired control over Bengal in 1765, they had little intention of making any innovations in its administration. They only desired to carry on their profitable trade and to collect taxes for remission to England. From 1765 to 1772, in the period of the Dual Government, Indian officials were allowed to function as before but under the over-all control of the British Governor and British officials. The Indian officials had responsibility but no power while the Company's officials had power but no responsibility. Both sets of officials were venal and corrupt men. In 1772 the Company ended the Dual Government and undertook to administer Bengal directly through its own servants. But the evils inherent in the administration of a country by a purely commercial company soon came to the surface.

The East India Company was at this time a commercial body designed to trade with the East. Moreover, its higher authority was situated in England, many thousands of miles away from India. Yet, it had come to wield political power over millions of people. This anomalous state of affairs posed many problems for the British Government. What was to be the relation of the East India Company and its possessions to the government in Britain? How were the Company's authorities in Britain to control the great multitude of officials and soldiers stationed in far away India? How was a single centre of control to be provided in India over the far-flung British possessions in Bengal, Madras and Bombay.

The first of these problems was the most pressing as well as the most important. It was, moreover, closely interwoven with party and parliamentary rivalries in Britain, the political ambitions of English statesmen, and the commercial greed of English merchants. The rich resources of Bengal had fallen into the hands of the Company whose Directors immediately raised dividends to 10 per cent in 1767 and proposed in 1771 to raise the rate further to 12 ½ per cent. The Company's English servants took advantage of their position to make quick fortunes through illegal and unequal trade and forcible collection of bribes and gifts from Indian chiefs and zamindars. Clive returned to England at the age of 34 with wealth and property yielding £ 40,000 a year.

The Company's high dividends and the fabulous wealth brought home by its officials excited the jealousy of other sections of British society. Merchants kept out of the East by the monopoly of the Company, the growing class of manufacturers and, in general, the rising forces of free enterprise in Britain wanted to share in the profitable Indian trade and the riches of India which the Company and its servants alone were enjoying.

They, therefore, worked hard to destroy the Company's trade monopoly and, in order to achieve this, they attacked the Company's administration of Bengal. They also made the officials of the Company who returned from India their special target. These officials were given the derisive title of 'nabobs' and were ridiculed in the press and on the stage. They were boycotted by the aristocracy and were condemned as the exploiters and oppressors of the Indian people. Their two main targets were Clive and Warren Hastings. By condemning the 'nabobs', the opponents of the Company hoped to make the Company unpopular and then to displace it.

Many ministers and other Members of Parliament were keen to benefit from the acquisition of Bengal. They sought to win popular support by forcing the Company to pay tribute to the British government so that Indian revenues could be used to reduce taxation or the public debt of England. In 1767, the Parliament passed an act obliging the Company to pay to the British treasury £400,000 per year. Many political thinkers and statesmen of Britain wanted to control the activities of the Company and its officials because they were afraid that the powerful Company and its rich officials would completely debauch the English nation and its politics.

The parliamentary politics of Britain during the latter half of the eighteenth century was corrupt in the extreme. The Company as well as its retired officials bought seats in the House of Commons for their agents. Many English statesmen were worried that the Company and its officials, backed by Indian plunder, might gain a preponderant influence in the government of Britain.

The Company and its vast empire in India had to be controlled or the Company, as master of India, would soon come to control British administration and be in a position to destroy the liberties of the British people. The exclusive privileges of the Company were also attacked by the rising school of economists representing free-trade manufacturing capitalism.

In his celebrated work, *The Wealth of Nations*, **Adam Smith**, the founder of classical economics, condemned the exclusive companies:

*Such exclusive companies, therefore, are nuisances in many respects; always more or less inconvenient to the countries in which they are established and destructive to those which have the misfortune to fall under their government.*

Thus, reorganization of the relations between the British state and the Company's authorities became necessary and the occasion arose when the Company had to ask the government for a loan of £1,000,000. But, while the Company's enemies were many and powerful, it was not without powerful friends in the Parliament; moreover, the king, George III, was its patron. The Company, therefore, fought back.

In the end, the Parliament worked out a compromise by which the interests of the Company and of the various influential sections of British society were delicately balanced. It was decided that the British government would control the basic policies of the Company's Indian administration so that British rule in India was carried on in the interests of the British upper classes as a whole.

At the same time the Company would retain its monopoly of Eastern trade and the valuable right of appointing its officials in India. The details of Indian administration were also left to the directors of the Company. The first important parliamentary act regarding the Company's affairs was the Regulating Act of 1773. This Act made changes in the constitution of the Court of Directors of the Company and subjected their actions to the supervision of the British Government. The Regulating Act soon broke down in practice. It had not given the British government effective and decisive control over the Company.

The Act had also failed to resolve the conflict between the Company and its opponents in England who were daily growing stronger and more vocal. Moreover, the Company remained extremely vulnerable to the attacks of its enemies as the administration of its Indian possessions continued to be corrupt, oppressive, and economically disastrous.



The defects of the Regulating Act and the exigencies of British politics necessitated the passing in 1784 of another important act known as the Pitt's India Act. This Act gave the British government supreme control over the company's affairs and its administration in India. It established six commissioners for the affairs of India, popularly known as the Board of Control, including two Cabinet Ministers.

The Board of Control was to guide and control the work of the Court of Directors and the Government of India. The Act placed the Government of India in the hands of the Governor-General and a Council of three, so that if the Governor-General could get the support of even one member, he could have his way. The Act clearly subordinated the Bombay and Madras Presidencies to Bengal in all questions of war, diplomacy, and revenues.

With this Act began a new phase of the British conquest of India. While the East India Company became the instrument of British national policy, India was to be made to serve the interests of all sections of the ruling classes of Britain. The Company, having saved its monopoly of the Indian and Chinese trade, was satisfied. Its directors retained the profitable right of appointing and dismissing its British officials in India. Moreover, the Government of India was to be carried out through their agency.

While the Pitt's India Act laid down the general framework in which the Government of India was to be carried on till 1857, later enactments brought about several important changes which gradually diminished the powers and privileges of the Company. In 1786, the Governor-General was given the authority to overrule his Council in matters of importance affecting safety, peace, or the interests of the empire in India. By the Charter Act of 1813, the trade monopoly of the Company in India was ended and trade with India was thrown open to all British subjects. But trade in tea and trade with China was still exclusive to the Company. The government and the revenues of India continued to be in the hands of the Company. The Company also continued to appoint its officials in India.

The Charter Act of 1833 brought the Company's monopoly of tea trade and trade with China to an end. At the same time, the debts of the Company were taken over by the Government of India, which was also to pay its shareholders a 10% per cent dividend on their capital. The Government of India continued to be run by the Company under the strict control of the Board of Control. Thus the various acts of Parliament discussed above completely subordinated the Company and its Indian administration to the British Government. At the same time, it was recognised that day-to-day administration of India could not be run or even superintended from a distance of 6,000 miles.



**Lord Charles Cornwallis**

Supreme authority in India was, therefore, delegated to the Governor-General-in-Council. The Governor-General, having the authority to overrule his Council on important questions, became in fact the real, effective ruler of India, functioning under the superintendence, control and direction of the British government. The British created a new system of administration in India to serve their purposes. But before we discuss the salient features of this system, it would be better if we first examine the purposes which it was designed to serve, for the main function of the administrative system of a country is to accomplish the aims and objects of its rulers.

The chief aim of the British was to enable them to exploit India economically to the maximum advantage of various British interests, ranging from the Company to the Lancashire manufacturers. In 1793, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General, defined two primary objectives for the Bengal government. It must 'ensure its political safety and it must render the possession of the country as advantageous as possible to the East India Company and the British nation'. At the same time India was to be made to bear the full cost of its own conquest as well as of foreign rule. An examination of the economic policies of the British in India is, therefore, of prime importance.

## BRITISH ECONOMIC POLICIES IN INDIA (1757-1857)

### Commercial Policy:

From 1600 to 1757 the East India Company's role in India was that of a trading corporation which brought goods or precious metals into India and exchanged them for Indian goods like textiles and spices, which it sold abroad. Its profits came primarily from the sale of Indian goods abroad. Naturally, it tried constantly to open new markets for Indian goods in Britain and other countries. Thereby, it increased the export of Indian manufacturers and thus encouraged their production.

This is the reason why Indian rulers tolerated and even encouraged the establishment of the Company's factories in India. But, from the very beginning, the British manufacturers were jealous of the popularity that Indian textiles enjoyed in Britain. All of a sudden, dress fashions changed and light cotton textiles began to replace the coarse woollens of the English. Before, the author of the famous novel, Robinson Crusoe, complained that Indian cloth had "crept into our houses, our closets and bed chambers; curtains, cushions, chairs, and at last beds themselves were nothing but calicos or India stuffs". The British manufacturers put pressure on their government to restrict and prohibit the sale of Indian goods in England. By 1720, laws had been passed forbidding the wear or use of printed or dyed cotton cloth. In 1760 a lady had to pay a fine of £200 for possessing an imported handkerchief.

Moreover, heavy duties were imposed on the import of plain cloth. Other European countries, except Holland, also either prohibited the import of Indian cloth or imposed heavy import duties. In spite of these laws, however, Indian silk and cotton textiles still held their own in foreign markets, until the middle of the eighteenth century when the English textile industry began to develop on the basis of new and advanced technology.

After the battle of Plassey in 1757, the pattern of the Company's commercial relations with India underwent a qualitative change. Now the Company could use its political control over Bengal to acquire monopolistic control over Indian trade and production and push its Indian trade. Moreover, it utilised the revenues of Bengal to finance its export of Indian goods. The activity of the Company should have encouraged Indian manufacturers, for Indian exports to Britain went up from £1.5 million in 1750-51 to £5.8 million in 1797-98, but this was not so. The Company used its political power to dictate terms to the weavers of Bengal who were forced to sell their products at a cheaper and dictated price, even at a loss.

Moreover, their labour was no longer free. Many of them were compelled to work for the Company for low wages and forbidden to work for Indian merchants. The Company eliminated its rival traders, both Indian and foreign, and prevented them from offering higher wages or prices to the Bengal handicraftsmen.

The servants of the Company monopolized the sale of raw cotton and made the Bengal weaver pay exorbitant prices for it. Thus, the weaver lost both ways, as a buyer as well as a seller. At the same time, Indian textiles had to pay heavy duties on entering England. The British government was determined to protect its rising machine industry whose products could still not compete with the cheaper and better Indian goods. Even so Indian products held some of their ground. The real blow to Indian handicrafts fell after 1813, when they lost not only their foreign markets but, what was of much greater importance, their market in India itself. The Industrial Revolution in Britain completely transformed Britain's economy and its economic relations with India.

During the second half of the eighteenth century and the first few decades of the nineteenth century, Britain underwent profound social and economic transformation, and British industry developed and expanded rapidly on the basis of modern machines, the factory system, and capitalism. This development was aided by several factors. British overseas trade had been expanding rapidly in the previous centuries. Britain had come to capture and monopolise many foreign markets by means of war and colonialism. These export markets enabled its export industries to expand production rapidly, utilizing the latest techniques in production and organisation. Africa, the West Indies, Latin America, Canada, Australia, China and above all India provided unlimited opportunities for export. This was particularly true of the cotton textile industry which served as the main vehicle of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

Britain had already evolved the colonial pattern of trade that helped the Industrial Revolution which, in turn, strengthened this pattern: the colonies and underdeveloped countries exported agricultural and mineral raw materials to Britain while the latter sold them its manufactures. Second, there was sufficient capital accumulated in the country for investment in new machinery and the factory system. Moreover, this capital was concentrated, not in the hands of the feudal class which would waste it in luxurious living, but in the hands of merchants and industrialists who were keen to invest it in trade and industry. Here again the immense wealth drawn from Africa, Asia, the West Indies, and Latin America, including that drawn from India by the East India Company and its servants after the battle of Plassey, played an important role in financing industrial expansion.

Third, rapid increase in population met the need of the growing industries for more and cheaper labour. The population of Britain increased rapidly after 1740; it doubled in fifty years after 1780. Fourth, Britain had a government which was under the influence of commercial and manufacturing interests and which, therefore, fought other countries determinedly for markets and colonies.

Fifth, the demands for increased production were met by developments in technology. Britain's rising industry could base itself on the inventions of Hargreaves, Watt, Crompton, Cartwright, and many others. Many of the inventions now utilised had been available for centuries. In order to take full advantage of these inventions and steam-power, production was now increasingly concentrated in factories. It should be noted that it was not these inventions which produced the Industrial Revolution. Rather it was the desire of manufacturers to increase production rapidly for the expanding markets and their capacity to invest the needed capital which led them to utilise the existing technology and to call forth new inventions.

In fact, new organisation of industry was to make technical change a permanent feature of human development. The Industrial Revolution has, in this sense, never come to an end, for modern industry and technology have gone on developing from one stage to another ever since the middle of the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution transformed British society in a fundamental manner. It led to rapid economic development which is the foundation of today's high standard of living in Britain as well as in Europe, the Soviet Union, the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and Japan.

In fact, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the difference in the standards of living of what are today economically the advanced and the backward countries was not marked. It was the absence of the Industrial Revolution in the latter group of countries which has led to the immense income gap that we see in the world of today. Britain became increasingly urbanized as a result of the Industrial Revolution. More and more people began to live in factory towns. In 1750, Britain had only two cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants; in 1851, the number was 29.



Two entirely new classes of society were born, the industrial capitalists, who owned the factories, and workers who hired out their labour on daily wages. While the former class developed rapidly, enjoying unprecedented prosperity, the workers—the labouring poor—in the beginning reaped a harvest of sorrow. They were uprooted from their rural surroundings, and their traditional way of life was disrupted and destroyed. They now had to live in cities which were full of smoke and filth. Housing was utterly inadequate and insanitary.

Most of them lived in dark, sunless slums which have been described so well in the novels of Charles Dickens. The working hours in the factories and mines were intolerably long—often going up to 14 or 16 hours a day. Wages were very low. Women and children had to work equally hard. Sometimes 4- or 5-year-old children were employed in factories and mines. In general, a worker's life was one of poverty, hard work, disease, and malnutrition. It was only after the middle of the nineteenth century that improvement in their incomes began to take place.

The rise of a powerful class of manufacturers had an important impact on Indian administration and its policies. The interest of this class in the Empire was very different from that of the East India Company. It did not gain from the monopolisation of the export of Indian handicrafts or the direct appropriation of Indian revenues. As this class grew in number and strength and political influence, it began to attack the trade monopoly of the Company. Since the profits of this class came from manufacturing and not from trading, it wanted to encourage, not imports of manufactures from India, but exports of its own products to India as well as imports of raw materials like raw cotton from India.

In 1769 the British industrialists compelled the Company by law to export every year British manufactures amounting to over £380,000, even though it suffered a loss on the transaction. In 1793, they forced the Company to grant them the use of 3,000 tons of its shipping every year to carry their goods. Exports of British cotton goods to the East, mostly to India, increased from £156 in 1794 to nearly £110,000 in 1813, that is, by nearly 700 times.

But this increase was not enough to satisfy the wild hopes of the Lancashire manufacturers who began to actively search for ways and means of promoting the export of their products to India. As R.C. Dutt pointed out later in 1901 in his famous work, *The Economic History of India*, the effort of the Parliamentary Select Committee of 1812 was “to discover how they (Indian manufacturers) could be replaced by British manufacturers, and how British industries could be promoted at the expense of Indian industries”.

The British manufacturers looked upon the East India Company, its monopoly of eastern trade, and its methods of exploitation of India through control of India's revenues and export trade, to be the chief obstacles in the fulfillment of their dreams. Between 1793 and 1813, they launched a powerful campaign against the Company and its commercial privileges and finally succeeded in 1813 in abolishing its monopoly of Indian trade.

With this event, a new phase in Britain's economic relations with India began. Agricultural India was to be made an economic colony of industrial England. The Government of India now followed a policy of free trade or unrestricted entry of British goods. Indian handicrafts were exposed to the fierce and unequal competition of the machine-made products of Britain and faced extinction. India had to admit British goods free or at nominal tariff rates. The Government of India also tried to increase the number of purchasers of British goods by following a policy of fresh conquests and direct occupation of protected states like Awadh. Many British officials, political leaders and businessmen advocated reduction in land revenue so that the Indian peasant might be in a better position to buy foreign manufacturers. They also advocated the westernization of India so that more and more Indians might develop a taste for Western goods.

Indian hand-made goods were unable to compete against the much cheaper products of British mills which had been rapidly improving their productive capacity by using inventions and a wider use of steam power. Any government wedded to Indian interests alone would have protected Indian industry through high tariff walls and used the time thus gained to import the new techniques of the West. Britain had done

this in relation to its own industries in the eighteenth century; France, Germany and the U.S.A. were also doing so at the time; Japan and the Soviet Union were to do it many decades later; and free India is doing it today.

However, not only were Indian industries not protected by the foreign rulers but foreign goods were given free entry. Foreign imports rose rapidly. Imports of British cotton goods alone increased from £1,100,000 in 1813 to £6,300,000 in 1856. The free trade imposed on India was, however, one-sided. While the doors of India were thus thrown wide open to foreign goods, Indian products which could still compete with British products were subjected to heavy import duties on entry into Britain.

The British would not take in Indian goods on fair and equal terms even at this stage when their industries had achieved technological superiority over Indian handicrafts. Duties in Britain on several categories of Indian goods continued to be high till their export to Britain virtually ceased. For example, in 1824, a duty of 67 ½ per cent was levied on Indian calicos and a duty of 37½ per cent on Indian muslins. Indian sugar had to pay on entry into Britain a duty that was over three times its cost price. In some cases duties in England went up as high as 400 per cent. As a result of such prohibitive import duties and development of machine industries, Indian exports to foreign countries fell rapidly. The unfairness of British commercial policy has been summed up by the British historian, H.H. Wilson, in the following words:

It was stated in evidence, that the cotton and silk goods of India up to this period could be sold for a profit in the British market, at a price from 50 to 60 per cent lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70 to 80 per cent on their value, or by positive prohibition.

Had this not been the case, had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and of Manchester would have been stopped in their outset and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the power of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufacture. Had India been independent, she would have retaliated, would have imposed preventive duties upon British goods, and would thus have preserved her own productive industry from annihilation. This act of self-defence was not permitted her; she was at the mercy of the stranger.

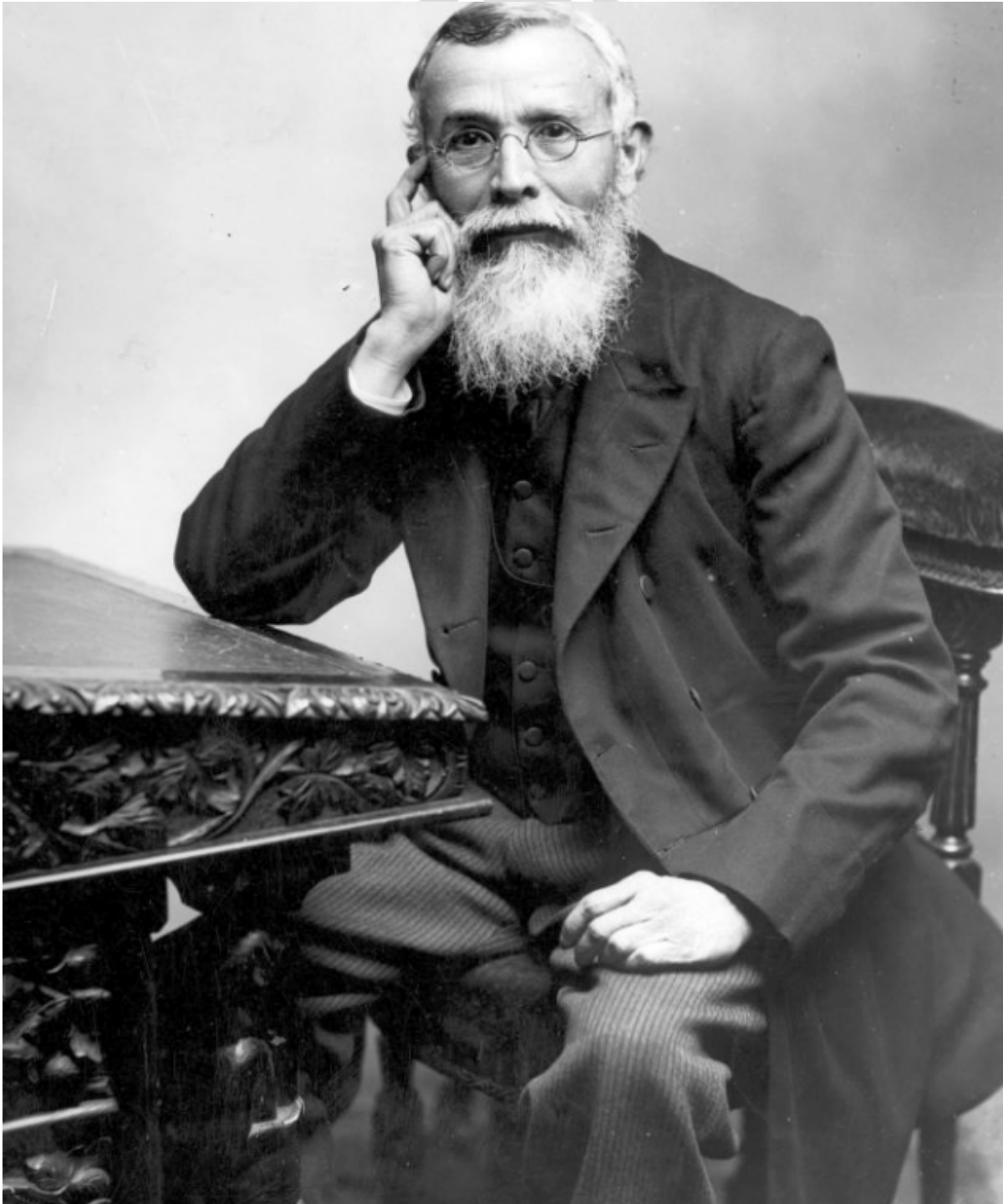
British goods were forced upon her without paying any duty; and the foreign manufacturer employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not have contended on equal terms. Instead of exporting manufactures, India was now forced to export raw materials like raw cotton and raw silk which British industries needed urgently, or plantation products like indigo and tea, of food grains which were in short supply in Britain.

In 1856, India exported £4,300,000 worth of raw cotton, only £810,000 worth of cotton manufactures, £2,900,000 worth of food grains, £1,730,000 worth of indigo, and £770,000 worth of raw silk. The British also promoted the sale of Indian opium in China even though the Chinese put a ban on it because of its poisonous and other harmful effects. But the trade yielded large profits to British merchants and fat revenues to the Company-controlled administration of India.

Interestingly enough, the import of opium into Britain was strictly banned. By the end of the nineteenth century, Indian exports consisted primarily of raw cotton, jute and silk, oilseeds, wheat, hides and skins, indigo and tea. Thus, the commercial policy of the East India Company after 1813 was guided by the needs of British industry. Its main aim was to transform India into a consumer of British manufactures and a supplier of raw materials.

**THE DRAIN OF WEALTH**

Drain theory was the core of nationalist critique of colonialism and the acknowledged high-priest of this critique was Dadabhai Naoroji who, as early as 1867, put forward the idea that Britain was draining and bleeding India and that, too, for nothing. The British exported to Britain part of India's wealth and resources for which India got no adequate economic or material return. This 'economic drain' was peculiar to British rule. Even the worst of previous Indian governments had spent the revenue they extracted from the people inside the country. Whether they spent it on irrigation canals and trunk roads, or on palaces, temples and mosques, or on wars and conquests, or even on personal luxury, it ultimately encouraged Indian trade and industry or gave employment to Indians. This was so because even foreign conquerors, like the Mughals, soon settled in India and made it their home. But the British remained perpetual foreigners.



**Dadabhai Naoroji: The Grand Old Man of India**



Englishmen, working and trading in India, nearly always planned to go back to Britain, and the Indian government was controlled by a foreign company of merchants and the government of Britain. The British, consequently, spent a large part of the taxes and income they derived from the Indian people not in India but in Britain, their home country. The drain of wealth from Bengal began in 1757 when the Company's servants began to carry home immense fortunes extorted from Indian rulers, zamindars, merchants and the common people. They sent home nearly £6 million between 1758 and 1765. This amount was more than four times the total land revenue collection of the Nawab of Bengal in 1765.

This amount of drain did not include the trading profits of the Company which were often no less illegally derived. In 1765 the Company acquired the Diwani of Bengal and thus gained control over its revenues. The Company, even more than its servants, soon directly organised the drain. It began to purchase Indian goods out of the revenue of Bengal and to export them. These purchases were known as 'Investments'. Thus, through 'Investments', Bengal's revenue was sent to England. For example, from 1765 to 1770, the Company sent out nearly £4 million worth of goods or about 33 per cent of the net revenue of Bengal.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the drain constituted nearly 9 per cent of India's national income. The actual drain was even more, as a large part of the salaries and other incomes of English officials and the trading fortunes of English merchants also found their way into England. The drain took the form of an excess of India's exports over its imports, for which India got no return. While the exact amount of the annual drain has not been calculated so far and historians differ on its quantum, the fact of the drain, at least from 1757 to 1857, was widely accepted by British officials.

Thus, for example, Lord Ellenborough, Chairman of the Select Committee of the House of Lords, and later Governor-General of India, admitted in 1840 that India was "required to transmit annually to this country (Britain), without any return except in the small value of military stores, a sum amounting to between two and three million sterling".

And **John Sullivan, President of the Board of Revenue, Madras, remarked:**

**"Our system acts very much like a sponge, drawing up all the good things from the banks of the Ganges, and squeezing them down on the banks of the Thames."**

The drain went on increasing after 1858, though the British administrators and imperialist writers now began to deny its existence. By the end of the nineteenth century it constituted nearly 6 per cent of India's national income and one-third of its national savings.

The wealth drained out of India played an important part in financing Britain's capitalist development, especially during the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, during the period of Britain's early industrialization. It has been estimated that it constituted nearly two per cent of Britain's national income during that period. The figure assumes importance if it is kept in view that Britain was at that time investing in industry and agriculture about 7 per cent of its national income.

**DEVELOPMENT OF MEANS OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION**

Up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the means of transport in India were backward. They were confined to bullock-cart, camel, and packhorse. The British rulers soon realized that a cheap and easy system of transport was a necessity if British manufactures were to flow into India on a large scale and her raw materials secured for British industries. The British rulers introduced steamships on the rivers and set about improving the roads. Work on the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Delhi began in 1839 and completed in the 1850s. Efforts were also made to link by road the major cities, ports, and markets of the country.



**INDIA'S FIRST TRAIN (BOMBAY TO THANE, 1853)**

**Development of Railway**

The first railway engine designed by George Stephenson was put on the rail in England in 1814. Railways developed rapidly during the 1830s and 1840s. The earliest suggestion to build a railway in India was made in Madras in 1831. But the wagons of this railway were to be drawn by horses. Construction of steam-driven railways in India was first proposed in 1834 in England. It was given strong political support by England's railway promoters, financiers, and mercantile houses trading with India, and textile manufacturers. It was decided that the Indian railways were to be constructed and operated by private companies who were guaranteed a minimum of five per cent return on their capital by the Government of India. The first railway line running from Bombay to Thane was opened to traffic in 1853.

Lord Dalhousie, who became Governor-General of India in 1849, was an ardent advocate of rapid railway construction. Dalhousie proposed a network of four main trunk lines which would link the interior of the country with the big ports and inter-connect the different parts of the country. By the end of 1869, more than 4,000 miles of railways had been built by the guaranteed companies; but this system proved very costly and slow, and so in 1869 the Government of India decided to build new railways as state enterprises. But the speed of railway extension still did not satisfy officials in India and businessmen in Britain. After 1880, railways were built through private enterprises as well as state agency.

By 1905, nearly 28,000 miles of railways had been built. The railway lines were laid primarily with a view to link India's raw material producing areas in the interior with the ports of export. The needs of Indian industries regarding their markets and their sources of raw materials were neglected. Moreover, the railway rates were fixed in a manner so as to favor imports and exports and to discriminate against internal movement of goods. Several railway lines in Burma and North-Western India were built at high cost to serve British imperial interests.

### **Postal and Telegraph System**

**The British also established an efficient and modern postal system and introduced the telegraph. The first telegraph line from Calcutta to Agra was opened in 1853. Lord Dalhousie introduced postage stamps.** Previously cash payment had to be made when a letter was posted. He also cut down postal rates and charged a uniform rate of half an anna for a letter all over the land. Before his reforms, the postage on a letter depended on the distance it was to travel: in some cases the postage on a letter was the equivalent of as much as four days wages of a skilled Indian worker!

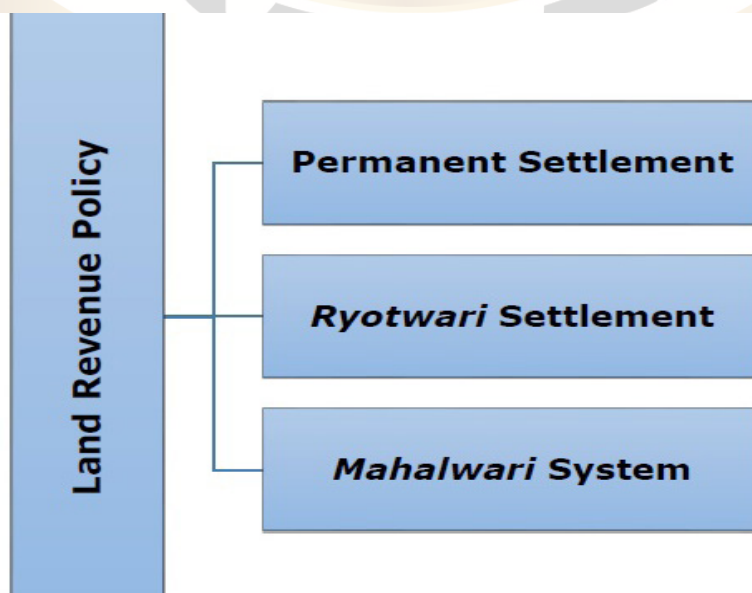
## **LAND REVENUE POLICY**

The Company needed Indian revenues to pay for its purchase of Indian handicrafts and other goods for export, meet the cost of the conquest of the whole of India and the consolidation of British rule, pay for the employment of thousands of Englishmen in superior administrative and military positions at salaries that were fabulous by contemporary standards, and to meet the costs of economic and administrative charges needed to enable colonialism to fully penetrate Indian villages and the far-flung areas.

This meant a steep rise in the burden of taxation on the India peasant. In fact, nearly all the major changes in the administration and judicial system till 1813 were geared to the collection of land revenues. The main burden of providing money for the trade and profits of the Company, the cost of administration, and the wars of British expansion in India had to be borne by the Indian peasant or ryot.

The Indian peasants had been forced to bear, the main burden of providing money for the trade and profits of the Company, the cost of administration, and the wars of British expansion in India. In fact, the British could not have conquered such a vast country as India if they had not taxed him heavily.

It had done so either directly through its servants or indirectly through intermediaries, such as zamindars, revenue farmers, etc., who collected the land revenue from the cultivator and kept a part of it as their commission. These intermediaries were primarily collectors of land revenue, although they did sometimes own some land in the area from which they collected revenue.





## THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

We have seen that in 1765, the East India Company acquired the Diwani, or control over the revenues, of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Initially, it made an attempt to continue the old system of revenue collection though it increased the amount to be collected from Rs 14,290,000 in 1722 and Rs 18,180,000 in 1764 to Rs 23,400,000 in 1771.

In 1773, it decided to manage the land revenues directly. Warren Hastings auctioned the right to collect revenue to the highest bidders. But his experiment did not succeed. Though the amount of land revenue was pushed high by zamindars and other speculators bidding against each other, the actual collection varied from year to year and seldom came up to official expectations. This introduced instability in the Company's revenues at a time when the Company was hard pressed for money. Moreover, neither the ryot nor the zamindar would do anything to improve cultivation when they did not know what the next year's assessment would be or who would be the next year's revenue collector.

It was at this stage that the idea first emerged of fixing the land revenue at a permanent amount. Finally, after prolonged discussion and debate, the **Permanent Settlement was introduced in Bengal and Bihar in 1793 by Lord Cornwallis.**

It had two special features. First, the zamindars and revenue collectors were converted into so many landlords. They were not only to act as agents of the government in collecting land revenue from the ryot but also to become the owners of the entire land in their zamindaris. Their right of ownership was made hereditary and transferable. On the other hand the cultivators were reduced to the low status of mere tenants and were deprived of long-standing rights to the soil and other customary rights. The use of the pasture and forest lands, irrigation canals, fisheries, and homestead plots and protection against enhancement of rent were some of the rights which were sacrificed. In fact, the tenantry of Bengal and Bihar was left entirely at the mercy of the zamindars. This was done so that the zamindars might be able to pay in time the exorbitant land revenue demand of the Company.

Second, the zamindars were to give 10/11th of the rental they derived from the peasantry to the state, keeping only 1/11th for themselves. But the sums to be paid by them as land revenue were fixed in perpetuity. If the rental of a zamindar's estate increased owing to extension of cultivation and improvement in agriculture, or his capacity to extract more from his tenants, or any other reason, he would keep the entire amount of the increase. The state would not make any further demand upon him. At the same time, the zamindar had to pay his revenue rigidly on the due date even if the crop had failed for some reason; otherwise his lands were to be sold.

The initial fixation of revenue was made arbitrarily and without any consultation with the zamindars. The attempt of the officials was to secure the maximum amount. As a result, the rates of revenue were fixed very high. Between 1765-66 and 1793, land revenue demand nearly doubled.

**John Shore, the man who planned the Permanent Settlement** and later succeeded Cornwallis as Governor-General, calculated that if the gross produce of Bengal be taken as 100, the government claimed 45, zamindars and other intermediaries below them received 15, and only 40 remained with the actual cultivator. One result of this high and impossible land revenue demand was that nearly half the zamindari lands were put up for sale between 1794 and 1807. It was later generally admitted by officials and non-officials alike that before 1793 the zamindars of Bengal and Bihar did not enjoy proprietary rights over most of the land. The question then arises: why did the British recognise them as such?



**Sir John Shore**

One explanation is that this was in part the result of a misunderstanding. In England, the central figure in agriculture at the time was the landlord and the British officials made the mistake of thinking that the zamindar was his Indian counterpart.

It is, however, to be noted that in one crucial respect the British officials clearly differentiated between the positions of the two. The landlord in Britain was the owner of land not only in relation to the tenant but also in relation to the state.

But in Bengal while the zamindar was landlord over the tenant, he was himself subordinated to the state. In fact he was reduced virtually to the status of a tenant of the East India Company. In contrast to the British landlord, who paid a small share of his income as land tax, he had to pay as tax 10/11th of his income from the land of which he was supposed to be the owner; and he could be turned out of the land unceremoniously and his estate sold if he failed to pay the revenue in time. Other historians think that the decision to recognise the zamindars as the proprietors of land was basically determined by political, financial and administrative expediency. Here the guiding factors were three. The first arose out of clever statecraft: the need to create political allies.

The British officials realised that as they were foreigners in India, their rule would be unstable unless they acquired local supporters who would act as a buffer between them and the people of India. This argument had immediate importance as there were a large number of popular revolts in Bengal during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. So they brought into existence a wealthy and privileged class of zamindars which owed its existence to British rule and which would, therefore, be compelled by its own basic interests to support it.

This expectation was, in fact, fully justified later when the zamindars as a class supported the foreign government in opposition to the rising movement for freedom. Second, and perhaps the predominant motive,

was that of financial security. Before 1793 the Company was troubled by fluctuations in its chief source of income, the land revenue. The Company was faced with a constant financial crisis as Bengal revenue had to finance its army engaged in wars of expansion, the civil establishment in Bengal, Madras and Bombay, and the purchase of manufactures for export. The Permanent Settlement guaranteed stability of income. The newly created property of the zamindars acted as a security of this.

Moreover, the Permanent Settlement enabled the Company to maximise its income as land revenue was now fixed higher than it had ever been in the past. Collection of revenue through a small number of zamindars seemed to be much simpler and cheaper than the process of dealing with lakhs of cultivators.

Third, the Permanent Settlement was expected to increase agricultural production. Since the land revenue would not be increased in future even if the zamindar's income went up, the latter would be inspired to extend cultivation and improve agricultural productivity as was being done in Britain by its landlords. The Permanent Zamindari Settlement was later extended to Orissa, the Northern Districts of Madras, and the District of Varanasi.

In parts of Central India and Awadh the British introduced a temporary zamindari settlement under which the zamindars were made owners of land but the revenue they had to pay was revised periodically. Another group of landlords was created all over India when the government started the practice of giving land to persons who had rendered faithful service to the foreign rulers.

### Benefits of Permanent Settlement

- Before 1793, the Company was troubled by fluctuations in its chief source of income, i.e. the land revenue. The Permanent Settlement guaranteed the stability of income.
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### THE RYOTWARI SETTLEMENT

The establishment of British rule in south and south-western India brought new problems of land settlement. The officials believed that in these regions there were no zamindars with large estates with whom settlement of land revenue could be made and that the introduction of zamindari system would upset the existing state of affairs. Many Madras officials led by Reed and Munro recommended that settlement should, therefore, be made directly with the actual cultivators. They also pointed out that under the Permanent Settlement the Company was a financial loser as it had to share the revenues with the zamindars and could not claim a share of the growing income from land.

Moreover, the cultivator was left at the mercy of the zamindar who could oppress him at will. Under the system they proposed, which is known as the Ryotwari Settlement, the cultivator was to be recognised as the owner of his plot of land subject to the payment of land revenue. The supporters of the Ryotwari system claimed that it was a continuation of the state of affairs that had existed in the past.

**Munro said:**

**“It is the system which has always prevailed in India.”**



The Ryotwari Settlement was in the end introduced in parts of the Madras and Bombay Presidencies in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The settlement under the Ryotwari system was not made permanent. It was revised periodically after 20 to 30 years when the revenue demand was usually raised. The Ryotwari Settlement did not bring into existence a system of peasant ownership. The peasant soon discovered that the large number of zamindars had been replaced by one giant zamindar—the state—and that they were mere government tenants whose land was sold if they failed to punctually pay land revenue. In fact, the government later openly claimed that land revenue was rent and not a tax.

**The ryot's rights of ownership of his land were also negated by three other factors:**

- In most areas the land revenue fixed was exorbitant; the ryot was hardly left with bare maintenance even in the best of seasons. For instance, in Madras the government claim was fixed as high as 45 to 55 per cent of gross production in the settlement. The situation was nearly as bad in Bombay.
- The government retained the right to enhance land revenue at will.
- The ryot had to pay revenue even when his produce was partially or wholly destroyed by drought or floods.

### **THE MAHALWARI SETTLEMENT**

A modified version of the zamindari settlement, introduced in the Ganga valley, the North-West Provinces, parts of central India, and the Punjab, was known as the Mahalwari System. The revenue settlement was to be made village by village or estate (mahal) by estate with landlords or heads of families who collectively claimed to be the landlords of the village or the estate. In the Punjab a modified Mahalwari System known as the village system was introduced. In Mahalwari areas also, the land revenue was periodically revised. Both the Zamindari and the Ryotwari systems departed fundamentally from the traditional land systems of the country.

The British created a new form of private property in land in such a way that the benefit of the innovation did not go to the cultivators. All over the country, land was now made saleable, mortgageable, and alienable. This was done primarily to protect the government's revenue. If land had not been made transferable or saleable, the government would find it very difficult to realise revenue from a cultivator who had no savings or possessions out of which to pay it. Now he could borrow money on the security of this land or even sell part of it and pay his land revenue.

If he refused to do so, the government could and often did auction his land and realise the amount. Another reason for introducing private ownership of land was provided by the belief that only right of ownership would make the landlord or the ryot exert himself in making improvements. The British by making land a commodity which could be freely bought and sold introduced a fundamental change in the existing land systems of the country. The stability and the continuity of the Indian villages were shaken. In fact, the entire structure of rural society began to break up.

## UNIT-VII

# ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL POLICY UNDER THE BRITISH

### INTRODUCTION

We have seen in the previous chapter that by 1784 the East India Company's administration of India had been brought under the control of the British government and that its economic policies were being determined by the needs of British economy. We will now discuss the organisation through which the Company administered its recently acquired dominion. In the beginning the Company left the administration of its possessions in India in Indian hands, confining its activities to supervision. But it soon found that British aims were not adequately served by following old methods of administration.

Consequently, the Company took some aspects of administration into its own hands. Under Warren Hastings and Cornwallis, the administration at the top was overhauled and the foundations of a new system based on the English pattern lay. The spread of British power to new areas, new problems, new needs, new experiences and new ideas led in the nineteenth century to more fundamental changes in the system of administration. But the overall objectives of imperialism were never forgotten. The British administration in India was based on three pillars: the Civil Service, the Army, and the Police. This was so for two reasons.

For one, the chief aim of British Indian administration was the maintenance of law and order and the perpetuation of British rule. Without law and order, British merchants and British manufacturers could not hope to sell their goods in every nook and corner of India. Again, the British, being foreigners, could not hope to win the affections of the Indian people; they, therefore, relied on superior force rather than on public support for the maintenance of their control over India. The **Duke of Wellington**, who had served in India under his brother, Lord Wellesley, remarked after his return to Europe:

*The system of Government in India, the foundation of authority, and the modes of supporting it and of carrying on the operations of government is entirely different from the systems and modes adopted in Europe for the same purpose. The foundation and the instrument of all power there is the sword.*

### THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICES (ICS)

The Civil Service was brought into existence by Lord Cornwallis. We know that the East India Company had from the beginning carried on its trade in the East through servants who were paid low wages but who were permitted to trade privately. Later, when the Company became a territorial power, the same servants assumed administrative functions.

They now became extremely corrupt. By oppressing local weavers and artisans, merchants and zamindars, by extorting bribes and 'gifts' from rajas and nawabs, by indulging in illegal private trade, they amassed untold wealth with which they retired to England. Clive and Warren Hastings made attempts to put an end to their corruption, but were only partially successful.

Cornwallis, who came to India as Governor-General in 1786, was determined to purify the administration, but he realised that the Company's servants would not give honest and efficient service so long as they were not given adequate salaries. He, therefore, enforced the rules against private trade and acceptance of presents and bribes by officials with strictness. At the same time, he raised the salaries of the Company's servants. For example, the Collector of a district was to be paid Rs 1500 a month and one per cent commission on the revenue collection of his district. In fact, the Company's Civil Service became the highest

paid service in the world. Cornwallis also laid down that promotion in the Civil Service would be by seniority so that its members would remain independent of outside influence.

In 1800, **Lord Wellesley established the College of Fort William at Calcutta for the education of young recruits to the Civil Service.** The directors of the Company disapproved of his action and in 1806 replaced it by their own **East Indian College at Hailey-bury in England.**

Till 1853 all appointments to the Civil Service were made by the directors of the East India Company who placated the members of the Board of Control by letting them make some of the nominations. The directors fought hard to retain this lucrative and prized privilege and refused to surrender it even when their other economic and political privileges were taken away by Parliament. They lost it finally in 1853 when the Charter Act decreed that all recruits to the Civil Service were to be selected through a competitive examination.

A special feature of the Indian Civil Service since the days of Cornwallis was the rigid and complete exclusion of Indians from it. It was laid down officially in 1793 that all higher posts in administration worth more than £500 a year in salary were to be held by Englishmen. This policy was also applied to other branches of government, such as the army, police, judiciary and engineering.

**In the words of John Shore, who succeeded Cornwallis:**

*The fundamental principle of the English had been to make the whole Indian nation subservient, in every possible way, to the interests and benefits of ourselves. The Indians have been excluded from every honour, dignity, or office, which the lowest Englishmen could be prevailed to accept.*

Why did the British follow such a policy? Many factors combined to produce it. For one, they were convinced that an administration based on British ideas, institutions, and practices could be firmly established only by English personnel. And, then, they did not trust the ability and integrity of the Indians. For example, Charles Grant, Chairman of the Court of Directors, condemned the people of India as “a race of men lamentably degenerate and base; retaining but a feeble sense of moral obligation; and sunk in misery by their vices”.

Similarly, Cornwallis believed that “Every native of Hindustan is corrupt.” It may be noted that this criticism did apply to some extent to a small class of Indian officials and zamindars of the time. But, then, it was equally if not more true of British officials in India. In fact, Cornwallis had proposed to give them high salaries in order to help them resist temptations and to become honest and obedient. But he never thought of applying the same remedy of adequate salaries to eradicate corruption among Indian officials.

In reality, the exclusion of Indians from higher grades of the services was a deliberate policy. These services were required at the time to establish and consolidate British rule in India. Obviously the task could not be left to Indians who did not possess the same instinctive sympathy for, and understanding of, British interests as Englishmen. Moreover, the influential classes of British society were keen to preserve the monopoly of lucrative appointments in the Indian Civil Service and other services for their sons. In fact, they fought tooth and nail among themselves over these appointments.

The right to make them was a perpetual bone of contention between the directors of the Company and the members of the British Cabinet. How could the English then agree to let Indians occupy these posts? Indians were, however, recruited in large numbers to fill subordinate posts as they were cheaper and much more readily available than Englishmen. The Indian Civil Service gradually developed into one of the most efficient and powerful civil services in the world. Its members exercised vast power and often participated in the making of policy. They developed certain traditions of independence, integrity and hard work, though these qualities obviously served British and not Indian interests. They came to believe that they had an almost divine right to rule India. The Indian Civil Service has often been called the ‘steel-frame’ which reared and sustained British rule in India. In course of time it became the chief opponent of all that was progressive and advanced in Indian life and one of the main targets of attacks by the rising Indian national movement.



## THE ARMY

The second important pillar of the British regime in India was the army. It fulfilled four important functions. It was the instrument through which the Indian powers were conquered; it defended the British Empire in India from foreign rivals; it safeguarded British supremacy from the ever-present threat of internal revolt; and it was the chief instrument for extending and defending the British empire in Asia and Africa. The bulk of the Company's army consisted of Indian soldiers, recruited chiefly from the area at present included in U.P and Bihar.

For instance, in 1857, the strength of the army in India was 311,400 of whom 265,900 were Indians. Its officers were, however, exclusively British, at least since the days of Cornwallis. In 1856, only three Indians in the army received a salary of Rs 300 per month and the highest Indian officer was a subedar. A large number of Indian troops had to be employed as British troops were far too expensive. Moreover, the population of Britain was perhaps too small to provide the large soldiery needed for the conquest of India. As a counterweight, the army was officered entirely by British officials and a certain number of British troops were maintained to keep the Indian soldiers under control.

Even so, it appears surprising today that a handful of foreigners could conquer and control India with a predominantly Indian army. This was possible because of two factors. On the one hand, there was absence of modern nationalism in the country at the time. A soldier from Bihar or Awadh did not think, and could not have thought, that in helping the Company defeat the Marathas or the Punjabis he was being anti-Indian. On the other, the Indian soldier had a long tradition of loyalty to the salt. In other words, the Indian soldier was a good mercenary, and the Company on its part was a good paymaster. It paid its soldiers regularly and well, something that the Indian rulers and chieftains were no longer doing.

## THE POLICE

The third pillar of British rule was the police whose creator was once again Cornwallis. He relieved the zamindars of their police functions and established a regular police force to maintain law and order. In this respect, he went back to, and modernized, the old Indian system of thanas. This put India ahead of Britain where a system of police had not developed yet. Cornwallis established a system of circles or thanas headed by a daroga, who was an Indian.

Later, the post of the District Superintendent of Police was created to head the police organisation in a district. Once again, Indians were excluded from all superior posts. In the villages, the duties of the police continued to be performed by village-watchmen who were maintained by the villagers. The police gradually succeeded in reducing major crimes such as dacoity. The police also prevented the organisation of a large-scale conspiracy against foreign control, and when the national movement arose, the police was used to suppress it.

In its dealings with the people, the Indian police adopted an unsympathetic attitude. A Committee of Parliament reported in 1813 that the police committed "depredations on the peaceable inhabitants, of the same nature as those practiced by the dacoits whom they were employed to suppress".

**And William Bentinck, the Governor-General, wrote in 1832:**

*As for the police, so far from being a protection to the people, I cannot better illustrate the public feeling regarding it, than by the following fact, that nothing can exceed the popularity of a recent regulation by which, if a robbery has been committed, the police are prevented from making any enquiry into it, except upon the requisition of the persons robbed: that is to say, the shepherd is a more ravenous beast of prey than the wolf.*

## JUDICIAL ORGANISATION

The British laid the foundations of a new system of dispensing justice through a hierarchy of civil and criminal courts. Though given a start by Warren Hastings, the system was stabilized by Cornwallis in 1793. In each district was established a Diwani Adalat, or civil court, presided over by the District Judge who belonged to the Civil Service. Cornwallis thus separated the posts of the Civil Judge and the Collector.

Appeal from the District Court lay first to four Provincial Courts of Civil Appeal and then, finally, to the Sadar Diwani Adalat. Below the District Court were Registrars' Courts, headed by Europeans, and a number of subordinate courts headed by Indian judges known as Munsifs and Amins. To deal with criminal cases, Cornwallis divided the Presidency of Bengal into four Divisions, in each of which a Court of Circuit presided over by the civil servants was established. The civil courts applied the customary law that had prevailed in any area or among a section of the people since times immemorial.

In 1831, William Bentinck abolished the Provincial Courts of Appeal and Circuit. Their work was assigned first to Commissions and later to District Judges and District Collectors.

Bentinck also raised the status and powers of Indians in the judicial service and appointed them as Deputy Magistrates, Subordinate Judges, and Principal Sadar Amins.

In 1865, High Courts were established at Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay to replace the Sadar Courts of District and Nizamat. The British also established a new system of laws through the processes of enactment and codification of old laws. The traditional system of justice in India had been largely based on customary law which arose from the long tradition and practice.

Though many laws were based on the shastras and shariat as well as on imperial authority. However, the British gradually evolved a new system of laws. British introduced regulations, codified the existing laws, and often systematized and modernized them through judicial interpretation. The Charter Act of 1833 conferred all law making power on the Governor General-in-Council.



**Lord Macaulay**

**In 1833, the Government appointed a Law Commission headed by Lord Macaulay** to codify Indian laws. Macaulay's work eventually resulted in the Indian Penal Code, the Western derived Codes of Civil and Criminal Procedure and other codes of laws.

The same Laws now prevailed all over the country and they were enforced by a uniform system of courts. Thus it may be said that India was judicially unified.

## THE RULE OF LAW

The British introduced the modern concept of the rule of law. This meant that their administration was to be carried out, at least in theory, in obedience to laws, which clearly defined the rights, privileges and obligations of the subjects, and not according to the caprice or personal discretion of the ruler. In practice, of course, the bureaucracy and the police enjoyed arbitrary powers and interfered with the rights and liberties of the people. The rule of law was to some extent a guarantee of the personal liberty of a person. It is true that previous rulers of India had been in general bound by tradition and custom.

But they always had the legal right to take any administrative steps they wanted and there existed no other authority before which their acts could be questioned. The Indian rulers and chiefs sometimes exercised this power to do as they wanted. Under British rule, on the other hand, administration was largely carried on according to laws as interpreted by the courts though the laws themselves were often defective, were made not by the people through a democratic process but autocratically by the foreign rulers, and left a great deal of power in the hands of the civil servants and the police. But that was perhaps inevitable in a foreign regime that could not in the very nature of things be democratic or libertarian.

### Equality before Law

The Indian legal system under the British was based on the concept of equality before law. This meant that in the eyes of the law all men were equal. The same law applied to all persons irrespective of their caste, religion, or class. Previously, the judicial system had paid heed to caste distinctions and had differentiated between the so-called highborn and low born. For the same crime lighter punishment was awarded to a Brahmin than to a non-Brahmin.

Similarly, in practice zamindars and nobles were not judged as harshly as the commoner. In fact, very often they could not be brought to justice at all for their actions. Now the humble could also move the machinery of justice. There was, however, one exception to this excellent principle of equality before law. The Europeans and their descendants had separate courts and even laws. In criminal cases they could be tried only by European judges.

Many English officials, military officers, planters and merchants behaved with Indians in a haughty, harsh, and even brutal manner. When efforts were made to bring them to justice, they were given indirect and undue protection, and consequently light or no punishment, by many of the European judges before whom alone they could be tried. Consequently, there was frequent miscarriage of justice. In practice, there emerged another type of legal inequality. Justice became quite expensive as court fees had to be paid, lawyers engaged, and the expenses of witnesses met. Courts were often situated in distant towns. Lawsuits dragged on for years.

The complicated laws were beyond the grasp of the illiterate and ignorant peasants. Invariably, the rich could turn and twist the laws and courts to operate in their own favour. The mere threat to take a poor person through the long process of justice from the lower court to the highest court of appeal and thus to face him with complete ruin often sufficed to bring him to heel. Moreover, the widespread prevalence of corruption in the ranks of the police and the rest of the administrative machinery led to the denial of justice. Officials often favoured the rich. The zamindars oppressed the riots without fear of official action. In contrast, the system of justice that had prevailed in pre-British times was comparatively informal, speedy and inexpensive.



Thus, while the new judicial system marked a great step forward insofar as it was based on the laudable principles of the rule of law and equality before the law and on rational and humane man-made laws; it was a retrograde step in some other respects: it was now costlier and involved long delays.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL POLICY

We have seen that British authorities reorganised and regulated India's economy in the interests of British trade and industry and organised a modern administrative system to guarantee order and security. Till 1813 they also followed a policy of non-interference in the religious, social and cultural life of the country, but after 1813 they took active steps to transform Indian society and culture. This followed the rise of new interests and new ideas in Britain during the nineteenth century.

The Industrial Revolution, which had begun in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the consequent growth of industrial capitalism, was fast changing all aspects of British society. The rising industrial interests wanted to make India a big market for their goods. This could not be accomplished merely by adhering to the policy of keeping peace, and required the partial transformation and modernisation of Indian society. And so, in the words of the historians Thompson and Garratt, "the mood and methods of the old brigandage were changing into those of modern industrialism and capitalism." Science and technology also opened new vistas of human progress. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a great ferment of new ideas in Britain and Europe which influenced the British outlook towards Indian problems. All over Europe "new attitudes of mind, manners, and morals were appearing". The great French Revolution of 1789 with its message of liberty, equality, and fraternity generated powerful democratic sentiments and unleashed the force of modern nationalism.

In the realm of thought, the new trend was represented by Bacon, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Adam Smith and Bentham; in the realm of literature by Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Charles Dickens. The impact of the new thought the product of the intellectual revolution of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution was naturally felt in India and to some extent affected the official notions of government.

The three outstanding characteristics of the new thought were rationalism or faith in reason and science, humanism or love of man, and confidence in the capacity of man to progress. The rational and scientific attitude indicated that only that was true which was in conformity with human reason and capable of being tested in practice. The scientific progress of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the tremendous powers of production released by the application of science to industry were visible proofs of the power of human reason.

Humanism was based on the belief that every human being was an end in him and should be respected and prized as such. No man had the right to look upon another human being as a mere agent of his own happiness. The humanistic outlook gave birth to the doctrines of individualism, liberalism, and socialism. According to the doctrine of progress, all societies must change with time: nothing was or could be static. Moreover, man had the capacity to remodel nature and society on rational and just lines.

The new currents of thought in Europe came into conflict with the old outlook and produced a clash of attitudes among those who determined Indian policy or ran the Indian administration. The older attitude, known as the conservative or traditional attitude, was that of making as few changes in India as possible. The early representatives of this attitude were Warren Hastings and Edmund Burke, the famous writer and parliamentarian, and the later ones were the famous officials Munro, Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe. The conservatives maintained that Indian civilisation was different from European civilisation but was not necessarily inferior to it. Many of them respected and admired Indian philosophy and culture. Realising that it might be necessary to introduce some Western ideas and practices, they proposed to introduce them very cautiously and gradually.

Favoring social stability above all, they opposed any programme of rapid change. Sweeping or hasty innovations, they felt, would produce a violent reaction in the country. The conservative outlook remained influential in England as well as in India up to the very end of British rule. In fact, the majority of British officials in India were generally of conservative persuasion. By 1800, the conservative attitude was fast giving way to a new attitude which was sharply critical of Indian society and culture. Indian civilisation was condemned as static; it was looked down upon with contempt. Indian customs were considered uncivilised, Indian institutions corrupt and decadent, and Indian thought narrow and unscientific. This critical approach was used by most of the officials and writers and statesmen of Britain to justify political and economic enslavement of India and to proclaim that it was incapable of improvement and must therefore remain permanently under British tutelage.

However, a few Englishmen, known as Radicals, went beyond this narrow criticism and imperialistic outlook and applied the advanced humanistic and rational thought of the West to the Indian situation as they saw it. The doctrine of reason led them to believe that India need not always be a fallen country, for all societies had the capacity to improve by following the dictates of reason and science. The doctrine of humanism led them to desire the improvement of Indian people. The doctrine of progress led them to the conviction that Indians were bound to improve. And so the Radicals, though few but representing the better elements of British society, desired to make India a part of the modern progressive world of science and humanism.

To them, the answer to India's ills appeared to lie in the introduction of modern Western sciences, philosophy and literature in fact, in all out and rapid change along modern lines. Some of the officials who came to India in the 1820s and after were deeply influenced by the Radical outlook. It must, however, be emphasised at this stage that such honest and philanthropic Englishmen were few and that their influence was never decisive so far as the British administration of India was concerned. The ruling elements in British-Indian administration continued to be imperialistic and exploitative.

They would accept new ideas and adopt reformist measures only if, and to the extent that, they did not come into conflict with commercial interest and profit motives and enabled economic penetration of India and the consolidation of British rule. Modernisation of India had to occur within the broad limits imposed by the needs of easier and more thorough exploitation of its resources.

Thus modernisation of India was accepted by many English officials, businessmen and statesmen because it was expected to make Indians better customers for British goods and reconcile them to the alien rule. In fact many of the Radicals themselves no longer remained true to their own beliefs when they discussed Indian policy. Instead of working for a democratic government, as they did in Britain, they demanded a more authoritarian regime, described by them as paternalistic.

In this respect they were at one with the conservatives who too were ardent champions of paternalism which would treat the Indian people as children and keep them out of the administration.

The basic dilemma before the British administrators in India was that while British interest in India could not be served without some modernisation, full modernisation would generate forces which would go against their interests and would in the long run endanger British supremacy in the country.

They had, therefore, to follow a delicately balanced policy of partial modernisation, that is, a policy of introducing modernisation in some respects and blocking and preventing it in other respects. In other words, modernisation of India was to be colonial modernisation, carried out within the parameters of, and with a view to promoting, colonialism. The policy of modernising Indian society and culture was also encouraged by Christian missionaries and religious-minded persons such as William Wilberforce and Charles Grant, the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, who wanted to spread Christianity in India.

They, too, adopted a critical attitude towards Indian society but on religious grounds. They passionately believed that Christianity alone was the true religion and that all other religions were false. They supported a programme of Westernisation in the hope that it would eventually lead to the country's conversion to Christianity. They thought that the light of Western knowledge would destroy people's faith in their own religions and lead them to welcome and embrace Christianity. They, therefore, opened modern schools, colleges and hospitals in the country. The missionaries were, however, often most unwilling allies of the rationalist Radicals whose scientific approach undermined not only Hindu or Muslim mythology but Christian mythology as well.

As Professor H.H. Dodwell has pointed out: "Taught to question the validity of their own gods, they [the Westernised Indians] questioned also the validity of the Bible and the truth of its narrative."

The missionaries also supported the paternalistic imperialistic policies since they looked upon law and order and British supremacy as essential for their work of religious propaganda. They also sought the support of British merchants and manufacturers by holding out the hope that Christian converts would be better customers for their goods.

The Radicals were given strong support by Raja Rammohun Roy and other like-minded Indians, who were conscious of the low state to which their country and society had sunk, who were sick of caste prejudices and other social evils, and who believed that the salvation of India lay in science and humanism. Another reason why the Government of India followed a policy of cautious and gradual innovation and not of all out modernisation was the continuous prevalence of the conservative outlook among the British officials in India and the belief that interference in their religious beliefs and social customs might produce a revolutionary reaction among the Indian people.

Even the most ardent Radicals paid heed to this warning for, along with the other members of the British governing classes; they too desired most of all the safety and perpetuation of British rule in India. Every other consideration was of secondary importance. As a matter of fact, the policy of hesitant and weak modernisation was gradually abandoned after 1858 as Indians proved apt pupils, shifted rapidly towards modernisation of their society and assertion of their culture, and demanded to be ruled in accordance with the modern principles of liberty, equality and nationality. However in due course of time the British increasingly withdrew their support from the reformers and gradually came to side with the socially orthodox and conservative elements of society. They also encouraged casteism and communalism.

## HUMANITARIAN MEASURES

The official British efforts at reforming Indian society of its abuses were on the whole very meagre and, therefore, bore little fruit. Their biggest achievement was the outlawing of the practice of Sati in 1829 when William Bentinck declared it a crime to associate in any way with the burning of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. Earlier the British rulers had been apathetic and afraid of arousing the anger of the orthodox Indians. It was only after Rammohun Roy and other enlightened Indians and the missionaries agitated persistently for the abolition of this monstrous custom that the Government agreed to take this humanitarian step. Many Indian rulers in the past, including Akbar and Aurangzeb, the Peshwas, and Jai Singh of Jaipur, had made unsuccessful attempts to suppress this evil practice. In any case, Bentinck deserves praise for having acted resolutely in outlawing a practice which had taken a toll of 800 lives in Bengal alone between 1815 and 1818 and for refusing to bow before the opposition of the orthodox supporters of the practice of Sati, Female infanticide or the practice of killing female children at the time of their birth had prevailed among some of the Rajput clans and other castes because of paucity of young men who died in large numbers in warfare and because of the difficulties of earning a livelihood in unfertile areas, and in parts of Western and Central India because of the prevalence of the evil custom of dowry in a virulent form. Regulations prohibiting infanticide had been passed in 1795 and 1802, but they were sternly enforced only by Bentinck and Hardinge.



Hardinge also suppressed the practice of making human sacrifices that had prevailed among the primitive tribe of Gonds. In 1856 the Government of India passed an Act enabling Hindu widows to remarry. The Government acted after Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and other reformers had carried on a prolonged agitation in favour of the measure. The immediate effects of this Act were negligible. All these official reforms touched no more than the fringes of the Indian social system and did not affect the life of the vast majority of the people. It was perhaps not possible for a foreign government to do more.

## SPREAD OF MODERN EDUCATION

In 1781, Warren Hastings set up the Calcutta Madrasah for the study and teaching of Muslim law and related subjects. In 1791, Jonathan Duncan started a Sanskrit College at Varanasi, where he was the Resident, for the study of Hindu Law and Philosophy. Missionaries and their supporters and many humanitarians soon began to exert pressure on the Company to encourage and promote modern secular westernized education in India. Lord Macaulay, who was the Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, argued in a famous minute that Indian languages were not sufficiently developed to serve the purpose, and that "Oriental learning was completely inferior to European learning".

Raja Ram Mohan Roy fervently advocated the study of Western knowledge, which was seen by them as "the Key to the treasures of scientific and democratic thought of the modern West." Education and modern ideas were thus supposed to filter or radiate downwards from the upper classes. **The State's Educational Dispatch of 1854 (by Charles Wood) was another important step in the development of education in India.**

The Dispatch asked the Government of India to assume responsibility for the education of the masses. It thus repudiated the "downward filtration" theory, at last on paper. As a result of the directions given by the Dispatch, Departments of Education were instituted in all provinces and affiliating Universities were set up in 1857 at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras.



**Charles Wood**

**Bankim Chandra Chatterjee**, the famous Bengali novelist, became in 1858 one of the first two graduates of Calcutta University. Western education was expected to reconcile the people of India to British rule particularly as it glorified the British conquerors of India and their administration. Thus the British wanted to use modern education to strengthen the foundation of their political authority in the country. The

traditional Indian system of education gradually withered away for lack of official support and even more because of the official announcement in 1844 that applicants for government employment should possess knowledge of English. Thus declaration made English-medium schools very popular and compelled more and more students to abandon the traditional schools.

### Weakness of Educational System

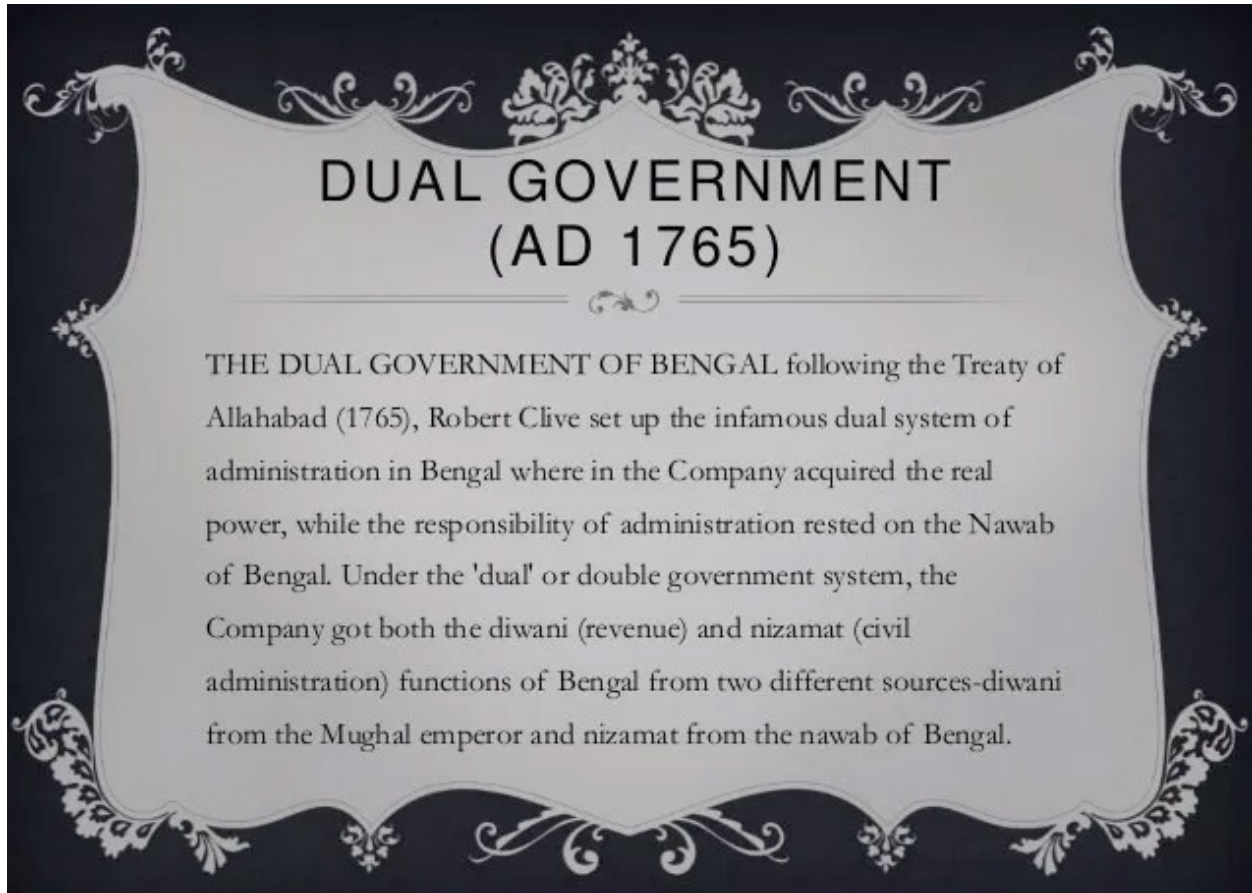
- A major weakness of the educational system was the neglect of mass education with the result that mass literacy in India was hardly better in 1921 than in 1821.
- As many as 94 percent of Indians were illiterate in 1911 and 92 percent in 1921.
- The emphasis on English as the medium of instruction in place of the Indian language also prevented the spread of education to the masses.
- The costly nature of higher education tended to make it a monopoly of the richer classes and the city-dwellers.
- A major lacuna in the early educational policy was the almost total neglect of the education of girls for which no funds were allotted. It was because female education lacked immediate usefulness in the eyes of the foreign officials (because women could not be employed as clerks in the Government offices).
- The Company's administration also neglected scientific and technical education.
- By 1857, there were only three medical colleges in the country at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras.
- There was only one good Engineering College at Roorkee to impart higher technical education and even this was open only to Europeans and Eurasians.

"Empowering Endeavours"

## UNIT-VIII

# VARIOUS COMPANY ACTS AND ETHICAL JUSTIFICATION OF BRITISH IMMORALITY

### DUAL GOVERNMENT IN BENGAL



During Dual System, Nawab-ud-Daulla and Saif-ud-Daulla were the Nawabs of Bengal. Following the Treaty of Allahabad (1765), Robert Clive set up the infamous dual system of administration in Bengal. Following the Treaty of Allahabad (1765), Robert Clive set up the infamous dual system of administration in Bengal. Under this system, the administration of Bengal was divided into Nizamat and Diwani. Diwani being the right to collect revenue was given to East India Company and Nizamat (administrative responsibility) was entrusted to Bengal Nawab. The British administration acquired the functions of the Diwani or revenue Diwani (Fiscal) from the Mughal emperor. [The Diwani was concerned with revenue and civil justice and the Nizamat with police, criminal justice etc] Though the administration theoretically divided between the Company and the Nawab, the whole power was actually in the hand of the Company. Under this system, the fiction of sovereignty of Mughal emperor and formal authority of Nawab was maintained. As the diwan, the Company was authorised to collect revenues of the province, while through the right to nominate the deputy Nizam (deputy subahdar) it was in a position to control the Nizamat or the police and judicial powers. The deputy subahdar (appointed to help Nawab) could not be removed without the consent of the Company. However, at this point of time, the Company was neither willing nor able to collect the revenue directly. Hence, it appointed two deputy diwans for exercising diwani functions – (1) Mohammad Reza Khan for Bengal and (2) Raja Sitah Roy for Bihar. Mohammad Reza Khan also functioned as deputy Nizam. In this way, the whole administration of Bengal was exercised through Indian agency, although the actual authority rested with the Company.



## Merits and reasons of the Dual Government

Clive showed his sagacity by following the policy of decentralization in the matter of Company's administration in Bengal. By this policy he could save the British in India from the wrath of the Indian rulers who might have taken drastic steps to oust the British from India had it been done otherwise. By the dual system of Government in Bengal Clive could save the company from the jealousy of the other European powers like the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese. These European powers would have withdrawn their payment of tariff to the servants of the Company on the event of Clive's full occupation of Bengal. Clive was wise enough not to take upon the administration of Bengal directly. He knew fully well that the servants of the company were not conversant with the languages, customs, traditions and laws prevailing among the people of Bengal. They would have cut a very sorry figure had they been entrusted with the administration of Bengal in the event of Clive's occupation of the state. In addition to their ignorance of the task of administration, their number was also too small to manage it. Both the Board of Directors and the British Parliament were not in favour of direct administration in Bengal. Clive did not like to incur displeasure of the home authority by taking over the administration of Bengal directly. By establishing Dual Government in Bengal, Clive showed his honour to the Board of Directors on the one hand and saved the Company from the wrath of British parliament on the other. The dual Government in Bengal helped the East India Company to remain free from the real responsibility of the administration of Bengal. The English Company got power and pelf by this system of Government by successfully keeping themselves away from the hazards of administration. For every omission and commission in the Government the Nawab of Bengal was to be held responsible. Clive established Dual Government in Bengal because the exigencies of time demanded it. It provided a conducive atmosphere for the growth of British power in India under the prevailing circumstances. Any alternative would have led the company to disaster. It was stop-gap arrangement. It was make-shift agreement which aimed at tiding over the difficulties confronting the English in 1765.

## Demerit of the Dual Government

The Dual Government of Clive has been criticized in various ways. It led to disastrous results. The administration in Bengal almost collapsed. Power was divorced from the responsibility. The British were in possession of power and money whereas the Nawab had neither power nor money. He had only the responsibility of running the administration and take the blame for any failure. The Nawab failed to manage the administration smoothly with a small annual grant of rupees 50 lakhs only. The company tried to improve its own lot by the revenue it collected from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Nawab could not do any work of public utility due to paucity of fund. The Nawab also had no power to enforce law. As a result lawlessness prevailed in most parts of Bengal. The cases of theft and robbery increased by leaps and bounds. The common people had to suffer a lot due to want of justice. The condition of agriculture in Bengal gradually deteriorated under the Dual Government of Clive. The power of collection of revenue rested in the hands of the company only. So, the Nawab could not make any provision like irrigation for the development of agriculture in Bengal. He also failed to advance loan to the needy farmers due to shortage of fund. The great famine of 1770 was an indirect outcome of the above difficulties. The poor administration in Bengal led to rapid increase of private trade. The servants of the East India Company carried on trade and commerce privately without paying any tax. They earned a lot of profit out of this illegal trade. But on the other hand the merchants of Bengal suffered a lot, because they were over burdened with tax. Thus, the Dual Government dealt a terrible blow to the local trade and commerce. The servants of the Nawab became wayward and oppressive when they came to know that the Nawab was a great puppet in the hands of the English company. This led to the suffering of the people of Bengal. The Dual Government of Clive was further responsible for the downfall of local industries. The company's people forced the local weavers to work exclusively for the company. Many other small local industries also were brought under the control of the company. People failed to get proper justice under the Dual system of Government. The judges of the Nawab were influenced by British authority, because the latter played vital role in their appointment. Thus, the judges failed to give impartial verdict which was detrimental to the interest of the public. The downfall of agriculture under the Dual Government ultimately led to the downfall of Company's income

due to decrease of revenue collection. Thus, the Dual Government of Clive proved to Bengal a failure. It gave rise to several complications in the administration of Bengal. The absence of responsibility on the part of the company led to abuses of power and corruption. This dual system was proved to be unsuccessful and in 1772 it was ended by Lord Warren Hastings on the orders of the directors of the company. At the time of end of this system Mubaraq-ud-Daulla was the Nawab of Bengal.

## THE REGULATING ACT OF 1773

By 1773, the East India Company was in dire financial crisis. The Company was important to Britain because it was a monopoly trading company in India and in the east and many influential people were shareholders. The Company paid £400,000 annually to the government to maintain the monopoly but had been unable to meet its commitments because of the loss of tea sales to America since 1768 as Dutch were able to enter the American Markets. The East India Company owed money to both the Bank of England and the government; it had 15 million lbs of tea rotting in British warehouses. The mismanaged Finances made the company almost insolvent and the company was forced to apply to the British Government for a loan. The East India Company was basically a trading farm that made business over a vast area of India but also maintained an army to protect its interests. PM Lord North decided to start Governmental control, as East India Company had no experience in ruling it conquered few areas. The British Parliament appointed two committees: (1) Secret Committee (2) Select committee. Based on the recommendations of the two committees there two Act were passed (1) Granted to the company a loan of £ 14, 00000 at 4% interest (2) Regulating Act, 1773 Lord North decided to overhaul the management of the East India Company and to provide some form of legal government for the Indian possessions of the East India Company with the Regulating Act 1773. This was the first step along the road to government control of India. The Act set up a system whereby it supervised (regulated) the work of the East India Company but did not take power for itself. Since the Government in Britain regulated the company and did not take it over, it was termed "Regulating Act". East India Company had a very powerful lobby in Parliament in spite of the financial crises of the Company. The Shareholders along with this lobby of Parliament opposed the act.

**Provisions of Act:-**The Regulating act of 1773 permitted the Company to retain its former possessions and power in India but the management was brought under control by the British Government.

**Election for Directors:** The directors of the company were elected for four years. One-fourth of them retire for every year and the retiring Directors were not entitled to be elected again. In order to assert parliament's control over the company, the directors were required to place regularly all their correspondence, regarding civil military affairs with the Indian authorities, before the secretary of the state in England. All correspondence regarding to revenues in India was required to be placed before the Treasury in England. The Act limited Company dividends to 6% until it repaid a GB £1.5 Million loan and restricted the Court of Directors to four-year terms. It prohibited the servants of company from engaging in any private trade or accepting presents or bribes from the natives to curb corruption.

**First Governor General of India:** The Act elevated Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings to Governor-General of Bengal and subsumed the presidencies of Madras and Bombay under Bengal's control. Now, no other presidency could give orders for commencing hostilities with the Indian Princes, declare a war or negotiate a treaty. Now, the Governor General of India and his council of 4 members got a legal status. Their term of office was five years and the king was empowered to dethrone them even earlier on recommendation of the court of directors. [Commonly we call Warren Hastings as First Governor General of India. But the official title of Warren Hastings was the Governor of the Presidency of Fort William. This office became Governor General of India in 1833 from the times of Lord William Bentinck and in 1858, when India was taken over by England; it remained Viceroy and Governor-General of India till 1947]

**Council of Four:** The Act named four additional men to serve with the Governor-General on the Supreme Council of Bengal: Lt-Gen John Clavering, George Monson, Richard Barwell, and Philip Francis. Barwell was the only one with previous experience in India. These councillors were commonly known as the "Council of Four".



The governor general in council was given all the power to govern the company's territorial acquisition in India, to administer the revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and to supervise and control the general civil and military government of the Presidency. The presidencies of Bombay and Madras were placed under the control and superintendence of the Governor General in Council while exercising their power to make war and peace.

The Governor General and the Council were to keep the court of directors fully informed of all their activities affecting the interests of the company and they were also to work in entire obedience to the orders and instructions of the court of directors.

**India's First Supreme Court:** A supreme court was established at Fort William at Calcutta. British judges were to be sent to India to administer the British legal system that was used there. This Supreme Court consisted a Chief Justice and three other regular judges or Puisne Judges, being barristers of not less than five years standing and to be appointed by His Majesty. **Sir Elijah Impey was the first Chief Justice.** The Supreme Court was the supreme judiciary over all British subjects including the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

**Position of the Supreme Court Calcutta:** There was nothing comprehensible in the act with regard to the relation of the Supreme Court with the Government of Bengal. The Supreme Court subjected the company to the control of British Government.

**Jurisdiction:** Supreme Court was given very wide jurisdiction. Cases against company and corporation of Calcutta also placed under the court

**Civil jurisdiction:** His Majesty's subjects or persons employed directly or indirectly by the company or persons who have voluntarily agreed in writing to refer their disputes to the supreme court were under the jurisdiction. (Various terms like the "British subjects", "subjects of His majesty", "persons employed directly or indirectly in the service of the company" were used to define the personal jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. The significance of these terms by no means clearly defined). Supreme Court was also given permission to accept cases against the Governor General and any of his Council members.

**Criminal Jurisdiction:** The court was not given jurisdiction over all the native Indian residing in Calcutta and with in the territory Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It was only vested with the jurisdiction over all British subjects (though it was not clear who were British subject? If Calcutta was under British, all residents could be British Subjects?), their servants and the persons employed by the company. Supreme Court was given permission to accept the cases against Governor General and his council members, but court had no power to arrest or imprison any of them in any action. The Supreme Court was also made to consider and respect the religious and social customs of the Indians. Appeals could be taken from the provincial courts to the Governor-General-in-Council and that was the final court of appeal. The rules and regulations made by the Governor General-in-Council were not to be registered with the Supreme Court. Later an amendment in this act was made (The amending act of 1881), in which the actions of the public servants in the company in their official capacity were exempted from the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.

### **Assessment of the Act**

There was nothing in the act which could address the people of India, who were paying revenue to the company but now were dying in starvation in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Regulating Act of 1773 is called the First step of Government Control in India. From 1773 onwards, the executive and judicial administration of the country was placed on a regular, though imperfect, footing by parliamentary act. Provisions of the Act were also towards stopping corruption but it failed to do so. The major charges were brought against the first Governor General, Warren Hastings and he was impeached in the trial for corruption. In fact the whole council was divided into two factions based on the corruptions- the Hastings Group and the Francis Group. They fought against each other on the issues of corruption charges alleged on them. Consequently, Pitt's India act, 1784 was passed to prevent corruption and an uncorrupted per-



son, Lord Cornwallis, was appointed in order to bring a corruption free environment in the company. Due to decision of council was to be by majority, many times decisions could not be taken as per Hasting as Governor General in Council was first among equal with no veto. This problem was resolved in Pitt's India Act 1784 by reducing the number of Council members apart from Governor General in Council to three and giving The Governor General the right of casting vote, in case the members present in a meeting of the council shall any time be equally divided in opinion. Also he was given veto power in major decision in Act of 1784. Another problem was regarding jurisdiction of Supreme Court. There were many confusions regarding its jurisdictions and also on whom its jurisdiction was applicable. Many defects of the Act were removed by the Declaratory Act 1781, The Pitt's India Act 1784 and the Amendment Act of 1786.

## THE PITT'S INDIA ACT OF 1784

Pitt the Younger became the youngest Prime Minister of England in 1783 at the age of 24. Pitt was an outstanding administrator who worked for efficiency and reform, bringing in a new generation of outstanding administrators. The East India Company Act 1784, also known as Pitt's India Act, was an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain intended to address the shortcomings of the Regulating Act of 1773 by bringing the East India Company's rule in India under the control of the British Government. British Government enacted the Regulating Act in 1773 to control the activities of the Company. The Act set up a system whereby it supervised (regulated) the work of the Company but did not take power for itself. The Act had proven to be a failure within a few years and the British government decided to take a more active role in the affairs of the Company. Pitt's India Act established the system of dual control of India by the government of Great Britain and the British East India Company. These changes continued till 1858.

### Provisions of the 1784 Act

- With the Pitts India Act of 1784, East India Company's political functions were differentiated from its commercial activities.
- In political matters, the company which was till now working as somewhat sovereign was made directly subordinate to the British government. To enable this, a Board of Commissioners was created, which was called Board of Control.
- 6 people viz. the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State, and four Privy Councilors, nominated by the King were the members of this Board of Control.
- The Secretary of the State was entitled as the President of the Board of Control. This Board of control was empowered to control all matters of civil or military government or revenues.
- The board was given full access to the company's records. It had the powers to send Governors to India and full authority to alter them.

### Result of Creation of Board of Control:

- 1) The Pitts India Act 1734 actually provided for a joint government of the company and British crown in India. So now, the fate of India People would decide the company and the British Government (indirectly).
- 2) The Company was to be represented by the Court of Directors and the Crown was represented by the Board of Control.
- 3) There was a secret committee of the 3 directors, which had to transmit the orders of the Board to India. This Secret Committee was to work as a link between the Board of control and the Court of Directors.
- 4) The Board of control had no independent executive power. It had no patronage. Its power was veiled. It had access to all the Company's papers and its approval was necessary for all dispatches that were not purely commercial, and in case of emergency the Board could send its own draft to the Secret Committee of the Directors to be signed and sent out in its name.

### Impact on Governor General-in Council:

- 1) The Governor General's council was now reduced to 3 members, one of whom was to be the commander-in-chief of the King's army in India. The governor general, a crown appointee, was authorised to veto the majority decisions.
- 2) The Governor General was given the right of casting vote, in case the members present in a meeting of the council shall any time be equally divided in opinion.
- 3) The Governors of Presidencies of Bombay and Madras were deprived of their independent powers and Calcutta was given greater powers in matters of war, revenue, and diplomacy, thus Calcutta becoming in effect, the capital of Company possessions in India.
- 4) The Governor General Council was now under indirect control of the British Government through the Board of Control.

By a supplementary act passed in 1786 Lord Cornwallis was appointed as the second governor-general of Bengal, and he then became the effective ruler of British India under the authority of the Board of Control and the Court of Directors. **Act of 1786:** Governor General given the power to over-ride the council and was made Commander-in-Chief also.

**Disclosing of Property:** All civil and military officers of the East India Company were ordered to provide the Court of Directors a full inventory of their property in India and in Britain within two months of their joining their posts. Severe punishment was provisioned for corrupt officials. The constitution set up by Pitt's India Act did not undergo any major changes until the end of the company's rule in India in 1858.

### Assessment of Pitts India Act 1784

This Act removed many faults of Regulating Act 1773. It ended an inappropriate division of authority in India by making the Governor-General supreme over the subordinate governments of Bombay and Madras. By reducing Governor General Council's members to three, it removed one of the shortcomings of Regulating Act 1773, as now Governor General found easier to get majority in any decision and in case of tie, he had final say. The act was deemed a failure. This was because; very soon it became apparent that the boundaries between government control and the company's powers were nebulous and highly subjective. The act was a naive one, it divided the responsibility between the Board of Control, Court of Directors and the Governor General in Council but again, no boundaries could be fixed as they matter was subjective and not objective. The British Government felt obliged to respond to humanitarian calls for better treatment of local peoples in British-occupied territories. The Board of control was alleged for nepotism.

## THE CHARTER ACT OF 1793 AND 1813

### (A) Charter Act of 1793

The East India Company Act 1793, or Charter Act of 1793, was an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain which renewed the charter issued to the British East India Company (EIC), and continued the Company's rule in India. In contrast with legislation concerning British India proposed in the preceding two decades, the 1793 Act "passed with minimal trouble". The Act made only fairly minimal changes to either the system of government in India or British oversight of the Company's activities. Company's trade monopoly was continued for a further 20 years. The Company's charter was next renewed by the Charter Act of 1813.

### Provisions of the Act

- The Act recognized the Company's political functions and clearly established that the "acquisition of sovereignty by the subjects of the Crown is on behalf of the Crown and not in its own right".
- The company was allowed to increase its dividend to 10%

- Salaries for the staff and paid members of the Board of Control were also now charged to the Company.
- A provision in the Charter act of 1793 was made that the company, after paying the necessary expenses, interest, dividend, salaries, etc from the Indian Revenues will pay 5 Lakh British pounds annually out of the surplus revenue to the British Government.
- The Governor-General was granted extensive powers over the subordinate presidencies.
- Governor General was empowered to disregard the majority in the Council in special circumstances. Thus more powers were entrusted in him. The Governor General and respective governors of the other presidencies could now override the respective councils, and the commander in chief was not now the member of Governor General's council, unless he was specially appointed to be a member by the Court of Directors.
- Royal approval was mandated for the appointment of the Governor-General, the governors, and the Commander-in-Chief.
- Senior officials were forbidden from leaving India without permission.
- If a high official departed from India without permission, it was to be treated as resignation.
- The EIC was empowered to grant licences to both individuals and Company employees to trade in India (known as the "privilege" or "country" trade), which paved the way for shipments of opium to China.
- This act reorganized the courts and redefined their jurisdictions. The revenue administration was divorced from the judiciary functions and this led to disappearing of the Maal Adalats.

### **(B) Charter Act of 1813**

Napoleon Bonaparte had put in place the Berlin decree of 1806 & Milan Decree of 1807 forbade the import of British goods into European countries allied with or dependent upon France, and installed the Continental System in Europe. These circumstances posed hardships to British traders, and they demanded entry to the ports of Asia and dissolve the monopoly of the East India Company. But the East India Company clamored that its political authority and commercial privileges cannot be separated. The controversy was later resolved by allowing all the British merchants to trade with India under a strict license system. The East India Company Act 1813', also known as the Charter Act of 1813, was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom which renewed the charter issued to the British East India Company, and continued the Company's rule in India. Company's trade monopoly was continued for a further 20 years. The Company's charter was next renewed by the Charter Act of 1833.

#### **Provisions of the Act**

- The Act expressly asserted the Crown's sovereignty over British India. The charter act of 1813, for the first time explicitly defined the constitutional position of the British territories in India.
- This act regulated the company's territorial revenues and commercial profits. The company debt was to be reduced and dividend was fixed @10.5% per annum.
- This act also empowered the local governments to impose taxes on the persons subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.
- The Company's commercial monopoly was ended, except for the tea trade and the trade with China. Reflecting the growth of British power in India,



- This act also made provisions to grant permission to the persons who wished to go to India for promoting moral and religious improvements. (Christian Missionaries)
- The power of the provincial governments and courts in India over European British subjects was also strengthened.
- Financial provision was made to encourage a revival in Indian literature and for the promotion of science.
- There was also a provision that Company should invest Rs. 1 Lakh every year on the education of Indians.

**Lord Minto retired in 1813. He was succeeded by Lord Hastings also known as Lord Moira**

## THE CHARTER ACT OF 1833

The Saint Helena Act 1833 or The Government of India Act 1833 or The Charter Act of 1833 is an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom and it gave another lease of life to the Company for next 20 years. The 20 years renewal of the charter in 1813 ran out in 1833. This was the time for the government to do a careful assessment of the functioning of the company in India. The charter was renewed for another 20 years, but the company was asked to close its commercial business. Thus, this time the charter was renewed on the condition that Company should abandon its trade entirely, alike with India and China, and permit Europeans to settle freely in India.

### Provisions of the Act

#### **(1) India as a British Colony:**

- The charter act of 1813 legalized the British colonization of India and the territorial possessions of the company were allowed to remain under its government, but were held “in trust for his majesty” for the service of Government of India.
- It ended the activities of the British East India Company as a commercial body and became a purely administrative body.
- In particular, the company lost its monopoly in China and also the trade of tea which it enjoyed with Charter act of 1813.
- It redesignated the Governor-General of Bengal as the Governor-General of India. Thus with Charter Act of 1833, Lord William Bentinck became the “First Governor General of British India”.
- The Governor-General in council was given the power to control, superintend and direct the civil and military affairs of the Company.
- Central government was to have complete control over raising of revenues and expenditure. i.e. All financial and administrative powers were centralized in the hands of Governor General-in-Council.
- The number of the members of the Governor General’s council was again fixed to 4, which had been reduced by the Pitt’s India act to 3.
- However, certain limits were imposed on the functioning of the 4th member. The 4th member was NOT entitled to act as a member of the council except for legislative purposes. **First fourth person to be appointed as the member of the Council was Lord Macaulay.**

**(2) Split in Bengal Presidency:**

The Charter Act of 1833 provided for splitting the Presidency of Bengal, into two presidencies which were to be known as, Presidency of Fort William and Presidency of Agra. But this provision never came into effect, and was suspended later.

**(3) Enhanced Power of Governor General of India:**

- It deprived the Governors of Bombay and Madras of their legislative powers. The Governor-General was given exclusive legislative powers for the whole of British India.
- Governor-General-in-Council could repeal, amend or alter any laws or regulations including all persons (whether British or native or foreigners), all places and things in every part of British territory in India, for all servants of the company, and articles of war.
- However, the Court of Directors acting under the Board of control could veto any laws made by the Governor-General-in-Council.

**(4) Codifying the Laws:**

- The charter act of 1833 is considered to be an attempt to codify all the Indian Laws. The British parliament as a supreme body retained the right to legislate for the British territories in India and repeal the acts.
- The act of 1833 provided that all laws made in India were to be laid before the parliament and were to be known as Acts
- In a step towards codifying the laws, the Governor-General-in-Council was directed under the Charter act of 1833, to set up an Indian law Commission.

**First Indian Law Commission:** The first law commission was set up by the Charter act of 1833 and Lord Macaulay was its most important member and Chairman. The objectives of the law commission was to inquire into the Jurisdiction, powers and rules of the courts of justice police establishments, existing forms of judicial procedure, nature and operation of all kinds of laws. It was directed that the law Commission shall submit its report to the Governor General-in-council and this report was to be placed in the British parliament.

**(5) Indians in the Government service:**

The section 87 of the Charter Act of 1833, declared that merit was to be the basis for employment in Government Services and the religion, birth place, and race of the candidates were not to be considered in employment. This policy was not seen in any other previous acts. So the Charter act of 1833 was the first act which provisioned to freely admit the natives of India to share an administration in the country. It attempted to introduce a system of open competitions for the selection of civil servants. However this provision was negated after opposition from the Court of Directors who continued to hold the privilege of appointing Company officials.

**(6) Mitigation of Slavery:** This act also directed the Governor General-in-Council to adopt measures to mitigate the state of slavery, persisting in India. The Governor General-in-Council was also directed to pay attention to laws of marriage, rights and authorities of the heads of the families, while drafting any laws.

**(7) More Bishops:** The number of British residents was increasing in India. The charter act of 1833 laid down regulation of establishment of Christian establishments in India and the number of Bishops was made 3.

**(8) Drain of Wealth:** The debts of the Company were taken over by the Indian government which agreed to pay its shareholders a 10.5% dividend on their capital out of the Indian revenues for the next 40 years. This added to the burden of India and proved to be an important component of drain of wealth.

## UTILITARIANISM AND INDIA

Utilitarianism is a theory in ethics holding that the moral action is the one that maximizes utility. Utility is defined in various ways, including as pleasure, economic well-being and the lack of suffering. Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism, which implies that the consequences of an action are of moral importance. Classical utilitarianism's two most influential contributors are 19th century English philosophers and economists Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Bentham, who takes happiness as the measure for utility, says, "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong". Utilitarianism is an effort to provide an answer to the practical question "What ought a man to do?" Its answer is that he ought to act so as to produce the best consequences possible.

### Growth of classical English Utilitarianism

English Utilitarianism was an offshoot of the western liberal ideas. In the history of English philosophy, Bishop Richard Cumberland, a 17th-century moral philosopher, was the first to have a Utilitarian philosophy. A generation later, however, Francis Hutcheson, a British theorist, more clearly held a Utilitarian view. He not only analyzed that action as best that "procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers" but proposed a form of "moral arithmetic" for calculating the best consequences. Bentham believed that an individual in governing his own actions would always seek to maximize his own pleasure and minimize his own pain. For Bentham, the greatest happiness of the greatest number would play a role primarily in the art of legislation, in which the legislator would seek to maximize the happiness of the entire community. By laying down penalties for mischievous acts, the legislator would make it unprofitable for a man to harm his neighbour. Bentham's major philosophical work, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), was designed as an introduction to a plan of a penal code. With Bentham, Utilitarianism became the ideological foundation of a reform movement, later known as "philosophical radicalism," that would test all institutions and policies by the principle of utility. Bentham attracted as his disciples a number of younger (earlier 19th-century) men. They included David Ricardo, who gave classical form to the science of economics; John Stuart Mill's father, James Mill; and John Austin, a legal theorist. James Mill argued for representative government and universal male suffrage on Utilitarian grounds; he and other followers of Bentham were advocates of parliamentary reform in England in the early 19th century. John Stuart Mill was a spokesman for women's suffrage, state-supported education for all, and other proposals that were considered radical in their day. He argued on Utilitarian grounds for freedom of speech and expression and for the noninterference of government or society in individual behaviour that did not harm anyone else. Mill's essay "Utilitarianism," published in *Fraser's Magazine* (1861), is an elegant defense of the general Utilitarian doctrine and perhaps remains the best introduction to the subject. In it Utilitarianism is viewed as an ethics for ordinary individual behaviour as well as for legislation.

### Effects of utilitarianism

The influence of Utilitarianism has been widespread, permeating the intellectual life of the last two centuries. Its significance in law, politics, and economics is especially notable. The Utilitarian theory of the justification of punishment stands in opposition to the "retributive theory" according to which punishment is intended to make the criminal pay for his crime. According to the Utilitarian, the rationale of punishment is entirely to prevent further crime by either reforming the criminal or protecting society from him and to deter others from crime through fear of punishment. In its political philosophy Utilitarianism bases the authority of government and the sanctity of individual rights upon their utility, thus providing an alternative to theories of natural law, natural rights, or social contract. What kind of government is best thus becomes a question of what kind of government has the best consequences. Generally, Utilitarians have supported democracy as a way of making the interest of government coincide with the general interest; they have argued for the greatest individual liberty compatible with an equal liberty for others on the ground that each individual is generally the best judge of his own welfare; and they have believed in the possibility and the desirability of progressive social change through peaceful political processes. With different factual assumptions, however, Utilitarian arguments can lead to different conclusions. If



the inquirer assumes that a strong government is required to check man's basically selfish interests and that any change may threaten the stability of the political order, he may be led by Utilitarian arguments to an authoritarian or conservative position. In economic policy, the early Utilitarians had tended to oppose governmental interference in trade and industry on the assumption that the economy would regulate itself for the greatest welfare if left alone; later Utilitarians, however, lost confidence in the social efficiency of private enterprise and were willing to see governmental power and administration used to correct its abuses. As a movement for the reform of social institutions, 19th-century Utilitarianism was remarkably successful in the long run. Most of their recommendations have since been implemented and Utilitarian arguments are now commonly employed to advocate institutional or policy changes.

### **James Mill's Utilitarianism and British Imperialism in India**

Throughout the years of his involvement in the colonial administration of India from 1819-1835 in the East India Company, James Mill persistently held a conviction that India needed enlightenment and progress. Mill applied his utilitarianism and theory of progress to justify the British rule in India. Before taking up the post in the East India Company in 1819, Mill wrote a history book named "History of British India". (He never visited India). James Mill condemned Indian culture as irrational and inimical to human progress. Mill first formulated a periodization of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods. He wrote: "India would progress and the Indians would be able to have more happiness under British rule than when they were governed by their native kings. Thus, if only the benefits which the Indians would gain from British rule were taken into account, it was desirable for the British to rule the Indians. However, whether the British should take a total control of India depended on whether there would be an overall utility or disutility." Mill believed that from the utilitarian perspective, there would be an overall utility if the British kept British India, which included the provinces of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras, and if the British extended their rule to the remaining parts of India. The English Utilitarianism in India took roots under such paternalistic attitudinal context. They saw Indian people held in bondage by despotic rulers, archaic economic relations, and by religion steeped in superstition. So, they set about to reform the Indians and the colonial system. Freethinking utilitarians—followers of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill—who were influential in the company's service, who wished to use India as a laboratory for their theories, and who thought Indian society could be transformed by legislation. Bentinck's administrative reforms were in line with utilitarian theory but with deference to local conditions and in harmony with his own military sense of command. In Bengal the collector was made the real head of his district by the addition of civil judgeship to his magistracy; he was also disciplined by the institution of commissioners to superintend him. The judiciary was overhauled with the same eye to a chain of authority.



# UNIT-IX

## THE FIRST MAJOR CHALLENGE: REVOLT OF 1857

### THE BEGINNING

It was the morning of 11 May 1857. The city of Delhi had not yet woken up when a band of Sepoys from Meerut, who had defied and killed the European officers the previous day, crossed the Jamuna, set the toll house on fire and marched to the Red Fort. They entered the Red Fort through the Raj Ghat gate, followed by an excited crowd, to appeal to Bahadur Shah II, the Moghul Emperor— a pensioner of the British East India Company, who possessed nothing but the name of the mighty Mughals — to become their leader, thus, give legitimacy to their cause. Bahadur Shah vacillated as he was neither sure of the intentions of the sepoys nor of his own ability to play an effective role. He was however persuaded, if not coerced, to give in and was proclaimed the Shahenshah-e-Hindustan. The sepoys, then, set out to capture and control the imperial city of Delhi. Simon Fraser, the Political Agent and several other Englishmen were killed; the public offices were either occupied or destroyed. The Revolt of an unsuccessful but heroic effort to eliminate foreign rule, had begun. The capture of Delhi and the proclamation of Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of Hindustan gave a positive political meaning to the revolt and provided a rallying point for the rebels by recalling the past glory of the imperial city.

### THE PRECURSORS

The Revolt at Meerut and the capture of Delhi was the precursor to a widespread mutiny by the sepoys and rebellion almost all over North India, as well as Central and Western India. South India remained quiet and Punjab and Bengal were only marginally affected. Almost half the Company's sepoy strength of 2,32,224 opted out of their loyalty to their regimental colors and overcame the ideology of the army, meticulously constructed over a period of time through training and discipline.

Even before the Meerut incident, there were rumblings of resentment in various cantonments. The 19th Native Infantry at Berhampur which refused to use the newly introduced Enfield Rifle, was disbanded in March 1857. A young sepoy of the 34th Native Infantry, Mangal Pande, went a step further and fired at the Sergeant Major of his regiment. He was overpowered and executed and his regiment too, was disbanded. The 7th Oudh regiment which defied its officers met with a similar fate.

### THE ACTUAL SPREAD AND LOCAL LEADERS

Within a month of capture of Delhi, the Revolt spread to different parts of the country: Kanpur, Lucknow, Benares, Allahabad, Bareilly, Jagdishpur and Jhansi. The rebel activity was marked by intense anti-British feelings and the administration was invariably toppled. In the absence of any leaders from their own ranks, the insurgents turned to the traditional leaders of Indian society — the territorial aristocrats and feudal chiefs who had suffered at the hands of the British.

At Kanpur, the natural choice was Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the last Peshwa, Baji Rao II. He had refused the family title and, banished from Poona, was living near Kanpur. Begum Hazrat Mahal took over the reigns where popular sympathy was overwhelmingly in favour of the deposed Nawab. Her son, Birjis Qadir, was proclaimed the Nawab and a regular administration was organized with important offices shared equally by Muslims and Hindus.

At Barielly, Khan Bahadur, a descendant of the former ruler of Rohilkhand was placed in command. Living on a pension granted by the British, he was not too enthusiastic about this and had in fact, warned the Commissioner of the impending mutiny. Yet, once the Revolt broke out, he assumed the administration, organized an army of 40,000 soldiers and offered stiff resistance to the British.

In Bihar the Revolt was led by Kunwar Singh, the zamindar of Jagdishpur a 70 year-old man on the brink of bankruptcy. He nursed a grudge against the British. He had been deprived of his estates by them and his repeated appeals to be entrusted with their management again fell on deaf ears. Even though he had not planned an uprising, he unhesitatingly joined the sepoys when they reached Arrah from Dinapore.

The most outstanding leader of the Revolt was Rani Lakshmibai, who assumed the leadership of the sepoys at Jhansi. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, had refused to allow her adopted son to succeed to the throne after her husband died and had annexed the state by the application of the Doctrine of Lapse. The Rani had tried everything to reverse the decision. She even offered to keep Jhansi 'safe' for the British if they would grant her wishes. When it was clear nothing was working she joined the sepoys and, in time, became one of the most formidable enemies the British had to contend with. The Revolt was not confined to these major centres. It had embraced almost every cantonment in the Bengal and a few in Bombay. Only the Madras army remained totally loyal.

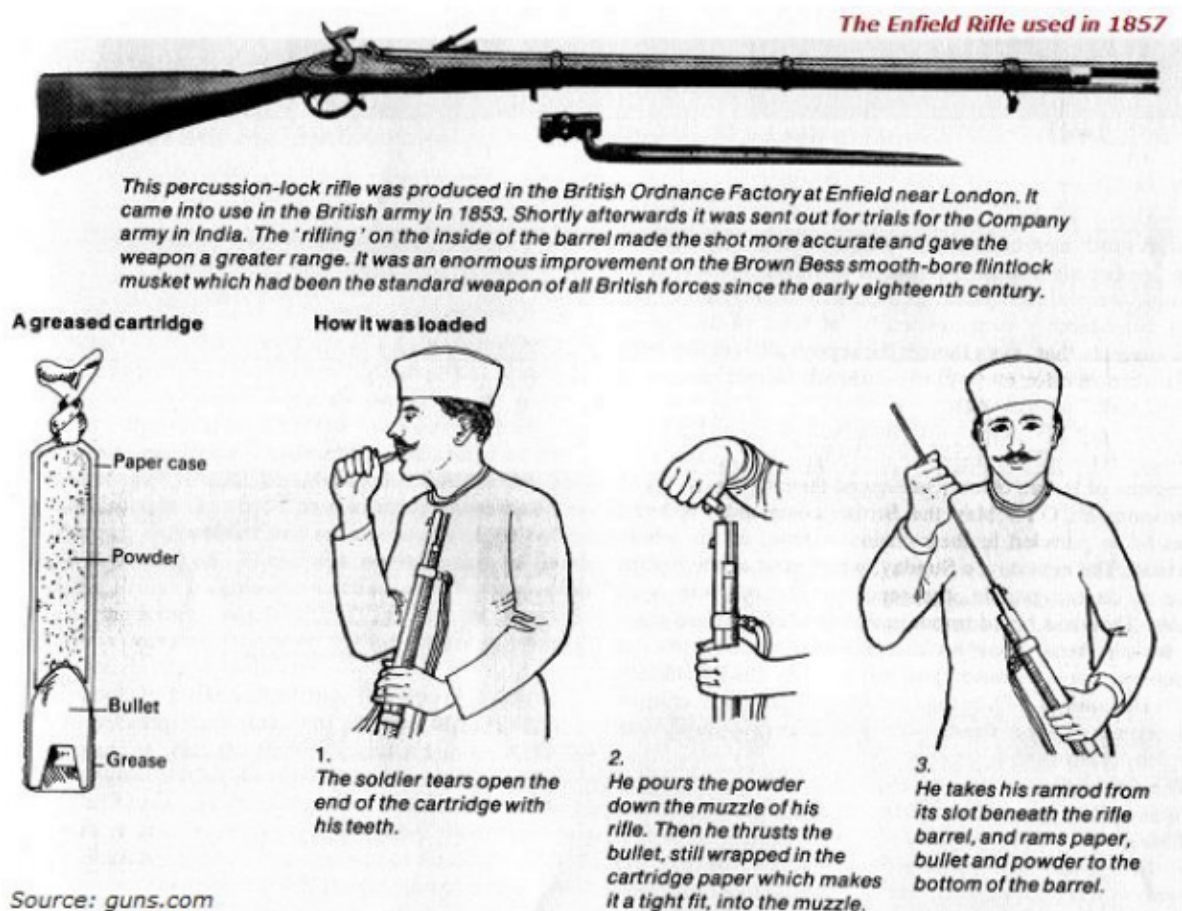
### FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE REVOLT OF 1857

Why did the sepoys revolt? It was considered prestigious to be in the service of the Company; it provided economic stability. Why, then, did the sepoys choose to forego these advantages for the sake of an uncertain future? A proclamation issued at Delhi indicates the immediate cause:

*'it is well known that in these days all the English have entertained these evil designs — first, to destroy the religion of the whole Hindustani Army, and then to make the people by compulsion Christians. Therefore, we, solely on account of our religion, have combined with the people, and have not spared alive one infidel, and have re-established the Delhi dynasty on these terms.'*

It is certainly true that the conditions of service in the Company's army and cantonments increasingly came into conflict with the religious beliefs and prejudices of the sepoys, who were predominantly drawn from the upper caste Hindus of the North Western Provinces and Oudh. Initially, the administration sought to accommodate the sepoys' demands: facilities were provided to them to live according to the dictates of their caste and religion. But, with the extension of the Army's operation not only to various parts of India, but also to countries outside, it was not possible to do so any more. Moreover, caste distinctions and segregation within a regiment were not conducive to the cohesiveness of a fighting unit. To begin with, the administration thought of an easy way out: discourage the recruitment of Brahmins; this apparently did not succeed and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the upper castes predominated in the Bengal Army, for instance.





The unhappiness of the sepoys first surfaced in 1824 when the 47th Regiment at Barrackpur was ordered to go to Burma. To the religious Hindu, crossing the sea meant loss of caste. The sepoys, therefore, refused to comply. The regiment was disbanded and those who led the opposition were hanged. The religious sensibilities of the sepoys who participated in the Afghan War were more seriously affected. During the arduous and disastrous campaigns, the fleeing sepoys were forced to eat and drink whatever came their way. When they returned to India, those at home correctly sensed that they could not have observed caste stipulations and therefore, were hesitant to welcome them back into the biradiri (caste fraternity). Sitaram who had gone to Afghanistan found himself outcaste not only in his village, but even in his own barracks. The Prestige of being in the pay of the Company was not enough to hold his Position in society; religion and caste proved to be more powerful.

The rumours about the Government's secret designs to promote conversions to Christianity further exasperated the sepoys. The official-missionary nexus gave credence to the rumour. In some cantonments missionaries were permitted to preach openly and their diatribe against other religions angered the sepoys. The reports about the mixing of bone dust in atta and the introduction of the Enfield rifle enhanced the sepoys' growing disaffection with the Government. The cartridges of the new rifle had to be bitten off before loading and the grease was reportedly made of beef and pig fat. The army administration did nothing to allay these fears, and the sepoys felt their religion was in real danger.

The sepoys' discontent was not limited to religion alone. They were equally unhappy with their emoluments. A sepoy in the infantry got seven rupees a month. A sawar in the cavalry was paid Rs. 27, out of which he had to pay for his own uniform, food and the upkeep of his mount, and he was ultimately left with only a rupee or two. What was more galling was the sense of deprivation compared to his British counterparts. He was made to feel a subordinate at every step and was discriminated against racially and in matters of promotion and privileges.

*‘Though he might give the signs of a military genius of Hyder,’ wrote T.R. Holmes, ‘he knew that he could never attain the pay of an English subaltern and that the rank to which he might attain, after 30 years of faithful service, would not protect him from the insolent dictation of an ensign fresh from England.’*

The discontent of the sepoy was not limited to matters military; they felt the general disenchantment with and opposition to British rule. The sepoy, in fact, was a peasant in uniform, whose consciousness was not divorced from that of the rural population. A military officer had warned Dalhousie about the possible consequences of his policies:

*‘Your army is derived from the peasantry of the country who have rights and if those rights are infringed upon, you will no longer have to depend on the fidelity of the army . . . If you infringe the institutions of the people of India, that army will sympathize with them; for they are part of the population, and in every infringement you may make upon the rights of the individuals, you infringe upon the rights of men who are either themselves in the army or upon their sons, their fathers or their relations.’*

Almost every agricultural family in Oudh had a representative in the army; there were 75,000 men from Oudh. Whatever happened there was of immediate concern to the sepoy. The new land revenue system introduced after the annexation and the confiscation of lands attached to charitable institutions affected his well-being. That accounted for the 14,000 petitions received from the sepoys about the hardships of the revenue system. A proclamation issued by the Delhi rebels clearly reflected the sepoy’s awareness of the misery brought about by British rule. The mutiny in itself, therefore, was a revolt against the British and, thus, a political act. What imparted this character to the mutiny was the sepoy’s identity of interests with the general population.

The Revolt of the sepoys was accompanied by a rebellion of the civil population, particularly in the North Western Provinces and Oudh, the two areas from which the sepoys of the Bengal army were recruited. Except in Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur, civil rebellion followed the Revolt of the sepoys. The action of the sepoys released the rural population from fear of the state and the control exercised by the administration. Their accumulated grievances found immediate expression and they rose en masse to give vent to their opposition to British rule. Government buildings were destroyed, the **“treasury was plundered, the magazine was sacked, barracks and court houses were burnt and prison gates were flung open.”**

The civil rebellion had a broad social base, embracing all sections of society — the territorial magnates, peasants, artisans, religious mendicants and priests, civil servants, shopkeepers and boatmen. The Revolt of the sepoys, thus, resulted in a popular uprising. The reason for this mass upsurge has to be sought in the nature of British rule which adversely affected the interests of almost all sections of society. Under the burden of excessive taxes the peasantry became progressively indebted and impoverished. The only interest of the Company was the realization of maximum revenue with minimum effort. Consequently settlements were hurriedly undertaken, often without any regard for the resources of the land. For instance, in the district of Bareilly in 1812, the settlement was completed in the record time of ten months with a dramatic increase of Rs. 14,73,188 over the earlier settlement. Delighted by this increase, the Government congratulated the officers for their ‘zeal, ability and indefatigable labour.’ It did not occur to the authorities that such a sharp and sudden increase would have disastrous consequences on the cultivators. Naturally, the revenue could not be collected without coercion and torture: in Rohilkhand there were as many as 2,37,388 coercive collections during 1848-56. Whatever the conditions, the Government was keen on collecting revenue. Even in very adverse circumstances, remissions were rarely granted. A collector, who repeatedly reported his inability to realize revenue from an estate, as only grass was grown there, was told that **grass was a very good produce and it should be sold for collecting revenue!** The traditional landed aristocracy suffered no less. In Oudh, which was a storm centre of the Revolt, the taluqdars lost all their power and privileges. About 21,000 taluqdars whose estates were confiscated suddenly found themselves without a source of income, ‘unable to work, ashamed to beg, condemned to penury.’



These dispossessed taluqdars smarting under the humiliation heaped on them, seized the opportunity presented by the Sepoy Revolt to oppose the British and regain what they had lost. British rule also meant misery to the artisans and handicraftsmen. The annexation of Indian states by the Company cut off their major source of patronage. Added to this, British policy discouraged Indian handicrafts and promoted British goods. The highly skilled Indian craftsmen were deprived of their source of income and were forced to look for alternate sources of employment that hardly existed, as the destruction of Indian handicrafts was not accompanied by the development of modern industries.

The reforming zeal of British officials under the influence of utilitarianism had aroused considerable suspicion, resentment, and opposition. The orthodox Hindus and Muslims feared that through social legislation the British were trying to destroy their religion and culture. Moreover, they believed that legislation was undertaken to aid the missionaries in their quest for evangelization. The orthodox and the religious, therefore, arrayed against the British. Several proclamations of the rebels expressed this cultural concern in no uncertain terms. The coalition of the Revolt of the sepoys and that of the civil population made the 1857 movement an unprecedented popular upsurge.

### A SPONTANEOUS UPRISING OR A PLANNED REBELLION

Was it an organized and methodically planned Revolt or a spontaneous insurrection? In the absence of any reliable account left behind by the rebels it is difficult to be certain. The attitude and activities of the leaders hardly suggest any planning or conspiracy on their part and if at all it existed it was at an embryonic stage.

When the sepoys arrived from Meerut, Bahadur Shah seems to have been taken by surprise and promptly conveyed the news to the Lt. Governor at Agra. So did Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi who took quite some time before openly joining the rebels. Whether Nana Saheb and Maulvi Ahmad Shah of Faizabad had established links with various cantonments and were instrumental in instigating Revolt is yet to be proved beyond doubt. Similarly, the message conveyed by the circulation of chappatis and lotus flowers is also uncertain. The only positive factor is that within a month of the Meerut incident the Revolt became quite widespread.

Even if there was no planning and organization before the revolt, it was important that it was done, once it started. Immediately after the capture of Delhi a letter was addressed to the rulers of all the neighboring states and of Rajasthan soliciting their support and inviting them to participate. In Delhi, a court of administrators was established which was responsible for all matters of state. The court consisted of ten members, six from the army and four from the civilian departments. All decisions were taken by a majority vote. The court conducted the affairs of the state in the name of the Emperor.

***'The Government at Delhi,' wrote a British official, 'seems to have been a sort of constitutional Milocracy. The king was king and honoured as such, like a constitutional monarch; but instead of a Parliament, he had a council of soldiers, in whom power rested, and of whom he was no degree a military commander.'***

In other centres, also attempts were made to bring about an organization. Bahadur Shah was recognized as the Emperor by all rebel leaders. Coins were struck and orders were issued in his name. At Bareilly, Khan Bahadur Khan conducted the administration in the name of the Mughal Emperor. It is also significant that the first impulse of the rebels was always to proceed to Delhi whether they were at Meerut, Kanpur or Jhansi. The need to create an organization and a political institution to preserve the gains was certainly felt. But in the face of the British counter-offensive, there was no chance to build on these early nebulous ideas.

For more than a year, the rebels carried on their struggle against heavy odds. They had no source of arms and ammunition; what they had captured from the British arsenals could not carry them far. They were often forced to fight with swords and pikes against an enemy supplied with the most modern weapons.



They had no quick system of communication at their command and, hence, no coordination was possible. Consequently, they were unaware of the strength and weaknesses of their compatriots and as a result could not come to each other's rescue in times of distress. Everyone was left to play a lonely hand.

Although the rebels received the sympathy of the people, the country as a whole was not behind them. The merchants, intelligentsia and Indian rulers not only kept aloof, but actively supported the British. Meetings were organized in Calcutta and Bombay by them to pray for the success of the British. Despite the Doctrine of Lapse, the Indian rulers who expected their future to be safer with the British liberally provided them with men and materials. Indeed, the sepoys might have made a better fight of it if they had received their support.

Almost half the Indian soldiers not only did not Revolt but fought against their own countrymen. The recapture of Delhi was effected by five columns consisting of 1700 British troops and 3200 Indians. The blowing up of Kashmere Gate was conducted by six British officers and NCOs and twenty-four Indians, of whom ten were Punjabis and fourteen, were from Agra and Oudh. Apart from some honourable exceptions like the Rani of Jhansi, Kunwar Singh and Maulvi Ahmadullah, the rebels were poorly served by their leaders. Most of them failed to realize the significance of the Revolt and simply did not do enough. Bahadur Shah and Zeenat Mahal had no faith in the sepoys and negotiated with the British to secure their safety. Most of the taluqdars tried only to protect their own interests. Some of them, like Man Singh, changed sides several times depending on which side had the upper hand.

Apart from a commonly shared hatred for alien rule, the rebels had no political perspective or a definite vision of the future. They were all prisoners of their own past, fighting primarily to regain their lost privileges. Unsurprisingly, they proved incapable of ushering in a new political order. **John Lawrence rightly remarked that had a single leader of ability arisen among them (the rebels) we must have been lost beyond redemption.**

That was not to be, yet the rebels showed exemplary courage, dedication and commitment. Thousands of men courted death, fighting for a cause they held dear. Their heroism alone, however, could not stem the onslaught of a much superior British army. The first to fall was Delhi on 20 September 1857 after a prolonged battle. Bahadur Shah, who took refuge in Humayun's tomb, was captured, tried and deported to Burma.

With that the back of the Revolt was broken, since Delhi was the only possible rallying point. The British military then dealt with the rebels in one centre after another. The Rani of Jhansi died fighting on 17 June 1858. **General Hugh Rose**, who defeated her, paid high tribute to his enemy when he said that **'here lay the woman who was the only man among the rebels.'** Nana Saheb refused to give in and finally escaped to Nepal in the beginning of 1859, hoping to renew the struggle. Kunwar Singh, despite his old age, was too quick for the British troops and constantly kept them guessing till his death on 9 May 1858. Tantia Tope, who successfully carried on guerrilla warfare against the British until April 1859, was betrayed by a zamindar, captured and put to death by the British.

## 1857: A SOURCE OF ETERNAL INSPIRATION

Thus, came to an end the most formidable challenge the British Empire had to face in India. It is a matter of speculation as to what the course of history would have been had the rebels succeeded. Whether they would have put the clock back' and resurrected and reinforced a feudal order need not detain us here; although that was not necessarily the only option. Despite the sepoys' limitations and weaknesses, their effort to emancipate the country from foreign rule was a patriotic act and a Progressive step. If the importance of a historical event is not limited to its immediate achievements the Revolt of 1857 was not a pure historical tragedy. Even in failure it served a grand purpose: a source of inspiration for the national liberation movement which later achieved what the Revolt could not.

# UNIT-X

## ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES AFTER 1858

### ADMINISTRATION

- An Act of Parliament in 1858 transferred the power to govern from the East India Company to the British Crown.
- While authority over India had previously been wielded by the Directors of the Company and the Board of Control, now this power was to be exercised by a Secretary of State for India aided by a Council.
- The Secretary of State was a member of the British Cabinet and as such was responsible to Parliament. Thus the ultimate power over India remained with British Parliament.
- By 1869, the Council was completely subordinated to the Secretary of State. Most of the members of the India Council were retired British-Indian officials.
- Under the Act, a government was to be carried on as before by the Governor-General who was also given the title of Viceroy or Crown's personal representative.
- Viceroy was paid two and a half lakhs of rupees a year in addition to his other allowances.
- With the passage of time, the Viceroy was increasingly reduced to a subordinate status in relation to the British Government in matters of policy as well as the execution of policy.
- As a result of the Regulating Act, Pitt's India Act, and the later Charter Acts the Government of India was being effectively controlled from London.
- Instructions from London took a few weeks to arrive and the Government of India had often to take important policy decisions in a hurry. Control by the authorities in London was therefore often more in the nature of *post facto* evaluation and criticism than of actual direction.
- By 1870, a submarine cable had been laid through the Red Sea between England and India. Orders from London could now reach India in a matter of hours.
- The Secretary of State could now control the minutest details of administration and do so constantly every hour of the day.
- No Indian had a voice in the India Council or the British Cabinet or Parliament. Indians could hardly even approach such distant masters.
- In a given condition, Indian opinion had even less impact on government policy than before. On the other hand, British industrialists, merchants, and bankers increased their influence over the Government of India.
- In India, the Act of 1858 provided that the Governor-General would have an Executive Council whose members were to act as heads of different departments and as his official advisers.
- The position of the members of the Council was similar to that of Cabinet ministers. Originally there were five members of this Council but by 1918, there were six ordinary members, apart from the Commander-in-Chief who headed the Army Department.
- The Council discussed all important matters and decided them by a majority vote; but the Governor-General had the power to override any important decision of the Council. In fact, gradually all power was concentrated in the Governor-General's hands.

- The Indian Councils Act of 1861 enlarged the Governor-General's Council for the purpose of making laws in which capacity it was known as the Imperial Legislative Council.
- The Governor-General was authorized to add to his Executive Council between six and twelve members of whom at least half had to be non-officials who could be Indian or English.
- The Imperial Legislative Council possessed no real powers and should not be seen as a sort of elementary or weak parliament. It was merely an advisory body. It could not discuss any important measure, and no financial measures at all, without the previous approval of the Government
- The Imperial Legislative Council had no control over the budget. It could not discuss the notions of the administration; the members could not even ask questions about them. The Legislative Council had no control over the executive.
- No bill passed by Legislative Council could become an Act until it was approved by the Governor-General.
- The Secretary of State could disallow any of its Acts. Thus, the only important function of the Legislative Council was to ditto official measures and give them the appearance of having been passed by a legislative body.
- The Indian members of the Legislative Council were few in number and were not elected by the Indian people, but rather were nominated by the Governor-General whose choice invariably fell on princes and their ministers, big zamindars, big merchants, or retired senior government officials.

## PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

- For the administrative convenience, the British had divided India into provinces; three of which — **Bengal, Madras, and Bombay** were known as Presidencies.
- The Presidencies were administered by a Governor and his three Executive Councils, who were appointed by the Crown.
- The Presidency Governments possessed more rights and powers than other provinces. Other provinces were administered by Lieutenant Governors and Chief Commissioners appointed by the Governor-General.
- The Act of 1861 marked the turning of the tide of centralization. It laid down that legislative councils similar to that of the center should be established first in Bombay, Madras, and Bengal and then in other provinces.
- The provincial legislative councils also were mere advisory bodies consisting of officials and four to eight non-official Indians and Englishmen. They also lacked the powers of a democratic parliament.
- The evil of extreme centralization was most obvious in the field of finance. The revenues from all over the country and from different sources were gathered at the center and then distributed by it to the provincial governments.
- The Central Government exercised authoritarian control over the smallest details of provincial expenditure. But this system proved quite wasteful in practice. It was not possible for the Central Government to supervise the efficient collection of revenues by a provincial government or to keep adequate check over its expenditure.
- The two governments constantly quarreled over minute details of administration and expenditure, and, on the other, a provincial government had no motive to be economical. The authorities therefore decided to decentralize public finance.



- In 1870, Lord Mayo had taken the first step in the direction of separating central and provincial finances. The provincial governments were granted fixed sums out of central revenues for the administration of certain services like Police, Jails, Education, Medical Services, and Roads and were asked to administer them as they wished.
- Lord Mayo's scheme was enlarged in 1877 by Lord Lytton who transferred to the provinces certain other heads of expenditure such as Land Revenue, Excise, General Administration, and Law and Justice.
- To meet the additional expenditure, a provincial government was to get a fixed share of the income realized from that province from certain sources like Stamps, Excise Taxes, and Income Tax.
- In 1882, Lord Ripon had brought some changes. The system of giving fixed grants to the provinces was ended and, instead, a province was to get the entire income within it from certain sources of revenue and a fixed share of the income.
- Thus all sources of the revenue were now divided into three heads as –
  - General,
  - Provincial, and
  - Those to be divided between the center and the provinces.
- The financial arrangements between the center and the provinces were to be reviewed every five years.

## LOCAL BODIES

- Financial difficulties led the Government to further decentralize administration by promoting local government through municipalities and district boards.
- Local bodies were first formed between 1864 and 1868, but almost in every case, they consisted of nominated members and were presided over by the District Magistrates.
- The local bodies did not represent local self-government at all nor did the intelligent Indians accept them as such. The Indians looked upon them as instruments for the extraction of additional taxes from the people.
- In 1882, Lord Ripon Government laid down the policy of administering local affairs largely through rural and urban local bodies, a majority of whose members would be non-officials.
- The non-official members would be elected by the people wherever and whenever officials felt that it was possible to introduce elections.
- The resolution also permitted the election of a non-official as Chairman of a local body.
- The provincial acts were passed to implement this resolution. But the elected members were in a minority in all the district boards and in many of the municipalities.
- Elected members were, moreover, elected by a small number of voters since the right to vote was severely restricted.
- District officials continued to act as presidents of district boards though nonofficials gradually became chairmen of municipal committees.
- The Government also retained the right to exercise strict control over the activities of the local bodies and to suspend and supersede them at its own discretion.
- The local bodies functioned just like departments of the Government and were in no way good examples of local self-government.

## CHANGES IN THE ARMY

- The Indian army was carefully reorganized after 1858. Some changes were made necessary by the transfer of power to the Crown.
- The East India Company's European forces were merged with the Crown troops. But the army was re-organized most of all to prevent the recurrence of another revolt.
- The rulers had seen that their bayonets were the only secure foundation of their rule. Several following steps were taken to minimize, if not completely eliminate, the capacity of Indian soldiers to revolt –
  - 1) The domination of the army by its European branch was carefully guaranteed.
  - 2) The proportion of Europeans to Indians in the army was raised and fixed at one to two in the Bengal Army and two to five in the Madras and Bombay armies.
  - 3) The European troops were kept in key geographical and military positions. The crucial branches of the army like artillery and, later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tanks, and armored corps were put exclusively in European hands.
  - 4) The older policy of excluding Indians from the officer corps was strictly maintained. Till 1914, no Indian could rise higher than the rank of a *subedar*.
  - 5) The organization of the Indian section of the army was based on the policy of "balance and counterpoise" or "divide and rule" so as to prevent its chances of uniting again in an anti-British uprising.
  - 6) Discrimination on the basis of caste, region, and religion was practiced, in recruitment to the army.
  - 7) A fiction was created that Indians consisted of "martial" and "non-martial" classes.
  - 8) Soldiers from Avadh, Bihar, Central India, and South India who had first helped the British conquer India but had later taken part in the Revolt of 1857, were declared to be non-martial. They were no longer taken in the army on a large scale.
  - 9) The Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Pathans, who had assisted in the suppression of the Revolt, were declared to be martial and were recruited in large numbers.
  - 10) The Indian regiments were made a mixture of various castes' and groups' which were so placed as to balance each other.
  - 11) Communal, caste, tribal, and regional loyalties were encouraged among the soldiers, so that the sentiment of nationalism would not grow among them.
  - 12) It was isolated from nationalist ideas by every possible means. Newspapers, journals, and nationalist publications were prevented from reaching the soldiers.
- Later, all such efforts failed in the long run and sections of the Indian army played an important role in our struggle for freedom.

## PUBLIC SERVICES

- All positions of power and responsibility in the administration were occupied by the members of the Indian Civil Service who were recruited through an annual open competitive examination held in London.
- Indians also could sit in this examination. Satyendranath Tagore, brother of Rabindranath Tagore, was the first Indian civil servant.

- Almost every year, thereafter, one or two Indians joined the coveted ranks of the Civil Service, but their number was negligible compared to the English entrants.
- In practice, the doors of the Civil Service remained barred to Indians because –
  - 1) The competitive examination was held in faraway London;
  - 2) It was conducted through the medium of the alien English language;
  - 3) It was based on Classical Greek and Latin learning, which could be acquired only after a prolonged and costly course of studies in England; and
  - 4) The maximum age for entry into the Civil Service was gradually reduced from twenty-three in 1859 to nineteen in 1878.
- In other departments of administration such as: Police, Public Works Department, and Railways the superior and highly paid posts were reserved for British citizens.
- The rulers of India believed it to be an essential condition for the maintenance of British supremacy in India.
- The Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, stressed “the absolute necessity of keeping the government of this wide-spread Empire in European hands, if that Empire is to be maintained.”
- The Indians, in the civil services, functioned as agents of British rule and loyally served Britain’s imperial purposes.
- Under Indian pressure, the different administrative services were gradually Indianised after 1918, but the positions of control and authority were still kept in British hands. Moreover, the people soon discovered that Indianisation of these services had not put any part of political power in their hands.

## RELATIONS WITH THE PRINCELY STATES

- Before 1857, British had availed themselves of every opportunity to annex princely states. The Revolt of 1857 led the British to reverse their policy towards the Indian States.
- Most of the Indian princes had not only remained loyal to the British but had actively assisted in suppressing the Revolt.
- Canning declared in 1862 that “the Crown of England stood forward, the unquestioned Ruler and Paramount Power in all India.” Princes were made to acknowledge Britain as the paramount power.
- In 1876, Queen Victoria assumed the title of the ‘**Empress of India**’ to emphasize British sovereignty over the entire Indian subcontinent.
- Lord Curzon later made it clear that the princes ruled their states merely as agents of the British Crown. The princes accepted this subordinate position and willingly became junior partners in the Empire because they were assured of their continued existence as rulers of their states.
- As the paramount power, the British claimed the right to supervise the internal government of the princely states. They not only interfered in the day to day administration through the Residents but insisted on appointing and dismissing ministers and other high officials.
- After 1868, the Government recognized the adopted heir of the old ruler and in 1881, the state was fully restored to the young Maharajah.
- In 1874, the ruler of Baroda, Malhar Rao Gaekwad, was accused of misrule and of trying to poison the British Resident and was deposed after a brief trial.



## ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

The British attitude towards India and, consequently, their policies in India changed for the worse after the revolt of 1857; they now consciously began to follow reactionary policies. The view was now openly put forward that the Indians were unfit to rule themselves and that they must be ruled by Britain for an indefinite period. This reactionary policy was reflected in many fields.

## DIVIDE AND RULE

- The British had conquered India by taking advantage of the disunity among the Indian powers and by playing them against one another.
- After 1858, the British continued to follow the policy of divide and rule by turning the princes against the people, province against province, caste against caste, group against group, and, above all, Hindus against Muslims.
- The unity displayed by Hindus and Muslims during the Revolt of 1857 had disturbed the foreign rulers. They were determined to break this unity so as to weaken the rising nationalist movement.
- Immediately after the Revolt, the British repressed Muslims, confiscated their lands and property on a large scale, and declared Hindus to be their favorites. However, after 1870, this policy was reversed and an attempt was made to turn upper class and middle class Muslims against the nationalist movement.
- Because of industrial and commercial backwardness and the near absence of social services, the educated Indians depended almost entirely on government service. This led to keen competition among them for the available government posts.
- The Government utilized this competition to foment provincial and communal rivalry and hatred. It promised official favors on a communal basis in return for loyalty and so played the educated Muslims against the educated Hindus.

## HOSTILITY TOWARDS EDUCATED INDIANS

- The Government of India had actively encouraged modern education after 1833.
- The Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were started in 1857 and higher education spread rapidly thereafter.
- Many British officials commended the refusal by educated Indians to participate in the Revolt of 1857. But this favorable official attitude towards the educated Indians soon changed because some of them had begun to use their recently acquired modern knowledge to analyze the imperialistic character of British rule and to put forward demands for Indian participation in administration.
- The officials became actively hostile to higher education and to the educated Indians when the latter began to organize a nationalist movement among the people and founded the Indian National Congress in 1885.
- The officials took active steps to curtail higher education. They sneered at the educated Indians whom they commonly referred to as 'babus.'
- Thus the British turned against that group of Indians who had imbibed modern Western knowledge and who stood for progress along modern lines. Such progress was, however, opposed to the basic interests and policies of British imperialism in India.
- The official opposition to the educated Indians and higher education shows that British rule in India had already exhausted whatever potentialities for progress it originally possessed.

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ZAMINDARS

- The British now offered friendship to the most reactionary group of Indians, the princes, the zamindars, and the landlords.
- The zamindars and landlords too were placated in the same manner. For example, the lands of most of the taluqdars of Avadh were restored to them.
- The zamindars and landlords were now hailed as the traditional and 'natural' leaders of the Indian people. Their interests and privileges were protected. They were secured in the possession of their land at the cost of the peasants and were utilized as counter weights against the nationalist-minded intelligentsia.
- The zamindars and landlords in return recognized that their position was closely bound up with the maintenance of British rule and became its only firm supporters.

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIAL REFORMERS

- As a part of the policy of alliance with the conservative classes, the British abandoned their previous policy of helping the social reformers.
- The British believed that their measures of social reform, such as the abolition of the custom of Sati and permission to widows to remarry, had been a major cause of the Revolt of 1857.
- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has put it in his book "The Discovery of India," "Because of this natural alliance of the British power with the reactionaries in India, it became the guardian and upholder of many an evil custom and practice, which it otherwise condemned."
- It may, however, be noted that the British did not always remain neutral on social questions. By supporting the status quo they indirectly gave protection to existing social evils.
- By encouraging casteism and communalism for political purposes, British actively encouraged the social reaction.

## EXTREME BACKWARDNESS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

- The Government of India spent most of its income on the army and wars and the administrative services and starved the social services.
- In 1886, of its total net revenue of nearly Rs. 47 crores, the Governmental India spent nearly 19.41 crores on the army and 17 crores on civil administration but less than 2 crores on education, medicine, and public health and only 65 lakhs on irrigation.
- The few halting steps that were taken in the direction of providing services like sanitation, water supply, and public health were usually confined to urban areas, and that too to the so called civil lines of British or modern parts of the cities.

## LABOUR LEGISLATION

- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the condition of workers in modern factories and plantations was miserable. They had to work between 12 and 16 hours a day and there was no weekly day of rest.
- Women and children worked the same long hours as men. The wages were extremely low, ranging from Rs. 4 to 20 per month.
- The factories were over-crowded, badly lighted and aired, and completely unhygienic. Work on machines was hazardous, and accidents very common.

- The Government of India, which was generally pro-capitalist, took some half-hearted and 'totally inadequate steps to mitigate the sorry state of affairs in the modern factories; many of the factories were owned by the Indians.
- The manufacturers of Britain put constant pressure on it to pass factory laws. They were afraid that cheap labor would enable Indian manufacturers to outsell them in the Indian market.
- The first Indian Factory Act was passed in 1881. The Act dealt primarily with the problem of child labor.
- The Factory Act of 1881 laid down that the child below 7 could not work in factories, while the children between 7 and 12 would not work for more than 9 hours a day. Children would also get four holidays in a month.
- The Act also provided for the proper fencing around the dangerous machinery.
- The second Indian Factory Act was passed in 1891, it provided for a weekly holiday for all workers.
- Working hours for women were fixed at 11 per day while daily hours of work for children were reduced to 7. Hours of work for men were still left unregulated.
- Neither of the two Acts applied to British-owned tea and coffee plantations. On the contrary, the Government gave every help to the foreign planters to exploit their workers in a most ruthless manner.
- The Government of India gave planters full help and passed penal laws in 1863, 1865, 1870, 1873, and 1882 to enable them to do so.
- Once a laborer had signed a contract to go and work in a plantation, he could not refuse to do so. Any breach of contract by a laborer was a criminal offence, the planter also having the power to arrest him.
- Better labor laws were, however, passed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the pressure of the rising trade union movement. Still, the condition of the Indian working class remained extremely depressed and deplorable.

## RESTRICTIONS ON THE PRESS

- The British had introduced the printing press in India and thus initiated the development of the modern press.
- The educated Indians had immediately recognized that the press could play a great role in educating public opinion and in influencing the government policies through criticism and censure.
- Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade, Surendranath Banerjea, Lokmanya Tilak, G. Subramaniya Iyer, C. Karhnakara Menon, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, and other Indian leaders played an important part in starting newspapers and making them a powerful political force.
- The Indian press was freed of restrictions by Charles Metcalfe in 1835. This step had been welcomed enthusiastically by the educated Indians. It was one of the reasons why they had for some time supported British rule in India.
- The nationalists gradually began to use the press to arouse national consciousness among the people and to sharply criticize the reactionary policies of the Government. This turned the officials against the Indian press and they decided to curb its freedom. This was attempted by passing the Vernacular Press Act in 1878.



- The Press Act put serious restrictions on the freedom of the Indian language newspapers. Indian public opinion was now fully aroused and it protested loudly against the passage of this Act.
- The protest had immediate effect and the Act was repealed in 1882. For nearly 25 years thereafter, the Indian press enjoyed considerable freedom. But the rise of the militant Swadeshi and Boycott movement after 1905 once again led to the enactment of the repressive press laws in 1908 and 1910.

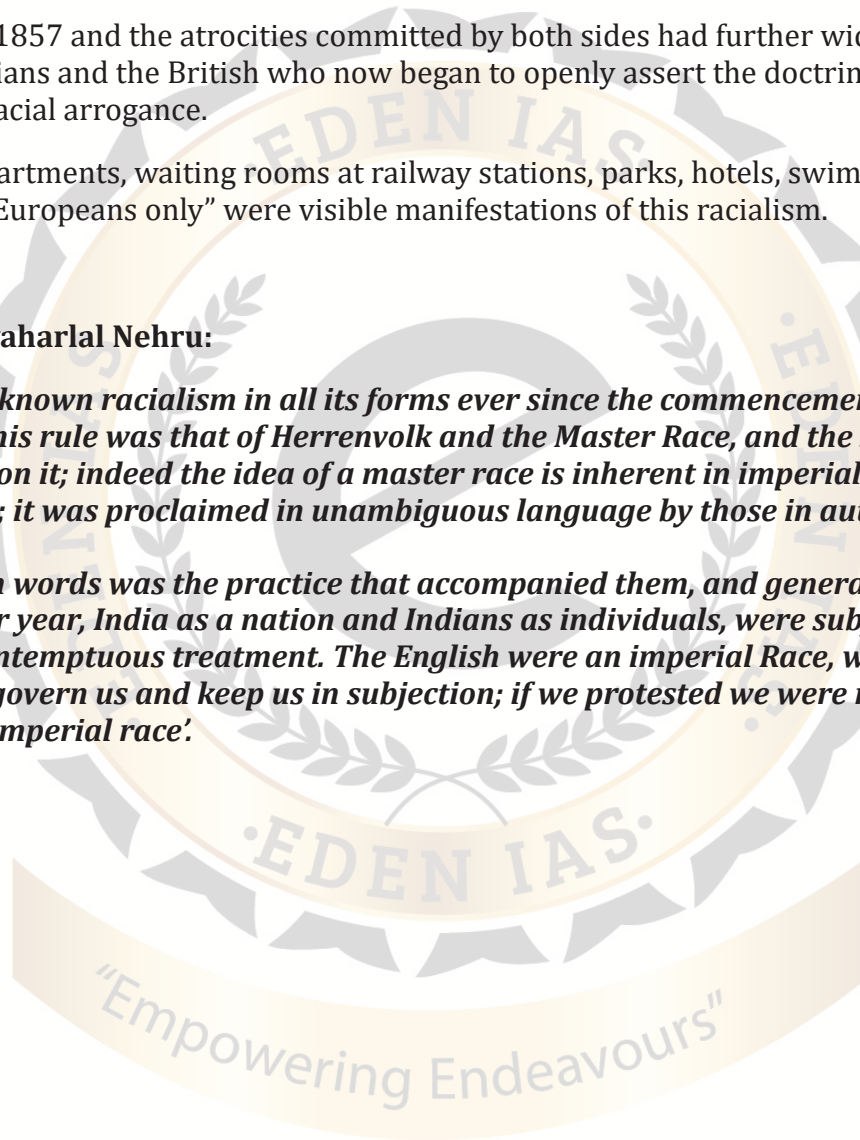
## RACIAL ANTAGONISM

- The British in India had always held aloof from the Indians and felt themselves be racially superior.
- The Revolt of 1857 and the atrocities committed by both sides had further widened the gulf between the Indians and the British who now began to openly assert the doctrine of racial supremacy and practice racial arrogance.
- Railway compartments, waiting rooms at railway stations, parks, hotels, swimming pools, clubs, etc. reserved for “Europeans only” were visible manifestations of this racialism.

### In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru:

*... We in India have known racialism in all its forms ever since the commencement of British rule. The whole ideology of this rule was that of Herrenvolk and the Master Race, and the structure of government was based upon it; indeed the idea of a master race is inherent in imperialism. There was no subterfuge about it; it was proclaimed in unambiguous language by those in authority.*

*More powerful than words was the practice that accompanied them, and generation after generation and year after year, India as a nation and Indians as individuals, were subjected to insult, humiliation and contemptuous treatment. The English were an imperial Race, we were told, with God-given right to govern us and keep us in subjection; if we protested we were reminded of the ‘tiger qualities of an imperial race’.*



# UNIT-XI

## TERRITORIAL GREED OF THE BRITISH

### THE BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

Under the British rule, India developed relations with its neighbours on a new basis. This was the result of two factors. The development of modern means of communication and the political and administrative consolidation of the country impelled the Government of India to reach out to the natural, geographical frontiers of India. This was essential both for defence and for internal cohesion. Inevitably this tended to lead to some border clashes. Unfortunately, sometimes the Government of India went beyond the natural and traditional frontiers. The other factor was the alien character of the Government of India. The foreign policy of a free country is basically different from the foreign policy of a country ruled by a foreign power. In the former case it is based on the needs and interests of the people of the country; in the latter, it serves primarily the interests of the ruling country. In India's case, the foreign policy that the Government of India followed was dictated by the British government.

#### **The British government had two major aims in Asia and Africa:**

The protection of its invaluable Indian empire and the expansion of British commerce and other economic interests in Africa and Asia. Both these aims led to British expansion and territorial conquests outside India's natural frontiers. Moreover, these aims brought the British government into conflict with other imperialist nations of Europe who also wanted extension of their territorial possessions and commerce in Afro-Asian lands.

The desire to defend their Indian empire, to promote British economic interests, and to keep the other European powers at arm's length from India often led the British Indian government to commit aggression on India's neighbours. In other words, during the period of British domination, India's relations with its neighbours were ultimately determined by the needs of British imperialism.

But, while Indian foreign policy served British imperialism, the cost of its implementation was borne by India. In pursuance of British interests, India had to wage many wars against its neighbours; Indian soldiers had to shed their blood and Indian taxpayers had to meet the heavy cost.





## THE WAR WITH NEPAL

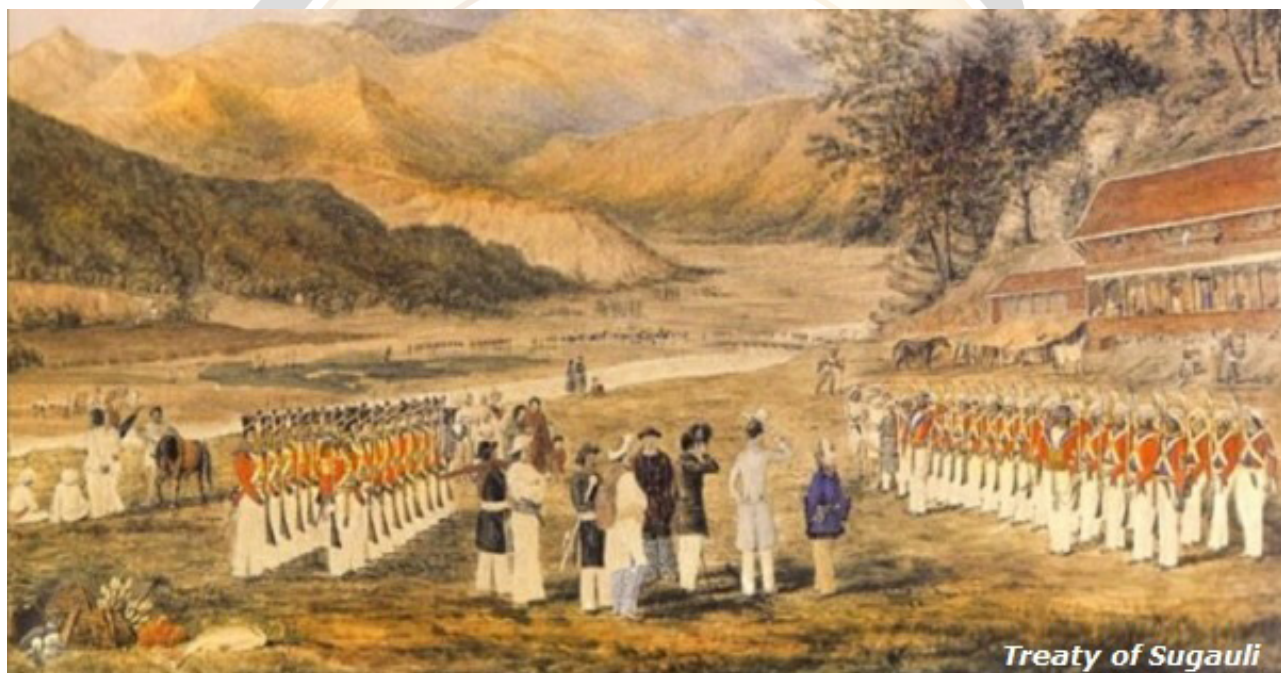
- The British desire to extend their Indian Empire to its natural geographical frontier brought them into conflict, first of all, with the northern Kingdom of Nepal.

### War with Nepal, 1814

- The Nepal valley had been conquered in 1768 by the Gurkhas, a Western Himalayan tribe.
- Gurkhas had gradually built up a powerful army and extended their sway from Bhutan in the East to the river Sutlej in the West.
- From the Nepal *Tarai*, the Gurkha now began to push southward. In the meanwhile, the British conquered Gorakhpur in 1801. This brought the two expanding powers face to face across an ill-defined border.
- In October 1814, a border clash between the border police of the two countries led to open war.
- The British officials had expected an easy walk-over especially as their army attacked all along the 600 mile frontier. But the Gurkhas defended themselves with vigor and bravery. The British armies were defeated again and again.



- In the long run, however, the Gurkhas could not survive. The British were far superior in men, money, and materials
- In April 1815, they occupied *Kumaon*, and on 15<sup>th</sup> May, they forced the brilliant Gurkha Commander Amar Singh Thapa to surrender.
- The Government of Nepal was now compelled for peace. But the negotiations for peace soon broke down. The Government of Nepal would not accept the British demand for the stationing of a Resident at Kathmandu, capital Nepal.
- It was realized that to accept a subsidiary alliance with the British amounted to signing away Nepal's independence. Fighting was resumed early in 1816.
- The British forces won important victories and reached within 50 miles of Kathmandu. In the end, the Nepal Government had to make a peace agreement (known as **Treaty of Sugauli**) on British terms.



- Nepal Government accepted a British Resident. It ceded the districts of Garhwal and Kumaon and abandoned claims to the Tarai areas. It also withdrew from Sikkim.
- The agreement held many advantages for the British such as –
  - Their Indian Empire now reached the Himalayas;
  - They gained greater facilities for trade with Central Asia;
  - They also obtained sites for important hill-stations such as Simla, Mussoorie, and Nainital; and
  - The Gurkhas gave added strength to the British-Indian army by joining it in large numbers.
- The relations of the British with Nepal were quite friendly thereafter. Both parties to the War of 1814 had learnt to respect each other's fighting capacity and preferred to live at peace with each other.

## CONQUEST OF BURMA

- The conflict between Burma and British India was initiated by border clashes. It was whiffed by the expansionist urges.
- The British merchants cast avaricious glances on the forest resources of Burma and were keen to promote export of their manufactures among its people.
- The British authorities also wanted to check the spread of French commercial and political influence in Burma and the rest of South-East Asia.
- Through three successive wars, the independent kingdom of Burma was conquered by the British during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### First Burmese War, 1824-26

- Burma and British India developed a common frontier at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when both were expanding powers.
- After centuries of internal strife, Burma was united by King Alaungpaya between 1752 and 1760.
- Bodawpaya, the successor of King Alaungpaya, was ruling from Ava on the river Irrawaddi repeatedly invaded Siam, repelled many Chinese invasions, and conquered the border states of Arakan (1785) and Manipur (1813) bringing Burma's border up to that of British India. Continuing his westward expansion, he threatened Assam and the Brahmaputra Valley.
- In 1822, the Burmese conquered Assam. The Burmese occupation of Arakan and Assam led to continuous friction along the ill-defined border between Bengal and Burma.
- The Burmese Government pressed the British authorities to take action against the insurgents (Arakanese fugitives) and to hand them over to the Burmese authorities.
- The Burmese forces, chasing the insurgents, would often cross into Indian Territory. In 1823, clashes on the Chittagong Arakan frontier came to a head over the possession of Shahpuri island, which was first occupied by the Burmese and then by the British.
- The Burmese proposal for neutralization of the island was rejected by the British and tension between the two began to mount.
- Burmese occupation of Manipur and Assam provided another source of conflict between the two. It was looked upon by the British authorities as a serious threat to their position in India. To counter this threat they established British influence over the strategic border states of Cachar and Jaintia.
- The Burmese were angered by the British action and marched their troops into Cachar. A clash between Burmese and British troops ensued, the Burmese being compelled to withdraw into Manipur.
- For several decades, British Indian authorities had been trying to persuade the Government of Burma to sign a commercial treaty with them and to exclude French traders from Burma.
- The British believed that the Burmese power should be broken as soon as possible, especially as they felt that British power was at the time far superior to that of the Burmese. The Burmese, on their part, did nothing to avoid war.



- The Burmese rulers had been long isolated from the world and did not correctly assess the strength of the enemy. They were also led to believe that an Anglo-Burmese war would lead many of the Indian powers to rebel.
- The war was officially declared on 24 February 1824. After an initial set-back, the British forces drove the Burmese out of Assam, Cachar, Manipur, and Arakan.
- The British expeditionary forces by sea occupied Rangoon in May 1824 and reached within 45 miles of the capital at Ava.



- The famous Burmese General Maha Bandula was killed in April 1825. But Burmese resistance was tough and determined. Especially effective was guerrilla warfare in the jungles.
- The rainy climate and virulent diseases added to the cruelty of the war. Fever and dysentery killed more people than the war.
- In Rangoon, 3,160 died in hospitals and 166 on the battlefield. In all, the British lost 15,000 soldiers out of the 40,000 they had landed in Burma.
- The war was proving extremely costly (financially as well as in terms human lives), thus the British, who were winning the war, as well as the Burmese, who were losing it, were glad to make peace which came in February 1826 with the **Treaty of Yandabo**.
- The Government of Burma agreed –
  - to pay one crore rupees as war compensation;
  - to cede its coastal provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim;
  - to abandon all claims to Assam, Cachar, and Jaintia;
  - to recognize Manipur as an independent state;



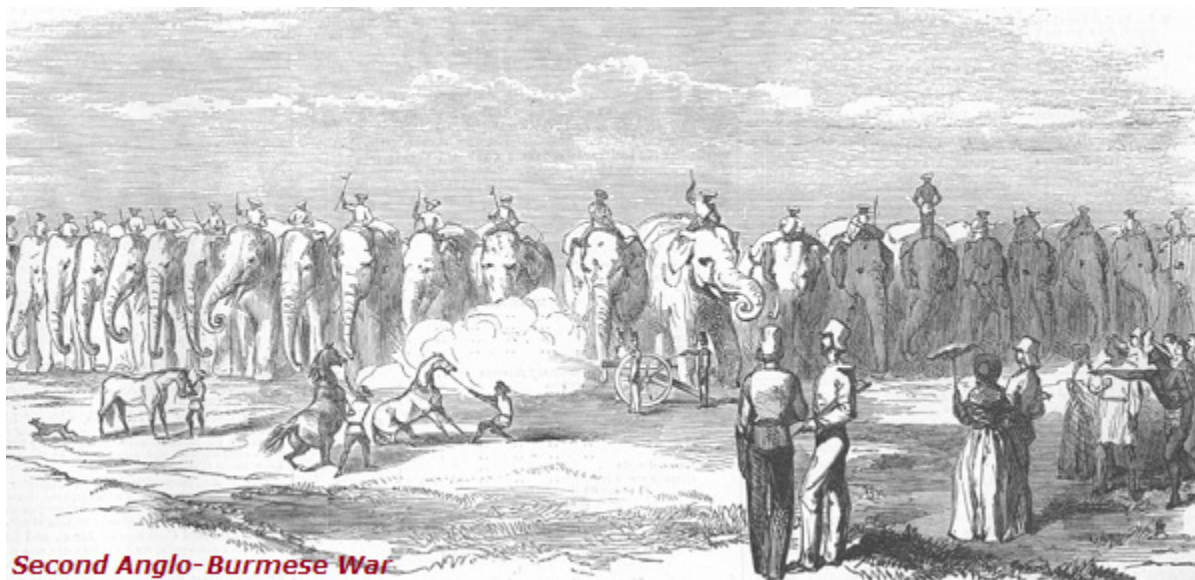
- to negotiate a commercial treaty with Britain; and
- to accept a British Resident at Ava while posting a Burmese envoy at Calcutta.
- By this treaty, the British deprived Burma of most of its coastline, and acquired a firm base in Burma for future expansion.

## Second Burmese War (1852)

- If the First Burmese War was in part the result of border clashes, the second Burmese War which broke out in 1852 was almost wholly the result of British commercial greed.
- British timber firms had begun to take interest in the timber resources of Upper Burma. Moreover, the large population of Burma appeared to the British to be a vast market for the sale of British cotton goods and other manufactures.
- The British, already in occupation of Burma's two coastal provinces, now wanted to establish commercial relations with the rest of the country, but the Burmese Government did not permit further foreign commercial penetration.
- The British merchants now began to complain of "lack of facilities for trade" and of "oppressive treatment" by the Burmese authorities at Rangoon.
- The fact of the matter was that British imperialism was at its zenith and the British believed themselves to be a superior people. British merchants had begun to believe that they had a divine right to force their trade upon others.
- By the time, the aggressive Lord Dalhousie became the Governor-General of India. He was determined to heighten British imperial prestige and to push British interests in Burma.
- As an excuse for armed intervention in Burma, Dalhousie took up the frivolous and petty complaint of two British sea-captains that the Governor of Rangoon had extorted neatly 1,000 rupees from them.
- In November 1851, Dalhousie sent an envoy, accompanied by several ships of war, to Rangoon to demand compensation for the two British merchants.
- The British envoy, Commodore Lambert, behaved in an aggressive and unwarranted manner. On reaching Rangoon, he demanded the removal of the Governor of Rangoon before he would agree to negotiate.
- The Court at Ava was frightened by the show of British strength and agreed to recall the Governor of Rangoon and to investigate British complaints. But the haughty British envoy was determined to provoke a conflict. He started a blockade of Rangoon and attacked and destroyed over 150 small ships in the port.
- The Burmese Government agreed to accept a British Resident at Rangoon and to pay the full compensation demanded by the British.
- The Government of India now turned on the screw and pushed up their demands to an exorbitant level. They demanded the recall of the new Governor of Rangoon and also an apology for alleged insults to their envoy.
- Such demands could hardly be accepted by an independent government. Obviously, the British

desired to strengthen their hold over Burma by peace or by war before their trade competitors, the French or the Americans, could establish themselves there.

- A full British expedition was dispatched to Burma in April 1852. This time, the war was much shorter than in 1825-26 and the British victory was more decisive.



**Second Anglo-Burmese War**

- Rangoon was immediately captured and then other important towns—Bassein, Pegu, Prome fell to the British.
- Burma was at this time undergoing a struggle for 'power. The Burmese King, Mindon, who had deposed his half-brother, King Pagan Min, in a struggle for power in February 1853, was hardly in a position to fight with the British; at the same time, he could not openly 'agree to surrender Burmese territory. Consequently, there were no official negotiations for peace and the war ended without a treaty.
- The British now controlled the whole of Burma's coastline and its entire seatriade.
- The brunt of fighting the war was borne by Indian soldiers and its expense was wholly met from Indian revenues.

### Third Burmese War (1885)

- Relations between Burma and Britain remained peaceful for several years after the annexation of Pegu.
- In particular, the British merchants and industrialists were attracted by the possibility of trade with China through Burma.
- There was vigorous agitation in Britain and Rangoon for opening the land route to Western China. Finally, Burma was persuaded in 1862 to sign a commercial treaty by which British merchants were permitted to settle in any part of Burma and to take their vessels up the Irrawaddy River to China.
- British merchants were impatient of restrictions on their trade and profits and began to press for stronger action against the Burmese Government. Many of them even demanded British conquest of Upper Burma. The king was finally persuaded to abolish all monopolies in February 1882.

## Causes of Third Anglo-Burmese War

- There are many other political and economic questions over which the Burmese king and the British Government clashed.
- The British Government humiliated the king in 1871 by armoring that relations with him would be conducted through the Viceroy of India as if he were merely a ruler of one of the Indian states. Another source of friction was the attempt by the king to develop friendly relations with other European powers.
- In 1873, a Burmese mission visited France and tried to negotiate a commercial treaty, which would also enable Burma to import modern arms, but later under British pressure, the French Government refused to ratify the treaty.
- King Mindon died in 1878 and was succeeded by King Thibaw.
- The British gave shelter to rival princes and openly interfered in Burma's internal affairs under the garb of preventing the alleged cruelties of King Thibaw.
- The British thus claimed that they had the right to protect the citizens of Upper Burma from their own king.
- Thibaw's desire to pursue his father's policy of developing commercial and political relations with France.
- In 1885, Thibaw signed a purely commercial treaty with France providing for trade. The British were intensely jealous of the growing French influence in Burma.
- The British merchants feared that the rich Burmese market would be captured by their French and American rivals.
- The British officials felt that an alliance with France might enable the king of Upper Burma to escape British tutelage or might even lead to the founding of a French dominion in Burma and so endanger the safety of their Indian Empire.
- The French had already emerged as a major rival of Britain in South-East Asia.
- In 1883, they had seized Annam (Central Vietnam), thus laying the foundation of their colony of Indo-China.
- They were pushing actively towards North Vietnam, which they conquered between 1885 and 1889, and in the west towards Thailand and Burma.
- The chambers of commerce in Britain and the British merchants in Rangoon now pressed the willing British Government for the immediate annexation of Upper Burma.

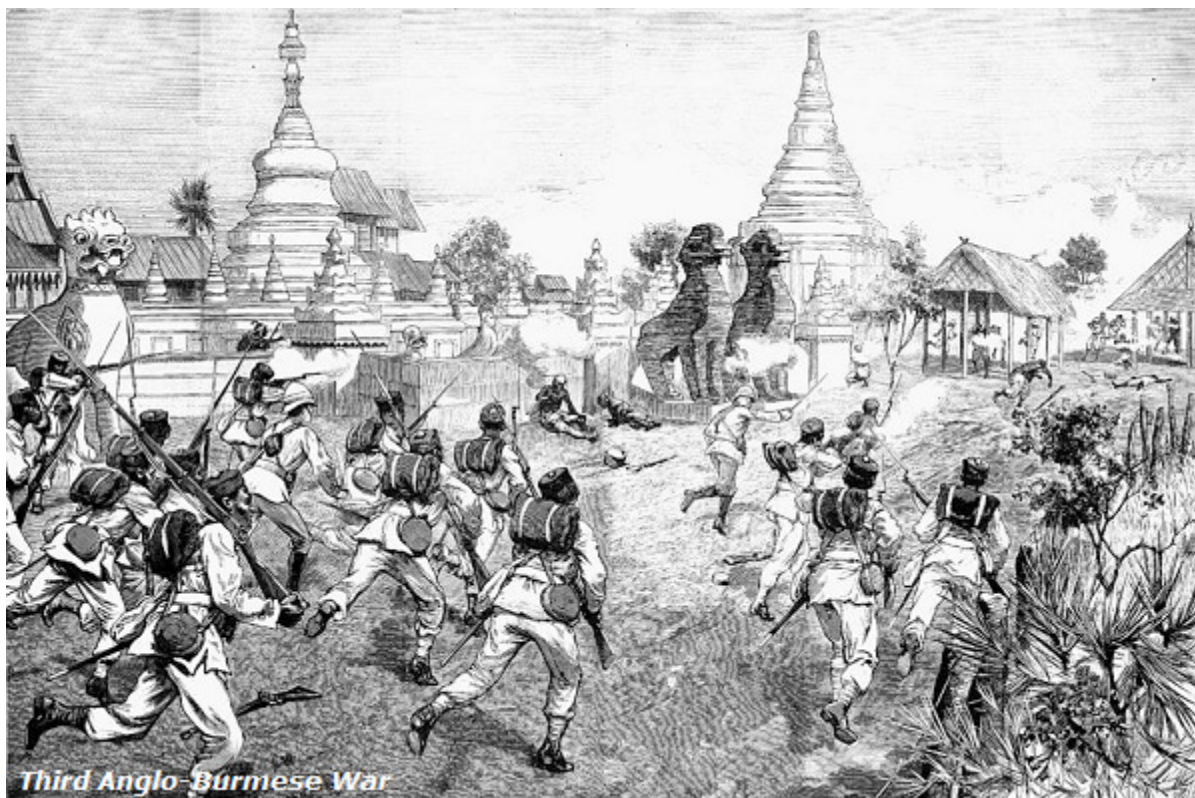
## Immediate Cause

- Only a pretext for war was needed. This was provided by the Bombay-Burma Trading Corporation, a British concern which held a lease of the teak forests in Burma.
- The Burmese Government accused the Company of extracting more than double the quantity of teak contracted for by bribing local officials, and demanded compensation.
- The British Government, which had already prepared a military plan for the attack on Upper Bur-



ma, decided to seize this opportunity and put forward many claims on the Burmese Government including the demand that the foreign relations of Burma must be placed under the control of the Viceroy of India.

- The Burmese Government could not have accepted such demands without losing its independence. Its rejection was followed by a British invasion on 13 November 1885.



Third Anglo-Burmese War

- Burma as an independent country had every right to put trade restrictions on foreigners. Similarly, it had every right to establish friendly relations with France and to import arms from anywhere.
- The Burmese Government was unable to put up effective resistance to the British forces. The King was incompetent, unpopular, and unprepared for war.
- The country was divided by court intrigues. A condition of near civil war prevailed. King Thibaw surrendered on 28 November 1885 and his dominions were annexed to the Indian Empire soon after.

### Freedom Struggle of Burma

- After the First World War, a vigorous modern nationalist movement arose in Burma. A wide campaign of boycotting British goods and administration was organized and the demand for Home Rule was put forward.
- The Burmese nationalists soon joined hands with the Indian National Congress.
- In 1935, the British separated Burma from India in the hope of weakening the Burmese struggle for freedom. The Burmese nationalists opposed this step.
- The Burmese nationalist movement reached new heights under the leadership of **U Aung San** during the Second World War. And, finally, Burma won its independence on 4 January 1948.

## EQUATION WITH AFGHANISTAN

- The British Indian Government fought two wars with Afghanistan before its relations with the Government of Afghanistan were stabilized.
- During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the problem of Indo-Afghan relations got inextricably mixed up with the Anglo-Russian rivalry. Britain was expanding colonial power in West, South, and East Asia, Russia was an expanding power in Central Asia and desired to extend its territorial control in West and East Asia.
- The two imperialisms openly clashed all over Asia. In fact, in 1855, Britain in alliance with France and Turkey fought a war with Russia, known as the **Crimean War**.



- Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British rulers of India feared that Russia would launch an attack on India through Afghanistan and the North Western frontier of India. They, therefore, wanted to keep Russia at a safe distance from the Indian frontier.
- Afghanistan was placed in a crucial position geographically from the British point of view. It could serve as an advanced post outside India's frontiers for checking Russia's potential military threat as well as for promoting British commercial interests in Central Asia.
- The British policy towards Afghanistan entered an active phase in 1835 when the Whigs came to power in Britain and Lord Palmerston became the Foreign Secretary.
- Afghan politics had been unstable since the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dost Muhammad Khan (the ruler of Afghanistan) had brought about partial stability, but was constantly threatened by internal and external enemies such as –
  - In the North, Dost Muhammad faced internal revolts and the potential Russian danger;
  - In the South, one of his brothers challenged his power at Kandahar;
  - In the East, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had occupied Peshawar and beyond him lay the English; and
  - In the West, enemies were at Herat and the Persian threat





- Dost Muhammad Khan was therefore in dire need of powerful friends. And, since he had a high regard for English strength, he desired some sort of an alliance with the Government of India.
- The Russians tried to convince Dost Mohammad Khan, but he refused to comply. While discouraging the Russian envoy, he adopted a friendly attitude towards the British envoy, Captain Burns. But he failed to get adequate terms from the British who would not offer anything more than a verbal sympathy.
- The British wanted to weaken and end Russian influence in Afghanistan, but they did not want a strong Afghanistan. They wanted to keep her a weak and divided country which they could easily control.
- Lord Auckland, the Indian Governor-General, offered Dost Muhammed an alliance based on the subsidiary system.
- Dost Muhammed wanted to be an ally of the British Indian Government on the basis of complete equality and not as one of its puppets or subsidiary allies.
- Having tried his best to acquire British friendship, but failed, Dost Muhammad reluctantly turned towards Russia.

### The First Afghan War

- Auckland now decided to replace Dost Mohammed with a friendly i.e. subordinate ruler. His gaze fell on Shah Shuja, who had been deposed from the Afghan throne in 1809 and since then living at Ludhiana as a British pensioner.
- On 26 June 1838, the Indian Government, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and Shah Shuja signed a treaty at Lahore (**three allies**) by which the first two promised to help Shah Shuja capture power in Afghanistan and, in return, Shah Shuja promised not to enter into negotiations with any foreign state without the consent of the British and the Punjab Governments.



- The three allies launched an attack on Afghanistan in February 1839. But Ranjit Singh cleverly hung back and never went beyond Peshawar. The British forces had not only to take the lead but to do all weary fighting.
- Most of the Afghan tribes had already been won over with bribes. Kabul fell to the English on 7 August 1839, and Shah Shuja was immediately placed on the throne.
- Shah Shuja was detested and despised by the people of Afghanistan, especially as he had come back with the help of foreign bayonets.
- The Afghani people resented British interference in their administration. Gradually, the patriotic, freedom-loving Afghans began to rise up in anger and Dost Muhammed and his supporters began to harass the British army.
- Dost Muhammed was captured in November 1840 and sent to India as a prisoner. But popular anger went on increasing and more and more Afghan tribes rose in revolt.



- Then suddenly, on 2 November 1841, an uprising broke out at Kabul and the sturdy Afghans fell upon the British forces.
- On 11 December 1841, the British were compelled to sign a treaty with the Afghan chiefs by which they agreed to evacuate Afghanistan and to restore Dost Mohammed.
- As the British forces withdrew, the Afghans were attacked all along the way. Out of 16,000 men, only one reached the frontier alive, while a few others survived as prisoners.
- The entire Afghan adventure ended as total failure. It had proved as one of the greatest disasters suffered by the British arms in India.
- The British Indian Government now organized a new expedition. Kabul was reoccupied on 16 September 1842.

- But it had learnt its lesson well, having avenged its recent defeat and humiliation, it arrived at a settlement with Dost Mohammed by which the British evacuated Kabul and recognized him as the independent ruler of Afghanistan.
- Afghan War cost India over one and a half crores of rupees and its army, about 20,000 men.

### Policy of Non-Interference

- A new period of Anglo-Afghan friendship was inaugurated in 1855 with the signing of a treaty of friendship between Dost Mohammed and the Government of India.
- The two governments promised to maintain friendly and peaceful relation, to respect each other's territories, and to abstain from interfering in each other's internal affairs.
- Dost Mohammed also agreed that he would be "the friend of the friends of the East India Company and the enemy of its enemies." He remained loyal to this treaty during the Revolt of 1857 and refused to give help to the rebels.
- After 1864, the policy of non-interference was vigorously pursued by Lord Lawrence and his two successors. As Russia again turned its attention to Central Asia after its defeat in the Crimean War; however, the British followed the policy of strengthening Afghanistan as a powerful buffer.
- The British gave the Amir of Kabul aid and assistance to help him discipline his rivals internally and maintain his independence from foreign enemies. Thus, by a policy of non-interference and occasional help, the Amir was prevented from aligning himself with Russia.

### Second Afghan War

- The policy of non-interference did not, however, last very long. From 1870 onwards, there was a resurgence of imperialism all over the world. The Anglo-Russian rivalry was also intensified.
- The British Government was again keen on the commercial and financial penetration of Central Asia.
- Anglo-Russian ambitions clashed ever, more openly in the Balkans and West Asia.
- The British statesmen once again thought of bringing Afghanistan under direct political control so that it could serve as a base for British expansion in Central Asia.
- The Indian Government was directed by London to make Afghanistan a subsidiary state whose foreign and defence policies would be definitely under British control.
- Sher Ali, the Afghan ruler or Amir, was fully conscious of the Russian danger to his independence and he was, therefore, quite willing to cooperate with the British in eliminating any threat from the North.
- Sher Ali offered the Government of India a defensive and offensive alliance against Russia and asked it for promise of extensive military aid in case of need against internal or foreign enemies.
- The Indian Government refused to enter into any such reciprocal and unconditional commitment. It demanded instead the unilateral right to keep a British mission at Kabul and to exercise control over Afghanistan's foreign relations.



- When Sher Ali refused to comply, he was declared to be anti-British and pro-Russian in his sympathies.
- Lord Lytton, who had come to India as Governor-General in 1876, openly declared: *“A tool in the hands of Russia, I will never allow him to become. Such a tool it would be my duty to break before it could be used.”*
- Lytton proposed to effect “the gradual disintegration and weakening of the Afghan power.”
- To force British terms on the Amir, a new attack on Afghanistan was launched in 1878. Peace came in May 1879 when Sher Ali’s son, Yakub Khan, signed the **Treaty of Gandamak** by which the British secured all they had desired.
- They secured certain border districts, the right to keep a Resident at Kabul, and control over Afghanistan’s foreign policy.
- The British success was short lived. The national pride of the Afghans had been hurt and once again they rose to defend their independence.
- On 3 September 1879, the British Resident, Major Cavagnari, and his military escort were attacked and killed by rebellious Afghan troops. Afghanistan was again invaded and occupied.



- A change of government took place in Britain in 1880 and Lytton was replaced by a new Viceroy, Lord Ripon.
- Ripon rapidly reversed Lytton’s aggressive policy and went back to the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of a strong and friendly Afghanistan.
- Ripon recognized Abdur Rahman a grandson of Dost Mohammed, as the new ruler of Afghanistan.
- The demand for the maintenance of a British Resident in Afghanistan was withdrawn in return; Abdur Rahman agreed not to maintain political relations with any power except the British.



- The Government of India also agreed to pay Amir an annual subsidy and to come to his support in case of foreign aggression.
- Amir of Afghanistan lost control of his foreign policy and, to that extent became a dependent ruler.

### Third Anglo-Afghan War

- The First World War and the Russian Revolution of 1917 created a new situation in Anglo-Afghan relations.
- The war gave rise to strong anti-British feeling in Muslim countries, and the Russian Revolution inspired new anti-imperialist sentiments in Afghanistan as, in fact, all over the world.
- The disappearance of Imperial Russia, moreover, removed the perpetual fear of aggression from the northern neighbor, which had compelled successive Afghan rulers to look to the British for support.



- The Afghans now demanded full Independence from British control. Habibullah, who had succeeded Abdul Rahman in 1901 as Amir, was assassinated on 20 February 1919 and his son Amanullah, the new Amir, declared open war on British India.
- Peace came in 1921 by a treaty; Afghanistan recovered its independence in foreign affairs.

## RELATIONS WITH SIKKIM

- The state of Sikkim lies to the north of Bengal, adjacent to Nepal and at the border between Tibet and India (as shown in the map given below – highlighted with red line).



- In 1835, the Raja of Sikkim ceded to the British territory around Darjeeling in return for an annual money grant.
- Friendly relations between the British and Raja (of Sikkim) were disturbed in 1849 when a minor quarrel led Dalhousie to send troops into Sikkim whose ruler was in the end forced to cede nearly 1700 square miles of his territory to British India.
- In 1860, the second clash occurred when the British were engaged by the troops of the *Diwan* of Sikkim.
- By the peace treaty signed in 1861, Sikkim was reduced to the status of a virtual protectorate.
- The Raja of Sikkim expelled the *Diwan* and his relations from Sikkim, agreed to pay a fine of Rs. 7,000 as well as full compensation for British losses in the war, opened his country fully to British trade, and agreed to limit the transit duty on goods exchanged between India and Tibet via Sikkim.
- In 1886, fresh trouble arose when the Tibetans tried to bring Sikkim under their control with the complicity of its rulers who were pro-Tibet. But the Government of India would not let this happen.
- It looked upon Sikkim as an essential buffer for the security of India's northern frontier, particularly of Darjeeling and its tea-gardens. The British, therefore, carried out military operations against the Tibetans in Sikkim during 1888.
- A settlement came in 1890 with the signing of an Anglo-Chinese agreement. The treaty recognized that Sikkim was a British protectorate over whose internal administration and foreign relations, the Government of India had the right to exercise exclusive control.



**RELATIONS WITH TIBET**

- Tibet lies to the north of India where the Himalayan peaks separate it from India. It was ruled by a Buddhist religious aristocracy (the *Lamas*) who had reduced the local population to serfdom and even slavery.
- The chief political authority was exercised by the Dalai Lama, who claimed to be the living incarnation of the power of the Buddha.
- The lamas wanted to isolate Tibet from the rest of the world; however, since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet had recognized the nominal suzerainty of the Chinese Empire.
- The Chinese Government also discouraged contacts with India though a limited trade and some pilgrim traffic between India and Tibet existed.
- The Chinese Empire under the Manchu monarchy entered a period of decline during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gradually, Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Japan, and the United States of America penetrated China commercially and politically and established indirect political control over the Manchus.
- The Chinese people also created a powerful anti-Manchu and anti-imperialist nationalist movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Manchus were overthrown in 1911.
- But the nationalists led by Dr. Sun Yat Sen failed to consolidate their power and China was torn by civil war during the next few years.
- The result was that, China, since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was in no position to assert even nominal control over Tibet. The Tibetan authorities still acknowledged in theory Chinese overlordship so that other foreign powers would not feel tempted to penetrate Tibet. But Tibet was not able to maintain its complete isolation for long.
- Both Britain and Russia were keen to promote relations with Tibet. The British policy towards Tibet was governed by both economic and political considerations.
- **Economically**, the British wanted to develop Indo-Tibetan trade and to exploit its rich mineral resources.
- **Politically**, the British wanted to safeguard the northern frontier of India. But up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Tibetan authorities blocked all British efforts to penetrate it.
- At this time, Russian ambitions also turned towards Tibet. Russian influence in Tibet was on the increase, this the British Government would not tolerate.
- The Government of India, under Lord Curzon, a vigorous empire builder, decided to take immediate action to counter Russian moves and to bring Tibet under its system of protected Border States.
- According to some historians, the Russian danger was not real and was merely used as an excuse by Curzon to intervene in Tibet.
- In March 1904, Curzon dispatched a military expedition to Lhasa, the Capital of Tibet, under Francis Younghusband.





- The virtually unarmed Tibetans, who lacked modern weapons, fought back bravely but without success.
- In August 1904, the expedition reached Lhasa without coming across any Russians on the way. A treaty was signed after prolonged negotiations.
- Tibet had to pay Rs. 25 lakhs as indemnity; the *Chumbi* valley was to be occupied by the British for three years; a British trade mission was to be stationed at *Gyantse*.
- The British agreed not to interfere in Tibet's internal affairs. On their part, the Tibetans agreed not to admit the representatives of any foreign power into Tibet.
- The British achieved very little by the Tibetan expedition. It secured Russia's withdrawal from Tibet, but at the cost of confirming Chinese suzerainty.

Empowering Endeavours"





## UNIT-XII

# AN ECONOMIC CRITIQUE OF COLONIALISM

### DISRUPTION OF THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

The economic policies followed by the British led to the rapid transformation of India's economy into a colonial economy whose nature and structure were determined by the needs of the British economy. In this respect the British conquest of India differed from all previous foreign conquests. The previous conquerors had overthrown Indian political powers, but had made no basic changes in the country's economic structure; they had gradually become a part of Indian life, political as well as economic. The peasant, the artisan and the trader had continued to lead the same type of existence as before.

The basic economic pattern that of the self-sufficient rural economy had been perpetuated. Change of rulers had merely meant change in the personnel of those who appropriated the peasant's surplus. But the British conquerors were entirely different. They totally disrupted the traditional structure of the Indian economy. Moreover, they never became an integral part of Indian life. They always remained foreigners in the land, exploiting Indian resources and carrying away India's wealth as tribute. The results of this subordination of the Indian economy to the interests of British trade and industry were many and varied.

### RUIN OF ARTISANS AND CRAFTSMEN

There was a sudden and quick collapse of the urban handicrafts industry which had for centuries made India's name a byword in the markets of the entire civilized world. This collapse was caused largely by competition with the cheaper imported machine made goods from Britain. We know the British imposed a policy of one way free trade on India after 1813 and the invasion of British manufactures, in particular cotton textiles, immediately followed. Indian goods made with primitive techniques could not compete with goods produced on a mass scale by powerful steam-operated machines.

The ruin of Indian industries, particularly rural artisan industries, proceeded even more rapidly once the railways were built. The railways enabled British manufactures to reach and uproot the traditional industries in the remotest villages of the country. As the American writer, **D.H. Buchanan** has put it, "*The armour of the isolated self-sufficient village was pierced by the steel rail, and its life blood ebbed away.*"

The cotton-weaving and spinning industries were the worst hit. Silk and woolen textiles fared no better and a similar fate overtook the iron, pottery, glass, paper, metals, guns, shipping, oil-pressing, tanning and dyeing industries.

Apart from the influx of foreign goods, some other factors arising from British conquest also contributed to the ruin of Indian industries. The oppression practiced by the East India Company and its servants on the craftsmen of Bengal during the second half of the eighteenth century, forcing them to sell their goods below the market price and to hire their services below the prevailing wage, compelled a large number of them to abandon their ancestral professions. In the normal course, Indian handicrafts would have benefited from the encouragement given by the Company to their export, but this oppression had an opposite effect.

The high import duties and other restrictions imposed on the import of Indian goods into Britain and Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, combined with the development of modern manufacturing industries in Britain led to the virtual closing of European markets to Indian manufacturers after 1820.



The gradual disappearance of Indian rulers and their courts who were the main customers of the handicrafts produced also gave a big blow to these industries. "For instance, the Indian states were completely dependent on the British in the production of military weapons."

The British purchased all their military and other government stores in Britain. Moreover, Indian rulers and nobles were replaced as the ruling class by British officials and military officers who patronized their own home-products almost exclusively. This increased the cost of handicrafts and reduced their capacity to compete with foreign goods.

The ruin of Indian handicrafts was reflected in the ruin of the towns and cities which were famous for their manufacture. Cities which had withstood the ravages of war and plunder failed to survive British conquest. Dhaka, Surat, Murshidabad and many other populous and flourishing industrial centres were depopulated and laid waste. By the end of the nineteenth century, urban population formed barely 10 per cent of the total population.

**William Bentinck, the Governor-General, reported in 1834-35:**

*"The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India."*

The tragedy was heightened by the fact that the decay of the traditional industries was not accompanied by the growth of modern machine industries as was the case in Britain and Western Europe. Consequently, the ruined handicraftsmen and artisans failed to find alternative employment. The only choice open to them was to crowd into agriculture.

Moreover, the British rule also upset the balance of economic life in the villages. The gradual destruction of rural crafts broke up the union between agriculture and domestic industry in the countryside and thus contributed to the destruction of the self-sufficient rural economy. On the one hand, millions of peasants, who had supplemented their income by part-time spinning and weaving, now had to rely overwhelmingly on cultivation; on the other, millions of rural artisans lost their traditional livelihood and became agricultural labourers or petty tenants holding tiny plots. They added to the general pressure on land.

Thus British conquest led to the de-industrialisation of the country and increased dependence of the people on agriculture. No figures for the earlier period are available but, according to Census Reports, between 1901 and 1941 alone the percentage of population dependent on agriculture increased from 63.7 per cent to 70 per cent. This increasing pressure on agriculture was one of the major causes of the extreme poverty in India under British rule.

In fact, India now became an agricultural colony of manufacturing Britain which needed it as a source of raw materials for its industries. Nowhere was the change more glaring than in the cotton textile industry. While India had been for centuries the largest exporter of cotton goods in the world, it was now transformed into an importer of British cotton products and an exporter of raw cotton.

## **IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE PEASANTRY**

The peasant was also progressively impoverished under British rule. Although he was now free from internal wars, his material condition deteriorated and he steadily sank into poverty. In the very beginning of British rule in Bengal, the policy of Clive and Warren Hastings of extracting the largest possible land revenue had led to such devastation that even Cornwallis complained that one-third of Bengal had been transformed into "a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts".

Nor did improvement occur later. In both the permanently and the Temporarily Settled Zamindari areas, the lot of the peasants remained unenviable. They were left to the mercies of the zamindars who raised rents to unbearable limits, compelled them to pay illegal dues and to perform forced labour or beggar and oppressed them in diverse other ways.

The condition of the cultivators in the Ryotwari and Mahalwari areas was no better. Here the government took the place of the zamindars and levied excessive land revenue which was in the beginning fixed as high as one-third to one-half of the produce. Heavy assessment of land was one of the main causes of the growth of poverty and the deterioration of agriculture in the nineteenth century. Many contemporary writers and officials noted this fact. For instance, **Bishop Heber** wrote in 1826:

*Neither Native nor European agriculturist, I think, can thrive at the present rate of taxation. Half of the gross produce of the soil is demanded by government. ... In Hindustan [Northern India] I found a general feeling among the King's officers... that the peasantry in the Company's Provinces are on the whole worse off, poorer and more dispirited than the subjects of the Native Provinces; and here in Madras, where the soil is, generally speaking, poor, the difference is said to be still more marked. The fact is, no Native Prince demands the rent which we do.*

Even though the land revenue demand went on increasing year after year—it increased from Rs. 15.3 crore in 1857—58 to Rs. 35.8 crore in 1936—37—the proportion of the total produce taken as land revenue tended to decline, especially in the twentieth century as the prices rose and production increased. No proportional increase in land revenue was made, as the disastrous consequences of demanding extortionate revenue became obvious. But by now the population pressure on agriculture had increased to such an extent that the lesser revenue demand of later years weighed on the peasants as heavily as the higher revenue demand of the earlier years of the Company's administration.

Moreover, by the twentieth century, the agrarian economy had been ruined and the landlords, moneylenders and merchants had made deep inroads into the village. The evil of high revenue demand was made worse because the peasant got little economic return for his labour. The government spent very little on improving agriculture.

It devoted almost its entire income to meeting the needs of the British-Indian administration, making the payments of direct and indirect tribute to England, and serving the interests of British trade and industry. Even the maintenance of law and order tended to benefit the merchant and the moneylender rather than the peasant. The harmful effects of an excessive land revenue demand were further heightened by the rigid manner of its collection. Land revenue had to be paid promptly on the fixed dates even if the harvest had been below normal or had failed completely. But in bad years the peasant found it difficult to meet the revenue demand even if he had been able to do so in good years.

Whenever the peasant failed to pay land revenue, the government put up his land on sale to collect the arrears of revenue. But in most cases the peasant himself took this step and sold part of his land to meet the government demand. In either case he lost his land. More often the inability to pay revenue drove the peasant to borrow money at high rates of interest from the moneylender. He preferred getting into debt by mortgaging his land to a moneylender or to a rich peasant neighbour to losing it outright. He was also forced to go to the moneylender whenever he found it impossible to make both ends meet.

But once in debt he found it difficult to get out of it. The moneylender charged high rates of interest and through cunning and deceitful measures, such as false accounting, forged signatures and making the debtor sign for larger amounts than he had borrowed, got the peasant deeper and deeper into debt till he parted with his land.

The moneylender was greatly helped by the new legal system and the new revenue policy. In pre-British times, the moneylender was subordinated to the village community. He could not behave in a manner totally disliked by the rest of the village. For instance, he could not charge usurious rates of interest. In fact, the rates of interest were fixed by usage and public opinion. Moreover, he could not seize the land of the debtor; he could at most take possession of the debtor's personal effects like jewellery, or part of his standing crop. By introducing transferability of land the British revenue system enabled the moneylender or the rich peasant to take possession of the land.

Even the benefits of peace and security established by the British through their legal system and police were primarily reaped by the moneylender in whose hands the law placed enormous power; he also used the power of the purse to turn the expensive process of litigation in his favour and to make the police serve his purposes.

Moreover, the literate and shrewd moneylender could easily take advantage of the ignorance and illiteracy of the peasant to twist the complicated processes of law to get favourable judicial decisions. Gradually the cultivators in the Ryotwari and Mahalwari areas sank deeper and deeper into debt and more and more land passed into the hands of moneylenders, merchants, rich peasants and other moneyed classes. The process was repeated in the zamindari areas where the tenants lost their tenancy rights and were ejected from the land or became subtenants of the moneylender. The process of transfer of land from cultivators was intensified during periods of scarcity and famines. The Indian peasant hardly had any savings for critical times and whenever crops failed he fell back upon the moneylender not only to pay land revenue but also to feed himself and his family.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the moneylender had become a major curse of the countryside and an important cause of the growing poverty of the rural people. In 1911 the total rural debt was estimated at Rs 300 crore. By 1937 it amounted to Rs 1800 crore. The entire process became a vicious circle. The pressure of taxation and growing poverty pushed the cultivators into debt, which in turn increased their poverty. In fact, the cultivators often failed to understand that the moneylender was an inevitable cog in the mechanism of imperialist exploitation and turned their anger against him as he appeared to be the visible cause of their impoverishment.

For instance, during the Revolt of 1857, wherever the peasantry rose in revolt, quite often its first target of attack was the moneylender and his account books. Such peasant actions soon became a common occurrence. The growing commercialization of agriculture also helped the moneylender-cum-merchant to exploit the cultivator. The poor peasant was forced to sell his produce just after the harvest and at whatever price he could get as he had to meet in time the demands of the government, the landlord and the moneylender.

This placed him at the mercy of the grain merchant, who was in a position to dictate terms and who purchased his produce at much less than the market price. Thus a large share of the benefit of the growing trade in agricultural products was reaped by the merchant, who was very often also the village moneylender.

The loss and overcrowding of land caused by de-industrialisation and lack of modern industry compelled the landless peasants and ruined artisans and handicraftsmen to become either tenants of the moneylenders and zamindars by paying rack-rent or agricultural labourers at starvation wages. Thus the peasantry was crushed under the triple burden of the government, the zamindar or landlord, and the moneylender. After these three had taken their share not much was left for the cultivator and his family to subsist on. It has been calculated that in 1950-51 land rent and moneylenders' interest amounted to Rs 1400 crore or roughly equal to one-third of the total agricultural produce for the year. The result was that the impoverishment of the peasantry continued along with an increase in the incidence of famines. People died in millions whenever droughts or floods caused failure of crops and scarcity.

## **RUIN OF OLD ZAMINDARS AND RISE OF NEW LANDLORDISM**

The first few decades of British rule witnessed the ruin of most of the old zamindars in Bengal and Madras. This was particularly so with Warren Hastings' policy of auctioning the rights of revenue collection to the highest bidders. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 also had a similar effect in the beginning. The heaviness of land revenue—the government claimed ten-elevenths of the rental—and the rigid law of collection, under which the zamindari estates were ruthlessly sold in case of delay in payment of revenue, worked havoc for the first few years. Many of the great zamindars of Bengal were utterly ruined and were forced to sell their zamindari rights.



By 1815 nearly half of the landed property of Bengal had been transferred from the old zamindars, who had resided in the villages and who had traditions of showing some consideration to their tenants, to merchants and other moneyed classes, who usually lived in towns and who were quite ruthless in collecting to the last pie what was due from the tenant irrespective of difficult circumstances. Being utterly unscrupulous and possessing little sympathy for the tenants, these new landlords began to subject the latter to rack-renting and ejection. The Permanent Settlement in north Madras and the Temporary Zamindari Settlement in Uttar Pradesh were equally harsh on the local zamindars. But the condition of the zamindars soon improved radically.

In order to enable the zamindars to pay the land revenue in time, the authorities increased their power over the tenants by extinguishing the traditional rights of the tenants. The zamindars now set out to push up the rents to the utmost limit. Consequently, they rapidly grew in prosperity. In the Ryotwari areas too the system of landlord-tenant relations spread gradually. As we have seen above, more and more land passed into the hands of moneylenders, merchants and rich peasants who usually got the land cultivated by tenants. One reason why the Indian moneyed classes were keen to buy land and become landlords was the absence of effective outlets for investment of their capital in industry.

Another process through which this landlordism spread was that of subletting. Many owner-cultivators and occupancy tenants, having a permanent right to hold land, found it more convenient to lease out land to land-hungry tenants at exorbitant rent than to cultivate it themselves. In time, landlordism became the main feature of agrarian relations not only in the zamindari areas but also in the Ryotwari ones. A remarkable feature of the spread of landlordism was the growth of subinfeudation or intermediaries. Since the cultivating tenants were generally unprotected and the overcrowding of land led the tenants to compete with one another to acquire land, the rent of land went on increasing.

The zamindars and the new landlords found it convenient to sublet their right to collect rent to other eager persons on profitable terms. But as rents increased, sub-lessees of land in their turn sublet their rights in land. Thus by a chain-process a large number of rent-receiving intermediaries between the actual cultivator and the government sprang up. In some cases in Bengal their number went up to as high as fifty! The condition of the helpless cultivating tenants who ultimately had to bear the burden of maintaining this horde of superior landlords was precarious beyond imagination. Many of them were little better than slaves. An extremely harmful consequence of the rise and growth of zamindars and landlords was the political role they played during India's struggle for independence. Along with the princes of protected states, many of them became the chief political supporters of the foreign rulers and opposed the rising national movement. Realising that they owed their existence to British rule, they tried hard to maintain and perpetuate it.

## **STAGNATION AND DETERIORATION OF AGRICULTURE**

As a result of overcrowding in agriculture, excessive land revenue demand, growth of landlordism, increasing indebtedness and the growing impoverishment of cultivators, Indian agriculture began to stagnate and even deteriorate resulting in extremely low yields per acre. Overall agricultural production fell by 14 per cent between 1901 and 1939. The overcrowding in agriculture and increase in subinfeudation led to subdivision and fragmentation of land into small holdings most of which could not maintain their cultivators. The extreme poverty of the overwhelming majority of peasants left them without any resources with which to improve agriculture by using better cattle and seeds, more manure and fertilisers, and improved techniques of production.

Nor did the cultivator, rack-rented by both the government and the landlord, have any incentive to do so. After all, the land he cultivated was rarely his property and the bulk of the benefit which agricultural improvements would bring was likely to be reaped by the horde of absentee landlords and moneylenders. Subdivision and fragmentation of land also made it difficult to effect improvements. In England and other European countries, the rich landlords often invested capital in their land to increase its productivity with a view to sharing in the increased income. But in India the absentee landlords, both old and new,

performed no useful function. They were mere rent-receivers who had often no roots in the land and who took no personal interest in it beyond collecting rent. They found it possible and therefore preferred to increase their income by further squeezing their tenants rather than by making productive investments in their lands.

The government could have helped in improving and modernising agriculture. But the government refused to recognise any such responsibility. A characteristic of the financial system of British India was that, while the main burden of taxation fell on the shoulders of the peasant, the government spent only a very small part of it on him. An example of this neglect of the peasant and agriculture was the step motherly treatment meted out to public works and agricultural improvement. While the Government of India had spent by 1905 over 360 crore of rupees on the railways which was demanded by British business interests, it spent in the same period less than 50 crores of rupees on irrigation which would have benefited millions of Indian cultivators. Even so, irrigation was the only field in which the government took some steps forward.

At a time when agriculture all over the world was being modernized and revolutionised, Indian agriculture was technologically stagnating; hardly any modern machinery was used. What was worse was that even ordinary implements were centuries old. For example, in 1951, there were only 930,000 iron ploughs in use while wooden ploughs numbered 31.8 million. The use of inorganic fertilisers was virtually unknown, whereas a large part of animal manure, i.e. cow-dung, night-soil and cattle bones, was wasted. In 1922—23, only 1.9 percent of all cropped land was under improved seeds. By 1938-39, this percentage had gone up to only 11 per cent. Furthermore, agricultural education was completely neglected. In 1939 there were only six agricultural colleges with 1306 students. There was not a single agricultural college in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Sind. Nor could peasants make improvements through self-study. There was hardly any spread of primary education or even literacy in the rural areas.

## DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN INDUSTRIES

An important development in the second half of the nineteenth century was the establishment of large-scale machine-based industries in India. The machine age in India began when cotton textile, jute and coal-mining industries were started in the 1850s. The first textile mill was started in Bombay by Cowasjee Nanabhoy in 1853 and the first jute mill in Rishra (Bengal) in 1855. These industries expanded slowly but continuously. In 1879 there were 56 cotton textile mills in India employing nearly 43,000 persons. In 1882 there were 20 jute mills, most of them in Bengal, employing nearly 20,000 persons.

By 1905, India had 206 cotton mills employing nearly 196,000 persons. In 1901 there were over 36 jute mills employing nearly 115,000 persons. The coal-mining industry employed nearly one lakh of persons in 1906. Other mechanical industries which developed during the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries were cotton gins and presses, rice, flour and timber mills, leather tanneries, woolen textiles, sugar mills, iron and steel works, and such mineral industries as salt, mica and saltpeter.

Cement, paper, matches, sugar and glass industries developed during the 1930s. But all these industries had a very stunted growth. Most of the modern Indian industries were owned or controlled by British capital. Foreign capitalists were attracted to Indian industry by the prospect of high profit. Labour was extremely cheap; raw materials were readily and cheaply available; and for many goods, India and its neighbours provided a ready market. For many Indian products, such as tea, jute and manganese, there was a ready demand the world over.

On the other hand, profitable investment opportunities at home were getting fewer. At the same time, the colonial government and officials were willing to provide all help and show all favours. Foreign capital easily overwhelmed Indian capital in many of the industries.

Only in the cotton textile industry did Indians have a large share from the beginning, and in the 1930s, the sugar industry was developed by Indians. Indian capitalist also had to struggle from the beginning against the power of British managing agencies and British banks. To enter a field of enterprise, Indian businessmen had to bend before British managing agencies dominating that field. In many cases even Indian-owned companies were controlled by foreign-owned or controlled managing agencies.

Indians also found it difficult to get credit from banks most of which were dominated by British financiers. Even when they could get loans they had to pay high interest rates while foreigners could borrow on much easier terms. Of course, gradually Indians began to develop their own banks and insurance companies. In 1914, foreign banks held over 70 per cent of all bank deposits in India; by 1937, their share had decreased to 57 per cent.

British enterprises in India also took advantage of their close connection with British suppliers of machinery and equipment, shipping, insurance companies, marketing agencies, government officials and political leaders to maintain their dominant position in Indian economic life. Moreover, the government followed a conscious policy of favouring foreign capital as against Indian capital. The railway policy of the government also discriminated against Indian enterprise; railway freight rates encouraged foreign imports at the cost of trade in domestic products. It was more difficult and costlier to distribute Indian goods than to distribute imported goods.

Another serious weakness of Indian industrial effort was the almost complete absence of heavy or capital goods industries, without which there can be no rapid and independent development of industries. India had no big plants to produce iron and steel, or to manufacture machinery. A few petty repair workshops represented engineering industries and a few iron and brass foundries represented metallurgical industries. The first steel in India was produced only in 1913. Thus India lacked such basic industries as steel, metallurgy, machine, chemical and oil. India also lagged behind in the development of electric power.

Apart from machine-based industries, the nineteenth century also witnessed the growth of plantation industries such as indigo, tea and coffee. They were almost exclusively European in ownership. Indigo was used as a dye in textile manufacture. Indigo manufacture was introduced into India at the end of the eighteenth century and flourished in Bengal and Bihar. Indigo planters gained notoriety for their oppression over the peasants who were compelled by them to cultivate indigo. This oppression was vividly portrayed by the famous Bengali writer Dinbandhu Mitra in his play *Neel Darpan* in 1860. The invention of a synthetic dye gave a big blow to the indigo industry and it gradually declined.

The tea industry developed in Assam, Bengal, south India and the hills of Himachal Pradesh after 1850. Being foreign-owned, it was helped by the government with grants of rent-free land and other facilities. In time, the use of tea spread all over India and it also became an important item of export. Coffee plantations developed during this period in south India.

The plantation and other foreign-owned industries were of hardly any advantage to the Indian people. Their profits went out of the country. A large part of their salary bill was spent on highly paid foreign staff. They purchased most of their equipment abroad. Most of their technical staff was foreign. Most of their products were sold in foreign markets and the foreign exchange so earned was utilised by Britain. The only advantage that Indians got out of these industries was the creation of unskilled jobs. Most of the workers in these enterprises were, however, extremely low paid, and they worked under extremely harsh conditions for very long hours. Moreover, conditions of near-slavery prevailed in the plantations.

On the whole, industrial progress in India was exceedingly slow and painful. It was mostly confined to cotton and jute industries and tea plantations in the nineteenth century, and to sugar and cement in the 1930s. As late as 1946, cotton and jute textiles accounted for 40 per cent of all workers employed in factories. In terms of production as well as employment, the modern industrial development of India was paltry compared with the economic development of other countries or those with India's economic needs.



It did not, in fact, compensate even for the displacement of the indigenous handicrafts; it had little effect on the problems of poverty and overcrowding of land. The paltriness of Indian industrialization is brought out by the fact that out of a population of 357 million in 1951 only about 2.3 million were employed in modern industrial enterprises.

Furthermore, the decay and decline of the urban and rural handicraft industries continued unabated after 1858. The Indian Planning Commission has calculated that the number of persons engaged in processing and manufacturing fell from 10.3 million in 1901 to 8.8 million in 1951 even though the population increased by nearly 40 per cent. The government made no effort to protect, rehabilitate, reorganize and modernize these old indigenous industries.

Moreover, even the modern industries had to develop without government help and often in opposition to British policy. British manufacturers looked upon Indian textile and other industries as their rivals and put pressure on the Government of India not to encourage but rather to actively discourage industrial development in India. Thus British policy artificially restricted and slowed down the growth of Indian industries. Furthermore, Indian industries, still in a period of infancy, needed protection. They developed at a time when Britain, France, Germany and the United States had already established powerful industries and could not therefore compete with them.

In fact, all other countries, including Britain, had protected their infant industries by imposing heavy customs duties on the import of foreign manufacturers. But India was not a free country. Its policies were determined in Britain and in the interests of British industrialists who forced a policy of Free Trade upon their colony. For the same reason the Government of India refused to give any financial or other help to the newly founded Indian industries as was being done at the time by the governments of Europe and Japan for their own infant industries. It would not even make adequate arrangements for technical education which remained extremely backward until 1951 and further contributed to industrial backwardness. In 1939 there were only 7 engineering colleges with 2217 students in the country.

Many Indian projects, for example, those concerning the construction of ships, locomotives, cars and aero planes, could not get started because of the government's refusal to give any help. Finally, in the 1920s and 1930s under the pressure of the rising nationalist movement and the Indian capitalist class, the Government of India was forced to grant some tariff protection to Indian industries. But, once again, the government discriminated against Indian-owned industries. The Indian-owned industries such as cement, iron and steel, and glass were denied protection or given inadequate protection. On the other hand, foreign dominated industries, such as the match industry, were given the protection they desired. Moreover, British imports were given special privileges under the system of 'imperial preferences' even though Indians protested vehemently.

Another feature of Indian industrial development was that it was extremely lopsided regionally. Indian industries were concentrated only in a few regions and cities of the country. Large parts of the country remained totally underdeveloped. This unequal regional economic development not only led to wide regional disparities in income but also affected the level of national integration. It made the task of creating a unified Indian nation more difficult. An important social consequence of even the limited industrial development of the country was the birth and growth of two new social classes in Indian society—the industrial capitalist class and the modern working class. These two classes were entirely new in Indian history because modern mines, industries and means of transport were new. Even though these classes formed a very small part of the Indian population, they represented new technology, a new system of economic organisation, new social relations, new ideas and a new outlook. They were not weighed down by the burden of old traditions, customs and styles of life. Most of all, they possessed an all-India outlook. Moreover, both of these new classes were vitally interested in the industrial development of the country. Their economic and political importance and roles were, therefore, out of all proportion to their numbers.

## POVERTY AND FAMINES

A major characteristic of British rule in India, and the net result of British economic policies, was the prevalence of extreme poverty among its people. While historians disagree on the question whether India was getting poorer or not under British rule, there is no disagreement on the fact that throughout the period of British rule most Indians always lived on the verge of starvation. As time passed, they found it more and more difficult to find employment or make a living. British economic exploitation, the decay of indigenous industries, the failure of modern industries to replace them, high taxation, the drain of wealth to Britain and a backward agrarian structure leading to the stagnation of agriculture and the exploitation of the poor peasants by the zamindars, landlords, princes, moneylenders, merchants and the state gradually reduced the Indian people to extreme poverty and prevented them from progressing. India's colonial economy stagnated at a low economic level.

The poverty of the people found its culmination in a series of famines which ravaged all parts of India in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of these famines occurred in western Uttar Pradesh in 1860-61 and cost over 2 lakhs of lives. In 1865-66 a famine engulfed Orissa, Bengal, Bihar and Madras and took a toll of nearly 20 lakhs of lives, Orissa alone losing 10 lakh people. More than 14 lakhs of persons died in the famine of 1868-70 in western Uttar Pradesh, Bombay and Punjab. Many states in Rajasthan, another affected area, lost one-fourth to one-third of their population. Perhaps the worst famine in Indian history till then occurred in 1876—78 in Madras, Mysore, Hyderabad, Maharashtra, western Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab. Maharashtra lost 8 lakh people, Madras nearly 35 lakh. Mysore lost nearly 20 per cent of its population and Uttar Pradesh over 12 lakh.

Drought led to a country-wide famine in 1896-97 which affected over 9.5 crores of people of whom nearly 45 lakh died. The famine of 1899-1900 followed quickly and caused widespread distress. In spite of official efforts to save lives through provision of famine relief, over 25 lakhs of people died. Apart from these major famines, many other local famines and scarcities occurred. **William Digby**, a British writer, has calculated that, in all, over 28,825,000 people died during famines from 1854 to 1901. Another famine in 1943 carried away nearly three million people in Bengal. These famines and the high losses of life caused by them indicate the extent to which poverty and starvation had taken root in India.

Many English officials in India recognised the grim reality of India's poverty during the nineteenth century. For example, **Charles Elliott**, a member of the Governor-General's Council, remarked:

*"I do not hesitate to say that half the agricultural population do not know from one year's end to another what it is to have a full meal."*

William Hunter, the compiler of the Imperial Gazetteer, conceded that "forty million of the people of India habitually go through life on insufficient food." The situation became still worse in the twentieth century. The quantity of food available to an Indian declined by as much as 29 per cent in the 30 years between 1911 and 1941. There were many other indications of India's economic backwardness and impoverishment. Colin Clark, a famous authority on national income, has calculated that during the period 1925-34, India and China had the lowest per capita incomes in the world. The income of an Englishman was five times that of an Indian.

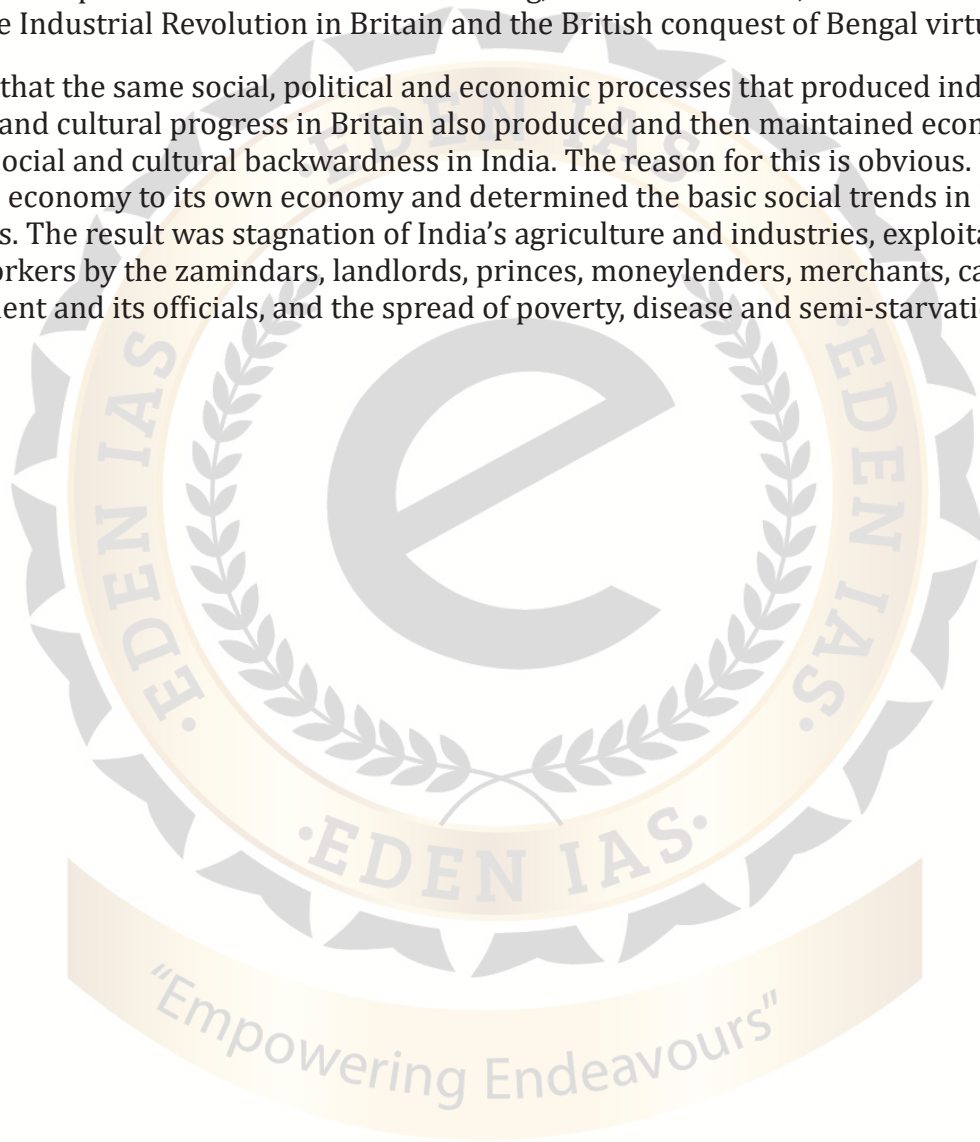
Similarly, the average life expectancy of an Indian during the 1930s was only 32 years in spite of the tremendous progress that modern medical sciences and sanitation had made. In most of the West European and North American countries, the average age was already over 60 years. India's economic backwardness and poverty were not due to the niggardliness of nature. They were man-made. The natural resources of India were abundant and capable of yielding, if properly utilised, a high degree of prosperity to the people.

But, as a result of foreign rule and exploitation, and of a backward agrarian and industrial economic structure—in fact as the total outcome of its historical and social development—India presented the paradox

of a poor people living in a rich country. The poverty of India was not a product of its geography or of the lack of natural resources or of some 'inherent' defect in the character and capabilities of the people. Nor was it a remnant of the Mughal period or of the pre-British past.

It was mainly a product of the history of the last two centuries. Before that, India was no more backward than the countries of Western Europe. Nor were the differences in standards of living at the time very wide among the countries of the world. Precisely during the period that the countries of the West developed and prospered, India was subjected to modern colonialism and was prevented from developing. All the developed countries of today developed almost entirely over the period during which India was ruled by Britain, most of them doing so after 1850. Till 1750 the differences in living standards were not wide between the different parts of the world. It is interesting, in this connection, to note that the dates of the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and the British conquest of Bengal virtually coincide!

The basic fact is that the same social, political and economic processes that produced industrial development and social and cultural progress in Britain also produced and then maintained economic underdevelopment and social and cultural backwardness in India. The reason for this is obvious. Britain subordinated the Indian economy to its own economy and determined the basic social trends in India according to her own needs. The result was stagnation of India's agriculture and industries, exploitation of its peasants and workers by the zamindars, landlords, princes, moneylenders, merchants, capitalists and the foreign government and its officials, and the spread of poverty, disease and semi-starvation.





# UNIT-XIII

## CIVIL REBELLIONS AND TRIBAL UPRISINGS

### INTRODUCTION

The Revolt of 1857 was the most dramatic instance of traditional India's struggle against foreign rule. But it was no sudden occurrence. It was the culmination of a century long tradition of fierce popular resistance to British domination. The establishment of British power in India was a prolonged process of piecemeal conquest and consolidation and the colonialization of the economy and society. This process produced discontent, resentment and resistance at every stage. This popular resistance took three broad forms: civil rebellions, tribal uprisings and peasant movements. We will discuss the first two in this chapter.

The series of civil rebellions, which run like a thread through the first 100 years of British rule, were often led by deposed rajas and nawabs or their descendants, uprooted and impoverished zamindars, landlords and poligars (landed military magnates in South India), and ex-retainers and officials of the conquered Indian states. The backbone of the rebellions, their mass base and striking power came from the rack-rented peasants, ruined artisans and demobilized soldiers.

### THE IMMEDIATE CAUSES

These sudden, localized revolts often took place because of local grievances although for short periods they acquired a broad sweep, involving armed bands of a few hundreds to several thousands. The major cause of all these civil rebellions taken as a whole was the rapid changes the British introduced in the economy, administration and land revenue system. These changes led to the disruption of the agrarian society, causing prolonged and widespread suffering among its constituents. Above all, the colonial policy of intensifying demands for land revenue and extracting as large an amount as possible produced a veritable upheaval in Indian villages. In Bengal, for example, in less than thirty years land revenue collection was raised to nearly double the amount collected under the Mughals. The pattern was repeated in other parts of the country as British rule spread. And aggravating the unhappiness of the farmers was the fact that not even a part of the enhanced revenue was spent on the development of agriculture or the welfare of the cultivator.

Thousands of zamindars and poligars lost control over their land and its revenues either due to the extinction of their rights by the colonial state or by the forced sale of their rights over land because of their inability to meet the exorbitant land revenue demanded. The proud zamindars and poligars resented this loss even more when they were displaced by rank outsiders — government officials and the new men of money — merchants and moneylenders. Thus they, as also the old chiefs, who had lost their principalities, had personal scores to settle with the new rulers.

Peasants and artisans, as we have seen earlier, had their own reasons to rise up in arms and side with the traditional elite. Increasing demands for land revenue were forcing large numbers of peasants into growing indebtedness or into selling their lands. The new landlords, bereft of any traditional paternalism towards their tenants, pushed up rents to ruinous heights and evicted them in the case of non-payment. The economic decline of the peasantry was reflected in twelve major and numerous minor famines from 1770 to 1857.

The new courts and legal system gave a further fillip to the dispossessors of land and encouraged the rich to oppress the poor. Flogging, torture and jailing of the cultivators for arrears of rent or land revenue or interest on debt were quite common. The ordinary people were also hard hit by the prevalence of corruption at the lower levels of the police, judiciary and general administration. The petty officials enriched

themselves freely at the cost of the poor. The police looted, oppressed and tortured the common people at will. William Edwards, a British official, wrote in 1859 that the police were 'a scourge to the people' and that 'their oppression and exactions form one of the chief grounds of dissatisfaction with our government.'

The ruin of Indian handicraft industries, as a result of the imposition of free trade in India and levy of discriminatory tariffs against Indian goods in Britain, pauperized millions of artisans. The misery of the artisans was further compounded by the disappearance of their traditional patrons and buyers, the princes, chieftains, and zamindars.

The scholarly and priestly classes were also active in inciting hatred and rebellion against foreign rule. The traditional rulers and ruling elite had financially supported scholars, religious preachers, priests, pandits and maulvis and men of arts and literature. With the coming of the British and the ruin of the traditional landed and bureaucratic elite, this patronage came to an end, and all those who had depended on it were impoverished.

Another major cause of the rebellions was the very foreign character of British rule. Like any other people, the Indian people too felt humiliated at being under a foreigner's heel. This feeling of hurt pride inspired efforts to expel the foreigner from their lands.

## MAJOR CIVIL REBELLIONS

The civil rebellions began as British rule was established in Bengal and Bihar, and they occurred in area after area as it was incorporated into colonial rule. There was hardly a year without armed opposition or a decade without a major armed rebellion in one part of the country or the other. From 1763 to 1856, there were more than forty major rebellions apart from hundreds of minor ones.

Displaced peasants and demobilized soldiers of Bengal led by religious monks and dispossessed zamindars were the first to rise up in the Sanyasi rebellion, made famous by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel *Anand Math*, that lasted from 1763 to 1800. It was followed by the Chuar uprising which covered five districts of Bengal and Bihar from 1766 to 1772 and then, again, from 1795 to 1816. Other major rebellions in Eastern India were those of Rangpur and Dinajpur, 1783; Bishnupur and Birbhum, 1799; Orissa zamindars, 1804-17; and Sambalpur, 1827-40.

In South India, the Raja of Vizianagram revolted in 1794, the poligars of Tamil Nadu during the 1790's, of Malabar and coastal Andhra during the first decade of the 19th century, of Parlekamedi during 1813-14. Dewan Velu Thampi of Travancore organized a heroic revolt in 1805. The Mysore peasants too revolted in 1830-31. There were major uprisings in Visakhapatnam from 1830-34, Ganjam in 1835 and Kurnool in 1846-47.

In Western India, the chiefs of Saurashtra rebelled repeatedly from 1816 to 1832. The Kolis of Gujarat did the same during 1824-28, 1839 and 1849. Maharashtra was in a perpetual state of revolt after the final defeat of the Peshwa. Prominent were the Bhil uprisings, 1818-31; the Kittur uprising, led by Chinnava, 1824; the Satara uprising, 1841; and the revolt of the Gadkaris, 1844.

Northern India was no less turbulent. The present states of Western U.P. and Haryana rose up in arms in 1824. Other major rebellions were those of Bilaspur, 1805; the taluqdars of Aligarh, 1814-17; the Bundelas of Jabalpur, 1842; and Khandesh, 1852.

The second Punjab War in 1848-49 was also in the nature of a popular revolt by the people and the army. These almost continuous rebellions were massive in their totality, but were wholly local in their spread and isolated from each other. They were the result of local causes and grievances, and were also localized in their effects. They often bore the same character not because they represented national or common efforts but because they represented common conditions though separated in time and space.

Socially, economically and politically, the semi-feudal leaders of these rebellions were backward looking and traditional in outlook. They still lived in the old world, blissfully unaware and oblivious of the modern world which had knocked down the defences of their society. Their resistance represented no societal alternative. It was centuries-old in form and ideological and cultural content. Its basic objective was to restore earlier forms of rule and social relations. Such backward looking and scattered, sporadic and disunited uprisings were incapable of fending off or overthrowing foreign rule. The British succeeded in pacifying the rebel areas one by one. They also gave concessions to the less fiery rebel chiefs and zamindars in the form of reinstatement, the restoration of their estates and reduction in revenue assessments so long as they agreed to live peacefully under alien authority. The more recalcitrant ones were physically wiped out. Velu Thampi was, for example, publicly hanged even after he was dead. The suppression of the civil rebellions was a major reason why the Revolt of 1857 did not spread to South India and most of Eastern and Western India. The historical significance of these civil uprisings lies in that they established strong and valuable local traditions of resistance to British rule. The Indian people were to draw inspiration from these traditions in the later nationalist struggle for freedom.

### THE TRIBAL UPRISINGS-SIDO, KANHU AND BIRSA MUNDA

The tribal people, spread over a large part of India, organized hundreds of militant outbreaks and insurrections during the 19th century. These uprisings were marked by immense courage and sacrifice on their part and brutal suppression and veritable butchery on the part of the rulers. The tribals had cause to be upset for a variety of reasons. The colonial administration ended their relative isolation and brought them fully within the ambit of colonialism. It recognized the tribal chiefs as zamindars and introduced a new system of land revenue and taxation of tribal products. It encouraged the influx of Christian missionaries into the tribal areas. Above all, it introduced a large number of moneylenders, traders and revenue farmers as middlemen among the tribals. These middlemen were the chief instruments for bringing the tribal people within the vortex of the colonial economy and exploitation. The middlemen were outsiders who increasingly took possession of tribal lands and ensnared the tribals in a web of debt. In time, the tribal people increasingly lost their lands and were reduced to the position of agricultural labourers, share-croppers and rack-rented tenants on the land they had earlier brought under cultivation and held on a communal basis.

Colonialism also transformed their relationship with the forest. They had depended on the forest for food, fuel and cattle feed. They practiced shifting cultivation (jhum, podu, etc.), taking recourse to fresh forest lands when their existing lands showed signs of exhaustion. The colonial government changed all this. It usurped the forest lands and placed restrictions on access to forest products, forest lands and village common lands. It refused to let cultivation shift to new areas.

Oppression and extortion by policemen and other petty officials further aggravated distress among the tribals. The revenue farmers and government agents also intensified and expanded the system of begar — making the tribals perform unpaid labour.

All this differed in intensity from region to region, but the complete disruption of the old agrarian order of the tribal communities provided the common factor for all the tribal uprisings. These uprisings were broad-based, involving thousands of tribals, often the entire population of a region. The colonial intrusion and the triumvirate of trader, moneylender and revenue farmer in sum disrupted the tribal identity to a lesser or greater degree. In fact, ethnic ties were a basic feature of the tribal rebellions. The rebels saw themselves not as a discreet class but as having a tribal identity. At this level the solidarity shown was of a very high order. Fellow tribals were never attacked unless they had collaborated with the enemy.

At the same time, not all outsiders were attacked as enemies. Often there was no violence against the non-tribal poor, who worked in tribal villages in supportive economic roles, or who had social relations with the tribals such as telis, gwalas, lohars, carpenters, potters, weavers, washermen, barbers, drummers, and bonded labourers and domestic servants of the outsiders. They were not only spared, but were



seen as allies. In many cases, the rural poor formed a part of the rebellious tribal bands. The rebellions normally began at the point where the tribals felt so oppressed that they felt they had no alternative but to fight. This often took the form of spontaneous attacks on outsiders, looting their property and expelling them from their villages. This led to clashes with the colonial authorities. When this happened, the tribals began to move towards armed resistance and elementary organization.

Often, religious and charismatic leaders — messiahs emerged at this stage and promised divine intervention and an end to their suffering at the hands of the outsiders, and asked their fellow tribals to rise and rebel against foreign authority. Most of these leaders claimed to derive their authority from God. They also often claimed that they possessed magical powers, for example, the power to make the enemies' bullets ineffective. Filled with hope and confidence, the tribal masses tended to follow these leaders to the very end. The warfare between the tribal rebels and the British armed forces was totally unequal. On one side were drilled regiments armed with the latest weapons and on the other were men and women fighting in roving bands armed with primitive weapons such as stones, axes, spears and bows and arrows, believing in the magical powers of their commanders. The tribals died in lakhs in this unequal warfare.

Among the numerous tribal revolts, the Santhal hool or uprising was the most massive. The Santhals, who live in the area between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, known as Daman-i-koh, rose in revolt; made a determined attempt to expel the outsiders — the dikus — and proclaimed the complete 'annihilation' of the alien regime. The social conditions which drove them to insurrection were described by a contemporary in the Calcutta Review as follows: 'Zamindars, the police, the revenue and court alas have exercised a combined system of extortions, oppressive exactions, forcible dispossession of property, abuse and personal violence and a variety of petty tyrannies upon the timid and yielding Santhals. Usurious interest on loans of money ranging from 50 to 500 per cent; false measures at the haul and the market; wilful and uncharitable trespass by the rich by means of their untethered cattle, tattoos, ponies and even elephants, on the growing crops of the poorer race; and, such like illegalities have been prevalent.'

The Santhals considered the dikus and government servants morally corrupt being given to beggary, stealing, lying and drunkenness. By 1854, the tribal heads, the majhis and parganites, had begun to meet and discuss the possibility of revolting. Stray cases of the robbing of zamindars and moneylenders began to occur. The tribal leaders called an assembly of nearly 6000 Santhals, representing 400 villages, at Bhaganidihi on 30 June 1855. It was decided to raise the banner of revolt, get rid of the outsiders and their colonial masters once and for all, the usher in Satyug, 'The Reign of Truth,' and 'True Justice.'

The Santhals believed that their actions had the blessings of God. **Sido and Kanhu**, the principal rebel leaders, claimed that Thakur (God) had communicated with them and told them to take up arms and fight for independence. Sido told the authorities in a proclamation: **'The Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not Sahibs . . . The Thacoor himself will fight. Therefore, you Sahibs and Soldiers (will) fight the Thacoor himself.'**

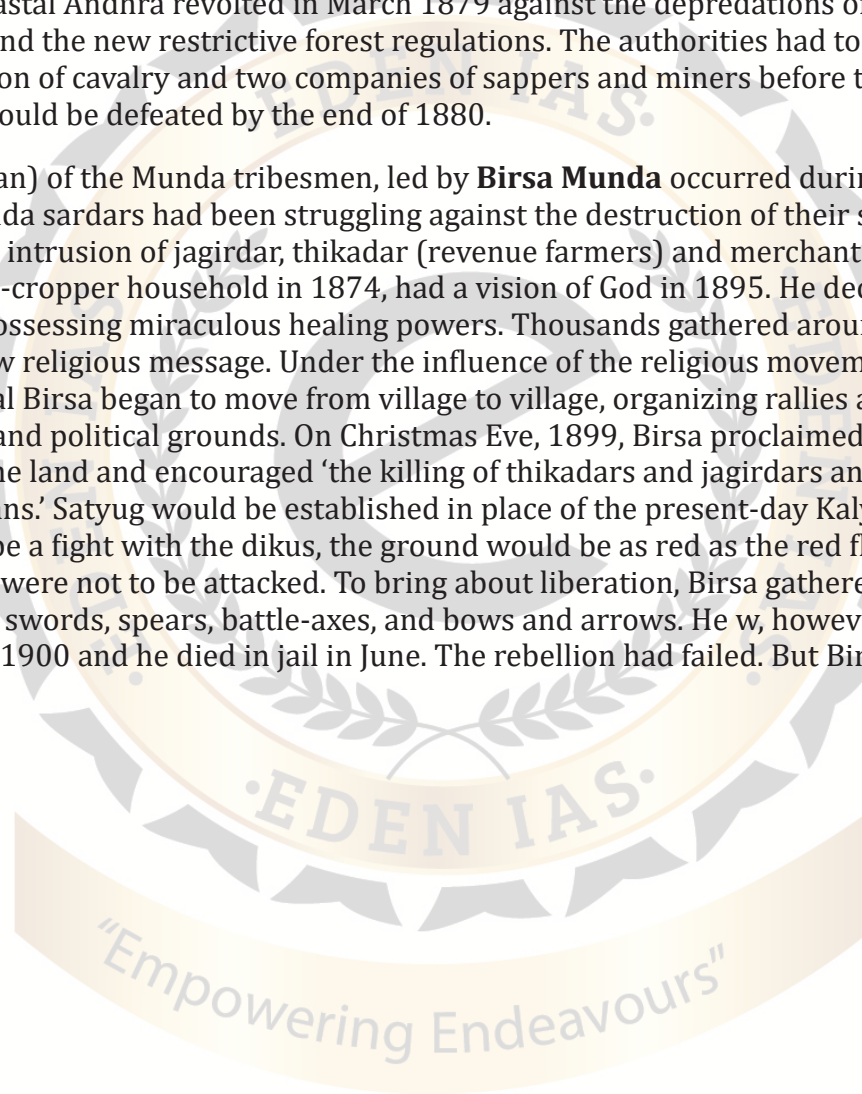
The leaders mobilized the Santhal men and women by organizing huge processions through the villages accompanied by drummers and other musicians. The leaders rode at the head on horses and elephants and in palkis. Soon nearly 60,000 Santhals had been mobilized. Forming bands of 1,500 to 2,000, but rallying in many thousands at the call of drums on particular occasions, they attacked the mahajans and zamindars and their houses, police stations, railway construction sites, the dak (post) carriers — in fact all the symbols of exploitation and colonial power. The Santhal insurrection was helped by a large number of non-tribal and poor dikus. Gwalas (milkmen) and others helped the rebels with provisions and services; lohars (blacksmiths) accompanied the rebel bands, keeping their weapons in good shape. Once the Government realized the scale of the rebellion; it organized a major military campaign against the rebels. It mobilized tens of regiments under the command of a major general, declared Martial Law in the affected areas and offered rewards of upto Rs. 10,000 for the capture of various leaders. The rebellion was crushed ruthlessly. More than 15,000 Santhals were killed while tens of villages were destroyed. Sido was betrayed and captured and killed in August 1855 while Kanhu was arrested by accident at the tail-end of the

rebellion in February 1866. And 'the Rajmahal Hills were drenched with the blood of the fighting Santhal peasantry.' One typical instance of the heroism of Santhal rebels has been narrated by **L.S.S. O'Malley**:

*"They showed the most reckless courage never knowing when they were beaten and refusing to surrender. On one occasion, forty- five Santhals took refuge in a mud hut which they held against the Sepoy's. Volley after volley was fired into it... Each time the Santhals replied with a discharge of arrows. At last, when their fire ceased, the Sepoys entered the hut and found only one old man was left alive. A Sepoy called on him to surrender, whereupon the old man rushed upon him and cut him down with his battle axe."*

Three other major tribal rebellions require some attention. The Kols of Chhotanagpur rebelled from 1820 to 1837. Thousands of them were massacred before British authority could be re-imposed. The hill tribesmen of Rampa in coastal Andhra revolted in March 1879 against the depredations of the government-supported mansabdar and the new restrictive forest regulations. The authorities had to mobilize regiments of infantry, a squadron of cavalry and two companies of sappers and miners before the rebels, numbering several thousands, could be defeated by the end of 1880.

The rebellion (ulgulan) of the Munda tribesmen, led by **Birsa Munda** occurred during 1899-19. For over thirty years the Munda sardars had been struggling against the destruction of their system of common land holdings by the intrusion of jagirdar, thikadar (revenue farmers) and merchant moneylenders. Birsa, born in a poor share-cropper household in 1874, had a vision of God in 1895. He declared himself to be a divine messenger, possessing miraculous healing powers. Thousands gathered around him seeing in him a Messiah with a new religious message. Under the influence of the religious movement soon acquired an agrarian and political Birsa began to move from village to village, organizing rallies and mobilizing his followers on religious and political grounds. On Christmas Eve, 1899, Birsa proclaimed a rebellion to establish Munda rule in the land and encouraged 'the killing of thikadars and jagirdars and Rajas and Hakims (rulers) and Christians.' Satyug would be established in place of the present-day Kalyug. He declared that 'there was going to be a fight with the dikus, the ground would be as red as the red flag with their blood.' The non-tribal poor were not to be attacked. To bring about liberation, Birsa gathered a force of 6,000 Mundas armed with swords, spears, battle-axes, and bows and arrows. He w, however, captured in the beginning of February 1900 and he died in jail in June. The rebellion had failed. But Birsa entered the realms of legend.



## UNIT-XIV

# PEASANT MOVEMENTS AND UPRISINGS AFTER 1857

### THE IMPACT OF COLONIAL RULE ON INDIAN PEASANTS

It is worth taking a look at the effects of colonial exploitation of the Indian peasants. Colonial economic policies, the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial systems, and the ruin of handicraft leading to the over-crowding of land, transformed the agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry. In the vast zamindari areas, the peasants were left to the tender mercies of the zamindars who rack-rented them and compelled them to pay the illegal dues and perform begar. In Ryotwari areas, the Government itself levied heavy land revenue.

This forced the peasants to borrow money from the moneylenders. Gradually, over large areas, the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants-at-will, share-croppers and landless labourers, while their lands, crops and cattle passed into the hands of landlords, trader-moneylenders and rich peasants. When the peasants could take it no longer, they resisted against the oppression and exploitation; and, they found whether their target was the indigenous exploiter or the colonial administration, that their real enemy, after the barriers were down, was the colonial state.

One form of elemental protest, especially when individuals and small groups found that collective action was not possible though their social condition was becoming intolerable, was to take to crime. Many dispossessed peasants took to robbery, dacoity and what has been called social banditry, preferring these to starvation and social degradation.

### THE INDIGO REVOLT

The most militant and widespread of the peasant movements was the Indigo Revolt of 1859-60. The indigo planters, nearly all Europeans, compelled the tenants to grow indigo which they processed in factories set up in rural (mofussil) areas. From the beginning, indigo was grown under an extremely oppressive system which involved great loss to the cultivators. The planters forced the peasants to take a meager amount as advance and enter into fraudulent contracts. The price paid for the indigo plants was far below the market price. The comment of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, J.B. Grant, was that 'the root of the whole question is the struggle to make the raiyats grow indigo plant, without paying them the price of it.' The peasant was forced to grow indigo on the best land he had whether or not he wanted to devote his land and labour to more paying crops like rice. At the time of delivery, he was cheated even of the due low price. He also had to pay regular bribes to the planter's officials. He was forced to accept an advance. Often he was not in a position to repay it, but even if he could he was not allowed to do so. The advance was used by the planters to compel him to go on cultivating indigo.

Since the enforcement of forced and fraudulent contracts through the courts was a difficult and prolonged process, the planters resorted to a reign of terror to coerce the peasants. Kidnapping, illegal confinement in factory godowns, flogging, attacks on women and children, carrying off cattle, looting, burning and demolition of houses and destruction of crops and fruit trees were some of the methods used by the planters. They hired or maintained bands of lathiyals (armed retainers) for the purpose.

In practice, the planters were also above the law. With a few exceptions, the magistrates, mostly European, favoured the planters with whom they dined and hunted regularly. Those few who tried to be fair were soon transferred. Twenty-nine planters and a solitary Indian zamindar were appointed as Honorary Magistrates in 1857, which gave birth to the popular saying 'je rakhak se bhakak' (Our protector is also our devourer).



The discontent of indigo growers in Bengal boiled over in the autumn of 1859 when their case seemed to get Government support. Misreading an official letter and exceeding his authority, Hem Chandra Kar, Deputy Magistrate of Kalaroa, published on 17 August a proclamation to policemen that 'in case of disputes relating to Indigo Ryots, they (ryots) shall retain possession of their own lands, and shall sow on them what crops they please, and the Police will be careful that no Indigo Planter nor anyone else be able to interface in the matter.

The news of Kar's proclamation spread all over Bengal, and peasant felt that the time for overthrowing the hated system had come. Initially, the peasants made an attempt to get redressal through peaceful means. They sent numerous petitions to the authorities and organized peaceful demonstrations. Their anger exploded in September 1859 when they asserted their right not to grow indigo under duress and resisted the physical pressure of the planters and their lathiyals backed by the police and the courts.

The beginning was made by the ryots of Govindpur village in Nadia district when, under the leadership of Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Biswas, ex-employees of a planter, they gave up indigo cultivation. And when, on 13 September, the planter sent a band of 100 lathiyals to attack their village, they organized a counter force armed with lathis and spears and fought back. The peasant disturbances and indigo strikes spread rapidly to other areas. The peasants refused to take advances and enter into contracts, pledged not to sow indigo, and defended themselves from the planters' attacks with whatever weapons came to hand — spears, slings, lathis, bows and arrows, bricks, bel-fruit, and earthen-pots (thrown by women).

The indigo strikes and disturbances flared up again in the spring of 1860 and encompassed all the indigo districts of Bengal. Factory after factory was attacked by hundreds of peasants and village after village bravely defended itself. In many cases, the efforts of the police to intervene and arrest peasant leaders were met with an attack on policemen and police posts. The planters then attacked with another weapon, their zamindari powers. They threatened the rebellious ryots with eviction or enhancement of rent. The ryots replied by going on a rent strike. They refused to pay the enhanced rents; and they physically resisted attempts to evict them. They also gradually learnt to use the legal machinery to enforce their rights. They joined together and raised funds to fight court cases filed against them, and they initiated legal action on their own against the planters. They also used the weapon of social boycott to force a planter's servants to leave him.

Ultimately, the planters could not withstand the united resistance of the ryots, and they gradually began to close their factories. The cultivation of indigo was virtually wiped out from the districts of Bengal by the end of 1860. A major reason for the success of the Indigo Revolt was the tremendous initiative, cooperation, organization and discipline of the ryots. Another was the complete unity among Hindu and Muslim peasants. Leadership for the movement was provided by the more well-off ryots and in some cases by petty zamindars, moneylenders and ex-employees of the planters.

A significant feature of the Indigo Revolt was the role of the intelligentsia of Bengal which organized a powerful campaign in support of the rebellious peasantry. It carried on newspaper campaigns, organized mass meetings, prepared memoranda on peasants' grievances and supported them in their legal battles. Outstanding in this respect was the role of Harish Chandra Mukherji, editor of the Hindoo Patriot. He published regular reports from his correspondents in the rural areas on planters' oppression, officials' partisanship and peasant resistance. He himself wrote with passion, anger and deep knowledge of the problem which, he raised to a high political plane. Revealing an insight into the historical and political significance of the Indigo Revolt, he wrote in May 1860: Bengal might well be proud of its peasantry. . Wanting power, wealth, political knowledge and even leadership, the peasantry of Bengal have brought about a revolution inferior in magnitude and importance to none that has happened in the social history of any other country . . . With the Government against them, the law against them, the tribunals against them, the Press against them, they have achieved a success of which the benefits will reach all orders and the most distant generations of our countrymen.' Din Bandhu Mitra's play, Neel Darpan, was to gain great fame for vividly portraying the oppression by the planters.

The intelligentsia's role in the Indigo Revolt was to have an abiding impact on the emerging nationalist intellectuals. In their very political childhood they had given support to a popular peasant movement against the foreign planters. This was to establish a tradition with long run implications for the national movement.

Missionaries were another group which extended active support to the indigo ryots in their struggle. The Government's response to the Revolt was rather restrained and not as harsh as in the case of civil rebellions and tribal uprisings. It had just undergone the harrowing experience of the Santhal uprising and the Revolt of 1857. It was also able to see, in time, the changed temper of the peasantry and was influenced by the support extended to the Revolt by the intelligentsia and the missionaries. It appointed a commission to inquire into the problem of indigo cultivation. Evidence brought before the Indigo Commission and its final report exposed the coercion and corruption underlying the entire system of indigo cultivation. The result was the mitigation of the worst abuses of the system. The Government issued a notification in November 1860 that ryots could not be compelled to sow indigo and that it would ensure that all disputes were settled by legal means. But the planters were already closing down the factories they felt that they could not make their enterprises pay without the use of force and fraud.

### THE PABNA AGRARIAN CRISIS

Large parts of East Bengal were engulfed by agrarian unrest during the 1870s and early 1880s. The unrest was caused by the efforts of the zamindars to enhance rent beyond legal limits and to prevent the tenants from acquiring occupancy rights under Act X of 1859. This they tried to achieve through illegal coercive methods such as forced eviction and seizure of crops and cattle as well as by dragging the tenants into costly litigation in the courts.

The peasants were no longer in a mood to tolerate such oppression. In May 1873, an agrarian league or combination was formed in Yusufshahi Parganah in Pabna district to resist the demands of the zamindars. The league organized mass meetings of peasants. Large crowds of peasants would gather and march through villages frightening the zamindars and appealing to other peasants to join them. The league organized a rent-strike — the ryots were to refuse to pay the enhanced rents — and challenged the zamindars in the courts. Funds were raised from the ryots to meet the costs. The struggle gradually spread throughout Pabna and then to the other districts of East Bengal. Everywhere agrarian leagues were organized, rents were withheld and zamindars fought in the courts. The main form of struggle was that of legal resistance. There was very little violence — it only occurred when the zamindars tried to compel the ryots to submit to their terms by force. There were only a few cases of looting of the houses of the zamindars. A few attacks on police stations took place and the peasants also resisted attempts to execute court decrees. But such cases were rather rare. Hardly any zamindar or zamindar's agent was killed or seriously injured. In the course of the movement, the ryots developed a strong awareness of the law and their legal rights and the ability to combine and form associations for peaceful agitation. Though peasant discontent smouldered till 1885, many of the disputes were settled partially under official pressure and persuasion and partially out of the zamindar's fear that the united peasantry would drag them into prolonged and costly litigation. Many peasants were able to acquire occupancy rights and resist enhanced rents.

The Government rose to the defence of the zamindars wherever violence took place. Peasants were then arrested on a large scale. But it assumed a position of neutrality as far as legal battles or peaceful agitations were concerned. The Government also promised to undertake legislation to protect the tenants from the worst aspects of zamindari oppression, a promise it fulfilled however imperfectly in 1885 when the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed.

What persuaded the zamindars and the colonial regime to reconcile themselves to the movement was the fact that its aims were limited to the redressal of the immediate grievances of the peasants and the enforcement of the existing legal rights and norms. It was not aimed at the zamindari system. It also did not have at any stage an anti-colonial political edge. The agrarian leagues kept within the bounds of law, used the legal machinery to fight the zamindars, and raised no anti-British demands. The leaders often argued



that they were against zamindars and not the British. In fact, the leaders raised the slogan that the peasants want 'to be the ryots of Her Majesty the Queen and of Her only.' For this reason, official action was based on the enforcement of the Indian Penal Code and it did not take the form of armed repression as in the case of the Santhal and Munda uprisings.

Once again the Bengal peasants showed complete Hindu-Muslim solidarity, even though the majority of the ryots were Muslim and the majority of zamindars Hindu. There was also no effort to create peasant solidarity on the grounds of religion or caste.

In this case, too, a number of young Indian intellectuals supported the peasants' cause. These included Bankim Chandra Chatterjea and R.C. Dutt. Later, in the early 1880s, during the discussion of the Bengal Tenancy Bill, the Indian Association, led by Surendranath Banerjee, Anand Mohan Bose and Dwarkanath Ganguli, campaigned for the rights of tenants, helped form ryot' unions, and organized huge meetings of upto 20,000 peasants in the districts in support of the Rent Bill. The Indian Association and many of the nationalist newspapers went further than the Bill. They asked for permanent fixation of the tenant's rent. They warned that since the Bill would confer occupancy rights even on non-cultivators, it would lead to the growth of middlemen — the jotedars — who would be as oppressive as the zamindars so far as the actual cultivators were concerned. They, therefore, demanded that the right of occupancy should go with actual cultivation of the soil, that is, in most cases to the under ryots and the tenants-at-will.

## THE DECCAN AGRARIAN DISTRESS

A major agrarian outbreak occurred in the Poona and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra in 1875. Here, as part of the Ryotwari system, land revenue was settled directly with the peasant who was also recognized as the owner of his land. Like the peasants in other Ryotwari areas, the Deccan peasant also found it difficult to pay land revenue without getting into the clutches of the moneylender and increasingly losing his land. This led to growing tension between the peasants and the moneylenders most of whom were outsiders — Marwaris or Gujaratis.

Three other developments occurred at this time. During the early 1860s, the American Civil War had led to a rise in cotton exports which had pushed up prices. The end of the Civil War in 1864 brought about an acute depression in cotton exports and a crash in prices. The ground slipped from under the peasants' feet. Simultaneously, in 1867, 'the Government raised land revenue by nearly 50 per cent. The situation was worsened by a succession of bad harvests.

To pay the land revenue under these conditions, the peasants had to go to the moneylender who took the opportunity to further tighten his grip on the peasant and his land. The peasant began to turn against the perceived cause of his misery, the moneylender. Only a spark was needed to kindle the fire. A spontaneous protest movement began in December 1874 in Kardab village in Sirur taluq. When the peasants of the village failed to convince the local moneylender, Kalooram, that he should not act on a court decree and pull down a peasant's house, they organized a complete social boycott of the 'outsider' moneylenders to compel them to accept their demands a peaceful manner. They refused to buy from their shops. No peasant would cultivate their fields. The bulletedars (village servants) — barbers, washermen, carpenters, ironsmiths, shoemakers and others would not serve them. No domestic servant would work in their houses and when the socially isolated moneylenders decided to run away to the taluq headquarters, nobody would agree to drive their carts. The peasants also imposed social sanctions against those peasants and bulletedars who would not join the boycott of moneylenders. This social boycott spread rapidly to the villages of Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur and Satara districts.

The social boycott was soon transformed into agrarian riots when it did not prove very effective. On 12 May, peasants gathered in Supa, in Bhimthari taluq, on the bazar day and began a systematic attack on the moneylenders' houses and shops. They seized and publicly burnt debt bonds and deeds — signed under pressure, in ignorance, or through fraud — decrees, and other documents dealing with their debts. Within days the disturbances spread to other villages of the Poona and Ahmednagar districts.



There was very little violence in this settling of accounts. Once the moneylenders' instruments of oppression — debt bonds — were surrendered, no need for further violence was felt. In most places, the 'riots' were demonstrations of popular feeling and of the peasants' newly acquired unity and strength. Though moneylenders' houses and shops were looted and burnt in Supa, this did not occur in other places.

The Government acted with speed and soon succeeded in repressing the movement. The active phase of the movement lasted about three weeks, though stray incidents occurred for another month or two. As in the case of the Pabna Revolt, the Deccan disturbances had very limited objectives. There was once again an absence of anti-colonial consciousness. It was, therefore, possible for the colonial regime to extend them a certain protection against the moneylenders through the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879.

Once again, the modern nationalist intelligentsia of Maharashtra supported the peasants' cause. Already, in 1873-74, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, led by Justice Ranade, had organized a successful campaign among the peasants, as well as at Poona and Bombay against the land revenue settlement of 1867. Under its impact, a large number of peasants had refused to pay the enhanced revenue. This agitation had generated a mentality of resistance among the peasants which contributed to the rise of peasant protest in 1875. The Sabha as well as many of the nationalist newspapers also supported the D.A.R. Bill.

Peasant resistance also developed in other parts of the country. Mappila outbreaks were endemic in Malabar. Vasudev Balwant Phadke, an educated clerk, raised a Ramosi peasant force of about 50 in Maharashtra during 1879, and organized social banditry on a significant scale. The Kuka Revolt in Punjab was led by Baba Ram Singh and had elements of a messianic movement. It was crushed when 49 of the rebels were blown up by a cannon in 1872. High land revenue assessment led to a series of peasant riots in the plains of Assam during 1893-94. Scores were killed in brutal firings and bayonet charges.

## THE IMPACT OF PEASANT STRUGGLES

There was a certain shift in the nature of peasant movements after 1857. Princes, chiefs and landlords having been crushed or co-opted, peasants emerged as the main force in agrarian movements. They now fought directly for their own demands, centered almost wholly on economic issues, and against their immediate enemies, foreign planters and indigenous zamindaris and moneylenders. Their struggles were directed towards specific and limited objectives and redressal of particular grievances. They did not make colonialism their target. Nor was their objective the ending of the system of their subordination and exploitation. They did not aim at turning the world upside down.'

The territorial reach of these movements was also limited. They were confined to particular localities with no mutual communication or linkages. They also lacked continuity of struggle or long-term organization. Once the specific objectives of a movement were achieved, its organization, as also peasant solidarity built around it, dissolved and disappeared. Thus, the Indigo strike, the Pabna agrarian leagues and the social-boycott movement of the Deccan ryots left behind no successors.

Consequently, at no stage did these movements threaten British supremacy or even undermine it. Peasant protest after 1857 often represented an instinctive and spontaneous response of the peasantry to its social condition. It was the result of excessive and unbearable oppression, undue and unusual deprivation and exploitation, and a threat to the peasant's existing, established position. The peasant often rebelled only when he felt that it was not possible to carry on in the existing manner.

He was also moved by strong notions of legitimacy, of what was justifiable and what was not. That is why he did not fight for land ownership or against landlordism but against eviction and undue enhancement of rent. He did not object to paying interest on the sums he had borrowed; he hit back against fraud and chicanery by the moneylender and when the latter went against tradition in depriving him of his land. He did not deny the state's right to collect a tax on land but objected when the level of taxation overstepped all traditional bounds. He did not object to the foreign planter becoming his zamindar but resisted the planter when he took away his freedom to decide what crops to grow and refused to pay him a proper price for his crop.

The peasant also developed a strong awareness of his legal rights and asserted them in and outside the courts. And if an effort was made to deprive him of his legal rights by extra-legal means or by manipulation of the law and law courts, he countered with extra-legal means of his own. Quite often, he believed that the legally-constituted authority approved his actions or at least supported his claims and cause. In all the three movements discussed here, he acted in the name of this authority, the sarkar.

In these movements, the Indian peasants showed great courage and a spirit of sacrifice, remarkable organizational abilities, and a solidarity that cut across religious and caste lines. They were also able to wring considerable concessions from the colonial state. The latter, too, not being directly challenged, was willing to compromise and mitigate the harshness of the agrarian system though within the broad limits of the colonial economic and political structure. In this respect, the colonial regime's treatment of the post-1857 peasant rebels was qualitatively different from its treatment of the participants in the civil rebellions, the Revolt of 1857 and the tribal uprisings which directly challenged colonial political power.

A major weakness of the 19th century peasant movements was the lack of an adequate understanding of colonialism — of colonial economic structure and the colonial state — and of the social framework of the movements themselves. Nor did the 19th century peasants possess a new ideology and a new social, economic and political programme based on an analysis of the newly constituted colonial society. Their struggles, however militant, occurred within the framework of the old societal order. They lacked a positive conception of an alternative society — a conception which would unite the people in a common struggle on a wide regional and all-India plane and help develop long-term political movements. An all-India leadership capable of evolving a strategy of struggle that would unify and mobilize peasants and other sections of society for nation-wide political activity could be formed only on the basis of such a new conception, such a fresh vision of society. In the absence of such a new ideology, programme, leadership and strategy of struggle, it was not too difficult for the colonial state, on the one hand, to reach a Conciliation and calm down the rebellious peasants by the grant of some concessions and on the other hand, to suppress them with the full use of its force. This weakness was, of course, not a blemish on the character of the peasantry which was perhaps incapable of grasping on its own the new and complex phenomenon of colonialism. That needed the efforts of a modern intelligentsia which was itself just coming into existence.

Most of these weaknesses were overcome in the 20th century when peasant discontent was merged with the general anti-imperialist discontent and their political activity became a part of the wider anti-imperialist movement. And, of course, the peasants' participation in the larger national movement not only strengthened the fight against the foreigner it also, simultaneously, enabled them to organize powerful struggles around their class demands and to create modern peasant organization.

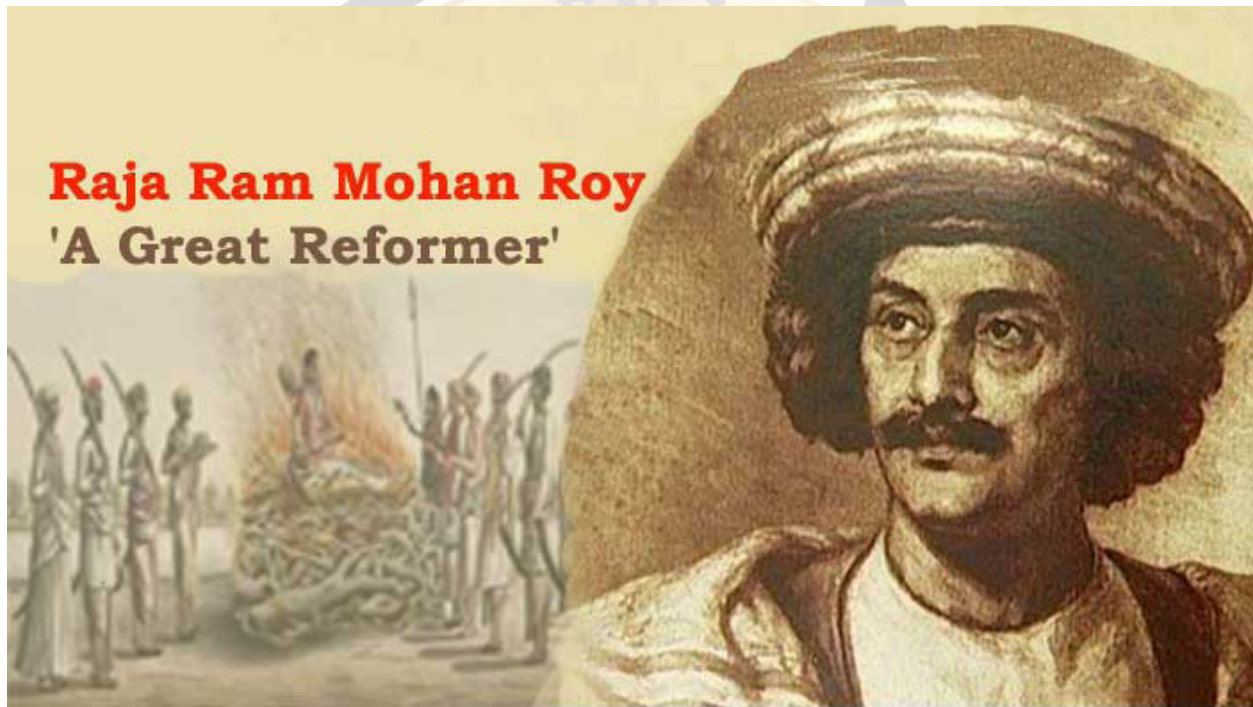
"Empowering Endeavours"

## UNIT-XV

# SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMS AND NATIONAL AWAKENING

### BRAHMO SAMAJ-RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY

Western conquest exposed the weakness and decay of Indian society. Hence, thoughtful Indians began to look for the defects of their society and for the ways and means of removing them. The central figure in the awakening was Ram Mohan Roy, who is rightly regarded as the first great leader of modern India.



Ram Mohan Roy was pained by the stagnation and corruption of the contemporary Indian society, which was at that time dominated by caste and convention. Popular religion was full of superstitions and was exploited by ignorant and corrupt priests. The upper classes were selfish and often sacrificed social interest to their own narrow interests. Ram Mohan Roy possessed great love and respect for the traditional philosophic systems of the East; but, at the same time, he believed that Western culture alone would help to regenerate Indian society. In particular, Ram Mohan Roy wanted his countrymen to accept the rational and scientific approach and the principle of human dignity and social equality of all men and women. He was also in favor of the introduction of modern capitalism and industry in the country.

Ram Mohan Roy represented a synthesis of the thought of East and West. He was a learned scholar who knew more than dozen languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English, French, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. As a young man, Ram Mohan Roy had studied Sanskrit literature and Hindu philosophy at Varanasi and Koran and Persian and Arabic literature at Patna. Ram Mohan Roy was also well-acquainted with Jainism and other religious movements and sects of India. Ram Mohan Roy made an intensive study of Western thought and culture. Only to study the Bible in the original form, he learnt Greek and Hebrew. In 1809, Ram Mohan Roy wrote his famous work *Gift to Monotheists* in Persian. In this work, he put forward weighty arguments against belief in many gods and for the worship of a single God. Ram Mohan Roy settled in Calcutta in 1814 and soon attracted a band of young men with whose cooperation he started the *Atmiya*



**Sabha.** In particular, Ram Mohan Roy vigorously opposed worship of idols, rigidity of caste, and prevalence of meaningless religious rituals. He condemned the priestly class for encouraging and inculcating these practices. Roy held that all the principal ancient texts of the Hindus preached monotheism or worship of one God.

Roy published the Bengali translation of the Vedas and of five of the principal Upanishads to prove his point. He also wrote a series of tracts and pamphlets in defence of monotheism. In 1820, Roy published his *Precepts of Jesus* in which he tried to separate the moral and philosophic message of the New Testament, which he praised, from its miracle stories. Roy wanted the high-moral message of Christ to be incorporated in Hinduism. This earned for him the hostility of the missionaries. Roy vigorously defended Hindu religion and philosophy from the ignorant attacks of the missionaries. At the same time, he adopted an extremely friendly attitude towards other religions. Roy believed that basically all religions preach a common message and that their followers are all brothers under the skin. In 1829, Roy founded a new religious society, the **Brahma Sabha**, later known as the **Brahmo Samaj**, whose purpose was to purify Hinduism and to preach theism or the worship of one God. The new society was to be based on the twin pillars of reason and the Vedas and Upanishads. The *Brahmo Samaj* laid emphasis on human dignity, opposed idolatry, and criticized such social evils as the practice of *Sati*. Ram Mohan Roy was one of the earliest propagators of modern education, which he looked upon as a major instrument for the spread of modern ideas in the country. In 1817, David Hare, who had come to India in 1800 as a watchmaker, but who spent his entire life in the promotion of modern education in the country, founded the famous **Hindu College**.

Ram Mohan Roy gave most enthusiastic assistance to Hare in his educational projects. Roy maintained at his own cost an English school in Calcutta from 1817 in which, among other subjects, mechanics and the philosophy of Voltaire were taught. In 1825, Roy established a *Vedanta* College in which courses both in Indian learning and in Western social and physical sciences were offered. Ram Mohan Roy represented the first glimmerings of the rise of national consciousness in India. In particular, Roy opposed the rigidities of the caste system, which he declared, "*has been the source of want of unity among us.*" He believed that the caste system was double evil: it created inequality and it divided people and deprived them of patriotic feeling.

Ram Mohan Roy was pioneer of Indian journalism. He brought out journals in Bengali, Persian, Hindi, and English to spread scientific literary and political knowledge among the people, to educate public opinion on topics of current interest, and to represent popular demands and grievances before the Government. Roy was also the initiator of public agitation on political questions in the country. Roy condemned the oppressive practices of the Bengal Zamindars, which had reduced the peasants to a miserable condition. Roy demanded that the maximum rents paid by the actual cultivators of land should be permanently fixed so that they too would enjoy the benefits of the Permanent Settlement of 1793. Roy also protested against the attempts to impose taxes on tax-free lands.

Roy demanded the abolition of the Company's trading rights and the removal of heavy export duties on Indian goods. Roy raised the demands for the Indianisation of the superior services, separation of the executive and the judiciary, trial by jury, and judicial equality between Indians and Europeans. Ram Mohan Roy took a keen interest in international events and everywhere he supported the cause of liberty, democracy, and nationalism and opposed injustice, oppression, and tyranny in every form. Roy condemned the miserable condition of Ireland under the oppressive regime of absentee landlordism. He publicly declared that he would emigrate from the British Empire if Parliament failed to pass the Reform Bill.

## HENRY VIVIAN DEROZIO

A radical trend arose among the Bengali intellectuals during the late 1820s and the 1830s. This trend was more modern than Roy's ideology and is known as the "Young Bengal Movement."



The leader and inspirer of Young Bengal Movement was the young Anglo-Indian **Henry Vivian Derozio**, who was born in 1809 and who taught at Hindu College from 1826 to 1831. Derozio possessed a dazzling intellect and followed the most radical views of the time. He was inspired by the great French Revolution. Derozio and his famous followers, known as the *Derozians* and Young Bengal, were fiery patriots. Perhaps, he was the first nationalist poet of modern India. Derozio was removed from the Hindu College in 1831 because of his radicalism and died of cholera soon after at the young age of 22. Even so, the Derozians carried forward Ram Mohan Roy's tradition of educating the people in social, economic, and political questions through newspapers, pamphlets, and public associations. Surendranath Banerjee, the famous leader of the nationalist movement, described the Derozians as "*the pioneers of the modern civilization of Bengal, the conscript fathers of our race whose virtues will excite veneration and whose failings will be treated with gentlest consideration.*"

## TATVABODHINI SABHA

In 1839, Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore, founded the *Tatvabodhini Sabha* to propagate Ram Mohan Roy's ideas. The *Tatvabodhini Sabha* and its organ the *Tatvabodhini Patrika* promoted a systematic study of India's past in the Bengali language. In 1843, Debendranath Tagore reorganized the *Brahmo Samaj* and put new life into it. The *Samaj* actively supported the movement for widow remarriage, abolition of polygamy, Women's education, improvement of the *ryot's* condition, etc.



**Pt. ISHWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR**

Born in 1820 in a very poor family, Vidyasagar struggled through hardship to educate himself and in the end, became the principal of the Sanskrit College (in 1851). Though Vidyasagar was a great Sanskrit scholar, his mind was open to the Western thought, and he came to represent a happy blend of Indian and Western culture. Vidyasagar resigned from government service, as he would not tolerate undue official interference. Vidyasagar's generosity to the poor was fabulous. He seldom possessed a warm coat that he invariably gave it to the first naked beggar he met on the street. Vidyasagar evolved a new technique of teaching Sanskrit. He wrote a Bengali primer which is used till this day. By his writings, he helped in the evolution of a modern prose style in Bengali. Vidyasagar opened the gates of the Sanskrit college to non-Brahmin students as well. To free Sanskrit studies from the harmful effects of self-imposed isolation, Vidyasagar introduced the study of Western thought in the Sanskrit College. He also helped to establish a college, which is now named after him.

He raised his powerful voice, backed by the weight of immense traditional learning, in favor of widow remarriage in 1855. The first lawful Hindu widow remarriage among the upper castes in India was celebrated in Calcutta on 7 December 1856 under the inspiration and supervision of Vidyasagar. In 1850, Vidyasagar protested against child-marriage. All his life, he campaigned against polygamy. As a Government Inspector of Schools,



**Pt. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**

Vidyasagar organized thirty five girls' schools, many of which he ran at his own expense. The Bethune School, founded in Calcutta in 1849, was the first fruit of the powerful movement for women's education that arose in the 1840s and 1850s. As Secretary to the Bethune School, Vidyasagar was one of the innovators of higher education for women.



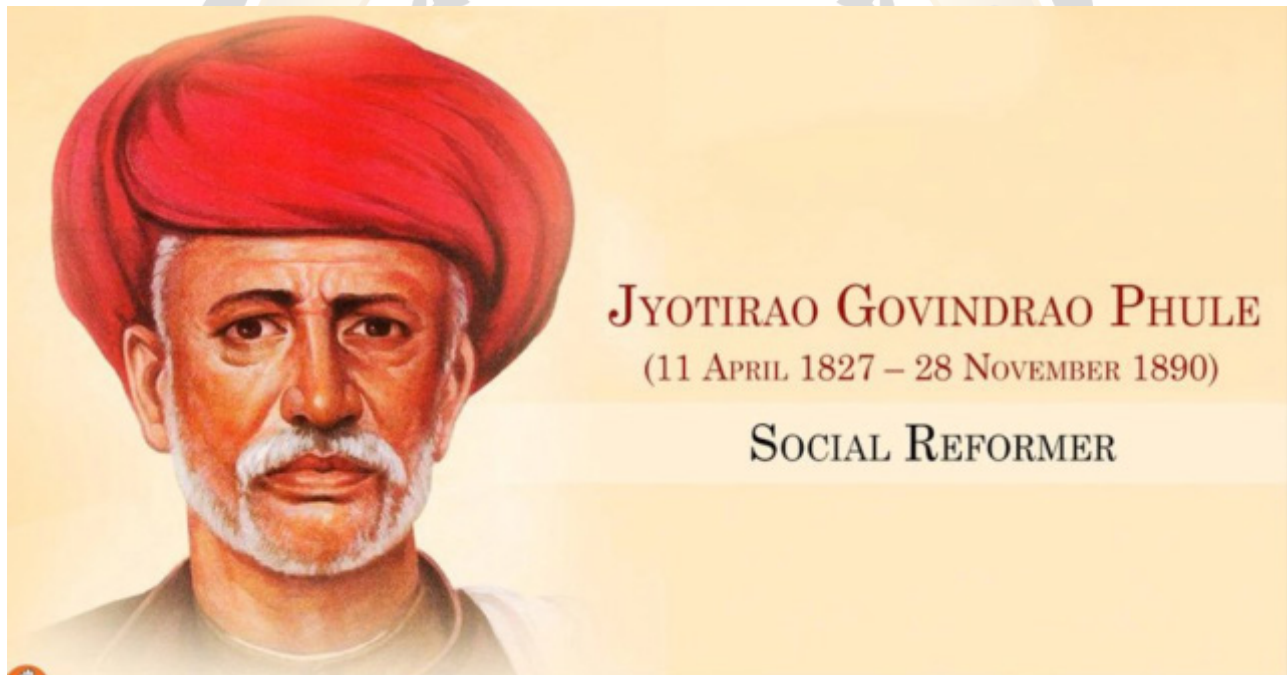
## RELIGIOUS REFORMS IN MAHARASHTRA-JOTIBA PHULE

Religious reform was begun in Bombay in 1840 by the Parmahans Mandali, which aimed at fighting idolatry and the caste system. The earliest religious reformer in Western India perhaps was **Gopal Hari Deshmukh**, known popularly as '*Lokhitwadi*'. He wrote in Marathi, made powerful rationalist attacks on Hindu orthodoxy, and preached religious and social equality.

Later the **Prarthana Samaj** was started with the aim of reforming Hindu religious thought and practice in the light of modern knowledge. It preached the worship of one God and tried to free religion of caste orthodoxy and priestly domination. Two of its great leaders were R.G. Bhandarkar, the famous Sanskrit scholar and historian, and Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901). Prarthana Samaj was powerfully influenced by the Brahmo Samaj. Its activities also spread to South India as a result of the efforts of the Telugu reformer, **Viresalingam**.

## JOTIBA PHULE

**Jyotirao Govindrao Phule**, also known as **Jotiba Phule** was an Indian social activist, thinker, anti-caste social reformer and writer from Maharashtra.



His work extended to many fields including eradication of untouchability and the caste system, and women's emancipation. On 24 September 1873, Phule, along with his followers, formed the **Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of Seekers of Truth)** to attain equal rights for people from lower castes. People from all religions and castes could become a part of this association which worked for the uplift of the oppressed classes. Phule is regarded as an important figure of the social reform movement in Lagrange. He and his wife, **Savitribai Phule**, were pioneers of women education in India. He is most known for his efforts to educate women and lower caste people. Phule started the first school for girls in 1848 at Poona. He also founded a home for the widows. The couple was among the first native Indians to open a school for girls of India. He was also the first reformer who advocated universalization of education.

**RAMKRISHNA MISSION AND VIVEKANANDA**

Ramakrishna Parmhansa (1834-1886) was a saintly person who sought religious salvation in the traditional ways of renunciation, meditation, and devotion (bhakti). Parmhansa, again and again, emphasized that there were many roads to God and salvation and that service of man was service of God, for man was the embodiment of God. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863-1902), a disciple of Ramakrishna Parmhansa popularized his religious message and tried to put it in a form that would suit the needs of contemporary Indian society. Swami Vivekananda said, "Knowledge unaccompanied by action in the actual world in which we lived was useless." In 1898, Swami Vivekananda wrote – "For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam ... is the only hope."

Vivekananda condemned the caste system and the current Hindu emphasis on rituals, ceremonies, and superstitions, and urged the people to imbibe the spirit of liberty, equality, and free thinking.



**Ramakrishna Parmahans**

To the educated Indians, Swami Vivekananda said, "So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold everyman a traitor who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them." In 1896, Vivekananda founded the **Ramakrishna Mission** to carry on humanitarian relief and social work. The Mission had many branches in different parts of the country and carried on social service by opening schools, hospitals, and dispensaries, orphanages, libraries, etc.



**Swami Vivekananda**

**Two objectives of the Ramakrishna Mission are**

- To bring into existence a band of monks dedicated to a life of renunciation and practical spirituality, from among whom teachers and workers would be sent out to spread the universal message of Vedanta as illustrated in the life of Ramakrishna; and
- In conjunction with lay disciples, to carry on preaching, philanthropic and charitable works, looking upon all men, women and children, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, as veritable manifestations of the Divine.

Paramahansa himself founded the Ramakrishna Math with his young monastic disciples as a nucleus to fulfill the first objective. The second objective was taken up by Swami Vivekananda after Ramakrishna's death. Vivekananda carried the message of Ramakrishna all over India. He was an eloquent speaker with a charming personality.



Vivekananda's followers included people of all strata including princes and priests. In 1893, he attended the famous "Parliament of Religions" at Chicago. He delivered lectures on Hindu philosophy as enunciated by Ramakrishna Paramahansa at various places in the UK and the USA.

The headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission are at Belur, near Kolkata. This centre was established in 1898 by Swami Vivekananda. The Math is a religious trust dedicated to the nursing of the inner spiritual life of the members of the monastery. The Mission is a charitable society dedicated to the expression of inner spiritual life in outward collective action in the service of men. The Belur Math is the headquarters of both the Math and the Mission. Both the organisations have close links, and are almost inseparable from each other. The Mission stands for religious and social reforms. The Vedantic doctrine is its ideal.

Its emphasis is on the development of the highest spirituality inherent in man. Certain spiritual experiences of Ramakrishna, the teachings of the Upanishads and the Gita, and the examples of the Buddha and Jesus are the basis of Vivekananda's message to the world about human values. He wanted to make the Vedanta practical. His mission was to bridge the gulf between paramartha (service) and vyavahara (behaviour), and between spirituality and day-to-day life. He advocated the doctrine of service – the service of all beings. The service of jiva (living objects) is the worship of Siva. Life itself is religion. By service, the Divine exists within man. Vivekananda was for using technology and modern sciences in the service of mankind. The Mission has been in existence for more than a century. It has now developed into a world-wide organisation. The Mission is a deeply religious body; but it is not a proselytising body. It is not a sect of Hinduism. In fact, this is one of the strong reasons for the success of the Mission.

The Mission has given top priority to the idea of social service, both in terms of philanthropic work and upliftment of religious and spiritual life. It has been successful in propagating the universal principle of Vedanta and giving a true picture of India to the western world.

## THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The Theosophical Society was founded in the **United States** by **Madam H.P. Blavatsky** and **Colonel H.S. Olcott**, who later came to India and founded the headquarters of the Society at **Adyar** near Madras in 1886.



The Theosophist movement soon grew in India as a result of the leadership given to **Mrs. Annie Besant** who had come to India in 1893. The Theosophists advocated the revival and strengthening of the ancient religion of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism. The Theosophists recognized the doctrine of

the transmigration of the soul. They also preached the universal brotherhood of man. It was a movement led by westerners who glorified Indian religions and philosophical tradition. Theosophical movement helped Indians to recover their self-confidence, even though it tended to give them a sense of false pride in their past greatness. One of Mrs. Besant's many achievements in India was the establishment of the **Central Hindu School** at **Banaras** which was later developed by Madan Mohan Malaviya into the Banaras Hindu University.

## THE ARYA SAMAJ

Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883).



**Swami Dayanand Saraswati**

Swami Dayanand believed that selfish and ignorant priests had perverted Hindu religion with the aid of the Puranas, which he said were full of false teachings. Swami Dayanand rejected all later religious thought if it conflicted with the Vedas. His total dependence on the Vedas and their infallibility gave his teachings an orthodox coloring.

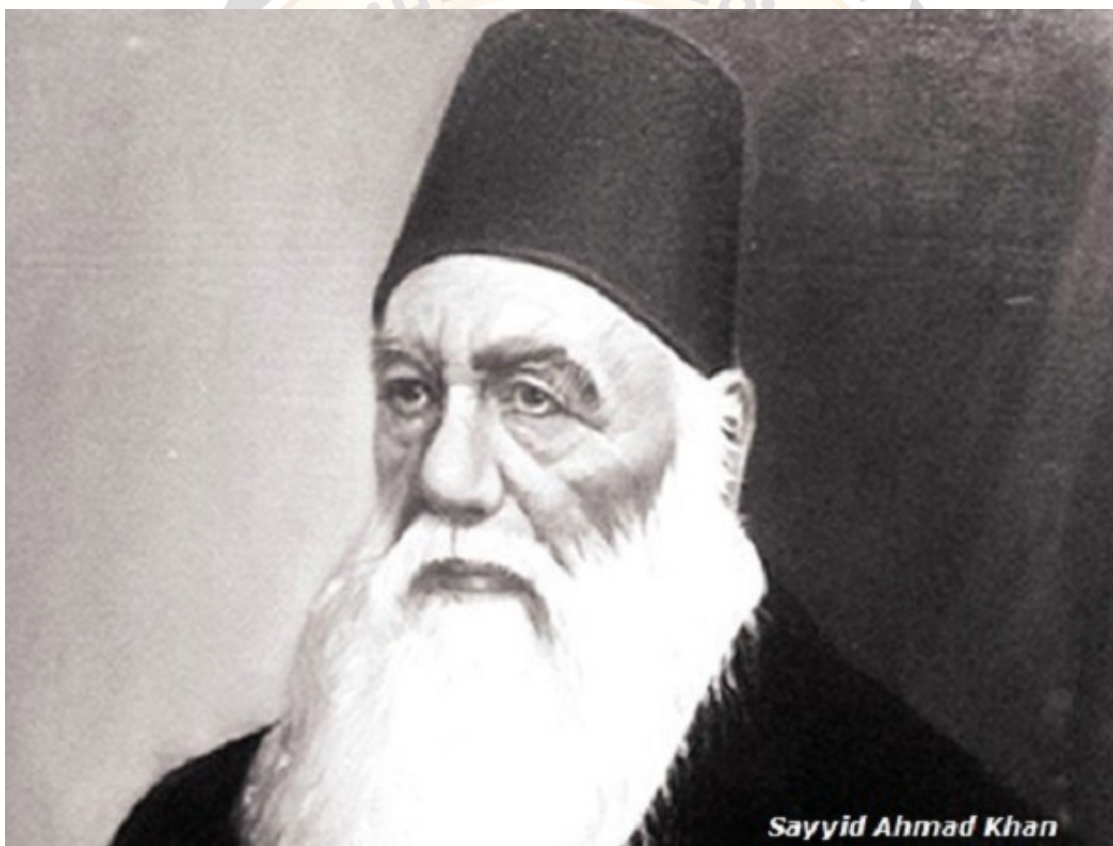
The Arya Samaj emphasized on the liberation of the Hindu society. Dayanand claimed that only Vedas were the repositories of true knowledge and the only religion was the religion of the Vedas. The principles of economics, politics, social sciences, humanities can be found in the Vedas. His clarion call "Go Back to the Vedas" created consciousness among the people. He rejected other scriptures and 'Puranas'. He strongly opposed idol worship, ritualism, practice of animal-sacrifice, the concept of polytheism, the idea of heaven and hell and fatalism.

The Arya Samaj simplified Hinduism and made Hindus conscious of their glorious heritage and superior value of Vedic knowledge. It said that the Hindus should not look towards Christianity, Islam or western culture for guidance.

Swami Dayanand was opposed to idolatry, ritual, and priesthood and particularly to the prevalent caste practices and popular Hinduism as preached by Brahmins. Some of Swami Dayanand's followers later started a network of schools and colleges in the country to impart education on western lines; Lala Hansraj played a leading part in this effort. On the other hand, in 1902, Swami Shradhananda started the Gurukul near Hardwar to propagate the most traditional ideals of education.

### SYED AHMAD KHAN AND THE ALIGARH MOVEMENT

The **Mohammedan Literary Society** was founded at Calcutta in 1863. This Society promoted discussion of religious, social, and political questions in the light of modern ideas and encouraged upper and middle class Muslims to take to western education.



The most important reformer among the Muslims was **Sayyid Ahmad Khan** (1817-1898). He was tremendously impressed by modern scientific thought and worked all his life to reconcile it with Islam. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, first of all, declared that the Quran alone was the authoritative work for Islam and all other Islamic writings were secondary.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan urged the people to develop a critical approach and freedom of thought. He said, "*so long as freedom of thought is not developed, there can be no civilized life.*"

He also warned against fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, and exclusiveness, and urged students and others to be broadminded and tolerant. A closed mind, he said, was the hallmark of social and intellectual backwardness. Therefore promotion of modern education remained his first task throughout his life. As an official, he founded schools in many towns and had many western books translated into Urdu. In 1875, Sayyid Ahmad Khan founded the **Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College** at Aligarh as a center for spreading western sciences and culture. Later, this College grew into the **Aligarh Muslim University**.



Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a great believer in religious toleration. He believed that all religions had a certain underlying unity, which could be called practical morality. Believing that a person's religion was his or her private affair, he roundly condemned any sign of religious bigotry in personal relations. He was also opposed to communal friction. He appealed to Hindus and Muslims to unite. Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote in favor of raising the women's status in society and advocated removal of purdah and spread of education among women. He also condemned the customs of polygamy and easy divorce. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was helped by a band of loyal followers who are collectively described as the **Aligarh School**.

## MUHAMMAD IQBAL

Muhammad Iqbal widely known as Allama Iqbal was a poet, philosopher and politician, as well as an academic, barrister and scholar in British India. Muhammad Iqbal (1876- 1938) also profoundly influenced by his poetry, the philosophical and religious outlook of the younger generation of Muslims as well as of Hindus. Iqbal was basically a humanist. In fact, he raised human action to the status of a prime virtue.



**Md. Iqbal**

However it is sad to note that during his later life he supported the two-nation theory. He is widely regarded as having inspired the Pakistan Movement. He is called the "Spiritual Father of Pakistan."

## RELIGIOUS REFORMS AMONG THE PARSIS

In 1851, the Rehnumai Mazdayasan Sabha or Religious Reform Association was started by Naoroji Furdonji, Dadabhai Naoroji, S.S. Bengalee, and others. Religious Reform Association campaigned against the entrenched orthodoxy in the religious field and initiated the modernization of Parsi social customs regarding the education of women, marriage, and the social position of women in general.

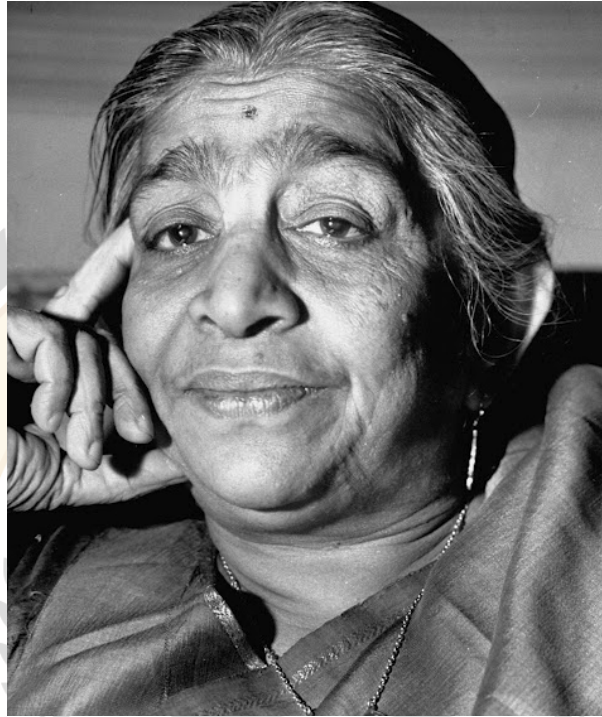
## RELIGIOUS REFORMS AMONG THE SIKHS

Religious reform among the Sikhs was begun at the end of the 19th century when the Khalsa College was started at Amritsar. In 1920, the Akali Movement rose in Punjab. The main aim of the Akalis was to purify the management of the gurudwaras or Sikh shrines.

These gurudwaras had been heavily endowed with land and money by devout Sikhs. But they had come to be managed autocratically by corrupt and selfish mahants. The Sikh masses led by the Akalis started in 1921 a powerful Satyagraha against the mahants and the Government which came to their aid. The Akalis soon forced the Government to pass a new Sikh Gurudwaras Act in 1922, which was later amended in 1925.

**EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN**

Based on the various religious practices and the personal laws, it was assumed that the status of women was inferior to that of men. After 1880s, when Dufferin hospitals, named after Lady Dufferin (wife of the Viceroy), were started, efforts were made to make modern medicine and child delivery techniques available to Indian Women. Sarojini Naidu, the famous poetess, became the President of the National Congress in 1925. In 1937, several women became ministers or parliamentary secretaries.



**Sarojini Naidu**

'All India Women's Conference founded in 1927. Women's struggle for equality took a big step forward after the independence. Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution (1950) guaranteed the complete equality of men and women. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 made the daughter an equal co-heir with the son. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 permitted dissolution of marriage on specific grounds. Monogamy has been made mandatory for men as well as women. The Constitution gives women equal right to work and to get employment in State agencies. The Directive Principles of the Constitution lay down the principle of equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

# UNIT-XVI

## THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

### THE PREDECESSORS

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was not a sudden event, or a historical accident. It was the culmination of a process of political awakening that had its beginnings in the 1860s and 1870s and took a major leap forward in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The year 1885 marked a turning point in this process, for that was the year the political Indians, the modern intellectuals interested in politics, who no longer saw themselves as spokesmen of narrow group interests, but as representatives of national interest vis-a-vis foreign rule, as a 'national party', saw their efforts bear fruit. The all-India nationalist body that they brought into being was to be the platform, the organizer, the headquarters, the symbol of the new national spirit and politics.

British officialdom, too, was not slow in reading the new messages that were being conveyed through the nationalist political activity leading to the founding of the Congress, and watched them with suspicion, and a sense of foreboding. As this political activity gathered force, the prospect of disloyalty, sedition and Irish-type agitations began to haunt the Government. The **Indian National Congress (INC)**, founded in December 1885, was the first organized expression of the Indian National Movement on an all-India scale. It had, however, many predecessors.

### Major Public Associations

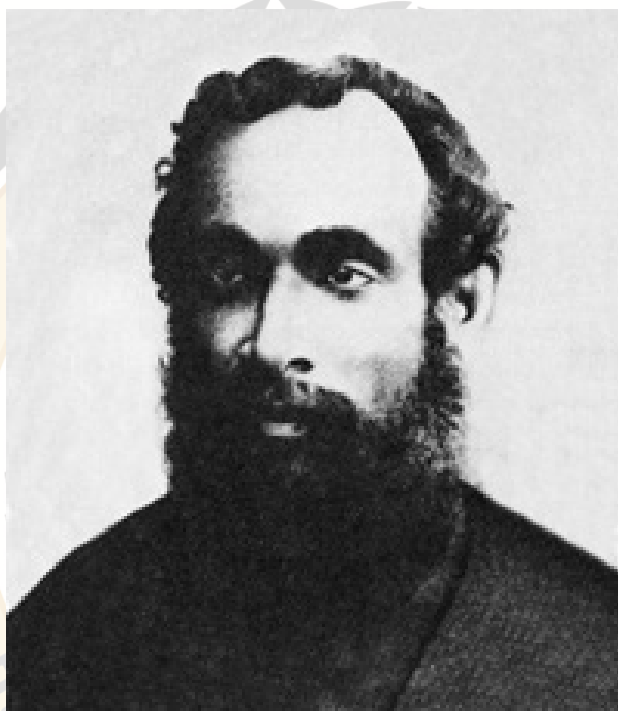
- Following are the important public associations, established before the Indian National Congress –
  - The **Landholders' Society** – founded in 1837, it was an association of the landlords of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Its purpose was to promote the class interests of the landlords.
  - The **Bengal British Indian Society** – founded in 1843, it was organized to protect and promote general public interests.
  - In 1851, the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British Indian Society merged to form the **British India Association**.
  - The **Madras Native Association** and the **Bombay Association** were established in 1852.
  - The **Scientific Society** founded by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, were established in different towns of the country.
- All the above-discussed associations were dominated by wealthy and aristocratic elements — called in those days' prominent persons and were provincial or local in character.
- The members of public associations worked for reform of administration, association of Indians with the administration, and spread of education, and sent long petitions, putting forward Indian demands, to the British Parliament.
- In 1866, **Dadabhai Naoroji** organized the **East India Association in London** to discuss the Indian question and to influence British public men to promote Indian welfare. Later he organized branches of the Association in prominent Indian cities.
- Born in 1825, Dadabhai Naoroji devoted his entire life to the national movement and soon came to be known as the '**Grand Old Man of India**.'



- Dadabhai Naoroji was the first economic thinker of India. In his writings on economics, he showed that the basic cause of India's poverty lay in the British exploitation of India and the drain of its wealth.
- Dadabhai was honored by being thrice elected president of the Indian National Congress.

### Surendranath Banerjea

- Surendranath Banerjea was a brilliant writer and orator. He was unjustly turned out of the Indian Civil Service as his superiors could not tolerate the presence of an independent-minded Indian in the ranks of this service.



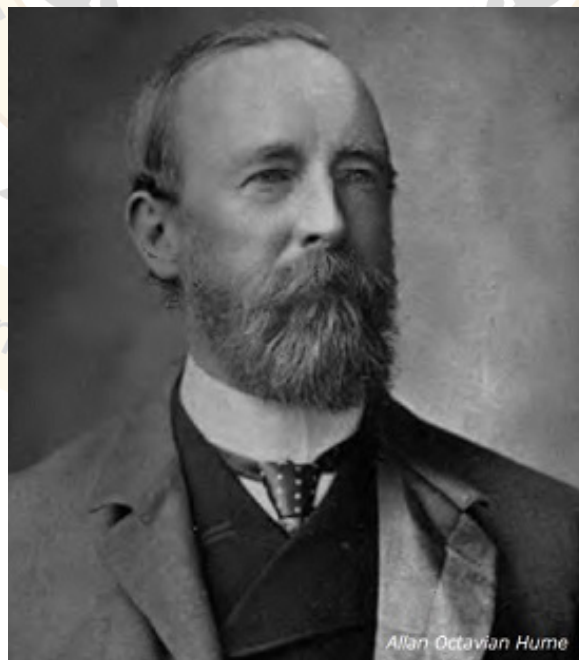
**Surendranath Banerjea**

- Banerjea began his public career in 1875 by delivering brilliant addresses on nationalist topics to the students of Calcutta.
- Led by Surendranath and Anandamohan Bose, the younger nationalists of Bengal founded the **Indian Association** in July 1876.
- The Indian Association set before itself the aims of creating a strong public opinion in the country on political questions and the unification of the Indian people on a common political program.
- In order to attract large numbers of people to its banner, the Indian Association fixed a low membership fee for the poorer classes.
- The first major issue that the Indian Association took up for agitation was the reform of the Civil Service regulations and the raising of the age limit for its examination.
- Surendranath Banerjea toured different parts of the country during 1877-78 in an effort to create an all-India public opinion on this question.
- The Indian Association also carried out agitation against the Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act and in favor of protection of the tenants from oppression by the reminders.

- During 1883-85, the Indian Association organized popular demonstrations of thousands of peasants to get the Rent Bill changed in favor of the tenants.
- The Indian Association agitated for better conditions of work for the workers in the English-owned tea plantations.
- Many branches of the Indian Association were opened in the towns and villages of Bengal and also in many towns outside Bengal.
- Some other Important Public Associations were –
  - ❖ **Justice Ranade** and others organized the **Poona Sarvajanik Sabha** in the 1870s.
  - ❖ The **Madras Mahajan Sabha** was started in 1881 and the **Bombay Presidency Association** in 1885.
  - ❖ The most important of the pre-Congress nationalist organizations was the **Indian Association of Calcutta**.
- The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha brought out a quarterly journal under the guidance of Justice Ranade. This journal became the intellectual guide of new India, particularly on economic questions.
- These organizations were mainly devoted to criticism of important administrative and legislative measures.

## THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

- **A. O. Hume**, a retired English Civil Servant along with prominent Indian leaders founded all-India organization namely the “Indian National Congress.”



- The first session of the Indian National Congress was held at Bombay in December 1885. It was presided over by **W. C. Bonnerjee** and attended by **72 delegates**.

## Objectives of the Indian National Congress

- The **aims** of the National Congress were declared to be –
  - Promotion of friendly relations among nationalist political workers residing in different parts of the country;
  - Development and consolidation of the feeling of national unity irrespective of caste, religion, or province;
  - Formulation of popular demands and their presentation before the Government; and
  - Training and organization of public opinion in the country.
- One of the main aims of Hume in helping to found the National Congress was to provide an outlet i.e. 'a **safety valve**'—to the increasing popular discontent against British rule.
- In 1879, Wasudeo Balwant Phadke, a clerk in the commissariat department, had gathered a band of **Ramoshi** peasants and started an armed uprising in Maharashtra. Though this crude and an ill-prepared attempt was easily crushed, it was a portent of events to come.
- Hume as well as other English officials and statesmen were afraid that the educated Indians might provide leadership to the masses and organize a powerful rebellion against the foreign government. As Hume put it: "*A safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces generated by our own action was urgently needed.*"
- Hume believed that the National Congress would provide a peaceful and constitutional outlet to the discontent among the educated Indians and would thus help to avoid the outbreak of a popular revolt.
- The National Congress represented the urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national organization to work for their political and economic advancement.
- In any case, the Indian leaders, who cooperated with Hume in starting this National Congress, were patriotic men of high character who willingly accepted Hume's help as they did not want to arouse official hostility towards their efforts at so early stage of political activity.
- Surendranath Banerjea and many other leaders of Bengal had not attended the first session of the National Congress as they were busy with the Second National Conference at Calcutta.
- In 1886, Surendranath Banerjea and other leaders of Bengal merged their forces with those of the National Congress whose second session met in Calcutta in December 1886 under the president-ship of Dadabhai Naoroji.
- From the Calcutta session, the National Congress became 'the whole country's Congress'. Its delegates, numbering 436, were elected by different local organizations and groups.
- The National Congress met every year in December, in a different part of the country.
- The number of its delegates soon increased to thousands. Its delegates consisted mostly of lawyers, journalists, traders, industrialists, teachers, and landlords.
- In 1890, **Kadambini Ganguli**, the first woman graduate of Calcutta University addressed the Congress session.
- This was symbolic of the fact that India's straggle for freedom would raise Indian women from the degraded position to which they had been reduced for centuries past.



- Some of the great presidents of the National Congress during its early years were Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozeshah Mehta, P. Ananda Charlu, Surendranath Banerjea, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Ananda Mohan Bose, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

## REFORMS AFTER THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

- Reforms after the Indian National Congress can be studied under the following heads –
  - ❖ Constitutional Reforms
  - ❖ Economic Reforms
  - ❖ Administrative Reforms
  - ❖ Methods of Political Work

### Constitutional Reforms

- From 1885 to 1892, the nationalist leaders demanded the expansion and reform of the Legislative Councils. They demanded membership of the councils for elected representatives of the people and also an increase in the powers of the councils.
- The British Government was forced by their agitation to pass the Indian Councils Act of 1892. By this Act, the number of members of the Imperial Legislative Council as well as of the provincial councils was increased.
- Some of the members of Councils could be elected indirectly by Indians, but the officials' majority remained as it is.
- The Councils were also given the right to discuss the annual budgets though they could not vote on them.
- The nationalists were totally dissatisfied with the Act of 1892 and declared it to be a hoax. They demanded a larger share for Indians in the councils as also wider powers for them. In particular, they demanded Indian control over the public purse and raised the slogan that had earlier become the national cry of the American people during their War of Independence: '*No taxation without representation.*'
- By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the nationalist leaders advanced further and put forward the claim for *Swarajya* or self-government within the British Empire on the model of self-governing colonies like Australia and Canada.
- This demand was made from the Congress platform by Gokhale in 1905 and by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906.

### Economic Reforms

- Dadabhai Naoroji declared as early as 1881 that British rule was "*an everlasting, increasing, and every day increasing foreign invasion*" that was "*utterly, though gradually, destroying the country.*"
- The nationalists blamed the British for the destruction of India's indigenous Industries. The chief remedy they suggested for the removal of India's poverty was the rapid development of modern industries.

- The Indian people made a great effort to popularize the idea of *swadeshi* or the use of Indian goods and the boycott of British goods as a means of promoting Indian industries.
- Students in Poona and in other towns of Maharashtra publicly burnt foreign clothes in 1896 as part of the larger *swadeshi* campaign.
- Indians agitated for improvement in the work conditions of the plantation laborers.
- The nationalists declared high taxation to be one of the causes of India's poverty and demanded abolition of the salt tax and reduction of land revenue.
- The nationalists condemned the high military expenditure of the Government of India and demanded its reduction.

### Administrative Reforms

- The most important administrative reform the Indians desired at this time was Indianisation of the higher grades of administrative services. They put forward this demand on economic, political, and moral grounds.
- Economically, the European monopoly of the higher services was harmful on two grounds –
  - Europeans were paid at very high rates and this made Indian administration very costly—Indians of similar qualifications could be employed on lower salaries; and
  - Europeans sent out of India a large part of their salaries and their pensions were paid in England. This added to the drain of wealth from India.
- Politically, the nationalists hoped that the Indianisation of these (civil) services would make the administration more responsive to Indian needs and hence, they –
  - Demanded separation of the judiciary from executive powers;
  - Opposed the curtailment of the powers of the juries;
  - Opposed the official policy of disarming the people;
  - Asked the government to trust the people and grant them the right to bear arms and thus defend themselves and their country in times of need;
  - Urged the government to undertake and develop welfare activities of the state;
  - Demanded greater facilities for technical and higher education;
  - Urged the development of agricultural banks to save the peasant from the clutches of the money-lender; and
  - Demanded extension of medical and health facilities and improvement of the police system to make it honest, efficient, and popular.

### Methods of Political Work

- The Indian national movement up to 1905 was dominated by leaders who have often been described as moderate nationalists or **Moderates**.
- The political methods of the Moderates can be summed up briefly as constitutional agitation within the four walls of the law and slow orderly political progress.

- Moderates believed that if public opinion was created and organized and popular demands presented to the authorities through petitions, meetings, resolutions, and speeches, the authorities would concede these demands gradually and step by step.
- In 1889, the British Committee started a journal called '*India*'.
- Dadabhai Naoroji spent a major part of his life and income in England in popularizing India's case among England's people.
- Moderates genuinely believed that the continuation of India's political connection with Britain was in the interests of India at that stage of history. They, therefore, planned not to expel the British but to transform British rule to approximate to national rule.
- Later, when Moderates took note of the evils of British rule and the failure of the government to accept nationalist demands for reform, many of them stopped talking of loyalty to British rule and started demanding self government for India.
- From the beginning, many nationalist leaders had no faith in the good intentions of the British. They believed in depending on political action by, and the strength of the Indian people themselves.
- Tilak and numerous other leaders and newspaper editors represented the trend, that later came to be known as **Extremists** or **radical nationalists**.

### Attitude of the Government

- The British authorities were from the beginning hostile to the rising nationalist movement and had become suspicious of the National Congress.
- The British officials branded the nationalist leaders as 'disloyal *babus*', 'seditious *brahmins*' and 'violent *villains*'.
- As the British became apparent that the National Congress would not become a tool in the hands of the authorities, but rather it was gradually becoming a focus of Indian nationalism. British officials now began to criticize and condemn the National Congress and other Rationalist spokesmen openly.
- In 1887, Dufferin attacked the National Congress in a public speech and ridiculed it as representing only 'a microscopic minority of the people.'
- In 1900; Lord Curzon announced to the Secretary of State, that "*the Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions, while in India, is to assist it to a peaceful demise*".
- The British authorities also pushed further the policy of 'divide and rule.' They encouraged Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Raja Shiva Prasad of Benaras, and other pro-British individuals to start an anti-Congress movement.
- Some critics say that the nationalist movement and the National Congress did not achieve much success in their early phase; however, it established the political truth that India must be ruled in the interests of the Indians and made the issue of nationalism a dominant one in Indian life.



## UNIT-XVII

# THE FIGHT TO SECURE PRESS FREEDOM

### PRESS-A TOOL TO BUILD NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Almost from the beginning of the 19th century, politically conscious Indians had been attracted to modern civil rights, especially the freedom of the Press. As early as 1824, Raja Rammohan Roy had protested against a regulation restricting the freedom of the Press. In a memorandum to the Supreme Court, he had said that every good ruler 'will be anxious to afford every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestricted liberty of publication is the only effectual means that can be employed.'

In the period from 1870 to 1918, the national movement had not yet resorted to mass agitation through thousands of small and large maidan meetings, nor did political work consist of the active mobilization of people in mass struggles. The main political task still was that of politicization, political propaganda and education and formation and propagation of nationalist ideology. The Press was the chief instrument for carrying out this task, that is, for arousing, training, mobilizing and consolidating nationalist public opinion.

### IMPORTANT ENDEAVOURS IN INDIAN PRESS

Even the work of the National Congress was accomplished during these years largely through the Press. The Congress had no organization of its own for carrying on political work. Its resolutions and proceedings had to be propagated through newspapers. Interestingly, nearly one-third of the founding fathers of the Congress in 1885 were journalists. Powerful newspapers emerged during these years under distinguished and fearless journalists. These were the Hindu and Swadesamitran under the editorship of G. Subramaniya Iyer, Kesari and Mahratta under B.G. Tilak, Bengalee under Surendranath Banerjea, Amrita Bazar Patrika under Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh, Sudhakar under G.K. Gokhale, Indian Mirror under N.N. Sen, Voice of India under Dadabhai Naoroji, Hindustani and Advocate under G.P. Varma and Tribune and Akhbar-i-Am in Punjab, Indu Prakash, Dnyan Prakash, Kal and Gujarati in Bombay, and Som Prakash, Banganivasi, and Sadharani in Bengal. In fact, there hardly existed a major political leader in India who did not possess a newspaper or was not writing for one in some capacity or the other.

### THE IMPACT OF THE PRESS

The influence of the Press extended far beyond its literate subscribers. Nor was it confined to cities and large towns. A newspaper would reach remote villages and would then be read by a reader to tens of others. Gradually library movements sprung up all over the country. A local 'library' would be organized around a single newspaper. A table, a bench or two or a charpoy would constitute the capital equipment. Every piece of news or editorial comment would be read or heard and thoroughly discussed. The newspaper not only became the political educator; reading or discussing it became a form of political participation.

Newspapers were not in those days business enterprises, nor were the editors and journalists professionals. Newspapers were published as a national or public service. They were often financed as objects of philanthropy. To be a journalist was often to be a political worker and an agitator at considerable self-sacrifice. It was, of course, not very expensive to start a newspaper, though the editor had usually to live at a semi starvation level or earn his livelihood through a supplementary source. The Amrita Bazar Patrika was started in 1868 with printing equipment purchased for Rs. 32. Similarly, Surendranath Banerjea purchased the goodwill of the Bengalee in 1879 for Rs. 10 and the press for another Rs. 1600.

Nearly all the major political controversies of the day were conducted through the Press. It also played the institutional role of opposition to the Government. Almost every act and every policy of the Government was subjected to sharp criticism, in many cases with great care and vast learning backing it up. 'Oppose, oppose, oppose' was the motto of the Indian Press. Regarding the role of the nationalist Press, Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, wrote as early as March 1886: 'Day after day, hundreds of Sharp-witted babus pour forth their indignation against their English Oppressors in very pungent and effective diatribe.' And again in May: *'In this way there can be no doubt there is generated in the minds of those who read these papers... a sincere conviction that we are all enemies of mankind in general and of India in particular.'*

## THE STRATEGEMS

To arouse political consciousness, to inculcate nationalism, to expose colonial rule, to 'preach disloyalty' was no easy task, for there had existed since 1870 Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code according to which 'whoever attempts to excite feelings of disaffection to the Government established by law in British India' was to be punished with transportation for life or for any term or with imprisonment upto three years. This clause was, moreover, later supplemented with even more strident measures.

Indian journalists adopted several clever strategems and evolved a distinctive style of writing to remain outside the reach of the law. Since Section 124A excluded writings of persons whose loyalty to the Government was undoubted, they invariably prefaced their vitriolic writing with effusive sentiments of loyalty to the Government and the Queen. Another strategem was to publish anti-imperialist extracts from London-based socialist and Irish newspapers or letters from radical British citizens knowing that the Indian Government could not discriminate against Indians by taking action against them without touching the offending Britishers. Sometimes the extract from the British newspaper would be taken without quotation marks and acknowledgement of the source, thus teasing the British-Indian bureaucracy into contemplating or taking action which would have to be given up once the real source of the comment became known. For example, a sympathetic treatment of the Russian terrorist activities against Tsarism would be published in such a way that the reader would immediately draw a parallel between the Indian Government and the Revolutionary Terrorists of Bengal and Maharashtra. The officials would later discover that it was an extract from the Times, London, or some such other British newspaper.

Often the radical expose would take the form of advice and warning to the Government as if from a well-wisher, as if the writer's main purpose was to save the authorities from their own follies! B.G. Tilak and Motilal Ghosh were experts at this form of writing. Some of the more daring writers took recourse to irony, sarcasm, banter, mock-seriousness and burlesque.

In all cases, nationalist journalists, especially of Indian language newspapers, had a difficult task to perform, for they had to combine simplicity with subtlety — simplicity was needed to educate a semi-literate public, subtlety to convey the true meaning without falling foul of the law. They performed the task brilliantly, often creatively developing the languages in which they were willing, including, surprisingly enough, the English language. The national movement from the beginning zealously defended the freedom of the Press whenever the Government attacked it or tried to curtail it. In fact, the struggle for the freedom of the Press became an integral part of the struggle for freedom.

## THE ATTACK ON INDIAN PRESS

Indian newspapers began to find their feet in the 1870s. They became highly critical of Lord Lytton's administration, especially regarding its inhuman approach towards the victims of the famine of 1876-77. As a result the Government decided to make a sudden strike at the Indian language newspapers, since they reached beyond the middle class readership. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, directed only against Indian language newspapers, was conceived in great secrecy and passed at a single sitting of the Imperial Legislative Council. The Act provided for the confiscation of the printing press, paper and other materials of a newspaper if the Government believed that it was publishing seditious materials and had flouted an official warning.

Indian nationalist opinion firmly opposed the Act. The first great demonstration on an issue of public importance was organized in Calcutta on this question when a large meeting was held in the Town Hall. Various public bodies and the Press also campaigned against the Act. Consequently, it was repealed in 1881 by Lord Ripon. The manner in which the Indian newspapers cleverly fought such measures was brought out by a very amusing and dramatic incident. The Act was in particular aimed at the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* which came out at the time in both Bengali and English.

The objective was to take summary action against it. But when the officials woke up the morning after the Act was passed, they discovered to their dismay that the *Patrika* had foxed them; overnight, the editors had converted it into an English newspaper!

Another remarkable journalistic coup occurred in 1905. Delivering the Convocation Address at Calcutta University, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy said that 'the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception. Undoubtedly, truth took a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honored in the East.' The insinuation was that the British had taught this high Conception of truth to Indians. Next day, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* came out with this speech on the front page along with a box reproducing an extract from Curzon's book *Problems of the East* in which he had taken credit for lying while a visit to Korea. He had written that he had told the President of the Korean Foreign Office that he was forty when he was actually thirty three because he had been told that in the East respect went with age. He has ascribed his youthful appearance to the salubrious climate of Korea! Curzon had also recorded his reply to the President's question whether he was a near relation of Queen Victoria as follows:

***"No," I replied, "I am not." But observing the look of disgust that passed over his countenance, I was fain to add, "I am, however, as yet an unmarried man," with which unscrupulous suggestion I completely regained the old gentleman's favour.'***

The whole of Bengal had a hearty laugh at the discomfiture of the strait-laced Viceroy, who had not hesitated to insult an entire people and who was fond of delivering homilies to Indians. *The Weekly Times* of London also enjoyed the episode. Lord Curzon's 'admiration for truth,' it wrote, 'was perhaps acquired later on in life, under his wife's management. It is pre-eminently a Yankee quality.' (Curzon's wife was an American heiress).

Surenranath Banerjea, one of the founding fathers of the Indian national movement, was the first Indian to go to jail in performance of his duty as a journalist. A dispute concerning a family idol, a *saligram*, had come up before Justice Norris of the Calcutta High Court. To decide the age of the idol, Norris ordered it to be brought to the Court and pronounced that it could not be a hundred years old. This action deeply hurt the sentiments of the Bengali Hindus. Banerjea wrote an angry editorial in the *Bengalee* of 2 April 1883. Comparing Norris with the notorious Jeffreys and Seroggs (British judges in the 17th century, notorious for infamous conduct as judges), he said that Norris had done enough **'to show how unworthy he is of his high office.'** Banerjea suggested that **'some public steps should be taken to put a quietus to the wild eccentricities of this young and raw Dispenser of Justice'**

Immediately, the High Court hauled him up for contempt of court before a bench of five judges, four of them Europeans. With the Indian judge, Romesh Chandra Mitra, dissenting, the bench convicted and sentenced him to two months imprisonment. Popular reaction was immediate and angry. There was a spontaneous *hartal* in the Indian part of Calcutta. Students demonstrated outside the courts smashing windows and pelting the police with stones. One of the rowdy young men was Asutosh Mukherjea who later gained fame as a distinguished Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University. Demonstrations were held all over Calcutta and in many other towns of Bengal as also in Lahore, Amritsar, Agra, Faizabad, Poona and other cities. Calcutta witnessed for the first time several largely attended open-air meetings.

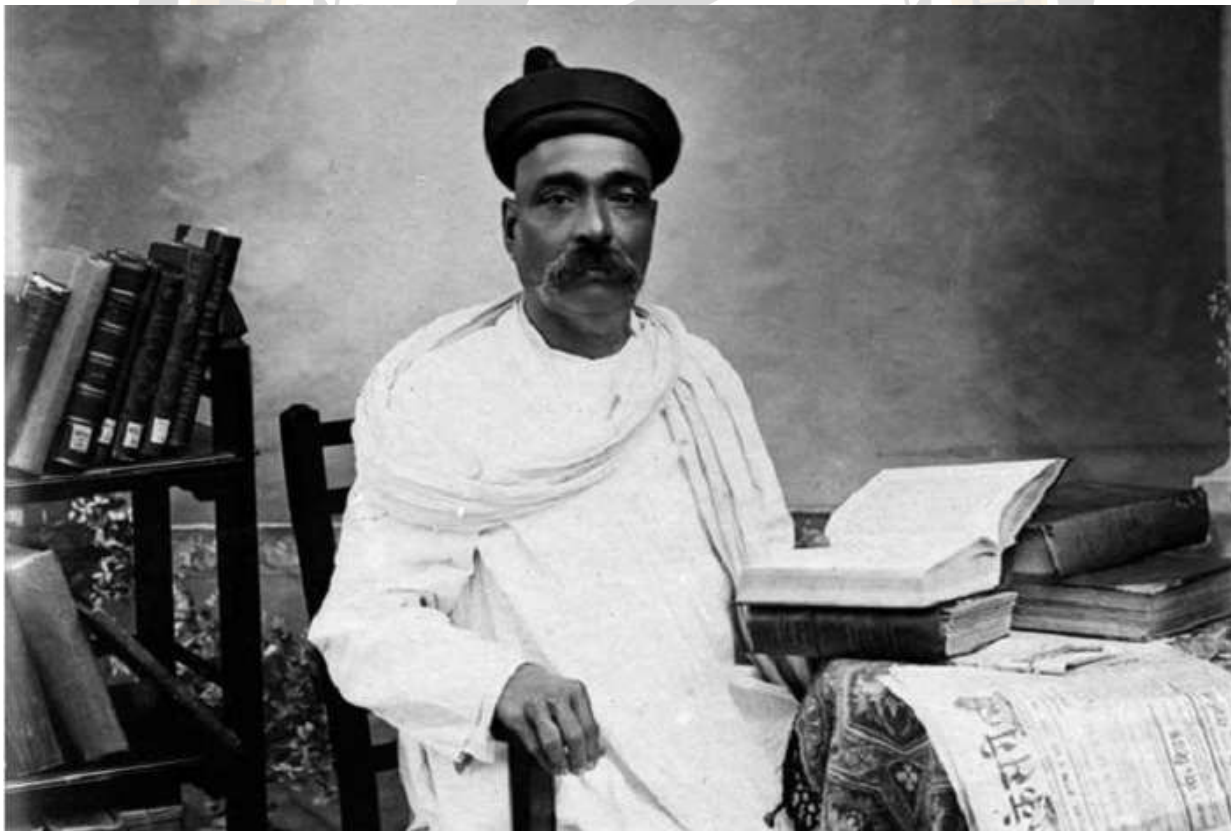


**BALGANGADHAR TILAK AND THE NATIONALIST PRESS**

But the man who is most frequently associated with the struggle for the freedom of the Press during the nationalist movement is Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the outstanding leader of militant nationalism. Born in 1856, Tilak devoted his entire life to the service of his country. In 1881, along with G.G. Agarkar, he founded the newspaper *Kesari* (in Marathi) and *Mahratta* (in English). In 1888, he took over the two papers and used their columns to spread discontent against British rule and to preach national resistance to it. Tilak was a fiery and courageous journalist whose style was simple and direct and yet highly readable.

In 1893, he started the practice of using the traditional religious Ganapati festival to propagate nationalist ideas through patriotic songs and speeches. In 1896, he started the Shivaji festival to stimulate nationalism among young Maharashtrians.

In the same year, he organized an all-Maharashtra campaign for the boycott of foreign cloth in protest against the imposition of the excise duty on cotton. He was, perhaps the first among the national leaders to grasp the important role that the lower middle classes, peasants, artisans and workers could play in the national movement and, therefore, he saw the necessity of bringing them into the Congress fold. Criticizing the Congress for ignoring the peasant, he wrote in the *Kesari* in early 1897: 'The country's emancipation can only be achieved by removing the clouds of lethargy and indifference which have been hanging over the peasant, who is the soul of India. We must remove these clouds, and for that we must completely identify ourselves with the peasant --- we must feel that he is ours and we are his.' Only when this is done would 'the Government realize that to despise the Congress is to despise the Indian Nation. Then only will the efforts of the Congress leaders be crowned with success.'



**LOKMANYA BALGANGADHAR TILAK**

In pursuance of this objective, he initiated a no-tax Campaign in Maharashtra during 1896-97 with the help of the young workers of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha. Referring to the official famine code whose copies he got printed in Marathi and distributed by the thousand, he asked the famine-stricken peasants of Maharashtra to withhold payment of land revenue if their crops had failed.

In 1897, plague broke out in Poona and the Government had to undertake severe measures of segregation and house searches. Unlike many other leaders, Tilak stayed in Poona, supported the Government and organized his own measures against the plague. But he also criticized the harsh and heartless manner in which the officials dealt with the plague-stricken people. Popular resentment against the official plague measures resulted in the assassination of Rand, the Chairman of the Plague Committee in Poona, and Lt. Ayerst by the Chaphekar brothers on 27 June 1898.

The anti-plague measures weren't the only practices that made the people irate. Since 1894, anger had been rising against the Government because of its tariff, currency and famine policy. A militant trend was rapidly growing among the nationalists and there were hostile comments in the Press. The Government was determined to check this trend and teach a lesson to the Press. Tilak was by now well-known in Maharashtra, both as a militant nationalist and as a hostile and effective journalist. The Government was looking for an opportunity to make an example of him. The Rand murder gave them the opportunity. The British owned Press and the bureaucracy were quick to portray the Rand murder as a conspiracy by the Poona Brahmins led by Tilak.

The Government investigated the possibility of directly involving Tilak in Rand's assassination. But no proof could be found.

Moreover, Tilak had condemned the assassination describing it as the horrible work of a fanatic, though he would not stop criticizing the Government, asserting that it was a basic function of the Press to bring to light the unjust state of affairs and to teach people how to defend their rights. And so, the Government decided to arrest him under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code on the charge of sedition, that is, spreading disaffection and hatred against the Government.

Tilak was arrested on 27 July 1899 and tried before Justice Strachey and a jury of six Europeans and three Indians. The charge was based on the publication in the *Kesari* of 15 June of a poem titled 'Shivaji's Utterances' read out by a young man at the Shivaji Festival and on a speech Tilak had delivered at the Festival in defence of Shivaji's killings of Afzal Khan.

In 'Shivaji's Utterances,' the poet had shown Shivaji awakening in the present and telling his countrymen: 'Alas! Alas! I now see with my own eyes the ruin of my country... Foreigners are dragging out Lakshmi violently by the hand (*kar* in Marathi which also means taxes) and by persecution... The wicked Akabaya (misfortune personified) stalks with famine through the whole country... How have all these kings (leaders) become quite effeminate like helpless figures on the chessboard?'

Tilak's defence of Shivaji's killing of Afzal Khan was portrayed by the prosecution as an incitement to kill British officials. The overall accusation was that Tilak propagated the views in his newspaper, that the British had no right to stay in India and any and all means could be used to get rid of them. Looking back, it is clear that the accusation was not wrong. But the days when, under Gandhiji's guidance, freedom fighters would refuse to defend themselves and openly proclaim their sedition were still far off. The politics of sacrifice and open defiance of authority were still at an early stage. It was still necessary to claim that anti-colonial activities were being conducted within the limits of the law. And so Tilak denied the official charges and declared that he had no intention of preaching disaffection against alien rule. Within this 'old' style of facing the rulers, Tilak set a high example of boldness and sacrifice. He was aware that he was initiating a new kind of politics which must gain the confidence and faith of the people by the example of a new type of leader, while carefully avoiding premature radicalism which would invite repression by the Government and lead to the cowering down of the people and, consequently, the isolation of the leaders from the people.

Pressure was brought upon Tilak by some friends to withdraw his remarks and apologise. Tilak's reply was: My position (as a leader) amongst the people entirely depends upon my character... Their (Government's) object is to humiliate the Poona leaders, and I think in me they will not find a "kutcha" (weak) reed... Then you must remember beyond a certain stage we are all servants of the people. You will be

betraying and disappointing them if you show a lamentable Want of courage at a critical time.' Judge Strachey's partisan summing up to the jury was to gain notoriety in legal circles, for he defined disaffection as 'simply the absence of affection' which amounted to the presence of hatred, enmity, disloyalty and every other form of ill-will towards the Government! The jury gave a 6 to 3 verdict holding Tilak guilty, the three dissenters being its Indian members. The Judge passed a barbarous sentence of rigorous imprisonment for eighteen months, and this when Tilak was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council! Simultaneously several other editors of Bombay Presidency were tried and given similar harsh sentences.

Tilak's imprisonment led to widespread protests all over the country. Nationalist newspapers and political associations, including those run by Tilak's critics like the Moderates, organized a countrywide movement against this attack on civil liberties and the fiefdom of the Press. Many newspapers came out with black borders on the front page. Many published special supplements hailing Tilak as a martyr in the battle for the freedom of the Press. Addressing Indian residents in London, Dadabhai Naoroji accused the Government of initiating Russian (Tsarist) methods of administration and said that gagging the Press was simply suicidal. Overnight Tilak became a popular all-India leader and the title of Lokamanya (respected and honored by the people) was given to him. He became a hero, a living symbol of the new spirit of self-sacrifice a new leader who preached with his deeds. When at the Indian National Congress session at Amraoti in December 1897, Surendranath Banerjea made a touching reference to Tilak and said that 'a whole nation is in tears,' the entire audience stood up and enthusiastically cheered.

In 1898, the Government amended Section 124A and added a new Section 153A to the penal code, making it a criminal offence for anyone to attempt 'to bring into contempt' the Government of India or to create hatred among different classes, that is vis-a-vis Englishmen in India. This once again led to nation-wide protest.

## THE IMPACT OF SWADESHI MOVEMENT ON THE INDIAN PRESS

The Swadeshi and Boycott Movement led to a new wave of repression in the country. The people once again felt angry and frustrated. This frustration led the youth of Bengal to take to the path of individual terrorism. Several cases of bomb attacks on officials Occurred in the beginning of 1908. The Government felt unnerved. Once again newspapers became a major target Fresh laws for Controlling the Press were enacted, prosecutions against a large number of newspapers and their editors were launched atmosphere it was inevitable that the Government's attention would turn towards Lokamanya Tilak, the mainstay of the Boycott movement and militant politics outside Bengal.

Tilak wrote a series of articles on the arrival of the 'Bomb' on the Indian scene. He condemned the use of violence and individual killings he described Nihilism as 'this Poisonous tree' — but, simultaneously, he held the Government responsible for suppressing criticism and dissent and the urge of the people for greater freedom. In such an atmosphere, he said 'violence, however deplorable, became inevitable.' As he wrote in one of his articles: 'When the official class begins to overawe the people without any reason and when an endeavour is made to produce despondency among the people by unduly frightening them, then the sound of the bomb is spontaneously produced to impart to the authorities the true knowledge that the people have reached a higher stage than the vapid one in which they pay implicit regard to such an illiberal policy of repression.'

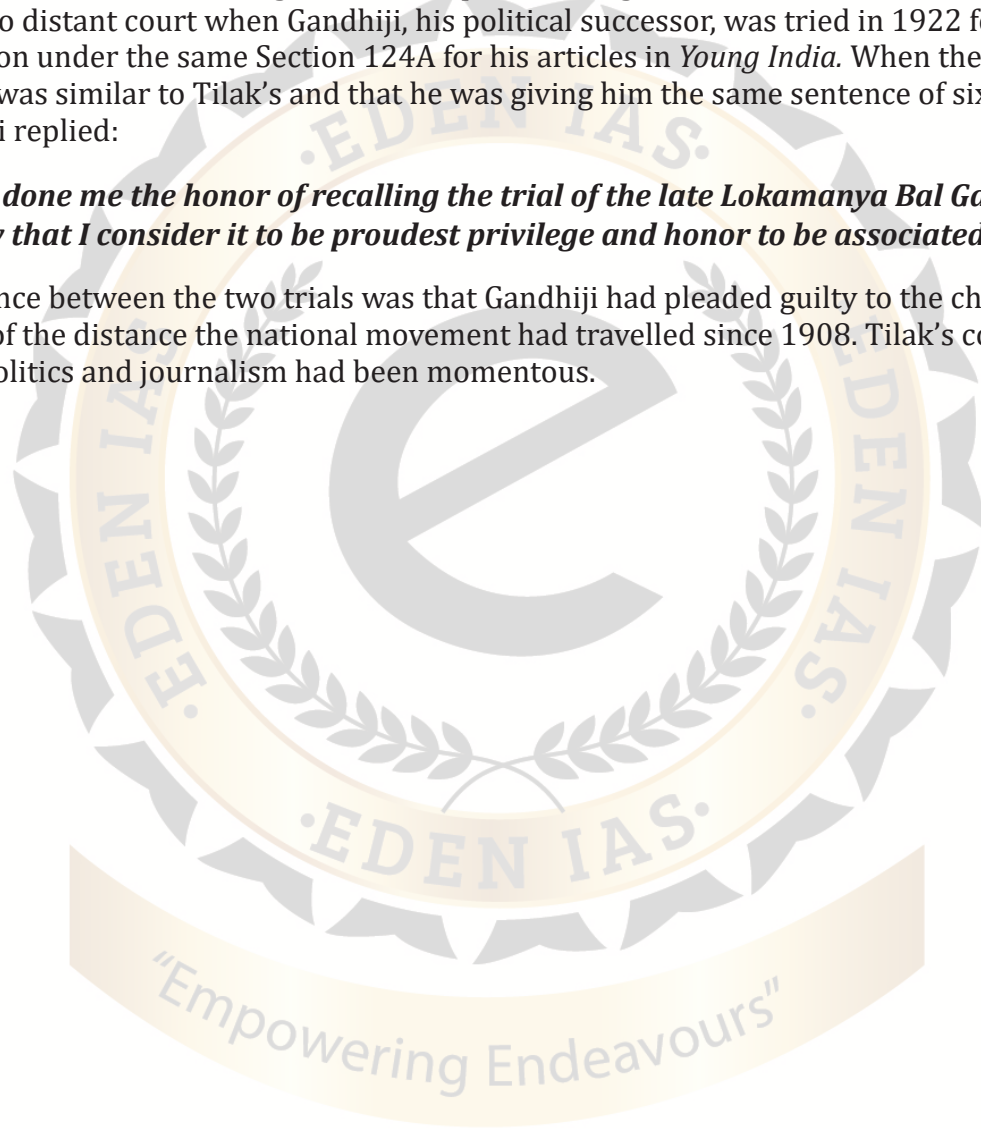
Once again, on 24 June 1908, Tilak was arrested and tried on the charge of sedition for having published these articles. Once again Tilak pleaded not guilty and behaved with exemplary courage. A few days before his arrest, a friendly police officer warned him of the coming event and asked Tilak to take precautionary steps. Tilak laughed and said: The Government has converted the entire nation into a prison and we are all prisoners. Going to prison only means that from a big cell one is confined to a smaller one." In the court, Tilak posed the basic question: "Tilak or no Tilak is not the question. The question is, do you really intend as guardians of the liberty of the Press to allow as much liberty here in India as is enjoyed by the people of England?"



Once again the jury returned a verdict of guilty with only the two Indian members opposing the verdict. Tilak's reply was: 'There are higher powers that rule the destiny of men and nations; and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my sufferings than by my remaining free.' Justice Davar awarded him the sentence of six years' transportation and after some time the Lokamanya was sent to a prison in Mandalay in Burma. The public reaction was massive. Newspapers proclaimed that they would defend the freedom of the Press by following Tilak's example. All markets in Bombay city were closed on 22 July, the day his was announced, and remained closed for a week. The Workers of all the textile mills and railway workshops went on strike for six days. Efforts to force them to go back to work led to a battle between them and the Police. The army was called out and at the end of the battle sixteen workers lay dead in the streets with nearly fifty others seriously injured. Lenin hailed this as the entrance of the Indian working class on the political stage.' Echoes of Tilak's trial were to be heard in another not-so distant court when Gandhiji, his political successor, was tried in 1922 for the same offence of sedition under the same Section 124A for his articles in *Young India*. When the Judge told him that his offence was similar to Tilak's and that he was giving him the same sentence of six years' imprisonment Gandhiji replied:

***'Since you have done me the honor of recalling the trial of the late Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, I just want to say that I consider it to be proudest privilege and honor to be associated with his name.'***

The only difference between the two trials was that Gandhiji had pleaded guilty to the charges. This was also a measure of the distance the national movement had travelled since 1908. Tilak's contribution to this change in politics and journalism had been momentous.



## UNIT-XVIII

# THE TUSSLE IN THE LEGISLATURES

### BRITISH LEGISLATIVE PLATFORMS AND LEGISLATIVE RIGHTS

Legislative Councils in India had no real official power till 1920. Yet, work done in them by the nationalists helped the growth of the national movement.

The Indian Councils Act of 1861 enlarged the Governor-General's Executive Council for the purpose of making laws. The Governor-General could now add from six to twelve members to the Executive Council. At least half of these nominations had to be non-officials, Indian or British. This council came to be known as the Imperial Legislative Council. It possessed no powers at all.

It could not discuss the budget or a financial measure or any other important bill without the previous approval of the Government. It could not discuss the actions of the administration. It could not, therefore, be seen as some kind of parliament, even of the most elementary kind. As if to underline this fact, the Council met, on an average, for only twenty-five days in a year till 1892.

The Government of India remained, as before 1858, an alien despot. Nor was this accidental. While moving the Indian Councils Bill of 1861, the Secretary of State for India, Charles Wood, said: All experience reaches us that where a dominant race rules another, the mildest form of Government is despotism.' A year later he wrote to Elgin, the Viceroy, that the only government suitable for such a state of things as exists in India a despotism controlled from home." This 'despotism controlled from home' was to remain the fundamental feature of the Government of India till 15 August 1947.

What was the role of Indian members in this Legislative Council? The Government had decided to add them in order to represent Indian views, for many British officials and statesmen had come to believe that one reason for the Revolt of 1857 was that Indian views were not known to the rulers. But, in practice, the Council did not serve even this purpose. Indian members were few in number — in thirty years, from 1862 to 1892, only forty-five Indians were nominated to it. Moreover, the Government invariably chose rulers of princely states or their employees, big zamindars, big merchants or retired high government officials as Indian members. Only a handful of political figures and independent intellectuals such as Syed Ahmed Khan (1878-82), Kristodas Pal (1883), V.N. Mandlik (1884-87), K.L. Nulkar (1890-91) and Rash Behari Ghosh (1892) were nominated. The overwhelming majority of Indian nominees did not represent the Indian people or emerging nationalist opinion. It was, therefore, not surprising that they completely toed the official line. There is the interesting story of Raja Dig Vijay Singh of Balarampur — nominated twice to the Council — who did not know a word of English. When asked by a relative how he voted one way or the other, he replied that he kept looking at the Viceroy and when the Viceroy raised his hand he did so too and when he lowered it he did the same!

The voting record of Indian nominees on the Council was poor. When the Vernacular Press Bill came up before the Council, only one Indian member, Maharaja Jotendra Mohan Tagore, the leader of the zamindari-dominated British Indian Association was present. He voted for it. In 1885, the two spokesmen of the zamindars in the Council helped emasculate the pro-tenant character of the Bengal Tenancy Bill at a time when nationalist leaders like Surendranath Banerjee were agitating to make it more pro-tenant. In 1882, Jotendra Mohan Tagore and Durga Charan Laha, the representative of Calcutta's big merchants, opposed the reduction of the salt tax and recommended the reduction of the licence tax on merchants and professionals instead. The nationalists were demanding the opposite. In 1888, Peary Mohan Mukherjee and Dinshaw Petit, representatives of the big zamindars and big merchants respectively, supported the enhancement of the salt tax along with the non-official British members representing British business in India.

By this time nationalists were quite active in opposing the salt tax and reacted strongly to this support. In the newspapers and from the Congress platform they described Mukherjea and Petit as 'gilded shams' and magnificent non-entities.' They cited their voting behavior as proof of the nationalist contention that the existing Legislative Councils were unrepresentative of Indian opinion. Madan Mohan Malaviya said at the National Congress session of 1890: 'We would much rather that there were no nonofficial members at all on the Councils than that there should be members who are not in the least in touch with people and who...betray a cruel want of sympathy with them' Describing Mukherjea and Petit as 'these big honourable gentlemen, enjoying private incomes and drawing huge salaries,' he asked rhetorically: 'Do you think, gentlemen, such members would be appointed to the Council if the people were allowed any voice in their selection?' The audience shouted 'No, no, never.'

However, despite the early nationalists believing that India should eventually become self-governing, they moved very cautiously in putting forward political demands regarding the structure of the state, for they were afraid of the Government declaring their activities seditious and disloyal and suppressing them. Till 1892, their demand was limited to the expansion and reform of the Legislative Councils. They demanded wider participation in them by a larger number of elected Indian members as also wider powers for the Councils and an increase in the powers of the members to 'discuss and deal with' the budget and to question and criticize the day-to-day administration.

### THE NATIONALIST AGITATION IN THE LEGISLATURES

The nationalist agitation forced the Government to make some changes in legislative functioning by the Indian Councils Act of 1892. The number of additional members of the Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils was increased from the previous six to ten to ten to sixteen. A few of these members could be elected indirectly through municipal committees, district boards, etc., but the official majority remained. The members were given the right to discuss the annual budget but they could neither vote on it nor move a motion to amend it. They could also ask questions but were not allowed to put supplementary questions or to discuss the answers. The 'reformed' Imperial Legislative Council met, during its tenure till 1909, on an average for only thirteen days in a year, and the number of unofficial Indian members present was only five out of twenty- four!

The nationalists were totally dissatisfied with the Act of 1892. They saw in it a mockery of their demands. The Councils were still impotent; despotism still ruled. They now demanded a majority for non-official elected members with the right to vote on the budget and, thus, to the public purse. They raised the slogan 'no taxation without representation.' Gradually, they raised their demands. Many leaders — for example Dadabhai Naoroji in 1904, G.K. Gokhale in 1905 and Lokamanya Tilak in 1906 began to put forward the demand for self government the model of the self governing colonies of Canada and Australia.

Lord Dufferin, who had prepared the outline of the Act of 1892, and other British statesmen and administrators, had seen in the Legislative Council a device to incorporate the more vocal Indian political leaders into the colonial political structure where they could, in a manner of Speaking let off their political steam. They knew that the members of the Councils enjoyed no real powers; they could only make wordy speeches and indulge in empty rhetorics, and the bureaucracy could afford to pay no attention to them.

But the British policy makers had reckoned without the political capacities of the Indian leaders who soon transformed the powerless and impotent councils, designed as mere machines for the endorsement of government policies, and measures and as toys to appease the emerging political leadership, into forums for ventilating popular grievances, mercilessly exposing the defects and shortcomings of the bureaucratic administration, criticizing and opposing almost every government policy and proposal, and raising basic economic issues, especially relating to public finance. They submitted the acts and policies of the Government to a ruthless examination regarding both their intention and their method and consequence. Far from being absorbed by the Councils, the nationalist members used them to enhance their own political stature in the county and to build a national movement. The safety valve was transformed into a major



channel for nationalist propaganda. By sheer courage, debating skill, fearless criticism, deep knowledge and careful marshalling of data they kept up a constant campaign against the Government in the Councils undermining its political and moral influence and generating a powerful anti-imperialist sentiment.

Their speeches began to be reported at length in the newspapers and widespread public interest developed in the legislative proceedings. The new Councils attracted some of the most prominent nationalist leaders. Surendranath Banerjee, Kalicharan Banerjee, Ananda Mohan Bose, Lal Mohan Ghosh, W.C. Bonnerji and Rash Behari Ghosh from Bengal, Ananda Charlu, C. Sankaran Nair and Vijayaraghavachariar from Madras, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Ayodhyanath and Bishambar Nath from U.P., B.G. Tilak, Pheroze-shah Mehta, R.M. Sayani, Chimanlal Setalvad, N.G.Chandravarkar and G.K. Gokhale from Bombay, and G.M.Chitnavis from Central Provinces were some of served as members of the Provincial or Central Legislative Councils from 1893 to 1909.

The two men who were most responsible for putting the Council to good use and introducing a new spirit in them were Pheroze-shah Mehta and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Both men were political Moderates. Both became famous for being fearlessly independent and the *bete noir* of British officialdom in India.

### **PHEROZESHAH MEHTA AND GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE**

Born in 1845 in Bombay, Pheroze-shah Mehta came under Dadabhai Naoroji's influence while studying law in London during the 1860s. He was one of the founders of the Bombay Presidency Association as also the Indian National Congress. From about the middle of the 1890s till his death in 1915 he was a dominant figure in the Indian National Congress and was often accused of exercising autocratic authority over it. He was a powerful debater and his speeches were marked by boldness, lucidity, incisiveness, a ready wit and quick repartee, and a certain literary quality.



**PHEROZESHAH MEHTA**

Mehta's first major intervention in the Imperial Legislative Council came in January 1895 on a Bill for the amendment of the Police Act of 1861 which enhanced the power of the local authorities to quarter a punitive police force in an area and to recover its cost from selected sections of the inhabitants of the area. Mehta pointed out that the measure was an attempt to convict and punish individuals without a judicial trial under the garb of preserving law and order. He argued: 'I cannot conceive of legislation more empirical, more retrograde, more open to abuse, or more demoralizing. It is impossible not to see that it is a piece of that empirical legislation so dear to the heart of executive officers, which will not and cannot recognize

the scientific fact that the punishment and suppression of crime without injuring or oppressing innocence must be controlled by judicial procedure.' Casting doubts on the capacity and impartiality of the executive officers entrusted with the task of enforcing the Act, Mehta said: 'It would be idle to believe that they can be free from the biases, prejudices, and defects of their class and position.'

Nobody would today consider this language and these remarks very strong or censorious. But they were like a bomb thrown into the ranks of a civil service which considered itself above such criticism. How dare a mere 'native' lay his sacrilegious hands on its fair name and reputation and that too in the portals of the Legislative Council? James Westland, the Finance Member, rose in the house and protested against 'the new spirit' which Mehta 'had introduced into the Council.' He had moreover uttered 'calumnies' against and 'arraigned' as a class as biased, prejudiced, utterly incapable of doing the commonest justice . . . a most distinguished service,' which had 'contributed to the framing and consolidation of the Empire.' His remarks had gravely detracted 'from the reputation which this Council has justly acquired for the dignity, the calmness and the consideration which characterize its deliberations.' In other words, Mehta was accused of changing the role and character of the colonial legislatures.

The Indian reaction was the very opposite. Pheroza Shah Mehta won the instant approval of political Indians, even of his political opponents like Tilak, who readily accepted Westland's description that 'a new spirit' had entered the legislatures. People were accustomed to such criticism coming from the platform or the Press but that the 'dignified' Council halls could reverberate with such sharp and fearless criticism was a novel experience. The *Tribune* of Lahore commented: 'The voice that has been so long shut out from the Council Chamber — the voice of the people has been admitted through the open door of election . . . Mr. Mehta speaks as the representative of the people... Sir James Westland's protest is the outcry of the bureaucrat rapped over the knuckles in his own stronghold.'

The bureaucracy was to smart under the whiplash of Mehta's rapier-like wit almost every time he spoke in the Council. We may give a few more examples of the forensic skill with which he regaled the Indians and helped destroy the moral influence and prestige of the British Indian Government and its holier-than-thou bureaucracy. The educated Indians and higher education were major bugbears of the imperialist administrators then as they are of the imperialist schools of historians today.

Looking for ways and means of cutting down higher education because it was producing 'discontented and seditious *babus*,' the Government hit upon the expedient of counterposing to expenditure on primary education of the masses that on the college education of the elites.

Pointing to the real motives behind this move to check the spread of higher education, Mehta remarked: It is very well to talk of "raising the subject to the pedestal of the rule?" but when the subject begins to press close at your heels, human nature is after all weak, and the personal experience is so intensely disagreeable that the temptation to kick back is almost irresistible.' And so, most of the bureaucrats looked upon 'every Indian college (as) a nursery for hatching broods of vipers; the less, therefore, the better.'

In another speech, commenting on the official desire to transfer public funds from higher to primary education, he said he was reminded of 'the amiable and well-meaning father of a somewhat numerous family, addicted unfortunately to slipping off a little too often of an evening to the house over the way, who, when the mother appealed to him to do something for the education of the grown-up boys, begged of her with tears in his eyes to consider if her request was not unreasonable, when there was not even enough food and clothes for the younger children.'

The poor woman could not gainsay the fact, with the hungry eyes staring before her; but she could not help bitterly reflecting that the children could have food and clothes, and education to boot, if the kindly father could be induced to be good enough to spend a little less on drink and cards. Similarly, gentlemen, when we are reminded of the crying wants of the poor masses for sanitation and pure water and medical relief and primary education, might we not respectfully venture to submit that there would be funds, and to spare, for all these things, and higher education too, if the enormous and growing resources of

the country were not ruthlessly squandered on a variety of whims and luxuries, on costly residences and Sumptuous furniture, on summer trips to the hills, on little holiday excursions to the frontiers, but above and beyond all, on the lavish and insatiable humours of an irresponsible military policy, enforced by the very men whose view and opinions of its necessity cannot but accommodate themselves to their own interests and ambitions.”

The officials were fond of blaming the Indian peasant’s poverty and indebtedness on his propensity to spend recklessly on marriages and festivals. In 1901, a Bill was brought in the Bombay Legislative to take away the peasant’s right of ownership of land to prevent him from *bartering* it away because of his thriftlessness. Denying this charge and opposing the bill, Mehta defended the right of the peasant to have some joy, colour, and moments of brightness in his life. In the case of average Indian peasant, he said, ‘a few new earthenware a few wild flowers, the village tom-tom, a stomach-full meal, bad arecanut and betel leaves and a few stalks of cheap tobacco, and in some cases a few cheap tawdry trinkets, exhaust the joys of a festive occasion in the life of a household which has known only an unbroken period of unshrinking labour from morn to sunset.”° And when the Government insisted on using its official majority to push through the Bill, Mehta along. With Gokhale, G.K. Parekh, Balachandra Krishna and D.A. Khare took the unprecedented step of organizing the first walk-out in India’s legislatj history.

Once again officialdom was furious with Mehta. The *Times of India*, then British-owned even suggested that these members should be made to resign their seats!

Criticizing the Government’s excise policy for encouraging drinking in the name of curbing it, he remarked in 1898 that the excise department ‘seems to follow the example of the preacher who said that though he was bound to teach good principles, he was by no ‘means bound to practice them.”

Pherozeshah Mehta retired from the Imperial Legislative Council in 1901 due to bad health. He got elected in his place thirty-five-year-old Gokhale, who had already made his mark as the Secretary of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and the editor of the *Sudharak*. In 1897, as a witness in London before the Royal Commission on Expenditure in India, Gokhale had outshone veterans like Surendranath Banerjea, D.E. Wacha, G.Subramaniya Iyer and Dadabhai Naoroji. Gokhale was to prove a more than worthy successor to Mehta.



**Dinshaw Edulji Wacha**



Gopal Krishna Gokhale was an outstanding intellectual who had been carefully trained in Indian economics by Justice Ranade and G.V. Joshi. He was no orator. He did not use strong and forceful language as Tilak, Dadabhai Naoroji and R.C. Dutt did. Nor did he take recourse, as Mehta did, to humour, irony and courteous, sarcasm. As a speaker he was gentle, reasonable, courteous, non-flamboyant and lucid. He relied primarily upon detailed knowledge and the careful data. Consequently, while his speeches did not entertain or hurt, they gradually took hold of the listeners' or readers' attention by their sheer intellectual power.

Gokhale was to gain great fame for his budget speeches which used to be reported extensively by the newspapers and whose readers would wait eagerly for their morning copy. He was to transform the Legislative Council into an open university for imparting political education to the people.

His very first budget speech on 26 March 1902 established him as the greatest parliamentarian that India has produced. The Finance Member, Edward Law, had just presented a budget with a seven-crore-rupees surplus for which he had received with great pride the congratulations, of the house. At this point Gokhale rose to speak. He could not, he said, 'conscientiously join in the congratulations' because of the huge surplus. On the contrary, the surplus budget 'illustrated the utter absence of a due correspondence between the Condition of the country and the condition of the finances of the country.' In fact, this surplus coming in times of serious depression and suffering, constituted 'a wrong to the community.' The keynote of his speech was the poverty of the people. He examined the problem in all its aspects and came to the conclusion that the material condition of the mass of the people was 'steadily deteriorating' and that the phenomenon was 'the saddest in the whole range of the economic history of the world.' He then set out to analyze the budget in detail. He showed how land revenue and the salt tax had been going up even in times of drought and famine. He asked for the reduction of these two taxes and for raising the minimum level of income liable to income tax to Rs. 1,000 so that the lower middle classes would not be harassed. He condemned the large expenditure on the army and territorial expansion beyond Indian frontiers and demanded greater expenditure on education and industry instead. The management of Indian finances, he said, revealed that Indian interests were invariably subordinated to foreign interests. He linked the poor state of Indian finances and the poverty of the people with the colonial status of the Indian economy and polity. And he did all this by citing at length from the Government's own blue books.'

Gokhale's first budget speech had 'an electrifying effect' upon the *people*. As his biographer, B.R. Nanda, has put it: 'Like Byron, he could have said that he woke up one fine morning and found himself famous'. He won instant praise even from his severest critics and was applauded by the entire nationalist Press. It was felt that he had raised Indian pride many notches higher. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, which had missed no opportunity in the past to berate and belittle him, gave unstinted expression to this pride: 'We had ever entertained the ambition of seeing some Indian member openly and fearlessly criticizing the Financial Statement of the Government. But this ambition was never satisfied. When members had ability, they had not the requisite courage. When they had the requisite courage, they had not the ability. . . For the first time in the annals of British rule in India, a native of India has not only succeeded in exposing the fallacies which underlie these Government statements, but has ventured to do it in an uncompromising manner.' All this well deserved acclaim did not go to Gokhale's head. He remained unassuming and modest as before. To G.V. Joshi (leading economist and one of his *gurus*), he wrote: 'Of course it is your speech more than mine and I almost feel I am practicing a fraud on the public in that I let all the credit for it come to me.'

In the next ten years, Gokhale was to bring this 'mixture of courage, tenacity and ability' to bear upon every annual budget and all legislation, highlighting in the process the misery and poverty of the peasants, the drain of wealth from India, the Government neglect of industrial development, the taxation of the poor, the lack of welfare measures such as primary education and health and medical facilities, the official efforts to suppress the freedom of the Press and other civil liberties, the enslavement of Indian labourers in British colonies, the moral dwarfing of Indians, the underdevelopment of the Indian economy and the complete neglect and subordination of Indian interests by the rulers.



### **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**

Officials from the Viceroy downwards squirmed with impotent fury under his sharp and incisive indictments of their policies. In 1904, Edward Law, the Finance Member, cried out in exasperation: 'When he takes his seat at this Council table he unconsciously perhaps adopts the role and demeanour of the habitual mourner, and his sad wails and lamentations at the delinquencies of Government are as piteous as long practice and training can make them.' Such was the fear Gokhale's budget speeches aroused among officials that in 1910, Lord Minto, the Viceroy, asked the Secretary of State to appoint R.W. Carlyle as Revenue Member because he had come to know privately of 'an intended attack in which Gokhale is interested on the whole of our revenue system and it is important that we should be well prepared to meet it.'

Gokhale was to be repaid in plenty by the love and recognition of his own people. Proud of his legislative achievement they were to confer him the title of 'the leader of the opposition'. Gandhiji was to declare him his political *guru*. And Tilak, his lifelong political opponent, said at his funeral: "This diamond of India, this jewel of Maharashtra, this prince of workers, is taking eternal rest on the funeral ground. Look at him and try to emulate him."

# UNIT-XIX

## THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

With the start of the Swadeshi Movement at the turn of the century, the Indian national movement took a major leap forward. Women, students and a large section of the urban and rural population of Bengal and other parts of India became actively involved in politics for the first time. The next half a decade saw the emergence of almost all the major political trends of the Indian national movement. From conservative moderation to political extremism, from terrorism to incipient socialism, from petitioning and public speeches to passive resistance and boycott, all had their origins in the movement. The richness of the movement was not confined to politics alone. The period saw a breakthrough in Indian literature, music, science and industry. Indian society, as a whole, was experimenting and the creativity of the people expanded in every direction.

### THE GENESIS OF THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT

The Swadeshi Movement had its genesis in the anti-partition movement which was started to oppose the British decision to partition Bengal. There was no questioning the fact that Bengal with a population of 78 million (about a quarter of the population of British India) had indeed become administratively unwieldy. Equally there was no escaping the fact that the real motive for partitioning Bengal was political. Indian nationalism was gaining in strength and partition expected to weaken what was perceived as the nerve centre of Indian nationalism at that time. The attempt, at that time in the words of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy (1899-1905) was to 'dethrone Calcutta' from its position as the 'centre from which the Congress Party is manipulated throughout Bengal, and indeed which the Congress Party centre of successful intrigue' and 'divide the Bengali speaking population.'

Risley, the Home Secretary to the Government of India, was more blunt. He said on 6 December 1904: ***'Bengal united, is power, Bengal divided, will pull several different ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel: their apprehensions are perfectly correct and they form one of the great merits of the scheme...in this scheme... one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.'***

Curzon reacted sharply to the almost instant furore that was raised in Bengal over the partition proposals and wrote to the Secretary of State. 'If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again: and you will be cementing and solidifying a force already formidable and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future'. The partition of the state intended to curb Bengali influence by not only placing Bengalis under two administrations but by reducing them to a minority in Bengal itself as in the new proposal Bengal proper was to have seventeen million Bengali and thirty-seven million Oriya and Hindi speaking people! Also, the partition was meant to foster another kind of division— this time on the basis of religion. The policy of propping up Muslim communalists as a counter to the Congress and the national movement, which was getting increasingly crystallized in the last quarter of the 19th century. was to be implemented once again. Curzon's speech at Dacca, betrayed his attempt to 'woo the Muslims' to support partition. With partition, he argued, Dacca could become the capital of the new Muslim majority province (with eighteen million Muslims and twelve million Hindus) 'which would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman Viceroys and Kings.' The Muslims would thus get a 'better deal' and the eastern districts would be freed of the 'pernicious influence of Calcutta.'

And even Lord Minto, Curzon's successor was critical of the way in which partition was imposed disregarding public opinion saw that it was good political strategy; Minto argued that 'from a political point



of View alone, putting aside the administrative difficulties of the old province, I believe partition to have been very necessary . . .’

The Indian nationalists clearly saw the design behind the partition and condemned it unanimously. The anti-partition and Swadeshi Movement had begun.

In December 1903, the partition proposals became publicly known, immediate and spontaneous protest followed. The strength of this protest can be gauged from the fact that in the first two months following the announcement 500 protest meetings were held in East Bengal alone, especially in Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittagong. Nearly fifty thousand copies of pamphlets giving a detailed critique of the partition proposals were distributed all over Bengal. Surendranath Banerjea, Krishna Kumar Mitra, Prithwishchandra Ray and other leaders launched a powerful press campaign against the partition proposals through journals and newspapers like the *Bengalee*, *Hitabadi* and *Sanjibani*. Vast protest meetings were held in the town hall of Calcutta in March 1904 and January 1905, and numerous petitions (sixty-nine memoranda from the Dacca division alone), some of them signed by as many as 70,000 people — a very large number keeping in view the level of politicization in those days — were sent to the Government of India and the Secretary of State. Even, the big zamindars who had hitherto been loyal to the Raj, joined forces with the Congress leaders who were mostly intellectuals and political workers drawn from journalism, law and other liberal professions.

This was the phase, 1903 to mid-1905 when moderate techniques of petitions, memoranda, speeches, public meetings and press campaigns held full sway. The objective was to turn to public opinion in India and England against the partition proposals by preparing a foolproof case against them. The hope was that this would yield sufficient pressure to prevent this injustice from occurring.

The Government of India however remained unmoved. Despite the widespread protest, voiced against the partition proposals, the decision to partition Bengal was announced on 19 July 1905. It was obvious to the nationalists that their moderate methods were not working and that a different kind of strategy as needed. Within days of the government announcement numerous spontaneous protest meetings were held in mofussil towns such as Dinajpur, Pabna, Faridpur, Tangail, Jessore, Dacca, Birbhum, and Barisal. It was in these meetings that the pledge to boycott foreign goods was first taken in Calcutta; students organized a number of meetings against partition and for Swadeshi.

The formal proclamation of the Swadeshi Movement was, made on the 7 August 1905, in meeting held at the Calcutta town hall. The movement; hitherto sporadic and spontaneous, now had a focus and a leadership that was coming together. At the 7 August meeting, the famous Boycott Resolution was passed. Even Moderate leaders like Surendranath Banerjea toured the country urging the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt. On September 1, the Government announced that partition was to be effected on [6 October] 1905. The following weeks saw protest meetings being held almost every day all over Bengal; some of these meetings, like the one in Barisal, drew crowds of ten to twelve thousand. That the message of boycott went home is evident from the fact that the value of British cloth sold in some of the mofussil districts fell by five to fifteen times between September 1904 and September 1905.

The day partition took effect — 16 October 1905 — was declared a day of mourning throughout Bengal. People fasted and no fires were lit at the cooking hearth. In Calcutta a *hartal* was declared. People took out processions and band after band walked barefoot, bathed in the Ganges in morning and then paraded the streets singing *Bande Mataram* which, almost spontaneously, became the theme song of the movement. People tied *rakhis* on each other's hands as a symbol of the unity of the two halves of Bengal. Later in the day Anandamohan Bose and Surendranath Banerjea addressed two huge mass meetings which drew crowds of 50,000 to 75,000 people. These were, perhaps, the largest mass meetings ever to be held under the nationalist banner this far. Within a few hours of the meetings, a sum of Rs. 50,000 was raised for the movement.

It was apparent that the character of the movement in terms both its goals and social base had begun to expand rapidly. As Abdul Rasul, President of Barisal Conference, April 1906, put it:

*'What we could not have accomplished in 50 or 100 years, the great disaster, the partition of Bengal, has done for us in six months. Its fruits have been the great national movement known as the Swadeshi movement.'*

### SPREAD OF SWADESHI MOVEMENT OUTSIDE BENGAL

The message of Swadeshi and the boycott of foreign goods soon spread to the rest of the country: Lokamanya Tilak took the movement to different parts of India, especially Poona and Bombay; Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai spread the Swadeshi message in Punjab and other parts of northern India. Syed Haidar Raza led the movement in Delhi; Rawalpindi, Kangra, Jammu, Multan and Haridwar witnessed active participation in the Swadeshi Movement; Chidambaram Pillai took the movement to the Madras presidency, which was also galvanized by Bipin Chandra Pal's extensive lecture tour.

The Indian National Congress took up the Swadeshi call and the Banaras Session, 1905, presided over by G.K. Gokhale, supporter the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement for Bengal. The militant nationalists led by Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh were, however, in favour of extending the movement to the rest of India and carrying it beyond the programme of just Swadeshi and boycott to a full fledged political mass struggle. The aim was now *Swaraj* and the abrogation of partition had become the 'pettiest and narrowest of all political objects'. The Moderates, by and large, were not as yet willing to go that far. In 1906, however, the Indian National Congress at its Calcutta Session, presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji, took a major step forward. Naoroji in his presidential address declared that the goal of the Indian National Congress was 'self-government or *Swaraj* like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies.' The differences between the Moderates and the Extremists, especially regarding the pace of the movement and the techniques of struggle to be adopted, came to a head in the 1907 Surat session of the Congress where the party split with serious consequences for the Swadeshi Movement.

### THE EXTREMIST INFLUENCE OVER THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT

In Bengal, however, after 1905, the Extremists acquired a dominant influence over the Swadeshi Movement. Several new forms of mobilization and techniques of struggle now began to emerge at the popular level. The trend of 'mendicancy,' petitioning and memorials was on the retreat. The militant nationalists put forward several fresh ideas at the theoretical, propagandistic and programmatic plane. Political independence was to be achieved by converting the movement into a mass movement through the extension of boycott into a full-scale movement of non-cooperation and passive resistance. The technique of 'extended boycott' was to include, apart from boycott of foreign goods, boycott of government schools and colleges courts, titles and government services and even the organization of strikes. The aim was to 'make the administration under present conditions impossible by an organized refusal to do anything which shall help either the British Commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it.' While some, with remarkable foresight, saw the tremendous potential of large scale peaceful resistance--- . . the *Chowkidar*, the constable; the deputy and the munsif and the clerk, not to speak of the sepoy all resign their respective *functions*, *feringhee* rule in the country may come to an end in a moment No powder and shot will be needed, no sepoys will have to be trained... Others like Aurobindo Ghosh (with his growing links with revolutionary terrorists) kept open the option of violent resistance if British repression was stepped up.



**SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH**

### **DIFFERENT METHODS ADOPTED DURING THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT**

Among the several forms of struggle thrown up by the movement, it was the boycott of foreign goods which met with the greatest visible success at the practical and popular level. Boycott and public burning of foreign cloth, picketing of shops selling foreign goods, all became common in remote corners of Bengal as well as in many important towns and cities throughout the country. Women refused to wear foreign bangles and use foreign utensils, washermen refused to wash foreign clothes and even priests declined offerings which contained foreign sugar.

The movement also innovated with considerable success different forms of mass mobilization. Public meetings and processions emerged as major methods of mass mobilization and simultaneously as forms of popular expression. Numerous meetings and processions organized at the district, *taluka* and village levels, in cities and towns, both testified to the depth of Swadeshi sentiment and acted as vehicles for its further spread. These forms were to retain their pre-eminence in later phases of the national movement.

Corps of volunteers (or *samitis* as they were called) were another major form of mass mobilization widely used by the Swadeshi Movement. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti set up by Ashwini Kumar Dutt, a school teacher, in Barisal was the most well known volunteer organization of them all. Through the activities



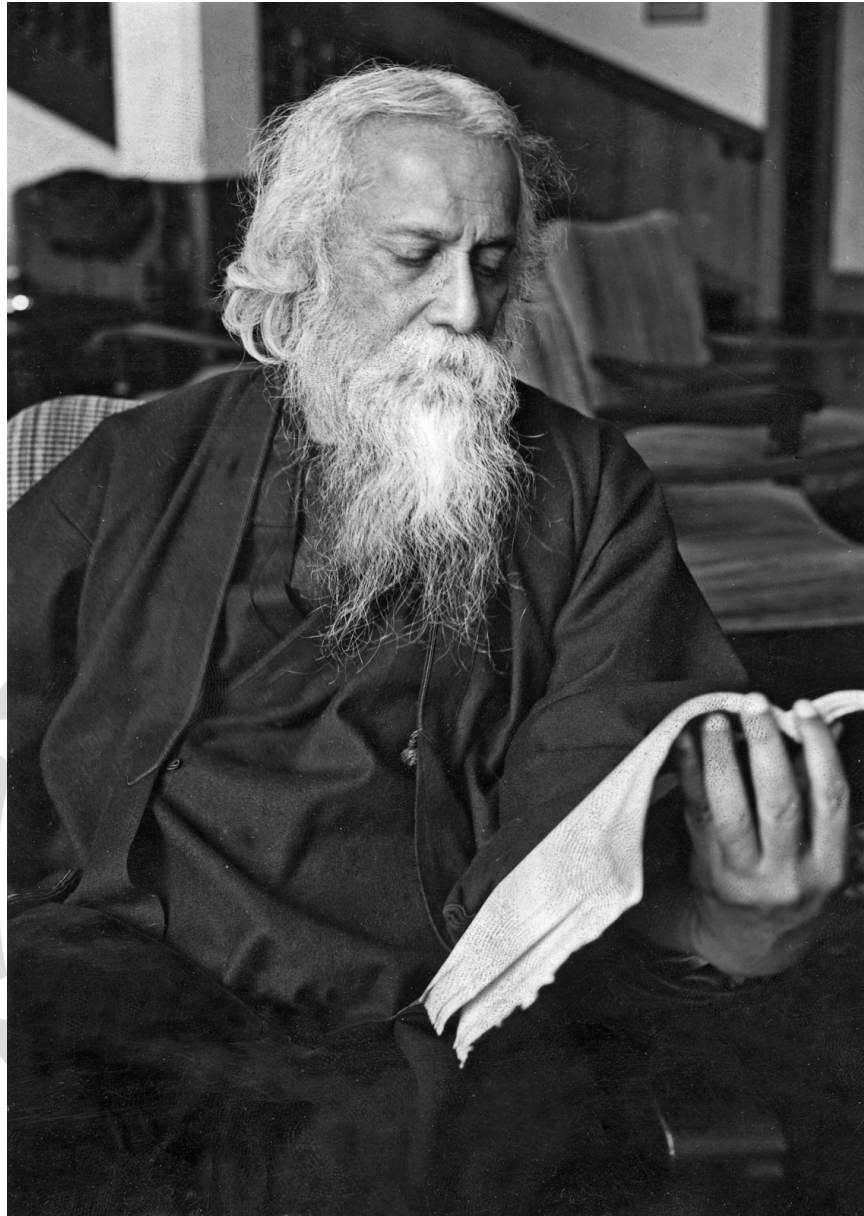
of this Samiti, whose 159 branches reached out to the remotest corners of the district, Dutt was able to generate an unparalleled mass following among the predominantly Muslim Peasantry of the region. The samitis took the Swadeshi message to the villages through magic lantern lectures and Swadeshi songs, gave physical and moral training to the members, did social work during famines and epidemics, organized schools, training in Swadeshi craft and arbitration courts. By August 1906 the Barisal Samiti reportedly settled 523 disputes through eighty-nine arbitration committees. Though the samitis *stuck* their deepest roots in Barisal, they had expanded to other parts of Bengal as well. British officialdom was genuinely alarmed by their activities, their growing popularity with the rural masses.

The Swadeshi period also saw the creative use of traditional popular festivals and *melas* as a means of reaching out to the masses. The Ganapati and Shivaji festivals, popularized by Tilak, became a medium for Swadeshi propaganda not only in Western India but also in Bengal. Traditional folk theatre forms such as *jatras* i.e. extensively used in disseminating the Swadeshi message in an intelligible form to vast sections of the people, many of whom were being introduced to modern political ideas for the first time.

Another important aspect of the Swadeshi Movement was the great emphasis given to self-reliance or 'Atmasakti' as a necessary part of the struggle against the Government. Self-reliance in various fields meant the re-asserting of national dignity, honor and confidence. Further, self-help and constructive work at the village level was envisaged as a means of bringing about the social and economic regeneration of the villages and of reaching the rural masses. In actual terms this meant social reform and campaigns against evils such as caste oppression, early marriage, the dowry system, consumption of alcohol, etc. One of the major planks of the programme of self-reliance was Swadeshi or national education. Taking a cue from Tagore's Shantiniketan, the Bengal National College was founded, with Aurobindo as the principal. Scores of national schools sprang up all over the country within a short period. In August 1906, the National Council of Education was established. The Council, consisting of virtually all the distinguished persons of the country at the time, defined its objectives in this way. . . 'to organize a system of Education Literary; Scientific and Technical — on National lines and under National control from the primary to the university level. The chief medium of instruction was to be the vernacular to enable the widest possible reach. For technical education, the Bengal Technical institute was set and funds were raised to send students to Japan for advanced learning.

Self-reliance also meant an effort to set up Swadeshi or indigenous enterprises. The period saw a mushrooming of Swadeshi textile mills, soap and match factories; - tanneries, banks, insurance companies, shops, etc. While many of these enterprises, whose promoters were more endowed with patriotic zeal than with business acumen were unable to survive for long, some others such as Acharya P.C. Ray's Bengal Chemicals Factory, became successful and famous.

"Empowering Endeavours"

**RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

It was, perhaps, in the cultural sphere that the impact of the Swadeshi Movement was most marked. The songs composed at that time by Rabindranath Tagore, Rajani Kanta Sen, Dwijendralal Ray, Mukunda Das, Syed Abu Mohammed, and others later became the moving spirit for nationalists of all hues, 'terrorists, Gandhian or Communists' and are still popular. Rabindranath's *Amar Sonar Bangla*, written at that time, was to later inspire the liberation struggle of Bangladesh and was adopted as the national anthem of the country in 1971. The Swadeshi influence could be seen in Bengali folk music popular among Hindu and Muslim villagers (Palligeet and Jan Gàn) and it evoked collections of India fairy tales such as, *Thakurmar Jhuli* (Grandmother's tales) written by Daksinaranjan Mitra Majumdar which delights Bengali children to this day. In art, this was the period when Abanindranath Tagore broke the domination of Victorian naturalism over Indian art and sought inspiration from the rich indigenous traditions of Mughal, Rajput and Ajanta paintings. Nandalal Bose, who left a major imprint on Indian art, was the first recipient of a scholarship offered by the Indian Society of Oriental Art founded in 1907. In science, Jagdish Chandra Bose, Prafulla Chandra Ray, and others pioneered original research that was praised the world over.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT

In sum, the Swadeshi Movement with its multi-faceted programme and activity was able to draw for the first time large sections of society into active participation in modern nationalist into the ambit of modern political ideas. The social base of the national movements now extended to include a certain zamindari section, the lower middle class in the cities and small towns and school and college students on a massive scale. Women came out of their homes for the first time and joined processions and picketing. This period saw, again for the first time, an attempt being made to give a political direction to the economic grievances of the working class. Efforts were Swadeshi leaders, some of whom were influenced by

International socialist currents such as those in Germany and Russia, to organize strikes in foreign managed concerns such as Eastern India Railway and Clive Jute Mills, etc.

While it is argued that the movement was unable to make much headway in mobilizing the peasantry especially its lower rungs except in certain areas, such as the district of Barisal, there can be no gain-saying the fact that even if the movement was able to mobilize the peasantry only in a limited area that alone would count for a lot. This is so peasant participation in the Swadeshi Movement marked the very beginnings of modern mass politics in India. After all, even in the later, post-Swadeshi movements, intense political mobilization and activity among the peasantry largely remained concentrated in specific pockets.

Also, while it is true that during the Swadeshi phase the peasantry was not organized around peasant demands, and that the peasants in most parts did not actively join in certain forms of struggle such as, boycott or passive resistance, large sections of the peasants, through meetings, jattras, constructive work, and so on were exposed for the first time to modern nationalist ideas and politics.

The main drawback of the Swadeshi Movement was that it was not able to garner the support of the mass of Muslims and especially of the Muslim peasantry. The British policy of consciously attempting to use communalism to turn the Muslims against the Swadeshi Movement was to a large extent responsible for this. The Government was helped in its designs by the peculiar situation obtaining in large parts of Bengal where Hindus and Muslims were divided along class lines with the former being the landlords and the latter constituting the peasantry. This was the period when the All India Muslim League was set up with the active guidance and support of the Government. More specifically, in Bengal, people like Nawab Salim-ullah of Dacca were propped up so centres of opposition to the Swadeshi Movement. Mullahs and maulvis were pressed into service and, unsurprisingly, at the height of the Swadeshi Movement communal riots broke out in Bengal.

Given this background, some of the forms of mobilization adopted by the Swadeshi Movement had certain unintended negative consequences. The use of traditional popular customs, festivals and institutions for mobilizing the masses—a technique used widely in most parts of world to generate mass movements, especially in the initial stages —was misinterpreted and distorted by communalists backed by the state. The communal forces saw narrow religious identities in the traditional forms utilized by the Swadeshi movements whereas in fact these forms generally reflected common popular cultural traditions which had evolved as a synthesis of different religious 'prevalent among the people.

By mid-1908, the open movement with its popular mass character had all but spent itself. This was due to several reasons. First, the government, seeing the revolutionary potential of the movement, came down with a heavy hand. Repression took the form of controls and bans on public meetings, processions and the press. Student participants were expelled from Government schools and colleges, debarred from Government service, fined and at times beaten up by the police. The case of the 1906 Barisal Conference, where the police forcibly dispersed the conference and brutally beat up a large number of the participants, is a telling example of the government's attitude and policy.



Second, the internal squabbles, and especially, the split, in 1907 in the Congress, the apex all-India organization, weakened the movement. Also, though the Swadeshi Movement had spread outside Bengal, the rest of the country was not as yet fully prepared to adopt the new style and stage of politics. Both these factors strengthened the hands of the government. Between 1907 and 1908, nine major leaders in Bengal including Ashwini Kumar Dutt and Krishna Kumar Mitra were deported, Tilak was given a sentence of six years imprisonment, Ajit Singh and Lajpat Rai of Punjab were deported and Chidambaram Pillai and Hari-sarvottam Rao from Madras and Andhra were arrested. Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh retired from active politics, a decision not unconnected with the repressive measures of the Government. Almost with one stroke the entire movement was rendered leaderless.

Third, the Swadeshi Movement lacked an effective organization and party structure. The movement had thrown up programmatically the entire gamut of Gandhian techniques such as passive resistance, non-violent non-cooperation, the call to fill the British jails, social reform, constructive work, etc. It was, however, unable to give these techniques a centralized, disciplined focus, carry the bulk of political - India, and convert these techniques into actual, practical political practice, as Gandhiji was able to do later.

Lastly, the movement declined partially because of the very logic of mass movements itself—they cannot be sustained endlessly at the same pitch of militancy and self-sacrifice, especially when faced with severe repression, but need to pause, to consolidate its forces for yet another struggle.

However, the decline of the open movement by mid-1908 engendered yet another trend in the Swadeshi phase i.e., the rise of revolutionary nationalism. The youth of the country, who had been part of the mass movement, now found themselves unable to disappear tamely into the background once the movement itself grew moribund and Government repression was stepped up. Frustrated, some among them opted for 'individual heroism' as distinct from the earlier attempts at mass action.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT

With the subsiding of the mass movement, one era in the Indian freedom struggle was over. It would be wrong, however, to see the Swadeshi Movement as a failure. The movement made a major contribution in taking the idea of nationalism, in a truly creative fashion, to many sections of the people, hitherto untouched by it.

By doing so, it further eroded the hegemony of colonial ideas and institutions. Swadeshi influence in the realm of culture and ideas was crucial in this regard and has remained unparalleled in Indian history, except, perhaps, for the cultural upsurge of the 1930s this time under the influence of the Left.

Further, the movement evolved several new methods and techniques of mass mobilization and mass action though it was not able to put them all into practice successfully. Just as the Moderates' achievement in the realm of developing an economic critique of colonialism is not minimized by the fact that they could not themselves carry this critique to large masses of people, similarly the achievement of the Extremists and the Swadeshi Movement in evolving new methods of mass mobilization and action is not diminished by the fact that they could not themselves fully utilize these methods. The legacy they bequeathed was one on which the later national movement was to draw heavily.

Swadeshi Movement was only the first round in the national popular struggle against colonialism. It was to borrow this imagery used by Antonio Gramsci an important battle' in the long drawn out and complex 'war of position' for Indian independence.

## UNIT-XX

# THE SURAT SPLIT AND THE RISE OF REVOLUTIONARIES

### THE BACKGROUND OF THE SURAT SPLIT

The Indian National Congress split in December 1907. Almost at the same time revolutionary nationalism made its appearance in Bengal. The two events were not unconnected. By 1907, the Moderate nationalists had exhausted their historical role. Their achievements, as we have seen in the previous chapter, were immense, considering the low level of political consciousness and the immense difficulties they had to face when they began. Their failures too were numerous. They lacked faith in the common people, did no work among them and consequently failed to acquire any roots among them. Even their propaganda did not reach them. Nor did they organize any all-India campaigns and when, during 1905-07, such an all-India campaign did come up in the form of the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement, they were not its leader (though the Bengal Moderates did play an active role in their own province). Their politics were based on the belief that they would be able to persuade the rulers to introduce economic and political reforms but their practical achievements in this respect were meagre. Instead of respecting them for their moderation, the British treated them with contempt, sneered at their politics and met popular agitations with repression. Their basic failure, however, was that of not keeping pace with events. They could not see that their own achievements had made their Politics obsolete. They failed to meet the demands of the new stage of the national movement) Visible proof of this was their failure to attract the younger generation.

The British had been suspicious of the National Congress from its inception. But they had not been overtly hostile, in the first few years of its existence because they believed its activities would remain academic and confined to a handful of intellectuals. However, as soon as it became apparent that the Congress would not remain so narrowly confined, and that it was becoming a focus of Indian nationalism, the officials turned openly critical of the Congress, the nationalist leaders and the Press.

They now began to brand the nationalists as 'disloyal babus' 'seditious Brahmins,' and 'violent villains.' The Congress was described as 'a factory of sedition' and Congressmen as 'disappointed candidates for office and discontented lawyers who represent no one but themselves.' In 1888, Dufferin, the Viceroy, attacked the National Congress in a public speech and ridiculed it as representing only the elite 'a microscopic minority.' George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, accused the Congress leaders of possessing 'seditious and double sided character.'

This hostility did not abate when the Moderates, who then controlled the Congress, began to distance themselves from the rising militant nationalist tendencies of certain sections of the Congress which became apparent when the government unleashed a repressive policy against the Indian Press in 1897.

Instead the British appeared even more eager to attack and finish the Congress. Why was this so? First, because however moderate and loyal in their political perception the Moderates were, they were still nationalists and propagators of anti-colonialist politics and ideas. As Curzon, the Viceroy, put it in 1905: 'Gokhale either does not see where he is going, or if he does see it, then he is dishonest or his pretensions. You cannot awaken and appeal to the spirit of nationality in India and at the same time, profess loyal acceptance of British rule.' Or, as George Hamilton, the Secretary of State had complained to Dadabhai Naoroji in 1900: 'You announce yourself as a sincere supporter of British rule; you vehemently denounce the condition, and consequences which are inseparable from the maintenance of that rule.'

Second, the British policy-makers felt that the Moderate-led Congress could be easily finished because it was weak and without a popular base. Curzon, in particular, supported by George Hamilton, pursued this

policy. He declared in 1900: 'The Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my greatest ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise'. In 1903, he wrote to the Madras Governor: 'My policy, ever since I came to India, has been to reduce the Congress to impotence.' In 1904, he had insulted the Congress by refusing to meet its delegation headed by its President.

This policy was changed once the powerful Swadeshi, and Boycott Movement began and the militant nationalist trend became strong. An alternative policy of weakening the nationalist movement was now to be followed. Instead of sneering at the Moderates, the policy was to be that of 'rallying' them as John Morley, the new Secretary of State for India, put it in 1907. The new policy, known as the policy of the carrot and the stick, was to be a three pronged one. It may be described as a policy of repression-conciliation-suppression. The Extremists, as we shall refer to the militant nationalists from now on, were to be repressed, though mildly in the first stage, the purpose being to frighten the Moderates. The Moderates were then to be placated through some concessions and promises and hints were to be given that further concessions would be forthcoming if they disassociated themselves from the Extremists. The entire objective of the new policy was to isolate the Extremists. Once the Moderates fell into the trap; the Extremists could be suppressed through the use of the full might of the state. The Moderates, in turn, could then be ignored. Unfortunately for the national movement, neither the Moderates nor the Extremists were able to understand the official strategy and consequently suffered a number of reverses.

The Government of India, headed by Lord Minto as Viceroy and John Morley as the Secretary of State, offered a bait of fresh reforms in the Legislative Councils and in the beginning of 1906 began discussing them with the Moderate leadership of the Congress. The Moderates agreed to cooperate with the Government and discuss reforms even while a vigorous popular movement, which the Government was trying to suppress, was going on in the country. The result was a total split in the nationalist ranks.

Before we take up this split at some length, it is of some interest to note that the British were to follow this tactic of dividing the Moderates from the militants in later years also — for example in 1924, vis-a-vis Swarajists, in 1936, vis-a-vis Nehru and the leftists, and so on. The difference was that in the later years the national leadership had learnt a lesson from the events of 1907-1909, and refused to rise to the bait, remaining united despite deep differences.

## THE MODERATE - EXTREMIST RIFT

There was a great deal of public debate and disagreement among Moderates and Extremists in the years 1905-1907, even when they were working together against the partitioning of Bengal. The Extremists wanted to extend the Swadeshi and the Boycott Movement from Bengal to the rest of the country. They also wanted to gradually extend the boycott from foreign goods to every form of association or cooperation with the colonial Government. The Moderates wanted to confine the boycott part of the movement to Bengal and were totally opposed to its extension to the Government.

Matters nearly came to a head at the Calcutta Congress in 1906 over the question of its Presidentship. A split was avoided by choosing Dadabhai Naoroji, who was respected by all the nationalists as a great patriot. Four compromise resolutions on the Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, and Self-Government demands were passed. Throughout 1907 the two sides fought over differing interpretations of the four resolutions. By the end of 1907, they were looking upon each other as their main political enemy. The Extremists were convinced that the battle for freedom had begun as the people had been roused. They felt it was time for the big push and in their view the Moderates were a big drag on the movement. Most of them, led by Aurobindo Ghose, felt that the time had come to part company with the Moderates, push them out of the leadership of the Congress, and split the organization if the Moderates could not be deposed.

Most of the Moderates, led by Pherozeshah Mehta, were no less determined on a split. To remain with the Extremists was, they felt, to enter dangerous waters. They were afraid that the Congress organization built carefully over the last twenty years, would be shattered. The Government was bound to suppress



any large-scale antiimperialist movement; why invite premature repression? As Gokhale put it in 1907, 'You (the Extremists) do not realize the enormous reserve of power behind the Government, if the Congress were to do anything such as you suggest, the Government would have no difficulty in throttling it in five minutes.' Minto and Morley were holding up hopes of brighter prospects. Many Moderates thought that their dream of Indians sharing political and administrative power was going to come true. Any hasty action by the Congress under Extremist pressure could annoy the Liberals in power in Britain. Why not get rid of the Extremists while there was still time? As H.A. Wadia, representing Pheroze Shah Mehta's thinking, wrote in an article in which, after referring to 'the Extremists as 'the worst enemies of our cause,' said: 'The union of these men with the Congress is the union of a diseased limb to a healthy body, and the only remedy is surgical severance, if the Congress is to be saved from death by blood poisoning.'

Both sides had it wrong — from the nationalist point of view as well as their own factional point of view. The Moderates did not see that the colonial state was negotiating with them not because of their inherent political strength but because of the fear of the Extremists. The Extremists did not see that the Moderates were their natural outer defence line (in terms of civil liberties and so on) and that they did not possess the required strength to face the colonial state's juggernaut. Neither saw that in a vast country like India ruled by a powerful imperialist nation only a broad-based united movement had any chance of success.

It wasn't as though the whole leadership was blind to the danger. The main public leaders of the two wings, Tilak (of the Extremists) and Gokhale (of the Moderates) were mature politicians who had a clear grasp of the dangers of disunity in the nationalist ranks. Tilak did not want the united national front to break. He saw clearly that a powerful movement could not be built up at that stage nor political demands successfully pressed on the rulers without the unity of different political trends. His tactics were to organize massive support for his political line and, thus, force a favourable compromise on the Moderates. But having roused his followers in Maharashtra and pushed on by the more extreme elements of Bengal. Tilak found that he could not afford to dismount from the tiger he found himself riding.

When it came to the crunch, he had to go with the more extreme leaders like Aurobindo Ghose. Gokhale, too, saw the dangers of a split in the nationalist ranks and tried to avoid it. Already, in October 1907, he had written to a friend: 'If a split does come it means a disaster, for the Bureaucracy will then put down both sections without much *difficulty*.' But he did not have the personality to stand up to a wilful autocrat like Pheroze Shah Mehta. He, too, knuckled under pressure of his own extremists.

## THE DISASTROUS SPLIT AT SURAT

The Congress session was held on 26 December, 1907 at Surat, on the banks of the river Tapti. The Extremists were excited by the rumours that the Moderates wanted to scuttle the four Calcutta resolutions. The Moderates were deeply hurt by the ridicule and venom poured on them in mass meetings held at Surat on the previous three days. The delegates, thus, met in an atmosphere surcharged with excitement and anger. The Extremists wanted a guarantee that the four resolutions would be passed. To force the Moderates to do so they decided to object to the duly elected President for the year, Rash Behari Ghose. Both sides came to the session prepared for a confrontation. In no time, the 1600 delegates were shouting, coming to blows and hurling chairs at each other. In the meantime, some unknown person hurled a shoe at the dais which hit Pheroze Shah Mehta and Surendranath Banerjee. The police came and cleared the hall. The Congress session was over. The only victorious party was the rulers. Minto immediately wrote to Morley that the 'Congress collapse' at Surat was 'a great triumph for us.'

Tilak had seen the coming danger and made last minute efforts to avoid it. But he was helpless before his followers. Lajpat Rai, a participant in the events from the Extremist side, wrote later: 'Instead of leading his party, he (Tilak) allowed himself to be led by some of its wild spirits. Twice on my request, at Surat, he agreed to waive his opposition to the election of Dr. Rash Behari Ghose and leave the matter of the four Calcutta resolutions to the Subjects Committee, but the moment I left him he found himself helpless before the volume of opinion that surrounded him.' The suddenness of the Surat fiasco took Tilak by

surprise. He had not bargained for it because, as Aurobindo Ghose wrote later, Tilak viewed the split as a 'catastrophe.' He valued the Congress 'as a great national fact and for its unrealized possibilities.' He now tried to undo the damage. He sent a virtual letter of regret to his opponents, accepted Rash Behari Ghose as the President of the Congress and offered his cooperation in working for Congress unity. But Pherozeshah Mehta and his colleagues would not relent. They thought they were on a sure wicket. The Government immediately launched a massive attack on the Extremists. Extremist newspapers were suppressed. Tilak, their main leader, was sent to Mandalay jail for six years.



**THE FAMOUS TRIO- LALA LAJPAT RAI, BAL GANGADHAR TILAK AND BIPIN CHANDRA PAL**

Aurobindo Ghose, their ideologue, was involved in a revolutionary Conspiracy case and immediately after being judged innocent gave up politics and escaped to Pondicherry to take up religion. B.C. Pal temporarily retired from politics and Lajpat Rai, who had been a helpless onlooker at Surat, left for Britain in 1908 to come back in 1909 and then to go off to the United States for an extended stay. The Extremists were not able to organize an effective alternative party or to sustain the movement. The Government had won, at least for the moment.'

The Moderates were indulging their own foolish beliefs. They gave up all the radical measures adopted at the Benaras and Calcutta sessions of the Congress, spurned all overtures for unity from the Extremists and excluded them from the party. They thought they were going to rebuild, to quote Pherozeshah Mehta, a 'resuscitated, renovated, reincarnated Congress.' But the spirit had gone out of the Congress and all efforts to restore it failed. They had lost the respect and support of the political Indians, especially the youth, and were reduced to a small coterie. Most of the Moderate leaders withdrew into their shells; only Gokhale plodded on, with the aid of a small band of co-workers from the Servants of India Society. And the vast majority of politically conscious Indians extended their support, however passive, to Lokamanya Tilak and the militant nationalists.



After 1908 the national movement as a whole declined. In 1909, Aurobindo Ghose noted the change: 'When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of *Bande Mataram*, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country.' But while the upsurge was gone, the aroused nationalist sentiments did not disappear. The people waited for the next phase. In 1914, Tilak was released and he picked up the threads of the movement.

The Moderates and the country as a whole were disappointed by the 'constitutional' reforms of 1909. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 increased the number of elected members in the imperial Legislative Council and the provincial legislative councils. Most of the elected members were still elected indirectly. An Indian was to be appointed a member of the Governor-General's Executive Council. Of the sixty-eight members of the Imperial Legislative Council, thirty-six were officials and five were nominated non-officials. Out of twenty seven elected members, six were elected by big landlords and two by British capitalists. The Act permitted members to introduce resolutions; it also increased their power to ask questions. Voting on separate budget items was allowed. But the reformed councils still enjoyed no real power and remained mere advisory bodies. They also did not introduce an element of democracy or self-government.

The undemocratic, foreign and exploitative character of British rule remained unchanged. Morley openly declared in Parliament: 'If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily up to the establishment of a Parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it.'

The real purpose of the Morley-Minto Reforms was to divide the nationalist ranks and to check the growing unity among Indians by encouraging the growth of Muslim communalism. To achieve the latter objective, the Reforms introduced the system of separate electorates under which Muslims could only vote for Muslim candidates in constituencies specially reserved for them. This was done to encourage the notion that the political, economic and cultural interests of Hindus and Muslims were separate and not common. The institution of separate electorates was one of the poisonous trees which was to yield a bitter harvest in later years.

## REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

The end of 1907 brought another political trend to the fore. The impatient young men of Bengal took to the path of individual heroism and revolutionary nationalism. This was primarily because they could find no other way of expressing their patriotism. It is necessary at this point to reiterate the fact that, while the youth of Bengal might have been incensed at the official arrogance and repression and the 'mendicancy' of the Congress Moderates, they were also led to 'the politics of the bomb' by the Extremists' failure to give a positive lead to the people. The Extremists had made a sharp and on the whole correct and effective critique of the Moderates. They had rightly emphasized the role of the masses and the need to go beyond propaganda and agitation. They had advocated persistent opposition to the Government and put forward a militant programme of passive resistance and boycott of foreign cloth, foreigners' courts, education and so on. They had demanded self-sacrifice from the youth. They had talked and written about direct action.

But they had failed to find forms through which all these ideas could find practical expression. They could neither create a viable organization to lead the movement nor could they really define the movement in a way that differed from that of the Moderates. They were more militant their critique of British rule was couched in stronger language, they were willing to make greater sacrifices and undergo greater suffering, but they did not know how to go beyond more vigorous agitation. They were not able to put before people new forms of political struggle or mass movements. Consequently, they too had come to a political dead end by the end of 1907. Perhaps that is one reason why they expended so much of their energy in criticizing the Moderates and capturing the Congress. Unsurprisingly, the Extremists' waffling failed to impress the youth who decided to take recourse to physical force. The *Yugantar*, a newspaper echoing this feeling of disaffection, wrote in April 1906, after the police assault on the peaceful Barisal Conference: 'The thirty crores of people inhabiting India must raise their sixty crores of hands to stop this curse of oppression. Force must be stopped by force.' But the question was what form would this movement based



on force take. Organizing a popular mass uprising would necessarily be an uphill and prolonged task. Many thought of trying to subvert the loyalty of the army, but they knew it would not be easy. However, these two objectives were kept as long-term goals and, for the present, revolutionary youth decided to copy the methods of the Irish nationalists and Russian nihilists and populists. That is to say, they decided to organize the assassination of unpopular British officials. Such assassinations would strike terror into the hearts of the rulers, amuse the patriotic instincts of the people, inspire them and remove the fear of authority from their minds. Each assassination, and if the assassins were caught, the consequent trial of the revolutionaries involved, would act as 'propaganda by deed'. All that this form of struggle needed was numbers of young people ready to sacrifice their lives. Inevitably, it appealed to the idealism of the youth; it aroused their latent sense of heroism. A steadily increasing number of young men turned to this form of political struggle. Here again the Extremist leadership let the young people down, While it praised their sense of self-sacrifice and courage, it failed to provide a positive outlet for their revolutionary energies and to educate them on the political difference between a evolution based on the activity of the masses and a revolutionary feeling based on individual action, however heroic. It also failed to oppose the notion that to be a revolutionary meant to be a believer in violent action. In fact, Aurobindo Ghose encouraged this notion. Perhaps the actions of the Extremist leadership were constrained by the feeling that it was not proper to politically criticize the heroic youth who were being condemned and hunted by the authorities. But this failure to politically and ideologically oppose the young revolutionaries proved a grievous error, for it enabled the individualistic and terrorist conception of revolution to take root in Bengal.



**Vinayak Damodar Savarkar**

In 1904, V.D. Sarvarkar organized Abhinav Bharat as a secret society of revolutionaries. After 1905 several newspapers openly (and a few leaders secretly) began to advocate revolutionary terrorism. In 1907, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. In April 1908, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose threw a bomb at a carriage which they believed was occupied by Kingsford, the unpopular judge at Muzzafarpur. Unfortunately, they killed two English ladies instead. Prafulla Chaki shot himself dead while Khudiram Bose was tried and hanged. Thousands wept at his death and he and Chaki entered the ranks of popular nationalist heroes about whom folk songs were composed and sung all over the country.

The era of revolutionary nationalism had begun. Very soon secret societies of revolutionaries came up all over the country, the most famous and long lasting being Anushilan Samity and Jugantar. Their activities took two forms---the assassination of oppressive officials and informers and traitors from their own ranks and dacoities to raise funds for purchase of arms etc. The latter came to be popularly known as Swadeshi dacoities! Two of the most spectacular revolutionary terrorist actions of the period were the unsuccessful

attempt under the leadership of Rash Behari Bose and Sachin Sanyal to kill the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge who was wounded by the bomb thrown at him while he was riding an elephant in a state procession — and the assassination of Curzon-Wylie in London by Madan Lal Dhingra. In all 186 revolutionaries were killed or convicted between the years 1908-1918. The revolutionary terrorists also established centres abroad. The more famous of them were Shyamji Krishnavarma, V.D. Savarkar and Har Dayal in London and Madame Cama and Ajit Singh in Europe.



**Khudiram Bose**



**Madam Bhikaiji Cama**



**Madan Lal Dhingra**

Revolutionary nationalism gradually petered out. Lacking a mass base, despite remarkable heroism, the individual revolutionaries, organized in small secret groups, could not withstand suppression by the still strong colonial state. But despite their 'small numbers and eventual failure, they made a valuable contribution to the growth of nationalism in India. As a historian has put it, 'they gave us back the pride of our manhood.'

# UNIT-XXI

## WORLD WAR-I & INDIAN NATIONALISM

### THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR-I AND THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 gave a new lease of life to the nationalist movement which had been dormant since the heady days of the Swadeshi Movement. Britain's difficulty was India's 'opportunity.' This opportunity was seized, in different ways and with varying success, by the Ghadar revolutionaries based in North America and by Lokamanya Tilak, Annie Besant and their Home Rule Leagues in India. The Ghadarites attempted a violent overthrow of British rule, while the Home Rule Leaguers launched a nation-wide agitation for securing Home Rule or Swaraj.

The West Coast of North America had, since 1904, become home to a steadily increasing number of Punjabi immigrants. Many of these were land-hungry peasants from the crowded areas of Punjab, especially the Jullundur and Hoshiarpur districts, in search of some means of survival. Some of them came straight from their villages in Punjab while others had emigrated earlier to seek employment in various places in the Far East, in the Malay States, and in Fiji. Many among them were ex-soldiers whose service in the British Indian Army had taken them to distant lands and made them aware of the opportunities to be had there. Pushed out from their homes by economic hardship and lured by the prospect of building a new and prosperous life for themselves and their kin, they pawned the belonging, mortgaged or sold their land, and set out for the promised lands.

The welcome awaited the travel-weary immigrants in Canada and the USA was, however not what they had expected. Many were refused entry, especially those who came straight from their villages and did not know Western Ways and manners those who were allowed to stay not only had to face racial Contempt but also the brunt of the hostility of the White labour force and unions who resented the competition they offered. Agitations against the entry of the Indians were launched by Native American labourers and these were supported by politicians looking for the popular vote. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for India had his own reasons for urging restrictions on immigration. For one, he believed that the terms of close familiarity of Indians with Whites which would inevitably take place in America was not good for British prestige; it was by prestige alone that India was held and not by force. Further, he was worried that the immigrants would get contaminated by socialist ideas, and that the racial discrimination to which they were bound to be subjected would become the source of nationalist agitation in India.' The combined pressure resulted in an effective restriction on Indian immigration into Canada in 1908. Tarak Nath Das, an Indian student, and one of the first leaders of the Indian community in North America to start a paper (called Free Hindustan) realized that while the British government was keen on Indians going to Fiji to work as labourers for British planters, it did not want them to go to North America where they might be infected by ideas of liberty.

The discriminatory policies of the host countries soon resulted in a flurry of political activity among Indian nationalists. As early as 1907, Ramnath Puri, a political exile on the West Coast, issued a Circular-e-Azadi (Circular of Liberty) in which he also pledged support to the Swadeshi Movement; Tarak Nath Das in Vancouver started the Free Hindustan and adopted a very militant nationalist tone; G.D. Kumar set up a Swadesh Sevak Home in Vancouver on the lines of the India House in London and also began to bring out a Gurmukhi paper called Swadesh Sevak which advocated social reform and also asked Indian troops to rise in revolt against the British. In 1910, Tarak Nath Das and G.D. Kumar, by now forced out of Vancouver, set up the United India House in Seattle in the US, where every Saturday they lectured to a group of twenty-five Indian labourers. Close links also developed between the United India House group, consisting mainly of radical nationalist students, and the Khalsa Diwan Society, and in 1913 they decided to send a deputation to meet the Colonial Secretary in London and the Viceroy and other officials in India. The Colonial Secretary in London could not find the time to see them even though they waited for a



whole month, but in India they succeed in meeting the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab. But, more important, their visit became the occasion for a series of public meetings in Lahore, Ludhiana, Ambala, Ferozepore, Jullundur, Amritsar Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Sialkot and Simla and they received enthusiastic support from the Press and the general public.

The result of this sustained agitation, both in Canada and the United States, was the creation of a nationalist consciousness and feeling of solidarity among immigrant Indians. Their inability to get the Government of India or the British Government to intercede on their behalf regarding immigration restrictions and other disabilities, such as those imposed by the Alien Land law which practically prohibited Indians from owning land in the US, led to an impatience and a mood of discontent which blossomed into a revolutionary movement.

## THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

The first fillip to the revolutionary movement was provided by the visit to Vancouver, in early 1913, of Bhagwan Singh, a Sikh priest who had worked in Hong Kong and the Malay States. He openly preached the gospel of violent overthrow of British rule and urged the people to adopt *Bande Mataram* as a revolutionary salute. Bhagwan Singh was expelled from Canada after a stay of three months.

The centre of revolutionary activity soon shifted to the US, which provided a relatively free political atmosphere. The crucial role was played by Lala Har Dayal, a political exile from India. Har Dayal arrived in California in April 1911, taught briefly at Stanford University, and soon immersed himself in political activity. During the summer of 1912, he concentrated mainly on delivering lectures on the anarchist and syndicalist movements to various American groups of intellectuals, radicals and workers, and did not show much interest in the problems that were agitating the immigrant Indian community. But the bomb attack on Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, in Delhi on 23 December, 1912, excited his imagination and roused the dormant Indian revolutionary in him. His faith in the possibility of a revolutionary overthrow of the British regime in India was renewed, and he issued a *Yugantar* Circular praising the attack on the Viceroy. Meanwhile, the Indians on the West Coast of the US had been in search of a leader and had even thought of inviting Ajit Singh, who had become famous in the agitation in Punjab in 1907. But Har Dayal was already there and, after December 1912, showed himself willing to play an active political role. Soon the Hindi Association was set up in Portland in May 1913.

At the very first meeting of the Association, held in the house of Kanshi Ram, and attended among others by Bhai Parmanand, Sohan Singh Bhakna, and Harnam Singh 'Tundilat,' Har Dayal set forth his plan of action: 'Do not fight the Americans, but use the freedom that is available in the US to fight the British; you will never be treated as equals by the Americans until you are free in your own land, the root cause of Indian poverty and degradation is British rule and it must be overthrown, not by petitions but by aimed revolt; carry this message to the masses and to the soldiers in the Indian Army; go to India in large numbers and enlist their support.' Har Dayal's ideas found immediate acceptance. A Working Committee was set up and the decision was taken to start a weekly paper, *The Ghadar*, for free circulation, and to set up a headquarters called *Yugantar Ashram* in San Francisco. A series of meetings held in different towns and centres and finally a representatives' meeting in Astoria confirmed and approved the decisions of the first meeting at Portland. The Ghadar Movement had begun.

The Ghadar militants immediately began an extensive propaganda Campaign; they toured extensively, visiting mills and farms where most of the Punjabi immigrant labour worked. The *Yugantar Ashram* became the home and headquarters and refuge of these political workers.

On 1 November 1913, the first issue of *Ghadar*, in Urdu was published and on 9 December, the *Grumukhi* edition. The name of the paper left no doubts as to its aim. *Ghadar* means Revolt. And if any doubts remained, they were to be dispelled by the captions on the masthead: 'Angrezi Raj ka Dushman' or 'An Enemy of British Rule.' On the front page of each issue was a feature titled *Angrezi Raj Ka Kacha Chittha* or 'An Expose of British Rule.' This *Chittha* consisted of fourteen points enumerating the harmful effects of

British rule, including the of wealth, the low per capita income of Indians, the high land tax, the contrast between the low expenditure on health and the high expenditure on the military, the destruction of Indian arts and industries, the recurrence of famines and plague that killed millions of Indians, the use of Indian tax payers' money for wars in Afghanistan, Burma, Egypt, Persia and China the British policy of promoting discord in the Indian States to extend their own influence, the discriminatory lenient treatment given to Englishmen who were guilty of killing Indians or dishonouring Indian women the policy of helping Christian missionaries with money raised from Hindus and Muslims, the effort to foment discord between Hindus and Muslims: in sum, the entire critique of British rule that had been formulated by the Indian national movement was summarized and presented every week to *Ghadar* readers. The last two points of the *Chittha* suggested the solution:

(1) The Indian population numbers seven crores in the Indian States and 24 crores in British India, while there are only 79,614 officers and soldiers and 38,948 volunteers who are Englishmen.

(2) Fifty-six years have lapsed since the Revolt of 1857; now there is urgent need for a second one.

Besides the powerful simplicity of the *Chittha*, the message was also conveyed by serializing Savarkar's *The Indian War of independence —1857*. *The Ghadar* also contained references to the contributions of Lokamanya Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, V.D. Savarkar, Madame Cama, Shyamji Krishna Varma, Ajit Singh and Sufi Amba Prasad, as well as highlights of the daring deeds of the *Anushilan Samiti*, the *Yugantar* group and the Russian secret societies. But, perhaps, the most powerful impact was made by the poems that appeared in *The Ghadar*, soon collected and published as *Ghadar di Goonj* and distributed free of cost. These poems were marked as much by their secular tone as by their revolutionary zeal, as the following extract demonstrates:

***Hindus, Sikhs, Pathans and Muslims,  
Pay attention ye all people in the army.  
Our country has been plundered by the British,  
We have to wage a war against them.  
We do not need pandits and quazis,  
We do not want to get our ship sunk.  
The time of worship is over now,  
It is time to take up the sword.***

*The Ghadar* was circulated widely among Indians in North America, and within a few months it had reached groups settled in the Philippines, Hong Kong, China, the Malay States, Singapore, Trinidad, the Honduras, and of course, India. It evoked an unprecedented response, becoming the subject of lively discussion and debate. The poems it carried were recited at gatherings of Punjabi immigrants, and were soon popular everywhere.

Unsurprisingly, *The Ghadar*, succeeded, in a very brief time, in changing the self-image of the Punjabi immigrant from that of a loyal soldier of the British Raj to that of a rebel whose only aim was to destroy the British hold on his motherland. *The Ghadar* consciously made the Punjabi aware of his loyalist past, made him feel ashamed of it, and challenged him to atone for it in the name of his earlier tradition of resistance to oppression:

***Why do you disgrace the name of Singhs?  
How come! You have forgotten the majesty of 'Lions'  
Had the like of Dip Singh been alive today  
How could the Singhs have been taunted?  
People say that the Singhs are no good***

*Why did you turn the tides during the Delhi mutiny?*

*Cry aloud. 'Let us kill the Whites'*

*Why do you sit quiet, shamelessly?*

*Let the earth give way so we may drown*

*To what good were these thirty crores born.*

The message went home, and ardent young militants began thirsting for 'action.' Har Dayal himself was surprised by the intensity of the response. He had, on occasion, spoken in terms of 'ten years' or 'some years' when asked how long it would take to organize the revolution in India. But those who read the heady exhortations of *The Ghadar* were too impatient, and ten years seemed a long time. Finally, in 1914, three events influenced the course of the *Ghadar* movement: the arrest and escape of Har Dayal, the *Komagata Maru* incident, and the outbreak of the First World War.

Dayal was arrested on 25 March 1914 on the stated ground of his anarchist activities though everybody suspected that the British Government had much to do with it. Released on bail, he used the opportunity to slip out of the country. With that, his active association with the *Ghadar* Movement came to an abrupt end.



**Komagata Maru**

Meanwhile, in March 1914, the ship, *Komagata Maru* had begun its fateful voyage to Canada. Canada had for some years imposed very strict restrictions on Indian immigration by means of a law that forbade entry to all, except those who made a continuous journey from India. This measure had proved effective because there were no shipping lines that offered such a route. But in November 1913, the Canadian Supreme Court allowed entry to thirty-five Indians who had not made a continuous journey. Encouraged by this judgment, 'Gurdit Singh, an Indian contractor living in Singapore, decided to charter a ship and carry to Vancouver, Indians who were living in various places in East and South-East Asia. Carrying a total of 376 Indian passengers, the ship began its journey to Vancouver. *Ghadar* activists visited the ship at Yokohama in Japan, gave lectures and distributed literature. The Press in Punjab warned of serious consequences if the Indians were not allowed entry into Canada.



The Press in Canada took a different view and some newspapers in Vancouver alerted the people to the 'Mounting Oriental Invasion.' The Government of Canada had, meanwhile, plugged the legal loopholes that had resulted in the November Supreme Court judgment. The battle lines were clearly drawn. When the ship arrived in Vancouver, it was not allowed into the port and was cordoned off by the police. To fight for the rights of the passengers, a 'Shore Committee' was set up under the leadership of Husain Rahim, Sohan Lal Pathak and Balwant Singh, funds were raised, and protest meetings organized.



**Lala Hardayal**

Rebellion against the British in India was threatened. In the United States, under the leadership of Bhagwan Singh, Barkatullah, Ram Chandra and Sohan Singh Bhakna, a powerful campaign was organized and the people were advised to prepare for rebellion. Soon the *Komagata Maru* was forced out of Canadian waters. Before it reached Yokohama, World War I broke out, and the British Government passed orders that no passenger be allowed to disembark anywhere on the way — not even at the places from where they had joined the ship — but only at Calcutta. At every port that the ship touched, it triggered off a wave of resentment and anger among the Indian community and became the occasion for anti-British mobilization. On landing at Budge Budge near Calcutta, the harassed and irate passengers, provoked by the hostile attitude of the authorities, resisted the police and this led to a clash in which eighteen passengers were killed, and 202 arrested. A few of them succeeded in escaping.

The third and most important development that made the *Ghadar* revolution imminent was the outbreak of the World War

1. After all, this was the opportunity they had been told to seize. True, they were not really prepared, but should they now let it just pass by? A special meeting of the leading activists of the *Ghadar* Movement decided that the opportunity must be seized, that it was better to die than to do nothing at all, and that their major weakness, the lack of arms, could be overcome by going to India and winning over the Indian soldiers to their cause. The *Ailan-e-Jung* or Proclamation of War of the *Ghadar* Party was issued and circu-

lated widely. Mohammed Barkatullah, Ram Chandra and Bhagwan Singh organized and addressed a series of public meetings to exhort Indians to go back to India and organize an armed revolt. Prominent leaders were sent to persuade Indians living in Japan, the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, The Malay States, Singapore and Burma to return home and join the rebels. The more impatient among the *Ghadar* activists, such as Kartar Singh Sarabha, later hanged by the British in a conspiracy case, and Raghubar Dayal Gupta immediately left for India.

## THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

The Government of India, fully informed of the *Ghadar* plans, which were, in any case, hardly a secret, armed itself with the Ingress into India Ordinance and waited for the returning emigrants. On arrival, the emigrants were scrutinized, the 'safe' ones allowed to proceed home, the more 'dangerous' ones arrested and the less dangerous' ones ordered not to leave their home villages. Of course, some of 'the dangerous' ones escaped detection and went to Punjab to foment rebellion. Of an estimated 8000 emigrants who returned to India, 5000 were allowed to proceed unhindered. Precautionary measures were taken for roughly 1500 men. Upto February 1915, 189 had been interned and 704 restricted to their villages. Many who came via Colombo and South India succeeded in reaching Punjab without being found out.

But Punjab in 1914 was very different from what the Ghadarites had been led to expect — they found the Punjabis were in no mood to join the romantic adventure of the Ghadar. The militants from abroad tried their best; they toured the villages, addressed gatherings at melas and festivals, all to no avail. The Chief Khalsa Diwan proclaiming its loyalty to the sovereign, declared them to be 'fallen' Sikhs and criminals, and helped the Government to track them down. Frustrated and disillusioned with the attitude of the civilian population, the Ghadarites turned their attention to the army and made a number of naive attempts in November 1914 to get the army units to mutiny. But the lack of an organized leadership and central command frustrated all the Ghadar's efforts.

Frantically, the Ghadar made an attempt to find a leader; Bengali revolutionaries were contacted and through the efforts of Sachindranath Sanyal and Vishnu Ganesh Pingley, Rash Behari Bose, the Bengali revolutionary who had become famous by his daring attack on Hardinge, the Viceroy, finally arrived in Punjab in mid-January 1915 to assume leadership of the revolt.

Bose established a semblance of an organization and sent out men to contact army units in different centres, (from Bannu in the North-West Frontier to Faizabad and Lucknow in the U.P.) and report back by 11 February 1915. The emissaries returned with optimistic reports, and the date for the mutiny was set first for 21 and then for 19 February. But the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) had succeeded in penetrating the organization, from the very highest level down, and the Government succeeded in taking effective pre-emptive measures. Most of the leaders were arrested, though Bose escaped. For all practical purposes, the Ghadar Movement was crushed. But the Government did not stop there. In what was perhaps the most repressive action experienced by the national movement this far, conspiracy trials were held in Punjab and Mandalay, forty-five revolutionaries were sentenced to death and over 200 to long terms of imprisonment.

An entire generation of the nationalist leadership of Punjab was, thus, politically beheaded. Some Indian revolutionaries who were operating from Berlin, and who had links with the Ghadar leader Ram Chandra in America, continued, with German help, to make attempts to organize a mutiny among Indian troops stationed abroad. Raja Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah tried to enlist the help of the Amir of Afghanistan and even, hopefully, set up a Provisional Government in Kabul, but these and other attempts failed to record any significant success. It appeared that violent opposition to British rule was fated to fail.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

Should we, therefore, conclude that the Ghadarites fought in vain? Or that, because they could not drive out the British, their movement was a failure? Both these conclusions are not necessarily correct because the success or failure of a political movement is not always to be measured in terms of its achievement of stated objectives. By that measure, all the major national struggles whether of 1920-22, 1930-34, or 1942 would have to be classified as failures, since none of them culminated in Indian independence. But if success and failure are to be measured in terms of the deepening of nationalist consciousness, the evolution and testing of new strategies and methods of struggle, the creation of tradition of resistance, of secularism, of democracy, and of egalitarianism, then, the Ghadarites certainly contributed their share to the struggle for India's freedom. Ironic though it may seem, it was in the realm of ideology that Ghadar success was the greatest. Through the earlier papers, but most of all through *The Ghadar* itself, the entire nationalist critique of colonialism, which was the most solid and abiding contribution of the moderate nationalists, was carried, in a powerful and simple form, to the mass of Indian immigrants, many of whom were poor workers and agricultural labourers. This huge propaganda effort motivated and educated an entire generation. Though a majority of the leaders of the Ghadar Movement, and most of the participants were drawn from among the Sikhs, the ideology that was created and spread through *The Ghadar* and *Ghadar di Goonj* and other publications was strongly secular in tone. Concern with religion was seen as petty and narrow-minded, and unworthy of revolutionaries. That this was not mere brave talk is seen by the ease with which leaders belonging to, different religions and regions were accepted by the movement. Lala Har Dayal was a Hindu, and so were Ram Chandra and many others, Barkatullah was a Muslim and Rash Behari Bose a Hindu and a Bengali! But perhaps much more important, the Ghadarites consciously set out to create a secular consciousness among the Punjabis. A good example of this is the way in which the term *Turka Shahi* (Turkish rule), which in Punjabi was a synonym for oppression and high-handed behavior, was sought to be reinterpreted and the Punjabis were urged to look upon the 'Turks' (read Muslims) as their brothers who fought hard for the country's freedom. Further, the nationalist salute *Bande Mataram* (and not any Sikh religious greeting such as *Sag Sri Akal*) was urged upon and adopted as the rallying cry of the *Ghadar* Movement. The *Ghadarites* sought to give a new meaning to religion as well. They urged that religion lay not in observing the outward forms such as those signified by long hair and *Kirpan* (sword), but in remaining true to the model of good behavior that was enjoined by all religious teachings.

The ambiguities that remained in the *Ghadar* ideological discourse, such as those evidenced by Har Dayal's advocacy of Khilafat as a religious cause of the Muslims, or when the British policy of not allowing Sikhs to carry arms was criticized, etc., were a product of the transitional stage in the evolution of a secular nationalist ideology that was spanned by the *Ghadar* Movement and its leaders. Also, the defence of religious interests has to be seen as part of the whole aspect of cultural defence against colonialism, and not necessarily as an aspect of communalism or communal ideology and consciousness. Nor did the Ghadarites betray any narrow regional loyalties. Lokamanya Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose, Khudi Ram Bose, Kanhia Lal Dutt, Savarkar were all the heroes of the *Ghadars*. Rash Behari Bose was importuned and accepted as the leader of the abortive *Ghadar* revolt in 1915. Far from dwelling on the greatness of the Sikhs or the Punjabis, the *Ghadars* constantly criticized the loyalist role played by the Punjabis during 1857.

Similarly, the large Sikh presence in the British Indian Army was not hailed as proof of the so-called 'martial' traditions of the Sikhs, as became common later, but was seen as a matter of shame and Sikh soldiers were asked to revolt against the British. The self-image of the Punjabi, and especially of the Punjabi Sikh, that was created by the *Ghadar* Movement was that of an Indian who had betrayed his motherland in 1857 by siding with the foreigner and who had, therefore, to make amends to *Bharat Mata*, by fighting for her honor. In the words of Sohan Singh Bhakna, who later became a major peasant and Communist leader: 'We were not Sikhs or Punjabis? Our religion was patriotism.'

Another marked feature of *Ghadar* ideology was its democratic and egalitarian content. It was clearly stated by the Ghadarites that their objective was the establishment of an independent republic of India.



Also, deeply influenced as he was by anarchist and syndicalist movements, and even by socialist ideas, Har Dayal imparted to the movement an egalitarian ideology. Perhaps this facilitated the transformation of many Ghadarites into peasant leaders and Communist in the '20s and '30s.

Har Dayal's other major contribution was the creation of a truly internationalist outlook among the *Ghadar* revolutionaries. His lectures and articles were full of references to Irish, Mexican, and Russian revolutionaries. For example, he referred to Mexican revolutionaries as 'Mexican Ghadarites.' Ghadar militants were thus distinguished by their secular, egalitarian, democratic and non-chauvinistic internationalist outlook.

## WEAKNESSES OF THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

This does not, however, mean that the *Ghadar* Movement did not suffer from any weaknesses. The major weakness of the *Ghadar* leaders was that they completely under-estimated the extent and amount of preparation at every level — organizational, ideological, strategic, tactical, financial — that was necessary before an attempt at an armed revolt could be organized. Taken by surprise by the outbreak of the war and roused to a fever-pitch by the *Komagata Maru* episode, they sounded the bugles of war without examining the state of their army. They forgot that to mobilize a few thousand discontented immigrant Indians, who were already in a highly charged emotional state because of the racial discrimination they suffered at the hands of white foreigners, was very different from the stupendous task of mobilizing and motivating lakhs of peasants and soldiers in India. They underestimated the strength of the British in India, both their armed and organizational might as well as the ideological foundations of their rule and led themselves to imagine that all that the masses of India lacked was a call to revolt, which, once given, would strike a fatal blow to the tottering structure of British rule.

The *Ghadar* Movement also failed to generate an effective and sustained leadership that was capable of integrating the various aspects of the movement. Har Dayal himself was temperamentally totally unsuited to the role of an organizer; he was a propagandist, an inspirer, an ideologue. Even his ideas did not form a structured whole but remained a shifting amalgam of various theories that attracted him from time to time. Further, his departure from the U.S. at a critical stage left his compatriots floundering.

Another major weakness of the movement was its almost non-existent organizational structure; the *Ghadar* Movement was sustained, more by the enthusiasm of the militants than by their effective organization.

These weaknesses of understanding, of leadership, of organization, all resulted in what one can only call a tremendous waste of valuable human resources. If we recall that forty Ghadarites were sentenced to be hanged and over 200 given long terms of imprisonment, we can well realize that the particular romantic adventure of 1914-15 resulted in the beheading of an entire generation of secular nationalist leadership, who could perhaps have, if they had remained politically effective, given an entirely different political complexion to Punjab in the following years. They would certainly have given their strong secular moorings, acted as a bulwark against the growth of communal tendencies that were to raise their heads in later years. That this is not just wild speculation is seen from the fact that, in the late '20s, and '30s, the few surviving Ghadarites helped lay the foundations of a secular national and peasant movement in Punjab.

## UNIT-XXII

# THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT

### EARLY EFFORTS OF ANNIE BESANT AND LOKMANYA TILAK

The romantic adventure of the *Ghadar* revolutionaries was the dramatic response of Indians living abroad to the First World War. We now turn to the less charged, but more effective, Indian response — the Home Rule League Movement, led by Lokamanya Tilak and Annie Besant.

On 16 June 1914, Bal Gangadhar Tilak was released after serving a prison sentence of six years, most of which he had spent in Mandalay in Burma. He returned to India very different to the one he had been banished from. Aurobindo Ghose, the firebrand of the Swadeshi days, had taken *sanyas* in Pondicherry, and Lala Lajpat Rai was away in the United States of America. The Indian National Congress had yet to recover from the combined effects of the split at Surat in 1907, the heavy government repression of the activists of the Swadeshi Movement, and the disillusionment of the Moderates with the constitutional reforms of 1909.

Tilak initially concentrated all his attention on seeking readmission, for himself and other Extremists, into the Indian National Congress. He was obviously convinced that the sanction of this body, that had come to symbolize the Indian national movement, was a necessary pre-condition for the success of any political action. To conciliate the Moderates and convince them of his *bonafides*, as well as to stave off any possible government repression, he publicly declared: I may state once for all that we are trying in India, as the Irish Home-rulers have been doing in Ireland, for a reform of the system of administration and not for the overthrow of Government; and I have no hesitation in saying that the acts of violence which had been committed in the different Parts of India are not only repugnant to me, but have, in my opinion, only unfortunately retarded to a great extent, the pace of our political progress." He further assured the Government of his loyalty to the Crown and urged all Indians to assist the British Government in its hour of crisis.

Many of the Moderate leaders of the Congress were also unhappy with the choice they had made in 1907 at Surat, and also with the fact that the Congress had lapsed into almost total inactivity. They were, therefore, quite sympathetic to Tilak's overtures. Further, they were under considerable pressure from Mrs. Annie Besant, who had just joined the Indian National Congress and was keen to arouse nationalist political activity, to admit the Extremists.

Annie Besant, already sixty-six in 1914, had begun her political career in England as a proponent of Free Thought, Radicalism, Fabianism and Theosophy, and had come to India in 1893 to work for the Theosophical Society. Since 1907, she had been spreading the message of Theosophy from her headquarters in Adyar, a suburb of Madras, and had gained a large number of followers among the educated members of many communities that had experienced no cultural revival of their own. In 1914, she decided to enlarge the sphere of her activities to include the building of a movement for Home Rule on the lines of the Irish Home Rule League. For this, she realized it was necessary both to get the sanction of the Congress, as well as the active cooperation of the Extremists. She devoted her energies, therefore, to persuading the Moderate leaders to open the doors of the Congress to Tilak and his fellow- Extremists.

But the annual Congress session in December 1914 was to prove a disappointment — Pherozeshah Mehta and his Bombay Moderate group succeeded, by winning over Gokhale and the Bengal Moderates, in keeping out the Extremists. Tilak and Besant thereupon decided to revive political activity on their own, while maintaining their pressure on the Congress to re-admit the Extremist group.

In early 1915, Annie Besant launched a campaign through her two papers, *New India* and *Commonweal*, and organized public meetings and conferences to demand that India be granted self-government on the lines of the White colonies after the War.

From April 1915, her tone became more peremptory and her stance more aggressive. Meanwhile, Lokamanya began his political activities, but, not yet having gained admittance into the Congress, was careful that he did not in any way alarm the Moderates or appear to be by-passing the Congress. This is clear from the fact that at the meeting of his followers convened at Poona in May 1915, it was decided that their initial phase of action would be to set up an agency 'to enlighten the villagers regarding the objects and work of the Congress.' The local associations that were set up in many Maharashtra towns in August and September of that year also concentrated more on emphasizing the need for unity in the Congress than on the stepping up of political activity. While sometimes resorting to threats to pressurize the more conservative among the Moderates, Tilak still hoped to persuade the majority to accept him because of his reasonableness and caution.

His efforts and those of Annie Besant were soon to meet with success, and at the annual session of the Congress in December 1915 it was decided that the Extremists be allowed to rejoin the Congress. The opposition from the Bombay group had been greatly weakened by the death of Pherozeshah Mehta. But Annie Besant did not succeed in getting the Congress and the Muslim League to support her decision to set up Home Rule Leagues. She did manage, however, to persuade the Congress to commit itself to a programme of educative propaganda and to a revival of the local level Congress committees. Knowing that the Congress, as constituted at the time, was unlikely to implement this, she had inserted a condition by which, if the Congress did not start this activity by September 1916, she would be free to set up her own League.

Tilak, not bound by any such commitment, and having gained the right of readmission, now took the lead and set up the Home Rule League at the Bombay Provincial Conference held at Belgaum in April 1916. Annie Besant's impatient followers, unhappy with her decision to wait till September, secured her permission to start Home Rule groups. Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Shankerlal Banker and Indulal Yagnik set up a Bombay paper *Young India* and launched an All India Propaganda Fund to publish pamphlets in regional languages and in English. In September 1916, as there were no signs of any Congress activity, Annie Besant announced the formation of her Home Rule League, with George Arundale, her Theosophical follower, as the Organizing Secretary. The two Leagues avoided any friction by demarcating their area of activity; Tilak's League was to work in Maharashtra, (excluding Bombay city), Karnataka, the Central Provinces and Berar, and Annie Besant's League was given charge of the rest of India. The reason the two Leagues did not merge was because, in Annie Besant's words, 'some of his followers disliked me and some of mine disliked him. We, however, had no quarrel with each other.'

Tilak promoted the Home Rule campaign with a tour of Maharashtra and through his lectures clarified and popularized the demand for Home Rule. 'India was like a son who had grown up and attained maturity it was right now that the trustee or the father should give him what was his due. The people of India must get this effected. They have a right to do so.' He also linked up the question of *Swaraj* with the demand for the formation of linguistic states and education in the vernacular. 'Form one separate state each for Marathi, Telugu and Kanarese provinces... The principle that education should be given through the vernaculars is self-evident and clear. Do the English educate their people through the French language? Do Germans do it through English or the Turks through French?' At the Bombay Provincial Conference in 1915, he told V.B. Alur who got up to support his condolence resolution on Gokhale's death: 'Speak in Kannada to establish the right of Kannada language.' It is clear that the Lokamanya had no trace of regional or linguistic Marathi chauvinism.

His stand on the question of non-Brahmin representation and on the issue of untouchability demonstrated that he was no casteist either. When the non-Brahmins in Maharashtra sent a separate memorandum to the Government dissociating themselves from the demands of the advanced classes, Tilak urged those who opposed this to be patient: 'If we can prove to the non-Brahmins, by example, that we are wholly on their side in their demands from the Government, I am sure that in times to come their agitation, now based on social inequality, will merge into our struggle.' To the non-Brahmins, he explained that the real difference was not between Brahmin and non-Brahmin, but between the educated and the non-educated.



Brahmins were ahead of others in jobs because they were more educated, and the Government, in spite of its sympathy for non-Brahmins and hostility towards Brahmins, was forced to look to the needs of the administration and give jobs to Brahmins. At a conference for the removal of untouchability, Tilak declared: 'If a God were to tolerate untouchability, I would not recognize him as God at all.' Nor can we discern in his speeches of this period any trace of religious appeal; the demand for Home Rule was made on a wholly secular basis. The British were aliens not because they belonged to another religion but because they did not act in the Indian interest. 'He who does what is beneficial to the people of this country, be he a Muhammedan or an Englishman, is not alien. 'Alienness' has to do with interests. Alienness is certainly not concerned with white or black skin . . . or religion.' Tilak's League furthered its propaganda efforts by publishing six Marathi and two English pamphlets, of which 47,000 copies were sold. Pamphlets were brought out in Gujarati and Kannada as well. The League was organized into six branches, one each in Central Maharashtra, Bombay city, Karnataka, and Central Provinces, and two in Berar.

As soon as the movement for Home Rule began to gather steam, the Government hit back, and it chose a particularly auspicious day for the blow. The 23rd of July, 1916, was Tilak's sixtieth birthday, and, according to custom, it was the occasion for a big celebration. A purse of Rs. one lakh was presented to him. The same day the Government offered him their own present: a notice asking him to show cause why he should not be bound over for good behavior for a period of one year and demanding securities of Rs. 60,000. For Tilak, this was the best gift he could have wanted for his birthday. 'The Lord is with us,' he said, 'Home Rule will now spread like wildfire.' Repression was sure to fan the fire of revolt.

Tilak was defended by a team of lawyers led by Mohammed Au Jinnah. He lost the case in the Magistrate's Court but was exonerated by the High Court in November. The victory was hailed all over the country. Gandhiji's *Young India* summed up the popular feeling: "Thus, a great victory has been won for the cause of Home Rule which has, thus, been freed from the chains that were sought to be put upon it."° Tilak immediately pushed home the advantage by proclaiming in his public speeches that Home Rule now had the sanction of the Government and he and his colleagues intensified their propaganda campaign for Home Rule. By April 1917 Tilak had enlisted 14,000 members.

Meanwhile, Annie Besant had gone ahead with the formal founding of her League in September 1916. The organization of her League was much looser than that of Tilak's, and three members could form a branch while in the case of Tilak's League each of the six branches had a clearly defined area and activities. Two hundred branches of Besant's League were established, some consisting of a town and others of groups of villages. And though a formal Executive Council of seven members was elected for three years by thirty-four 'founding branches,' most of the work was carried on by Annie Besant and her lieutenants—Arundale, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, and B.P. Wadia— from her headquarters at Adyar. Nor was there any organized method for passing on instructions—these were conveyed through individual members and through Arundale's column on Home Rule in *New India*. The membership of Annie Besant's League increased at a rate slower than that of Tilak's. By March 1917, her League had 7,000 members. Besides her existing Theosophical followers, many others including Jawaharlal Nehru in Allahabad and B. Chakravarti and J. Banerjea in Calcutta joined the Home Rule League. However, the strength of the League could not be judged from the number of branches because, while many were extremely active, others remained adjuncts of the Theosophical societies. In Madras city, for example, though the number of branches was very large, many were inactive, while the branch in Bombay city, the four branches in the U.P. towns, and many village branches in Gujarat were very active.

The main thrust of the activity was directed towards building up an agitation around the demand for Home Rule. This was to be achieved by promoting political education and discussion. Arundale, through *New India*, advised members to promote political discussions, establish libraries containing material on national politics, organize classes for students on politics, print and circulate pamphlets, collect funds, organize social work, take part in local government activities, arrange political meetings and lectures, present arguments to friends in favour of Home Rule and urge them to join the movement. At least some of these activities were carried on by many of the branches, and especially the task of promotion of political discussion and debate.

Some idea of the immensity of the propaganda effort that was launched can be gauged from the fact that by the time Annie Besant's League was formally founded in September 1916, the Propaganda Fund started earlier in the year had already sold 300,000 copies of twenty-six English pamphlets which focused mainly on the system of government existing in India and the arguments for self-government. After the founding of the League, these pamphlets were published again and, in addition, new ones in Indian languages were brought out. Most branches were also very active in holding public meetings and lectures. Further, they would always respond when a nation-wide call was given for protest on any specific issue. For example, when Annie Besant was externed from the Central Provinces and Berar in November 1916, most of the branches, at Arundale's instance, held meetings and sent resolutions of protest to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. Tilak's externment from Punjab and Delhi in February 1917 elicited a similar response.

Many Moderate Congressmen, who were dissatisfied with the inactivity into which the Congress had lapsed, joined the Home Rule agitation. Members of Gokhale's Servants of India Society, though not permitted to become members of the League, were encouraged to add their weight to the demand for Home Rule by undertaking lecture tours and publishing pamphlets. Many other Moderate nationalists joined the Home Rule Leaguers in U.P. in touring the surrounding towns and villages *in* preparation for the Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916. Their meetings were usually organized in the local Bar libraries, and attended by students, professionals, businessmen and, if it was a market day, by agriculturists. Speaking in Hindi, they contrasted India's current poverty with her glorious past, and also explained the main features of European independence movements. The participation of Moderates was hardly surprising, since the Home Rule Leagues were after all only implementing the programme of political propaganda and education that they had been advocating for so long.

## THE LUCKNOW PACT

The Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916 presented the Home Rule Leaguers with the long-awaited opportunity of demonstrating their strength. Tilak's Home Rule League established a tradition that was to become an essential part of later Congress annual sessions — a special train, known variously as the 'Congress Special' and the 'Home Rule Special,' was organized to carry delegates from Western India to Lucknow. Arundale asked every member of the League to get himself elected as a delegate to the Lucknow session — the idea being quite simply to flood the Congress with Home Rule Leaguers. Tilak and his men were welcomed back into the Congress by the Moderate president, Ambika Charan Mazumdar: 'After nearly 10 years of painful separation and wanderings through the wilderness of misunderstandings and the mazes of unpleasant controversies... both the wings of the Indian Nationalist party have come to realize the fact that united they stand, but divided they fall, and brothers have at last met brothers...' The Lucknow Congress was significant also for the famous Congress League Pact; popularly known as the Lucknow Pact.

Both Tilak and Annie Besant had played a leading role in bringing about this agreement between the Congress and the League, much against the wishes of many important leaders, including Madan Mohan Malaviya. Answering the criticism that the Pact had acceded too much to the Muslim League, Lokamanya Tilak said: 'It has been said, gentlemen, by some that we Hindus have yielded too much to our Mohammedan brethren. I am sure I represent the sense of the Hindu community all over India when I say that we could not have yielded too much. I would not care if the rights of self-government are granted to the Mohammedan community only. I would not care if they are granted to the Rajputs. I would not care if they are granted to the lower and the lowest classes of the Hindu population provided the British Government consider them more fit than the educated classes of India for exercising those rights. I would not care if those rights are granted to any section of the Indian community... When we have to fight against a third party — it is a very important thing that we stand on this platform united, united in race, united in religion, united as regards all different shades of political creed.'



Faced with such a stand by one who was considered the most orthodox of Hindus and the greatest scholar of the ancient religious texts, the opposition stood little chance of success, and faded away. And though the acceptance of the principle of separate electorates for Muslims was certainly a most controversial decision, it cannot be denied that the Pact was motivated by a sincere desire to allay minority fears about majority domination.

The Lucknow Congress also demanded a further dose of constitutional reforms as a step towards self-government. Though this did not go as far as the Home Rule Leaguers wished, they accepted it in the interests of Congress unity. Another very significant proposal made by Tilak — that the Congress should appoint a small and cohesive Working Committee that would carry on the day to day affairs of the Congress and be responsible for implementing the resolutions passed at the annual sessions, a proposal by which he hoped to transform the Congress from a deliberative body into one capable of leading a sustained movement — was unfortunately quashed by Moderate opposition. Four years later, in 1920, when Mahatma Gandhi prepared a reformed 'constitution for the Congress, this was one of the major changes considered necessary if the Congress was to lead a sustained movement.

After the end of the Congress session, a joint meeting of the two Home Rule Leagues was held in the same *pandal*, and was attended by over 1,000 delegates. The Congress League Pact was hailed and the gathering was addressed by both Annie Besant and Tilak. On their return journeys, both the leaders made triumphant tours through various parts of North, Central and Eastern India. The increasing popularity of the Home Rule Movement soon attracted the Government's wrath. The Government of Madras was the most harsh and first came out with an order banning students from attending political meetings. This order was universally condemned and Tilak commented: "The Government is fully aware that the wave of patriotism strikes the students most, and if at all a nation is to prosper, it is through an energetic new generation."

### ARREST OF ANNIE BESANT AND HOME RULE MOVEMENT

The turning point in the movement came with the decision of the Government of Madras in June 1917 to place Mrs. Besant and her associates, B.P. Wadia and George Arundale, under arrest. Their internment became the occasion for nation-wide protest. In a dramatic gesture, Sir S. Subramania Aiyar renounced his knighthood. Those who had stayed away, including many Moderate leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Surendranath Banerjea and M.A. Jinnah now enlisted as members of the Home Rule Leagues to record their solidarity with the internees and their condemnation of the Government's action. At a meeting of the AICC on 28 July, 1917, Tilak advocated the use of the weapon of passive resistance or civil disobedience if the Government refused to release the internees.

The proposal for adopting passive resistance was sent for comment to all the Provincial Congress Committees, and while Berar and Madras were willing to adopt it immediately, most of the others were in favour of waiting for more time before taking a decision. At Gandhiji's instance, Shankerlal Banker and Jamnadas Dwarkadas collected signatures of one thousand men willing to defy the internment orders and march to Besant's place of detention. They also began to collect signatures of a million Peasants and workers on a petition for Home Rule. They made regular visits to Gujarat towns and villages and helped found branches of the League. In short, repression only served to harden the attitude of the agitators and strengthen their resolve to resist the Government. Montague, writing in his Diary, commented: '...Shiva cut his wife into fifty-two pieces only to discover that he had fifty-two wives. This is really what happens to the Government of India when it interns Mrs. Besant.'

The Government in Britain decided to effect a change in policy and adopt a conciliatory posture. The new Secretary of State, Montague, made a historic declaration in the House of Commons, On 20 August, 1917 in which he stated: 'The policy of His Majesty's Government . . . is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the



British Empire.” This statement was in marked contrast to that of Lord Morley who, while introducing the Constitutional Reforms in 1909, had stated categorically that these reforms were in no way intended to lead to self-government. The importance of Montague’s Declaration was that after this the demand for Home Rule or self- government could no longer be treated as seditious.

This did not, however, mean that the British Government was about to grant self-government. The accompanying clause in the statement which clarified that the nature and the timing of the advance towards responsible government would be decided by the Government alone gave it enough leeway to prevent any real transfer of power to Indian hands for a long enough time. In keeping with the conciliatory stance of the Montague Declaration, Annie Besant was released in September 1917. Annie Besant was at the height of her popularity and, at Tilak’s suggestion, was elected President at the annual session of the Congress in December 1917.

During 1918, however, various factors combined to diffuse the energies that had concentrated in the agitation for Home Rule. The movement, instead of going forward after its great advance in 1917, gradually dissolved. For one, the Moderates who had joined the movement after Besant’s arrest were pacified by the promise of reforms and by Besant’s release. They were also put off by the talk of civil disobedience and did not attend the Congress from September 1918 onwards. The publication of the scheme of Government reforms in July 1918 further divided the nationalist ranks. Some wanted to accept it outright and others to reject it outright, while many felt that, though inadequate, they should be given a trial. Annie Besant herself indulged in a lot of vacillation on this question as well as on the question of passive resistance. At times she would disavow passive resistance, and at other times, under pressure from her younger followers, would advocate it. Similarly, she initially, along with Tilak, considered the reforms unworthy of Britain to offer and India to accept, but later argued in favour of acceptance. Tilak was more consistent in his approach, but given Besant’s vacillations, and the change in the Moderate stance, there was little that he could do to sustain the movement on his own. Also, towards the end of the year, he decided to go to England to pursue the libel case that he had filed against Valentine Chirol, the author of *Indian Unrest*, and was away for many critical months. With Annie Besant unable to give a firm lead, and Tilak away in England, the movement was left leaderless.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT

The tremendous achievement of the Home Rule Movement and its legacy was that it created a generation of ardent nationalists who formed the backbone of the national movement in the coming years when, under the leadership of the Mahatma, it entered its truly mass phase. The Home Rule Leagues also created organizational links between town and country which were to prove invaluable in later years. And further, by popularizing the idea of Home Rule or self-government, and making it a commonplace thing, it generated a widespread pro-nationalist atmosphere in the country. By the end of the First World War, in 1918, the new generation of nationalists aroused to political awareness and impatient with the pace of change, were looking for a means of expressing themselves through effective political action. The leaders of the Home Rule League, who themselves were responsible for bringing them to this point, were unable to show the way forward. The stage was thus set for the entry of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a man who had already made a name for himself with his leadership of the struggle of Indians in South Africa and by leading the struggles of Indian peasants and workers in Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda. And in March 1919, when he gave a call for a Satyagraha to protest against the obnoxious ‘Rowlatt’ Act, he was the rallying point for almost all those who had been awakened to politics by the Home Rule Movement.

# UNIT-XXIII

## THE ADVENT OF MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

### GANDHIJI IN SOUTH AFRICA AS A YOUNG BARRISTER

When Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi called for a nationwide *Satyagraha* against the Rowlatt Act in March 1919, his first attempt at leading an all India struggle, he was already in his fiftieth year. To understand the man who was about to take over the reins of the Indian national movement and guide its destinies through its most climactic years, it is necessary to begin his story at least twenty-five years earlier, in 1893, when as a twenty-four old barrister, he began the struggle of Indians against racial discrimination in South Africa.



**MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI**

The young barrister who landed at Durban in 1893 on a one-year contract to sort out the legal problems of Dada Abdullah, a Gujarati merchant, was to all appearances an ordinary young man trying to make a living. But he was the first Indian barrister, the first highly-educated Indian, to have come to South Africa.

Indian immigration to South Africa had begun in 1890 when the White settlers recruited indentured Indian labour, mainly from South India, to work on the sugar plantations. In their wake had come Indian merchants, mostly Meman Muslims. Exindentured labourers, who had settled down in South Africa after the expiry of their contract, and their children, many born in South Africa itself, constituted the third

group of Indians that was in South Africa prior to Gandhiji's arrival. None of these groups of Indians had much access to education and certainly very little education in English; even the wealthy merchants often knew only a smattering of English necessary to carry on their trade. The racial discrimination to which they were subjected, as part of their daily existence, they had come to accept as a way of life, and even if they resented it, they had little idea about how to challenge it.

But young Mohandas Gandhi was not used to swallowing racial insults in order to carry on with the business of making a living. He was the son of a *Dewan* (Minister) of an Indian state whose family, though in straitened economic circumstances, was widely respected in his native Kathiawad. Further, he had spent three years in London studying for the Bar. Neither in India nor in England had he ever come in contact with the overt racism that confronted him within days of his arrival in South Africa. His journey from Durban to Pretoria, which he undertook within a week of his arrival on the continent, consisted of a series of racial humiliations. Apart from the famous incident in which he was bundled out of a first-class compartment by a White man and left to spend the night shivering in the waiting room, he was made to travel in the driver's box in a coach for which he had bought a first-class ticket, when he ignored the coach leader's order to vacate even that seat and sit on the foot-board, he was soundly thrashed. On reaching Johannesburg, he found that all the hotels became full up the moment he asked for a room to stay the night. Having succeeded in securing a first-class train ticket from Johannesburg to Pretoria (after quoting extensively from railway regulations), he was almost pushed out again from his railway compartment and was only saved this humiliation by the intervention of a European passenger.'

On his arrival in Pretoria, where he was to work on the civil suit that had brought him to South Africa, he immediately convened a meeting of the Indians there. He offered to teach English to anybody who wanted to learn and suggested that they organize themselves and protest against oppression. He voiced his protest through the Press as well. In an indignant letter to the *Natal Advertiser*, he asked: 'Is this Christian-like, is this fair play, is this justice, is this civilization? I pause for a reply.' Even though he had no plans of staying in South Africa at that stage, he tried his best to arouse the Indians in Pretoria to a sense of their own dignity as human beings and persuade them to resist all types of racial disabilities.

Having settled the law suit for which he had come, Gandhiji prepared to leave for India. But on the eve of his departure from Durban, he raised the issue of the bill to disenfranchise Indians which was in the process of being passed by the Natal legislature.

The Indians in South Africa begged Gandhiji to stay on for a month and organize their protest as they could not do so on their own, not knowing even enough English to draft petitions, and so on. Gandhiji agreed to stay on for a month and stayed for twenty years. He was then only twenty-five; when he left, he was forty five. Gandhiji's experience in South Africa was unique in one respect. By virtue of being a British-educated barrister, he demanded many things as a matter of right, such as first-class train tickets and rooms in hotels, which other Indians before him had never probably even had the courage to ask for. Perhaps, they believed that they were discriminated against because they were not 'civilized,' that is, 'westernized.' Gandhiji's experience, the first of a westernized Indian in South Africa, demonstrated clearly, to him and to them, that the real cause lay elsewhere, in the assumption of racial superiority by the White rulers. His uniqueness in being the only western-educated Indian also simultaneously placed on his shoulders the responsibility of leading the struggle of the Indians against increasing racial discrimination. Wealthy Indian merchants, senior to the twenty five- year-old barrister in experience and age, appointed him as their leader because he was the only one who could speak to the rulers in their own language, the only one who understood the intricacies of their laws and their system of government, the only one who could draft their petitions, create their organizations, and represent them before their rulers.

The story of Gandhiji in South Africa is a long one and we present it here in its briefest outline only to highlight the wide experience that Gandhiji had undergone before he came back to India. Gandhiji's political activities from 1894 to 1906 may be classified as the 'Moderate' phase of the struggle of the South African Indians. During this phase, he concentrated on petitioning and sending memorials to the South



African legislatures, the Colonial Secretary in London and the British Parliament. He believed that if all the facts of the case were presented to the Imperial Government, the British sense of justice and fair play would be aroused and the Imperial Government would intervene on behalf of Indians who were, after all, British subjects. His attempt was to unite the different sections of Indians, and to give their demands wide publicity.

This he tried to do through the setting up of the Natal Indian Congress and by starting a paper called *Indian Opinion*. Gandhiji's abilities as an organizer, as a fund-raiser, as a journalist and as a propagandist, all came to the fore during this period. But, by 1906, Gandhiji, having fully tried the 'Moderate' methods of struggle, was becoming convinced that these would not lead anywhere.

The second phase of the struggle in South Africa, which began in 1906, was characterized by the use of the method of passive resistance or civil disobedience, which Gandhiji named *Satyagraha*. It was first used when the Government enacted legislation making it compulsory for Indians to take out certificates of registration which held their finger prints. It was essential to carry these on person at all times. At a huge public meeting held on 11 September, 1906, in the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg, Indians resolved that they would refuse to submit to this law and would face the consequences. The Government remained adamant, and so did the Indians. Gandhiji formed the Passive Resistance Association to conduct the campaign. The last date for registration being over, the Government started proceedings against Gandhiji and twenty-six others. The passive resisters pleaded guilty, were ordered to leave the country and, on refusing to do so, were sent to jail. Others followed, and their numbers swelled to 155. The fear of jail had disappeared, and it was popularly called King Edward's Hotel.

General Smuts called Gandhiji for talks, and promised to withdraw the legislation if Indians voluntarily agreed to register themselves. Gandhiji accepted and was the first to register. But Smuts had played a trick; he ordered that the voluntary registrations be ratified under the law. The Indians under the leadership of Gandhiji retaliated by publicly burning their registration certificates.

Meanwhile, the Government brought in new legislation, this time to restrict Indian immigration. The campaign, widened to oppose this. In August 1908, a number of prominent Indians from Natal crossed the frontier into Transvaal to defy the new immigration laws and were arrested. Other Indians from Transvaal opposed the laws by hawking without a license; traders who had Licenses refused to produce them. All of them were jailed. Gandhiji himself landed in jail in October 1908 and, along with the other Indians, was sentenced to a prison term involving hard physical labour and miserable conditions. But imprisonment failed to crush the spirit of the resisters, and the Government resorted to deportation to India, especially of the poorer Indians. Merchants were pressurized by threats to their economic interests.

At this stage, the movement reached an impasse. The more committed *Satyagrahis* continued to go in and out of jail, but the majority were showing signs of fatigue. The struggle was obviously going to be a protracted one, and the Government was in no mood to relent. Gandhiji's visit to London in 1909 to meet the authorities there yielded little result. The funds for supporting the families of the *Satyagrahis* and for running *Indian Opinion* were fast running out. Gandhiji's own legal practice had virtually ceased since 1906, the year he had started devoting all his attention to the struggle. At this point, Gandhiji set up Tolstoy Farm, made possible through the generosity of his German architect friend, Kallenbach, to house the families of the *Satyagrahis* and give them a way to sustain themselves. Tolstoy Farm was the precursor of the later Gandhian ashrams that were to play so important a role in the Indian national movement. Funds also came from India — Sir Ratan Tata sent Rs. 25,000 and the Congress and the Muslim League, as well as the Nizam of Hyderabad, made their contributions.

In 1911, to coincide with the coronation of King George V, an agreement was reached between the Government and the Indians which, however, lasted only till the end of 1912. Meanwhile, Gokhale paid a visit to South Africa, was treated as a guest of the Government and was made a promise that all discriminatory laws against Indians would be removed. The promise was never kept, and *Satyagraha* was resumed in 1913. This time the movement was widened further to include resistance to the poll tax of three pounds

that was imposed on all ex-indentured Indians. The inclusion of the demand for the abolition of this tax, a particularly heavy charge on poor labourers whose wages hardly averaged ten shillings a month, immediately drew the indentured and ex-indentured labourers into the struggle, and *Satyagraha* could now take on a truly mass character. Further fuel was added to the already raging fire by a judgement of the Supreme Court which invalidated all marriages not conducted according to Christian rites and registered by the Registrar of Marriages. By implication, Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriages were illegal and the children born through these marriages illegitimate. The Indians treated this judgment as an insult to the honor of their women and many women were drawn into the movement because of this indignity.

Gandhiji decided that the time had now come for the final struggle into which all the resisters' resources should be channelled. The campaign was launched by the illegal crossing of the border by a group of sixteen *Satyagrahis*, including Kasturba, Gandhiji's wife, who marched from Phoenix Settlement in Natal to Transvaal, and were immediately arrested. A group of eleven women then marched from Tolstoy Farm in Transvaal and crossed the border into Natal without a permit, and reached New Castle, a mining town. Here, they talked to the Indian mine workers, mostly Tamils, and before being arrested persuaded them to go on strike.

Gandhiji reached New Castle and took charge of the agitation. The employers retaliated by cutting off water and electricity to the workers' quarters, thus forcing them to leave their homes. Gandhiji decided to march this army of over two thousand men, women and children over the border and thus see them lodged in Transvaal jails. During the course of the march, Gandhiji was arrested twice, released, arrested a third time and sent to jail. The morale of the workers, however, was very high and they continued the march till they were put into trains and sent back to Natal, where they were prosecuted and sent to jail. The treatment that was meted out to these brave men and women in jail included starvation and whipping, and being forced to work in the mines by mounted military police. Gandhiji himself was made to dig stones and sweep the compound. He was kept in a dark cell, and taken to court handcuffed and manacled.

The Governments' action inflamed the entire Indian community; workers on the plantations and the mines went on a lightning strike. Gokhale toured the whole of India to arouse Indian public opinion and even the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, condemned the repression as 'one that would not be tolerated by any country that calls itself civilized' and called for an impartial enquiry into the charges of atrocities. The use of brutal force on unarmed and peaceful men and women aroused widespread indignation and condemnation. Eventually, through a series of negotiations involving Gandhiji, the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, C.F. Andrews and General Smuts, an agreement was reached by which the Government of South Africa conceded the major Indian demands relating to the poll tax, the registration certificates and marriages solemnized according to Indian rites, and promised to treat the question of Indian immigration in a sympathetic manner.

Non-violent civil disobedience had succeeded in forcing the opponents to the negotiating table and conceding the substance of the demands put forward by the movement. The blueprint for the 'Gandhian' method of struggle had been evolved and Gandhiji started back for his native land. The South African 'experiment' was now to be tried on a much wider scale on the Indian subcontinent.

In other respects, too, the South African experiment prepared Gandhiji for leadership of the Indian national struggle. He had had the invaluable experience of leading poor Indian labourers, of seeing their capacity for sacrifice and for bearing hardship, their morale in the face of repression. South Africa built up his faith in the capacity of the Indian masses to participate in and sacrifice for a cause that moved them. Gandhiji also had had the opportunity of leading Indians belonging to different religions: Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis were all united under his leadership in South Africa. They also came from different regions, being mainly Gujaratis and Tamils. They belonged to different social classes; rich merchants combined with poor indentured labourers. Women came along with the men.

Another aspect of the South African experience also stood Gandhiji in good stead. He learnt, the hardest way, that leadership involves facing the ire not only of the enemy but also of one's followers. There were



two occasions on which Gandhiji was faced with a serious threat to his life. Once, when a white mob chased him down a street in Durban in 1896 and surrounded the house where he was staying, asking for his blood; he had to be whisked out in disguise. The second, when an Indian, a Pathan, who was angry with him because of an agreement he had reached with the Government assaulted him on the street. Gandhiji learnt that leaders often have to take hard decisions that are unpopular with enthusiastic followers.

South Africa, then, provided Gandhiji with an opportunity for evolving his own style of politics and leadership, for trying out new techniques of struggle, on a limited scale, untrammelled by the opposition of contending political currents. In South Africa, he had already taken the movement from its 'Moderate' phase into its 'Gandhian' phase. He already knew the strengths and the weaknesses of the Gandhian method and he was convinced that it was the best method around. It now remained for him to introduce it into India.

## GANDHIJI'S RETURN TO INDIA AND EARLY ACTIVISM

Gandhiji returned to India, in January 1915, and was warmly welcomed. His work in South Africa was well-known, not only to educated Indians, but, as he discovered on his visit to the Kumbh Mela at Hardwar, even to the masses who flocked to him for his 'darshan.' Gokhale had already hailed him as being 'without doubt made of the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made.' The veteran Indian leader noticed in Gandhiji an even more important quality: 'He has in him the marvelous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs.'

On Gokhale's advice, and in keeping with his own style of never intervening in a situation without first studying it with great care, Gandhiji decided that for the first year he would not take a public stand on any political issue. He spent the year travelling around the country, seeing things for himself, and in organizing his ashram in Ahmedabad where he, and his devoted band of followers who had come with him from South Africa, would lead a community life. The next year as well, he continued to maintain his distance from political affairs, including the Home Rule Movement that was gathering momentum at this time. His own political understanding did not coincide with any of the political currents that were active in India then. His faith in 'Moderate' methods was long eroded, nor did he agree with the Home Rulers that the best time to agitate for Home Rule was when the British were in difficulty because of the First World War.

Further, he was deeply convinced that none of these methods of political struggle were really viable; the only answer lay in Satyagraha. His reasons for not joining the existing political organizations are best explained in his own words: 'At my time of life and with views firmly formed on several matters, I could only join an organization to affect its policy and not be affected by it. This does not mean that I would not now have an open mind to receive new light. I simply wish to emphasize the fact that the new light will have to be specially dazzling in order to entrance me.' In other words, he could only join an organization or a movement that adopted non-violent *Satyagraha* as its method of struggle.

That did not, however, mean that Gandhiji was going to remain politically idle. During the course of 1917 and early 1918, he was involved in three significant struggles — in Champaran in Bihar, in Ahmedabad and in Kheda in Gujarat. The common feature of these struggles was that they related to specific local issues and that they were fought for the economic demands of the masses. Two of these struggles, Champaran and Kheda, involved the peasants and the one in Ahmedabad involved industrial workers.

## CHAMPARAN

The story of Champaran begins in the early nineteenth century when European planters had involved the cultivators in agreements that forced them to cultivate indigo on 3/20th of their holdings (known as the tinkathia system). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, German synthetic dyes forced indigo out of the market and the European planters of Champaran, keen to release the cultivators from the obligation of cultivating indigo, tried to turn their necessity to their advantage by securing enhancements in rent and other illegal dues as a price for the release. Resistance had surfaced in 1908 as well, but the exactions of



the planters continued till Raj Kumar Shukla, a local man, decided to follow Gandhiji all over the country to persuade him to come to Champaran to investigate the problem. Raj Kumar Shukla's decision to get Gandhiji to Champaran is indicative of the image he had acquired as one who fought for the rights of the exploited and the poor.

Gandhiji, on reaching Champaran, was ordered by the Commissioner to immediately leave the district. But to the surprise of all concerned, Gandhiji refused and preferred to take the punishment for his defiance of the law. This was unusual, for even Tilak and Annie Besant, when externed from a particular province, obeyed the orders even though they organized public protests against them. To offer passive resistance or civil disobedience to an unjust order was indeed novel. The Government of India, not willing to make an issue of it and not yet used to treating Gandhiji as a rebel, ordered the local Government to retreat and allow Gandhiji to proceed with his enquiry.

A victorious Gandhiji embarked on his investigation of the peasants' grievances. Here, too, his method was striking. He and his colleagues, who now included Brij Kishore, Rajendra Prasad and other members of the Bihar intelligentsia, Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh, two young men from Gujarat who had thrown in their lot with Gandhiji, and J.B. Kripalani, toured the villages and from dawn to dusk recorded the statements of peasants, interrogating them to make sure that they were giving correct information



### GANDHI JI IN CHAMPARAN

Meanwhile, the Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry to go into the whole issue, and nominated Gandhiji as one of its members. Armed with evidence collected from 8,000 peasants, he had little difficulty in convincing the Commission that the *tinkathia* system needed to be abolished and that the peasants should be compensated for the illegal enhancement of their dues. As a compromise with the planters, he agreed that they refund only twenty-five per cent of the money they had taken illegally from the peasants. Answering critics who asked why he did not ask for a full refund, Gandhiji explained that even this refund had done enough damage to the planters' prestige and position. As was often the case, Gandhiji's assessment was correct and, within a decade, the planters left the district altogether.

**AHMEDABAD**

Gandhiji then turned his attention to the workers of Ahmedabad. A dispute was brewing between them and the mill owners over the question of a 'plague bonus' the employers wanted to withdraw once the epidemic had passed but the workers insisted it stay, since the enhancement hardly compensated for the rise in the cost of living during the War. The British Collector, who feared a showdown, asked Gandhiji to bring pressure on the mill owners and work out a compromise. Ambalal Sarabhai, one of the leading mill owners of the town, was a friend of Gandhiji, and had just saved the Sabarmati Ashram from extinction by a generous donation. Gandhiji persuaded the mill owners and the workers to agree to arbitration by a tribunal, but the mill owners, taking advantage of a stray strike, withdrew from the agreement. They offered a twenty per cent bonus and threatened to dismiss those who did not accept it. The breach of agreement was treated by Gandhiji as a very serious affair, and he advised the workers to go on strike. He further suggested, on the basis of a thorough study of the production costs and profits of the industry as well as the cost of living, that they would be justified in demanding a thirty-five per cent increase, in wages. The strike began and Gandhiji addressed the workers every day on the banks of the Sabarmati River. He brought out a daily news bulletin, and insisted that no violence be used against employers or blacklegs. Ambalal Sarabhai's sister, Anasuya Behn, was one of the main lieutenants of Gandhiji in this struggle in which her brother, and Gandhiji's friend, was one of the main adversaries.

After some days, the workers began to exhibit signs of weariness. The attendance at the daily meetings began to decline and the attitude towards blacklegs began to harden. In this situation, Gandhiji decided to go on a fast, to rally the workers and strengthen their resolve to continue. Also, he had promised that if the strike led to starvation he would be the first to starve, and the fast was a fulfillment of that promise. The fast, however, also had the effect of putting pressure on the mill owners and they agreed to submit the whole issue to a tribunal. The strike was withdrawn and the tribunal later awarded the thirty-five per cent increase the workers had demanded.

**KHEDA**

The dispute in Ahmedabad had not yet ended when Gandhiji learnt that the peasants of Kheda district were in extreme distress due to a failure of crops, and that their appeals for the remission of land revenue were being ignored by the Government. Enquiries by members of the Servants of India Society, Vithalbhai Patel and Gandhiji confirmed the validity of the peasants' case. This was that as the crops were less than one-fourth of the normal yield, they were entitled under the revenue code to a total remission of the land revenue. The *Gujarat Sabha*, of which Gandhiji was the President, played a leading role in the agitation. Appeals and petitions having failed, Gandhiji advised the withholding of revenue, and asked the peasants to 'fight unto death against such a spirit of vindictiveness and tyranny,' and show that 'it is impossible to govern men without their consent.' Vallabhbhai Patel, a young lawyer and a native of Kheda district, and other young men, including Indulal Yagnik, joined Gandhiji in touring the villages and urging the peasants to stand firm in the face of increasing Government repression which included the seizing of cattle and household goods and the attachment of standing crops. The cultivators were asked to take a solemn pledge that they would not pay; those who could afford to pay were to take a vow that they would not pay in the interests of the poorer ryots who would otherwise panic and sell off their belongings or incur debts in order to pay the revenue. However, if the Government agreed to suspend collection of land revenue, the ones who could afford to do so could pay the whole amount. The peasants of Kheda, already hard pressed because of plague, high prices arid drought, were beginning to show signs of weakness when Gandhiji came to know that the Government had issued secret instructions directing that revenue should be recovered only from those peasants who could pay. A public declaration of this decision would have meant a blow to Government prestige, since this was exactly what Gandhiji had been demanding. In these circumstances, the movement was withdrawn. Gandhiji later recalled that by this time 'the people were exhausted' and he was actually 'casting about for some graceful way of terminating the struggle.'

## ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA

Champanan, Ahmedabad and Kheda served as demonstrations of Gandhiji's style and method of politics to the country at large. They also helped him find his feet among the people of India and study their problems at close quarters. He came to possess, as a result of these struggles, a surer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the masses, as well as of the viability of his own political style. He also earned the respect and commitment of many political workers, especially the younger ones, who were impressed by his identification with the problems of ordinary Indians, and his willingness to take up their cause. It was this reservoir of goodwill, and of experience, that encouraged Gandhiji, in February 1919, to call for a nation-wide protest against the unpopular legislation that the British were threatening to introduce. Two bills, popularly known as the Rowlatt Bills after the man who chaired the Committee that suggested their introduction, aimed at severely curtailing the civil liberties of Indians in the name of curbing terrorist violence, were introduced in the Legislative Council. One of them was actually pushed through in indecent haste in the face of opposition from all the elected Indian members. This act of the Government was treated by the whole of political India as a grievous insult, especially as it came at the end of the War when substantial constitutional concessions were expected.

Constitutional protest having failed, Gandhiji stepped in and suggested that a *Satyagraha* be launched. A *Satyagraha Sabha* was formed, and the younger members of the Home Rule Leagues who were more than keen to express their disenchantment with the Government flocked to join it. The old lists of the addresses of Home Rule Leagues and their members were taken out, contacts established and propaganda begun. The form of protest finally decided upon was the observance of a nation-wide *hartal* (strike) accompanied by fasting and prayer. In addition, it was decided that civil disobedience would be offered against specific laws.

## JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE

The sixth of April was fixed as the date on which the *Satyagraha* would be launched. The movement that emerged was very different from the one that had been anticipated or planned. Delhi observed the *hartal* on 30 March because of some confusion about dates, and there was considerable violence in the streets. This seemed to set the pattern in most other areas that responded to the call; protest was generally accompanied by violence and disorder. Punjab, which was suffering from the after effects of severe wartime repression, forcible recruitment, and the ravages of disease, reacted particularly strongly and both in Amritsar and Lahore the situation became very dangerous for the Government. Gandhiji tried to go to Punjab to help quieten the people, but the Government deported him to Bombay. He found that Bombay and even his native Gujarat, including Ahmedabad, were up in flames and he decided to stay and try and pacify the people.





### JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE

Events in Punjab were moving in a particularly tragic direction. In Amritsar, the arrest of two local leaders on 10 April led to an attack on the town hall and the post office: telegraph wires were cut and Europeans including women were attacked. The army was called in and the city handed over to General Dyer, who issued an order prohibiting public meetings and assemblies. On 13 April, *Baisakhi* day, a large crowd of people, many of whom were visitors from neighbouring villages who had come to the town to attend the *Baisakhi* celebrations, collected in the Jallianwala Bagh to attend a public meeting. General Dyer, incensed that his orders were disobeyed, ordered his troops to fire upon the unarmed crowd. The shooting continued for ten minutes. General Dyer had not thought it necessary to issue any warning to the people nor was he deterred by the fact that the ground was totally hemmed in from all sides by high walls which left little chance for escape. The Government estimate was 379 dead, other estimates were considerably higher. The brutality at Jallianwala Bagh stunned the entire nation.

The response would come, not immediately, but a little later. For the moment, repression was intensified, Punjab placed under martial law and the people of Amritsar forced into indignities such as crawling on their bellies before Europeans. Gandhiji, overwhelmed by the total atmosphere of violence, withdrew the movement on 18 April. That did not mean, however, that Gandhiji had lost faith either in his non-violent *Satyagraha* or in the capacity of the Indian people to adopt it as a method of struggle. A year later, he launched another nation-wide struggle, on a scale bigger than that of the Rowlatt *Satyagraha*. The wrong inflicted on Punjab was one of the major reasons for launching it. The Mahatma's 'Indian Experiment' had begun.

## UNIT-XXIV

# THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT (NCM)

### THE SPARK THAT IGNITED THE NCM

The last year of the second decade of the twentieth century found India highly discontented. *With* much cause, The Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and martial law in Punjab had belied all the generous wartime promises of the British. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms announced towards the end of 1919, with their ill-considered scheme of diarchy satisfied few. The Indian Muslims were incensed when they discovered that their loyalty had been purchased during the War by assurances of generous treatment of Turkey after the War — a promise British statesman had no intention of fulfilling. The Muslims regarded the Caliph of Turkey as their spiritual head and were naturally upset when they found that he would retain no control over the holy places it was his duty as Caliph to protect. Even those who were willing to treat the happenings at Jallianwala Bagh and other places in Punjab as aberrations, that would soon be 'corrected', were disillusioned when they discovered that the Hunter Committee appointed by the Government to enquire into the Punjab disturbances was an eye wash and that the House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer's action and that the British public had demonstrated its support by helping the *Morning Post* collect 30,000 pounds for General Dyer.

By the end of the first quarter of 1920, all the excuses in favour of the British Government were fast running out. The Khilafat leaders were told quite clearly that they should not expect anything more and the Treaty of Sevres signed with Turkey in May 1920 made it amply clear that the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire was complete. Gandhiji, who had been in close touch with the Khilafat leaders for quite some time, and was a special invitee to the Khilafat Conference in November 1919, had all along been very sympathetic to their cause, especially because he felt the British had committed a breach of faith by making promises that they had no intention of keeping. In February 1920, he suggested to the Khilafat Committee that it adopt a programme of non-violent non cooperation to protest the Government's behavior. On 9 June 1920, the Khilafat Committee at Allahabad unanimously accepted the suggestion of non-cooperation and asked Gandhiji to lead the movement.

Meanwhile, the Congress was becoming skeptical of any possibility of political advance through constitutional means. It was disgusted with the Hunter Committee Report especially since it was appraised of brutalities in Punjab by its own enquiry committee. In the circumstances, it agreed to consider noncooperation. The AICC met in May 1920 and decided to convene a special session in September to enable the Congress to decide on its course of action. It was apparent they had to work out something soon for it was clear that the people were chafing for action. Large numbers of them, who had been awakened to political consciousness by the incessant propaganda efforts that the nationalist leadership had been making for the previous four decades or more, were thoroughly outraged by what they perceived as insults by the British government. To swallow these insults appeared dishonourable and cowardly. Also many sections of Indian society suffered considerable economic distress. In the towns, the workers and artisans, the lower middle class and the middle class had been hit by high prices, and shortage of food and essential commodities. The rural poor and peasants were in addition victims of widespread drought and epidemics.

### THE LAUNCH OF THE NON COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The movement was launched formally on 1 August 1920, after the expiry of the notice that Gandhiji had given to the Viceroy in his letter of 22 June in which he had asserted the right recognized 'from time immemorial of the subject to refuse to assist a ruler who misrules.' Lokamanya Tilak passed away in the early hours of 1 August, and the day of mourning and of launching of the movement merged as people all over the country observed *hartal* and took out processions. Many kept a fast and offered prayers.



The Congress met in September at Calcutta and accepted non-cooperation as its own. The main opposition, led by C.R. Das, was to the boycott of legislative councils, elections to which were to be held very soon. But even those who disagreed with the idea of boycott accepted the Congress discipline and withdrew from the elections. The voters, too, largely stayed away. By December, when the Congress met for its annual session at Nagpur, the opposition had melted away; the elections were over and, therefore, the boycott of councils was a non-issue, and it was C.R. Das who moved the main resolution on non-cooperation. The programme of non-cooperation included within its ambit the surrender of titles and honours, boycott of government affiliated schools and colleges, law courts, foreign cloth, and could be extended to include resignation from government service and mass civil disobedience including the non-payment of taxes. National schools and colleges were to be set up, panchayats were to be established for settling disputes, hand-spinning and weaving was to be encouraged and people were asked to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity, give up untouchability and observe strict non-violence. Gandhiji promised that if the programme was fully implemented, *Swaraj* would be ushered in within a year. The Nagpur session, thus, committed the Congress to a programme of extra-constitutional mass action. Many groups of revolutionary terrorists, especially in Bengal, also pledged support to the movement.

To enable the Congress to fulfil its new commitment, significant changes were introduced in its creed as well as in its organizational structure. The goal of the Congress was changed from the attainment of self-government by constitutional and legal means to the attainment of *Swaraj* by peaceful and legitimate means. The new constitution of the Congress, the handiwork of Gandhiji, introduced other important changes. The Congress was now to have a Working Committee of fifteen members to look after its day-to-day affairs. This proposal, when first made by Tilak in 1916, had been shot down by the Moderate opposition. Gandhiji, too, knew that the Congress could not guide a sustained movement unless it had a compact body that worked round the year. Provincial Congress Committees were now to be organized on a linguistic basis, so that they could keep in touch with the people by using the local language. The Congress organization was to reach down to the village and the *mohalla* level by the formation of village and *mohalla* or ward committees. The membership fee was reduced to four annas per year to enable the poor to become members. Mass involvement would also enable the Congress to have a regular source of income. In other ways, too, the organization structure was both streamlined and democratized. The Congress was to use Hindi as far as possible.

### THE DIFFERENT METHODS ADOPTED FOR STRUGGLE

The adoption of the Non-Cooperation Movement (initiated earlier by the Khilafat Conference) by the Congress gave it a new energy and, from January 1921, it began to register considerable success all over the country. Gandhiji, along with the Ali brothers (who were the foremost Khilafat leaders), undertook a nationwide tour/during which he addressed hundreds of meetings and met a large number of political workers. In the first month itself, thousands of students (90,000 according to one estimate) left schools and colleges and joined more than 800 national schools and colleges that had sprung up all over the country. The educational boycott was particularly successful in Bengal, where the students in Calcutta triggered off a province-wide strike to force the managements of their institutions to disaffiliate themselves from the Government. C.R. Das played a major role in promoting the movement and Subhas Bose became the principal of the National Congress in Calcutta. The Swadeshi spirit was revived with new vigour, this time as part of a nation-wide struggle. Punjab, too, responded to the educational boycott and was second only to Bengal, Lala Lajpat Rai playing a leading part here despite his initial reservations about this item of the programme. Other areas that were active were Bombay, U.P., Bihar, Orissa and Assam, Madras remained lukewarm. The boycott of law courts by lawyers was not as successful as the educational boycott, but it was very dramatic and spectacular. Many leading lawyers of the country, like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, M.R. Jayakar, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, T. Prakasam and Asaf Ali gave up lucrative practices, and their sacrifice became a source of inspiration for many. In numbers again Bengal led, followed by Andhra Pradesh, U.P., Karnataka and Punjab.



But, perhaps, the most successful item of the programme was the boycott of foreign cloth. Volunteers would go from house to house collecting clothes made of foreign cloth, and the entire community would collect to light a bonfire of the goods. Prabhudas Gandhi, who accompanied Mahatma Gandhi on his nation-wide tour in the first part of 1921, recalls how at small way-side stations where their train would stop for a few minutes. Gandhiji would persuade the crowd, assembled to greet him, to at least discard their head dress on the spot. Immediately, a pile of caps, *dupattas*, and turbans would form and as the train moved out they would see the flames leaping upwards.

Picketing of shops selling foreign cloth was also a major form of the boycott. The value of imports of foreign cloth fell from Rs. 102 crore in 1920-21 to Rs. 57 crore in 1921-22. Another feature of the movement which acquired great popularity in many parts of the country, even though it was not part of the original plan, was the picketing of toddy shops. Government revenues showed considerable decline on this count and the Government was forced to actually carry on propaganda to bring home to the people the healthy effects of a good drink. The Government of Bihar and Orissa even compiled and circulated a list of all the great men in history (which included Moses, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Shakespeare, Gladstone, Tennyson and Bismarck) who enjoyed their liquor.

The AICC, at its session at Vijayawada in March 1921, directed that for the next three months Congressmen should concentrate on collection of funds, enrolment of members and distribution of *charkhas*. As a result, a vigorous membership drive was launched and though the target of one crore members was not achieved, Congress membership reached a figure roughly of 50 lakhs. The Tilak Swaraj Fund was oversubscribed, exceeding the target of rupees one crore. *Charkhas* were popularized on a wide scale and *khadi* became the uniform of the national movement. There was a complaint at a students meeting Gandhiji addressed in Madurai that *khadi* was too costly.

Gandhiji retorted that the answer lay in wearing less clothes and, from that day, discarded his *dhoti* and *kurta* in favour of a *langot*. For the rest of his life, he remained a 'half-naked fakir.'

In July 1921, a new challenge was thrown to the Government. Mohammed Ali, at the All India Khilafat Conference held at Karachi on 8 July, declared that it was 'religiously unlawful for the Muslims to continue in the British Army' and asked that this be conveyed to every Muslim in the Army. As a result, Mohammed Ali, along with other leaders, was immediately arrested. In protest, the speech was repeated at innumerable meetings all over the country. On 4 October, forty-seven leading Congressmen, including Gandhiji, issued a manifesto repeating whatever Mohammed Ali had said and added that every civilian and member of the armed forces should sever connections with the repressive Government. The next day, the Congress Working Committee passed a similar resolution, and on 16 October, Congress committees all over the country held meetings at which the same resolution was adopted. The Government was forced to ignore the whole incident, and accept the blow to its prestige.

The next dramatic event was the visit of the Prince of Wales which began on 17 November, 1921. The day the Prince landed in Bombay was observed as a day of *hartal* all over the country. In Bombay, Gandhiji himself addressed a mammoth meeting in the compound of the Elphinstone Mill owned by the nationalist Umar Shobhani, and lighted a huge bonfire of foreign cloth. Unfortunately, however, clashes occurred between those who had gone to attend the welcome function and the crowd returning from Gandhiji's meeting. Riots followed, in which Parsis, Christians, Anglo-Indians became special targets of attack as identifiable loyalists. There was police firing, and the three-day turmoil resulted in fifty-nine dead. Peace returned only after Gandhiji had been on fast for three days. The whole sequence of events left Gandhiji profoundly disturbed and worried about the likelihood of recurrence of violence once mass civil disobedience was sanctioned.

## THE ARRIVAL OF THE PRINCE OF WALES AND PREPARATION FOR CDM

The Prince of Wales was greeted with empty streets and downed shutters wherever he went. Emboldened by their successful defiance of the Government, non-cooperators became more and more aggressive. The Congress Volunteer Corps emerged as a powerful parallel police, and the sight of its members marching in formation and dressed in uniform was hardly one that warmed the Government's heart. The Congress had already granted permission to the PCCs to sanction mass civil disobedience wherever they thought the people were ready and in some areas, such as Midnapur district in Bengal, which had started a movement against Union Board Taxes and Chirala-Pirala and Pedanandipadu taluqa in Guntur district of Andhra, no-tax movements were already in the offing.' The Non-Cooperation Movement had other indirect effects as well. In the Avadh area of U.P., where *kisan sabhas* and a *kisan* movement had been gathering strength since 1918, Noncooperation propaganda, carried on among others by Jawaharlal Nehru, helped to fan the already existing ferment, and soon it became difficult to distinguish between a Non cooperation meeting and a *kisan* meeting.'

In Malabar in Kerala, Non cooperation and Khilafat propaganda helped to arouse the Muslims tenants against their landlords, but the movement here, unfortunately, at times took on a communal colour.' In Assam, labourers on tea plantations went on strike. When the fleeing workers were fired upon, there were strikes on the steamer service and on the Assam-Bengal Railway as well. J.M. Sengupta, the Bengali nationalist leader, played a leading role in these developments. In Midnapur, a cultivators' strike against a White *zamindari* company was led by a Calcutta medical student. Defiance of forest laws became popular in Andhra. Peasants and tribals in some of the Rajasthan states began movements for securing better conditions of life. In Punjab, the Akali Movement for 'Test1ng control of the gurudwaras from the corrupt mahants (priests) was a part of the general movement of Non-cooperation, and the Akalis observed strict non-violence in the face of tremendous repression? The examples could be multiplied, but the point is that the spirit of unrest and defiance of authority engendered by the Non-Cooperation Movement contributed to the rise of many local movements in different parts of the country, movements which did not often adhere strictly either to the programme of the Non-Cooperation Movement or even to the policy of non-violence.

In this situation, it was hardly surprising that the Government came to the conclusion that it's earlier policy had not met with success and that the time to strike had arrived. In September 1920, at the beginning of the movement, the Government had thought it best to leave it alone as repression would only make martyrs of the nationalists and fan the spirit of revolt. In May 1921, it had tried, through the Gandhi-Reading talks, to persuade Gandhiji to ask the Ali brothers to withdraw from their speeches those passages that contained suggestions of violence; this was an attempt to drive a wedge between the Khilafat leaders and Gandhiji, but it failed. By December, the Government felt that things were really going too far and announced a change of policy by declaring the Volunteer Corps illegal and arresting all those who claimed to be its members. C.R. Das was among the first to be arrested, followed by his wife Basanti Debi, whose arrest so incensed the youth of Bengal that thousands came forward to court arrest. In the next two months, over 30,000 people were arrested from all over the country, and soon only Gandhiji out of the top leadership remained out of jail. In mid-December, there was an abortive attempt at negotiations, initiated by Malaviya, but the conditions offered were such that it meant sacrificing the Khilafat leaders, a course that Gandhiji would not accept. In any case, the Home Government had already decided against a settlement and ordered the Viceroy, Lord Reading, to withdraw from the negotiations. Repression continued, public meetings and assemblies were banned, newspapers gagged, and midnight raids on Congress and Khilafat offices became common. Gandhiji had been under considerable pressure from the Congress rank and file as well as the leadership to start the phase of mass civil disobedience. The Ahmedabad session of the Congress in December 1921 had appointed him the sole authority on the issue. The Government showed no signs of relenting and had ignored both the appeal of the All- Parties Conference held in mid-January 1922 as well as Gandhiji's letter to the Viceroy announcing that, unless the Government lifted the ban on civil liberties and released political prisoners, he would be forced to go ahead with mass civil disobedience.



**CHAURI-CHAURA AND WITHDRAWAL OF THE NCM**

The Viceroy was unmoved and, left with no choice; Gandhiji announced that mass civil disobedience would begin in Bardoli taluqa of Surat district, and that all other parts of the country should cooperate by maintaining total discipline and quiet so that the entire attention of the movement could be concentrated on Bardoli. But Bardoli was destined to wait for another six years before it could launch a no-tax movement. Its fate was decided by the action of members of a Congress and Khilafat procession in Chauri-Chaura in Gorakhpur district of U.P. on 5 February 1922.

Irritated by the behavior of some policemen, a section of the crowd attacked them. The police opened fire. At this, the entire procession attacked the police and when the latter hid inside the police station, set fire to the building. Policemen who tried to escape were hacked to pieces and thrown into the fire. In all twenty-two policemen were done to death. On hearing of the incident, Gandhiji decided to withdraw the movement. He also persuaded the Congress Working Committee to ratify his decision and thus, on 12 February 1922, the Non-Cooperation Movement came to an end.

Gandhiji's decision to withdraw the movement in response to the violence at Chauri Chaura raised a controversy whose heat can still be felt in staid academic seminars and sober volumes of history. Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, and many others have recorded their utter bewilderment on hearing the news. They could not understand why the whole country had to pay the price for the crazy behavior of some people in a remote village. Many in the country thought that the Mahatma had failed miserably as a leader and that his days of glory were over.

Many later commentators, following the tradition established by R. Palme Dutt in *India Today*, have continued to condemn the decision taken by Gandhiji, and seen in it proof of the Mahatma's concern for the propertied classes of Indian society. Their argument is that Gandhiji did not withdraw the movement simply because of his belief in the necessity of non-violence. He withdrew it because the action at Chauri Chaura was a symbol and an indication of the growing militancy of the Indian masses, of their growing radicalization, of their willingness to launch an attack on the status quo of property relations.

Frightened by this radical possibility and by the prospect of the movement going out of his hands and into the hands of radical forces, and in order to protect the interests of landlords and capitalists who would inevitably be at the receiving end of this violence, Gandhiji cried halt to the movement. They have found supportive proof in the resolution of the Congress Working Committee of 12 February 1922 popularly known as the Bardoli resolution which while announcing the withdrawal, asked the peasants to pay taxes and tenants to pay rents. This, they say, was the real though hidden motive behind the historic decision of February 1922.

It seems, however, that Gandhiji's critics have been less than fair to him. First, the argument that violence in a remote village could not be a sufficient cause for the decision is in itself a weak one. Gandhiji had repeatedly warned that he did not even want any non-violent movement in any other part of the country while he was conducting mass civil disobedience in Bardoli, and in fact had asked the Andhra PCC to withdraw the permission that it had granted to some of the District Congress Committees to start civil disobedience. One obvious reason for this was that, in such a situation of mass ferment and activity, the movement might easily take a violent turn, either due to its own volatile nature or because of provocation by the authorities concerned (as had actually happened in Bombay in November 1921 and later in Chauri Chaura); also if violence occurred anywhere it could easily be made the excuse by the Government to launch a massive attack on the movement as a whole. The Government could always cite the actual violence in one part as proof of the likelihood of violence in another part of the country, and thus justify its repression. This would upset the whole strategy of non-violent civil disobedience which was based on the principle that the forces of repression would always stand exposed since they would be using armed force against peaceful civil resisters. It was, therefore, not enough to assert that there was no connection between Chauri Chaura and Bardoli.



It is entirely possible that in Gandhiji's assessment the chances of his being allowed to conduct a mass civil disobedience campaign in Bardoli had receded further after Chauri Chaura. The Government would have had excuse to remove him and other activists from the scene and use force to cow down the people. Mass civil disobedience would be defeated even before it was given a fair trial. By taking the onus of withdrawal on himself and on the Working Committee, Gandhiji was protecting the movement from likely repression, and the people from demoralization. True, the withdrawal itself led to considerable demoralization, especially of the active political workers, but it is likely that the repression and crushing of the movement (as happened in 1932) would have led to even greater demoralization.

Perhaps, in the long run, it was better to have felt that, if only Gandhiji had not withdrawn the movement, it would have surged forward, than to see it crushed and come to the conclusion that it was not possible for a mass movement to succeed in the face of government repression. It is necessary to remember that, after all, the Non Cooperation Movement was the first attempt at an all-India mass struggle against the British, and a serious reverse at this elementary stage could have led to a prolonged period of demoralization and passivity.

The other argument that the real motive for withdrawal was the fear of the growth of radical forces and that Chauri Chaura was proof of the emergence of precisely such a radical sentiment is on even thinner ground. The crowd at Chauri Chaura had not demonstrated any intention of attacking landlords or overturning the structure of property relations, they were merely angered by the overbearing behavior of policemen and vented their wrath by attacking them. Peasant unrest in most of Avadh and Malabar had died out long before this time, and the Eka movement that was on in some of the rural areas of Avadh showed no signs of wanting to abolish the *zamindari* system; it only wanted zamindars to stop 'illegal' cesses and arbitrary rent enhancements. In fact, one of the items of the oath that was taken by peasants who joined the Eka movement was that they would 'pay rent regularly at Kharif and Rabi.' The no-tax movement in Guntur was very much within the framework of the Non-Cooperation Movement; it was directed against the government and remained totally peaceful. Moreover, it was already on the decline before February 1922. It is difficult to discern where the threat from radical tendencies is actually located.

That the Bardoli resolution which announced the withdrawal also contained clauses which asked peasants to pay up taxes and tenants to pay up rents, and assured zamindars that the Congress had no intention of depriving them of their rights, is also no proof of hidden motives. The Congress had at no stage during the movement sanctioned non-payment of rent or questioned the rights of zamindars; the resolution was merely a reiteration of its position on this issue. Non-payment of taxes was obviously to cease if the movement as a whole was being withdrawn.

There are also some indications that Gandhiji's decision may have been prompted by the fact that in many parts of the country, by the second half of 1921, the movement had shown clear signs of being on the ebb. Students had started drifting back to schools and colleges, lawyers and litigants to law courts, the commercial classes showed signs of weariness and worry at the accumulating stocks of foreign cloth, attendance at meetings and rallies had dwindled, both in the urban and rural areas. This does not mean that in some pockets, like Bardoli in Gujarat or Guntur in Andhra, where intensive political work had been done, the masses were not ready to carry on the struggle. But the mass enthusiasm that was evident all over the country in the first part of 1921 had, perhaps, receded. The cadre and the active political workers were willing to carry on the fight, but a mass movement of such a nature required the active participation of the masses, and not only of the highly motivated among them. However, at the present stage of research, it is not possible to argue this position with great force; we only wish to urge the possibility that this too was among the factors that led to the decision to withdraw.

Gandhiji's critics often fail to recognize that mass movements have an inherent tendency to ebb after reaching a certain height, that the capacity of the masses to withstand repression, endure suffering and make sacrifices is not unlimited, that a time comes when breathing space is required to consolidate, recuperate, and gather strength for the next round of struggle, and that, therefore, withdrawal or a shift to a

phase of non-confrontation is an inherent part of a strategy of political action that is based on the masses. Withdrawal is not tantamount to betrayal; it is an inevitable part of the strategy itself.

Of course, whether or not the withdrawal was made at the correct time can always be a matter open to debate. But perhaps Gandhiji had enough reasons to believe that the moment he chose was the right one. The movement had already gone on for over a year, the Government was in no mood for negotiations, and Chauri Chaura presented an opportunity to retreat with honour, before the internal weaknesses of the movement became apparent enough to force a surrender or make the retreat look like a rout. Gandhiji had promised *Swaraj* within a year if his programme was adopted. But the year was long over, the movement was withdrawn, and there was no sign of *Swaraj* or even of any tangible concessions. Had it all been in vain? Was the movement a failure?

## ACHIVEMENTS OF THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

One could hardly answer in the affirmative. The Non-Cooperation Movement had in fact succeeded on many counts. It certainly demonstrated that it commanded the support and sympathy of vast sections of the Indian people. After Noncooperation, the charge of representing a 'microscopic minority,' made by the Viceroy, Dufferin, in 1888, could never again be hurled at the Indian National Congress. Its reach among many sections of Indian peasants, workers, artisans, shopkeepers, traders, professionals, white-collar employees, had been demonstrated. The spatial spread of the movement was also nation-wide. Some areas were more active than others, but there were few that showed no signs of activity at all.

The capacity of the 'poor dumb millions' of India to take part in modern nationalist politics was also demonstrated. By their courage, sacrifice, and fortitude in the face of adversity and repression, they dispelled the notion that the desire for national freedom was the preserve of the educated and the rich and showed that it was an elemental urge common to all members of a subject nation. They may not as yet have fully comprehended all its implications, understood all the arguments put forth in its favour or observed all the discipline that the movement demanded for its successful conduct. This was, after all, for many of them, first contact with the modern world of nationalist politics and the modern ideology of nationalism. This was the first time that nationalists from the towns, students from schools and colleges or even the educated and politically aware in the villages had made a serious attempt to bring the ideology and the movement into their midst. Its success was bound to be limited, the weaknesses many. There were vast sections of the masses that even then remained outside the ambit of the new awakening.

But this was only the beginning and more serious and consistent efforts were yet in the offing. But the change was striking. The tremendous participation of Muslims in the movement, and the maintenance of communal unity, despite the Malabar developments, was in itself no mean achievement. There is hardly any doubt that it was Muslim participation that gave the movement its truly mass character in many areas, at some places two-thirds of those arrested were Muslims. And it was, indeed, unfortunate that this most positive feature of the movement was not to be repeated in later years once communalism began to take its toll. The fraternization that was witnessed between Hindus and Muslims, with Gandhiji and other Congress leaders speaking from mosques, Gandhiji being allowed to address meetings of Muslim women in which he was the only male who was not blind-folded, all these began to look like romantic dreams in later years.

The retreat that was ordered on 12 February, 1922 was only a temporary one. The battle was over, but the war would continue. To the challenge thrown by Montague and Birkenhead that 'India would not challenge with success the most determined people in the world, who would once again answer the challenge with all the vigour and determination at its command,' Gandhiji, in an article written in *Young India* on 23 February 1922 after the withdrawal of the movement, replied: 'It is high time that the British people were made to realize that the fight that was commenced in 1920 is a fight to the finish, whether it lasts one month or one year or many months or many years and whether the representatives of Britain re enact all the indescribable orgies of the Mutiny days with redoubled force or whether they do not.'

## UNIT-XXV

# THE STRUGGLE FOR GURDWARA REFORM AND TEMPLE ENTRY

### INTRODUCTION

The rising tide of nationalism and democracy inevitably began to overflow from the political to the religious and social fields affecting the downtrodden castes and classes. And many nationalists began to apply the newly discovered technique of non-violent *Satyagraha* and mobilization of public opinion to issues which affected the internal structure of Indian society. Quite often this struggle to reform Indian social and religious institutions and practices led the reformers to clash with the colonial authorities. Thus, the struggle to reform Indian society tended to merge with the anti-imperialist struggle. This was in part the result of the fact that as the national movement advanced, the social base of colonialism was narrowed and the colonial authorities began to seek the support of the socially, culturally and economically reactionary sections of Indian society. This aspect of the national movement is well illustrated by the Akali Movement in Punjab and the Temple Entry Movement in Kerala.

### THE AKALI MOVEMENT

The Akali Movement developed on a purely religious issue but ended up as a powerful episode of India's freedom struggle. From 1920 to 1925 more than 30,000 men and women underwent imprisonment, nearly 400 died and over 2,000 were wounded. The movement arose with the objective of freeing the Gurdwaras (Sikh temples) from the control of ignorant and corrupt *mahants* (priests). The Gurdwaras had been heavily endowed with revenue-free land and money by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh chieftains and other devout Sikhs during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These shrines came to be managed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Udasi Sikh *mahants* who escaped the wrath of Mughal authorities because they did not wear their hair long.

(Many ignorant people therefore believe that these *mahants* were Hindus. This is, of course, not true at all). In time corruption spread among these *mahants* and they began to treat the offerings and other income of the Gurdwaras as their personal income. Many of them began to live a life of luxury and dissipation. Apart from the *mahants*, after the British annexation of Punjab in 1849, some control over the Gurdwaras was exercised by Government-nominated managers and custodians, who often collaborated with *mahants*.

The Government gave full support to the *mahants*. It used them and the managers to preach loyalism to the Sikhs and to keep them away from the rising nationalist movement. The Sikh reformers and nationalists, on the other hand, wanted a thorough reformation of the Gurdwaras by taking them out of the control of the *mahants* and agents of the colonial regime. The nationalists were especially horrified by two incidents - - when the priests of the Golden Temple at Amritsar issued a *Hukamnama* (directive from the Gums or the holy seats of the Sikh authority) against the Ghadarites, declaring them renegades, and then honoured General Dyer, the butcher of Jallianwala massacre, with a *saropa* (robe of honour) and declared him to be a Sikh.

A popular agitation for the reform of Gurdwaras developed rapidly during 1920 when the reformers organized groups of volunteers known as *jathas* to compel the *mahants* and the Government-appointed managers to hand over control of the Gurdwaras to the local devotees. The reformers won easy victories in the beginning with tens of Gurdwaras being liberated in the course of the year. Symbolic of this early success was the case of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht. The reformers demanded that this foremost seat of Sikh faith should be placed in the hands of a representative body of the Sikhs, and organized a series of



public meetings in support of their demand. The Government did not want to antagonize the reformers at this stage and decided to stem the rising tide of discontent on such an emotional religious issue by appeasing the popular sentiment. It, therefore, permitted the Government-appointed manager to resign and, thus, let the control of the Temple pass effectively into the reformers' hands.

To control and manage the Golden Temple, the Akal Takht and other Gurdwaras, a representative assembly of nearly 10,000 reformers met in November 1920 and elected a committee of 175 to be known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC). At the same time, the need was felt for a central body which would organize the struggle on a more systematic basis. The Shiromani Akali Dal was established in December for this purpose. It was to be the chief organizer of the Akali *jathas* whose backbone was provided by Jat peasantry while their leadership was in the hands of the nationalist intellectuals. Under the influence of the contemporary Non-Cooperation Movement — and many of the leaders were common to both the movements — the Akali Dal and the SGPC accepted complete non-violence as their creed.

The Akali movement faced its first baptism by blood at Nankana, the birth place of Guru Nanak, in February 1921. The *mahant* of the Gurdwara there, Narain Das, was not willing to peacefully surrender his control to the Akalis. He gathered a force of nearly 500 mercenaries and armed them with guns, swords, lathis and other lethal weapons to meet the challenge of the peaceful Akali volunteers. On 20 February, an Akali jatha entered the Gurdwara to pray. Immediately, the *mahant's* men opened fire on them and attacked them with other weapons. Nearly 100 Akalis were killed and a large number of *jathas* under Kartar Singh Jhabbar's command marched into the Gurdwara and took complete control despite dire warnings by the Deputy Commissioner. The *mahant* had already been arrested. The Government policy was still of vacillation. On the one hand, it did not want to earn the ire of the Sikhs, and, on the other, it did not want to lose control over the Gurdwaras.

The Nankana tragedy was a landmark in the Akali struggle. As Kartar Singh Jhabbar, the liberator of the Nankana Gurdwara put it, 'the happening had awakened the Sikhs from their slumber and the march towards *Swaraj* had been quickened.' The tragedy aroused the conscience of the entire country. Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Lala Lajpat Rai and other national leaders visited Nankana to show their solidarity. The Government now changed its policy. Seeing the emerging integration of the Akali movement with the national movement, it decided to follow a two-pronged policy. To win over or neutralize the Moderates and those concerned purely with religious reforms, it promised and started working for legislation which would satisfy them. It decided to suppress the extremist or the anti-imperialist section of the Akalis in the name of maintaining law and order. The Akalis, too, changed their policy. Heartened by the support of nationalist forces in the country, they extended the scope of their movement to completely root out Government interference in their religious places. They began to see their movement as an integral part of the national struggle. Consequently, within the SGPC, too, the non-cooperator nationalist section took control. In May 1921, the SGPC passed a resolution in favour of non-cooperation, for the boycott of foreign goods and liquor, and for the substitution of *panchayats* for the British courts of law. The Akali leaders, arrested for the breaking of law, also refused to defend themselves, denying the jurisdiction of foreign-imposed courts.

A major victory was won by the Akalis in the 'Keys Affair' in October 1921. The Government made an effort to keep possession of the keys of the *Toshakhana* of the Golden Temple. The Akalis immediately reacted, and organized massive protest meetings; tens of Akali *jathas* reached Amritsar immediately. The SGPC advised Sikhs to join the *hartal* on the day of the arrival of the Prince of Wales in India. The Government retaliated by arresting the prominent, militant nationalist leaders of the SGPC like Baba Kharak Singh and Master Tara Singh. But, instead of dying down, the movement began to spread to the remotest rural areas and the army. The Non-Cooperation Movement was at its height in the rest of the country. The Government once again decided not to confront Sikhs on a religious issue. It released all those arrested in the 'Keys Affair' and surrendered the keys of the *Toshakhana* to Baba Kharak Singh, head of the SGPC. Mahatma Gandhi immediately sent a telegram to the Baba: 'First battle for India's freedom won. Congratulations.'

The culmination of the movement to liberate the Gurdwaras came with the heroic non-violent struggle around Guru-Ka-Bagh Gurdwara which shook the whole of India. Smarting under its defeat in the 'Keys Affair,' the Punjab bureaucracy was looking for an opportunity to teach the Akalis a lesson and to recover its lost prestige. It was further emboldened by the fact that the Non-Cooperation Movement had been withdrawn in February 1922. It began to look for a pretext.

The pretext was provided by events at a little known village, Ghokewala, about 20 kilometres from Amritsar. The *mahant* of the Gurdwara Guru-Ka-Bagh had handed over the Gurdwara to the SGPC in August 1921, but claimed personal possession of the attached land. When the Akalis cut a dry *kikkar* tree on the land for use in the community kitchen, he complained to the police 'of the theft of his property from his land.' The officials seized this opportunity to provoke the Akalis. On 9 August 1922, five Akalis were arrested and put on trial. The Akali Dal reacted immediately to the new challenge. Akali *jathas* began to arrive and cut trees from the disputed Land. The Government started arresting all of them on charges of theft and rioting. By 28 August more than 4,000 Akalis had been arrested.

The authorities once again changed their tactics. Instead of arresting the Akali volunteers they began to beat them mercilessly with lathis. But the Akalis stood their ground and would not yield till felled to the ground with broken bones and lacerated bodies. C.F. Andrews described the official action as inhuman, brutal, foul, cowardly and incredible to an Englishman and a moral defeat of England. The entire country was outraged. National leaders and journalists converged on Guru-Ka-Bagh. Massive protest meetings were organized all over Punjab. A massive Akali gathering at Amritsar on 10<sup>th</sup> September was attended by Swami Shraddhanand, Hakim Ajmal Khan and others. The Congress Working Committee appointed a committee to investigate the conduct of the police.

Once again the Government had to climb down. As a face saving device, it persuaded a retired Government servant to lease the disputed land from the *mahant* and then allow the Akalis to cut the trees. It also released all the arrested Akali volunteers. With the Gurdwaras under the control of the SGPC, the militant Akalis looked for some other opportunity of confronting the Government since they felt that the larger Gurdwara – the country was not yet liberated. In September 1923, the SGPC took up the cause of the Maharaja of Nabha who had been forced by the Government to abdicate. This led to the famous *morcha* at Jaito in Nabha. But the Akalis could not achieve much success on the issue since it neither involved religion nor was there much support in the rest of the country. In the meanwhile, the Government had succeeded in winning over the moderate Akalis with the promise of legislation which was passed in July 1925 and which handed over control over all the Punjab Gurdwaras to an elected body of Sikhs which also came to be called the SGPC.

## CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE AKALI MOVEMENT

Apart from its own achievement, the Akali Movement made a massive contribution to the political development of Punjab. It awakened the Punjab peasantry. As Mohinder Singh, the historian of the Akali Movement has pointed out: 'It was only during the Akali movement that the pro-British feudal leadership of the Sikhs was replaced by educated middle-class nationalists and the rural and urban classes united on a common platform during the two-pronged Akali struggle.' This movement was also a model of a movement on a religious issue which was utterly non-communal. To further quote Mohinder Singh: 'It was this idea of Liberation of the country from a foreign Government that united all sections of the Sikh community and brought the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs of the province into the fold of the Akali movement.' The Akali Movement also awakened the people of the princely states of Punjab to political consciousness and political activity. There were also certain weaknesses with long-term consequences. The movement encouraged a certain religiosity which would be later utilized by communalism.

The Akali Movement soon divided into three streams because it represented three distinct political streams, which had no reasons to remain united as a distinct Akali party once Gurdwara reform had taken place. One of the movement's streams consisted of moderate, pro- Government men who were pulled into the movement because of its religious appeal and popular pressure. These men went back to loyalist



politics and became a part of the Unionist Party. Another stream consisted of nationalist persons who joined the mainstream nationalist movement, becoming a part of the Gandhian or leftist Kirti-Kisan and Communist Wings. The third stream, which kept the title of Akali, although it was not the sole heir of the Akali Movement, used to the full the prestige of the movement among the rural masses, and became the political organ of Sikh communalism, mixing religion and politics and inculcating the ideology of political separation from Hindus and Muslims. In pre-1947 politics the Akali Dal constantly vacillated between nationalist and loyalist politics.

## INC AND THE TEMPLE ENTRY SATYAGRAHAS

Till 1917, the National Congress had refused to take up social reform issues lest the growing political unity of the Indian people got disrupted. It reversed this position in 1917 when it passed a resolution urging upon the people 'the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the depressed classes.' At this stage, Lokamanya Tilak also denounced untouchability and asked for its removal. But they did not take any concrete steps in the direction. Among the national leaders, it was Gandhi who gave top priority to the removal of untouchability and declared that this was no less important than the political struggle for freedom.

In 1923, the Congress decided to take active steps towards the eradication of untouchability. The basic strategy it adopted was to educate and mobilize opinion among caste Hindus on the question. The nationalist challenge in this respect came to be symbolized by two famous struggles in Kerala.

The problem was particularly acute in Kerala where the depressed classes or *avarnas* (those without caste, later known as Harijans) were subjected to degrading and de-humanising social disabilities. For example, they suffered not only from untouchability but also *theendal* or distance pollution — the *Ezhavas* and *Pulayars* could not approach the higher castes nearer than 16 feet and 72 feet respectively. Struggle against these disabilities was being waged since the end of 19th century by several reformers and intellectuals such as Sri Narayan Guru, N. Kumaran Asan and T.K. Madhavan.

Immediately after the Kakinada session, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) took up the eradication of untouchability as an urgent issue. While carrying on a massive propaganda campaign against untouchability and for the educational and social upliftment of the Harijans, it was decided to launch an immediate movement to open Hindu temples and all public roads to the *avarnas* or Harijans. This, it was felt, would give a decisive blow to the notion of untouchability since it was basically religious in character and the *avarnas'* exclusion from the temples was symbolic of their degradation and oppression.

A beginning was made in Vaikom, a village in Travancore. There was a major temple there whose four walls were surrounded by temple roads which could not be used by *avarnas* like *Ezhavas* and *Pulayars*. The KPCC decided to use the recently acquired weapon of *Satyagraha* to fight untouchability and to make a beginning at Vaikom by defying the unapproachability rule by leading a procession of *savarnas* (caste Hindus) and *avarnas* on the temple roads on 30 March 1924. The news of the *Satyagraha* aroused immediate enthusiasm among political and social workers and led to an intense campaign to arouse the conscience of *savarnas* and mobilize their active support. Many *savarna* organizations such as the Nair Service Society, Nair *Samajam* and Kerala Hindu Sabha supported the *Satyagraha*. Yogakshema Sabha, the leading organization of the Namboodiris (highest Brahmins by caste), passed a resolution favouring the opening of temples to *avarnas*. The temple authorities and the Travancore Government put up barricades on the roads leading to the temple and the District Magistrate served prohibitory orders on the leaders of the *Satyagraha*. On 30th March, the *Satyagrahis*, led by K.P. Kesava Menon, marched from the *Satyagraha* camp towards the temple. They, as well as the succeeding batches of *Satyagrahis*, consisting of both *savarnas* and *avarnas*, were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment.

The Vaikom *Satyagraha* created enthusiasm all over the country and volunteers began to arrive from different parts of India. An Akali *jatha* arrived from Punjab. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (popularly known as



Periyar later) led a *jatha* from Madurai and underwent imprisonment. On the other hand, the orthodox and reactionary section of caste Hindus met at Vaikom and decided to boycott all *pro-Satyagraha* Congressmen and not to employ them as teachers or lawyers or to vote for them.

On the death of the Maharaja in August 1924, the Maharani, as Regent, released all the Satyagrahis. As a positive response to this gesture, it was decided to organize a *jatha* (a group of volunteers) of caste Hindus to present a memorial to the Maharani asking for the opening of the temple roads to all. Batches of caste Hindus from all over Kerala converged on Vaikom. On 31 October, a *jatha* of nearly one hundred caste Hindus started their march on foot to Trivandrum. It was given warm receptions at nearly 200 villages and towns on the way. By the time it reached Trivandrum, it consisted of over 1,000 persons. The Maharani, however, refused to accept their demand and the *Satyagraha* was continued.

In early March 1925, Gandhi began his tour of Kerala and met the Maharani and other officials. A compromise was arrived at. The roads around the temple were opened to *avarnas* but those in the *Sankethan* of the temple remained closed to them. In his Kerala tour, Gandhi did not visit a single temple because *avarnas* were kept out of them.

The struggle against untouchability and for the social and economic uplift of the depressed classes continued all over India after 1924 as a part of the Gandhian constructive programme. Once again the struggle was most intense in Kerala. Prodded by K Kelappan, the KPCC took up the question of temple entry in 1931 during the period when the Civil Disobedience Movement was suspended. A vast campaign of public meetings was organized throughout Malabar. The KPCC decided to make a beginning by organizing a temple entry *Satyagraha* at Guruvayur on 1st November 1931.

A *jatha* of sixteen volunteers, led by the poet Subramanian Tirumambu, when became famous as the 'Singing Sword of Kerala,' began a march from Cannanore in the north to Guruvayur on 21 October. The volunteers ranged from the lowliest of Harijans to the highest caste Namboodiris. The march stirred the entire country and aroused anti-caste sentiments. The 1st of November was enthusiastically observed as All-Kerala Temple Entry Day with a programme of prayers, processions, meetings, receptions and fund collections. It was also observed in cities like Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Colombo (Sri Lanka). The popular response was tremendous. Many all-India leaders visited Malabar. Money and volunteers poured in from everywhere. The youth were specially attracted and were in the forefront of the struggle. The anti-untouchability movement gained great popularity. Many religious devotees transferred the offerings they would have made to the temple to the *Satyagraha* camp, feeling that the camp was even more sacred than the temple.

The temple authorities also made arrangements. They put up barbed wire all around the temple and organized gangs of watchmen to keep the Satyagrahis out and to threaten them with beating.

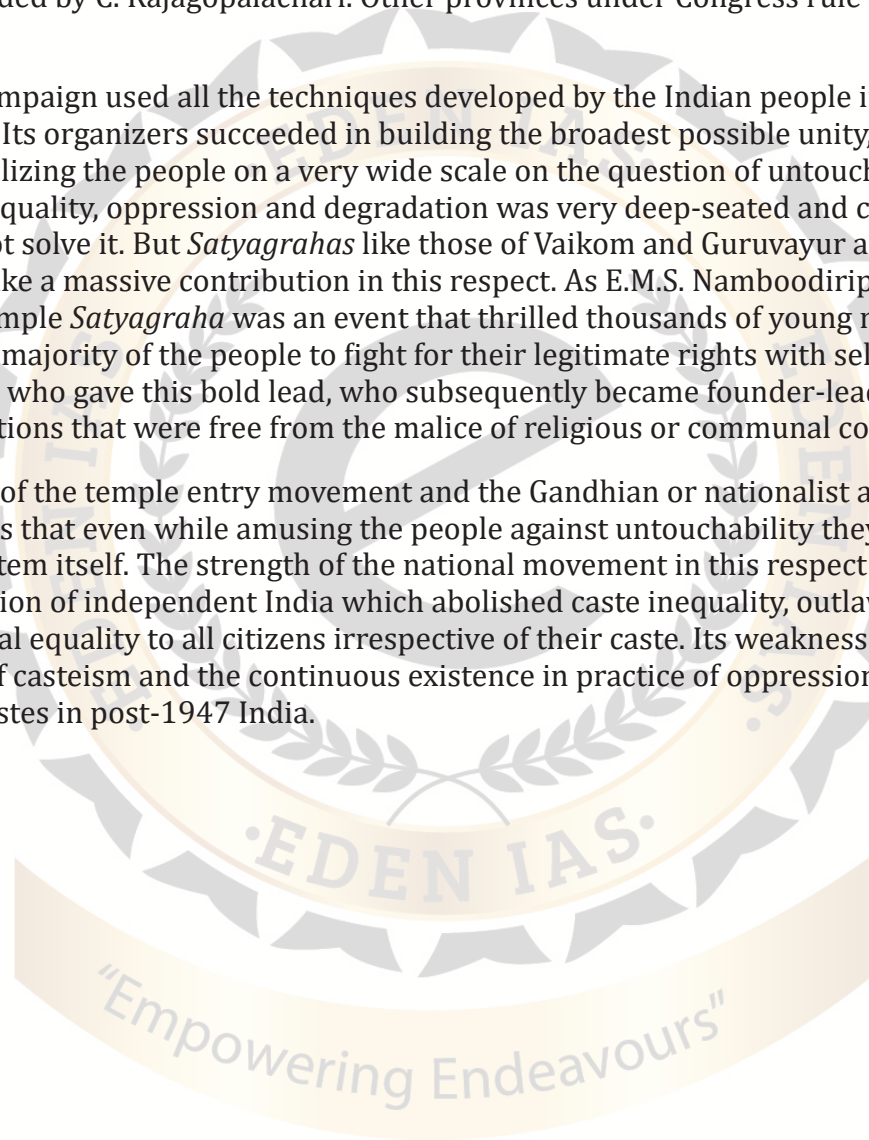
On 1 November, sixteen white *khadi-clad* volunteers marched to the eastern gate of the temple where their way was barred by a posse of policemen headed by the Superintendent of Police. Very soon, the temple servants and local reactionaries began to use physical force against the peaceful and non-violent Satyagrahis while the police stood by. For example, P Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan, who were to emerge later as major leaders of the Communist movement in Kerala, were mercilessly *beaten*. The *Satyagraha* continued even after the Civil Disobedience Movement was resumed in January 1932 and all Congress Committees were declared unlawful and most of the Congressmen leading the *Satyagraha* were imprisoned.

The *Satyagraha* entered a new phase on 21 September 1932 when K. Kelappan went on a fast unto death before the temple until it was opened to the depressed classes. The entire country was again stirred to its depths. Once again meetings and processions engulfed Kerala and many other parts of the country. Caste Hindus from Kerala as well as rest of India made appeals to the Zamorin of Calicut, custodian of the temple, to throw open the temples to all Hindus; but without any success. Gandhiji made repeated appeals to Kelappan to break his fast, at least temporarily, with an assurance that he would himself, if necessary, undertake the task of getting the temple opened.

Finally, Kelappan broke his fast on October 2, 1932. The *Satyagraha* was also suspended. But the temple entry campaign was carried on ever more vigorously. A *jatha* led by A.K. Gopalan toured whole of Kerala on foot, carrying on propaganda and addressing massive meetings everywhere. Before it was disbanded the *jatha* had covered nearly 1,000 miles and addressed over 500 meetings. Even though the Guruvayur temple was not opened immediately, the *Satyagraha* was a great success in broader terms. As A.K. Gopalan has recorded in his autobiography, 'although the Guruvayur temple was still closed to Harijans, I saw that the movement had created an impetus for social change throughout the country. It led to a transformation everywhere.' The popular campaign against untouchability and for temple entry continued in the succeeding years. In November 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore issued a proclamation throwing open all Government-controlled temples to all Hindus irrespective of caste. Madras followed suit in 1938 when its Ministry was headed by C. Rajagopalachari. Other provinces under Congress rule also took similar steps.

The temple entry campaign used all the techniques developed by the Indian people in the course of the nationalist struggle. Its organizers succeeded in building the broadest possible unity, imparting mass education, and mobilizing the people on a very wide scale on the question of untouchability. Of course, the problem of caste inequality, oppression and degradation was very deep-seated and complex and temple entry alone could not solve it. But *Satyagrahas* like those of Vaikom and Guruvayur and the movements around them did make a massive contribution in this respect. As E.M.S. Namboodiripad was to write years later: 'Guruvayur Temple *Satyagraha* was an event that thrilled thousands of young men like me and gave inspiration to a vast majority of the people to fight for their legitimate rights with self-respect. . . It was the very same youth who gave this bold lead, who subsequently became founder-leaders of the worker-peasant organizations that were free from the malice of religious or communal considerations.'

The main weakness of the temple entry movement and the Gandhian or nationalist approach in fighting caste oppression was that even while amusing the people against untouchability they lacked a strategy for ending the caste system itself. The strength of the national movement in this respect was to find expression in the Constitution of independent India which abolished caste inequality, outlawed untouchability and guaranteed social equality to all citizens irrespective of their caste. Its weakness has found expression in the growth of casteism and the continuous existence in practice of oppression and discrimination against the lower castes in post-1947 India.



## UNIT-XXVI

# SWARAJISTS, NO-CHANGERS AND GANDHIJI

### THE YEARS OF STAGNATION-PRO-CHANGERS VS NO-CHANGERS

The withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in February 1922 was followed by the arrest of Gandhiji in March and his conviction and imprisonment for six years for the crime of spreading disaffection against the Government. The result was the spread of disintegration, disorganization and demoralization in the nationalist ranks. There arose the danger of the movement lapsing into passivity. Many began to question the wisdom of the total Gandhian strategy. Others started looking for ways out of the impasse.

A new line of political activity, which would keep up the spirit of resistance to colonial rule, was now advocated by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru. They suggested that the nationalists should end the boycott of the legislative councils, enter them, expose them as 'sham parliaments' and as 'a mask which the bureaucracy has put on,' and obstruct 'every work of the council.' This, they argued, would not be giving up non-cooperation but continuing it in a more effective form by extending it to the councils themselves. It would be opening a new front in the battle.



**Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das**

C.R. Das as the President of the Congress and Motilal as its Secretary put forward this programme of 'either mending or ending' the councils at the Gaya session of the Congress in December 1922. Another section of the Congress, headed by Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari, opposed the new proposal which was consequently defeated by 1748 to 890 votes. Das and Motilal resigned from their respective offices in the Congress and on 1 January 1923 announced the formation of the Congress-Khilafat *Swaraj* Party better known later as the *Swaraj* Party. Das was the President and Motilal one of the Secretaries of the new party. The adherents of the council entry programme came to be popularly known as 'pro-changers' and those still advocating boycott of the councils as 'no—changers.'





**Pt. Motilal Nehru (sitting) with Jawaharlal Nehru**

The *Swaraj* Party accepted the Congress programme in its entirety except in one respect — it would take part *in* elections due later in the year. It declared that it would present the national demand for self-government in the councils and in case of its rejection its elected members would adopt ‘a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction within the councils, with a view to make the Government through the councils impossible.’ The councils would, thus, be wrecked from within by creating deadlocks on every measure that came before them. Both Das (born in 1870) and Motilal (born in 1861) were highly successful lawyers who had once been Moderates but had accepted the politics of boycott and non-cooperation in 1920. They had given up their legal practice, joined the movement as whole time workers and donated to the nation their magnificent houses in Calcutta and Allahabad respectively. They were great admirers of Gandhiji but were also his political equals. Both were brilliant and effective parliamentarians. One deeply religious and the other a virtual agnostic, both were secular to the core. Different in many ways, they complemented each other and formed a legendary political combination. Das was imaginative and emotional and a great orator with the capacity to influence and conciliate friends and foes. Motilal was firm, coolly analytical, and a great organizer and disciplinarian. They had such absolute trust and confidence in each other that each could use the other’s name for any statement without prior consultation.

## THE RECURRENCE OF SURAT EPISODE AND DIFFUSION OF TENSIONS

The no-changers, whose effective head was Gandhiji even though he was in jail, argued for the continuation of the full programme of boycott and non-cooperation, effective working of the constructive programme and quiet preparations for the resumption of the suspended civil disobedience.

The pro-changers and the no-changers were soon engaged in a fierce controversy. There was, of course, a lot of common ground between the two. Both agreed that civil disobedience was not possible immediately and that no mass movement could be carried on indefinitely or for a prolonged period. Hence, breathing time was needed and a temporary retreat from the active phase of the movement was on the agenda. Both also accepted that there was need to rest and to reinvigorate the anti-imperialist forces, overcome demoralization, intensify politicization, widen political participation and mobilization, strengthen organization, and keep up the recruitment, training and morale of the cadre. In fact, the national movement was facing the basic problem that any mass movement has to face: how were they to carry on political work in the movements' non-active phases?

It was in the answer to this last question that the two sides differed. The *Swarajists* said that work in the councils was necessary to fill in the temporary political void. This would keep up the morale of the politicized Indians, fill the empty newspaper spaces, and enthuse the people. Electioneering and speeches in the councils would provide fresh avenues for political agitation and propaganda. Even without Congressmen, said the *Swarajists*, the councils would continue to function and, perhaps, a large number of people would participate in voting. This would lead to the weakening of the hold of the Congress. Moreover, non-Congressmen would capture positions of vantage and use them to weaken the Congress. Why should such vantage points in a revolutionary fight be left in the hands of the enemy? By joining the councils and obstructing their work. Congressmen would prevent undesirable elements from doing mischief or the Government from getting some form of legitimacy for their laws.

In other words, the *Swarajists* claimed that they would transform the legislatures into arenas of political struggle and that their intention was not to use them, as the Liberals desired, as organs for the gradual transformation of the colonial state, but to use them as the ground on which the struggle for the overthrow of the colonial state was to be carried out.

The no-changers opposed council-entry mainly on the ground that parliamentary work would lead to the neglect of constructive and other work among the masses, the loss of revolutionary zeal and political corruption. The legislators who would go into the councils with the aim of wrecking them would gradually give up the politics of obstruction. get sucked into the imperial constitutional framework, and start cooperating with the Government on petty reforms and piecemeal legislation. Constructive work among the masses, on the other hand, would prepare them for the next round of civil disobedience.

As the pro-changer no-changer clash developed, the atmosphere of dismay in nationalist ranks began to thicken, and they began to be haunted by the fear of the repetition of the disastrous split of 1907. Pressure began to develop on the leaders to put a check on their public bickerings. Both groups of leaders began to pull back from the brink and move 'wards mutual accommodation. This trend was helped by several factors. First, the need for unity was felt very strongly by all the Congressmen. Secondly, not only the no-changers but also the *Swarajists* realized that however useful parliamentary work might be, the real sanctions which would compel the Government to accept national demands would be forged only by a mass movement outside the legislatures — and this would need unity. Lastly, both groups of leaders fully accepted the essentiality of Gandhiji's leadership. Consequently, in a special session of the Congress held at Delhi in September 1923, the Congress suspended all propaganda against council entry and permitted Congressmen to stand as candidates and exercise their franchise in forthcoming elections.

Gandhiji was released from jail on 5 February 1924 on health grounds. He was completely opposed to council-entry as also to the obstruction of work in the councils which he believed was inconsistent with non-violent non-cooperation. Once again a split in the Congress loomed on the horizon. The Government very much hoped for and banked on such a split. When releasing the Mahatma, the Bombay Government

had suggested that he 'would denounce the *Swarajists* for their defection from the pure principle of non-cooperation, and thus considerably reduce in legislatures their power for harm.' Similarly, Reading, the Viceroy, told the Secretary of State for India, on 6 June 1924:

***'The probability of a split between Swarajists and Gandhiji is increasing . . . Moonje, (The Swarajist leader from the Central Provinces) adds that the Swarajists are now driven to concentrating all their energy on breaking Gandhiji's hold on the Congress.'***

But Gandhiji did not oblige. Step by step, he moved towards an accommodation with the *Swarajists*. In fact, his approach towards the *Swarajists* at this stage brings out some of the basic features of his political style, especially when dealing with coworkers with whom he differed, and is therefore, worth discussing, however briefly.

Gandhiji's starting point was the fact that even when opposing the *Swarajist* leaders he had full trust in their bonafides. He described them as 'the most valued and respected leaders' and as persons who 'have made great sacrifices in the cause of the country and who yield to no one in their love of freedom of the motherland' Moreover, he and Das and Motilal Nehru throughout maintained warm personal relations based on mutual respect and regard. Immediately after his release, Gandhiji refused to publicly comment on council-entry till he had discussions with the *Swarajist* leaders. Even after meeting them, while he continued to believe in the futility and even harmful character of the *Swarajists'* programme, he remained convinced that public opposition to the 'settled fact' of council-entry would be counterproductive.

The courageous and uncompromising manner in which the *Swarajists* had functioned in the councils convinced Gandhiji that, however politically wrong, they were certainly not becoming a limb of imperial administration. To the contrary, he noted, 'they have shown determination, grit, discipline and cohesion and have not feared to carry their policy to the point of defiance. Once assume the desirability of entering Councils and it must be admitted that they have introduced a new spirit into the Indian Legislatures.'

Gandhiji was also pained by the bickerings in the worst of taste among the proponents of the two schools. As he wrote in April 1924: 'Even the "changers" and the "no-changers" have flung mud against one another. Each has claimed the monopoly of truth and, with an ignorant certainty of conviction, sworn at the other for his helpless stupidity.' He was very keen to end such mud-slinging.

In any case, felt Gandhiji, council entry had already occurred and now to withdraw would be 'disastrous' and would be 'misunderstood' by the Government and the people 'as a rout and weakness.' This would further embolden the Government in its autocratic behaviour and repressive policy and add to the state of political depression among the people.

The last straw came when the Government launched a full attack on civil liberties and the *Swarajists* in Bengal in the name of fighting terrorism. It promulgated an ordinance on 25 October 1924 under which it conducted raids on Congress offices and house searches and arrested a large number of revolutionary terrorists and *Swarajists* and other Congressmen including Subhas Chandra Bose and two *Swarajist* members of the Bengal legislature, Anil Baran Roy and S.C. Mitra.

Perceiving a direct threat to the national movement, Gandhiji's first reaction was anger. He wrote in *Young India* on 31 October: 'The Rowlatt Act is dead but the spirit that prompted it is like an evergreen. So long as the interest of Englishmen is antagonistic to that of Indians, so long must there be anarchic crime or the dread of it and an edition of the Rowlatt Act in answer.'

As an answer to the Government's offensive against the *Swarajists*, he decided to show his solidarity with the *Swarajists* by 'surrendering' before them. As he wrote in *Young India*: 'I would have been false to the country if I had not stood by the *Swaraj* Party in the hour of its need. . . I must stand by it even though I do not believe in the efficacy of Council-entry or even some of the methods of conducting Council Warfare And again "Though an uncompromising No-changer. I must not only tolerate their attitude and work with them, but I must even strengthen them wherever I can."



On 6 November 1924, Gandhiji brought the strife between the *Swarajists* and no-changers to an end, by signing a joint statement with Das and Motilal that the *Swarajist* Party would carry on work in the legislatures on behalf of the Congress and as an integral part of the Congress. This decision was endorsed in December at the Belgaum session of the Congress over which Gandhiji presided. He also gave the *Swarajists* a majority of seats on his Working Committee.

## THE SWARAJ PARTY AND COUNCIL ENTRY

Elections to the legislative councils were held in November 1923. The *Swarajist* manifesto, released on 14 October, took up a strong anti-imperialist position: "The guiding motive of the British in governing India is to secure the selfish interests of their own country and the so-called reform is a mere blind to further the said interests under the pretence of granting responsible government to India, the real object being to continue the exploitation of the unlimited resources of the country by keeping Indians permanently in a subservient position to Britain." It promised that the *Swarajists* would wreck the sham reforms from within the councils.

Even though the *Swarajists* got only a few weeks to prepare for the elections and the franchise was extremely narrow – only about 6.2 million or less than three per cent had the right to vote — they managed to do quite well. They won forty-two out of 101 elected seats in the Central Legislative Assembly they got a clear majority in the Central Provinces; they were the largest party in Bengal; and they fared quite well in Bombay and U.P., though not in Madras and Punjab because of strong casteist and communal currents.

In the Central Legislative Assembly, the *Swarajists* succeeded in building a common political front with the Independents led by M.A. Jinnah, the Liberals, and individuals such as Madan Mohan Malaviya. They built similar coalitions in most of the provinces. And they set out to inflict defeat after defeat on the Government.

The legislatures, reformed in 1919, had a 'semblance' of power without any real authority. Though they had a majority of elected members, the executive at the centre or in the provinces was outside their control, being responsible only to the British Government at home. Moreover, the Viceroy or the Governor could certify any legislation, including a budgetary grant, if it was rejected in the legislature. The *Swarajists* forced the Government to certify legislation repeatedly at the centre as well as in many of the provinces, thus exposing the true character of the reformed councils. In March 1925, they succeeded in electing Vithalbai Patel, a leading *Swarajist*, as the President of the Central Legislative Assembly.

Though intervening on every issue and often outvoting the Government, the *Swarajists* took up at the centre three major sets of problems on which they delivered powerful speeches which were fully reported in the Press and followed avidly every morning by the readers. One was the problem of constitutional advance leading to self-Government; second of civil liberties, release of political prisoners, and repeal of repressive laws; and third of the development of indigenous industries.

In the very first session, Motilal Nehru put forward the national demand for the framing of a new constitution, which would transfer real power to India. This demand was passed by 64 votes to 48. It was reiterated and passed in September 1925 by 72 votes to 45. The Government had also to face humiliation when its demands for budgetary grants under different heads were repeatedly voted out. On one such occasion, Vithalbai Patel told the Government: 'We want you to carry on the administration of this country by veto and by certification. We want you to treat the Government of India Act as a scrap of paper which I am sure it has proved to be.'

Similarly, the Government was defeated several times on the question of the repeal of repressive laws and regulations and release of political prisoners. Replying to the official criticism of the revolutionary terrorists, C.S. Ranga Iyer said that the Government officials were themselves 'criminals of the worst sort, assassins of the deepest dye, men who are murdering the liberties of a liberty-loving race.' **Lala Lajpat Rai said: 'Revolutions and revolutionary movements are only natural . . . there can be no progress**

*in the world without revolutions and revolutionary movements.” CR. Das was no less critical of the Government’s repressive policy. He told the Bengal Provincial Conference: ‘Repression is a process in the consolidation of arbitrary power — and I condemn the violence of the Government for repression is the most violent form of violence — just as I condemn violence as a method of winning political liberty.’*

The *Swarajist* activity in the legislatures was spectacular by any standards. It inspired the politicized persons and kept their political interest alive. People were thrilled every time the all powerful foreign bureaucracy was humbled in the councils. Simultaneously, during 1923-24, Congressmen captured a large number of municipalities and other local bodies. Das became the Mayor of Calcutta (with Subhas Bose as his Chief Executive Officer), and Vithalbhai Patel, the President of Bombay Corporation, Vallabhbhai Patel of Ahmedabad Municipality, Rajendra Prasad of Patna Municipality, and Jawaharlal Nehru of Allahabad Municipality. The no-changers actively joined in these ventures since they believed that local bodies could be used to promote the constructive programme. Despite their circumscribed powers, many of the municipalities and district boards, headed by a galaxy of leaders, set out to raise, however little, the quality of life of the people. They did excellent work in the fields of education, sanitation, health, anti-untouchability, and *khadi* promotion, won the admiration of friend and foe, and quite often aroused popular enthusiasm.

The *Swarajists* suffered a major loss when C.R. Das died on 16 June 1925. Even more serious were a few other political developments. In the absence of a mass movement, communalism raised its ugly head and the political frustrations of the people began to find expression in communal riots. Actively encouraged by the colonial authorities, the communalists of all hues found a fertile field for their activities.

Its preoccupation with parliamentary politics also started telling on the internal cohesion of the *Swaraj* Party. For one, the limits of politics of obstruction were soon reached. Having repeatedly outvoted the Government and forced it to certify its legislation, there was no way of going further inside the legislatures and escalating the politics of confrontation. This could be done only by a mass movement outside. But the *Swarajists* lacked any policy of coordinating their militant work in the legislatures with mass political work outside. In fact, they relied almost wholly on newspaper reporting.

The *Swarajists* also could not carry their coalition partners for ever and in every respect, for the latter did not believe in the *Swarajists’* tactic of ‘uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction.’ The logic of coalition politics soon began to pull back the *Swarajists* from militant obstructionism. Some of the *Swarajist* legislators could also not resist the pulls of parliamentary perquisites and positions of status and patronage. The Government’s policy of creating dissension among the nationalists by trying to separate the *Swarajists* from the Liberals, militant *Swarajists* from the more moderate *Swarajists*, and Hindus from Muslims began to bear fruit. In Bengal, the majority in the *Swaraj* Party failed to support the tenants’ cause against the *zamindars* and, thereby, lost the support of its pro-tenant, mostly Muslim, members. Nor could the *Swaraj* Party avoid the intrusion of communal discord in its own ranks. Very soon, a group of Responsivists arose in the party who wanted to work the reforms and to hold office wherever possible. The Responsivists joined the Government in the Central Provinces. Their ranks were soon swelled by N.C. Kelkar, M.R. Jayakar and other leaders. Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malaviya too separated themselves from the *Swaraj* Party on Responsivist as well as communal grounds.

To prevent further dissolution and disintegration of the party, the spread of parliamentary ‘corruption,’ and further weakening of the moral fibre of its members, the main leadership of the party reiterated its faith in mass civil disobedience and decided to withdraw from the legislatures in March 1926. Gandhiji, too, had resumed his critique of council-entry. He wrote to Srinivasa Iyengar in April 1926: The more I study the Councils’ work, the effect of the entry into the Councils upon public life, its repercussions upon the Hindu-Muslim question, the more convinced I become not only of the futility but the inadvisability of Council-entry.” The *Swaraj* Party went into the elections held in November 1926 as a party in disarray — a much weaker and demoralized force. It had to face the Government and loyalist elements and its own dissenters on the one side and the resurgent Hindu and Muslim communalists on the other. A virulent



communal and unscrupulous campaign was waged against the *Swarajists*. Motilal Nehru was, for example, accused of sacrificing Hindu interests, of favouring cow-slaughter, and of eating beef. The Muslim communalists were no less active in branding the *Swarajists* as anti-Muslim. The result was a severe weakening of the *Swaraj* Party. It succeeded in winning forty seats at the centre and half the seats in Madras but was severely mauled in all other provinces, especially in U.P., C.P., and Punjab. Moreover, communalists increased their representation in the councils. The *Swarajists* also could not form a nationalist coalition in the legislatures as they had done in 1923.

Once again the *Swarajists* passed a series of adjournment motions and defeated the Government on a number of bills. Noteworthy was the defeat of the Government on the Public Safety Bill in 1928. Frightened by the spread of socialist and communist ideas and influence and believing that the crucial role in this respect was being played by British and other foreign agitators sent to India by the Communist International, the Government proposed to acquire the power to deport 'undesirable' and 'subversive' foreigners. Nationalists of all colours, from the moderates to the militants, united in opposing the Bill. Lala Lajpat Rai said, 'Capitalism is only another name for Imperialism . . . We are in no danger from Bolshevism or Communism. The greatest danger we are in, is from the capitalists and exploiters.' Motilal Nehru narrated his experiences in the Soviet Union and condemned anti-Soviet propaganda. He described the Public Safety Bill as 'a direct attack on Indian nationalism, on the Indian National Congress' and as 'the Slavery of India, Bill No. 1.' T. Prakasam said that the Bill's main aim was to prevent the spread of nationalism among workers and peasants.' Diwan Chaman Lal, then a firebrand protege of Motilal, declared: 'If you are trying to preach against socialism, if you are demanding powers to suppress socialism, you will have to walk over our dead bodies before you can get that power.' Even the two spokesmen of the capitalist class, Purshottamdas Thakurdas and G.D. Birla, *firmly* opposed the Bill.

In March 1929, having failed to get the Bill passed, the Government arrested thirty-one leading communists, trade unionists and other leftwing leaders and put them on trial at Meerut. This led to strong criticism of the Government by the nationalists. Describing the arrests as presaging a period of terrorism,' Gandhi said that the motive behind these prosecutions is not to kill Communism, it is to strike terror.' He added: 'Evidently it (the Government) believes in a periodical exhibition of *its* capacity (supersede all law and to discover to a trembling India the red claws which usually remain under cover.' The *Swarajists* finally walked out of the legislatures in 1930 as a result of the Lahore Congress resolution and the beginning of civil disobedience.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SWARAJISTS

Their great achievement lay in their filling the political void at a time when the national movement was recouping its strength. And this they did without getting co-opted by the colonial regime. As Motilal Nehru wrote to his son: 'We have stood firm.' While some in their ranks fell by the wayside as was inevitable in the parliamentary framework, the overwhelming majority proved their mettle and stood their ground. They worked in the legislatures in an orderly disciplined manner and withdrew from them whenever the call came. Above all, they showed that it was possible to use the legislatures in a creative manner even as they promoted the politics of self-reliant anti-imperialism. They also successfully exposed the hollowness of the Reform Act of 1919 and showed the people that India was being ruled by lawless laws.

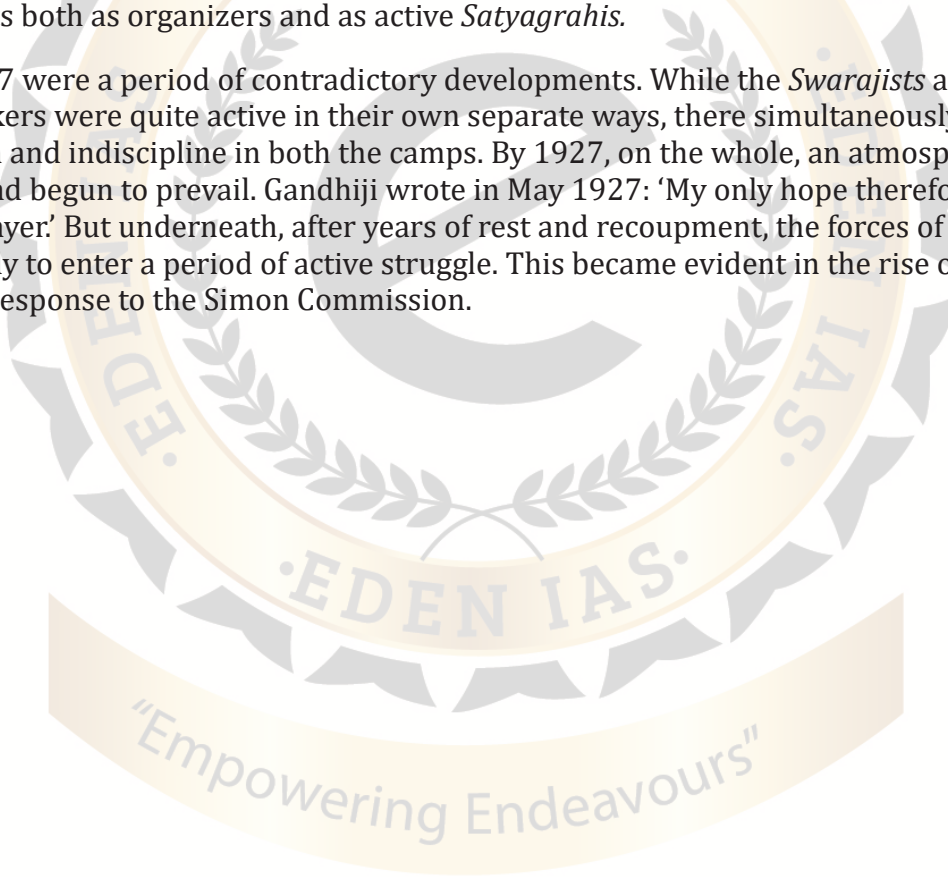
In the meantime, the no-changers carried on laborious, quiet, undemonstrative, grass-roots constructive work around the promotion of *khadi* and spinning, national education and Hindu-Muslim unity, the struggle against untouchability and the boycott of foreign cloth. This work was symbolized by hundreds of ashrams that came up all over the country where political cadres got practical training in *khadi* work and work among the lower castes and tribal people. For example, there was the Vedchi Ashram in Bardoli *taluka*, Gujarat, where Chimanlal Mehta, Jugatram Dave and Chimanlal Bhatt devoted their entire lives to the spread of education among the adivasis or *kaliparaj*; or the work done by Ravishankar Maharaj among the lower caste *Baralyas* of Kheda district.



In fact, Gandhian constructive work was multi-faceted in its content. It brought some much-needed relief to the poor; it promoted the process of the nation-in-the-making; and it made the urban-based and upper caste cadres familiar with the conditions of villages and lower castes. It provided Congress political workers or cadres Continuous and effective work in the passive phases of the national movement, helped build their bonds with those sections of the masses who were hitherto untouched by politics, and developed their organizing capacity and self-reliance. It filled the rural masses with a new hope and increased Congress influence among them.

Without the uplift of the lower castes and *Adivasis* there could be no united struggle against colonialism. The boycott of foreign cloth was a stroke of genius which demonstrated to rulers and the world the Indian people's determination to be free. National schools and colleges trained young men in an alternative, non-colonial ideological framework. A large number of young men and women who dropped out in 1920-21 went back to the officially recognized educational institutions but many often became whole time cadres of the movement. As a whole, constructive work was a major channel for the recruitment of the soldiers of freedom and their political training — as also for the choosing and testing of their 'officers' and leaders. Constructive workers were to act as the steel frame of the nationalist movement in its active *Satyagraha* phase. It was, therefore, not accidental that *khadi bhandar* workers, students and teachers of national schools and colleges, and Gandhian ashrams' inmates served as the backbone of the civil disobedience movements both as organizers and as active *Satyagrahis*.

The years 1922-27 were a period of contradictory developments. While the *Swarajists* and Gandhian constructive workers were quite active in their own separate ways, there simultaneously prevailed virulent factionalism and indiscipline in both the camps. By 1927, on the whole, an atmosphere of apathy and frustration had begun to prevail. Gandhiji wrote in May 1927: 'My only hope therefore lies in prayer and answer to prayer.' But underneath, after years of rest and recoupment, the forces of nationalism were again getting ready to enter a period of active struggle. This became evident in the rise of youth power and the national response to the Simon Commission.



## UNIT-XXVII

# RESURGENCE OF REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

### THE BACKGROUND OF THE RESURGENCE

The revolutionary nationalists were severely suppressed during World War I, with most of the leaders in jail or absconding. Consequently, in order to create a more harmonious atmosphere for the Montague-Chelmsford reforms, the Government released most of them under a general amnesty in early 1920. Soon after, the National Congress launched the Non Cooperation Movement and on the urging of Gandhiji, C.R. Das and other Leaders most of the revolutionary nationalists either joined the movement or suspended their own activities in order to give the Gandhian mass movement a chance. But the sudden suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement shattered the high hopes raised earlier. Many young people began to question the very basic strategy of the national leadership and its emphasis on non violence and began to look for alternatives. They were not attracted by the parliamentary politics of the *Swarajists* or the patient and un-dramatic constructive work of the no-changers. Many were drawn to the idea that violent methods alone would free India. Revolutionary nationalism again became attractive. It is not accidental that nearly all the major new leaders of the revolutionary nationalist politics, for example, Jogesh Chandra Chatterjea, Surya Sen, Jatin Das, Chandrashekhra Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Shiv Varma, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Jaidev Kapur, had been enthusiastic participants in the non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement.

Gradually two separate strands of revolutionary nationalism developed — one in Punjab, U.P. and Bihar and the other in Bengal. Both the strands came under the influence of several new social forces. One was the upsurge of working class trade unionism after the War. They could see the revolutionary potential of the new class and desired to harness it to the nationalist revolution. The second major influence was that of the Russian Revolution and the success of the young Socialist State in consolidating itself. The youthful revolutionaries were keen to learn from and take the help of the young Soviet State and its ruling Bolshevik Party. The third influence was that of the newly sprouting Communist groups with their emphasis on Marxism, Socialism and the proletariat.

### HINDUSTAN SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN ARMY (HSRA)

The revolutionaries in northern India were the first to emerge out of the mood of frustration and reorganize under the leadership of the old veterans, Ramprasad Bismil, Jogesh Chatterjea and Sachindranath Sanyal whose *Bandi Jivan* served as a textbook to the revolutionary movement. They met in Kanpur in October 1924 and founded the Hindustan Republican Association (or Army) to organize armed revolution to overthrow colonial rule and establish in its place a Federal Republic of the United States of India whose basic principle would be adult franchise. Before armed struggle could be waged, propaganda had to be organized on a large scale, men had to be recruited and trained and arms had to be procured. All these required money. The most important 'action' of the HRA was the Kakori Robbery. On 9 August 1925, ten men held up the 8-Down train at Kakori, an obscure village near Lucknow, and looted its official railway cash. The Government reaction was quick and hard. It arrested a large number of young men and tried them in the Kakori Conspiracy Case. Ashfaqulla Khan, Ramprasad Bismil, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri were hanged, four others were sent to the Andamans for life and seventeen others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Only Chandrashekhra Azad remained at large.



Ram Prasad Bismil



Ashfaqullah Khan



Roshan Singh



Rajendra Lahiri

The Kakori case was a major setback to the revolutionaries of northern India but it was not a fatal blow. Younger men such as Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Varma and Jaidev Kapur in U.P.,-Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Sukhdev in Punjab set out to reorganize the HRA under the overall leadership of Chandrashekhar Azad. Simultaneously, they were being influenced by socialist ideas. Finally, nearly all the major young revolutionaries of northern India met at Ferozeshah Kotla Ground at Delhi on 9 and 10 September 1928, created a new collective leadership, adopted socialism as their official goal and changed the name of the party to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (Army).



Chandrashekhar Azad



B.K. Dutt

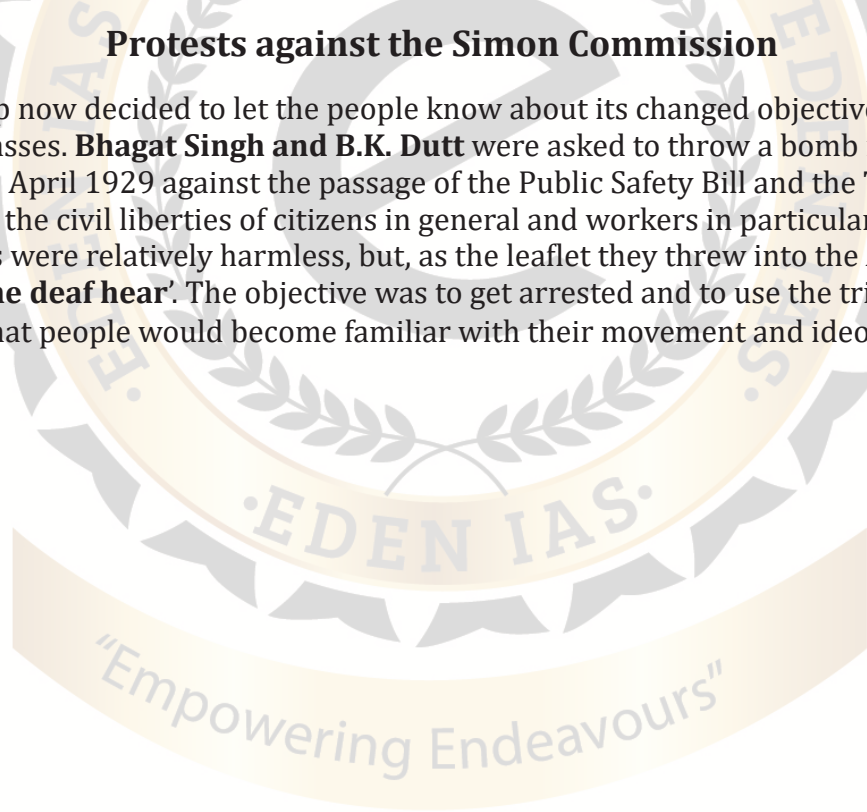
Even though, as we shall see, the HSRA and its leadership was rapidly moving away from individual heroic action and assassination and towards mass politics, Lala Lajpat Rai's death, as the result of a brutal lathi-charge when he was leading an anti-Simon Commission demonstration at Lahore on 30 October her 1928, led them once again to take to individual assassination. The death of this great Punjabi leader, popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, was seen by the romantic youthful leadership of the HSRA as a direct challenge. And so, on 17 December 1928, Bhagat Singh, Azad and Rajguru assassinated, at Lahore, Saunders, a police official involved in the lathi charge of Lab Lajpat Rai. In a poster, put up by the HSRA after the assassination, the assassination was justified as follows: **'The murder of a leader respected by millions of people at the unworthy hands of an ordinary police official . . . was an insult to the nation. It was the bounden duty of young men of India to efface it. . . We regret to have had to kill a person but he was part and parcel of that inhuman and unjust order which has to be destroyed.'**





### Protests against the Simon Commission

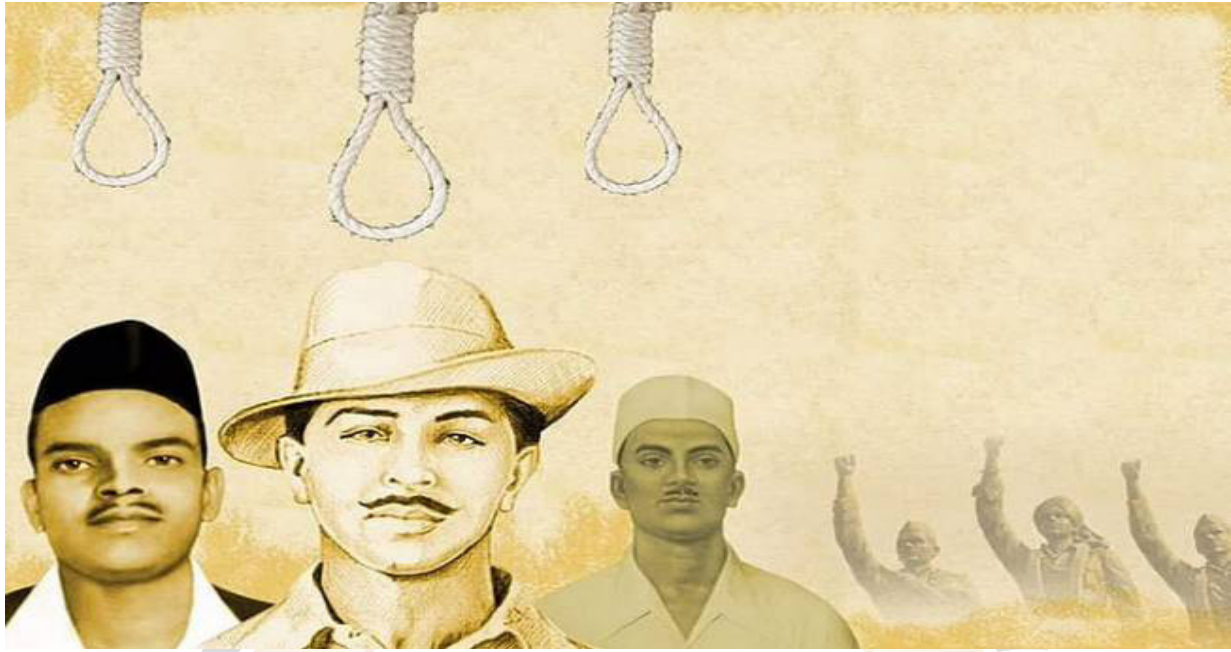
The HSRA leadership now decided to let the people know about its changed objectives and the need for a revolution by the masses. **Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt** were asked to throw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 April 1929 against the passage of the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill which would reduce the civil liberties of citizens in general and workers in particular. The aim was not to kill, for the bombs were relatively harmless, but, as the leaflet they threw into the Assembly hail proclaimed, '**to make the deaf hear**'. The objective was to get arrested and to use the trial court as a forum for propaganda so that people would become familiar with their movement and ideology.





**Shaheed Bhagat Singh**

Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were tried in the Assembly Bomb Case. Later, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru and tens of other revolutionaries were tried in a series of famous conspiracy cases. Their fearless and defiant attitude in the courts — every day they entered the court-room shouting slogans '*Inquilab Zindabad*,' '*Down, Down with Imperialism*,' '*Long Live the Proletariat*' and singing songs such as '*Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mei hai*' (our heart is filled with the desire for martyrdom) and '*Mera rang de basanti chola*' (dye my clothes in saffron colour (the colour of courage and sacrifice) — was reported in newspapers; unsurprisingly this won them the support and sympathy of people all over the country including those who had complete faith in non-violence. Bhagat Singh became a household name in the land. And many persons, all over the country, wept and refused to eat food, attend schools, or carry on their daily work, when they heard of his hanging in March 1931.



### **Shivaram Rajguru, Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev Thapar**

The country was also stirred by the prolonged hunger strike the revolutionary under-trials undertook as a protest against the horrible conditions in jails. They demanded that they be treated not as criminals but as political prisoners. The entire nation rallied behind the hunger-strikers. On 13 September, the 64<sup>th</sup> day of the epic fast, Jatin Das, a frail young man with an iron will, died. Thousands came to pay him homage at every station passed by the train carrying his body from Lahore to Calcutta. At Calcutta, a two-mile-long procession of more than six lakh people carried his coffin to the cremation ground.



### **Jatindra Nath Das (Jatin Das)**

A large number of revolutionaries were convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and other similar cases and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment; many of them were sent to the Andamans. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was carried out on 23 March 1931.



**SURYA SEN AND THE CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID**

In Bengal, too, the revolutionary nationalists started reorganizing and developing their underground activities. At the same time, many of them continued to work in the Congress organization. This enabled them to gain access to the vast Congress masses; on the other hand, they provided the Congress with an organizational base in small towns and the countryside. They cooperated with C.R. Das in his *Swarajist* work. After his death the Congress leadership in Bengal got divided into two wings, one led by Subhas Chandra Bose and the other by J.M. Sengupta, the Yugantar group joined forces with the first and Anushilan with the second. Among the several 'actions' of the reorganized groups was the attempt to assassinate Charles Tegart, the hated Police Commissioner of Calcutta, by Gopinath Saha in January 1924. By an error, another Englishman named Day was killed. The Government came down on the people with a heavy hand. A large number of people, suspected of being terrorists, or their supporters, were arrested under a newly promulgated ordinance. These included Subhas Chandra Bose and many other Congressmen. Saha was hanged despite massive popular protest. The revolutionary activity suffered a severe setback. Another reason for stagnation in revolutionary nationalist activity lay in the incessant factional and personal differences within the nationalist groups, especially where Yugantar and Anushilan rivalry was concerned. But very soon younger revolutionaries began to organize themselves in new groups, developing fraternal relations with the active elements of both the Anushilan and Yugantar parties. Among the new 'Revolt Groups,' the most active and famous was the Chittagong group led by Surya Sen.



**Surya Sen**

Surya Sen had actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement and had become a teacher in a national school in Chittagong, which led to his being popularly known as Masterda. Arrested and imprisoned for two years, from 1926 to 1928, for revolutionary activity, he continued to work in the Congress. He and his group were closely associated with the Congress work in Chittagong. In 1929, Surya Sen was the Secretary and five of his associates were members of the Chittagong District Congress Committee. Surya Sen, a brilliant and inspiring organizer, was an unpretentious, soft-spoken and transparently sincere person. Possessed of immense personal courage, he was deeply humane in his approach. He was fond of saying:

'Humanism is a special virtue of a revolutionary.' He was also very fond of poetry, being a great admirer of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Surya Sen soon gathered around himself a large band of revolutionary youth including Anant Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Lokenath Baul. They decided to organize a rebellion, on however small a scale, to demonstrate that it was possible to challenge the armed might of the British Empire in India. Their action plan was to include occupation of the two main armouries in Chittagong and the seizing of their arms with which a large band of revolutionaries could be formed into an armed detachment; the destruction of the telephone and telegraph systems of the city; and the dislocation of the railway communication system between Chittagong and the rest of Bengal. The action was carefully planned and was put into execution at 10 o'clock on the night of 18 April 1930. A group of six revolutionaries, led by Ganesh Ghosh, captured the Police Armory, shouting slogans such as *Inquilab Zindabad*, *Down with Imperialism* and *Gandhiji's Raj has been established*. Another group of ten, led by Lokenath Paul, took over the Auxiliary Force Armory along with its Lewis guns and 303 army rifles. Unfortunately they could not locate the ammunition. This was to prove a disastrous setback to the revolutionaries' plans. The revolutionaries also succeeded in dislocating telephone and telegraph communications and disrupting movement by train. In all, sixty-five were involved in the raid, which was undertaken in the name of the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch.

All the revolutionary groups gathered outside the Police Armory where Surya Sen, dressed in immaculate white khadi dhoti and a long coat and stiffly ironed Gandhi cap, took a military salute, hoisted the National Flag among shouts of *Bande Mataram* and *Inquilab Zindabad*, and proclaimed a Provisional Revolutionary Government. It was not possible for the band of revolutionaries to put up a fight in the town against the army which was expected. They, therefore, left Chittagong town before dawn and marched towards the Chittagong hill ranges, looking for a safe place. It was on the Jalalabad hill that several thousand troops surrounded them on the afternoon of 22 April. After a fierce fight in which over eighty British troops and twelve revolutionaries died, Surya Sen decided to disperse into the neighbouring villages; there they formed into small groups and conducted raids on Government, personnel and property. Despite several repressive measures and combing operations by the authorities, the villagers, gave food and shelter to the revolutionary outlaws and enabled them to survive for three years. Surya Sen was finally arrested on 16 February 1933, tried and hanged on 12 January 1934. Many of his co-fighters were caught and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

### THE IMPACT OF THE CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID

The Chittagong Armoury Raid had an immense impact on the people of Bengal. As an official publication remarked, it 'fired the imagination of revolutionary-minded youth' and 'recruits poured into the various nationalist groups in a steady stream.' The year 1930 witnessed a major revival of revolutionary activity, and its momentum carried over to 1931 and 1932. There were numerous instances of death-defying heroism. In Midnapore district alone, three British magistrates were assassinated. Attempts were made on the lives of two Governors; two Inspectors-General of Police were killed. During this three-year period, twenty-two officials and twenty non-officials were killed. The official reaction to the Armoury Raid and the revival of revolutionary terrorist activity was initially one of panic and, then of brutal reprisals. The Government armed itself with twenty repressive Acts and let loose the police on all nationalists. In Chittagong, it burnt several villages, imposed punitive fine on many others, and in general established a reign of terror. In 1933, it arrested and sentenced Jawaharlal Nehru to a two-year term in jail for sedition. He had in a speech in Calcutta condemned imperialism, praised the heroism of revolutionary youth (even while criticizing the policy of terrorism as futile and out-of-date) and condemned police repression.



### **Pritilata Waddedar**

A remarkable aspect of this new phase of the nationalist movement in Bengal was the large-scale participation of young women. Under Surya Sen's leadership, they provided shelter, acted as messengers and custodians of arms, and fought, guns in hand. Pritilata Waddedar died while conducting a raid, while Kalpana Dutt (later Joshi) was arrested and tried along with Surya Sen and given a life sentence. In December 1931, two school girls of Comilla, Santi Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury, shot dead the District Magistrate. In February 1932, Bina Das fired point blank at the Governor while receiving her degree at the Convocation.

Compared to the old revolutionary nationalists, as also Bhagat Singh and his comrades, the Chittagong rebels made an important advance. Instead of an individual's act of heroism or the assassination of an individual, theirs was a group action aimed at the organs of the colonial state. But the objective still was to set an example before the youth, and to demoralize the bureaucracy. As Kalpana Joshi (Dutt) has put it, the plan- was that when, after the Chittagong rebellion, 'the Government would bring in troops to take back Chittagong they would die fighting — thus creating a legend and setting an example before their countrymen to emulate.' Or as Surya Sen told Ananda Gupta: 'A dedicated band of youth must show the path of organized armed struggle in place of individual heroism. Most of us will have to die in the process but our sacrifice for such a noble cause will not go in vain.'



### GIRL, WOULD-BE ASSASSIN, GETS NINE YEARS IN INDIA

Calcutta, Feb. 15 (AP).—Bina Das, Indian girl student who was accused of attempting to shoot Sir Stanley Jackson, British governor, on Feb. 6, was sentenced today to nine years' imprisonment at hard labor by a special tribunal.

The girl pleaded guilty to a charge of attempted murder. She received the sentence calmly.

"I fired on the governor, impelled by love for my country, which is repressed," she said. "I sought only a way to death by offering myself at my country's feet and thus end my suffering. I invite the attention of all to the situation created by the measures of the government. This can upset even a frail woman like myself, brought up in all the best traditions of Indian womanhood.

"I can assure all that I have no personal feeling against the governor. As a man he is as good as my father, but as governor of Bengal he represents a system which has kept enslaved 300,000,000 men and women of my country."



### Bina Das' Statement in the Court

The Chittagong IRA cadre included many Muslims like Sattar, Mir Ahmad, Fakir Ahmad Mian, Tunu Mian and got massive support from Muslim villagers around Chittagong. But they still retained elements of social conservatism, nor did they evolve broader socio-economic goals. In particular, those revolutionary terrorists, who worked in the *Swaraj* party, failed to support the cause of Muslim peasantry against the *zamindars*.

### CONTRIBUTIONS OF BHAGAT SINGH TO THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

A real breakthrough in terms of revolutionary ideology and the goals of revolution and the forms of revolutionary struggle was made by Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Rethinking had, of course, started on both counts in the HRA itself. Its manifesto had declared in 1925 that it stood for 'abolition of all systems which make the exploitation of man by man possible.' Its founding council, in its meeting in October 1924, had decided 'to preach social revolutionary and communistic principles.' Its main organ, *The Revolutionary*, had proposed the nationalization of the railways and other means of transport and large-scale industries such as steel and ship building. The HRA had also decided 'to start labour and peasant organizations' and to work for 'an organized and armed revolution.'

In a message from the death-cell, Ramprasad Bismil had appealed to the youth to give up 'the desire to keep revolvers and pistols,' 'not to work in revolutionary conspiracies,' and to work in 'the open movement.' He had asked the people to establish Hindu-Muslim unity and unite all political groups under the leadership of the Congress. He had also affirmed his faith in communism and the principle that 'every human being has equal rights over products of nature.'

Bhagat Singh, born in 1907 and a nephew of the famous revolutionary Ajit Singh, was a giant of an intellectual. A voracious reader, he was one of the most well-read of political leaders of the time. He had devoured books in the Dwarkadas Library at Lahore on socialism, the Soviet Union and revolutionary movements, especially those of Russia, Ireland and Italy. At Lahore, he organized several study circles with the help of Sukhdev and others and carried on intensive political discussions. When the HSRA office was shifted to Agra, he immediately set up a library and urged members to read and discuss socialism and

other revolutionary ideas. His shirt pockets always bulged with books which he constantly offered to lend his comrades. After his arrest he transformed the jail into a veritable university. Emphasizing the role of ideas in the making of revolution, he declared before the Lahore High Court: "The sword of revolution is sharpened on the whetting-stone of ideas." This atmosphere of wide reading and deep thinking pervaded the ranks of the HSRA leadership. Sukhdev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Shiv Varma, Bejoy Sinha, Yashpal, all were intellectuals of a high order. Nor would even Chandrashekar- Azad, who knew little English, accept any idea till it was fully explained to him. He followed every major turn in the field of ideas through discussion.

The draft of the famous statement of revolutionary position, *The Philosophy of the Bomb*, was written by Bhagwati Charan Vohra at the instance of Azad and after a full discussion with him. Bhagat Singh had already, before his arrest in 1929, abandoned his belief in terrorism and individual heroic action. He had turned to Marxism and had come to believe that popular broad-based mass movements alone could lead to a successful revolution; in other words revolution could only be achieved 'by the masses for the masses.' That is why Bhagat Singh helped establish the Punjab **Naujawan Bharat Sabha** in 1926 (becoming its founding Secretary), as the open wing of the revolutionaries. The Sabha was to carry out open political work among the youth, peasants and workers. It was to open branches in the villages. Under its auspices, Bhagat Singh used to deliver political lectures with the help of magic lantern slides. Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev also organized the Lahore Students Union for open, legal work among the students.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades also gave expression to their understanding that revolution meant the development and organization of a mass movement of the exploited and suppressed sections of society by the revolutionary intelligentsia in the course of their statements from 1929 to 1931 in the courts as well as outside. Just before his execution, Bhagat Singh declared that 'the real revolutionary armies are in the villages and in factories.' Moreover, in his behest to young political workers, written on 2 February 1931, he declared: 'Apparently, I have acted like a terrorist. But I am not a terrorist. . . Let me announce with all the strength at my command, that I am not a terrorist and I never was, except perhaps in the beginning of my revolutionary career. And I am convinced that we cannot gain anything through those methods.'

Then why did Bhagat Singh and his comrades still take recourse to individual heroic action? One reason was the very rapidity of the changes in their thinking. The past formed a part of their present, for these young men had to traverse decades within a few years. Moreover, effective acquisition of a new ideology is not an event; it is not like a religious conversion: it is always a prolonged historical process. Second, they were faced with a classic dilemma: From where would come the cadres, the hundreds of full-time young political workers, who would fan out among the masses? How were they to be recruited? Patient intellectual and political work appeared to be *too* slow and too akin to the Congress style of politics which the revolutionaries wanted to transcend. The answer appeared to be to appeal to the youth through 'propaganda by deed,' to recruit the initial cadres of a mass revolutionary party through heroic dramatic action and the consequent militant propaganda before the courts. In the last stage, during 1930 and 1931, they were mainly fighting to keep the glory of the sacrifice of their comrades' wider sentence shining as before. As Bhagat Singh put it, he had to ask the youth to abandon the path of violence without tarnishing the sense of heroic sacrifice by appearing to have reconsidered his politics under the penalty of death." Life was bound to teach, sooner or later, correct politics; the sense of sacrifice once lost would not be easy to regain.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades also made a major advance in broadening the scope and definition of revolution. Revolution was no longer equated with mere militancy or violence. Its first objective was national liberation — the overthrow of imperialism. But it must go beyond and work for a new socialist social order; it must bend exploitation of man by man.' *The Philosophy of the Bomb*, written by Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Chandrasekhar Azad and Yashpal, defined revolution as independence, social, political and economic' aimed at establishing 'a new order of society in which political and economic exploitation will be an impossibility'. In the Assembly Bomb Case, Bhagat Singh told the court. "Revolution," does not necessarily involve sanguinary strife, nor is there any place in it for individual vendetta. It is not the cult



of the bomb and the pistol. By "Revolution" we mean that the present order of things, which is based on manifest injustice, must change." In a letter from jail, he wrote: "The peasants have to liberate themselves not only from foreign yoke but also from the yoke of landlords and capitalists." In his last message of 3 March 1931, he declared that the struggle in India would continue so long as 'a handful of exploiters go on exploiting the labour of common people for their own ends. It matters little whether these exploiters are purely British capitalism, or British and Indians in alliance, or even purely Indians.' "(Bhagat Singh defined socialism in a scientific manner — it must mean abolition of capitalism and class domination. He fully accepted Marxism and the class approach to society.<sup>1</sup> In fact, he saw himself above all as a Precursor and not maker of the 'revolution, as a propagator of the ideas of socialism and communism as a humble initiator of the socialist movement in India.'

Bhagat Singh was a great innovator in two areas of politics. Being fully and consciously secular, he understood, more clearly than many of his contemporaries, the danger that communalism posed to the nation and the national movement. He often told his audience that communalism was as big an enemy as colonialism. In April 1928, at the conference of youth where Naujawan Bharat Sabha was reorganized, Bhagat Singh and his comrades openly opposed the suggestion that youth belonging to religious communal organizations should be permitted to become members of the Sabha. Religion was one's private concern and communalism was an enemy to be fought, argued Bhagat Singh."

Earlier in 1927, condemning communal killings as barbaric, he had pointed out that communal killers did not kill a person because he was guilty of any particular act but simply because that person happened to be a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. But, wrote Bhagat Singh, a new group of youth was coming forward who did not recognize any differences based on religion and saw a person first as a human being and then as an Indian.

Bhagat Singh revered Lajpat Rai as a leader. But he would not spare even Lajpat Rai, when, during the last years of his life, Lajpat Rai turned to communal politics. He then launched a political-ideological campaign against him. Because Lajpat Rai was a respected leader, he would not publicly use harsh words of criticism against him. And so he printed as a pamphlet Robert Browning's famous poem, 'The Lost Leader,' in which Browning criticizes Wordsworth for turning against liberty. The poem begins with the line 'Just for a handful of silver he left us.' A few more of the poem's lines were: 'we shall march prospering, — not thro' his presence; Songs may inspire us, — not from his lyre,' and 'Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more.' There was not one word of criticism of Lajpat Rai. Only, on the front cover, he printed Lajpat Rai's photograph!

Significantly, two of the six rules of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, drafted by Bhagat Singh, were: 'To have nothing to do with communal bodies or other parties which disseminate communal ideas' and 'to create the spirit of general toleration among the public considering religion as a matter of personal belief of man and to act upon the same fully.' Bhagat Singh also saw the importance of freeing the people from the mental bondage of religion and superstition. A few weeks before his death, he wrote the article 'Why I am an Atheist' in which he subjected religion and religious philosophy to a scathing critique. He traced his own path to atheism, how he first gave up belief 'in the mythology and doctrines of Sikhism or any other religion,' and in the end lost faith in the existence of God. To be a revolutionary, he said, one required immense moral strength, but one also required 'criticism and independent thinking.' In the struggle for self-emancipation, humanity had to struggle against 'the narrow conception of religion' as also against the belief in God. 'Any man who stands for progress,' he wrote, 'has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith.' Proclaiming his own belief in atheism and materialism, he asserted that he was 'trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last; even on the gallows.'



## CONTRIBUTION OF REVOLUTIONARIES

Government action gradually decimated the revolutionary nationalist ranks. With the death of Chandrashekhar Azad in a shooting encounter a public park at Allahabad in February 1931, the revolutionary nationalist movement virtually came to an end in Punjab, U.P. and Bihar. Surya Sen's martyrdom marked an end to the prolonged saga of revolutionary nationalism in Bengal. A process of rethinking in jails and in the Andamans began large number of the revolutionaries turned to Marxism and the idea of a socialist revolution by the masses. They joined the Communist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and other Left parties. Many others joined the Gandhian wing of the Congress. The politics of the revolutionary nationalists had severe limitations — above all theirs was not the politics of a mass movement; they failed to politically activate the masses or move them into political actions; they could not even establish contact with the masses. All the same, they made an abiding contribution to the national freedom movement. Their deep patriotism, courage and determination, and sense of sacrifice stirred the Indian people. They helped spread nationalist consciousness in the land; and in northern India the spread of socialist consciousness owed a lot to them.

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## UNIT-XXVIII

# CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT (CDM)

### THE GATHERING STORM

In the years following the end of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922, the torch of nationalism had been kept alive by the Gandhian constructive workers who dug their roots deep into village soil, by the *Swarajists* who kept the Government on its toes in the legislatures, by the Koya tribals in Andhra who heroically fought the armed might of the colonial state under the leadership of Ramachandra Raju from 1922-24, by the Akalis in Punjab, by the *Satyagrahis* who flocked to defend the honour of the national flag in Nagpur in 1923, and countless others who engaged themselves in organizational, ideological and agitational activities at a variety of levels.

It was, however, from the latter part of 1927 that the curve of the mass anti-imperialist upsurge began to take a marked upward turn. As with the Rowlatt Bills in 1919, it was the British Government that provided a catalyst and a rallying ground by an announcement on 8 November 1927 of an all-White commission to recommend whether India was ready for further constitutional progress and on which lines. Indian nationalists had for many years declared the constitutional reforms of 1919 as inadequate and had been clamouring for an early reconsideration of the constitutional question, but the Government had been adamant that the declared period of ten years must lapse before fresh proposals were considered. In 1927, however, the Conservative Government of Britain, faced with the prospect of electoral defeat at the hands of the Labour Party, suddenly decided that it could not leave an issue which concerned the future of the British Empire in the irresponsible hands of an inexperienced Labour Government and it was thus that the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Simon Commission after its Chairman, was appointed. The response in India was immediate and unanimous. That no Indian should be thought fit to serve on a body that claimed the right to decide the political future of India was an insult that no Indian of even the most moderate political opinion was willing to swallow. The call for a boycott of the Commission was endorsed by the Liberal Federation led by Tej Bahadur Sapru, by the Indian Industrial and Commercial Congress, and by the Hindu Mahasabha the Muslim League even split on the issue, Mohammed Ali Jinnah carrying the majority with him in favour of boycott.

It was the Indian National Congress, however, that turned the boycott into a popular movement. The Congress had resolved on the boycott at its annual session in December 1927 at Madras, and in the prevailing excitable atmosphere, Jawaharlal Nehru had even succeeded in getting passed a snap resolution declaring complete independence as the goal of the Congress. But protest could not be confined to the passing of resolutions, as Gandhiji made clear in the issue of *Young India* of 12 January 1928: 'It is said that the Independence Resolution is a fitting answer. The act of appointment (of the Simon Commission) needs for an answer, not speeches, however heroic they may be, not declarations, however brave they may be, but corresponding action...'

The action began as soon as Simon and his friends landed at Bombay on 3 February 1928. That day, all the major cities and towns observed a complete *hartal*, and people were out on the streets participating in mass rallies, processions and black-flag demonstrations. In Madras, a major clash with the police resulted in firing and the death of one person. T. Prakasam symbolized the defiant spirit of the occasion by baring his chest before the armed policemen who tried in vain to stop him from going to the scene of the killing. Everywhere that Simon went — Calcutta, Lahore, Lucknow, Vijayawada, Poona — he was greeted by a sea of black-flags carried by thousands of people. And ever new ways of defiance were being constantly invented. The youth of Poona, for example, took advantage of the fact that for a long stretch between Lonavala and Poona the road and the rail-track ran within sight of each other. They climbed into a lorry and drove alongside the train that was carrying Simon and Company, waving black flags at them all the way from Lonavala to Poona. In Lucknow, Khaliqzaman executed the brilliant idea of floating kites and

balloons imprinted with the popular slogan 'Go Back Simon' over the reception organized in Kaiserbagh by the *taluqdars* for members of the Commission.

If humour and creativity was much in evidence, so too was popular anger at the manner in which the police dealt with the protesters. Lathi charges were becoming all too frequent, and even respected and senior leaders were not spared the blows. In Lucknow, Jawaharlal and Govind Ballabh Pant were beaten up by the police. But the worst incident happened in Lahore where Lala Lajpat Rai, the hero of the Extremist days and the most revered leader of Punjab, was hit on the chest by lathis on 30 October and succumbed to the injuries on 17 November 1928. It was his death that Bhagat Singh and his comrades were seeking to avenge when they killed the white police official, Saunders, in December 1928.

The Simon boycott movement provided the first taste of political action to a new generation of youth. They were the ones who played the most active role in this protest, and it was they who gave the movement its militant flavour. And although a youth movement had already begun to take shape by 1927, it was participation in the Simon agitation that gave a real fillip to the formation of youth leagues and associations all over the country. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose emerged as the leaders of this new wave of youth and students, and they travelled from one province to another addressing and presiding over innumerable youth conferences.

The upsurge among the youth also proved a fruitful ground for the germination and spread of the new radical ideas of socialism that had begun to reach Indian shores. Jawaharlal Nehru had returned from Europe in 1927 after representing the Indian National Congress at the Brussels Congress of the League against Imperialism. He also visited the Soviet Union and was deeply impressed by socialist ideas. It was with the youth that he first shared his evolving perspective. Although Jawaharlal Nehru's was undoubtedly the most important role, other groups and individuals too played a crucial part in the popularization of the socialist vision. Subhas Bose was one such individual, though his notion of socialism was nowhere as scientific and clear as Jawaharlal's. Among groups, the more important ones were the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in Lahore, and the small group of Communists who had formed the Workers' and Peasants' Parties with the specific aim of organizing workers and peasants and radicalizing the Congress from within. As a result, the young people who were being drawn into the anti-imperialist movement were also simultaneously becoming sympathetic to the ideas of socialism, and youth groups in some areas even developed links with workers' and peasants' struggles.

Lord Birkenhead, the Conservative Secretary of State responsible for the appointment of the Simon Commission, had constantly harped on the inability of Indians to formulate a concrete scheme of constitutional reforms which had the support of wide sections of Indian political opinion. This challenge, too, was taken up and meetings of the All-Parties Conference were held in February, May and August 1928 to finalize a scheme which popularly came to be known as the Nehru Report after Motilal Nehru, its principal author. This report defined Dominion Status as the form of government desired by India. It also rejected the principle of separate communal electorates on which previous constitutional reforms had been based. Seats would be reserved for Muslims at the Centre and in provinces in which they were in a minority, but not in those where they had a numerical majority. The Report also recommended universal adult suffrage, equal rights for women, freedom to form unions, and dissociation of the state from religion in any form. A section of the Muslim League had in any case dissociated itself from these deliberations, but by the end of the year it became clear that even the section led by Jinnah would not give up the demand for reservation of seats for Muslims especially in Muslim majority provinces. The dilemma in which Motilal Nehru and other secular leaders found themselves was not one that was easy to resolve: if they conceded more to Muslim communal opinion, then Hindu communalists would withdraw support and if they satisfied the latter, then Muslim leaders would be estranged. In the event, no further concessions were forthcoming and Jinnah withdrew his support to the report and went ahead to propose his famous 'Fourteen Points' which were basically a reiteration of his objections to the Nehru Report.

Young and radical nationalists led by Jawaharlal Nehru had their own, very different, objections to the Nehru Report. They were dissatisfied with its declaration of Dominion Status on the lines of the self-gov-



erning dominions as the basis of the future constitution of India. Their slogan was Complete Independence.' And it was in December 1928, at the annual session of the Congress at Calcutta, that the battle was joined. Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and Satyamurthi, backed by a large number of delegates, pressed for the acceptance of 'Purna Swaraj' or complete independence as the goal of the Congress. Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru and many other older leaders felt that the national consensus achieved with such great difficulty on Dominion Status should not be abandoned in such haste and a period of two years be given to the Government for accepting this. Under pressure, the grace of period for the Government was reduced to a year and, more important, the Congress decided that if the Government did not accept a constitution based on Dominion Status by the end of the year the Congress would not only adopt complete independence as its goal, but it would also launch a civil disobedience movement to attain that goal. A resolution embodying this proposal won over the majority of the delegates, and further amendments seeking immediate adoption of complete independence were defeated.

If civil disobedience was to be launched after the end of 'the present year of probation and grace,' as Gandhiji called it, then preparations had to begin in right earnest. Gandhiji cancelled his plans for a European tour, and explained in the issue of *Young India* dated 31 January, 1929: 'I feel that I would be guilty of desertion if I now went away to Europe. . . The voice within me tells me that I must not only hold myself in readiness to do what comes my way, but I must even think out and suggest means of working out what to me is a great programme. Above all I must prepare myself for next year's struggle, whatever shape it may take.'

Gandhiji had of course been preparing the people for the future struggle in multifarious ways. For one, since his release from jail in 1924 on medical grounds, he had been travelling incessantly through the country. By the beginning of 1929, he had already toured Kathiawad, Central Provinces, Bengal, Malabar, Travancore, Bihar, United Provinces, Kutch, Assam, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Orissa, many of them not once but twice. In 1929, in his sixtieth year, he began a tour of Sind, then proceeded via Delhi to Calcutta, then on to Burma, and back to Calcutta. In April, he began a six-week tour of Andhra Pradesh in which he visited 319 villages. In June, he was in Almora in the hills of U.P., and in September he covered the U.P. plains. The end of the year saw him in Lahore for the annual Congress session. He had also planned a visit to Kohat in the North-West Frontier Province, but was refused permission by the Government.

The significance of these mass contact tours was expressed by Gandhiji in these words: 'I travel because I fancy that the masses want to meet me. I certainly want to meet them. I deliver my simple message to them in few words and they and I are satisfied. It penetrates the mass mind slowly but surely.' While in his pre-1929 tours Gandhiji's emphasis had been on the constructive programme — *khadi*, Hindu-Muslim unity, and the removal of untouchability — he now began to prepare the people for direct political action. In Sind, for example, he told the youth to prepare for 'the fiery ordeal,' and it was at his instance that the Congress Working Committee constituted a Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee to promote an aggressive programme of boycott and public burning of foreign cloth, in Calcutta, on 4 March, 1929, Gandhiji took the lead in initiating the campaign of public burning of foreign cloth by lighting a bonfire in a public park before a crowd of thousands. The Government issued warrants for his arrest, but allowed him to go to Burma on his scheduled tour and face trial on his return. His arrest sparked off bonfires of foreign cloth all over the country. And when he returned to face trial, another wave of bonfires was lit to defy the Government. Gandhiji warned the people that while they must carry on all manner of preparations for civil disobedience, they must remember that civil disobedience had not yet begun, and that they must as yet remain within the law as far as possible. Apart from the preparations which the Congress carried on at various levels, there were a number of other developments that kept political excitement in 1929 at fever-pitch. On 20 March, 1929, in a major swoop, the Government arrested thirty-one labour leaders, most of them Communists, and marched them off to Meerut, in U.P., for trial. Their arrest was condemned by all sections of the national movement including Gandhiji and the Congress. Youth organizations organized protest demonstrations.

On 8 April, 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA) threw harmless bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly and were arrested. In jail, the members of the HSRA went on a prolonged hunger strike demanding better treatment for political prisoners, and in September the death of one of them. Jatin Das on the 64th day of the hunger strike led to some of the biggest demonstrations the country had ever witnessed. Meanwhile, in May 1929, a Labour Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald took power in Britain and Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, was called to London for consultations. The sequel was an announcement on 31 October: 'I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgement it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's progress as there contemplated, is the attainment of dominion status.' He also promised a Round Table Conference as soon as the Simon Commission submitted its report. Two days later, a conference of major national leaders met and issued what came to be known as the Delhi manifesto, in which they demanded that it should be made clear that the purpose of the Round Table Conference was not to discuss when Dominion Status should be granted, but to formulate a scheme for its implementation. A debate in the House of Lords on 5 November, 1929 on this question had already raised serious doubts about British intentions; and, finally, on 23 December Irwin himself told Gandhiji and the others that he was in no position to give the assurance they demanded. The stage of negotiations was over and the stage of confrontation was about to begin.

### THE LAHORE SESSION AND PURNA SWARAJ

The honour of hosting what was, perhaps, the most memorable of the Congress annual sessions went to Lahore, the capital city of Punjab, and the honour of declaring '*Purna Swaraj*' as the only honourable goal Indians could strive for went to the man who had done more than any other to popularize the idea — Jawaharlal Nehru. It was Gandhiji again who was the decisive voice in investing Jawaharlal Nehru with the office of President in what was to be a critical year of mass struggle. Only three out of eighteen Provincial Congress Committees had wanted Jawaharlal, but recognizing the appositeness of the occasion, and the upsurge of the youth who had made such a glorious success of the Simon Boycott, Gandhiji insisted and as usual got his way. The critics he countered by an assurance: 'Some fear in this transference of power from the old to the young, the doom of the Congress. I do not. . . "He is rash and impetuous," say some. This quality is an additional qualification, at the present moment. And if he has the dash and the rashness of a warrior, he has also the prudence of a statesman. . . He is undoubtedly an extremist thinking far ahead of his surroundings. But he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point.' He added: 'Older men have had their innings. The battle of the future has to be fought by younger men and women. And it is but meet that they are led by one of themselves. . . Responsibility will mellow and sober the youth, and prepare them for the burden they must discharge. Pandit Jawaharlal has everything to recommend him. He has for years discharged with singular ability and devotion the office of secretary of the Congress. By his bravery, determination, application, integrity and grit, he has captivated the imagination of the youth of the land. He has come in touch with labour and the peasantry. His close acquaintance with European politics is a great asset in enabling him to assess ours.'

To those who argued that he should himself assume the office because of the delicate nature of the negotiations that would have to be carried out with other parties and the Government, especially on the Hindu-Muslim question, he said: 'So long as I retain the affection and the confidence of our people, there is not the slightest danger of my not being able without holding office to make the fullest use of such powers as I may possess. God has enabled me to affect the life of the country since 1920 without the necessity of holding office.' And to the youth he said: 'They may take the election of Jawaharlal Nehru as a tribute to their service. . . (and as) proof of the trust the nation reposes in its youth Let them prove worthy of the trust.' Jawaharlal Nehru's Presidential Address was a stirring call to action: 'We have now an open conspiracy to free this country from foreign rule and you, comrades, and all our countrymen and countrywomen are invited to join it.' Nehru also made it known that in his view liberation did not mean only throwing off the foreign yoke: 'I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as



predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy." He also spelt out the methods of struggle: 'Any great movement for liberation today must necessarily be a mass movement, and mass movements must essentially be peaceful, except in times of organized revolt. . . And if the principal movement is a peaceful one, contemporaneous attempts at sporadic violence can only distract attention and weaken it.' On the banks of the river Ravi, at midnight on 31 December 1929, the tricolour flag of Indian independence was unfurled amidst cheers and jubilation. Amidst the excitement, there was also a grim resolve, for the year to follow was to be one of hard struggle.

The first task that the Congress set itself and the Indian people in the New Year was that of organizing all over the country, on 26 January, public meetings at which the Independence Pledge would be read out and collectively affirmed. This programme was a huge success, and in villages and towns, at small meetings and large ones, the pledge was read out in the local language and the national flag was hoisted. The text of the pledge bears quoting in full':

*'We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Poorna Swaraj or Complete Independence.*

*'India has been ruined economically. The revenue derived from our people is out of all proportion to our income. Our average income is seven pence, less than two pence, per day, and of the heavy taxes we pay, twenty per cent are raised from the land revenue derived from the peasantry and three per cent from the salt tax, which falls most heavily on the poor.*



**Jawaharlal Nehru (The Congress President) reading the Purna Swaraj Resolution**

*'Village industries, such as hand-spinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts, and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the crafts thus destroyed.*

*'Customs and currency have been so manipulated as to heap further burdens on the peasantry. The British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. Customs duties betray clear partiality for British manufacturers, and revenue from them is used not to lessen the burden on the masses, but for sustaining*



*a highly extravagant administration. Still more arbitrary has been the manipulation of the exchange ratio which has resulted in millions being drained away from the country.*

*'Politically, India's status has never been so reduced, as under the British regime. No reforms have given real political power to the people. The tallest of us have to bend before foreign authority. The rights of free expression of opinion and free association have been denied to us, and many of our countrymen are compelled to live in exile abroad and they cannot return to their homes. All administrative talent is killed, and the masses have to be satisfied with petty village offices and clerkships. 'Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings, our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us.*

*Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us unmanly, and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression, or defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers, and miscreants. 'We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this four-fold disaster to our country. We recognize, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will prepare ourselves, by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help, stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Poorna Swaraj.'*

## **SALT SATYAGRAHA & CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT**

The Lahore Congress of 1929 authorized the Working Committee to launch a programme civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes. It had also called upon all members of legislatures to resign their seats. In mid-February, 1930, the Working Committee, meeting at Sabarmati Ashram, invested Gandhiji with full powers to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement at a time and place of his choice. The acknowledged expert on mass struggle was already 'desperately in search of an effective formula.' His ultimatum of 31 January to Lord Irwin, stating the minimum demands in the form of 11 points, had been ignored, and there was now only one way out: civil disobedience.

By the end of February, the formula began to emerge as Gandhiji began to talk about salt: 'There is no article like salt outside water by taxing which the State can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhuman poll tax the ingenuity of man can devise.' On 2 March, he addressed his historic letter to the Viceroy in which he first explained at great length why he regarded British rule as a curse: 'It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation . . . It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture . . . it has degraded us spiritually.' He then informed the Viceroy of his plan of action, as he believed every true *Satyagrahi* must: '...on the 11th day of this month. I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner, to take up the work after me, and, in the act of disobeying the Salt Act to lay themselves open to the penalties of a law that should never have disfigured the Statute-book.' The plan was brilliantly conceived though few realized its significance when it was first announced. Gandhiji, along with a band of seventy-eight members of the Sabarmati Ashram, among whom were men belonging to almost every region and religion of India, was to march from his headquarters in Ahmedabad through the villages of Gujarat for 240 miles. On reaching the coast at Dandi, he would break the salt laws by collecting salt from the beach. The deceptively innocuous move was to prove devastatingly effective. Even before the march began, thousands began to throng the Sabarmati Ashram in anticipation of the dramatic events that lay ahead. And Gandhiji painstakingly explained his plans, gave directions for future action, impressed on the people the necessity for non-violence, and prepared them for the Government's response: 'Wherever possible, civil disobedience of salt laws should be started . . . Liquor and foreign-cloth shops can be picketed. We can refuse to pay taxes if we have the requisite strength. The lawyers can give up practice. The

public can boycott the courts by refraining from litigation. Government servants can resign their posts . . . I prescribe only one condition, viz., let our pledge of truth and nonviolence as the only means for the attainment of *Swaraj* be faithfully kept.'

Explaining the power of civil disobedience, he said:

*'Supposing ten persons from each of the 700,000 villages in India come forward to manufacture salt and to disobey the Salt Act, what do you think this Government can do? Even the worst autocrat you can imagine would not dare to blow regiments of peaceful civil resisters out of a cannon's mouth. If only you will bestir yourselves just a little, I assure you we should be able to tire this Government out in a very short time.'* He also explained how non-violence enabled the widest participation of the people, and put the Government in an unenviable quandary. To a crowd who came to the ashram on 10 March, he said: *'Though the battle is to begin in a couple of days, how is it that you can come here quite fearlessly? I do not think any one of you would be here if you had to face rifle-shots or bombs. But you have no fear of rifle-shots or bombs? Why? Supposing I had announced that I was going to launch a violent campaign (not necessarily with men aimed with rifles, but even with sticks or stones), do you think the Government would have left me free until now? Can you show me an example in history (be it in England, America or Russia) where the State has tolerated violent defiance of authority for a single day? But here you know that the Government is puzzled and perplexed.'*

And as Gandhiji began his march, staff in hand, at the head of his dedicated band, there was something in the image that deeply stirred the imagination of the people. News of his progress, of his speeches, of the teeming crowds that greeted and followed the marchers, of the long road lovingly strewn with leaves and festooned with banners and flags, of men and women quietly paying their homage by spinning yam on their *charkas* as Gandhiji passed, of the 300 village officials in Gujarat who resigned their posts in answer to his appeal, was carried day after day by newspapers to readers across the country and broadcast live by thousands of Congress workers to eager listeners. By the time Gandhiji reached Dandi, he had a whole nation, aroused and expectant, waiting restlessly for the final signal. On 6 April 1930, by picking up a handful of salt, Gandhiji inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement, a movement that was to remain unsurpassed in the history of the Indian national movement for the country-wide mass participation it unleashed.

While Gandhiji was marching to Dandi, Congress leaders and workers had been busy at various levels with the hard organizational task of enrolling volunteers and members, forming grass-roots Congress Committees, collecting funds, and touring villages and towns to spread the nationalist message.



**Gandhiji's Dandi March**



Preparations for launching the salt Satyagraha were made, sites chosen, volunteers prepared, and the logistics of battle worked out. Once the way was cleared by Gandhiji's ritual beginning at Dandi, the defiance of salt laws started all over the country. In Tamil Nadu, C. Rajagopalachari, led a salt march from Trichinopoly to Vedaranniyam on the Tanjore coast. By the time he was arrested on 30 April he had collected enough volunteers to keep the campaign going for quite some time in Malabar, K. Kelappan, the hero of the Vaikom Satyagraha, walked from Calicut to Payannur to break the salt law. A band of Satyagrahis walked all the way from Sylhet in Assam to Noakhali on the Bengal Coast to make salt. In Andhra, a number of sibirams (military style camps) were set up in different districts to serve as the headquarters of the salt Satyagraha, and bands of Satyagrahis marched through villages on their way to the coastal centres to defy the law. On their return journeys, they again toured through another set of villages. The Government's failure to arrest Gandhiji for breaking the salt law was used by the local level leaders to impress upon the people that 'the Government is afraid of persons like ourselves,' and that since the starting of the salt Satyagraha the Government 'has disappeared and hidden itself somewhere, and that Gandhi Government has already been established.'<sup>9</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru's arrest on 14 April, for defiance of the salt law, was answered with huge demonstrations and clashes with the police in the cities of Madras, Calcutta and Karachi.



**Gandhiji breaking the Salt Law**



**FRONTIER GANDHI AND RED SHIRTS**

On 23 April, the arrest of Congress leaders in the North West Frontier Province led to a mass demonstration of unprecedented magnitude in Peshawar. Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan had been active for several years in the area, and it was his mass work which lay behind the formation of the band of non-violent revolutionaries, the Khudai Khidmatgars, popularly known as the Red Shirts — who were to play an extremely active role in the Civil Disobedience Movement.



**Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan with Gandhiji in Peshawar**

The atmosphere created by their political work contributed to the mass upsurge in Peshawar during which the city was virtually in the hands of the crowd for more than a week. The Peshawar demonstrations are significant because it was here that the soldiers of the Garhwali regiments refused to fire on the unarmed crowd.

## THE GOVERNMENT'S QUANDARY AND REPRESSION OF CDM

It was becoming increasingly clear that the Government's gamble — that non-interference with the movement would result in its spending itself out, that Gandhiji's salt strategy would fail to take off— had not paid off. In fact, the Government had never been clear on what course it should follow, and was, as Gandhiji had predicted, 'puzzled and perplexed.' The dilemma in which it found itself was a dilemma that the Gandhian strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience was designed to create. The Government was placed in a classic 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' fix, i.e. if it did not suppress a movement that brazenly defied its laws, its administrative authority would be seen to be undermined and its control would be shown to be weak, and if it did suppress it, it would be seen as a brutal, anti-people administration that used violence on non-violent agitators. 'If we do too much, Congress will cry "repression" . . . if we do too little.

Congress will cry "victory," — this is how a Madras civilian expressed the dilemma in early 1930." Either way, it led to the erosion of the hegemony of the British government. The rapid spread of the movement left the Government with little choice but to demonstrate the force that lay behind its benevolent facade. Pressure from officials, Governors and the military establishment started building up, and, on 4 May, the Viceroy finally ordered Gandhiji's arrest. Gandhiji's announcement that he would now proceed to continue his defiance of the salt laws by leading a raid on the Dharasana Salt Works certainly forced the Government's hand, but its timing of Gandhiji's arrest was nevertheless ill-conceived. It had neither the advantage of an early strike, which would have at least prevented Gandhiji from carefully building up the momentum of the movement, nor did it allow the Government to reap the benefits of their policy of sitting it out. Coming as it did at a high point in the movement, it only acted as a further spur to activity, and caused endless trouble for the Government.'

There was a massive wave of protest at Gandhiji's arrest. In Bombay, the crowd that spilled out into the streets was so large that the police just withdrew. Its ranks were swelled by thousands of textile and railway workers. Cloth-merchants went on a six-day *hartal*. There were clashes and firing in Calcutta and Delhi. But it was in Sholapur, in Maharashtra, that the response was the fiercest. The textile workers, who dominated the town went on strike from 7 May, and along with other residents, burnt liquor shops and proceeded to attack all symbols of Government authority -- the railway station, law courts, police stations and municipal buildings. They took over the city and established a virtual parallel government which could only be dislodged with the imposition of martial law after 16 May.

But it was non-violent heroism that stole the show as the salt *Satyagraha* assumed yet another, even more potent form. On May 21, with Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian woman to become President of the Congress, and Imam Saheb, Gandhiji's comrade of the South African struggle, at the helm, and Gandhiji's son, Manu, in front ranks, a band of 2000 marched towards the police cordon that had sealed off the Dharasana salt works. As they came close, the police rushed forward with their steel-tipped lathis and set upon the non-resisting *Satyagrahis* till they fell down. The injured would be carried away by their comrades on make-shift stretchers and another column would take their place, be beaten to pulp, and carried away. Column after column advanced in this way; after a while, instead of walking up to the cordon the men would sit down and wait for the police blows. Not an arm was raised in defence, and by 11 a.m., when the temperature in the shade was 116 degrees Fahrenheit, the toll was already 320 injured and two dead. Webb Miller, the American journalist, whose account of the Dharasana *Satyagraha* was to carry the flavour of Indian nationalism to many distant lands, and whose description of the resolute heroism of the *Satyagrahis* demonstrated effectively that nonviolent resistance was no meek affair, summed up his impressions in these words: 'In eighteen years of my reporting in twenty countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana.'

This new form of salt *Satyagraha* was eagerly adopted by the people, who soon made it a mass affair. At Wadala, a suburb of Bombay, the raids on the salt works culminated on 1 June in mass action by a crowd of 15,000 who repeatedly broke the police cordon and triumphantly carried away salt in the face



of charges by the mounted police. In Karnataka, 10,000 invaded the Sanikatta salt works and faced lathis and bullets. In Madras, the defiance of salt laws led to repeated clashes with the police and to a protest meeting on 23 April on the beach which was dispersed by lathi charges and firing, leaving three dead. This incident completely divided the city on racial lines, even the most moderate of Indians condemning the incident, and rallying behind the nationalists. In Andhra bands of village women walked miles to carry away a handful of salt, and in Bengal, the old Gandhian ashrams, regenerated by the flood of volunteers from the towns, continued to sustain a powerful salt *Satyagraha* in Midnapore and other coastal pockets. The districts of Balasore, Puri and Cuttack in Orissa remained active centres of illegal salt manufacture.

### DIFFERENT FORMS OF DEFIANCE ADOPTED UNDER THE CDM

But salt *Satyagraha* was only the catalyst, and the beginning, for a rich variety of forms of defiance that it brought in its wake. Before his arrest Gandhiji had already called for a vigorous boycott of foreign cloth and liquor shops and had especially asked the women to play a leading role in this movement. "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel: it is man's injustice to woman," he had said; and the women of India certainly demonstrated in 1930 that they were second to none in strength and tenacity of purpose. Women who had never stepped unescorted out of their homes, women who had stayed in purdah, young mothers and widows and unmarried girls, became a familiar sight as they stood from morning to night outside liquor shops and opium dens and stores selling foreign cloth, quietly but firmly persuading the customers and shopkeepers to change their ways.

Along with the women, students and youth played the most prominent part in the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. In Bombay, for example, regular Congress sentries were posted in business districts to ensure that merchants and dealers did not flout the foreign cloth boycott. Traders' associations and commercial bodies were themselves quite active in implementing the boycott, as were the many mill owners who refused to use foreign yarn and pledged not to manufacture coarse cloth that competed with *khadi*. The recalcitrant among them were brought in line by fines levied by their own associations, by social boycott, by Congress black-listing, and by picketing. The liquor boycott brought Government revenues from excise duties crashing down; it also soon assumed a new popular form, that of cutting off the heads of toddy trees. The success of the liquor and drugs boycott was obviously connected with the popular tradition of regarding abstinence as a virtue and as a symbol of respectability. The depth of this tradition is shown by the fact that lower castes trying to move up in the caste hierarchy invariably tried to establish their upper caste status by giving up liquor and eating of meat.

Eastern India became the scene of a new kind of no-tax campaign — refusal to pay the *chowkidari* tax. *Chowkidars*, paid out of the tax levied specially on the villages, were guards who supplemented the small police force in the rural areas in this region. They were particularly hated because they acted as spies for the Government and often also as retainers for the local landlords. The movement against this tax and calling for the resignation of *Chowkidars*, and of the influential members of *chowkidari* panchayats who appointed the *Chowkidars*, first started in Bihar in May itself, as salt agitation had not much scope due to the land-locked nature of the province. In the Monghyr, Saran and Bhagalpur districts, for example, the tax was refused, *Chowkidars* induced to resign, and social boycott used against those who resisted. The Government retaliated by confiscation of property worth hundreds and thousands in lieu of a few rupees of tax, and by beatings and torture. Matters came to a head in Bihpur in Bhagalpur on May 31 when the police, desperate to assert its fast-eroding authority, occupied the Congress ashram which was the headquarters of nationalist activity in the area. The occupation triggered off daily demonstrations outside the ashram, and a visit by Rajendra Prasad and Abdul Ban from Patna became the occasion for a huge mass rally, which was broken up by a lathi charge in which Rajendra Prasad was injured. As elsewhere, repression further increased the nationalists' strength, and the police just could not enter the rural areas.

In Bengal, the onset of the monsoon, which made it difficult to make salt, brought about a shift to *anti-chowkidari* and anti-Union Board agitation. Here too, villagers withstood severe repression, losing thousands of rupees worth of property through confiscation and destruction, and having to hide for days in forests to escape the wrath of the police. In Gujarat, in Kheda district, in Bardoli *taluka* in Surat district,



and in Jambusar in Broach, a determined no-tax movement was in progress — the tax refused here was the land revenue. Villagers in their thousands, with family, cattle and household goods, crossed the border from British India into the neighbouring princely states such as Baroda and camped for months together in the open fields. Their houses were broken into, their belongings destroyed, their lands confiscated. The police did not even spare Vallabhbhai Patel's eighty-year-old mother, who sat cooking in her village house in Karamsad; her cooking utensils were kicked about and filled with kerosene and stone. Vallabhbhai, on his brief sojourns out of jail throughout 1930, continued to provide encouragement and solace to the hard-pressed peasants of his native land. Though their meagre resources were soon exhausted, and weariness set in, they stuck it out in the wilderness till the truce in March 1931 made it possible for them to return to their homes.

Defiance of forest laws assumed a mass character in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Central Provinces, especially in areas with large tribal populations who had been the most seriously affected by the colonial Government's restrictions on the use of the forest. At some places the size of the crowd that broke the forest laws swelled to 70,000 and above. In Assam, a powerful agitation led by students was launched against the infamous 'Cunningham circular' which forced students and their guardians to furnish assurances of good behaviour. The people seemed to have taken to heart Jawaharlal Nehru's message when he unfurled the national flag at Lahore in December 1929: 'Remember once again, now that this flag is unfurled, it must not be lowered as long as a single Indian, man, woman, or child lives in India.' Attempts to defend the honour of the national flag in the face of severe brutalities often turned into heroism of the most spectacular variety. At Bundur, on the Andhra Coast, Tota Narasaiah Naidu preferred to be beaten unconscious by a fifteen-member police force rather than give up the national flag. In Calicut, P. Krishna Pillai, who later became a major Communist leader, suffered lathi blows with the same determination. In Surat, a group of children used their ingenuity to defy the police. Frustrated by the repeated snatching of the national flag from their hands, they came up with the idea of stitching *khadi* dresses in the three colours of the national flag, and thereafter these little, 'living flags' triumphantly paraded the streets and defied the police to take away the national flag!

The national flag, the symbol of the new spirit, now became a common sight even in remote villages. U.P. was the setting of another kind of movement — a no-revenue, no-rent campaign. The no-revenue part was a call to the *zamindars* to refuse to pay revenue to the Government, the no-rent a call to the tenants not to pay rent to the *zamindars*. In effect, since the *zamindars* were largely loyal to the Government, this became a no-rent struggle. The civil Disobedience Movement had taken a firm hold in the province in the initial months, but repression had led to a relative quiet, and though no-rent was in the air, it was only in October that activity picked up again when Jawaharlal Nehru, out of jail for a brief period, got the U.P. Congress Committee to sanction the no-rent campaign. Two months of preparation and intensive propaganda led to the launching of the campaign in December; by January, severe repression had forced many peasants to flee the villages. Among the important centres of this campaign were the districts of Agra and Rae Bareilly.

The movement also popularized a variety of forms of mobilization. *Prabhatpheris*, in which bands of men, women and children went around at dawn singing nationalist songs, became the rule in villages and towns. *Patrikas*, or illegal news-sheets, sometimes written by hand and sometimes cyclostyled, were part of the strategy to defy the hated Press Act, and they flooded the country. Magic lanterns were used to take the nationalist message to the villages. And, as before, incessant tours by individual leaders and workers, and by groups of men and women, and the holding of public meetings, big and small, remained the staple of the movement. Children were organized into *vanar senas* or monkey armies and at least at one place the girls decided they wanted their own separate *manjari sena* or cat army!

## THE GANDHI-IRWIN PACT

The Government's attitude throughout 1930 was marked by ambivalence. Gandhiji's arrest itself had come after much vacillation. After that, ordinances curbing the civil liberties of the people were freely issued and provincial governments were given the freedom to ban civil disobedience organizations. But the Congress Working Committee was not declared unlawful till the end of June and Motilal Nehru, who was functioning as the Congress President, also remained free till that date. Many local Congress Committees were not banned till August. Meanwhile, the publication of the report of the Simon Commission, which contained no mention of Dominion Status and was in other ways also a regressive document, combined with the repressive policy, further upset even moderate political opinion. Madan Mohan Malaviya and M.S. Aney courted arrest. In a conciliatory gesture, the Viceroy on 9 July suggested a Round Table Conference and reiterated the goal of Dominion Status. He also accepted the suggestion, made by forty members of the Central Legislature, that Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar be allowed to explore the possibilities of peace between the Congress and the Government. In pursuance of this, the Nehrus, father and son, were taken in August to Yeravada jail to meet Gandhiji and discuss the possibilities of a settlement. Nothing came of the talks, but the gesture did ensure that some sections of political opinion would attend the Round Table Conference in London in November. The proceedings in London, the first ever conducted between the British and Indians as equals, at which virtually every delegate reiterated that a constitutional discussion to which the Congress was not a party was a meaningless exercise, made it clear that if the Government's strategy of survival was to be based on constitutional advance, then an olive branch to the Congress was imperative. The British Prime Minister hinted this possibility in his statement at the conclusion of the Round Table Conference. He also expressed the hope that the Congress would participate in the next round of deliberations to be held later in the year. On 25 January, the Viceroy announced the unconditional release of Gandhiji and all the other members of the Congress Working Committee, so that might be to respond to the Prime Minister's statement 'freely and fearlessly.'

After deliberating amongst itself for close to three weeks, and after long discussions with delegates who had returned from London, and with other leaders representing a cross-section of political opinion, the Congress Working Committee authorized Gandhiji to initiate discussions with the Viceroy. The fortnight long discussions culminated on 5 March 1931 in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, which was variously described as a 'truce' and a 'provisional settlement.'

The Pact was signed by Gandhiji on behalf of the Congress and by Lord Irwin on behalf of the Government, a procedure that was hardly popular with officialdom as it placed the Congress on an equal footing with the Government. The terms of the agreement included the immediate release of all political prisoners not convicted for violence, the remission of all fines not yet collected, the return of confiscated lands not yet sold to third parties, and lenient treatment for those government employees who had resigned. The Government also conceded the right to make salt for consumption to villages along the coast, as also the right to peaceful and non-aggressive picketing. The Congress demand for a public inquiry into police excesses was not accepted, but Gandhiji's insistent request for an inquiry was recorded in the agreement. The Congress, on its part, agreed to discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement. It was also understood that the Congress would participate in the next Round Table Conference.

The terms on which the Pact was signed, its timing, the motives of Gandhiji in signing the Pact, his refusal to make the Pact conditional on the commutation of the death-sentences of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, (even though he had tried his best to persuade the Viceroy to do so), have generated considerable controversy and debate among contemporaries and historians alike. The Pact has been variously seen as a betrayal, as proof of the vacillating nature of the Indian bourgeoisie and of Gandhiji succumbing to bourgeois pressure. It has been cited as evidence of Gandhiji's and the Indian bourgeoisie's fear of the mass movement taking a radical turn; a betrayal of peasants' interests because it did not immediately restore confiscated land, already sold to a third party, and so on.



However, as with arguments relating to the withdrawal of the Non Cooperation Movement in 1922 after Chauri Chaura, these perceptions are based on an understanding which fails to grasp the basic strategy and character of the Indian national movement. For one, this understanding ignores the fact which has been stressed earlier — that mass movements are necessarily short-lived they cannot go on forever, the people's capacity to sacrifice, unlike that of the activists', is not endless. And signs of exhaustion there certainly were, in large and important sectors of the movement. In the towns, while the students and other young people still had energy to spare, shopkeepers and merchants were finding it difficult to bear any more losses and the support from these sections, so crucial in making the boycott a success, had begun to decline by September of 1930. In rural India as well, those areas that had begun their resistance early in the year were fairly quiet in the second half. Through sporadic incidents of resistance and attacks on and clashes with police continued, this was as true of Bengal and Bihar as it was of Andhra and Gujarat. Those areas like U.P., which began their no-rent campaigns only at the end of 1930, still had more fight left in them, but the few instances of militant resistance that carried on and the ability of one or two regions to sustain activity can hardly be cited as proof of the existence of vast reserves of energy all over the country.

And what was the guarantee that when those reserves were exhausted, as they were bound to be sooner rather than later, the Government would still be willing to talk? 1931 was not 1946; and as 1932 was to show, the Government could change tack and suppress with a ferocity that could effectively crush the movement. No doubt the youth were disappointed, for they would have preferred their world to end with a bang' rather than with a whimper' and surely the peasants of Gujarat were not happy that some of their lands did not come back to them immediately (they were returned after the Congress Ministry assumed office in Bombay in 1937). But the vast mass of the people were undoubtedly impressed that the mighty British Government had had to treat their movement and their leader as an equal and sign a pact with him. They saw this as a recognition of their own strength, and as their victory over the Government. The thousands who flocked out of the jails as a result of the pact were treated as soldiers returning from a victorious battle and not as prisoners of war returning from a humiliating defeat. They knew that a truce was not a surrender, and that the battle could be joined again, if the enemy so wanted. Meanwhile, their soldiers could rest and they could all prepare for the next round: they retained their faith in their General, and in themselves.

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF CDM

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-31, then, marked a critically important stage in the progress of the anti-imperialist struggle. The number of people who went to jail was estimated at over 90,000 — more than three times the figure for the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22. Imports of cloth from Britain had fallen by half; other imports like *cigarettes* had suffered a similar fate. Government income from liquor excise and land revenue had been affected. Elections to the Legislative Assembly had been effectively boycotted. A vast variety of social groups had been politicized on the side of Indian nationalism — if urban elements like merchants and shopkeepers and students were more active in Tamil Nadu and Punjab, and in cities in general, peasants had come to the forefront in Gujarat, U.P., Bengal, Andhra, and Bihar, and tribals in the Central Provinces, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Bengal. Workers had not been missing from the battle either — they joined numerous mass demonstrations in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras and were in the forefront in Sholapur.

The participation of Muslims in the Civil Disobedience Movement was certainly nowhere near that in 1920-22. The appeals of communal leaders to stay away, combined with active Government encouragement of communal dissension to counter the forces of nationalism, had their effect. Still, the participation of Muslims was not insignificant, either. Their participation in the North-West Frontier Province was, as is well known, overwhelming. In Bengal, middle class Muslim participation was quite important in Senhatta, Tripura, Gaibandha, Bagura and Noakhali, and in Dacca, Muslim students and shopkeepers as well as people belonging to the lower classes extended support to the movement. Middle and upper class Muslim women were also active. The Muslim weaving community in Bihar and in Delhi and Lucknow the lower classes of Muslims were effectively mobilized as were many others in different parts of the country. The



support that the movement had garnered from the poor and the illiterate, both in the town and in the country, was remarkable indeed. Their participation was reflected even in the government statistics of jail goers — and jail-going was only one of the many forms of participation. The Inspector-General of Police in Bengal, E.J. Lowman, expressed the general official bewilderment when he noted: 'I had no idea that the Congress organization could enlist the sympathy and support of such ignorant and uncultivated people. . . For Indian women, the movement was the most liberating experience to date and can truly be said to have marked their entry into the public space.'

### THE YEARS FROM 1932 TO 1934

The Congress met at Karachi on 29 March 1931 to endorse the Gandhi-Irwin or Delhi Pact. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru had been executed six days earlier. Even though Gandhiji had made every attempt to save their lives, there was anger among the people, especially the youth, as to why he had not refused to sign the Pact on this question. All along Gandhiji's route to Karachi he was greeted with black flag demonstrations. The Congress passed a resolution drafted by Gandhiji by which it, 'while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form,' admired 'the bravery and sacrifice' of the three martyrs.' The Congress endorsed the Delhi Pact and reiterated the goal of *Poorna Swaraj*. The Karachi session became memorable for its resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme. Even though the Congress had from its inception fought for the economic interests, civil liberties and political rights of the people, this was the first time that the Congress defined what *Swaraj* would mean for the masses. It also declared that, 'in order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions.' The resolution guaranteed the basic civil rights of free speech, free press, free assembly, and freedom of association; equality before the law irrespective of caste, creed or sex; neutrality of the state in regard to all religions; elections on the basis of universal adult franchise; and free and compulsory primary education. It promised substantial reduction in rent and revenue, exemption from rent in case of uneconomic holdings, and relief of agricultural indebtedness and control of usury; better conditions for workers including a living wage, limited hours of work and protection of women workers; the right to organize and form unions to workers and peasants; and state ownership or control of key industries, mines and means of transport. It also maintained that 'the culture, language and script of the minorities and of the different linguistic areas shall be protected.' The Karachi resolution was to remain in essence the basic political and economic programme of the Congress in later years.

Gandhiji sailed for London on 29 August 1931 to attend the Second Round Table Conference. Nothing much was expected from the Conference for the imperialist political and financial forces, which ultimately controlled the British Government in London, were opposed to any political or economic concessions being given to India which could lead to its independence from their control. Winston Churchill, leader of the virulent right-wing, had strongly objected to the British Government negotiating on terms of equality with the 'seditious fakir' and demanded strong government in India. The Conservative *Daily Mail* declared that 'Without India, the British Commonwealth would fall to pieces. Commercially, economically, politically and geographically it is our greatest imperial asset. To imperil our hold on it would be the worst treason any Briton could commit.' In India, Irwin was replaced by Willingdon as the Viceroy. In Britain, after December 1931, the Laborite Ramsay MacDonald headed a Conservative dominated Cabinet with the weak and reactionary Samuel Hoare as the Secretary of State for India. Apart from a few able individuals, the overwhelming majority of Indian delegates to the Round Table Conference (RTC), hand-picked by the Government, were loyalists, communalists, careerists, and place-hunters, big landlords and representatives of the princes. They were used by the Government to claim that the Congress did not represent the interests of all Indians vis-a-vis imperialism, and to neutralize Gandhiji and all his efforts to confront the imperialist rulers with the basic question of freedom.

The great Gujarati poet, Meghani, in a famous poem gave expression to the nationalist misgivings regarding the RTC. Addressing Gandhiji on the eve of his departure for London, he sang in the first line: '*Chchello Katoro Jerno Aa: Pi Jayo Bapu!*' (Even this last cup of poison, you must drink, Bapu!) Gandhiji himself said:

'When I think of the prospects in London, when I know that all is not well in India . . . there is nothing wanting to fill me with utter despair. . . There is every chance of my returning empty-handed'. That is exactly what happened in London. The British Government refused to concede the basic Indian demand for freedom. Gandhiji came back at the end of December 1931 to a changed political situation.

The higher British officials in India had drawn their own lessons from the political impact of the Delhi Pact which had raised the political prestige of the Congress and the political morale of the people and undermined and lowered British prestige. They, as well as the new Viceroy, believed that the Government had made a major error in negotiating and signing a truce with the Congress, as if between two equal powers. They were now determined to reverse it all. No pact, no truce, no Gandhi-Viceroy meetings, no 'quarter for the enemy' became the watchwords of Government policy.

The British policy was now dominated by three major considerations: (a) Gandhiji must not be permitted to build up the tempo for a massive and protracted mass movement, as he had done in 1919, 1920-1 and 1930. (b) The Government functionaries — village officials, police and higher bureaucrats — and the loyalists — 'our friends' — must not feel disheartened that Gandhiji was being 'resurrected as a rival authority to the Government of India,' and that the Government was losing the will to rule. As the Home Member, H.G. Haig, put it: 'We can, in my view, do without the goodwill of the Congress, and in fact I do not believe for a moment that we shall ever have it, but we cannot afford to do without the confidence of those who have supported us in the long struggle against the Congress.' (c) In particular, the nationalist movement must not be permitted to gather force and consolidate itself in rural areas, as it was doing all over India, especially in U.P., Gujarat, Andhra, Bihar, Bengal and NWFP.

While Gandhiji was in London, the Government of India prepared, in secret, plain for the coming showdown with the nationalist forces. It decided to launch 'a hard and immediate blow' against any revival of the movement and to arrest Gandhiji at the very outset. It drafted a series of ordinances which would usher in virtual martial law, though under civilian control. The shape of things to come had been overshadowed by what happened in U.P., NWFP and Bengal during the truce period, in U.P. the Congress was leading a campaign for reduction of rent, remission of arrears of rent and prevention of eviction of tenants for non-payment of rents. By the first week of December, the Congress had launched a no-rent, no-revenue campaign in five districts. The Government's response was to arrest Jawaharlal on 26 December when he was going to Bombay to meet Gandhiji. In the North-Western Frontier Province, the Government continued its severe repression against the nonviolent Khudai Khidmatgars (servants of God), also known as Red Shirts because of the colour of their shirts, and the peasants they led against the Government's policy of extracting revenue through cruel methods and torture. On 24 December, their leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, was arrested and Peshawar district was occupied by the army. In Bengal, the Government was ruling through draconian ordinances and detaining thousands of political workers in the name of fighting terrorism. In September, the police fired upon political prisoners in Hijli jail, killing two.

Gandhiji landed in Bombay on 28 December. The Congress Working Committee met the next day and decided to resume civil disobedience. On the 31st, Gandhiji asked the Viceroy for a meeting, offering to suspend the decision on civil disobedience till such a meeting. The Viceroy refused to see Gandhiji — the first of many such refusals during the next five years. On 4 January 1932, the Government launched its pre-emptive strike against the national movement by arresting Gandhiji, promulgating ordinances which gave the authorities unlimited power — thus initiating what a historian has described as 'Civil Martial Law'. Civil liberties no longer existed and the authorities could seize people and property at will. Within a week, leading Congressmen all over the country were behind bars.

The Indian people responded with anger. Even though the Congress entered the battle rather unprepared, the popular response was massive. In the first four months, over 80,000 *Satyagrahis*, most of them urban and rural poor, were jailed, while lakhs took to the picketing of shops selling liquor and foreign cloth. Illegal gatherings, non-violent demonstrations, celebrations of various national days, and other forms of defiance of the ordinances were the rule of the day.



The non-violent movement was met by relentless repression. The Congress and its allied organizations were declared illegal and their offices and funds seized. Nearly all the Gandhi Ashrams were occupied by the police. Peaceful picketers, *Satyagrahis* and processionists were lathi-charged, beaten and often awarded rigorous imprisonment and heavy fines, which were realized by selling their lands and property at throw away prices. Prisoners in jail were barbarously treated. Whipping as punishment became frequent. The no-tax campaigns in different parts of rural India were treated with great severity. Lands, houses, cattle, agricultural implements, and other property were freely confiscated. The police indulged in naked terror and committed innumerable atrocities. At Ras, a village in Gujarat, the non-tax paying peasants were stripped naked, publicly whipped and given electric shocks. The wrath of the Government fell with particular harshness on women. Conditions in jails were made extraordinarily severe with the idea of scaring away women from the *Satyagraha*. The freedom of the Press to report or comment on the movement, or even to print pictures of national leaders or *Satyagrahis*, was curtailed. Within the first six months of 1932 action was taken against 109 journalists and ninety-eight printing presses. Nationalist literature — poems, stories and novels — was banned on a large scale. The people fought back. But Gandhiji and other leaders had no time to build up the tempo of the movement and it could not be sustained for long. The movement was effectively crushed within a few months. In August 1932, the number of those convicted came down to 3,047 and by August 1933 only 4,500 *Satyagrahis* were in jail. However, the movement continued to linger till early April 1934 when the inevitable decision to withdraw it was taken by Gandhiji. Political activists despaired at the turn the movement had taken. What have we achieved, many asked? Even a buoyant and active person like Jawaharlal gave voice to this sense of despair — accentuated by his separation from his sick wife — by copying a verse in his jail diary in June 1935: ‘Sad winds where your voice was; Tears, tears where my heart was; and ever with me, Child, ever with me, Silence where hope was.’ Earlier, when Gandhiji had withdrawn the movement, Jawaharlal had felt ‘with a stab of pain’ that his long association with Gandhiji was about to come to an end. Subhas Chandra Bose and Vithalbai Patel had been much more critical of Gandhiji’s leadership. In a strong statement from Europe they had said in 1933 that ‘Mr. Gandhi as a political leader has failed’ and called for ‘a radical reorganization of the Congress on a new principle with a new method, for which a new leader is essential.’

The enemies of Indian nationalism gloated over the frustration among the nationalists — and grossly misread it. Willingdon declared in early 1933: “The Congress is in a definitely less favourable position than in 1930, and has lost its hold on the public.” But Willingdon and company had completely failed to understand the nature and strategy of the Indian national movement — it was basically a struggle for the minds of men and women. Seen in this light, if the colonial policy of negotiations by Irwin had failed earlier, so had the policy of ruthless suppression by Willingdon. People had been cowed down by superior force; they had not lost faith in the Congress. Though the movement from 1930 to 1934 had not achieved independence and had been temporarily crushed, the Indian people had been further transformed. The will to fight had been further strengthened; faith in British rule had been completely shattered. H.N. Brailsford, Laborite journalist, wrote, assessing the results of the nationalists’ most recent struggle, that the Indians ‘had freed their own minds, they had won independence in their hearts.’ And, as we have seen earlier, this hiatus in the movement too was primarily to rest and regroup. Withdrawal of the movement did not mean defeat or loss of mass support; it only meant, as Dr. Ansari put it, ‘having fought long enough we prepare to rest,’ to fight another day a bigger battle with greater and better organized force.’ Symbolic of the real outcome, the real impact of the civil disobedience, was the heroes’ welcome given to prisoners on their release in 1934. And this became evident to all when the Congress captured a majority in six out of eleven provinces in the elections in 1937 despite the restricted nature of the franchise. Alone among his contemporaries, Gandhiji understood the true nature and outcome of the Civil Disobedience Movement. To Nehru, he wrote in September 1933: ‘I have no sense of defeat in me and the hope in me that this country of ours is fast marching towards its goal is burning as bright as it did in 1920.’ He reiterated this view to a group of Congress leaders in April 1934: ‘I feel no despondency in me. . . I am not feeling helpless. . . The nation has got energy of which you have no conception but I have.’ He had, of course, an advantage over most other leaders. While they needed a movement to sustain their sense of political activism, he had always available the alternative of constructive work.



## THE COMMUNAL AWARD

The British policy of 'Divide and Rule' found another expression in the announcement of the Communal Award in August 1932. The Award allotted to each minority a number of seats in the legislatures to be elected on the basis of a separate electorate that is Muslims would be elected only by Muslims and Sikhs only by Sikhs, and so on. Muslims, Sikhs and Christians had already been treated as minorities. The Award declared the Depressed Classes (Scheduled Castes of today) also to be a minority community entitled to separate electorate and thus separated them from the rest of the Hindus. The Congress was opposed to a separate electorate for Muslims, Sikhs and 'Christians as it encouraged the communal notion that they formed separate groups or communities having interests different from the general body of Indians. The inevitable result was to divide the Indian people and prevent the growth of a common national consciousness. But the idea of a separate electorate for Muslims had been accepted by the Congress as far back as 1916 as a part of the compromise with the Muslim League. Hence, the Congress took the position that though it was opposed to separate electorates, it was not in favour of changing the Award without the consent of the minorities. Consequently, though strongly disagreeing with the Communal Award, it decided neither to accept it nor to reject it.

But the effort to separate the Depressed Classes from the rest of Hindus by treating them as separate political entities was vehemently opposed by all the nationalists. Gandhiji, in Yeravada jail at the time, in particular, reacted very strongly. He saw the Award as an attack on Indian unity and nationalism, harmful to both Hinduism and the Depressed Classes, for it provided no answers to the socially degraded position of the latter. Once the Depressed Classes were treated as a separate community, the question of abolishing untouchability would not arise, and the work of Hindu social reform in this respect would come to a halt. Gandhiji argued that whatever harm separate electorates might do to Muslims or Sikhs, it did not affect the fact that they would remain Muslims or Sikhs. But while reformers like himself were working for the total eradication of untouchability, separate electorates would ensure that 'untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity.' What was needed was not the protection of the so-called interests of the Depressed Classes in terms of seats in the legislatures or jobs but the 'root arid branch' eradication of untouchability. Gandhiji demanded that the representatives of the Depressed Classes should be elected by the general electorate under a wide, if possible universal, common franchise. At the same time he did not object to the demand for a larger number of the reserved seats for the Depressed Classes. He went on a fast unto death on 20 September 1932 to enforce his demand. In a statement to the Press, he said: 'My life, I count of no consequence. One hundred lives given for this noble cause would, in my opinion, be poor penance done by Hindus for the atrocious wrongs they have heaped upon helpless men and women of their own faith.'

While many political Indians saw the fast as a diversion from the ongoing political movement, all were deeply concerned and emotionally shaken. Mass meetings took place almost everywhere. The 20th of September was observed as a day of fasting and prayer. Temples, wells, etc., were thrown open to the Depressed Classes all over the country. Rabindranath Tagore sent a telegraphic message to Gandhiji: 'It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. .. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love.' Political leaders of different political persuasions, including Madan Mohan Malaviya, M.C. Rajah and B.R. Ambedkar, now became active. In the end they succeeded in hammering out an agreement, known as the Poona Pact, according to which the idea of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was abandoned but the seats reserved for them in the provincial legislatures were increased from seventy one in the Award to 147 and in the Central Legislature to eighteen per cent of the total.

Regarding the Poona agreement, Gandhiji declared after breaking his fast: 'I would like to assure my Harijan friends . . . that they may hold my life as a hostage for its due fulfilment.' He now set out to redeem his pledge. First from jail and then from outside, for nearly two years he gave up all other pre-occupations and earned on a whirlwind campaign against untouchability. After his release from prison, he had shifted to *Satyagraha* Ashram at Wardha after abandoning Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad for he had vowed in 1930 not to return to Sabarmati till *Swaraj* was won. Starting from Wardha on 7 November 1933 and until

29 July 1934, for nearly nine months, he conducted an intensive 'Harijan tour' of the country travelling over 20,000 kilometres by train, car, bullock cart, and on foot. Collecting money for the recently founded Harijan Sewak Sangh, propagating the removal of untouchability in all its forms and practices, and urging social workers to leave all and go to the villages for the social, economic, cultural and political uplift of the Harijans — his name for the Depressed Classes.

In the course of his Harijan campaign, Gandhiji undertook two major fasts on 8 May and 16 August 1933 to convince his followers of the importance of the issue and the seriousness of his effort. 'They must either remove untouchability or remove me from their midst.' He justified these fasts as answers to his 'inner voice,' which, he said, could also be described as 'dictates of reason.' These fasts created consternation in the ranks of the nationalists, throwing many of them into an emotional crisis. The fast of 8 May 1933 was opposed even by Kasturba, his wife. As the hour of the fast approached, Miraben sent a telegram: 'Ba

wishes me to say she is greatly shocked. Feels the decision very wrong but you have not listened to any others and so will not hear her. She sends her heartfelt prayers.' Gandhiji's reply was characteristic: 'Tell Ba her father imposed on her a companion whose weight would have killed any other woman. I treasure her love. She must remain courageous to the end.'

Throughout Gandhiji's Harijan campaign, he was attacked by orthodox and social reactionaries. They met him with black flag demonstrations and disrupted his meetings. They brought out scurrilous and inflammatory leaflets against him, putting fantastic utterances in his mouth. They accused him of attacking Hinduism. They publicly burnt his portraits. On 25 June 1934, at Poona, a bomb was thrown on a car believed to be carrying Gandhiji, injuring its seven occupants. The protesters offered the Government full support against the Congress and the Civil Disobedience Movement if it would not support the anti-untouchability campaign. The Government obliged by defeating the Temple Entry Bill in the Legislative Assembly in August 1934.

Throughout his fast, Harijan work and Harijan tour, Gandhiji stressed on certain themes. One was the degree of oppression practised on the Harijans; in fact, day after day he put forward a damning indictment of Hindu society: 'Socially they are lepers. Economically they are worse. Religiously they are denied entrance to places we miscall houses of God. They are denied the use, on the same terms as Hindus, of public roads, public schools, public hospitals, public wells, public taps, public parks and the like. . . They are relegated for their residence to the worst quarters of cities and villages where they get no social services.' A second theme was that of the 'root and branch removal of untouchability.' Symbolic or rather the entering wedge in this respect was to be the throwing open of all temples to Harijans. Gandhiji's entire campaign was based on the grounds of humanism and reason. But he also argued that untouchability, as practised at present, had no sanction in the Hindu *Shastras*. But even if this was not so, the Harijan worker should not feel daunted. Truth could not be confined within the covers of a book. The *Shastras* should be ignored if they went against human dignity.

A major running theme in Gandhiji's writings and speeches was the need for caste Hindus to do 'penance' and 'make reparations . . . for the untold hardships to which we have subjected them (the Harijans) for centuries.' For this reason, he was not hostile to Dr. Ambedkar and other Harijans who criticized and distrusted him. 'They have every right to distrust me,' he wrote. 'Do I not belong to the Hindu section miscalled superior class or caste Hindus, who have ground down to powder the so called untouchables?' At the same time, he repeatedly warned caste Hindus that if this atonement was not made, Hinduism would perish: 'Hinduism dies if untouchability lives, and untouchability has to die if Hinduism is to live.' (This strong theme of 'penance' largely explains why caste Hindus born and brought up in pre-1947 India so readily accepted large scale reservations in jobs, enrolment in professional colleges and so on for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes after independence).

Gandhiji was not in favour of mixing up the issue of the removal of untouchability with the issues of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Restriction on the latter should certainly go, for 'dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society.' But they were also practised by caste Hindus among themselves as also

the Harijans among themselves. The present All-India campaign, he said, had to be directed against the disabilities which were specific to the Harijans. Similarly, he distinguished between the abolition of caste system and the abolition of untouchability. He disagreed with Dr. Ambedkar when the latter asserted that 'the outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. And nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system. On the contrary, Gandhiji said that whatever the 'limitations and defects' of the Varnashram, 'there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability.' He believed that purged of untouchability, itself a product of 'the distinction of high and low' and not of the caste system, this system could function in a manner that would make each caste 'complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other.' In any case, he said, both the believers and the critics of the Varna system should join hands in fighting untouchability, for opposition to the latter was common to both.

Gandhiji also stressed the positive impact that the struggles against untouchability would have on the communal and other questions. Non-Hindus were treated by Hindus as untouchables 'in some way or the other,' especially in matters of food and drink, and non-Hindus certainly took note of this fact. Hence, 'if untouchability is removed, it must result in bringing all Indians together.' Increasingly, he also began to point out that untouchability was only one form of the distinctions that society made between man and man; it was a product of the grading of society into high and low. To attack untouchability was to oppose 'this high-and-lowness.' That is why 'the phase we are now dealing with does not exhaust all the possibilities of struggle.' In keeping with his basic philosophy of non-violence, and being basically a 19th century liberal and believer in rational discussion, Gandhiji was opposed to exercising compulsion even on the orthodox supporters of untouchability, whom he described as the Sanatanists. Even they had to be tolerated and converted and won over by persuasion, 'by appealing to their reason and their hearts.' His fasts, he said, were not directed against his opponents or meant to coerce them into opening temples and wells etc.; they were directed towards friends and followers to goad them and inspire them to redouble their anti-untouchability work.

Gandhiji's Harijan campaign included a programme of internal reform by Harijans: promotion of education, cleanliness and hygiene, giving up the eating of carrion and beef, giving up liquor and the abolition of untouchability among themselves. But it did not include a militant struggle by the Harijans themselves through *Satyagraha*, breaking of caste taboos, mass demonstrations, picketing, and other forms of protests. At the same time, he was aware that his Harijan movement 'must cause daily increasing awakening among the Harijans' and that in time 'whether the *savarna* Hindus like it or not, the Harijans would make good their position.'

Gandhiji repeatedly stressed that the Harijan movement was not a political movement but a movement to purify Hinduism and Hindu society. But he was also aware that the movement 'will produce great political consequences,' just as untouchability poisoned 'our entire social and political fabric.' In fact, not only did Harijan work, along with other items of constructive work, enable the Congress cadre to keep busy in its non-mass movement phases, it also gradually carried the message of nationalism to the Harijans, who also happened to be agricultural labourers in most parts of the country, leading to their increasing participation in the national as well as peasant movements.



## UNIT-XXIX

# GLIMPSE OF SWARAJ: FORMATION OF MINISTRIES BY THE INC

### THE STRATEGIC DEBATE

A major debate on strategy occurred among the nationalists in the period following the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the first stage of the debate, during 1934-35, the issue was what course the national movement should take in the immediate future, that is, during its phase of non-mass struggle. How was the political paralysis that it had sunk into to be overcome? There were two traditional responses. Gandhiji emphasized constructive work in the villages, especially the revival of village crafts. Constructive work, said Gandhiji, would lead to the consolidation of people's power, and open the way to the mobilization of millions in the next phase of mass struggle. Another section of Congressmen advocated the revival of the constitutional method of struggle and participation in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly to be held in 1934. Led this time by Dr. M.A. Ansari, Asaf Ali, Satyamurthy, Bhulabhai Desai and B.C. Roy, the new Swarajists argued that in a period of political apathy and depression, when the Congress was no longer in a position to sustain a mass movement, it was necessary to utilize elections and work in the legislative councils to keep up the political interest and morale of the people. This did not amount, they said, to having faith in the capacity of constitutional politics to achieve freedom. It only meant opening up another political front which would help build up the Congress, organizationally extend its influence, and prepare the people for the next mass struggle. C. Rajagopalachari, an erstwhile no-changer, recommended the *Swarajist* approach to Gandhiji with the additional proviso that the Congress should itself, directly, undertake parliamentary work. A properly organized parliamentary party, he said, would enable the Congress to develop a certain amount of prestige and confidence among the masses even as (happened) during the short period when the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was in force. Since the Government was opposed to a similar pact, a strong Congress presence in the legislatures would serve the movement as 'its equivalent.']

But unlike in the 1920s, a third tactical perspective, based on an alternative strategy, made its appearance at this time. The strong Left trend that had developed in the early 1930s was critical of both the council-entry programme and the suspension of civil disobedience and its replacement by the constructive programme. Both of them, the leftists said, would sidetrack direct mass action and political work among the masses and divert attention from the basic issue of struggle against colonial rule. The leftists instead favoured the continuation or resumption of the non-constitutional mass movement since they felt that the situation continued to be revolutionary because of the continuing economic crisis and the readiness of the masses to fight. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who represented at this time at its most cogent and coherent this New Leftist alternative to the Gandhian anti-imperialist programme and strategy. Accepting the basic analytical framework of Marxism, Nehru put forward the Left paradigm in a series of speeches, letters, articles and books and his Presidential addresses to the Lucknow and Faizpur sessions of the Congress in 1936. The basic goal before the Indian people, as also before the people of the world, he said, had to be the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. While we've already looked at the pragmatic aspect of Nehru's challenge two of its other aspects have to be understood. To Nehru, the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement and council-entry and the recourse to constructive programmes represented a 'spiritual defeat' and a surrender of ideals, a retreat from the revolutionary to the reformist mentality, and a going back to the pre-1919 moderate phase. What was worse, it seemed that the Congress was giving up all social radicalism and 'expressing a tender solicitude for every vested interest.' Many Congress leaders, he said, 'preferred to break some people's hearts rather than touch others' pockets. Pockets are, indeed, more valuable and more cherished than hearts and brains and bodies and human justice and dignity.' His alienation from Gandhiji also seemed to be complete. He wrote in his jail diary in April 1934:

'Our objectives are different, our ideals are different, our spiritual outlook is different and our methods are likely to be different.'

The way out, said Nehru, lay in grasping the class basis of society and the role of class struggle and in 'revising vested interests in favour of the masses.' This meant taking up or encouraging the day-to-day class, economic demands of the peasants and workers against the landlords and capitalists, organizing the former in their class organizations — *kisan sabhas* and trade unions — and permitting them to affiliate with the Congress and, thus, influence and direct its policies and activities. There could be, said Nehru, no genuine anti-imperialist struggle which did not incorporate the class struggle of the masses.

Throughout these years, Nehru pointed to the inadequacy of the existing nationalist ideology and stressed the need to inculcate a new, socialist or Marxist ideology, which would enable the people to study their social condition scientifically. Several chapters of his *Autobiography*, published in 1935, were an ideological polemic against Gandhiji even though conducted in a friendly tone.

Jawaharlal also challenged the basic Gandhian strategy of struggle. Under the Gandhian strategy, which may be described as Struggle — Truce — Struggle (S-T-S'), phases of a vigorous extra-legal mass movement and confrontation with colonial authority alternate with phases, during which direct confrontation is withdrawn, political concessions or reforms, if any, wrested from the colonial regime, are willy-nilly worked and silent political work carried on among the masses within the existing legal framework, which, in turn, provides scope for such work. Both phases of the movement are to be utilized, each in its own way, to undermine the twin ideological notions on which the colonial regime rested — that British rule benefits Indians and that it is too powerful to be challenged and overthrown and to recruit and train cadres and to build up the people's capacity to struggle. The entire political process of S-T-S' was an upward spiralling one, which also assumed that the freedom struggle would pass through several stages, ending with the transfer of power by the colonial regime itself. Nehru did not subscribe to this strategy and believed that, whatever might have been the case in the past, the Indian national movement had now reached a stage where there should be a permanent confrontation and conflict with imperialism till it was overthrown. He accepted that the struggle had to go through setbacks and phases of upswing and downswing; but these should not lead to a passive phase or a stage of compromise or 'cooperation' with the colonial framework towards which permanent hostile and non-cooperation had to be maintained. The Congress, said Nehru, must maintain 'an aggressive direct action policy.' This meant that even if the mass movement was at a low ebb or remained at a symbolic plane, it should be continued. There could be no interposition of a constitutional phase when the existing constitutional framework was worked; nor could there be a diversion from political and economic class issues to the constructive programme. Furthermore, said Nehru, every moment sooner or later reached a stage when it endangered the existing order. The struggle then became perpetual and could go forward only through unconstitutional and illegal means. This also happened when the masses entered politics. No compromise or half-way house was then left. This stage had been reached in India with the Lahore Resolution for *Poorna Swaraj*. There was now no alternative to permanent continuation of the struggle. For this reason, Nehru attacked all moves towards the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement. This would lead, he warned, to 'some form of compromise with imperialism' which 'would be a betrayal of the cause.' Hence, 'the only way out is to struggle for freedom without compromise or going back or faltering.' Nehru also attacked the notion of winning freedom through stages. Real power could not be won gradually 'bit by bit' or by 'two annas and four annas.' 'The citadel' — State power — had to be seized, though through a non-violent mass struggle. Thus, to S-T-S' he counterposed the strategy of S-V ('V' standing for victory) or the permanent waging of mass struggle till victory was won.

So sharp were the differences between Nehru and the leftists on the one side and proponents of council-entry on the other that many — the nationalists with apprehension and the British officials with hope — expected a split sooner or later. But Gandhiji once again moved into the breach and diffused the situation. Though believing that *Satyagraha* alone was capable of winning freedom, he conciliated the proponents of council-entry by acceding to their basic demand that they should be permitted to enter the



legislatures. He also defended them from accusations of being lesser patriots Parliamentary politics, he said, could not lead to freedom but those large number of Congressmen who could not for some reason or the other offer *Satyagraha* or devote themselves to constructive work should not remain unoccupied. They could give expression to their patriotic energies through council work in a period when there was no mass movement, provided they were not sucked into constitutionalism or self-serving. As he put it in a letter to Sardar Patel on 23 April 1934:

'Realities cannot be wished away. At the most we can improve them a little. We may exercise control. We can do neither more nor less.' Consequently, under Gandhiji's guidance, the AICC meeting at Patna decided in May 1934 to set up a parliamentary board to fight elections under the aegis of the Congress itself. To the Leftwing critics of the resolution, Gandhiji replied: 'I hope that the majority will always remain untouched by the glamour of council work. . . *Swaraj* will never come that way. *Swaraj* can only come through an all-round consciousness of the masses.' At the same time, he assured Nehru and the leftists that the withdrawal of the civil disobedience was dictated by the reality of the political situation. But this did not mean following a policy of drift or bowing down before political opportunists or compromising with imperialism. Only civil disobedience had been discontinued, the war continued. The new policy, he said, 'is founded upon one central idea — that of consolidating the power of the people with a view to peaceful action.' Moreover, he told Nehru in August 1934: 'I fancy that I have the knack for knowing the need of the time.' He also appeased the Left by strongly backing Nehru for the Presidentship of the Lucknow Congress despite contrary pressure from C. Rajagopalachari and other right-wing leaders.

Gandhiji was at the same time convinced that he was out of tune with powerful trends in the Congress. He felt that a large section of the intelligentsia favoured parliamentary politics with which he was in fundamental disagreement. Another section of the intelligentsia felt estranged from the Congress because of his emphasis on the spinning wheel as 'the second lung of the nation,' on Harijan work based on a moral and religious approach, and on other items of the constructive programme. Similarly, the socialist group, whose leader was Jawaharlal, was growing in influence and importance but he had fundamental differences with it. Yet the Socialists felt constrained by the weight of his personality. As he put it: 'But I would not, by reason of the moral pressure I may be able to exert, suppress the spread of the ideas propounded in their literature.' Thus, vis-a-vis both groups, 'for me to dominate the Congress in spite of these fundamental differences is almost a species of violence which I must refrain from.' Hence, in October 1934, he announced his resignation from the Congress 'only to serve it better in thought, word and deed. Nehru and the Socialists responded with no less a patriotic spirit. While enemies of the Congress hoped that their radicalism would lead to their breaking away from the Congress, they had their priorities clearly worked out. The British must first be expelled before the struggle for socialism could be waged. And in the anti-imperialist struggle, national unity around the Congress, still the only anti-imperialist mass organization, was indispensable. Even from the socialist point of view, argued Nehru and other leftists, it was far better to gradually radicalize the Congress, where millions upon millions of the people were, than to get isolated from these millions in the name of political or ideological purity. Nehru, for example, wrote: 'I do not see why I should walk out of the Congress leaving the field clear to social reactionaries. Therefore, I think it is up to us to remain there and try to force the pace, thereby either converting others or making them depart.' The Right was no less accommodating. C Rajagopalachari wrote: "The British, perhaps, hope for a quarrel among Congressmen over this (socialism). But we hope to disappoint them." Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were held in November 1934. Of the seventy-five elected seats for Indians, the Congress captured forty-five. 'Singularly unfortunate; a great triumph for little Gandhi,' wailed the Viceroy, Willingdon.'

Even though the Government had successfully suppressed the mass movement during 1932-33, it was aware that suppression could only be a short-term tactic. It could not prevent the resurgence of another powerful movement in the years to come. For that it was necessary to permanently weaken the movement. This could be achieved if the Congress was internally divided and large segments of it co-opted or integrated into the colonial constitutional and administrative structure. The phase of naked suppression should, therefore, be followed, decided the colonial policy makers, by another phase of constitutional reforms.



In August 1935, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act of 1935. The Act provided for the establishment of an All-India Federation to be based on the union of the British Indian provinces and Princely States. The representatives of the States to the federal legislature were to be appointed directly by the Princes who were to be used to check and counter the nationalists. The franchise was limited to about one-sixth of the adults. Defence and foreign affairs would remain outside the control of the federal legislature, while the Viceroy would retain special control over other subjects. The provinces were to be governed under a new system based on provincial autonomy under which elected ministers controlled all provincial departments. Once again, the Governors, appointed by the British Government, retained special powers. They could veto legislative and administrative measures, especially those concerning minorities, the rights of civil servants, law and order and British business interests. The Governor also had the power to take over and indefinitely run the administration of a province. Thus both political and economic power remained concentrated in British hands; colonialism remained intact. As Linlithgow, Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Act of 1935 and the Viceroy of India from 1936, stated later, the Act had been framed 'because we thought that was the best way . . . of maintaining British influence in India. It is no part of our policy, I take it, to expedite in India constitutional changes for their own sake, or gratuitously to hurry the handing over of the controls to Indian hands at any pace faster than that which we regard as best calculated, on a long view, to hold India to the Empire.'

The long-term strategy, followed by the British Government from 1935 to 1939, had several major components. Reforms, it was hoped, would revive the political standing of the Liberals and other moderates who believed in the constitutional path, and who had lost public favour during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Simultaneously, in view of the severe repression of the movement, large sections of Congressmen would be convinced of the ineffectiveness of extra-legal means and the efficacy of constitutionalism. They would be weaned away from mass politics and guided towards constitutional politics. It was also hoped that once the Congressmen in office had tasted power and dispensed patronage they would be most reluctant to go back to the politics of sacrifice.

Another aspect of the colonial strategy was equally complex and masterly. Reforms could be used to promote dissensions and a split within the demoralized Congress ranks on the basis of constitutionalist vs. non constitutionalist and Right vs. Left. The constitutionalists and the right-wing were to be placated through constitutional and other concessions lured into the parliamentary game, encouraged to gradually give up agitational politics and coalesce with the moderate Liberals and landlords and other loyalists in working the constitution, and enabled to increase their weight in the nationalist ranks. The Left and radical elements, it was hoped, would see all this as a compromise with imperialism and abandonment of mass politics and would, therefore, become even more strident. Then, either the leftists (radicals) would break away from the Congress or their aggressive anti-Right politics and accent on socialism would lead the rightwing to kick them out. Either way, the Congress would be split and weakened. Moreover, isolated from the right-wing and devoid of the protection that a united national movement gave them, the leftist (radical) elements could be crushed through police measures.

It was as a part of this strategy that the Government reversed its policy, followed during 1933-34, of suppressing the anti-constitutionalists in order to weaken the opposition to constitutionalism. Once division between the Left and the Right began to grow within the Congress, the Government refrained from taking strong action against revolutionary agitation by leftwing Congressmen. This happened from 1935 onwards. Above all the Government banked on Nehru's strong attacks on the constitutionalists and the right-wing and his powerful advocacy of socialism and revolutionary overthrow of colonial rule to produce a fissure in the nationalist ranks. Officials believed that Nehru and his followers had gone so far in their radicalism that they would not retreat when defeated by the right-wing in the AICC and at the Lucknow Congress. It was for this reason that nearly all the senior officials advised the Viceroy during 1935-36 not to arrest him. Erskine, the Governor of Madras, for example, advised: 'The more speeches of this type that Nehru makes the better, as his attitude will undoubtedly cause the Congress to split. Indeed, we should keep him in cotton wool and pamper him, for he is unwittingly smashing the Congress organization from inside.'

Provincial autonomy, it was further hoped, would create powerful provincial leaders in the Congress who would wield administrative power in their own right, gradually learn to safeguard their administrative prerogatives, and would, therefore, gradually become autonomous centres of political power. The Congress would, thus, be provincialized; the authority of the central all-India leadership would be weakened if it were destroyed. As Linlithgow wrote in 1936, 'our best hope of avoiding a direct clash is in the potency of Provincial Autonomy to destroy the effectiveness of Congress as an All-India instrument of revolution.' The Act of 1935 was condemned by nearly all sections of Indian opinion and was unanimously rejected by the Congress. The Congress demanded instead, the convening of a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise to frame a constitution for an independent India.

The second stage of the debate over strategy occurred among Congressmen over the question of office acceptance. 'The British, after imposing the Act of 1935, decided to immediately/put into practice provincial autonomy, and announced the holding of elections to provincial legislatures in early 1937. Their strategy of co-optation or absorption into the colonial constitutional framework was underway. The nationalists were faced with a new political reality. All of them agreed that the 1935 Act must be opposed root and branch; but the question was how to do so in a period when a mass movement was not yet possible. Very sharp differences once again emerged in the ranks of the Congress leaders. There was, of course, full agreement that the Congress should fight the coming elections on the basis of a detailed political and economic programme, thus deepening the anti-imperialist consciousness of the people. But what was to be done after the elections? If the Congress got a majority in a province, should it agree to form the Government or not? Basic question of the strategy of the national movement and divergent perceptions of the prevailing political situation were involved. Moreover, the two sides to the debate soon got identified with the emerging ideological divide along Left and Right lines.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, the Congress Socialists and the Communists were totally opposed to office acceptance and thereby working the 1935 Act. The Left case was presented effectively and passionately by Nehru, especially in his Presidential Address at Lucknow in early 1936. Firstly, to accept office, was 'to negate our rejection of it (the 1935 Act) and to stand self-condemned.' It would mean assuming responsibility without power, since the basic state structure would remain the same. While the Congress would be able to do little for the people, it would be cooperating 'in some measure with the repressive apparatus of imperialism, and we would become partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people.' Secondly, office acceptance would take away the revolutionary character of the movement imbibed since 1919. Behind this issue, said Nehru, lay the question 'whether we seek revolutionary changes in India or (whether we) are working for petty reforms under the aegis of British imperialism.' Office acceptance would mean, in practice, 'a surrender' before imperialism. The Congress would get sucked into parliamentary activity within the colonial framework and would forget the main issues of freedom, economic and social justice, and removal of poverty. It would be co-opted and deradicalized. It would fall into 'a pit from which it would be difficult for us to come out.' The counter-strategy that Nehru and the leftists recommended was the older, *Swarajist* one: enter the assemblies with a view to creating deadlocks and making the working of the Act impossible. As a long term strategy, they put forward the policy of increasing reliance on workers and peasants and their class organizations, integration of these class organizations with the Congress, imparting a socialist direction to the Congress, and preparing for the resumption of a mass movement.

Those who favoured office acceptance said that they were equally committed to combating the 1935 Act. They denied that they were constitutionalists; they also believed that 'real work lies outside the legislature' and that work in the legislatures had to be a short-term tactic, for it could not lead to freedom — for that a mass struggle outside the legal framework was needed. But, they said, the objective political situation made it necessary to go through a constitutional phase, for the option of a mass movement was not available at the time. The Congress should, therefore, combine mass politics with work in the legislatures and ministries in order to alter an unfavourable political situation. In other words, what was involved was not a choice between principles but a choice between the two alternative strategies of S-T-S' and S-V. The case of the right-wing was put with disarming simplicity by Rajendra Prasad in a letter to Nehru in



December 1935: 'So far as I can judge, no one wants to accept offices for their own sake. No one wants to work the constitution as the Government would like it to be worked. The questions for us are altogether different. What are we to do with this Constitution? Are we to ignore it altogether and go our way? Is it possible to do so? Are we to capture it and use it as we would like to use it and to the extent it lends itself to be used in that way. . . It is not a question to be answered *a priori* on the basis of preconceived notions of a so-called pro-changer or no-changer, cooperator or obstructionist.' And he assured Nehru that 'I do not believe that anyone has gone back to pre non-cooperation mentality. I do not think that we have gone back to 1923-28. We are in 1928-29 mentality and I have no doubt that better days will soon come.' Similarly, speaking at the Lucknow Session of the Congress, J.B. Kriplani said: 'Even in a revolutionary movement there may be a time of comparative depression and inactivity. At such times, whatever programmes are devised have necessarily an appearance of reformatory activity but they are a necessary part of all revolutionary strategy.' Nor was the issue of socialism involved in the debate. As T. Vishwanathan of Andhra put it: 'To my socialist comrades, I would say, capture or rejection of office is not a matter of socialism. I would ask them to realize that it is a matter of strategy.'

The pro-office acceptance leaders agreed that there were pitfalls involved and that Congressmen in office could give way to wrong tendencies. But the answer, they said, was to fight these wrong tendencies and not abandon offices. Moreover, the administrative field should not be left clear to pro-Government forces. Even if the Congress rejected office, there were other groups and parties who would readily form ministries and use them to weaken nationalism and encourage reactionary and communal policies and politics. Lastly, despite their limited powers, the provincial ministries could be used to promote constructive work especially in respect of village and Harijan uplift, *khadi*, prohibition, education and reduction of burden of debt, taxes and rent on the peasants. The basic question that the ministerialists posed was whether office acceptance invariably led to co-option by the colonial state or whether ministries could be used to defeat the colonial strategy. The answer, in the words of Vishwanathan was: 'There is no office and there is no acceptance. . . Do not look upon ministries as offices, but as centres and fortresses from which British imperialism is radiated. . . The Councils cannot lead us to constitutionalism, for we are not babies; we will lead the Councils and use them for Revolution.' Though Gandhiji wrote little on the subject, it appears that in the Working Committee discussions he opposed office acceptance and posed the alternative of quiet preparation in the villages for the resumption of civil disobedience. But by the beginning of 1936 he felt that the latter was still not feasible; he was, therefore, willing to give a trial to the formation of Congress ministries, especially as the overwhelming mood of the party favoured this course.

The Congress decided at Lucknow in early 1936 and at Faizpur in late 1936 to fight the elections and postpone the decision on office acceptance to the post-election period. Once again, as in 1922-24 and 1934, both wings of the Congress, having mutual respect and trust in their commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle and aware of the damage to the movement that a split would cause, desisted from dividing the party. Though often out-voted, the Left fought every inch of the way for acceptance of their approach but would not go to breaking point. The Congress went all out to win the elections to the provincial assemblies held in February 1937. Its election manifesto reaffirmed its total rejection of the 1935 Act. It promised the restoration of civil liberties, the release of political prisoners, the removal of disabilities on grounds of sex and untouchability, the radical transformation of the agrarian system, substantial reduction in rent and revenue, scaling down of the rural debts, provision of cheap credit, the right to form trade unions and the right to strike. The Congress election campaign received massive response and once again aroused the political consciousness and energy of the people. Nehru's country-wide election tour was to acquire legendary proportions. He travelled nearly 80,000 kilometres in less than five months and addressed more than ten million people, familiarizing them with the basic political issues of the time. Gandhiji did not address a single election meeting though he was very much present in the minds of the voters. The Congress won a massive mandate at the polls despite the narrow franchise. It won 716 out of 1,161 seats it contested. It had a majority in most of the provinces. The exceptions were Bengal, Assam, the NWPF, Punjab and Sind; and in the first three, it was the largest single party. The prestige of the Congress as the alternative to the colonial state rose even higher. The election tour and election results heartened Nehru, lifted him from the slough of despondency, and made him reconcile to the dominant strategy of S-T-S'.



## TWENTY EIGHT MONTHS OF CONGRESS RULE

After a few months' tussle with the Government, the Congress Working Committee decided to accept office under the Act of 1935. During July, it formed Ministries in six provinces: Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, Orissa, Bihar and U.P. Later, Congress Ministries were also formed in the North-West Frontier Province and Assam. To guide and coordinate their activities and to ensure that the British hopes of the provincialization of the Congress did not materialize, a central control board known as the Parliamentary Sub-Committee was formed, with Sardar Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Rajendra Prasad as members. Thus began a novel experiment — a party which was committed to liquidate British rule took charge of administration under a constitution which was framed by the British and which yielded only partial state power to the Indians; this power could moreover be taken away from the Indians whenever the imperial power so desired. The Congress was now to function both as a government in the provinces and as the opposition vis-a-vis the Central Government where effective state power lay. It was to bring about social reforms through the legislature and administration in the provinces and at the same time carry on the struggle for independence and prepare the people for the next phase of mass struggle. Thus the Congress had to implement its strategy of Struggle-Truce-Struggle (S-T-S) in a historically unique situation.' As Gandhiji wrote on the meaning of office acceptance in *Harijan* on 7 August 1937: 'These offices have to be held lightly, not tightly. They are or should be crowns of thorns, never of renown. Offices have been taken in order to see if they enable us to quicken the pace at which we are moving towards our goal.' Earlier he had advised Congressmen to use the Act of 1935 'in a manner not expected by them (the British) and by refraining from using it in the way intended by them.'

The formation of the Ministries by the Congress changed the entire psychological atmosphere in the country. People felt as if they were breathing the very air of victory and people's power, for was it not a great achievement that *khadi* clad men and women who had been in prison until just the other day were now ruling in the secretariat and the officials who were used to putting Congressmen in jail would now be taking orders from them? The exhilarating atmosphere of the times is, perhaps, best brought out by the following passage from Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*: 'There was a sense of immense relief as of the lifting of a weight which had been oppressing the people; there was a release of long-suppressed mass energy which was evident everywhere . . . At the headquarters of the Provincial Governments, in the very citadels of the old bureaucracy, many a symbolic scene was witnessed. . . Now, suddenly, hordes of people, from the city and the village, entered these sacred precincts and roamed about almost at will. They were interested in anything; they went into the Assembly Chamber, where the sessions used to be held; they even peeped into the Ministers' rooms. It was difficult to stop them for they no longer felt as outsiders; they had a sense of ownership in all this . . . The policemen and the orderlies with shining daggers were paralyzed; the old standards had fallen; European dress, symbol of position and authority, no longer counted. It was difficult to distinguish between members of the Legislatures and the peasants and townsmen who came in such large numbers.'

There was an immense increase in the prestige of the Congress as an alternative power that would look after the interests of the masses, especially of the peasants. At the same time, the Congress had got an opportunity to demonstrate that it could not only lead the people in mass struggles but also use state power for their benefit. The responsibility was, of course, tremendous. However, there were limitations on the Congress Ministries' power and financial resources. They could obviously not change the basically imperialist character of the administration; they could not introduce a radical era. But, within the narrow limits of their powers, and the time available to them (their tenure lasted only two years and four months), they did try to introduce some reforms, take some ameliorative measures, and make some improvement in the condition of the people — to give the people a glimpse of the future *Swaraj*. The Congress Ministers set an example in plain living. They reduced their own salaries drastically from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 500 per month. They were easily accessible to the common people. And in a very short time, they did pass a very large amount of ameliorative legislation, trying to fulfil many of the promises made in the Congress election manifesto.

The commitment of the Congress to the defence and extension of civil liberties was as old as the Congress itself, and it is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Congress Ministries registered major achievements in this sphere. All emergency powers acquired by the provincial governments during 1932, through Public Safety Acts and the like, were repealed; bans on illegal political organizations such as the Hindustan Seva Dal and Youth Leagues and on political books and journals were lifted. Though the ban on the Communist Party remained, since it was imposed by the Central Government and could only be lifted on its orders, the Communists could in effect now function freely and openly in the Congress provinces. All restrictions on the press were removed. Securities taken from newspapers and presses were refunded and pending prosecutions were withdrawn. The blacklisting of newspapers for purposes of government advertising was given up. Confiscated arms were returned and forfeited arms licenses were restored. Of all the British functionaries, the ones the people were most afraid of, as also hated, were the police. On 21 August 1937, after the formation of the Ministries, Gandhiji wrote, 'Indeed, the triumph of the Congress will be measured by the success it achieves in rendering the police and military practically idle. . . The best and the only effective way to wreck the existing Constitution is for the Congress to prove conclusively that it can rule without the aid of military and with the least possible assistance of the police . . .' In the Congress provinces, police powers were curbed and the reporting of public speeches and the shadowing of political workers by CID (Central Investigation Department) agents stopped.

One of the first acts of the Congress Government was to release thousands of political prisoners and detenus and to cancel internment and deportation orders on political workers. Many of the revolutionaries involved in the Kakori and other conspiracy cases were released. But problems remained in U.P. and Bihar where several revolutionaries convicted of crimes involving violence remained in jails. Most of these prisoners had earlier been sent to *kala pani* (Cellular Jail in Andamans) from where they had been transferred to their respective provinces after they had gone on a prolonged hunger strike during July 1937. In February 1938, there were fifteen such prisoners in U.P. and twenty-three in Bihar. Their release required consent by the Governors which was refused. But the Congress Ministries were determined to release them. The Ministries of U.P. and Bihar resigned on this issue on 15 February. The problem was finally resolved through negotiations. All the prisoners in both provinces were released by the end of March. The difference between the Congress provinces and the non-Congress provinces of Bengal and Punjab was most apparent in this realm. In the latter, especially in Bengal, civil liberties continued to be curbed and revolutionary prisoners and detenus, kept for years in prison without trial, were not released despite repeated hunger strikes by the prisoners and popular movements demanding their release.

In Bombay, the Government also took steps to restore to the original owners lands which had been confiscated by the Government as a result of the no-tax campaign during the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. It, too, had to threaten resignation before it could persuade the Governor to agree. The pensions of officials dismissed during 1930 and 1932 for sympathizing with the movement were also restored. There were, however, certain blemishes on the Congress ministerial record in this respect. In July 1937, Yusuf Meherally, a Socialist leader, was prosecuted by the Madras Government for making an inflammatory speech in Malabar, though he was soon let off. In October 1937, the Madras Government prosecuted S.S. Batliwala, another Congress Social leader, for making a seditious speech and sentenced him to six months' imprisonment. There was a furore in the Congress ranks led by Jawaharlal Nehru, for this action went against the well-known Congress position that nobody should be prosecuted for making a speech and least of all for a speech against colonial rule. During the discussion on the subject in the Congress Working Committee, Nehru, reportedly, asked C. Rajagopalachari, the Premier of Madras (the head of the Provincial ministry was then known as Premier and not Chief Minister as now is the case): 'Do you mean to say that if I come to Madras and make a similar speech you would arrest me?' 'I would,' the latter is said to have replied. In the end Batliwala was released and went around Madras Presidency making similar speeches. The affair proved to be an exception; but it bred a certain suspicion regarding the future attitude of the Congress Right wing.

Much worse was the mentality of a few of the right-wing Congress ministers. For instance, K.M. Munshi, the Home Minister of Bombay, and a light-weight within the Congress leadership, used the CID to watch



the Communists and other left-wing Congressmen, earning a rebuke from Jawaharlal Nehru: 'You have already become a police officer.' The Madras Government, too, used the police to shadow radical Congressmen. These blemishes have, however, to be seen in the larger context of the vast expansion of civil liberties even in Bombay and Madras. Moreover, the mass of Congressmen were vigilant on this question. Led by the left-wing, they exerted intense pressure on the right-wing Congress ministers to avoid tampering with civil liberties.

The Congress Ministries tried to give economic relief to the peasants and the workers as quickly as possible. The Congress had succeeded, in the past, in acquiring massive support among them by exposing the roots of their poverty in colonial structure and policy, appealing to their nationalism, leading them in anti-imperialist struggles, and organizing and supporting their struggles around their economic demands. Now that the Congress had acquired some elements of state and administrative power, it was necessary to use these powers to improve their economic condition, and, thus, consolidate Congress support. The strategy of Congress agrarian legislation was worked out within certain broad parameters. First, the Congress was committed by its election manifesto and the election campaign to a policy of agrarian reform through reform of the system of land tenures and the reduction of rent, land revenue and the burden of debt. The Congress had asked rural voters to vote for its candidates by making large promises in this respect. The voters had taken them seriously; for example, according to government reports from Pratapgarh in U.P., on election day 'a very large number of voters had brought with them pieces of dried cow dung to the various polling stations where these were lighted and, according to the tenants, "bedakhlis", i.e., ejection orders, were burnt once for all. The Congress could not attempt a complete overhaul of the agrarian structure by completely eliminating the *zamindari* system. This, for two reasons, According to the constitutional structure of the 1935 Act, the provincial Ministries did not have enough powers to do so. They also suffered from an extreme lack of financial resources, for the lion's share of India's revenues was appropriated by the Government of India. The Congress Ministries could also not touch the existing administrative structure, whose sanctity was guarded by the Viceroy's and Governor's powers. What is more important, the strategy of class adjustment also forbade it. A multi-class movement could develop only by balancing or adjusting various, mutually clashing class interests. To unite all the Indian people in their struggle against colonialism, the main enemy of the time, it was necessary to make such an adjustment. The policy had to be that of winning over or at least neutralizing as large a part of the landlord classes as possible so as to isolate the enemy and deprive him of all social support within India. This was even more necessary because, in large parts of the country, the smaller landlords were active participants in the national movement. This was recognized by most of the leaders of the time. Swami Sahajanand, the militant peasant leader of Bihar, for example, wrote in his memoirs: 'As a national organization, the Congress is the forum of all classes. All the classes are a part of the Congress. It represents all sections and classes. This is the claim of the Congress and this is desirable also . . . The major function of the Congress is to maintain harmony between different classes and to further its struggle while doing so.

There was also the constraint of time. The Congress leadership knew that their Ministries would not last long and would have to quit soon as the logic of their politics was to confront imperialism and not cooperate with it. As Nehru put it later in his *Discovery of India*, a 'sense of impending crisis was always present; it was inherent in the situation.' Even when the Congress had accepted office, the usual figure given for longevity of the policy was two years. The time constraint became even more apparent as war clouds gathered in Europe from 1938 onwards. The Congress Ministries had, therefore, to act rapidly and achieve as much as possible in the short time available to them.

Further, nearly all the Congress-run states (that is, U.P., Bihar, Bombay, Madras and Assam) had reactionary second chambers in the form of legislative councils, which were elected on a very narrow franchise — while the number of voters for the assemblies in these states was over 17.5 million, it was less than 70 thousand for the second chambers. These were, therefore, dominated by landlords, capitalists and moneylenders, with the Congress forming a small minority. As a majority in the lower house was not enough, in order to get any legislation passed through the second chamber, the Congress had to simultaneously pressure their upper class elements and conciliate them. Thus the Bihar Government negotiated a com-



promise with the *zamindars* on its tenancy bills while the U.P. Government conciliated the moneylender and merchant members of its upper house by going slow on debt legislation so that their support could be secured for tenancy legislation.

Finally, the agrarian structure of various parts of India had developed over the centuries and was extremely complex and complicated.. There was not even enough information about its various components — land rights, for instance. The problem of debt and money lending was also integrated with peasant production and livelihood in too complex a manner to be tackled by an easy one-shot solution. Consequently, any effort at structural reform was bound to be an extremely formidable and time-consuming operation, as was to be revealed later after independence when the Congress and the Communists attempted to transform the agrarian structure in different states of the Indian union.

Within these constraints, the agrarian policy of the Congress Ministries went a long way towards promoting the interests of the peasantry. Agrarian legislation by these Ministries differed from province to province depending on differing agrarian relations, the mass base of the Congress, the class composition and the outlook of the provincial Congress organization and leadership and the nature and extent of peasant mobilization. In general, it dealt with questions of tenancy rights, security of tenure and rents of the tenants and the problem of rural indebtedness.

To enumerate the achievements of the Ministries, in this regard, briefly: In U.P. a tenancy act was passed in October 1939 which gave all statutory tenants both in Agra and Oudh full hereditary rights in their holdings while taking away the landlord's right to prevent the growth of occupancy. The rents of hereditary tenants could be changed only after ten years, while restrictions were placed on the rights of landlords to enhance rents even after this period. A tenant could no longer be arrested or imprisoned for non-payment of rent. All illegal exactions such as *nazrana* (forced gifts) and *begar* (forced unpaid labour) were abolished. In Bihar, the new tenancy legislation was passed mainly in 1937 and 1938, that is, more quickly than in U.P. More radical than that of U.P. in most respects, its main provisions were: All increases in rent made since 1911 were abolished; this was estimated to mean a reduction of about twenty-five per cent in rent. The rent was also reduced if the prices had fallen, during the currency of the existing rent, the deterioration of soil and the neglect of irrigation by the landlord. Occupancy *ryots* were given the absolute right to transfer their holding on the payment of a nominal amount of two per cent of rent to the landlord. A point of radical departure was the grant to under-ryots of occupancy rights if they had cultivated the land for twelve years. Existing arrears of rent were substantially reduced and the rate of interest on arrears was reduced from 12.5 to 6.25 per cent. The landlord's share in case of share-cropping was not to exceed 9/20 of the produce. Lands which had been sold in the execution of decrees for the payment of arrears between 1929 and 1937 (*bakasht* land) were to be restored to previous tenants on payment of half the amount of arrears. The landlord's power to realize rent was greatly reduced — the tenant could no longer be arrested or imprisoned on this account, nor could his immovable property be sold without his consent. Landlords were forbidden from charging illegal dues; any violation would lead to six months imprisonment. Occupancy tenants could no longer be ejected from their holdings for non-payment of rent. In fact, the only right that the landlord retained was the right to get his rent which was reduced significantly.

In Orissa, a tenancy bill was passed in May 1938 granting the right of free transfer of occupancy holdings, reducing the interest on arrears of rent from 12.5 to 6 per cent and abolishing all illegal levies on tenants. Another bill passed in February 1938 reduced all rents in the *zamindari* areas, transferred in the recent past from Madras presidency to Orissa, to the rate of land revenue payable for similar lands in the nearest *ryotwari* areas plus 12.5 per cent as compensation to the *zamindars*. The Governor refused to give assent to the bill as it would have reduced the *zamindars'* incomes by fifty to sixty per cent. In Madras, a committee under the chairmanship of T. Prakasam (1872-1957), the Revenue Minister, recommended that in the areas under Permanent Zamindari Settlement the *ryot* and not the *zamindar* was the owner of the soil and that therefore the level of rents prevailing when the Settlement was made in 1802 should be restored. This would have reduced the rents by about two-thirds and would have meant virtual liquidation of the

*zamindari* system. The Premier, C. Rajagopalachari, gave full support to the report. He also rejected the idea of compensating the *zamindars*. The Legislative Assembly passed, in January 1939, a resolution accepting the recommendations, but before a bill could be drafted, the Ministry resigned.

Measures of tenancy reform, usually extending security of tenure to tenants in landlord areas, were also carried in the legislatures of Bombay, the Central Provinces and the North-West Frontier Province. The agrarian legislation of the Congress Ministries thus improved and secured the status of millions of tenants in *zamindari* areas. The basic system of landlordism was, of course, not affected. Furthermore, it was, in the main, statutory and occupancy tenants who benefited. The interests of the sub-tenants of the occupancy tenants were overlooked. Agricultural labourers were also not affected. This was partially because these two sections had not yet been mobilized by the *kisan sabhas*, nor had they become voters because of the restricted franchise under the Act of 1935. Consequently, they could not exert pressure on the Ministries through either elections or the peasant movement.

Except for U.P. and Assam, the Congress Government passed a series of stringent debtors' relief acts which provided for the regulation of the moneylenders' business — provisions of the acts included measures such as the cancellation or drastic reduction of accumulated interest ranging from 6.25 per cent in Madras to 9 per cent in Bombay and Bihar. These Governments also undertook various rather modest rural reconstruction programmes. In Bombay 40,000 *dublas* or tied serfs were liberated. Grazing fees in the forests were abolished in Bombay and reduced in Madras. While the tenancy bills were strongly opposed by the landlords, the debtors' relief bills were opposed not only by the moneylenders but also by lawyers, otherwise supporters of the Congress, because they derived a large part of their income from debt litigation.

The Congress Ministries adopted, in general, a pro-labour stance. Their basic approach was to advance workers' interests while promoting industrial peace, reducing the resort to strikes as far as possible, establishing conciliation machinery, advocating compulsory arbitration before resorting to strikes, and creating goodwill between labour and capital with the Congress and its ministers assuming the role of intermediaries, while, at the same time, striving to improve the conditions of the workers and secure wage increases. This attitude alarmed the Indian capitalist class which now felt the need to organize itself to press the 'provincial governments to hasten slowly' on such matters.' Immediately after assuming office, the Bombay Ministry appointed a Textile Enquiry Committee which recommended, among other improvements, the increase of wages amounting to a crore of rupees. Despite mill owners protesting against the recommendations, they were implemented. In November 1938, the Governments passed the Industrial Disputes Act which was based on the philosophy of 'class collaboration and not class conflict,' as the Premier B.G. Kher put it. The emphasis in the Act was on conciliation, arbitration and negotiations in place of direct action. The Act was also designed to prevent lightning strikes and lockouts. The Act empowered the Government to refer an industrial dispute to the Court of Industrial Arbitration. No strike or lock-out could occur for an interim period of four months during which the Court would give its award. The Act was strongly opposed by Left Congressmen, including Communists and Congress Socialists, for restricting the freedom to strike and for laying down a new complicated procedure for registration of trade unions, which, they said, would encourage unions promoted by employers in Madras, too, the Government promoted the policy of 'internal settlement' of labour disputes through government sponsored conciliation and arbitration proceedings. In U.P., Kanpur was the seat of serious labour unrest as the workers expected active support from the popularly elected Government. A major strike occurred in May 1938. The Government set up a Labour Enquiry Committee, headed by Rajendra Prasad. The Committee's recommendations included an increase in workers' wages with a minimum wage of Rs. 15 per month, formation of an arbitration board, recruitment of labour for all mills by an independent board, maternity benefits to women workers, and recognition of the Left-dominated Mazdur Sabha by the employers. But the employers, who had refused to cooperate with the Committee, rejected the report. They did, however, in the end, because of a great deal of pressure from the Government, adopt its principal recommendations. A similar Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee headed by Rajendra Prasad was set up in 1938. It too recommended the strengthening of trade union rights, an improvement in labour conditions, and compulsory conciliation and arbitration to be tried before a strike was declared.



The Congress Governments undertook certain other measures of social reform and welfare. Prohibition was introduced in selected areas in different states. Measures for the advancement of untouchables or Harijans (children of God), as Gandhiji called them, including the passing of laws enabled Harijans to enter temples, and to get free access to public office, public sources of water such as wells and ponds, roads, means of transport, hospitals, educational and other similar institutions maintained out of public funds, and restaurants and hotels. Moreover, no court or public authority was to recognize any custom or usage which imposed any civil disability on Harijans. The number of scholarships and free ships for Harijan students was increased. Efforts were made to increase the number of Harijans in police and other government services. The Congress Ministries paid a lot of attention to primary, technical and higher education and public health and sanitation. Education for girls and Harijans was expanded. In particular, the Ministries introduced basic education with an emphasis on manual and productive work. Mass literacy campaigns among adults were organized. Support and subsidies were given to *khadi*, spinning and village industries. Schemes of prison reforms were taken up. The Congress Governments removed impediments in the path of indigenous industrial expansion and, in fact, actively attempted to promote several modern industrial ventures such as automobile manufacture. The Congress Governments also joined the effort to develop planning through the National Planning Committee appointed in 1938 by the Congress President Subhas Bose.

It was a basic aspect of the Congress strategy that in the non-mass struggle phases of the national movement, mass political activity and popular mobilization were to continue, though within the four-walls of legality, in fact, it was a part of the office-acceptance strategy that offices would be used to promote mass political activity. Jawaharlal Nehru, as the president of the Congress, for example, sent a circular to all Congressmen on 10 July, 1937 emphasizing that organizational and other work outside the legislature was to remain the major occupation of the Congress for 'without it legislative activity would have little value' and that 'the two forms of activity must be coordinated together and the masses should be kept in touch with whatever we do and consulted about it. The initiative must come from the masses.'

The question was the forms this mass political activity should take, and how work in administration and legislature was to be coordinated with political work outside and, equally important, what attitude the popularly elected government should adopt towards popular agitations, especially those which stepped outside the bounds of existing legality? There were no historical precedents to learn from or to follow. Different answers were found in different provinces. Unfortunately, the subject has not been studied in any depth by historians, except in a case study of U.P. by Visalakshi Menon.' According to Menon, the coordination of legislative and administrative activities and extra parliamentary struggles was quite successful in U.P. There was widespread mass mobilization which took diverse forms, from the organization of Congress committees in villages to the setting up of popular organs of authority in the form of Congress police stations and panchayats dispensing justice under the leadership of local Congress committees, from organizing of mass petitions to officials and Ministers to setting up of Congress grievance committees in the districts to hear local grievances and reporting them to MLAs and Ministers, from mass literacy campaigns to explain to the people the working of the Ministries, and from organization of local, district and provincial camps and conferences to celebration of various days and weeks. Local Congress committees, members of Legislative Assembly, provincial and all-India level leaders and even ministers were involved in many of these extra-parliamentary mass mobilization programmes. More detailed research is likely to show that not all Congress Governments were able to coordinate administration with popular mobilization, especially where the right-wing dominated the 'provincial Congress and the Government. Moreover, even in U.P., mass mobilization was losing steam by 1939.

However, the dilemma also arose in another manner. Political work outside the legislatures would involve organizing popular protest. How far could a movement go in organizing protests and agitations against itself? Could a party which ran a government be simultaneously the organizer of popular movements and enforcer of law and order? And what if some of the protests took a violent or extralegal form? Could civil liberties have their excess? How should the governmental wing of the movement then respond, since it is one of the functions of any government — colonial or nationalist, leftist or rightist or centrist --- to see



that the existing laws are observed, in fact, the issue looks at the very question of the role of the state in modern society, whether capitalist or socialist. Moreover, part of the strategy of increasing Congress influence or rather hegemony among the people was dependent on the demonstration, by the party leading the national movement, of its ability to govern and the capacity to rule. At the same time, existing laws were colonial laws. How far could a regime committed to their over-throw go in enforcing them? Furthermore, it was inevitable that, on the one hand, the long suppressed masses would try to bring pressure on the Ministries to get their demands fulfilled as early as possible, especially as they looked upon the Congress Ministries with 'a sense of ownership' while, on the other, the satisfaction of these demands by the Ministries would be slow because of the constraints inherent in working through constitutional processes. The issue was, perhaps, posed as an easily solvable problem as far as Congressmen committed to non violence were concerned, but there were many other Congressmen for example, Communists, Socialists, Royists and Revolutionary Terrorists — and non- Congressmen who were not so committed, who tell that expanded civil liberties should be used to turn the masses towards more militant or even violent forms of agitation, and who tried to prove through such agitations and inadequacy of non-violence, the Congress strategy of S-TS 'and the policy of the working of reforms. Could governance and tolerance, it' not promotion, of violent forms of protest coexist?

There was one other problem. While many Congressmen agitated within the perspective of accepting the Congress Ministries as their own and their role as one of strengthening them and the Congress through popular agitations and refrained from creating situations in which punitive action by the Government would become necessary, many others were out to expose the 'breaches of faith and promises' by these Ministries and show 'tip the true' character of the Congress as the political organ of the upper classes and one which was, perhaps, no different from the imperialist authorities so far as the masses and their agitations were concerned, in their turn, many of the Congressmen looked upon all hostile critics and militants as forces of disorder and all situations in which people expressed their feelings in an angry manner as 'getting out of hand.' Moreover, Congressmen like C. Rajagopalachari and K.M. Munshi did not hesitate to use their respective state apparatuses in a politically repressive manner. Unfortunately, the full dimensions of this dilemma have not been adequately explored by historians so far. Today they can, perhaps, be usefully analyzed in a comparative framework vis-a-vis the functioning of the Communists and other radical parties as ruling parties in several states of the Indian Union after 1947, or as parts of ruling groups as seen in France or Portugal, or as rulers in socialist countries. The formation of Congress Ministries and the vast extension of civil liberties unleashed popular energies everywhere. *Kisan sabhas* sprang up in every part of the country and there was an immense growth in trade union activity and membership.

Student and youth movements revived and burgeoned. A powerful fillip was given to the state peoples' movement. Left parties were able to expand manifold. Even though it was under a Central Government ban, the Communist Party was able to bring out its weekly organ, *The National Front*, from Bombay. The CSP brought out *The Congress Socialist* and several other journals in Indian languages. Of particular interest is the example of *Kirti Lehar* which the Kirti Communists of Punjab brought out from Meerut, U.P., because they could not do so in Unionist-ruled Punjab.

Inevitably, many of the popular movements clashed with the Congress Governments. Even though peasant agitations usually took the form of massive demonstrations and spectacular peasant marches, in Bihar, the *kisan* movement often came in frontal confrontation with the Ministry, especially when the *Kisan Sabha* asked the peasants not to pay rent or to forcibly occupy landlords' lands. There were also cases of physical attacks upon landlords, big and small, and the looting of crops. *Kisan Sabha* workers popularized Sahajanand's militant slogans: *Logan Lenge Kaise*, *Danda Hamara Zindabad* (How will you collect rent, long live our lathis or sticks) and *Lathi Men Sathi* (Lathi is my companion). Consequently, there was a breach in relations between the Bihar *kisan Sabha* and the provincial Congress leadership.

In Bombay, the AITUC, the Communists, and the followers of Dr. BR. Ambedkar organized a strike on 7 November 1938, in seventeen out of seventy-seven textile mills against the passage of the Industrial Disputes Act. There was some 'disorder' and large scale stone throwing at two mills and some policemen

were injured. The police opened fire, killing two and injuring over seventy. The Madras Government (as also the Provincial Congress Committee) too adopted a strong policy towards strikes, which sometimes took a violent turn. Kanpur workers struck repeatedly, sometimes acting violently and attacking the police. But they tended to get Congress support. Congress Ministries did not know how to deal with situations where their own mass base was disaffected. They tried to play a mediatory role which was successful in U.P. and Bihar and to a certain extent in Madras, but not in Bombay. But, in general, they were not able to satisfy the Left-wing critics. Quite often they treated all militant protests, especially trade union struggles, as a law and order problem. They took recourse to Section 144 of the Criminal Code against agitating workers and arrested peasant and trade union leaders, even in Kanpur. Jawaharlal Nehru was privately unhappy with the Ministries' response to popular protest but his public stance was different. Then his answer was: 'We cannot agitate against ourselves.' He tended 'to stand up loyally for the ministers in public and protect them from petty and petulant criticism.' To put a check on the growing agitations against Congress Ministries, the All India Congress Committee passed a resolution in September 1938, condemning those, 'including a few Congressmen,' who 'have been found in the name of civil liberty to advocate murder, arson, looting and class war by violent means.'

'The Congress,' the resolution went on, 'will, consistently with its tradition, support measures that may be undertaken by Congress governments for the defence of life and property.' The Left was highly critical of the Congress Governments' handling of popular protest; it accused them of trying to suppress peasants' and workers' organizations. The Communist critique of the Congress Ministries was later summed up by R. Palme Dutt: 'The experience of the two years of Congress Ministries demonstrated with growing acuteness the dangers implicit in entanglement in imperialist administration under a leadership already inclined to compromise. The dominant moderate leadership in effective control of the Congress machinery and of the Ministries was in practice developing an increasing cooperation with imperialism, was acting more and more openly in the interests of the upper-class landlords and industrialists, and was showing an increasingly marked hostility to all militant expression and forms of mass struggle . . . Hence a new crisis of the national movement began to develop.' Gandhiji too thought that the policy of ministry formation was leading to a crisis. But his angle of vision was very different from that of the Communists. To start with, he opposed militant agitations because he felt that their overt to covert violent character threatened his basic strategy based on non-violence. At the beginning of office acceptance, as pointed out earlier, he had advised the Congress Ministries to rule without the police and the army. Later he began to argue that 'violent speech or writing does not come under the protection of civil liberty.' But even while bemoaning the militancy and violence of the popular protest agitations and justifying the use of existing legal machinery against them, Gandhiji objected to the frequent recourse to colonial laws and law and order machinery to deal with popular agitations. He wanted reliance to be placed on the political education of the masses against the use of violence. He questioned, for example, the Madras Government's resort to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, especially to its 'obnoxious clauses.' While criticizing Left-wing incitement to class violence, he constantly sought to curb Right-wing confrontation with the Left. He also defended the right of the Socialists and the Communists to preach and practise their politics in so far as they abided by Congress methods. Gandhiji was able to see the immense harm that the Congress would suffer in terms of erosion of popular support, especially of the workers and peasants, because of the repeated use of law and order machinery to deal with their agitations. This would make it difficult to organize the next wave of extra-legal mass movement against colonial rule. He thus perceived the inherent dilemma in the situation and dealt with it in a large number of articles in *Haryana* during 1938-39. This was one major reason why he began to question the efficacy of continuing with the policy of office acceptance.' He wrote in December 1938 that if the Congress Ministries 'find that they cannot run the State without the use of the police and the military, it is the clearest possible sign, in terms of non-violence, that the Congress should give up office and again wander in the wilderness in search of the Holy Grail.'

The period of the Congress Ministries witnessed the emergence of serious weaknesses in the Congress. There was a great deal of factional strife and bickering both on ideological and personal bases, a good example of which was the factional squabbles within the Congress Ministry and the Assembly party in the Central provinces which led to the resignation of Dr. N.B. Khare as premier. The practice of bogus mem-



bership made its appearance and began to grow. There was a scramble for jobs and positions of personal advantage. Indiscipline among Congressmen was on the increase everywhere. Opportunists, self-seekers and careerists, drawn by the lure of associating with a party in power, began to enter the ranks of the Congress at various levels. This was easy because the Congress was an open party which anybody could join. Many Congressmen began to give way to casteism in their search for power.

Gandhiji began to feel that 'We seem to be weakening from within.' Full of despondency, Gandhiji repeatedly lashed out in the columns of *Haryana* against the growing misuse of office and creeping corruption in Congress ranks. 'I would go to the length of giving the whole Congress organization a decent burial, rather than put up with the corruption that is rampant,' he told the Gandhi Seva Sangh workers in May 1939.<sup>20</sup> Earlier, in November 1938, he had written in *Haryana*: 'If the Congress is not purged of illegalities and irregularities, it will cease to be the power it is today and will fail to fulfil expectations when the real struggle faces the country.' Gandhiji, of course, saw that this slackening of the movement and weakening of the moral fibre of Congressmen was in part inevitable in a phase of non-mass struggle. He, therefore, advised giving up of offices and starting preparations for another phase of *Satyagraha*. Jawaharlal too had been feeling for some time that the positive role of the Ministries was getting exhausted. He wrote to Gandhiji on 28 April 1938: 'I feel strongly that the Congress ministries are working inefficiently and not doing much that they could do. They are adapting themselves far too much to the old order and trying to justify it. But all this, bad as it is, might be tolerated. What is far worse is that we are losing the high position that we have built up, with so much labour, in the hearts of the people. We are sinking to the level of ordinary politicians who have no principles to stand by and whose work is governed by a day to day opportunism. ... I think there are enough men of goodwill in the Congress. But their minds are full of party conflicts and the desire to crush this individual or that group.' The Congress Ministries resigned in October 1939 because of the political crisis brought about by World War II. But Gandhiji welcomed the resignations for another reason — they would help cleanse the Congress of the 'rampant corruption.' He wrote to C. Rajagopalachari on 23 October 1939: 'I am quite clear in my mind that what has happened is best for the cause. It is a bitter pill I know. But it was needed. It will drive away all the parasites from the body. We have been obliged to do wrong things which we shall be able to avoid.' The resignations produced another positive effect. They brought the Left and the Right in the Congress closer because of a common policy on the question of participation in the war.

In the balance, the legislative and administrative record of the Congress Ministries was certainly positive. As R. Coupland was to remark in 1944: "The old contention that Indian self government was a necessity for any really radical attack on the social backwardness of India was thus confirmed." And Nehru, a stern critic of the Congress Ministries in 1938-39, wrote in 1944: 'Looking back, I am surprised at their achievements during a brief period of two years and a quarter, despite the innumerable difficulties that surrounded them.' Even though the Left was critical, in the long view even its expectations were fulfilled in a large measure. In 1935, Wang Ming, in his report on the revolutionary movements in colonial countries at the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist International, said in the section on India: 'Our Indian comrades in attempting to establish a united anti-imperialist front with the National Congress in December last year put before the latter such demands as "the establishment of an Indian workers' and peasants' soviet republic," "confiscation of all lands belonging to the *zamindars* without compensation," "a general strike as the only effective programme of action," etc. Such demands on the part of our Indian comrades can serve as an example of how not to carry on the tactics of the anti-imperialist united front. . . The Indian communists must formulate a programme of popular demands which could serve as a platform for a broad anti-imperialist united front . . . this programme for struggle in the immediate future should include approximately the following demands: 1) against the slavish constitution, 2) for the immediate liberation of all political prisoners, 3) for the abolition of all extraordinary laws etc., 4) against the lowering of wages, the lengthening of working day and discharge of workers, 5) against burdensome taxes, high land rents and against confiscation of peasants' lands for nonpayment of debts and obligations, and 6) for the establishment of democratic rights.' Certainly, the Congress Ministries fulfilled this agenda more or less in entirety.



One of the great achievements of the Congress Governments was their firm handling of the communal riots. They asked the district magistrates and police officers to take strong action to deal with a communal outbreak. The Congress leadership foiled the imperialist design of using constitutional reforms to weaken the national movement and, instead demonstrated how the constitutional structure could be used by a movement aiming at capture of state power to further its own aims without getting co-opted. Despite certain weaknesses, the Congress emerged stronger from the period of office acceptance. Nor was the national movement diverted from its main task of fighting for self government because of being engaged in day-to-day administration. Offices were used successfully for enhancing the national consciousness and increasing the area of nationalist influence and thus strengthening the movement's capacity to wage a mass struggle in the future. The movement's influence was now extended to the bureaucracy, especially at the lower levels. And the morale of the ICS (Indian Civil Service), one of the pillars of the British Empire, suffered a shattering blow. Many ICS officers came to believe that the British departure from India was only a matter of time. In later years, especially during the Quit India Movement, the fear that the Congress might again assume power in the future, a prospect made real by the fact that Congress Ministries had already been in power once, helped to neutralize many otherwise hostile elements, such as landlords and even bureaucrats, and ensured that many of them at least sat on the fence. One may quote in this respect Visalakshi Menon's judgement: 'From the instance of the United Provinces, it is obvious that there was no popular disillusionment with the Congress during the period of the Ministry. Rather, the people were able to perceive, in more concrete terms, the shape of things to come, if independence were won.'

There was also no growth of provincialism or lessening of the sense of Indian unity, as the framers of the Act of 1935 and of its provision for Provincial Autonomy had hoped. The Ministries succeeded in evolving a common front before the Government of India. Despite factionalism, the Congress organization as a whole remained disciplined. Factionalism, particularly at the top, was kept within bounds with a strong hand by the central leadership. When it came to the crunch, there was also no sticking so office. Acceptance of office thus did prove to be just one phase in the freedom struggle. When an all-India political crisis occurred and the central Congress leadership wanted it, the Ministries promptly resigned. And the opportunists started leaving. As the Congress General Secretary said at the time: "The resignations of the ministries demonstrated to all thou who had any doubts that Congress was not out for power and office but for the emancipation of the people of India from the foreign yoke."

The Congress also avoided a split between its Left and Right wings — a split which the British were trying to actively promote since 1934. Despite strong critiques of each other by the two wings, they not only remained united but tended to come closer to each other, as the crisis at Tripuri showed. Above all, the Congress gained by influencing all sections of the people. The process of the growth of Congress and nationalist hegemony in Indian society was advanced. If mass struggles destroyed one crucial element of the hegemonic ideology of British colonialism by demonstrating that British power was not invincible then the sight of Indians exercising power shattered another myth by which the British had held Indians in subjection: that Indians were not fit to rule.

## UNIT-XXX

# PEASANT & WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS IN THE 1920s, 30s AND 40s

### PEASANT MOVEMENTS AND NATIONALISM IN THE 1920s

Peasant discontent against established authority was a familiar feature of the nineteenth century. But in the twentieth century, the movements that emerged out of this discontent were marked by a new feature: they were deeply influenced by and in their turn had a marked impact on the ongoing struggle for national freedom. To illustrate the complex nature of this relationship, we will recount the story of three important peasant struggles that emerged in the second and third decade of the country: The *Kisan Sabha* and Eka movements in Avadh in U.P., the Mappila rebellion in Malabar and the Bardoli *Satyagraha* in Gujarat.

Following the annexation of Avadh in 1856, the second half of the nineteenth century had seen the strengthening of the hold of the *taluqdars* or big landlords over the agrarian society of the province. This had led to a situation in which exorbitant rents, illegal levies, renewal fees or *nazrana*, and arbitrary ejections or *bedakhli* had made life miserable for the majority of the cultivators. The high price of food and other necessities that accompanied and followed World War I made the oppression all the more difficult to bear, and the tenants of Avadh were ripe for a message of resistance.

It was the more active members of the Home Rule League in U.P. who initiated the process of the organization of the peasants of the province on modern lines into *kisan sabhas*. The U.P. *Kisan Sabha* was set up in February 1918 through the efforts of Gauri Shankar Misra and Indra Narain Dwivedi, and with the support of Madan Mohan Malaviya. The U.P. *Kisan Sabha* demonstrated considerable activity, and by June 1919 had established at least 450 branches in 173 tehsils of the province. A consequence of this activity was that a large number of *kisan* delegates from U.P. attended the Delhi and Amritsar sessions of the Indian National Congress in December 1918 and 1919.

Towards the end of 1919, the first signs of grass-roots peasant activity were evident in the reports of a *nai-dhobi* band (a form of social boycott) on an estate in Pratapgarh district. By the summer of 1920, in the villages of *taluqdari* Avadh, *kisan* meetings called by village panchayats became frequent. The names of Thinguri Singh and Durgapal Singh were associated with this development. But soon another leader, who became famous by the name of Baba Ramchandra, emerged as the rallying point. Baba Ramchandra, a Brahmin from Maharashtra, was a wanderer who had left home at the age of thirteen, done a stint as an indentured labourer in Fiji and finally turned up in Faizabad in U.P. in 1909. Till 1920, he had wandered around as a *sadhu*, carrying a copy of Tulsidas' *Ramayan* on his back, from which he would often recite verses to rural audiences. In the middle of 1920, however, he emerged as a leader of the peasants of Avadh, and soon demonstrated considerable leadership and organizational capacities. In June 1920, Baba Ramchandra led a few hundred tenants from the Jaunpur and Pratapgarh districts to Allahabad. There he met Gauri Shankar Misra and Jawaharlal Nehru and asked them to visit the villages to see for themselves the living conditions of the tenants. The result was that, between June and August, Jawaharlal Nehru made several visits to the rural areas and developed close contacts with the *Kisan Sabha* movement.

Meanwhile, the *kisans* found sympathy in Mehta, the Deputy Commissioner of Pratapgarh, who promised to investigate complaints forwarded to him. The *Kisan Sabha* at village Roor in Pratapgarh district became the centre of *activity* and about one lakh tenants were reported to have registered their complaints with this Sabha on the payment of one anna each. Gauri Shankar Mia was also very active in Pratapgarh during this period, and was in the process of working out an agreement with Mehta over some of the crucial tenant complaints such as *bedakhli* and *nazrana*.

But, in August 1920, Mehta went on leave and the *taluqdars* used the opportunity to strike at the growing *kisan* movement. They succeeded in getting Ramchandra and thirty-two *kisans* arrested on a trumped-up charge of theft on 28 August 1920. Incensed at this, 4,000 to 5,000 *kisans* collected at Pratapgarh to see their leaders in jail and were dispersed after a great deal of persuasion.

Ten days later, a rumour that Gandhiji was coming to secure the release of Baba Ramchandra brought ten to twenty thousand *kisans* to Pratapgarh, and this time they returned to their homes only after Baba Ramchandra gave them *darshan* from atop a tree in a sugar-cane field. By now, their numbers had swelled to sixty thousand. Mehta was called back from leave to deal with the situation and he quickly withdrew the case of theft and attempted to bring pressure on the landlords to change their ways. This easy victory, however, gave a new confidence to the movement and it burgeoned forth. Meanwhile, the Congress at Calcutta had chosen the path of non cooperation and many nationalists of U.P. had committed themselves to the new political path. But there were others, including Madan Mohan Malaviya, who preferred to stick to constitutional agitation. These differences were reflected in the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* as well, and soon the Non-cooperators set up an alternative Oudh *Kisan Sabha* at Pratapgarh on 17 October 1920. This new body succeeded in integrating under its banner all the grassroots *kisan sabhas* that had emerged in the districts of Avadh in the past few months; through the efforts of Misra, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mata Badal Pande, Baba Ramchandra, Deo Narayan Pande and Kedar Nath, the new organization brought under its wing, by the end of October, over 330 *kisan sabhas*. The Oudh *Kisan Sabha* asked the *kisans* to refuse to till *bedakhli* land, not to offer *hari* and *begar* (forms of unpaid labour), to boycott those who did not accept these conditions and to solve their disputes through panchayats. The first big show of strength of the Sabha was the rally held at Ayodhya, near Faizabad town, on 20 and 21 December which was attended by roughly 100,000 peasants. At this rally, Baba Ramchandra turned up bound in ropes to symbolize the oppression of the *kisans*. A marked feature of the *Kisan Sabha* movement was that *kisans* belonging to the high as well as the low castes were to be found in its ranks. In January 1921, however, the nature of the peasant activity underwent a marked change. The centres of activity were primarily the districts of Rae Bareli, Faizabad and, to a lesser extent, Sultanpur. The pattern of activity was the looting of bazaars, houses, granaries, and clashes with the police. A series of incidents, small and big, but similar in character. Some, such as the ones at Munshiganj and Karhaiya Bazaar in Rae Bareli, were sparked off by the arrests or rumours of arrest of leaders. The lead was often taken not by recognized *Kisan Sabha* activists, but by local figures-- *sadhus*, holy men, and disinherited expropriators. The Government, however, had little difficulty in suppressing these outbreaks of violence. Crowds were fired upon and dispersed, leaders and activists arrested, cases launched and, except for a couple of incidents in February and March, the movement was over by the end of January itself. In March, the Seditious Meetings Act was brought in to cover the affected districts and all political activity came to a standstill. Nationalists continued to defend the cases of the tenants in the courts, but could do little else. The Government, meanwhile, pushed through the Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act, and though it brought little relief to the tenants, it helped to rouse hopes and in its own way assisted in the decline of the movement.

Towards the end of the year, peasant discontent surfaced again in Avadh, but this time the centres were the districts of Hardoi, Bahraich, and Sitapur in the northern part of the province. The initial thrust here was provided by Congress and Khilafat leaders and the movement grew under the name of the Eka or unity movement. The main grievances here related to the extraction of a rent that was generally fifty per cent higher than the recorded rent, the oppression of *thekedars* to whom the work of rent-collection was farmed out and the practice of share-rents. The Eka meetings were marked by a religious ritual in which a hole that represented the river Ganges was dug in the ground and filled with water, a priest was brought in to preside and the assembled peasants 'owed that they would pay only the recorded rent but pay it on time, would not leave when ejected, would refuse to do forced labour, would give no help to criminals and abide by the panchayat decisions. The Eka Movement, however, soon developed its own grassroots leadership in the form of Madari Pasi and other low-caste leaders who were not particularly inclined to accept the discipline of non-violence that the Congress and Khilafat leaders urged. As a result, the movement's contact with the nationalists diminished and it went its own way. However, unlike the earlier *Kisan Sabha* movement that was based almost solely on tenants, the Eka Movement included in its ranks many small



zamindars who found themselves disenchanted with the Government because of its heavy land revenue demand. By March 1922, however, severe repression on the part of the authorities succeeded in bringing the Eka Movement to its end.

In August 1921, peasant discontent erupted in the Malabar district of Kerala. Here Mappila (Muslim) tenants rebelled. Their grievances related to lack of any security of tenure, renewal fees, high rents, and other oppressive landlord exactions. In the nineteenth century as well, there had been cases of Mappila resistance to landlord oppression but what erupted in 1921 was on a different scale together. The impetus for resistance had first come from the Malabar District Congress Conference held at Manjeri in April 1920. This conference supported the tenants' cause and demanded legislation to regulate landlord-tenant relations. The change was significant because earlier the landlords had successfully prevented the Congress from committing itself to the tenants' cause. The Manjeri conference was followed by the formation of a tenants' association at Kozhikode, and soon tenants' associations were set up in other parts of the district.

Simultaneously, the Khilafat Movement was also extending its sweep. In fact, there was hardly any way one could distinguish between Khilafat and tenants' meetings, the leaders and the audience were the same, and the two movements were inextricably merged into one. The social base of the movement was primarily among the Mappila tenants, and Hindus were quite conspicuous by their absence, though the movement could count on a number of Hindu leaders. Disturbed by the growing popularity of the Khilafat-cum-tenant agitation, which had received considerable impetus from the visits of Gandhiji, Shaikat Au, and Maulana Azad, the Government issued prohibitory notices on all Khilafat meetings on 5 February 1921. On 18 February, all the prominent Khilafat and Congress leaders, Yakub Hasan, U. Gopala Menon, P. Moideen Koya and K. Madhavan Nair, were arrested. This resulted in the leadership passing into the hands of the local Mappila leaders.

Angered by repression and encouraged by rumours that the British, weakened as a result of the World War, were no longer in a position to take strong military action, the Mappilas began to exhibit increasing signs of turbulence and defiance of authority. But the final break came only when the District Magistrate of Eranad *taluk*. E.F. Thomas, on 20 August 1921, accompanied by a contingent of police and troops, raided the mosque at Tirurangadi to arrest Ali Musaliar, a Khilafat leader and a highly respected priest. They found only three fairly insignificant Khilafat volunteers and arrested them. However the news that spread was that the famous Mambrath mosque, of which Au-Musaliar was the priest, had been raided and destroyed by the British army. Soon Mappilas from Kottakkal, Tanur and Parappanagadi converged at Tirurangadi and their leaders met the British officers to secure the release of the arrested volunteers. The people were quiet and peaceful, but the police opened fire on the unarmed crowd and many were killed. A clash ensued, and Government offices were destroyed, records burnt and the treasury looted. The rebellion soon spread into the Eranad, Walluvanad and Ponnani *taluks*, all Mappila strongholds.

In the first stage of the rebellion, the targets of attack were the unpopular jenmies (landlords), mostly Hindu, the symbols of Government authority's such as *kutcheris* (courts), police stations, treasuries and offices, and British planters. Lenient landlords and poor Hindus were rarely touched. Rebels would travel many miles through territory populated by Hindus and attack only the landlords and burn their records. Some of the rebel leaders, like Kunhammed Haji, took special care to see that Hindus were not molested or looted and even punished those among the rebels who attacked the Hindus. Kunhammed Haji also did not discriminate in favour of Muslims: he ordered the execution and punishment of a number of pro-government Mappilas as well.

But once the British declared martial law and repression began in earnest, the character of the rebellion underwent a definite change. Many Hindus were either pressurized into helping the authorities or voluntarily gave assistance and this helped to strengthen the already existing anti-Hindu sentiment among the poor illiterate Mappilas who in any case were motivated by a strong religious ideology. Forced conversions, attacks on and murders of Hindus increased as the sense of desperation mounted. What had been largely an anti-government and anti-landlord affair acquired strong communal overtones. The Mappilas'

recourse to violence had in any case driven a wedge between them and the Non-Cooperation Movement which was based on the principle of non-violence. The communalization of the rebellion completed the isolation of the Mappilas. British repression did the rest and by December 1921 all resistance had come to a stop. The toll was heavy indeed: 2,337 Mappilas had lost their lives. Unofficial estimates placed the number at above 10,000. A total of 45,404 rebels were captured or had surrendered. But the toll was in fact even heavier, though in a very different way. From then onwards, the militant Mappilas were so completely crushed and demoralized that till independence their participation in any form of politics was almost nil. They neither joined the national movement nor the peasant movement that was to grow in Kerala in later years under the Left leadership.

The peasant movements in U.P. and Malabar were thus closely linked with the politics at the national level. In UP, the impetus had come from the Home Rule Leagues and, later, from the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movement. In Avadh, in the early months of 1921 when peasant activity was at its peak, it was difficult to distinguish between a Non cooperation meeting and a peasant rally. A similar situation arose in Malabar, where Khilafat and tenants' meetings merged into one. But in both places, the recourse to violence by the peasants created a distance between them and the national movement and led to appeals by the nationalist leaders to the peasants that they should not indulge in violence. Often, the national leaders, especially Gandhiji, also asked the peasants to desist from taking extreme action like stopping the payment of rent to landlords. This divergence between the actions and perceptions of peasants and local leaders and the understanding of the national leaders had often been interpreted as a sign of the fear of the middle class or bourgeois leadership that the movement would go out of its own 'safe' hands into that of supposedly more radical and militant leaders of the people. The call for restraint, both in the demands as well as in the methods used, is seen as proof of concern for the landlords and propertied classes of Indian society. It is possible, however, that the advice of the national leadership was prompted by the desire to protect the peasants from the consequences of violent revolt, consequences which did not remain hidden for long as both in U.P. and Malabar the Government launched heavy repression in order to crush the movements. Their advice that peasants should not push things too far with the landlords by refusing to pay rent could also stem from other considerations. The peasants themselves were not demanding abolition of rent or landlordism, they only wanted an end to ejections, illegal levies, and exorbitant rents — demands which the national leadership supported. The recourse to extreme measures like refusal to pay rent was likely to push even the small landlords further into the lap of the government and destroy any chances of their maintaining a neutrality towards the on-going conflict between the government and the national movement.

The no-tax movement that was launched in Bardoli *taluk* of Surat district in Gujarat in 1928 was also in many ways a child of the Non-cooperation days.' Bardoli *taluk* had been selected in 1922 as the place from where Gandhiji would launch the civil disobedience campaign, but events in Chauri Chaura had changed all that and the campaign never took off. However, a marked change had taken place in the area because of the various preparations for the civil disobedience movement and the end result was that Bardoli had undergone a process of intense politicization and awareness of the political scene. The local leaders such as the brothers Kalyanji and Kunverji Mehta, and Dayalji Desai, had worked hard to spread the message of the Non-Cooperation Movement. These leaders, who had been working in the district as social reformers and political activists for at least a decade prior to Non-cooperation, had set up many national schools, persuaded students to leave government schools, carried out the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor, and had captured the Surat municipality. After the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Bardoli Congressmen had settled down to intense constructive work. Stung by Gandhiji's rebuke in 1922 that they had done nothing for the upliftment of the low-caste untouchable and tribal inhabitants — who were known by the name of *Kaliparaj* (dark people) to distinguish them from the high caste or *Ujaliparaj* (fair people) and who formed sixty per cent of the population of the *taluk* — these men, who belonged to high castes started work among the *Kaliparaj* through a network of six ashrams that were spread out over the *taluk*. These ashrams, many of which survive to this day as living institutions working for the education of the tribals, did much to lift the *taluk* out of the demoralization that had followed the withdrawal of 1922. Kunverji Mehta and Keshavji Ganeshji learnt the tribal dialect, and developed a '*Kaliparaj* literature' with

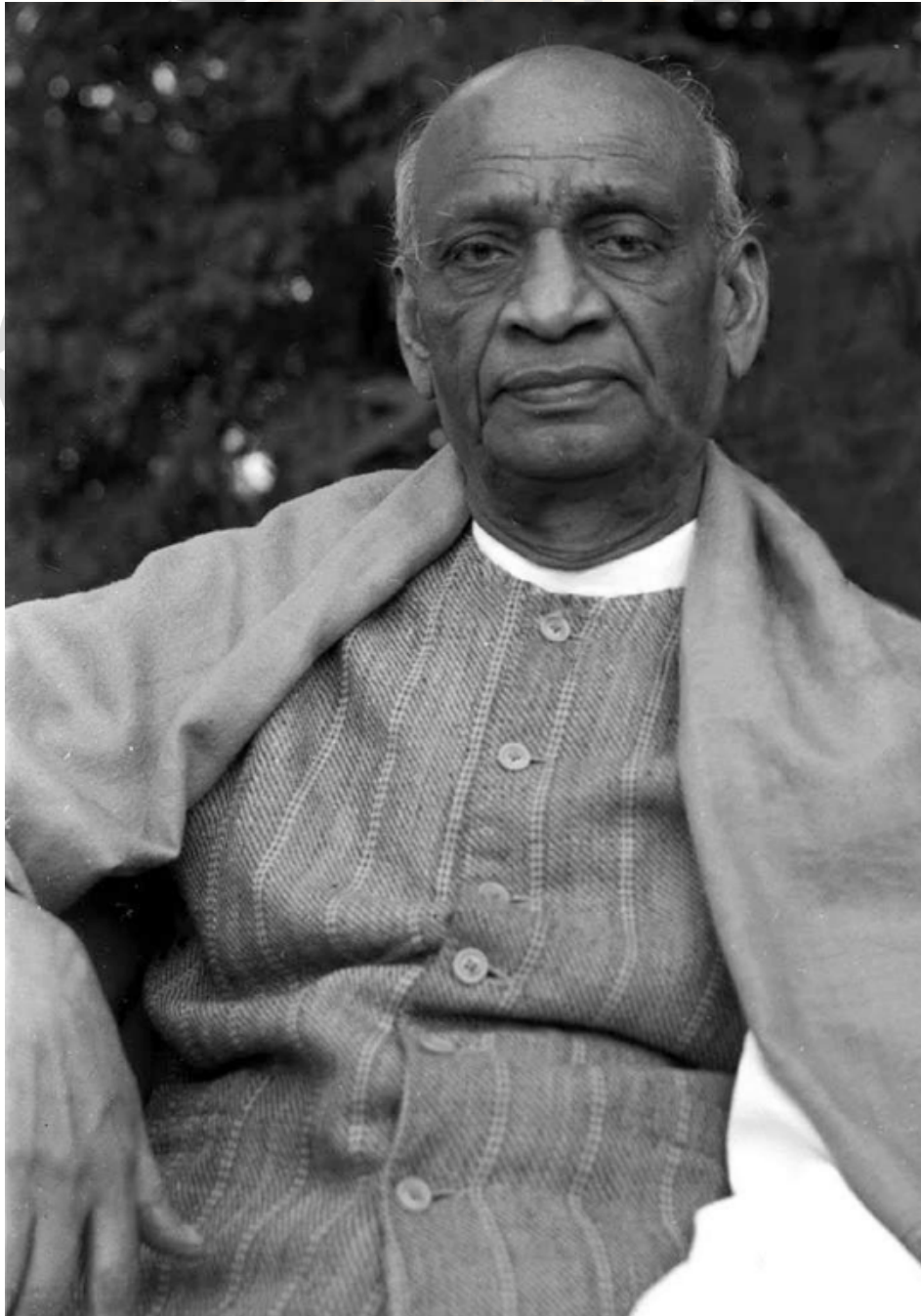


the assistance of the educated members of the *Kaliparaj* community, which contained poems and prose that aroused the *Kaliparaj* against the *Hali* system under which they laboured as hereditary labourers for upper-caste landowners, and exhorted them to abjure intoxicating drinks and high marriage expenses which led to financial ruin. *Bhajan mandalis* consisting of *Kaliparaj* and *Ujaliparaj* members were used to spread the message. Night schools were started to educate the *Kaliparaj* and in 1927 a school for the education of *Kaliparaj* children was set up in Bardoli town. Ashram workers had to often face the hostility of upper-caste landowners who feared that all this would 'spoil' their labour. Annual *Kaliparaj* conferences were held in 1922 and, in 1927, Gandhiji, who presided over the annual conference, initiated an enquiry into the conditions of the *Kaliparaj*, who he also now renamed as *Raniparaj* or the inhabitants of the forest in preference to the derogatory term *Kaliparaj* or dark people. Many leading figures of Gujarat including Narhari Parikh and Jugatram Dave conducted the inquiry which turned into a severe indictment of the *Hali* system, exploitation by money lenders and sexual exploitation of women by upper-castes. As a result of this, the Congress had built up a considerable base among the *Kaliparaj*, and could count on their support in the future. Simultaneously, of course, the Ashram workers had continued to work among the landowning peasants as well, and had to an extent regained their influence among them. Therefore, when in January 1926 it became known that Jayakar, the officer charged with the duty of reassessment of the land revenue demand of the *taluk*, had recommended a thirty percent increase over the existing assessment, the Congress leaders were quick to protest against the increase and set up the Bardoli Inquiry Committee to go into the issue. Its report, published in July 1926, came to the conclusion that the increase was unjustified. This was followed by a campaign in the Press, the lead being taken by *Young India* and *Navjivan* edited by Gandhiji. The constitutionalist leaders of the area, including the members of the Legislative Council, also took up the issue. In July 1927, the Government reduced the enhancement to 21.97 per cent. But the concessions were too meagre and came too late to satisfy anybody. The constitutionalist leaders now began to advise the peasants to resist by paying only the current amount and withholding the enhanced amount. The 'Ashram' group, on the other hand, argued that the entire amount must be withheld if it was to have any effect on the Government. However, at this stage, the peasants seemed more inclined to heed the advice of the moderate leaders.

Gradually, however, as the limitations of the constitutional leadership became more apparent, and their unwillingness to lead even a movement based on the refusal of the enhanced amount was clear, the peasants began to move towards the 'Ashram' group of Congress leaders. The latter, on their part had in the meanwhile contacted Vallabhbhai Patel and were persuading him to take on the leadership of the movement. A meeting of representatives of sixty villages at Bamni in Kadod division formally invited Vallabhbhai to lead the campaign. The local leaders also met Gandhiji and after having assured him that the peasants were fully aware of the implications of such a campaign, secured his approval. Patel reached Bardoli on 4 February and immediately had a series of meetings with the representatives of the peasants and the constitutionalist leaders. At one such meeting, the moderate leaders frankly told the audience that their methods had failed and they should now try Vallabhbhai's methods. Vallabhbhai explained to the peasants the consequences of their proposed plan of action and advised them to give the matter a week's thought. He then returned to Ahmedabad and wrote a letter to the Governor of Bombay explaining the miscalculations in the settlement report and requesting him to appoint an independent enquiry; else, he wrote, he would have to advise the peasants to refuse to pay the Land revenue and suffer the consequences. On 12 February, Patel returned to Bardoli and explained the situation, including the Government's curt reply, to the peasants' representatives, following this, a meeting of the occupants of Bardoli *taluk* passed a resolution advising all occupants of land to refuse payment of the revised assessment until the Government appointed an independent tribunal or accepted the current amount as full payment. Peasants were asked to take oaths in the name of *Prabhu* (the Hindu name for god) and *Khuda* (the Muslim name for god) that they would not pay the land revenue. The resolution was followed by the recitation of sacred texts from the Gita and the *Koran* and songs from Kabir, who symbolized Hindu-Muslim unity. The *Satyagraha* had begun. Vallabhbhai Patel was ideally suited for leading the campaign. A veteran of the Kheda *Satyagraha*, the Nagpur Flag *Satyagraha*, and the Borsad Punitive Tax *Satyagraha*, he had emerged as a leader of Gujarat who was second only to Gandhiji. His capacities as an organizer, speak-



er, indefatigable campaigner, inspirer of ordinary men and women were already known, but it was the women of Bardoli who gave him the title of *Sardar*. The residents of Bardoli to this day recall the stirring effect of the Sardar's speeches which he delivered in an idiom and style that was close to the peasant's heart. The Sardar divided the *taluk* into thirteen workers' camps or *Chhavanis* each under the charge of an experienced leader. One hundred political workers drawn from all over the province, assisted by 1,500 volunteers, many of whom were students, formed the army of the movement. A publications bureau that brought out the daily Bardoli Satyagraha *Patrika* was set up. This *Patrika* contained reports about the movement, speeches of the leaders, pictures of the *jabti* or confiscation proceedings and other news. An army of volunteers distributed this to the farthest corners of the *taluk*. The movement also had its own intelligence wing, whose job was to find out who the indecisive peasants were. The members of the intelligence wing would shadow them night and day to see that they did not pay their dues, secure information about Government moves, especially of the likelihood of *jabti* (confiscation) and then warn the villagers to lock up their houses or flee to neighbouring Baroda.



**Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel-The Iron Man of India**

The main mobilization was done through extensive propaganda via meetings, speeches, pamphlets, and door to door persuasion. Special emphasis was placed on the mobilization of women and many women activists like Mithuben Petit, a Parsi lady from Bombay, Bhaktiba, the wife of Darbar Gopaldas, Maniben Patel, the Sardar's daughter, Shardaben Shah and Sharda Mehta were recruited for the purpose. As a result, women often outnumbered men at the meetings and stood firm in their resolve not to submit to Government threats. Students were another special target and they were asked to persuade their families to remain thin.

Those who showed signs of weakness were brought into line by means of social pressure and threats of social boycott. Caste and village panchayats were used effectively for this purpose and those who opposed the movement had to face the prospect of being refused essential services from sweepers, barbers, washermen, agricultural labourers, and of being socially boycotted by their kinsmen and neighbours. These threats were usually sufficient to prevent any weakening. Government officials faced the worst of this form of pressure. They were refused supplies, services, transport and found it almost impossible to carry out their official duties. The work that the Congress leaders had done among the *Kaliparaj* people also paid dividends during this movement and the Government was totally unsuccessful in its attempts to use them against the upper caste peasants. Sardar Patel and his colleagues also made constant efforts to see that they carried the constitutionalist and moderate leadership, as well as public opinion, with them on all important issues. The result of this was that very soon the Government found even its supporters and sympathizers, as well as impartial men, deserting its side. Many members of the Bombay Legislative Council like K.M. Munshi and Laiji Naranji, the representatives of the Indian Merchants Chamber, who were not hot-headed extremists, resigned their seats. By July 1928, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, himself began to doubt the correctness of the Bombay Government's stand and put pressure on Governor Wilson to find a way out. Uncomfortable questions had started appearing in the British Parliament as well.

Public opinion in the country was getting more and more restive and anti-Government. Peasants in many parts of Bombay Presidency were threatening to agitate for revision of the revenue assessments in their areas. Workers in Bombay textile mills were on strike and there was a threat that Patel and the Bombay Communists would combine in bringing about a railway strike that would make movement of troops and supplies to Bardoli impossible. The Bombay Youth League and other organizations had mobilized the people of Bombay for huge public meetings and demonstrations. Punjab was offering to send *jathas* on foot to Bardoli. Gandhiji had shifted to Bardoli on 2 August, 1928, in order to take over the reins of the movement if Patel was arrested. All told, a retreat, if it could be covered up by a face saving device, seemed the best way out for the Government. The face-saving device was provided by the Legislative Council members from Surat who wrote a letter to the Governor assuring him that his pre-condition for an enquiry would be satisfied. The letter contained no reference to what the precondition was (though everyone knew that it was full payment of the enhanced rent) because an understanding had already been reached that the full enhanced rent would not be paid. Nobody took the Governor seriously when he declared that he had secured an 'unconditional surrender.' It was the Bardoli peasants who had won.

The enquiry, conducted by a judicial officer, Broomfield, and a revenue officer, Maxwell, came to the conclusion that the increase had been unjustified, and reduced the enhancement to 6.03 per cent. *The New statesman* of London summed up the whole affair on 5 May 1929: 'The report of the Committee constitutes the worst rebuff which any local government in India has received for many years and may have far-reaching results... It would be difficult to find an incident quite comparable with this in the long and controversial annals of Indian Land Revenue. 'The relationship of Bardoli and other peasant struggles with the struggle for freedom can best be described in Gandhiji's pithy words: 'Whatever the Bardoli struggle may be, it clearly is not a struggle for the direct attainment of *Swaraj*. That every such awakening, every such effort as that of Bardoli will bring *Swaraj* nearer and may bring it nearer even than any direct effort is undoubtedly true.'

## THE INDIAN WORKING CLASS AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The modern worker makes his appearance in India in the second half of the 19th century with the slow beginnings of modern industry and the growth of utilities like the railways and the post and the telegraph network. The process of the disparate groups of workers in various parts of country emerging as an organized, self-conscious, all India class is inextricably linked with the growth of the Indian national movement and the process of the Indian 'nation-in-the-making' because the notion of the Indian working class could not exist before the notion of the Indian 'people' had begun to take root.

Before the Indian nationalist intelligentsia began to associate itself with working class agitations towards the end of the 19th century, there were several agitations, including strikes by workers in the textile mills of Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Surat, Madras, Coimbatore, Wardha, and so on, in the railways and in the plantations. However, they were mostly sporadic, spontaneous and unorganized revolts based on immediate economic grievances, and had hardly any wider political implications.

There were also some early attempts at organized efforts to improve the condition of the workers. These efforts were made as early as the 1870s by philanthropists. In 1878, Sorabjee Shapoorji Bengalee tried unsuccessfully to introduce a Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council to limit the working hours for labour. In Bengal, Sasipada Banerjee, a Brahmo Social reformer, set up a Workingmen's Club in 1870 and brought out a monthly journal called *Bharat Sramjeebi* (Indian Labour), with the primary idea of educating the workers. In Bombay, Narayan Meghajee Lokhanday brought out an Anglo-Marathi weekly called *Dina Bandhu* (Friend of the Poor) in 1880, and started the Bombay Mill and Millhands' Association in 1890. Lokhanday held meetings of workers and in one instance sent a memorial signed by 5,500 mill workers, to the Bombay Factory Commission, putting forward some minimum workers' demands. All these efforts were admittedly of a philanthropic nature and did not represent the beginnings of an organized working class movement. Moreover, these philanthropists did not belong to the mainstream of the contemporary national movement.

The mainstream nationalist movement in fact was as yet, by and large, indifferent to the question of labour. The early nationalists in the beginning paid relatively little attention to the question of workers despite the truly wretched conditions under which they existed at that time. Also, they had a strikingly, though perhaps understandably, differential attitude towards the workers employed in European enterprises and those employed in Indian enterprises.

One major reason for the relatively lukewarm attitude of the early that, at this time, when the anti-imperialist movement was in its very infancy, the nationalists did not wish to, in any way, weaken the common struggle against British rule — the primary task to be achieved in a colonial situation — by creating any divisions within the ranks of the Indian people. Dadabhai Naoroji, in the very second session of the Indian National Congress (1886), made it clear that the Congress 'must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to class Congresses.' Later, with the national movement gaining in strength, and the emergence within the nationalist ranks of ideological trends with less inhibitions towards labour and increasingly with an actively pro-labour orientation, efforts were made to organize labour and secure for it a better bargaining position vis-a-vis the more powerful classes in the common anti-imperialist front. While still endeavouring to maintain an anti-imperialist united front, unity was no longer sought at the unilateral cost of the worker and the oppressed but was to be secured through sacrifices or concessions from all classes including the powerful propertied class.

At this stage, however, the nationalists were unwilling to take up the question of labour versus the indigent employer. Most of the nationalist newspapers, in fact, denied the need for any Government legislation to regulate working conditions and actively opposed the Factories Act of 1881 and 1891. Similarly, strikes in Indian textile mills were generally not supported. Apart from the desire not to create any divisions in the fledgling anti-imperialist movement, there were other reasons for the nationalist stance. The nationalists correctly saw the Government initiative on labour legislation as dictated by British



manufacturing interests which, when faced with growing Indian competition and a shrinking market in India, lobbied for factor legislation in India which would, for example, by reducing the working hours for labour, reduce the competitive edge enjoyed by Indian industry. Further, the early nationalists saw rapid industrialisation as the panacea for the problems of Indian poverty and degradation and were unwilling to countenance any measure which would impede this process. Labour legislation which would adversely affect the infant industry in India, they said, was like killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. But there was also the nationalist newspaper, *Mahratta*, then under the influence of the radical thinker, G.S. Agarkar, which even at this stage supported the workers' cause and asked the mill owners to make concessions to them. This trend was, however, still a very minor one.

The scenario completely altered when the question was of Indian labour employed in British-owned enterprises. Here the nationalists had no hesitation in giving full support to the workers. This was partially because the employer and the employed, in the words of P. Ananda Charlu, the Congress president in 1891, were not 'part and parcel of the same nation.' The Indian National Congress and the nationalist newspapers began a campaign against the manner in which the tea plantation workers in Assam were reduced to virtual slavery, with European planters being given powers, through legislation to arrest, punish and prevent the running away of labour. An appeal was made to national honour and dignity to protest against this unbridled exploitation by foreign capitalists aided by the colonial state.

It was not fortuitous, then, that perhaps the first organized strike by any section of the working class should occur in a British-owned and managed railway. This was the signallers' strike in May 1899 in the Great Indian Peninsular (GIP) Railway and the demands related to wages, hours of work and other conditions of service. Almost all nationalist newspapers came out fully in support of the strike, with Tilak's newspapers *Mahratta* and *Kesari* campaigning for it for months. Public meetings and fund collections in aid of the strikers were organized in Bombay and Bengal by prominent nationalists like Pherozeshah Mehta, D.E. Wacha and Surendranath Tagore. The fact that the exploiter in these cases was foreign was enough to take agitation against it a national issue and an integral part of national movement. At the turn of the century, with the growth of the working class, there emerged a new tendency among the nationalist intelligentsia. B.C. Pal and G. Subramania Iyer, for example, began to talk of the need for legislation to protect the workers, the weaker section, against the powerful capitalists. In 1903, G. Subramania Iyer urged that workers should combine and organize themselves into unions to fight for their rights and the public must give every help to the workers in achieving this task. The Swadeshi upsurge of 1903-8 was a distinct landmark in the history of the labour movement. An official survey pinpointed the rise of the 'professional agitator' and the 'power of organization' of labour into industrial strikes as the two distinct features of this period. The number of strikes rose sharply and many Swadeshi leaders enthusiastically threw themselves into the tasks of organizing stable trade unions, strikes, legal aid, and fund collection drives. Public meetings in support of striking workers were addressed by national leaders like B.C. Pal, C.R. Das and Liaquat Hussain. Four prominent names among the Swadeshi leaders who dedicated themselves labour struggles were Aswini coomar Banerjea, Prabhat Kumar Roy Chowdhuri, Premtosh Bose and Apurba Kumar Ghose were active in a large number of strikes but their greatest success, both in setting up workers' organizations and in terms of popular support, was among workers in the Government Press, Railways and the jute industry — significantly all areas in which either foreign capital or the colonial state held sway.

Frequent processions in support of the strikers were taken out in the Streets of Calcutta. People fed the processionists on the way. Large numbers including women and even police constables made contributions of money, rice, potatoes, and green vegetables. The first tentative attempts to form all-India unions were also made at this time but these were unsuccessful. The differential attitude towards workers employed in European enterprises and those in Indian ones, however, persisted throughout this period. Perhaps the most important feature of the labour movement during the Swadeshi days was the shift from agitations and struggles on purely economic questions to the involvement of the worker with the wider political issues of the day. The labour movement had graduated from relatively unorganized and spontaneous strikes on economic issues to organized strikes on economic issues with the support of the nation-

alists and then on to working class involvement in wider political movements. The national upsurge on 16 October 1905, the day the partition of Bengal came into effect, included a spurt of working class strikes and hartals in Bengal. Workers in several jute mills and jute press factories, railway coolies and carters, all struck work.

Workers numbering 12,000 in the Bum Company shipyard in Howrah struck work on being refused leave to attend the Federation Hall meeting called by the Calcutta Swadeshi leaders. Workers also went on strike when the management objected to their singing *Bande Mataram* or tying *rakhis* on each others' wrists as a symbol of unity.

In Tuticorin, in Tamil Nadu, Subramania Siva campaigned for a strike in February-March 1908 in a foreign-owned cotton mill saying that strikes for higher wages would lead to the demise of foreign mills. When Siva and the famous Swadeshi leader Chidambaram Pillai were arrested, there were widespread strikes and riots in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli. In Rawalpindi, in Punjab, the arsenal and railway engineering workers went on strike as part of the 1907 upsurge in the Punjab which had led to the deportation of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh. Perhaps the biggest political demonstration by the working class in this period occurred during Tilak's trial and subsequent conviction as has already been discussed earlier.

The Swadeshi period was also to see the faint beginnings of a socialist tinge among some of the radical nationalist leaders who were exposed to the contemporary Marxist and social democratic forces in Europe. The example of the working class movement in Russia as a mechanism of effective political protest began to be urged for emulation in India. With the decline in the nationalist mass upsurge after 1908, the labour movement also suffered an eclipse. It was only with the coming of the next nationalist upsurge in the immediate post World-War I years that the working class movement was to regain its élan, though now on a qualitatively higher plane.

Beginning with the Home Rule Leagues in 1915 and continuing through the Rowlatt *Satyagraha* in 1919, the national movement once again reached a crescendo in the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement in 1920-22. It was in this context that there occurred a resurgence of working class activity in the years from 1919 to 1922. The working class now created its own national level organisation to defend its class rights. It was in this period that the working class also got involved in the mainstream of nationalist politics to a significant extent. The most important development was the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920. Lokamanya Tilak, who had developed a close association with Bombay work, was one of the moving spirits in the formation of the AITUC, which had Lala Lajpat Rai, the famous Extremist leader from Punjab, as its first president and Dewan Chaman Lal, who was to become a major name in the Indian labour movement, as its General Secretary. In his presidential address to the first AITUC, Lala Lajpat Rai emphasized that, '...Indian labour should lose no time to organize itself on a national scale... the greatest need in this Country is to organize, agitate, and educate. We must organize our workers, make them class conscious... ' While aware that 'for some time to come' the workers will need all the help and guidance and cooperation they can get from such among the intellectuals as are prepared to espouse their cause, he maintained that 'eventually labour shall find its leaders from among its own ranks.'

The manifesto issued to the workers by the AITUC urged them not only to organize themselves but also to intervene in nationalist politics: 'Workers of India! . . . Your nation's leaders ask for *Swaraj*, you must not let them, leave you out of the reckoning. Political freedom to you is of no worth without economic freedom. You cannot therefore afford to neglect the movement for national freedom. You are part and parcel of that movement. You will neglect it only at the peril of your liberty.' Lajpat Rai was among the first in India to link capitalism with imperialism and emphasize the crucial of the working class in fighting this combination. He said on 7 November, 1920: 'India... has... been bled by the forces of organized capital and is today lying prostrate at its feet. Militarism and Imperialism are the twin-children of capitalism; they are one in three and three in one. Their shadow, their fruit and their bark all are poisonous. It is only lately that an antidote has been discovered and that antidote is organized labour.' Reflecting the emerging change in nationalist attitudes towards labour employed in Indian enterprise, Lajpat Rai said. 'We are



often told that in order successfully to compete with Manchester and Japan, capital in India should be allowed a high rate of profit and cheap labour is a necessity for that purpose . . . We are not prepared to admit the validity of this plea... An appeal to patriotism must affect the rich and the poor alike, in fact, the rich more than the poor . . . Surely . . . the way to develop Indian industries... is to be... (not) at the expense of labour alone... The Indian capitalist must meet labour half way and must come to an understanding with it on the basis of sharing the profits in a reasonable and just proportion... If, however, Indian capital wants to ignore the needs of labour and can think only of its huge profits, it should expect no response from labour and no sympathy from the general public.' Similarly second-session-of the AITUC, Dewan Chaman Lal while moving a resolution in favour of *Swaraj* pointed out that it was to be a *Swaraj*, not for the capitalists but for the workers. Apart from Lajpat Rai, several of the leading nationalists of the time became closely associated with the AITUC. C.R. Das presided over its third and fourth sessions, and among the other prominent names were those of C.F. Andrews, J.M. Sengupta, Subhas Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Satyamurti. The Indian National Congress at its Gaya session in 1922 welcomed the formation of the AITUC and formed a committee consisting of prominent Congressmen to assist its work.

C.R. Das, in his presidential address to the Gaya Congress, said that the Congress must 'take labour and the peasantry in hand... and organize them both from the point of view of their own special interests and also from the point of view of the higher ideal which demands satisfaction of their special interests and the devotion of such interests to the cause of *Swaraj*.' If this was not done, he warned, organization of workers and peasants would come up 'dissociated from the cause of *Swaraj*' and pursuing 'class struggles and the war of special interest.' The workers responded to the changed political atmosphere in a magnificent manner. In 1920, there were 125 unions with a total membership of 250,000, and large proportion of these had been formed during 1919-20. The workers' participation in the major national political events was also very significant. In April 1919, following the repression in Punjab and Gandhiji's arrest, the working class in Ahmedabad and other parts of Gujarat resorted to strikes, agitations and demonstrations. In Ahmedabad, Government buildings were set on fire, trains derailed, and telegraph wires snapped. Suppression led to at least twenty-eight people being killed and 123 wounded. Waves of working class protest rocked Bombay and Calcutta.

Railway workers' agitations for economic demands and against racial discrimination also coincided with the general anti-colonial mass struggle. Between 1919 and 1921, on several occasions railway workers struck in support of the Rowlatt agitation and the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement. The call for an All-India general strike given by the North Western Railway workers in April 1919 got after enthusiastic response in the northern region. Lajpat Jagga has shown that for railwaymen in large parts of the country Gandhiji came to symbolize resistance to colonial rule and exploitation, just as the Indian Railways symbolized the British Empire, 'the political and commercial will of the Raj.'

In November 1921, at the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales, the workers responded to the Congress call of a boycott by a countrywide general strike. In Bombay, the textile factories were closed and about 1,40,000 workers were on the streets participating in the rioting and attacks on Europeans and Parsis who had gone to welcome the Prince of Wales. The spirit and the urges that moved the workers in these eventful years, the relationship seen between the nationalist upsurge and the workers' own aspirations, is best expressed in the words of Arjun Atmaram Alwe, an illiterate worker in a Bombay textile mill, who was later to become a major figure in the working class movement: 'While our struggle . . . was going on in this manner, the drum of political agitation was being beaten in the country. The Congress started a great agitation demanding rights for India to conduct her own administration. At that time we workers understood the meaning of this demand for *Swaraj* to be only this, that our indebtedness would disappear, the oppression of the moneylender would stop, our wages would increase, and the oppression of the owner on the worker, the kicks and blows with which they belabour us, would stop by legislation, and that as a result of it, the persecution of us workers would come to an end. These and other thoughts came into the minds of us workers, and a good many workers from among us, and I myself, enlisted ourselves as volunteers in the Non-Cooperation movement.' Any discussion of these years would remain incomplete without mentioning the founding in 1918 by Gandhiji of the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (TLA)



which, with 14,000 workers on its rolls, was perhaps the largest single trade union of the time. Too often and too casually had Gandhiji's experiment based on the principle of trusteeship (the capitalist being the trustee of the workers' interest) and arbitration been dismissed as class collaborationist and against the interests of the workers. Apart from the fact that the TLA secured one of the highest hikes in wages (27 to 22 per cent) during a dispute in 1918, Gandhiji's conception of trusteeship also had a radical potential which is usually missed. As Acharya J.B. Kripalani, one of Gandhiji's staunchest followers, explained: 'The Trustee by the very term used means that he is not the owner. The owner is one whose interest he is called upon to protect,' i.e., the worker. Gandhiji himself told the textile workers of Ahmedabad 'that they were the real masters of the mills and if the trustee, the mill owner, did not act in the interest of the real owners, then the workers should offer *Satyagraha* to assert their rights.' Gandhiji's philosophy for labour, with its emphasis on arbitration and trusteeship, also reflected the needs of the anti-imperialist movement which could ill-afford an all-out class war between the constituent classes of the emerging nation. After 1922, there was again a lull in the working class movement, and a reversion to purely economic struggles, that is, to corporatism. The next wave of working class activity came towards the end of the 1920s, this time spurred by the emergence of a powerful and clearly defined Left Bloc in the national movement.

It was in the second half of the 1920s that a consolidation of various Left ideological trends occurred and began to have a significant impact on the national movement. Various Communist groups in different parts of India had by early 1927 organized themselves into the Workers' and Peasants' Parties (WPP), under the leadership of people like S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, P.C. Joshi and Sohan Singh Josh. The WPPs, functioning as a left-wing within the Congress, rapidly gained in strength within the Congress organization at the provincial and the all-India levels.

Also, by working within a broad Left from under the WPPs, Communist influence in the trade union movement, marginal till early 1927, had become very strong indeed, by the end of 1928. In Bombay, following the historic six-month-long general strike by the textile workers (April-September 1928), the Communist led Gimi Kamgar Union (KU) acquired a pre-eminent position. Its membership rose from 324 to 54,000 by the end of 1928. Communist influence also spread to workers in the railways, jute mills, municipalities, paper mills etc., in Bengal and Bombay and in the Burma Oil Company in Madras. In the AITUC too, by the time of the 1928 Jharia session, the broad Left including the Communists had acquired a dominating position. This resulted in the corporatist trend led by people like N.M. Joshi splitting away from the AITUC at the subsequent session presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. By the end of 1928, the Government was anxiously reporting that 'there was hardly a single public utility service or industry which had not been affected in whole or in part, by the wave of communism which swept the country.'

The workers under Communist and radical nationalist influence participated in a large number of strikes and demonstrations all over the country between 1922 and 1929. The AITUC in November 1927 took a decision to boycott the Simon Commission and many workers participated in the massive Simon boycott demonstrations. There were also numerous workers' meetings organized on May Day, Lenin Day, the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and so on. The Government, nervous of the growing militancy and political involvement of the working class, and especially at the coming together of the nationalist and the Left trends, launched a two-pronged attack on the labour movement. On the one hand it enacted repressive laws like the Public Safety Act and Trade Disputes Acts and arrested in one swoop virtually the entire radical leadership of the labour movement and launched the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case against them. On the other hand, it attempted, not without some success, to wean away through concessions (for example the appointment of the Royal Commission on Labour in 1929) a substantial section of the labour movement and commit it to the constitutionalist and corporatist mould.

The labour movement suffered a major setback partially due to this Government offensive and partially due to a shift in stance of the Communist-led wing of the movement. We shall look at this aspect in more detail later on; suffice it to say that from about the end of 1928, the Communists reversed their policy of aligning themselves with and working within the mainstream of the national movement. This led to the isolation of the Communists from the national movement and greatly reduced their hold over even the

working class. The membership of the GKU fell from 54,000 in December 1928 to about 800 by the end of 1929. Similarly, the Communists got isolated within the AITUC and were thrown out in the split of 1931. A CPI document of 1930 clearly brings out the impact of this dissociation from the Civil Disobedience Movement on the workers of Bombay: '... we actually withdrew from the struggle (civil disobedience) and left the field entirely to the Congress. We limited our role to that of a small group. The result was ... that in the minds of workers there grew an opinion that we are doing nothing and that the Congress is the only organization which is carrying on the fight against imperialism and therefore the workers began to follow the lead of the Congress.'

Nevertheless, workers participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement all over the country. The textile workers of Sholapur, dock labourers of Karachi, transport and mill owners of Calcutta, and the mill workers of Madras heroically clashed with the Government during the movement. In Sholapur, between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, the textile workers went on a rampage after the police fired to stop an anti-British procession. Government offices, law courts, police stations and railway stations were attacked and rebels virtually took over the city administration for some days. The national flag was hoisted over the town. The Government had to declare martial law to crush the insurgents. Several workers were hanged or sentenced to long-terms of imprisonment.

In Bombay, where the Congress slogan during civil disobedience was that the 'workers and peasants are the hands and the feet of the Congress,' about 20,000 workers mostly from the GIP Railway struck work on 4 February 1930. The day Gandhiji breached the salt law, 6 April, a novel form of *Satyagraha* was launched by the workers of GIP Railwaymen's Union. Batches of workers went to the suburban stations of North Bombay and prostrated themselves on the tracks with red flags posted in front of them. The police had to open fire to clear the tracks. On 6 July, Gandhi Day was declared by the Congress Working Committee to protest against large scale arrests, and about 50,000 people took part in the *hartal* that day with workers from forty-nine factories downing their tools.

There was a dip in the working class movement between 1931 and 1936. Neither did the workers take an active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932-34. The next wave of working class activity came with provincial autonomy and the formation of popular ministries during 1937-1939. The Communists had, in the meantime, abandoned their suicidal sectarian policies and since 1934 re-enacted the main-stream of nationalist politics. They also rejoined the AITUC in 1935. Left influence in nationalist politics and the trade union movement once again began to grow rapidly. The Communists, the Congress Socialists and the Left nationalists led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose now formed a powerful Left consolidation within the Congress and other mass organizations. When the campaign for the 1937 elections began, the AITUC, barring a few centres, gave its support to the Congress candidates. The Congress election manifesto declared that the Congress would take steps for the settlement of labour disputes and take effective measures for securing the rights to form unions and go on strike. During the tenure of the Congress Provincial Governments the trade union movement showed a phenomenal rise. Between 1937 and 1939 the number of trade unions increased from 271 to 362 and the total membership of these unions increased from 261,047 to 399,159. The number of strikes also increased considerably.

One of the principal factors which gave a fillip to the trade union movement in this period was the increased civil liberties under the Congress Governments and the pro-labour attitude of many of the Congress ministries. It is significant that a peculiar feature of the strikes in this period was that a majority of them ended successfully, with full or partial victory for the workers.' World War II began on 3 September 1939 and the working class of Bombay was amongst the first in the world to hold an anti-war strike on 2 October, 1939. About 90,000 workers participated in the strike. There were several strikes on economic issues all over the country despite the severe repression let loose by a government keen to prevent any disruption of the war effort. However, with the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the Communists argued that the character of the War had changed from an imperialist war to a people's war. It was now the duty of the working class to support the Allied powers to defeat Fascism which threatened the socialist fatherland. Because of this shift in policy, the Communist party dissociated itself from the Quit India



Movement launched by Gandhiji in August 1942. They also successfully followed a policy of industrial peace with employers so that production and war-effort would not be hampered.

The Quit India Movement, however, did not leave the working class untouched, despite the Communist indifference or opposition to it immediately after the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1942, following the Quit India Resolution, there were strikes and *hartals* all over the country, lasting for about a week, by workers in Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Bombay, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Jamshedpur, Madras, Indore and Bangalore. The Tata Steel Plant was closed for thirteen days with the strikers' slogan being that they would not resume work till a national government was formed. In Ahmedabad, the textile strike lasted for about three-and-a-half months with the mill owners in their nationalist euphoria actually co-operating! The participation of workers was, however, low in pockets of Communist influence though in many areas the Communist rank and file, actively joined the call of Quit India despite the party line.

There was a tremendous resurgence in working class activity between 1945-47. The workers in large numbers participated in the post-war political upsurge. They were part of the numerous meetings and demonstrations organized in towns and cities (especially in Calcutta) on the issue of the INA trials. Towards the end of 1945, the Bombay and Calcutta dock workers refused to load ships going to Indonesia with supplies for troops meant to suppress the national liberation struggles of South-East Asia. Perhaps the most spectacular action by the workers in this period was the strike and *hartal* by the Bombay workers in solidarity with the mutiny of the naval ratings in 1946. On 22<sup>nd</sup> February, two to three hundred thousand workers downed their tools, responding to a call given by the Communist Party and supported by the Socialists. Peaceful meetings and demonstrations developed into violent clashes as the police intervened. Barricades were set up on the streets which were the scene of pitched battles with the police and the army. Two army battalions were needed to restore order in the city; nearly 250 agitators laid down their lives.

The last years of colonial rule also saw a remarkably sharp increase in strikes on economic issues all over the country — the all-India strike of the Post and Telegraph Department employees being the most well known among them. The pent-up economic grievances during the War, coupled with the problems due to post-war demobilization and the continuation of high prices, scarcity of food and other essentials, and a drop in real wages, all combined to drive the working class to the limits of its tolerance. Also, the mood in anticipation of freedom was pregnant with expectation. Independence was seen by all sections of the Indian people as signalling an end to their miseries. The workers were no exception. They too were now struggling for what they hoped freedom would bring them as a matter of right.

## THE RISE OF THE LEFTWING

A powerful left-wing group developed in India in the late 1920s and 1930s contributing to the radicalization of the national movement. The goal of political independence acquired a clearer and sharper social and economic content. The stream of national struggle for independence and the stream of the struggle for social and economic emancipation of the suppressed and the exploited began to come together. Socialist ideas acquired roots in the Indian soil; and socialism became the accepted creed of Indian youth whose urges came to be symbolized by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. Gradually there emerged two powerful parties of the Left, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP).

Seminal in this respect was the impact of the Russian Revolution. On 7<sup>th</sup> November 1917, the Bolshevik (Communist) party, led by V.I. Lenin, overthrew the despotic Czarist regime and declared the formation of the first socialist state. The new Soviet regime electrified the colonial world by unilaterally renouncing its imperialist rights in China and other parts of Asia. Another lesson was driven home: If the common people — the workers and peasants and the intelligentsia — could unite and overthrow the mighty Czarist empire and establish a social order where there was no exploitation of one human being by another, then the Indian people battling against British imperialism could also do so. Socialist doctrines, especially Marxism, the guiding theory of the Bolshevik Party, acquired a sudden attraction, especially for the people



of Asia. Bipin Chandra Pal, the famous Extremist leader, wrote in 1919: 'Today after the downfall of German militarism, after the destruction of the autocracy of the Czar, there has grown up all over the world a new power, the power of the people determined to rescue their legitimate rights — the right to live freely and happily without being exploited and victimized by the wealthier and the so-called higher classes.' Socialist ideas now began to spread rapidly especially because many young persons who had participated actively in the Non-Cooperation Movement were unhappy with its outcome and were dissatisfied with Gandhian policies and ideas as well as the alternative *Swarajist* programme. Several socialist and communist groups came into existence all over the country. In Bombay, S.A. Dange published a pamphlet *Gandhi and Lenin* and started the first socialist weekly, *The Socialist*; in Bengal, Muzaffar Ahmed brought out *Navayug* and later founded the *Langal* in cooperation with the poet Nazrul Islam; in Punjab, Ghulam Hussain and others published *Inquilab*; and in Madras, M. Singaravelu founded the *Labour-Kisan Gazette*. Student and youth associations were organized all over the country from 1927 onwards. Hundreds of youth conferences were organized all over the country during 1928 and 1929 with speakers advocating radical solutions for the political, economic and social ills from which the country was suffering. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose toured the country attacking imperialism, capitalism, and landlordism and preaching the ideology of socialism. The Revolutionary Terrorists led by Chandrasekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh also turned to socialism. Trade union and peasant movements grew rapidly throughout the 1920s. Socialist ideas became even more popular during the 1930s as the world was engulfed by the great economic depression. Unemployment soared all over the capitalist world. The world depression brought the capitalist system into disrepute and drew attention towards Marxism and socialism. Within the Congress the left-wing tendency found reflection in the election of Jawaharlal Nehru as president for 1936 and 1937 and of Subhas Bose for 1938 and 1939 and in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party.

It was above all Jawaharlal Nehru who imparted a socialist vision to the national movement and who became the symbol of socialism and socialist ideas in India after 1929. The notion that freedom could not be defined only in political terms but must have a socioeconomic content began increasingly to be associated with his name. Nehru became the president of the historic Lahore Congress of 1929 at a youthful forty. He was elected to the post again in 1936 and 1937. As president of the Congress and as the most popular leader of the national movement after Gandhiji, Nehru repeatedly toured the country, travelling thousands of miles and addressing millions of people. In his books (*Autobiography* and *Glimpses of World History*), articles and speeches, Nehru propagated the ideas of socialism and declared that political freedom would become meaningful only if it led to the economic emancipation of the masses; it had to, therefore, be followed by the establishment of a socialist society, Nehru thus moulded a whole generation of young nationalists and helped them accept a socialist orientation. Nehru developed an interest in economic questions when he came in touch with the peasant movement in eastern U.P. in 1920-21. He then used his enforced leisure in jail, during 1922-23, to read widely on the history of the Russian and other revolutions. In 1927, he attended the international Congress against Colonial Oppression and imperialism, held at Brussels, and came into contact with communists and anti-colonial fighters from all over the world. By now he had begun to accept Marxism in its broad contours. The same year he visited the Soviet Union and was deeply impressed by the new socialist society. On his return he published a book on the Soviet Union on whose title page he wrote Wordsworth's famous lines on French Revolution: 'Bliss was it in that drawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven.' Jawaharlal returned to India, in the words of his biographer S. Gopal, 'a self-conscious revolutionary radical.'

In 1928, Jawaharlal joined hands with Subhas to organize the Independence for India League to fight for complete independence and 'a socialist revision of the economic structure of society.' At the Lahore session of the Congress in 1929, Nehru proclaimed: 'I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have a greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy.' India, he said, would have to adopt a full 'socialist programme' if she was 'to end her poverty and inequality.' It was also not possible for the Congress to hold the balance between capital and labour and landlord and tenant, for the existing balance was 'terribly weighted' in favour of the capitalists and landlords. Nehru's commitment to socialism found a clearer and sharper

expression during 1933-36. Answering the question 'Whither India' in October 1933, he wrote: 'Surely to the great human goal of social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of nation by nation and class by class.' And in December 1933 he wrote: 'The true civic ideal is the socialist ideal, the communist ideal.' He put his commitment to socialism in clear, unequivocal and passionate words in his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in April 1936: 'I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. . . I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation, and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service. During these years, Nehru also emphasized the role of class analysis and class struggle. Nehru developed a complex relationship with Gandhiji during this period. He criticized Gandhiji for refusing to recognize the conflict of classes, for preaching harmony among the exploiters and the exploited, and for putting forward the theories of trusteeship by, and conversion of, the capitalists and landlords. In fact, Nehru devoted a whole chapter in his *Autobiography* to gently combating some of the basic aspects of Gandhian ideology. At the same time, he fully appreciated the radical role that Gandhiji had played and was playing in Indian society. Defending Gandhiji against his left-wing critics, Jawaharlal contended in an article written in January 1936 that 'Gandhi has played a revolutionary role in India of the greatest importance because he knew how to make the most of the objective conditions and could reach the heart of the masses; while groups with a more advanced ideology functioned largely in the air.' Moreover, Gandhiji's actions and teachings had 'inevitably raised mass consciousness tremendously and made social issues vital. And his insistence on the raising of the masses at the cost, wherever necessary, of vested interests has given a strong orientation to the national movement in favour of the masses.' Nehru's advice to other Leftists in 1939 regarding the approach to be adopted towards Gandhiji and the Congress has been well summed up by Mohit Sen: Nehru believed that 'the overwhelming bulk of the Congress was composed of amorphous centrists, that Gandhiji not only represented them but was also essential for any genuinely widespread mass movement, that on no account should the Left be at loggerheads with him or the centrists, but their strategy should rather be to pull the centre to the left — possibilities for which existed, especially as far as Gandhiji was concerned.'

But Nehru's commitment to socialism was given within a framework that recognized the primacy of the political, anti-imperialist struggle so long as India was ruled by the foreigner. In fact the task was to bring the two commitments together without undermining the latter. Thus, he told the Socialists in 1936 that the two basic urges that moved him were 'nationalism and political freedom as represented by the Congress and social freedom as represented by socialism'; and that 'to continue these two outlooks and make them an organic whole is the problem of the Indian socialist.' Nehru, therefore, did not favour the creation of an organization independent of or separate from the Congress or making a break with Gandhiji and the right-wing of the Congress. The task was to influence and transform the Congress as a whole in a socialist direction. And this could be best achieved by working under its banner and bringing its workers and peasants to play a greater role in its organization. And in no case, he felt, should the Left become a mere sect apart from the mainstream of the national movement.

Attracted by the Soviet Union and its revolutionary commitment, a large number of Indian revolutionaries and exiles abroad made their way there. The most well-known and the tallest of them was M.N. Roy, who along with Lenin, helped evolve the Communist International's policy towards the colonies. Seven such Indians, headed by Roy, met at Tashkent in October 1920 and set up a Communist Party of India. Independently of this effort, as we have seen, a number of left-wing and communist groups and organizations had begun to come into existence in India after 1920. Most of these groups came together at Kanpur in December 1925 and founded an all-India organization under the name the Communist Party of India (CPI). After some time, S.V. Ghate emerged as the general secretary of the party. The CPI called upon all its members to enroll themselves as members of the Congress, form a strong left-wing in all its organs, cooperate with all other radical nationalists, and make an effort to transform the Congress into a more radical mass-based organization.



The main form of political work by the early Communists was to organize peasants' and workers' parties and work through them. The first such organization was the Labour-Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress organized by Muzaffar Ahmed, Qazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, and others in Bengal in November 1925. In late 1926, a Congress Labour Party was formed in Bombay and a Kirti-Kisan Party in Punjab. A Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan had been functioning in Madras since 1923. By 1928 all of these provincial organizations had been renamed the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) and knit into an All India party, whose units were also set up in Rajasthan, UP and Delhi. All Communists were members of this party. The basic objective of the WPPs was to work within the Congress to give it a more radical orientation and make it 'the party of the people' and independently organize workers and peasants in class organizations, to enable first the achievement of complete independence and ultimately of socialism. The WPPs grew rapidly and within a short period the communist influence in the Congress began to grow rapidly, especially in Bombay. Moreover, Jawaharlal Nehru and other radical Congressmen welcomed the WPPs' efforts to radicalize the Congress. Along with Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose, the youth leagues and other Left forces, the WPPs played an important role in creating a strong left-wing within the Congress and in giving the Indian national movement a leftward direction. The WPPs also made rapid progress on the trade union front and played a decisive role in the resurgence of working class struggles during 1927-29 as also in enabling Communists to gain a strong position in the working class. The rapid growth of communist and WPP influence over the national movement was, however, checked and virtually wiped out during 1929 and after by two developments. One was the severe repression to which Communists were subjected by the Government. Already in 1922-24, Communists trying to enter India from the Soviet Union had been tried in a series of conspiracy cases at Peshawar and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. In 1924, the Government had tried to cripple the nascent communist movement by trying S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta and Shaikat Usmani in the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. All four were sentenced to four years of imprisonment.

By 1929, the Government was deeply worried about the rapidly growing communist influence in the national and trade union movements. It decided to strike hard. In a sudden swoop, in March 1929, it arrested thirty-two radical political and trade union activists, including three British Communists — Philip Spratt, Ben Bradley and Lester Hutchinson — who had come to India to help organize the trade union movement. The basic aim of the Government was to behead the trade union movement and to isolate the Communists from the national movement. The thirty-two accused were put up for trial at Meerut. The Meerut Conspiracy Case was soon to become a *cause celebre*. The defence of the prisoners was to be taken up by many nationalists including Jawaharlal Nehru, M.A. Ansari and M.C. Chagla. Gandhiji visited the Meerut prisoners in jail to show his solidarity with them and to seek their cooperation in the coming struggle. Speeches of defence made in the court by the prisoners were carried by all the nationalist newspapers thus familiarizing lakhs of people for the first time with communist ideas. The Government design to isolate the Communists from the mainstream of the national movement, not only miscarried but had the very opposite consequence. It did, however, succeed in one respect. The growing working class movement was deprived of its leadership. At this early stage, it was not easy to replace it with a new leadership.

As if the Government blow was not enough, the Communists inflicted a more deadly blow on themselves by taking a sudden lurch towards what is described in leftist terminology as sectarian politics or 'leftist deviation'. Guided by the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, the Communists broke their connection with the National Congress and declared it to be a class party of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the Congress and the bourgeoisie it supposedly represented were declared to have become supporters of imperialism. Congress plans to organize a mass movement around the slogan of *Poorna Swaraj* were seen as sham efforts to gain influence over the masses by bourgeois leaders who were working for a compromise with British imperialism. Congress left leaders, such as Nehru and Bose, were described as 'agents of the bourgeoisie within the national movement who were out to 'bamboozle the mass of workers' and keep the masses under bourgeois influence. The Communists were now out to 'expose' all talk of non-violent struggle and advance the slogan of armed struggle against imperialism, in 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was described as a proof of the Congress betrayal of nationalism.



Finally, the Workers' and Peasants' Party was also dissolved on the ground that it was inadvisable to form a two-class (workers' and peasants') party for it was likely to fall prey to petty bourgeois influences. The Communists were to concentrate, instead, on the formation of an 'illegal, independent and centralized' communist party. The result of this sudden shift in the Communists' political position was their isolation from the national movement at the very moment when it was gearing up for its greatest mass struggle and conditions were ripe for massive growth in the influence of the Left over it. Further, the Communists split into several splinter groups. The Government took further advantage of this situation and, in 1934, declared the CPI illegal.

The Communist movement was, however, saved from disaster because, on the one hand, many of the Communists refused to stand apart from the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and participated actively in it, and, on the other hand, socialist and communist ideas continued to spread in the country. Consequently, many young persons who participated in the CDM or in Revolutionary Terrorist organizations were attracted by socialism, Marxism and the Soviet Union, and joined the CPI after 1934. The situation underwent a radical change in 1935 when the Communist Party was reorganized under the leadership of P.C. Joshi. Faced with the threat of fascism the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, meeting at Moscow in August 1935, radically changed its earlier position and advocated the formation of a united front with socialists and other anti-fascists in the capitalist Countries and with bourgeois-led nationalist movements in colonial countries. The Indian Communists were to once again participate in the activities of the mainstream of the national movement led by the National Congress. The theoretical and political basis for the change in communist politics in India was laid in early 1936 by a document popularly known as the Dun-Bradley Thesis. According to this thesis, the National Congress could play 'a great part and a foremost part in the work of realizing the anti-imperialist people's front.'

The Communist Party now began to call upon its members to join the Congress and enroll the masses under their influence to the Congress. In 1938, it went further and accepted that the Congress was 'the central mass political organization of the Indian people ranged against imperialism.' And, in 1939, P.C. Joshi wrote in the party weekly, *National Front*, that the greatest class struggle today is our national struggle' of which Congress was the 'main organ.' At the same time, the party remained committed to the objective of bringing the national movement under the hegemony of the working class, that is, the Communist Party. Communists now worked hard inside the Congress. Many occupied official positions inside the Congress district and provincial committees; nearly twenty were members of the All-India Congress Committee. During 1936-42, they built up powerful peasant movements in Kerala, Andhra, Bengal and Punjab. What is more important, they once again recovered their popular image of being the most militant of anti-imperialists.

The move towards the formation of a socialist party was made in the jails during 1930-31 and 1932-34 by a group of young Congressmen who were disenchanted with Gandhian strategy and leadership and attracted by socialist ideology. Many of them were active in the youth movement of the late 1920s. In the jails they studied and discussed Marxian and other socialist ideas. Attracted by Marxism, communism and Soviet Union, they did not find themselves in agreement with the prevalent political line of the CPI. Many of them were groping towards an alternative. Ultimately they came together and formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) at Bombay in October 1934 under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Minoo Masani. From the beginning, all the Congress socialists were agreed upon four basic propositions: that the primary struggle in India was the national struggle for freedom and that nationalism was a necessary stage on the way to socialism; that socialists must work inside the National Congress because it was the primary body leading the national struggle and, as Acharya Narendra Dev put it in 1934, It would be a suicidal policy for us to cut ourselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represents; that they must give the Congress and the national movement a socialist direction; and that to achieve this objective they must organize the workers and peasants in their class organizations, wage struggles for their economic demands and make them the social base of the national struggle."

The CSP from the beginning assigned itself the task of both transforming the Congress and of strengthening it. The task of transforming the Congress was understood in two senses. One was the ideological sense. Congressmen were to be gradually persuaded to adopt a socialist vision of independent India and a more radical pro-labour and pro-peasant stand on current economic issues. This ideological and programmatic transformation was, however, to be seen not as an event but as a process. As Jayaprakash Narayan repeatedly told his followers in 1934: 'We are placing before the Congress a programme and we want the Congress to accept it. If the Congress does not accept it, we do not say we are going out of the Congress. If today we fail, tomorrow we will try and if tomorrow we fail, we will try again.' The transformation of the Congress was also seen in an organizational sense, that is, in terms of changes in its leadership at the top. Initially, the task was interpreted as the displacement of the existing leadership, which was declared to be incapable of developing the struggle of the masses to a higher level. The CSP was to develop as the nucleus of the alternative socialist leadership of the Congress. As the Meerut Thesis of the CSP put it in 1935, the task was to 'wean the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from its present bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism.' This perspective was, however, soon found to be unrealistic and was abandoned in favour of a 'composite' leadership in which socialists would be taken into the leadership at all levels. The notion of alternate Left leadership of the Congress and the national movement came up for realization twice at Tripuri in 1939 and at Ramgarh in 1940. But when it came to splitting the Congress on a Left-Right basis and giving the Congress an executive left-wing leadership, the CSP (as also the CPI) shied away. Its leadership (as also CPI's) realized that such an effort would not only weaken the national movement but isolate the Left from the mainstream, that the Indian people could be mobilized into a movement only under Gandhiji's leadership and that, in fact, there was at the time no alternative to Gandhiji's leadership. However, unlike Jawaharlal Nehru, the leadership of the CSP, as also of other Left groups and parties, was not able to fully theorize or internalize this understanding and so it went back again and again to the notion of alternative leadership. The CSP was, however, firmly well grounded in the reality of the Indian situation. Therefore, it never carried its opposition to the existing leadership of the Congress to breaking point. Whenever it came to the crunch, it gave up its theoretical position and adopted a realistic approach close to that of Jawaharlal Nehru's. This earned it the condemnation of the other left-wing groups and parties — for example, in 1939, they were chastised for their refusal to support Subhas Bose in his confrontation with Gandhiji and the Right wing of the Congress. At such moments, the socialists defended themselves and revealed flashes of an empiricist understanding of Indian reality. Jayaprakash Narayan, for example, said in 1939 after Tripuri: 'We Socialists do not want to create factions in the Congress nor do we desire to displace the old leadership of the Congress and to establish rival leadership. We are only concerned with the policy and programme of the Congress. We only want to influence the Congress decisions. Whatever our differences with the old leaders, we do not want to quarrel with them. We all want to march shoulder to shoulder in our common fight against imperialism.'

From the beginning the CSP leaders were divided into three broad ideological currents: the Marxian, the Fabian and the current influenced by Gandhiji. This would not have been a major weakness — in fact it might have been a source of strength — for a broad socialist party which was a movement. But the CSP was already a part, and a cadre-based party at that, within a movement that was the National Congress. Moreover, the Marxism of the 1930s was incapable of accepting as legitimate such diversity of political currents on the Left. The result was a confusion which plagued the CSP till the very end. The party's basic ideological differences were papered over for a long time because of the personal bonds of friendship and a sense of comradeship among most of the founding leaders of the party, the acceptance of Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan as its senior leaders, and its commitment to nationalism and socialism.

Despite the ideological diversity among the leaders, the CSP as a whole accepted a basic identification of socialism with Marxism. Jayaprakash Narayan, for example, observed in his book *Why Socialism?* that 'today more than ever before it is possible to say that there is only one type, one theory of Socialism — Marxism.' Gradually, however as Gandhiji's politics began to be more positively evaluated, large doses of Gandhian and liberal democratic thought were to become basic elements of the CSP leadership's thinking.



Several other groups and currents developed on the Left in the 1930s. M.N. Roy came back to India in 1930 and organized a strong group of Royists who underwent several political and ideological transformations over the years. Subhas Bose and his left-wing followers founded the Forward Bloc in 1939 after Bose was compelled to resign from the Presidentship of the Congress. The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and various Trotskyist groups also functioned during the 1930s. There were also certain prestigious left-wing individuals, such as Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Professor N.G. Ranga, and Indulal Yagnik, who worked outside the framework of any organized left-wing party. The CPI, the CSP and Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and other Left groups and leaders all shared a common political programme which enabled them, despite ideological and organizational differences, to work together after 1935 and make socialism a strong current in Indian politics. The basic features of this programme were: consistent and militant anti-imperialism, anti-landlordism, the organization of workers and peasants in trade unions and *kisan sabhas*, the acceptance of a socialist vision of independent India and of the socialist programme of the economic and social transformation of society, and an antifascist, anti-colonial and anti-war foreign policy.

Despite the fact that the Left cadres were among the most courageous, militant and sacrificing of freedom fighters, the Left failed in the basic task it had taken upon itself— to establish the hegemony of socialist ideas and parties over the national movement. It also failed to make good the promise it held out in the 1930s. This is, in fact, a major enigma for the historian. Several explanations for this complex phenomenon suggest themselves. The Left invariably fought the dominant Congress leadership on wrong issues and, when it came to the crunch, was either forced to trail behind that leadership or was isolated from the national movement. Unlike the Congress right-wing, the Left failed to show ideological and tactical flexibility. It sought to oppose the right-wing with simplistic formulae and radical rhetoric. It fought the right-wing on slippery and wrong grounds. It chose to fight not on questions of ideology but on methods of struggle and on tactics. For example, its most serious charge against the Congress right-wing was that it wanted to compromise with imperialism, that it was frightened of mass struggle, that its anti-imperialism was not wholehearted because of bourgeois influence over it. The right-wing had little difficulty in disposing of such charges. The people rightly believed it and not the Left. Three important occasions may be cited as examples. In 1936-37, the Left fought the Right within the Congress on the issue of elections and office acceptance which was seen as a compromise with imperialism. In 1939-42, the fight was waged on the issue of the initiation of a mass movement, when Gandhiji's reluctance was seen as an aspect of his soft attitude towards imperialism and as the missing of a golden opportunity. And, in 1945-47, the Left confronted the dominant Congress leadership, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, on the question of negotiations for the transfer of power, which were seen as British imperialism's last ditch effort to prolong their domination and the tired Congress leadership's hunger for power or even betrayal.

The Left also failed to make a deep study of Indian reality. With the exception of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Left saw the dominant Congress leadership as bourgeois its policy of negotiations as working towards a compromise with imperialism any resort to constitutional work as a step towards the 'abandonment of the struggle for independence'. It took recourse to a simplistic model of analysing Indian social classes and their political behaviour. It saw all efforts to guide the national movement in a disciplined manner as imposing restrictions on the movement. It constantly counterposed armed struggle to nonviolence as a superior form and method of struggle, rather than concentrating on the nature of mass involvement and mobilization and ideology. It was convinced that the masses were ever ready for struggles in any form if only the leaders were willing to initiate them. It constantly overestimated its support among the people. Above all, the Left failed to grasp the Gandhian strategy of struggle. A major weakness of the Left was the failure of the different Left parties, groups and individuals to work unitedly except for short periods. All efforts at forging a united front of left-wing elements ended in frustration. Their doctrinal disputes and differences were too many and too passionately held, and the temperamental differences among the leaders overpowering. Nehru and Bose could not work together for long and bickered publicly in 1939. Nehru and the Socialists could not coordinate their politics. Bose and Socialists drifted apart after 1939. The CSP and the Communists made herculean efforts to work together from 1935 to 1940: The CSP opened its doors to Communists and Royists in 1935 so that the illegal Communist Party could have legal avenues



for political work. But the Socialists and Communists soon drifted apart and became sworn enemies. The inevitable result was a long-term schism between the Socialists who suffered from an anti-Communist phobia and Communists who saw every Socialist leader as a potential bourgeois or (after 1947) American agent.

The Left did succeed in making a basic impact on Indian society and politics. The organization of workers and peasants, discussed elsewhere, was one of its greatest achievements. Equally important was its impact on the Congress. Organizationally, the Left was able to command influence over nearly one-third of the votes in the All-India Congress Committee on important issues. Nehru and Bose were elected Congress presidents from 1936 to 1939. Nehru was able to nominate three prominent Socialists, Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan, to his Working Committee. In 1939, Subhas Bose, as a candidate of the Left, was able to defeat Pattabhi Sitaramayya in the presidential election by a majority of 1580 to 1377.

Politically and ideologically, the Congress as a whole was given a strong Left orientation. As Nehru put it, Indian nationalism had been powerfully pushed 'towards vital social changes, and today it hovers, somewhat undecided, on the brink of a new social ideology.' The Congress, including its right-wing, accepted that the poverty and misery of the Indian people was the result not only of colonial domination but also of the internal socio-economic structure of Indian society which had, therefore, to be drastically transformed. The impact of the Left on the national movement was reflected in the resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy passed by the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931, the resolutions on economic policy passed at the Faizpur session in 1936, the Election Manifesto of the Congress in 1936, the setting up of a National Planning Committee in 1938, and the increasing shift of Gandhiji towards radical positions on economic and class issues. The foundation of the All-India Students' Federation and the Progressive Writers' Association and the convening of the first All-India States' People's Conference in 1936 were some of the other major achievements of the Left. The Left was also very active in the All-India Women's Conference. Above all, two major parties of the Left, the Communist Party and the Congress Socialist Party, had been formed, and were being built up.

### PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN THE 1930s AND '40s

The 1930s bore witness to a new and nation-wide awakening of Indian peasants to their own strength and capacity to organize for the betterment of their living conditions. This awakening was largely a result of the combination of particular economic and political developments: the great Depression that began to hit India from 1929-30 and the new phase of mass struggle launched by the Indian National Congress in 1930. The Depression which brought agricultural prices crashing down to half or less of their normal levels dealt a severe blow to the already impoverished peasants burdened with high taxes and rents. The Government was obdurate in refusing to scale down its own rates of taxation or in asking zamindars to bring down their rents. The prices of manufactured goods, too, didn't register comparable decreases. All told, the peasants were placed in a situation where they had to continue to pay taxes, rents, and debts at pre-Depression rates while their incomes continued to spiral steadily downward. The Civil Disobedience Movement was launched in this atmosphere of discontent in 1930, and in many parts of the country it soon took on the form of a no-tax and no-rent campaign. Peasants, emboldened by the recent success of the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928), joined the protest in large numbers. In Andhra, for example, the political movement was soon enmeshed with the campaign against re-settlement that threatened an increase in land revenue. In U.P., no-revenue soon turned into no-rent and the movement continued even during the period of truce following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Gandhiji himself issued a manifesto to the U.P. kisans asking them to pay only fifty per cent of the legal rent and get receipts for payment of the full amount. Peasants in Gujarat, especially in Surat and Kheda, refused to pay their taxes and went *hijrat* to neighbouring Baroda territory to escape government repression. Their lands and movable property were confiscated. In Bihar and Bengal, powerful movements were launched against the hated *chowkidari* tax by which villagers were made to pay for the upkeep of their own oppressors. In Punjab, a no-revenue campaign was accompanied by the emergence of *kisan sabhas* that demanded a reduction in land revenue and

water-rates and the scaling down of debts. Forest *satyagrahas* by which peasants, including tribals, defied the forest laws that prohibited them from use of the forests were popular in Maharashtra, Bihar and the Central Provinces. *Anti-zamindari* struggles emerged in Andhra, and the first target was the Venkatagiri *zamindari*, in Nellore district.

The Civil Disobedience Movement contributed to the emerging peasant movement in another very important way; a whole new generation of young militant, political cadres was born from its womb. This new generation of political workers, which first received its baptism of fire in the Civil Disobedience Movement, was increasingly brought under the influence of the Left ideology that was being propagated by Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, the Communists and other Marxist and Left individuals and groups. With the decline of the Civil Disobedience Movement, these men and women began to search for an outlet of their political energies and many of them found the answer in organizing the peasants. Also, in 1934, with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), the process of the consolidation of the Left forces received a significant push forward. The Communists, too, got the opportunity, by becoming members of the CSP to work in an open and legal fashion. This consolidation of the Left acted as a spur to the formation of an all-India body to coordinate the *kisan* movement, a process that was already under way through the efforts of N.G. Ranga and other *kisan* leaders. The culmination was the establishment of the All-India *Kisan* Congress in Lucknow in April 1936 which later changed its name to the All-India *kisan Sabha*. Swami Sahajanand, the militant founder of the Bihar Provincial *Kisan Sabha* (1929), was elected the President, and N.G. Ranga, the pioneer of the *kisan* movement in Andhra and a renowned scholar of the agrarian problem, the General Secretary. The first session was greeted in person by Jawaharlal Nehru. Other participants included Ram Manohar Lohia, Sohan Singh Josh, Indulal Yagnik, Jayaprakash Narayan, Mohanlal Gautam, Kamal Sarkar, Sudhin Pramanik and Ahmed Din. The Conference resolved to bring out a *Kisan* Manifesto and a periodic bulletin edited by Indulal Yagnik. A *Kisan* Manifesto was finalized at the All-India *Kisan* Committee session in Bombay and formally presented to the Congress Working Committee to be incorporated into its forthcoming manifesto for the 1937 elections. The *Kisan* Manifesto considerably influenced the agrarian programme adopted by the Congress at its Faizpur session, which included demands for fifty per cent reduction in land revenue and rent, a moratorium on debts, the abolition of feudal levies, security of tenure for tenants, a living wage for agricultural labourers, and the recognition of peasant unions.

At Faizpur, in Maharashtra, along with the Congress session, was held the second session of the All India *Kisan* Congress presided over by N.G. Ranga. Five hundred *kisans* marched for over 200 miles from Manmad to Faizpur educating the people along the way about the objects of the *Kisan* Congress. They were welcomed at Faizpur by Jawaharlal Nehru, Shankar Rao Deo, M.N. Roy, Narendra Dev, S.A. Dange, M.R. Masani, Yusuf Meherally, Bankim Mukherji and many other *Kisan* and Congress leaders. Ranga, in his Presidential Address, declared: 'We are organizing ourselves in order to prepare ourselves for the final inauguration of a Socialist state and society.'

The formation of Congress Ministries in a majority of the provinces in early 1937 marked the beginning of a new phase in the growth of the peasant movement. The political atmosphere in the country underwent a marked change: increased civil liberties, a new sense of freedom born of the feeling that 'our own people are in power', a heightened sense of expectation that the ministries would bring in pro-people measures — all combined to make the years 1937-39 the high-water mark of the peasant movement. The different Ministries also introduced varying kinds of agrarian legislation — for debt relief, restoration of lands lost during the Depression, for security of tenure to tenants and this provided an impetus for the mobilization of the peasantry either in support of proposed legislation or for asking for changes in its content.

The chief form of mobilization was through the holding of *kisan* conferences or meetings at the *thana*, *taluka*, district and provincial levels at which peasants' demands would be aired and resolutions passed. These conferences would be addressed by local, provincial and all-India leaders. These would also usually be preceded by a campaign of mobilization at the village level when *kisan* workers would tour the villages, hold meetings, enroll Congress and *kisan Sabha* members, collect subscriptions in money and kind



and exhort the peasants to attend the conferences in large numbers. Cultural shows would be organized at these conferences to carry the message of the movement to the peasants in an appealing manner. The effect on the surrounding areas was powerful indeed, and peasants returned from these gatherings with a new sense of their own strength and a greater understanding of their own conditions. In Malabar, in Kerala, for example, a powerful peasant movement developed as the result of the efforts mainly of CSP activists, who had been working among the peasants since 1934, touring villages and setting up *Karshaka Sanghams* (peasant associations). The main demands, around which the movement cohered, were for the abolition of feudal levies or *akramapirivukal*, renewal fees or the practice of *policceluthu*, advance rent, and the stopping of eviction of tenants by landlords on the ground of personal cultivation. Peasants also demanded a reduction in the tax, rent, and debt burden, and the use of proper measures by landlords when measuring the grain rent, and an end to the corrupt practices of the landlords' managers. The main forms of mobilization and agitation were the formation of village units of the *Karshaka Sanghams*, conferences and meetings. But a form that became very popular and effective was the marching of *jathas* or large groups of peasants to the houses of big *jenmies* or landlords, placing the demands before them and securing immediate redressal. The main demand of these *jathas* was for the abolition of feudal levies such as *vasi*, *nuri*, etc. The *Karshaka Sanghams* also organized a powerful campaign around the demand for amending the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929. The 6th of November, 1938 was observed as the Malabar Tenancy Act Amendment Day and meetings all over the district passed a uniform resolution pressing the demand. A committee headed by R. Ramachandra Nedumgadi was appointed by the All Malabar *Karshaka Sangham* to enquire into the tenurial problem and its recommendations were endorsed by the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee on 20 November 1938. In December, two *jathas* of five hundred each started from Karivallur in north Malabar and Kanjikode in the south and, after being received and hosted by local Congress Committees en route converged at Chevayur near Calicut where the All Malabar *Karshaka Sangham* was holding its conference. A public meeting was held the same evening at Calicut beach presided over by P. Krishna Pillai, the CSP and later Communist leader, and resolutions demanding amendments in the Tenancy Act were passed. In response to popular pressure, T. Prakasam, the Andhra Congress leader who was the Revenue Minister in the Congress Ministry in Madras Presidency, toured Malabar in December 1938 to acquaint himself with the tenant problem. A Tenancy Committee was set up which included three left-wing members. The *Karshaka Sangham* units and Congress committees held a series of meetings to mobilize peasants to present evidence and to submit memoranda to the Committee. But, by the time the Committee submitted its report in 1940, the Congress Ministries had already resigned and no immediate progress was possible. But the campaign had successfully mobilized the peasantry on the tenancy question and created an awareness that ensured that in later years these demands would inevitably have to be accepted. Meanwhile, the Madras Congress Ministry had passed legislation for debt relief, and this was welcomed by the *Karshaka Sangham*. In coastal Andhra, too, the mobilization of peasants proceeded on an unprecedented scale. The Andhra Provincial Ryots Association and the Andhra Zamin Ryots Association already had a long history of successful struggle against the Government and *zamindars*. In addition, N.G. Ranga had, since 1933, been running the Indian Peasants' Institute in his home village of Nidobrolu in Guntur district which trained peasants to become active workers of the peasant movement. After 1936, leftwing Congressmen, members of the CSP, many of whom were to later join the CPI also joined in the effort to organize the peasants, and the name of P. Sundarayya was the foremost among them.

The defeat of many *zamindar* and *pro-zamindar* candidates in the 1937 elections by Congress candidates dealt a blow to the *zamindars* prestige and gave confidence to the *zamindari ryots*. Struggles were launched against the Bobbili and Mungala *zamindaris*, and a major struggle erupted against the Kalipatnam *zamindari* over cultivation and fishing rights. In coastal Andhra, the weapon of peasant marches had already been used effectively since 1933. Peasant marchers would converge on the district or *taluka* headquarters and present a list of demands to the authorities. But, in 1938, the Provincial Kisan Conference organized, for the first time, a march on a massive scale — a true long march in which over 2,000 *kisans* marched a distance of over 1,500 miles, starting from Itchapur in the north, covering nine districts and walking for a total of 130 days. En route, they held hundreds of meetings attended by lakhs of peas-



ants and collected over 1,100 petitions; these were then presented to the provincial legislature in Madras on 27 March 1938. One of their main demands was for debt relief, and this was incorporated in the legislation passed by the Congress Ministry and was widely appreciated in Andhra. In response to the peasants' demands the Ministry had appointed a *Zamindari* Enquiry Committee, but the legislation based on its recommendations could not be passed before the Congress Ministries resigned.

Another notable feature of the movement in Andhra was the organization of Summer Schools of Economics and Politics for peasant activists. These training camps, held at Kothapatnam, Mantenavaripalarn and other places were addressed by many of the major Left Communist leaders of the time including P.C. Joshi, Ajoy Ghosh and R.D. Bhardwaj. Lectures were delivered on Indian history, the history of the national struggle on Marxism, on the Indian economy and numerous associated subjects. Money and provisions for running these training camps were collected from the peasants of Andhra. The celebration of various *kisan* and other 'days,' as well as the popularization of peasant songs, was another form of mobilization.

Bihar was another major area of peasant mobilization in this period. Swami Sahajanand., the founder of the Bihar Provincial *Kisan Sabha* and a major leader of the All India *Kisan Sabha*, was joined by many other left-wing leaders like Karyanand Sharma, Rahul Sankritayan, Panchanan Sharma and Yadunandan Sharma in spreading the *kisan sabha* organization to the village of Bihar. The Bihar Provincial *Kisan Sabha* effectively used meetings, conferences, rallies, and mass demonstrations, including a demonstration of one lakh peasants at Patna in 1938, to popularize the *kisan Sabha* programme. The slogan of *zamindari* abolition, adopted by the Sabha in 1935, was popularized among the peasants through resolutions passed at these gatherings. Other demands included the stopping of illegal levies, the prevention of eviction of tenants and the return of *Bakasht* lands. The Congress Ministry had initiated legislation for the reduction of rent and the restoration of *Bakasht* lands. *Bakasht* lands were those which the occupancy tenants had lost to *zamindars*, mostly during the Depression years, by virtue of nonpayment of rent, and which they often continued to cultivate as share-croppers. But the formula that was finally incorporated in the legislation on the basis of an agreement with the *zamindars* did not satisfy the radical leaders of the *kisan Sabha*. The legislation gave a certain proportion of the lands back to the tenants on condition that they pay half the auction price of the land. Besides, certain categories of land had been exempted from the operation of the law.

The *Bakasht* lands issue became a major ground of contention between the *Kisan Sabha* and the Congress Ministry. Struggles, such as the one already in progress in Barahiya tal in Monghyr district under the leadership of Karyanand Shanna, were continued and new ones emerged. At Reora, in Gaya district, with Yadunandan Sharma at their head, the peasants won a major victory when the District Magistrate gave an award restoring 850 out of the disputed 1,000 *bighas* to the tenants. This gave a major fillip to the movement elsewhere. In Darbhanga, movements emerged in Padri, Raghopore, Dekuli and Pandoul. Jamuna Karjee led the movement in Saran district, and Rahul Sankritayan in Annawari. The movements adopted the methods of Satyagraha, and forcible sowing and harvesting of crops. The *zamindars* retaliated by using *lathials* to break up meetings and terrorize the peasants. Clashes with the *zamindars'* men became the order of the day and the police often intervened to arrest the leaders and activists. In some places, the government and other Congress leaders intervened to bring a compromise. The movement on the *Bakasht* issue reached its peak in late 1938 and 1939, but by August 1939 a combination of concessions, legislation and the arrest of about 600 activists succeeded in quietening the peasants. The movement was resumed in certain pockets in 1945 and continued in one form or another till *zamindari* was abolished. Punjab was another centre of *kisan* activity. Here, too, the *kisan sabhas* that had emerged in the early 1930s, through the efforts of Naujawan Bharat Sabha, *Kirti Kisan*. Congress and Akali activists, were given a new sense of direction and cohesion by the Punjab *Kisan* Committee formed in 1937. The pattern of mobilization was the familiar one — *kisan* workers toured villages enrolling *kisan Sabha* and Congress members, organizing meetings, mobilizing people for the *tehsils*, district and provincial level conferences (which were held with increasing frequency and attended by an array of national stars). The main demands related to the reduction of taxes and a moratorium on debts. The target of attack was the Unionist Ministry, dominated by the big landlords of Western Punjab. The two issues that came up for an immedi-

ate struggle were the resettlement of land revenue of Amritsar and Lahore districts and the increase in the canal tax or water-rate. *Jathas* marched to the district headquarters and huge demonstrations were held. The culmination was the Lahore Kisan Morcha in 1939 in which hundreds of *kisans* from many districts of the province courted arrest. A different kind of struggle broke out in the Multan and Montgomery canal colony areas. Here large private companies that had leased this recently-colonized land from the government and some big landlords insisted on recovering a whole range of feudal levies from the share-croppers who tilled the land. The *kisan* leaders organized the tenants to resist these exactions which had recently been declared illegal by a government notification and there were strikes by cultivators in some areas in which they refused to pick cotton and harvest the crops. Many concessions were won as a result. The tenants' struggle, I suspended as a result of the War, was resumed in 1946-47. The peasant movement in Punjab was mainly located in the Central districts, the most active being the districts of Jullundur, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Lyalpur and Sheikhpura. These districts were the home of the largely self-cultivating Sikh peasantry that had already been mobilized into the national struggle via the Gurdwara Reform Movement of the early 1920s and the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930-32. The Muslim tenants-at-will of Western Punjab, the most backward part of the province, as well as the Hindu peasants of South-eastern Punjab (the present day Haryana) largely remained outside the ambit of the *Kisan* Movement. The tenants of Montgomery and Multan districts mobilized by the *kisan* leaders were also mostly emigrants from Central Punjab, Baba Sohan Singh, Teja Singh Swatantar, Baba Rur Singh, Master Han Singh, Bhagat Singh Bilga, and Wadhawa Ram were some of the important peasant leaders.'

The princely states in Punjab also witnessed a major outbreak of peasant discontent. The most powerful movement emerged in Patiala and was based on the demand for restoration of lands illegally seized by a landlord-official combine through various forms of deceit and intimidation. The *muzaras* (tenants) refused to pay the *batai* (share rent) to their *biswedars* (landlords) and in this they were led by Left leaders like Bhagwan Singh Longowalia and Jagir Singh Joga and in later years by Teja Singh Swatantar. This struggle continued intermittently till 1953 when legislation enabling the tenants to become owners of their land was passed.

In other parts of the country as well, the mobilization of peasants around the demands for security of tenure, abolition of feudal levies, reduction of taxes and debt relief, made major headway. In Bengal, under the leadership of Bankim Mukherji, the peasants of Burdwan agitated against the enhancement of the canal tax on the Damodar canal and secured major concessions. *Kisans* of the 24-Parganas pressed their demands by a march to Calcutta in April 1938. In Surma Valley, in Assam, a no-rent struggle continued for six months against *zamindari* oppression and Karuna Sindhu Roy conducted a major campaign for amendment of the tenancy law. In Orissa, the Utkal Provincial *Kisan Sabha*, organized by Malati Chowdhury and others in 1935, succeeded in getting the *kisan* manifesto accepted by the PCC as part of its election manifesto, and the Ministry that followed introduced significant agrarian legislation. In the Orissa States, a powerful movement in which tribals also participated was led on the question of forced labour, rights in forests, and the reduction of rent. Major clashes occurred in Dhenkanal and thousands fled the state to escape repression. The *kisans* of Ghalla Dhir state in the North-West Frontier Province protested against evictions and feudal exactions by their Nawab. In Gujarat the main demand was for the abolition of the system of *hail* (bonded labour) and a significant success was registered. The Central Provinces *Kisan Sabha* led a march to Nagpur demanding the abolition of the *malguzari* system, reduction of taxes and moratorium on debts.

The rising tide of peasant awakening was checked by the outbreak of World War II which brought about the resignation of the Congress Ministries and the launching of severe repression against left-wing and *kisan Sabha* leaders and workers because of their strong anti-War stance. The adoption by the CM of the Peoples' War line in December 1941 following Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union created dissensions between the Communist and non-Communist members of the *kisan Sabha*. These dissensions came to a head with the Quit India Movement, in which Congress Socialist members played a leading role. The CPI because of its pro-War People's War line asked its cadres to stay away, and though many local level workers did join the Quit India Movement, the party line sealed the rift in the *kisan sabha* ranks, resulting



in a split in 1943. In these year' three major leaders of the All India *Kisan Sabha*, N.G. Ranga, Swam, Saha-janand Saraswati and Indulal Yagnik, left the organization. Nevertheless, during the War years the *kisan Sabha* continued to play an important role in various kinds of relief work, as for example in the Bengal Famine of 1943 and helped to lessen the rigour of shortages of essential goods, rationing and the like. It also continued its organizational work, despite being severely handicapped by its taking the unpopular pro- War stance which alienated it from various sections of the peasantry.

The end of the War, followed by the negotiations for the transfer of power and the anticipation of freedom, marked a qualitatively new stage in the development of the peasant movement. A new spirit was evident and the certainty of approaching freedom with the promise of a new social order encouraged peasants, among other social groups, to assert their rights and claims with a new vigour.

Many struggles that had been left off in 1939 were renewed. The demand for *zamindari* abolition was pressed with a greater sense of urgency. The organization of agricultural workers in Andhra which had begun a few years earlier took on the form of a struggle for higher wages and use of standard measures for payment of wages in kind. The peasants of Punnapra-Vayalar in Travancore fought bloody battles with the administration. In Telengana, the peasants organized themselves to resist the landlords' oppression and played an important role in the anti-Nizam struggle. Similar events took place in other parts of the country. But in British India, it was the *tebhaga* struggle in Bengal that held the limelight. In late 1946, the share-croppers of Bengal began to assert that they would no longer pay a half share of their crop to the *jotedars* but only one-third and that before division the crop would be stored in their *khamars* (godowns) and not that of the *jotedars*. They were no doubt encouraged by the fact that the Bengal Land Revenue Commission, popularly known as the Flood Commission, had already made this recommendation in its report to the government. The Hajong tribals were simultaneously demanding commutation of their kind rents into cash rents. The *tebhaga* movement, led by the Bengal Provincial *Kisan Sabha*, soon developed into a clash between *jotedars* and *bargadars* with the *bargadars* insisting on storing the crop in their own *khamars*.

The movement received a great boost in late January 1947 when the Muslim League Ministry led by Suhrawardy published the Bengal Bargadars Temporary Regulation Bill in the *Calcutta Gazette* on 22 January 1947. Encouraged by the fact that the demand for *tebhaga* could no longer be called illegal, peasants in hitherto untouched villages and areas joined the struggle. In many places, peasants tried to remove the paddy already stored in the *jotedars'* *khamars* to their own, and this resulted in innumerable clashes.

The *jotedars* appealed to the Government, and the police came in to suppress the peasants. Major clashes ensued at a few places, the most important being the one at Khanpur in which twenty peasants were killed. Repression continued and by the end of February the movement was virtually dead. A few incidents occurred in March as well, but these were only the death pangs of a dying struggle. The Muslim League Ministry failed to pursue the bill in the Assembly and it was only in 1950 that the Congress Ministry passed a Bargadars Bill which incorporated, in substance, the demands of the movement. The main centres of the movement were Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Mymensingh, Midnapore, and to a lesser extent 24-Parganas and Khulna. Initially, the base was among the Rajbansi Kshatriya peasants, but it soon spread to Muslims, Hajongs, Santhals and Oraons. Among the important leaders of this movement were Krishnobinode Ray, Abani Lahiri, Sunil Sen, Bhowani Sen, Moni Singh, Ananta Singh, Bhibuti Guha, Ajit Ray, Sushil Sen, Samar Ganguli, and Gurudas Talukdar.

To draw up a balance sheet of such a diverse and varied struggle is no easy task, but it can be asserted that perhaps the most important contribution of the peasant movements that covered large areas of the subcontinent in the 30s and 40s was that even when they did not register immediate successes, they created the climate which necessitated the post-Independence agrarian reforms. *Zamindari* abolition, for example, did not come about as a direct culmination of any particular struggle, but the popularization of the demand by the *kisan sabha* certainly contributed to its achievement.



The immediate demands on which struggles were fought in the pre-Independence days were the reduction of taxes, the abolition of illegal cesses or feudal levies and *begar* or *vethi*, the ending of oppression by landlords and their agents, the reduction of debts, the restoration of illegally or illegitimately seized lands, and security of tenure for tenants. Except in a few pockets like Andhra and Gujarat, the demands of agricultural labourers did not really become part of the movement. These demands were based on the existing consciousness of the peasantry of their just or legitimate rights, which was itself a product of tradition, custom, usage, and legal rights. When landlords or the Government demanded what was seen by peasants as illegitimate — high taxes, exorbitant rents, illegal cesses, forced labour or rights over land which peasants felt was theirs — they were willing to resist if they could muster the necessary organizational and other resources. But they were also willing to continue to respect what they considered legitimate demands. The struggles based on these demands were clearly not aimed at the overthrow of the existing agrarian structure but towards alleviating its most oppressive aspects. Nevertheless, they corroded the power of the landed classes in many ways and thus prepared the ground for the transformation of the structure itself. The *kisan* movement was faced with the task of transforming the peasants' consciousness and building movements based on a transformed consciousness.

It is also important to note that, by and large, the forms of struggle and mobilization adopted by the peasant movements in diverse areas were similar in nature as were their demands. The main focus was on mobilization through meetings, conferences, rallies, demonstrations, enrolment of members, formation of *kisan sabhas* or *ryotu* and *karshaka sanghams*. Direct action usually involved *Satyagraha* or civil disobedience, and nonpayment of rent and taxes. All these forms had become the stock-in-trade of the national movement for the past several years. As in the national movement, violent clashes were the exception and not the norm. They were rarely sanctioned by the leadership and were usually popular responses to extreme repression. The relationship of the peasant movement with the national movement continued to be one of a vital and integral nature. For one, areas where the peasant movement was active were usually the ones that had been drawn into the earlier national struggles. This was true at least of Punjab, Kerala, Andhra, U.P. and Bihar. This was hardly surprising since it was the spread of the national movement that had created the initial conditions required for the emergence of peasant struggles — a politicized and conscious peasantry and a band of active political workers capable of and willing to perform the task of organization and leadership. In its ideology as well, the *kisan* movement accepted and based itself on the ideology of nationalism. Its cadres and leaders carried the message not only of organization of the peasantry on class lines but also of national freedom. As we have shown earlier, in most areas *kisan* activists simultaneously enrolled *kisan sabha* and Congress members.

True, in some regions, like Bihar, serious differences emerged between sections of Congressmen and the *kisan sabha* and at times the *kisan* movement seemed set on a path of confrontation with the Congress, but this tended to happen only when both left-wing activists and right-wing or conservative Congressmen took extreme positions and showed an unwillingness to accommodate each other. Before 1942 these differences were usually contained and the *kisan* movement and the national movement occupied largely common ground. With the experience of the split of 1942, the *kisan* movement found that if it diverged too far and too clearly from the path of the national movement, it tended to lose its mass base, as well as create a split within the ranks of its leadership. The growth and development of the peasant movement was thus indissolubly linked with the national struggle for freedom.

## UNIT-XXXI

# PRINCELY INDIA, INDIAN CAPITALISTS AND WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

### FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN PRINCELY INDIA

The variegated pattern of the British conquest of India, and the different stratagems through which the various parts of the country were brought under colonial rule, had resulted in two-fifths of the sub-continent being ruled by Indian princes. The areas ruled by the Princes included Indian States like Hyderabad, Mysore and Kashmir that were equal in size to many European countries, and numerous small States who counted their population in the thousands. The common feature was that all of them, big and small, recognized the paramountcy of the British Government. In return, the British guaranteed the Princes against any threat to their autocratic power, internal or external. Most of the princely States were run as unmitigated autocracies, with absolute power concentrated in the hands of the ruler or his favourites. The burden of the land tax was usually heavier than in British India and there was usually much less of the rule of law and civil liberties. The rulers had unrestrained power over the state revenues for personal use, and this often led to ostentatious living and waste. Some of the more enlightened rulers and their ministers did make attempts, from time to time, to introduce reforms in the administration, the system of taxation and even granted powers to the people to participate in government. But the vast majority of the States were bastions of economic, social, political and educational backwardness, for reasons not totally of their own making. Ultimately, it was the British Government that was responsible for the situation in which the Indian States found themselves in the twentieth century. As the national movement grew in strength, the Princes were increasingly called upon to play the role of 'bulwarks of reaction.' Any sympathy with nationalism, such as that expressed by the Maharaja of Baroda, was looked upon with extreme disfavour. Many a potential reformer among the rulers was gradually drained of initiative by the constant surveillance and interference exercised by the British residents. There were honorable exceptions, however, and some States, like Baroda and Mysore, succeeded in promoting industrial and agricultural development, administrative and political reforms, and education to a considerable degree.

The advance of the national movement in British India, and the accompanying increase in political consciousness about democracy, responsible government and civil liberties had an inevitable impact on the people of the States. In the first and second decade of the twentieth century, runaway terrorists from British India seeking shelter in the States became agents of politicization. A much more powerful influence was exercised by the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement launched in 1920; around this time and under its impact, numerous local organizations of the States' people came into existence. Some of the States in which *praja mandals* or States' People's Conferences were organized were Mysore, Hyderabad, Baroda, the Kathiawad States, the Deccan States, Jamnagar, Indore, and Nawanagar. This process came to a head in December 1927 with the convening of the All India States' People's Conference (AISPC) which was attended by 700 political workers from the States. The men chiefly responsible for this initiative were Baidwantrao Mehta, Maniklal Kothari and G.R. Abhayankar. The policy of the Indian National Congress towards the Indian states had been first enunciated in 1920 at Nagpur when a resolution calling upon the Princes to grant full responsible government in their States had been passed. Simultaneously, however, the Congress, while allowing residents of the States to become members of the Congress, made it clear that they could not initiate political activity in the States in the name of Congress but only in their individual capacity or as members of the local political organizations. Given the great differences in the political conditions between British India and the States, and between the different States themselves, the general lack of civil liberties including freedom of association, the comparative political backwardness of the people, and the fact that the Indian States were legally independent entities, these were understandable restraints imposed in the interest of the movements in the States as well as the movement in British India. The main



emphasis was that people of the States should build up their own strength and demonstrate their capacity to struggle for their demands.

Informal links between the Congress and the various organisations of the people of the States, including the AISPC, always continued to be close. In 1927, the Congress reiterated as resolution of 1920, and in 1929. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his presidential address to the famous Lahore Congress, declared that 'the Indian states cannot live apart from the rest of India. . . the only people who have a right to determine the future of the states must be the people of those states') In later years, the Congress demanded that the Princes guarantee fundamental rights to their people. In the mid thirties, two associated developments brought about a distinct change in the situation in the Indian States. First, the Government of India Act of 1935 projected a scheme of federation in which the Indian States were to be brought into a direct constitutional relationship with British India and the States were to send representatives to the Federal Legislature. The catch was that these representatives would be nominees of the Princes and not democratically elected representatives of the people. They would number one-third of the total numbers of the Federal legislature and act as a solid conservative block that could be trusted to thwart nationalist pressures. The Indian National Congress and the AISPC and other organizations of the States' people clearly saw through this imperialist manoeuvre and demanded that the States be represented not by the Princes' nominees but by elected representatives of the people. This lent a great sense of urgency to the demand for responsible democratic government in the States.

The second development was the assumption of office by Congress Ministries in the majority of the provinces in British India in 1937. The fact that the Congress was in power created a new sense of confidence and expectation in the people of the Indian States and acted as a spur to greater political activity. The Princes too had to reckon with a new political reality — the Congress was no longer just a party in opposition but a party in power with a capacity to influence developments in contiguous Indian States. The years 1938-39, in fact, stand out as years of a new awakening in the Indian States and were witness to a large number of movements demanding responsible government and other reforms. *Praja mandals* mushroomed in many States that had earlier no such organizations. Major struggles broke out in Jaipur, Kashmir, Rajkot, Patiala, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and the Orissa States. These new developments brought about a significant change in Congress policy as well. Whereas, even in the Haripura session in 1938, the Congress had reiterated its policy that movements in the States should not be launched in the name of the Congress but should rely on their own independent strength and fight through local organizations, a few months later, on seeing the new spirit that was abroad among the people and their capacity to struggle. Gandhiji and the Congress changed their attitude on this question. The radicals and socialists in the Congress, as well as political workers in the States, had in any case been pressing for this change for quite some time.

Explaining the shift in policy in an interview to the *Times of India* on 24 January, 1939, Gandhiji said: 'The policy of nonintervention by the Congress was, in my opinion, a perfect piece of statesmanship when the people of the States were not awakened. That policy would be cowardice when there is all-round awakening among the people of the States and a determination to go through a long course of suffering for the vindication of their just rights . . . The moment they became ready, the legal, constitutional and artificial boundary was destroyed.'

Following upon this, the Congress at Tripuri in March 1939 passed a resolution enunciating its new policy: 'The great awakening that is taking place among the people of the States may lead to a relaxation, or to a complete removal of the restraint which the Congress imposed upon itself, thus resulting in an ever increasing identification of the Congress with the States' peoples'. Also in 1939, the AISPC elected Jawaharlal Nehru as its President for the Ludhiana session, thus setting the seal on the fusion of the movements in Princely India and British India. The outbreak of the Second World War brought about a distinct change in the political atmosphere. Congress Ministries resigned, the Government armed itself with the Defence of India Rules, and in the States as well there was less tolerance of political activity. Things came to a head again in 1942 with the launching of the Quit India Movement. This time the Congress made no distinction between British India and the Indian States and the call for struggle was extended to the peo-



ple of the States. The people of the States thus formally joined the struggle for Indian independence, and in addition to their demand for responsible government they asked the British to quit India and demanded that the States become integral parts of the Indian nation.

The negotiations for transfer of power that ensued after the end of the War brought the problem of the States to the centre of the stage. It was, indeed, to the credit of the national leadership, especially Sardar Patel, that the extremely complex situation created by the lapse of British paramountcy which rendered the States legally independent — was handled in a manner that defused the situation to a great degree. Most of the States succumbed to a combination of diplomatic pressure, arm twisting, popular movements and their own realization that independence was not a realistic alternative, and signed the Instruments of Accession. But some of the States like Travancore, Junagadh, Kashmir and Hyderabad held out till the last minute. Finally, only Hyderabad held out and made a really serious bid for Independence. To illustrate the pattern of political activity in the Indian States, it is instructive to look more closely at the course of the movements in two representative States, Rajkot and Hyderabad — one among the smallest and the other the largest, one made famous by Gandhiji's personal intervention and the other by its refusal to accede to the Indian Union in 1947, necessitating the use of armed forces to bring about its integration.

Rajkot, a small state with a population of roughly 75,000, situated in the Kathiawad peninsula, had an importance out of all proportion to its size and rank among the States of Western India because Rajkot city was the seat of the Western India State Agency from where the British Political Agent maintained his supervision of the numerous States of the area. Rajkot had enjoyed the good fortune of being ruled for twenty years till 1930 — by Lakhajiraj, who had taken great care to promote the industrial, educational and political development of his state. Lakhajiraj encouraged popular participation in government by inaugurating in 1923 the Rajkot Praja Pratinidhi Sabha. This representative assembly consisted of ninety representatives elected on the basis of universal adult franchise, something quite unusual in those times. Though the Thakore Sahib, as the ruler was called, had full power to veto any suggestion, yet under Lakhajiraj this was the exception rather than the rule and popular participation was greatly legitimized under his aegis. Lakhajiraj had also encouraged nationalist political activity by giving permission to Mansukhlal Mehta and Amritlal Sheth to hold the first Kathiawad Political Conference in Rajkot in 1921 which was presided over by Vithalbhaji Patel. He himself attended the Rajkot and Bhavnagar (1925) sessions of the Conference, donated land in Rajkot for the starting of a national school that became the centre of political activity' and, in defiance of the British Political Agent or Resident, wore *khadi* as a symbol of the national movement. He was extremely proud of Gandhiji and his achievements and often invited 'the son of Rajkot' to the Durbar and would then make Gandhiji sit on the throne while he himself sat in the Durbar. He gave a public reception to Jawaharlal Nehru during his visit to the State. Lakhajiraj died in 1939 and his son Dharmendra Singhji, a complete contrast to the father, soon took charge of the State. The new Thakore was interested only in pleasure, and effective power fell into the hands of Dewan Virawala, who did nothing to stop the Thakore from frittering away the State's wealth, and finances reached such a pass that the State began to sell monopolies for the sale of matches, sugar, rice, and cinema licences to individual merchants. This immediately resulted in a rise in prices and enhanced the discontent that had already emerged over the Thakore's easy-going life-style and his disregard for popular participation in government as reflected in the lapse of the Pratinidhi Sabha as well as the increase in taxes.

The ground for struggle had been prepared over several years of political work by political groups in Rajkot and Kathiawad. The first group had been led by Mansukhlal Mehta and Amritlal Sheth and later by Balwantraji Mehta. another by Phulchand Shah, a third by Vrajlal Shukia, and a fourth group consisted of Gandhian constructive workers who, after 1936, under the leadership of U.N. Dhebar, emerged as the leading group in the Rajkot struggle. The first struggle emerged under the leadership of Jethalal Joshi, a Gandhian worker, who organized the 800 labourers of the state-owned cotton mill into a labour union and led a twenty-one day strike in 1936 to secure better working conditions. The Durbar had been forced to concede the union's demands. This victory encouraged Joshi and Dhebar to convene, in March 1937, the first meeting of the Kathiawad Rajakiya Parishad to be held in eight years. The conference, attended by 15,000 people, demanded responsible government, reduction in taxes and state expenditure.

There was no response from the Durbar and, on 15 August 1938, the Parishad workers organized a protest against gambling (the monopoly for which had been sold to a disreputable outfit called Carnival) at the Gokulakshmi Fair. According to a prearranged plan, the protesters were severely beaten with lathis first by the Agency police and then by the State police. This resulted in a complete *hantal* in Rajkot city, and a session of the Parishad was held on 5 September and presided over by Sardar Patel. In a meeting with Dewan Virawala, Patel, on behalf of the Parishad, demanded a committee to frame proposals for responsible government, and election to the Pratinidhi Sabha, reduction of land revenue by fifteen percent, cancellation of all monopolies or */ijaras*, and a limit on the ruler's claim on the State treasury. The Durbar, instead of conceding the demands, asked the Resident to appoint a British officer as Dewan to deal effectively with the situation, and Cadell took over on 12 September. Meanwhile, Virawala himself became Private Adviser to the Thakore, so that he could continue to operate from behind the scenes.

The *Satyagraha* now assumed major proportions and included withhold of land revenue, defiance of monopoly rights, boycott of all goods produced by the State, including electricity and cloth. There was a run on the State Bank and strikes in the state cotton mill and by students. All sources of income of the state, including excise and custom duties, were sought to be blocked.

Sardar Patel, though most of the time not physically present in Rajkot, kept in regular touch with the Rajkot leaders by telephone every evening. Volunteers began to arrive from other parts of Kathiawad, from British Gujarat and Bombay. The movement demonstrated a remarkable degree of organization: a secret chain of command ensured that on the arrest of one leader another took charge and code numbers published in newspapers informed each *Satyagrahi* of his arrival date and arrangements in Rajkot.

By the end of November, the British were clearly worried about the implications of a possible Congress victory in Rajkot. The Viceroy, Linlithgow, wired to the Secretary of State: 'I have little doubt that if Congress were to win in the Rajkot case the movement would go right through Kathiawad, and that they would then extend their activities in other directions . . .' But the Durbar decided to ignore the Political Department's advice and go ahead with a settlement with Sardar Patel. The agreement that was reached on 26 December, 1938, provided for a limit on the Thakore's Privy Purse and the appointment of a committee of ten State subjects or officials to draw up a scheme of reforms designed to give the widest possible powers to the people. A separate letter to the Sardar by the Thakore contained the informal understanding that 'seven members of the Committee . . . are to be recommended by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and they are to be nominated by us'. All prisoners were released and the *Satyagraha* was withdrawn.

But such open defiance by the Thakore could hardly be welcomed by the British government. Consultations involving the Resident, the Political Department, the Viceroy and the Secretary of State were immediately held and the Thakore was instructed not to accept the Sardar's list of members of the Committee, but to select another set with the help of the Resident. Accordingly, the list of names sent by Patel was rejected, the excuse being that it contained the names of only Brahmins and Banias, and did not give any representation to Rajputs, Muslims and the depressed classes.

The breach of agreement by the State led to a resumption of the *Satyagraha* on 26 January 1939. Virawala answered with severe repression. As before, this soon led to a growing concern and sense of outrage among nationalists outside Rajkot. Kasturba, Gandhiji's wife, who had been brought up in Rajkot, was so moved by the state of affairs that she decided, in spite of her poor health and against everybody's advice, to go to Rajkot. On arrival, she and her companion Maniben Patel, the Sardar's daughter, were arrested and detained in a village sixteen miles from Rajkot.

But Rajkot was destined for even more dramatic events. The Mahatma decided that he, too, must go to Rajkot. He had already made it clear that he considered the breach of a solemn agreement by the Thakore Sahib a serious affair and one that was the duty of every *Satyagrahi* to resist. He also felt that he had strong claims on Rajkot because of his family's close association with the State and the Thakore's family, and that this justified and prompted his personal intervention.



In accordance with his wishes, mass *Satyagraha* was suspended to prepare the way for negotiations. But a number of discussions with the Resident, the Thakore and Dewan Virawala yielded no results and resulted in an ultimatum by Gandhiji that if, by 3<sup>rd</sup> March, the Durbar did not agree to honour its agreement with the Sardar, he would go on a fast unto death. The Thakore, or rather Virawala, who was the real power behind the throne, stuck to his original position and left Gandhiji with no choice but to begin his fast.

The fast was the signal for a nation-wide protest. Gandhiji's health was already poor and any prolonged fast was likely to be dangerous. There were *hartals*, an adjournment of the legislature and finally a threat that the Congress Ministries might resign. The Viceroy was bombarded with telegrams asking for his intervention. Gandhiji himself urged the Paramount Power to fulfil its responsibility to the people of the State by persuading the Thakore to honour his promise. On 7 March, the Viceroy suggested arbitration by the Chief Justice of India, Sir Maurice Gwyer, to decide whether in fact the Thakore had violated the agreement. This seemed a reasonable enough proposition, and Gandhiji broke his fast.

The Chief Justice's award, announced on 3 April, 1939, vindicated the Sardar's position that the Durbar had agreed to accept seven of his nominees. The ball was now back in the Thakore's court. But there had been no change of heart in Rajkot. Virawala continued with his policy of propping up Rajput, Muslim and depressed classes' claims to representation and refused to accept any of the proposals made by Gandhiji to accommodate their representatives while maintaining a majority of the Sardar's and the Parishad's nominees.

The situation soon began to take an ugly turn, with hostile demonstrations by Rajputs and Muslims during Gandhiji's prayer meetings, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah's and Ambedkar's demand that the Muslims and depressed classes be given separate representation. The Durbar used all this to continue to refuse to honour the agreement in either its letter or spirit. The Paramount Power, too, would not intervene because it had nothing to gain and everything to lose from securing an outright Congress victory. Nor did it see its role as one of promoting responsible government in the States.

At this point, Gandhiji, analyzing the reasons for his failure to achieve a 'change of heart' in his opponents, came to the conclusion that the cause lay in his attempt to use the authority of the Paramount Power to coerce the Thakore into an agreement. This, for him, smacked of violence; non-violence should have meant that he should have directed his fast only at the Thakore and Virawala, and relied only on the strength of his suffering to effect a 'change of heart'. Therefore, he released the Thakore from the agreement, apologized to the Viceroy and the Chief Justice for wasting their time, and to his opponents, the Muslims and the Rajputs, and left Rajkot to return to British India.

The Rajkot *Satyagraha* brought into clear focus the paradoxical situation that existed in the States and which made the task of resistance a very complex one. The rulers of the States were protected by the might of the British Government against any movements that aimed at reform and popular pressure on the British Government to induce reform could always be resisted by pleading the legal position of the autonomy of the States. This legal independence, however, was usually forgotten by the British when the States desired to follow a course that was unpalatable to the Paramount Power. It was, after all, the British Government that urged the Thakore to refuse to honour his agreement with the Sardar. But the legal separation of power and responsibility between the States and the British Government did provide a convenient excuse for resisting pressure, an excuse that did not exist in British India. This meant that movements of resistance in the States operated in conditions that were very different from those that provided the context for movements in British India. Perhaps, then, the Congress had not been far wrong when for years it had urged that the movements in Princely India and British India could not be merged. Its hesitation to take on the Indian States was based on a comprehension of the genuine difficulties in the situation, difficulties which were clearly shown up by the example of Rajkot.

Despite the apparent failure of the Rajkot *Satyagraha*, it exercised a powerful politicizing influence on the people of the States, especially in Western India. It also demonstrated to the Princes that they survived only because the British were there to prop them up, and thus, the struggle of Rajkot, along with others of



its time, facilitated the process of the integration of the States at the time of independence. Many a Prince who had seen for himself that the people were capable of resisting would hesitate in 1947 to resist the pressure for integration when it came. In the absence of these struggles, the whole process of integration would inevitably have been arduous and protracted. It is hardly a matter of surprise that the man who was responsible more than any other for effecting the integration in 1947-48 was the same Sardar who was a veteran of many struggles against the Princes.

But there was one State that refused to see the writing on the wall — Hyderabad. Hyderabad was the largest princely State in India both by virtue of its size and its population. The Nizam's dominions included three distinct linguistic areas: Marathi speaking (twenty-eight per cent), Kannadas speaking (twenty-two) and Telugu-speaking (fifty per cent). Osman Ali Khan, who became Nizam in 1911 and continued till 1948, ruled the State as a personalized autocracy. The *sarf khas*, the Nizam's own estate, which accounted for ten per cent of the total area of the State, went directly to meet the royal expenses. Another thirty per cent of the States' area was held as *jagirs* by various categories of the rural population and was heavily burdened by a whole gamut of illegal levies and exactions and forced labour or *vethi*. Particularly galling to the overwhelmingly Hindu population of the State was the cultural and religious suppression practised by the Nizam. Urdu was made the court language and all efforts were made to promote it, including the setting up of the Osmania University. Other languages of the State — Telugu, Marathi and Kannada — were neglected and even private efforts to promote education in these languages were obstructed. Muslims were given a disproportionately large share of the jobs in the administration, especially in its upper echelons. The Arya Samaj Movement that grew rapidly in the 1920s was actively suppressed and official permission had to be sought to set up a *havan kund* for Arya Samaj religious observances. The Nizam's administration increasingly tried to project Hyderabad as a Muslim state, and this process was accelerated after 1927 with the emergence of the *Ittehad ul Muslimin*, an organization that based itself on the notion of the Nizam as the 'Royal Embodiment of Muslim Sovereignty in the Deccan.' It is in this context of political, economic, cultural and religious oppression that the growth of political consciousness and the course of the State's People's Movement in Hyderabad has to be understood.

As in other parts of India, it was the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement of 1920-22 that created the first stirrings of political activity. From various parts of the State, there were reports of *charkhas* being popularized, national schools being set up, of propaganda against drink and untouchability, of badges containing pictures of Gandhiji and the All brothers being sold. Public meetings were not much in evidence, except in connection with the Khilafat Movement, which could take on a more open form because the Nizam hesitated to come out openly against it. Public demonstration of Hindu-Muslim unity was very popular in the years.

This new awakening found expression in the subsequent years in the holding of a series of Hyderabad political conferences at different venues outside the State. The main discussion at these conferences centered around the need for a system of responsible government and for elementary civil liberties that were lacking in the State. Oppressive practices like *vethi* or *veth begar* and exorbitant taxation, as well as the religious and cultural suppression of the people, were also condemned. Simultaneously, there began a process of regional cultural awakening, the lead being taken by the Telengana area. A cohesion to this effort was provided by the founding of the Andhra Jana Sangham which later grew into the Andhra Mahasabha. The emphasis initially was on the promotion of Telugu language and literature by setting up library associations, schools, journals and newspapers and promoting a research society. Even these activities came under attack from the State authorities, and schools, libraries and newspapers would be regularly shut down. The Mahasabha refrained from any direct political activity or stance till the 1940s.

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-32, in which many people from the State participated by going to the British areas, carried the process of politicization further. Hyderabad nationalists, especially many of the younger ones, spent time in jail with nationalists from British India and became part of the political trends that were sweeping the rest of the nation. A new impatience was imparted to their politics, and the pressure for a more vigorous politics became stronger.

In 1937, the other two regions of the State also set up their own organizations — the Maharashtra Parishad and the Kannada Parishad. And, in 1938, activists from all three regions came together and decided to found the Hyderabad State Congress as a state-wide body of the people of Hyderabad. This was not a branch of the Indian National Congress, despite its name, and despite the fact that its members had close contacts with the Congress. But even before the organization could be formally founded, the Nizam's government issued orders banning it, the ostensible ground being that it was a communal body of Hindus and that Muslims were not sufficiently represented in it. Negotiations with the Government bore no fruit, and the decision was taken to launch a *Satyagraha*.

The leader of this *Satyagraha* was Swami Ramanand Tirtha, a Marathi-speaking nationalist who had given up his studies during the Non-Cooperation Movement, attended a national school and college, worked as a trade unionist in Bombay and Sholapur and finally moved to Mominabad in Hyderabad State where he ran a school on nationalist lines. A Gandhian in his lifestyle and a Nehruite in his ideology, Swamiji emerged in 1938 as the leader of the movement since the older and more established leaders were unwilling or unable to venture into this new type of politics of confrontation with the State.

The *Satyagraha* started in October 1938 and the pattern adopted was that a group of five *Satyagrahis* headed by a popular leader and consisting of representatives of all the regions would defy the ban by proclaiming themselves as members of the State Congress. This was repeated thrice a week for two months and all the *Satyagrahis* were sent to jail. Huge crowds would collect to witness the *Satyagraha* and express solidarity with the movement. The two centres of the *Satyagraha* were Hyderabad city and Aurangabad city in the Marathwada area. Gandhiji himself took a keen personal interest in the developments, and regularly wrote to Sir Akbar Hydari, the Prime Minister, pressing him for better treatment of the *Satyagrahis* and for a change in the State's attitude. And it was at his instance that, after two months, in December j 1938, the *Satyagraha* was withdrawn.

The reasons for this decision were to be primarily found in an accompanying development — the *Satyagraha* launched by the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Civil Liberties Union at the same time as the State Congress *Satyagraha*. The Arya Samaj *Satyagraha*, which was attracting *Satyagrahis* from all over the country, was launched as a protest against the religious persecution of the Arya Samaj, and it had clearly religious objectives. It also tended to take on communal overtones. The State Congress and Gandhiji increasingly felt that in the popular mind their clearly secular *Satyagraha* with distinct political objectives were being confused with the religious-communal *Satyagraha* of the Arya Samaj and that it was, therefore, best to demarcate themselves from it by withdrawing their own *Satyagraha*. The authorities were in any case lumping the two together and seeking to project the State Congress as a Hindu communal organization.

Simultaneously, there was the emergence of what came to be known as the Vande Mataram Movement. Students of colleges in Hyderabad city organised a protest strike against the authorities' refusal to let them sing *Vande Mataram* in their hostel prayer rooms. This strike rapidly spread to other parts of the State and many of the students who were expelled from the Hyderabad colleges left the State and continued their studies in Nagpur University in the Congress-ruled Central Provinces where they were given shelter by a hospitable Vice-Chancellor. This movement was extremely significant because it created a young and militant cadre that provided the activists as well as the leadership of the movement in later years.

The State Congress, however continued to be banned, and the regional cultural organizations remained the main forums of activity. The Andhra Mahasabha was particularly active in this phase, and the majority of the younger newly-politicized cadre flocked to it. A significant development that occurred around the year 1940 was that Ravi Narayan Reddy, who had emerged as a major leader of the radicals in the Andhra Mahasabha and had participated in the State Congress *Satyagraha* along with B. Yella Reddy, was drawn towards the Communist Party. As a result, several of the younger cadres also came under Left and Communist influence, and these radical elements gradually increased in strength and pushed the Andhra Mahasabha towards more radical politics. The Mahasabha began to take an active interest in the problems



of the peasants. The outbreak of the War provided an excuse to the government for avoiding any moves towards political and constitutional reforms. A symbolic protest against the continuing ban was again registered by Swami Ramanand Tirtha and six others personally selected by Gandhiji. They were arrested in September 1940 and kept in detention till December 1941. A resumption of the struggle was ruled out by Gandhiji since an All-India struggle was in the offing and now all struggles would be part of that. The Quit India Movement was launched in August 1942 and it was made clear that now there was no distinction to be made between the people of British India and the States: every Indian was to participate. The meeting of the AISPC was convened along with the AICC session at Bombay that announced the commencement of struggle. Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru both addressed the AISPC Standing Committee, and Gandhiji himself explained the implications of the Quit India Movement and told the Committee that henceforth there would be one movement. The movement in the States was now to be not only for responsible government but for the independence of India and the integration of the States with British India.

The Quit India Movement got a considerable response from Hyderabad, especially the youth. Though arrests of the main leaders, including Swamiji, prevented an organized movement from emerging, many people all over the State offered *Satyagraha* and many others were arrested. On 2 October 1942, a batch of women offered *Satyagraha* in Hyderabad city, and Sarojini Naidu was arrested earlier in the day. Slogans such as '*Gandhi Ka Charkha Chalana Padega, Goron ko London Jana Padega*' (Gandhiji's wheel will have to be spun, while the Whites will have to return to London) became popular. In a state where, till a few years ago even well-established leaders had to send their speeches to the Collector in advance and accept deletions made by him, the new atmosphere was hardly short of revolutionary. But the Quit India Movement also sealed the rift that had developed between the Communist and non-Communist radical nationalists after the Communist Party had adopted the slogan of People's War in December 1941. Communists were opposed to the Quit India Movement as it militated against their understanding that Britain must be supported in its anti-Fascist War. The young nationalists in Telengana coalesced around Jamalpuram Keshavrao but a large section went with Ravi Narayan Reddy to the Communists. The Communists were also facilitated by the removal of the ban on the CPI by the Nizam, in keeping with the policy of the Government of India that had removed the ban because of the CPI's pro-War stance. Therefore, while most of the nationalists were clamped in jail because of their support to the Quit India Movement, the Communists remained free to extend and consolidate their base among the people. This process reached a head in 1944 when a split occurred in the Andhra Mahasabha session at Bhongir, and the pro-nationalist as well as the liberal elements walked out and set up a separate organization. The Andhra Mahasabha now was completely led by the Communists and they soon launched a programme of mobilization and organization of the peasantry. The end of the War in 1945 brought about a change in the Peoples' War line, and the restraint on organizing struggles was removed.

The years 1945-46, and especially the latter half of 1946, saw the growth of a powerful peasant struggle in various pockets in Nalgonda district, and to some extent in Warangal and Khammam. The main targets of attack were the forced grain levy, the practice of *veth begar*, illegal exactions and illegal seizures of land. Clashes took place initially between the landlords' *goondas* and the peasants led by the Sangham (as the Andhra Mahasabha was popularly known), and later between the armed forces of the State police and peasants armed with sticks and stones. The resistance was strong, but so was the repression, and by the end of 1946 the severity of the repression succeeded in pushing the movement into quietude. Thousands were arrested and beaten, many died, and the leaders languished in jails. Yet, the movement had succeeded in instilling into the oppressed and downtrodden peasants of Telengana a new confidence in their ability to resist.

On 4 June 1947, the Viceroy, Mountbatten, announced at a press conference that the British would soon leave India for good on 15 August. On 12 June, the Nizam announced that on the lapse of British paramountcy he would become a sovereign monarch. The intention was clear: he would not accede to the Indian Union. The first open session of the Hyderabad State Congress which demanded accession to the Indian Union and grant of responsible government was held from 16 to 18 June. The State Congress, with the full support of the Indian National Congress, had also thwarted an attempt by the Nizam. a few



months earlier, to foist an undemocratic constitution on the people. The boycott of the elections launched by them had received tremendous support. With this new confidence, they began to take a bold stand against the Nizam's moves. The decision to launch the final struggle was taken by the leaders of the State Congress in consultation with the national leaders in Delhi. As recorded by Swami Ramanand Tirtha in his *Memoirs of Hyderabad Freedom Struggle*: 'That (the) final phase of the freedom struggle in Hyderabad would have to be a clash of arms with the Indian Union, was what we were more than ever convinced of. It would have to be preceded by a *Satyagraha* movement on a mass scale'.

After the preliminary tasks of setting up the Committee of Action under the Chairmanship of D.G. Bindu (which would operate from outside the State to avoid arrest), the establishment of offices in Sholapur, Vijayawada, Gadag and a central office at Bombay, mobilization of funds in which Jayaprakash Narayan played a critical role, the struggle was formally launched on 7<sup>th</sup> August which was to be celebrated as 'Join Indian Union Day'. The response was terrific, and meetings to defy the bans were held in towns and villages all over the State. Workers and students went on strike, including 12,000 Hyderabad workers in Bombay. Beatings and arrests were common. On 13<sup>th</sup> August, the Nizam banned the ceremonial hoisting of the national flag. Swamiji gave the call: 'This order is a challenge to the people of Hyderabad and I hope they will accept it'. Swamiji and his colleagues were arrested in the early hours of 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, soon after the dawn of Indian Independence. But, despite tight security arrangements, 100 students rushed out of the Hyderabad Students' union office and hoisted the flag in Sultan Bazaar as scheduled. In subsequent days, the hoisting of the Indian national flag became the major form of defiance and ingenious methods were evolved. Trains decorated with national flags would steam into Hyderabad territory from neighbouring Indian territory. Students continued to play a leading role in the movement, and were soon joined by women in large numbers, prominent among them being Brij Rani and Yashoda Ben. As the movement gathered force and gained momentum, the Nizam and his administration cracked down on it. But the most ominous development was the encouragement given to the storm troopers of the *Ittihad ul Muslimin*, the Razakars, by the State to act as a paramilitary force to attack the peoples' struggle. Razakars were issued arms and let loose on protesting crowds; they set up camps near rebellious villages and carried out armed raids.

On 29 November 1947, the Nizam signed a Standstill Agreement with the Indian Government, but simultaneously the repression was intensified, and the Razakar menace became even more acute. Many thousands of people who could afford to do so fled the State and were housed in camps in neighbouring Indian territory. The people increasingly took to self-defence and protected themselves with whatever was available. In organizing the defence against the Razakars and attacks on Razakar camps, the Communists played a very important role, especially in the areas of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam that were their strongholds. Peasants were organized into *dalams*, given training in arms, and mobilized for the anti-Nizam struggle. In these areas, the movement also took an anti-landlord stance and many cruel landlords were attacked, some even killed, and illegally occupied land was returned to the original owners. Virtually all the big landlords had run away, and their land was distributed to and cultivated by those with small holdings or no land. The State Congress, too, organized armed resistance from camps on the State's borders. Raids were made on customs' outposts, police Stations and Razaicar camps. Outside the Communist strongholds in the Telengana areas, it was the State Congress that was the main vehicle for organizing popular resistance. Over 20,000 *Satyagrahis* were in jail and many more were participating in the movement outside. By September 1948, it became clear that all negotiations to make the Nizam accede to the Union had failed. On 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1948, the Indian Army moved in and on 18<sup>th</sup> September the Nizam surrendered. The process of the integration of the Indian Union was finally complete. The people welcomed the Indian Army as an army of liberation, an army that ended the oppression of the Nizam and the Razakars. Scenes of jubilation were evident all over, and the national flag was hoisted. The celebration was, however, marred by the decision of the Communists to refuse to lay down arms and continue the struggle against the Indian Union, but that is another long story that falls outside the scope of our present concerns.

The cases of Hyderabad, and that of Rajkot, are good examples of how methods of struggle evolved to suit the conditions in British India, such as non-violent mass civil disobedience or *Satyagraha*, did not have the same viability or effectiveness in the India States. The lack of civil liberties, and of representative institutions, meant that the political space for hegemonic politics was very small, even when compared to the conditions prevailing under the semi-hegemonic and semi-repressive colonial state in British India. The ultimate protection provided by the British enabled the rulers of the States to withstand popular pressure to a considerable degree, as happened in Rajkot. As a result, there was a much greater tendency in these States for the movements to resort to violent methods of agitation — this happened not only in Hyderabad, but also in Travancore, Patiala, and the Orissa States among others. In Hyderabad, for example, even the State Congress ultimately resorted to violent methods of attack, and, in the final count, the Nizam could only be brought into line by the Indian Army. This also meant that those such as the Communists and other Left groups, who had less hesitation than the Congress in resorting to violent forms of struggle, were placed in a more favourable situation in these States and were able to grow as a political force in these areas. Here, too, the examples of Hyderabad, Travancore, Patiala and the Orissa States were quite striking.

The differences between the political conditions in the States and British India also go a long way in explaining the hesitation of the Congress to merge the movements in the States with those in British India. The movement in British India adopted forms of struggle and a strategy that was specifically suited to the political context. Also, political sagacity dictated that the Princes should not be unnecessarily pushed into taking hard positions against Indian nationalism, at least till such time as this could be counter-balanced by the political weight of the people of the state.

### **ROLE PLAYED BY INDIAN CAPITALISTS IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT**

Among the various groups that participated in the national movement were several individual capitalists who joined the Congress. They fully identified with the movement, went to jails and accepted the hardships that were the lot of Congressmen in the colonial period. The names of Jamnalal Bajaj, Vadilal Lallubhai Mehta, Samuel Aaron, Lala Shankar Lal, and others are well known in this regard. There were other individual capitalists who did not join the Congress but readily gave financial and other help to the movement. People like G.D. Birla, Ambalal Sarabhai and Waichand Hirachand, fall into this category. There were also a large number of smaller traders and merchants who at various points came out in active support of the national movement. On the other hand, there were several individual capitalists or sections of the class who either remained neutral towards the Congress and the national movement or even actively opposed it. In this chapter, we shall examine the overall strategy of the Indian capitalist class, as a class, towards the national movement, rather than highlight the role of various individuals or sections within the class who did not necessarily represent the class as a whole, or even its dominant section.

At the outset it must be said that the economic development of the Indian capitalist class in the colonial period was substantial and in many ways the nature of its growth was quite different from the usual experience in other colonial countries. This had important implications regarding the class's position vis-a-vis imperialism. First, the Indian capitalist class grew from about the mid 19th century with largely an independent capital base and not as junior partners of foreign capital or as compradors. Second, the capitalist class on the whole was not tied up in a subservient position with pro-imperialist feudal interests either economically or politically. In fact, a wide cross section of the leaders of the capitalist class actually argued, in 1944-45, in their famous Bombay plan (the signatories to which were Purshottamdas Thakurdas, J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla, Ardeshir Dalal, Sri Ram, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, A.D. Shroff and John Mathai) for comprehensive land reform, including cooperativization of production, finance and marketing.' Third, in the period 1914-1947, the capitalist class grew rapidly, increasing its strength and self-confidence. This was achieved primarily through import substitution; by edging out or encroaching upon areas of European domination, and by establishing almost exclusive control over new areas thus accounting for the bulk of the new investments made since the 1920s. Close to independence, indigenous enterprise had already cornered seventy two to seventy three per cent of the domestic market and over eighty per cent of the



deposits in the organized banking sector. However, this growth, unusual for a colonial capitalist class, did not occur, as is often argued, as a result or by-product of colonialism or because of a policy of decolonization. On the contrary it was achieved in spite of and in opposition to colonialism — by waging a constant struggle against colonialism and colonial interests, i.e., by wrenching space from colonialism itself.

There was, thus, nothing in the class position or the economic interest of the Indian capitalists which, contrary to what is so often argued,<sup>4</sup> inhibited its opposition to imperialism. In fact, by the mid 1920s, Indian capitalists began to correctly perceive their long-term class interest and felt strong enough to take a consistent and openly anti-imperialist position. The hesitation that the class demonstrated was not in its opposition to imperialism but in the choice of the specific path to fight imperialism. It was apprehensive that the path chosen should not be one which, while opposing imperialism, would threaten its own existence, i.e., undermine capitalism itself.

Before we go on to discuss the capitalist class's position vis-a-vis imperialism and vis-a-vis the course of the anti-imperialist movement, we should look at the emergence of the class as a political entity — a 'class for itself.' Since the early 1920s, efforts were being made by various capitalists like G.D. Birla and Purshottamdas Thakurdas to establish a national level organization of Indian commercial, industrial and financial interests (as opposed to the already relatively more organized European interests in India) to be able to effectively lobby with the colonial government. This effort culminated in the formation of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 1927, with a large and rapidly increasing representation from all parts of India. The FICCI was soon recognized by the British government as well as the Indian public in general, as representing the dominant opinion as well as the overall consensus within the Indian capitalist class.

The leaders of the capitalist class also clearly saw the role of the FICCI as being that of 'national guardians of trade, commerce and industry,' performing in the economic sphere in colonial India the functions of a national government. In the process, Indian capitalists, with some of the most astute minds of the period in their ranks, developed a fairly comprehensive economic critique of imperialism in all its manifestations, whether it be direct appropriation through-home charges or exploitation through trade, finance, currency manipulation or foreign investments, including in their sweep the now fashionable concept of unequal exchange occurring in trade between countries with widely divergent productivity levels. (G.D. Birla and S.P. Jam were talking of unequal exchange as early as the 1930s).<sup>6</sup> The Congress leaders quite often saw their assistance as invaluable and treated their opinions and expertise on many national economic issues with respect.

The FICCI was, however, not to remain merely a sort of trade union organization of the capitalist class fighting for its own economic demands and those of the nation. The leaders of the capitalist class now clearly saw the necessity of, and felt strong enough for, the class to effectively intervene in politics. As Sir Purshottamdas, President of FICCI, declared at its second annual session in 1928: 'We can no more separate our politics from our economics.' Further involvement of the class in politics meant doing so on the side of Indian nationalism. 'Indian commerce and industry are intimately associated with and are, indeed, an integral part of the national movement — growing with its growth and strengthening with its strength.' Similarly G.D. Birla was to declare a little later in 1930: 'It is impossible in the present . . . political condition of our country to convert the government to our views. . . the only solution. . . lies in every Indian businessman strengthening the hands of those who are fighting for the freedom of our country.'

However, as mentioned earlier, the Indian capitalist class had its own notions of how the anti-imperialist struggle ought to be waged. It was always in favour of not completely abandoning the constitutional path and the negotiating table and generally preferred to put its weight behind constitutional forms of struggle as opposed to mass civil disobedience. This was due to several reasons.



First, there was the fear that mass civil disobedience, especially if it was prolonged, would unleash forces which could turn the movement revolutionary in a social sense (i.e., threaten capitalism itself). As Laiji Naranji wrote to Purshottamdas in March 1930, 'private property,' itself could be threatened and the 'disregard for authority' created could have

'disastrous after effects' even for the 'future government of Swaraj.' Whenever the movement was seen to be getting too dangerous in this sense, the capitalists tried their best to bring the movement back to a phase of constitutional opposition.

Second, the capitalists were unwilling to support a prolonged all-out hostility to the government of the day as it prevented the continuing of day-to-day business and threatened the very existence of the class.

Further, the Indian capitalists' support to constitutional participation, whether it be in assemblies, conferences or even joining the Viceroy's Executive Council, is not to be understood simply as their getting co-opted into the imperial system or surrendering to it. They saw all this as a forum for maintaining an effective opposition fearing that boycotting these forums completely would help 'black legs' and elements who did not represent the nation to, without any opposition, easily pass measures which could severely affect the Indian economy and the capitalist class. However, there was no question of unconditionally accepting reforms or participating in conferences or assemblies. The capitalists were to 'participate on (their) own terms,' with 'no compromise on fundamentals,' firmly rejecting offers of cooperation which fell below their own and the minimum national demands.' It was on this ground that the FICCI in 1934 rejected the 'Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms for India' as 'even more reactionary than the proposals contained in the White paper.'

Further, however keen the capitalists may have been to keep constitutional avenues open, they clearly recognized the futility of entering councils, etc., 'unless,' as N.R. Sarkar, the President of FICCI, noted in 1934, 'the nation also decides to enter them.' They also generally refused to negotiate with the British Government, and certainly to make any final commitments, on constitutional as well as economic issues, behind the back of the Congress, i.e., without its participation or at least approval. In 1930, the FICCI (in sharp contrast to the Liberals) advised its members to boycott the Round Table Conference (RTC) stating that '... no conference ... convened for the purpose of discussing the problem of Indian constitutional advance can come to a solution ... unless such a conference is attended by Mahatma Gandhi, as a free man, or has at least his approval.' This was partially because the capitalists did not want India to present a divided front at the RTC and because they knew only the Congress could actually deliver the goods. As Ambalal Sarabhai put it in November 1929, 'Minus the support of the Congress, the government will not listen to you.' Finally, it must be noted that for the capitalist class constitutionalism was not an end in itself, neither did it subscribe to what has often been called 'gradualism,' in which case it would have joined hands with the Liberals and not supported the Congress which repeatedly went in for non-constitutional struggle including mass civil disobedience. The capitalist class itself did not rule out other forms of struggle, seeing constitutional participation as only a step towards the goal, to achieve which other steps could be necessary. For example, G.D. Birla, who had worked hard for a compromise leading to the Congress accepting office in 1937, warned Lord Halifax and Lord Lothian that the 'Congress was not coming in just to work the constitution, but to advance towards their goal,' and if the 'Governors and the Services' did not play 'the game' or 'in case there was no (constitutional) advance after two or three years, then India would be compelled to take direct action,' by which he meant 'non-violent mass civil disobedience.'

This brings us to the Indian capitalists' attitude towards mass civil disobedience, which was very complex. While, on the one hand, they were afraid of protracted mass civil disobedience, on the other hand, they clearly saw the utility, even necessity of civil disobedience in getting crucial concessions for their class and the nation. In January 1931, commenting on the existing Civil Disobedience Movement, G.D. Birla wrote to Purshottamdas, 'There could be no doubt that what we are being offered at present is entirely due to Gandhiji. . . if we are to achieve what we desire, the present movement should not be allowed to slacken.'

When, after the mass movement had gone on for considerable time, the capitalists, for reasons discussed above, sought the withdrawal of the movement and a compromise (often mediating between the Government and Congress to secure peace), they were quite clear that this was to be only after extracting definite concessions, using the movement, or a threat to re-launch it, to bargain. In their 'anxiety for peace,' they were not to surrender or 'reduce (their) demands.' The dual objective of achieving conciliation without weakening the national movement, which after all secured the concessions, was aptly described by G.D. Birla in January 1931: 'We should . . . have two objects in view: one is that we should jump in at the most opportune time to try for a conciliation and the other is that we should not do anything which might weaken the hands of those through whose efforts we have arrived at this stage.'

Further, however opposed the capitalist class may have been at a point of time to mass civil disobedience, it never supported the colonial Government in repressing it. In fact, the capitalists throughout pressurized the Government to stop repression, remove the ban on the Congress and the press, release political prisoners and stop arbitrary rule with ordinances as a first step to any settlement, even when the Congress was at the pitch of its non-constitutional mass phase. The fear of Congress militancy or radicalization did not push the capitalists (especially after the late 1920s) to either supporting imperialism in repressing it or even openly condemning or dissociating themselves from the Congress.

The Indian capitalists' attitude had undergone significant changes on this issue over time. During the Swadeshi Movement (1905-08), the capitalists remained opposed to the boycott agitation. Even during the Non-Cooperation Movement of the early '20s, a small section of the capitalists, including Purshottamdas, openly declared themselves enemies of the Non-Cooperation Movement. However, during the 1930s' Civil Disobedience Movement, the capitalists largely supported the movement and refused to respond to the Viceroy's exhortations (in September 1930) to publicly repudiate the Congress stand and his offer of full guarantee of government protection against any harassment for doing so.' In September 1940, Purshottamdas felt that, given the political stance of the British, the Congress was 'left with no other alternative than to launch non-cooperation.'<sup>20</sup> On 5 August 1942, four days before the launching of the Quit India Movement, Purshottamdas, J.R.D. Tata and G.D. Birla wrote to the Viceroy that the only solution to the present crisis, the successful execution of the war and the prevention of another civil disobedience movement was 'granting political freedom to the country. . . even during the midst of war.'

It must be emphasized at this stage that though, by the late 1920s, the dominant section of the Indian capitalist class began to support the Congress, the Indian national movement was not created, led or in any decisive way influenced by this class, nor was it in any sense crucially dependent on its support. In fact, it was the capitalist class which reacted to the existing autonomous national movement by constantly trying to evolve a strategy towards it. Further, while the capitalist class on the whole stayed within the nationalist camp (as opposed to lining up with the loyalists), it did so on the most conservative end of the nationalist spectrum, which certainly did not call the shots of the national movement at any stage.

However, the relative autonomy of the Indian national movement has been repeatedly not recognized, and it has been argued that the capitalists, mainly by using the funds at their command, were able to pressurize the Congress into making demands such as a lower Rupee-Sterling ratio, tariff protection, reduction in military expenditure, etc., which allegedly suited only their class? Further, it is argued that the capitalists were able to exercise a decisive influence over the political course followed by the Congress, even to the extent of deciding whether a movement was to be launched, continued or withdrawn. The examples quoted are of the withdrawal of civil disobedience in 1931 with the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the non-launching of another movement between 1945-47.

These formulations do not reflect the reality and this for several reasons. First, a programme of economic nationalism vis-a-vis imperialism, with demands for protection, fiscal and monetary autonomy, and the like, did not represent the interest of the capitalist class alone, it represented the demands of the entire nation which was subject to imperialist exploitation. Even the leftists — Nehru, Socialists, and Communists — in their struggle against imperialism had to and did fight for these demands. Second, the detailed



working out of the doctrine of economic nationalism was done by the early nationalism nearly half a century before the Indian capitalists got constituted as a class and entered the political arena and began fighting for these demands. So there was no question of the Congress being bought, manipulated or pressurized into these positions by the capitalist class.

Third, while it is true that the Congress needed and accepted funds from the business community, especially during constitutional (election) phases. there is no evidence to suggest that through these funds the businessmen were able to, in any basic way, influence the party's policy and ideology along lines which were not acceptable to it independently. Even the Congress dependence on funds (in the days when it was a popular movement) has been grossly exaggerated. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau, in reply to a query from the Viceroy, noted in March 1939, 'Congress has also very important substitutes for regular finance. The "appeal to patriotism" saves a lot of cash expenditures. . . Both for normal Congress activities and for election purposes, the moneybags (capitalists) are less important than the Gandhian superstition . . . local Congress organizations can command so much support from the public that they are in a position to fight elections without needing much money. 'In non-election phases, an overwhelming majority of Congress cadres maintained themselves on their own and carried on day-to-day agitations with funds raised through membership fees and small donations.

Gandhiji's position on capitalist support is very revealing in this context. As early as 1922, while welcoming and even appealing for support from merchants and mill owners; he simultaneously maintained *that*, 'whether they do so or not, the country's march to freedom cannot be made to depend on any corporation or groups of men. This is a mass manifestation. The masses are moving rapidly towards deliverance and they must move whether with the aid of the organized capital or without. This must therefore be a movement independent of capital and yet not antagonistic to it. Only if capital came to the aid of the masses, it would redound to the credit of the capitalists and hasten the advent of the happy day.' (Gandhiji's attitude towards the capitalists was to harden further over time, especially during World War II when a large number of them were busy profiteering while the national movement was facing untold repression and the people shortages and famines).

Lastly, as for the capitalists' determining the course of the Congress-led movements (many of them in specific areas led or supported by socialists and Communists), again there is little evidence to support this view. The Congress launched or withdrew movements based on its own strategic perceptions arising out of its understanding of the nature of the colonial state and its current postures, the organizational, political and ideological preparedness of the people, the staying power of the masses, especially when faced with repression, and so on. It did not do so at the behest, and not even on behalf of the capitalist class. In fact, almost each time the Congress launched mass movements, e.g., in 1905-08, 1920-22, 1930, 1932 and 1942, it did so without the approval of either the capitalist class as a whole or a significant section of it. However, once the movements were launched, the capitalist class reacted to it in a complex and progressively changing fashion, as discussed above. Quite significantly, the Indian capitalists never saw the Congress as their class party or even as a party susceptible only to their influence. On the contrary, they saw the Congress as an open-ended organization, heading a popular movement, and in the words of J.K. Mehta, Secretary, Indian Merchants' Chamber, with 'room in it for men of all shades of political opinion and economic views,' and therefore, open to be transformed in either the Left or the Right direction.

In fact, it was precisely the increasing radicalization of the Congress in the Left direction in the 1930s, with the growing influence of Nehru, and the Socialists and Communists within the Congress, which spurred the capitalists into becoming more active in the political field. The fear of radicalization of the national movement, however, did not push the capitalists into the 'lap of imperialism,' as predicted by contemporary radicals and as actually happened in some other colonial and semi-colonial countries. Instead, the Indian capitalists evolved a subtle, many sided strategy to contain the Left, no part of which involved a sell-out to imperialism or imperial interests. For example, when in 1929 certain capitalists, to meet the high pitch of Communist activity among the trade unions, attempted to form a class party, where European and Indian capitalists would combine, the leaders of the capitalist class firmly quashed such a move. As G.D. Birla put it, The salvation of the capitalists does not lie in joining hands with reactionary elements'



(i.e., pro-imperialist European interests in India) but in 'cooperating with those who through constitutional means want to change the government for a national one' (i.e. conservative nationalists). Similarly, in 1928, the capitalists refused to support the Government in introducing the Public Safety Bill, which was intended to contain the Communists, on the ground that such a provision would be used to attack the national movement.

Further, the capitalists were not to attempt to 'kill Bolshevism and Communism with such frail weapons' as frontally attacking the Left with their class organizations which would carry no weight with 'the masses' or even the 'middle classes.' As Birla explained, 'I have not the least doubt in my mind that a purely capitalist organization is the last body to put up an effective fight against communism.' A much superior method, he argued later (in 1936), when Nehru's leftist attitude was seen as posing a danger, was to 'let those who have given up property say what you want to say.' The strategy was to 'strengthen the hands' of those nationalists who, in their ideology, did not transcend the parameters of capitalism or, preferably, even opposed socialism.

The capitalists also realized, as G.L. Mehta, the president of FICCI, argued in 1943, that 'A consistent . . . programme of reforms' was the most effective remedy against social upheavals.' It was with this reform perspective that the 'Post War Economic Development Committee,' set up by the capitalists in 1942, which eventually drafted the Bombay Plan, was to function. Its attempt was to incorporate 'whatever is sound and feasible in the socialist movement' and see 'how far socialist demands could be accommodated without capitalism surrendering any of its essential features.' The Bombay Plan, therefore, seriously took up the question of rapid economic growth and equitable distribution, even arguing for the necessity of partial nationalization, the public sector, land reform and a series of workers' welfare schemes. One may add that the basic assumption made by the Bombay planners was that the plan could be implemented only by an independent national Government.

Clearly the Indian capitalist class was anti-socialist and bourgeois but it was not pro-imperialist. The maturity of the Indian capitalist class in identifying its long term interests, correctly understanding the nature of the Congress and its relationship with the different Classes in Indian society, its refusal to abandon the side of Indian nationalism even when threatened by the Left or tempted by imperialism, its ability to project its own class interests as societal interests, are some of the reasons (apart from the failure of the Left in several of the above directions) which explains why, on the whole, the Indian national movement remained, till independence under bourgeois ideological hegemony, despite strong contending trends within it.

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

One of the forerunners of India's struggle for freedom was Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi, who became a legendary figure in the history of Indian nationalism. Before, Mahatma Gandhi became the indisputable leader of the national movement; there were two prominent women who encouraged women to participate in the movement. One of them was Annie Besant, the leader of the Theosophical Movement in India. She advocated emancipation of Indian women. In fact, many Indian women joined her Home Rule Movement. According to her, the Home Rule Movement was rendered tenfold more effective by the involvement of a large number of women, who brought to it the uncalculating heroism, the endurance, and the self-sacrifice of the feminine nature. She considered child marriage to be a social evil and wanted its removal from the Indian society. For this, she suggested that boys should not marry at an immature age. She also supported the remarriage of child and young widows. She wholeheartedly supported the drive to educate women and believed that this would assist in successfully solving the vital problems of national life.

Sarojini Naidu was one of the forerunners of women's participation in the National Movement. Gopal Krishna Gokhale told her to use her poetry and her beautiful words to rejuvenate the spirit of independence in the hearts of villagers. He asked her to use her talent to free Mother India. In August 1914, she met Mahatma Gandhi, and from then onwards devoted her energy to the freedom movement. Sarojini Naidu worked as an active politician and freedom fighter. In 1917, she led the delegation to meet Mr. Mon-

tagu for women's suffrage. In 1918, she had a resolution passed at the special congress session in Bombay, supporting women's franchise. In 1919, she went to England as a member of the Home Rule League deputation to give evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee. There, she put forward the case for women's suffrage. In 1919, she became a campaigner for women's satyagraha, traveling all over India to propagate the cause. She appealed, in particular, to women to agitate against the Rowlett Act. In 1920, Sarojini joined the non-cooperation movement. In 1921, during the riots in Bombay following the protest against the visit of the Prince of Wales to the city, Sarojini Naidu visited the riot-torn areas, with the aim of persuading people for Hindu-Muslim unity. Similarly, she went to Moplah during the rebellion to deal with a volatile situation, and criticized the government action.

During the 1920s and 1930s, she supported the Akalis and protested against the ban imposed on them. In 1924, she went to South Africa, presided at a session of the East African Congress, and criticized the Anti-Historic Bill. She went to prison a number of times and worked on various committees set up for the cause of freedom. In September 1931, representatives of various women's organizations in India met in Bombay with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu as their president, and drafted a memorandum demanding "the immediate acceptance of adult franchise without any sex distinction." The memorandum went on to be accepted and women were granted equal rights as with men. This was a time, when many other Western countries were still fighting for equality between the sexes.

In 1930 when Mahatma Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, Sarojini led from the front along with many other Congress leaders. However, the British responded by arresting most of them. At this time Sarojini took over and continued the campaign. Jawaharlal Nehru in his book "The Discovery of India" writes, "It was not only the display of courage and daring, but what was even more surprising was the organizational power she showed." Sarojini was a great orator. Everyone who met her was impressed by her ability to speak. She had an integrated personality and could mesmerize the audiences with pure honesty and patriotism. Although a Congresswoman and personally close to Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu's nationalist vision was far more militant than Gandhi's.

As a feminist, Sarojini Naidu would appear to have spoken in two voices, one through her poetry and the other as a public figure. It is this dual feminist consciousness that is seen in her portrayal of the Indian woman, in which Sarojini Naidu shows the world-weary sensations, the stasis, the unmistakable agony of Indian women who have nowhere in the world to go. As Sarojini Naidu's political exposure grew—in 1925 she became the first Indian woman to become President of the Indian National Congress—a new portrayal of Indian womanhood enters her poetry. She also portrayed India as the slumbering Mother who must be awakened by her daughter. In 1908, she laid the foundation of her great contribution to the women's movement at a conference on Widow Marriage in Madras. After the Jalianwalla Bagh incident in which hundreds of men, women, and children were ruthlessly gunned down, political consciousness among women increased. This resulted in more and more women joining the national movement.

Many women stood up to the colonial patriarchy, such as Pandita Ramabai, Anandi Gopal and Savitribai Phule. Gandhiji was also instrumental in bringing women into the fold of the national movement. Gandhiji believed that marriages should take place only when there is a desire for progeny. His overpowering presence in the freedom struggle and his views on women considerably influenced their positioning in the Indian society. He believed that child marriage was a brutal social custom that has a very negative impact upon the physical and mental well-being of the child. Enforced widowhood, especially for child widows, was sinful and irrational, and the parents of a child widow should themselves make efforts to get their daughter remarried. Gandhiji was shocked at the widespread practice of the social evil of Devadasi and believed that a majority of Devadasis took to religious prostitution, as they were economically poor. He also condemned the practice of Purdah as it was detrimental to the mental and physical well-being of a woman. Gandhiji believed that women had a right to education, and that this education should not be restricted to the three R's. Education should help a man or woman in performing their duties effectively. One of the greatest contributions of Gandhiji to the emancipation of women is his insistence on their participation in politics. Gandhiji felt that women should have as much a share in winning Swaraj for India as

men. In fact, large number of women participated in India's struggle for independence. Women could take part in the movement, and were in fact encouraged to do so, since the methods for struggle were mainly non-cooperation and non-violence.

They were active in participating in the Swadeshi movement, or the boycott of foreign goods, non-payment of taxes, picketing of liquor shops, and so on. There was mass participation of women in the non-cooperation movement of 1921 and the civil disobedience movement of 1930. As a result of being associated with, and participating in the freedom struggle, Indian women realized the importance of living life as conscious human beings. A number of women activists also gained prominence were Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Kalpana Dutt, and Madame Bhikaji Cama.

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## UNIT-XXXII

# THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

### THE CRISIS AT TRIPURI

The Congress victory in the 1937 election and the consequent formation of popular ministries changed the balance of power within the country vis-a-vis the colonial authorities. The growth of left-wing parties and ideas led to a growing militancy within the nationalist ranks. The stage seemed to be set for another resurgence of the nationalist movement. Just at this time, the Congress had to undergo a crisis at the top—an occurrence which plagued the Congress every few years. Subhas Bose had been a unanimous choice as the President of the Congress in 1938. In 1939, he decided to stand again—this time as the spokesperson of militant politics and radical groups. Putting forward his candidature on 21 January 1939, Bose said that he represented the ‘new ideas, ideologies, problems and programmes’ that had emerged with ‘the progressive sharpening of the anti-imperialist struggle in India.’

The presidential elections, he said, should be fought among different candidates ‘on the basis of definite problems and programmes.’ On 24 January, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, J.B. Kripalani and four other members of the Congress Working Committee issued a counter statement, declaring that the talk of ideologies, programmes and policies was irrelevant in the elections of a Congress president since these were evolved by the various Congress bodies such as the AICC and the Working Committee, and that the position of the Congress President was like that of a constitutional head who represented and symbolized the unity and solidarity of the nation. With the blessings of Gandhiji, these and other leaders put up Pattabhi Sitaramayya as a candidate for the post. Subhas Bose was elected on 29 January by 1580 votes against 1377. Gandhiji declared that Sitaramayya’s defeat was ‘more mine than his.’ But the election of Bose resolved nothing, it only brought the brewing crisis to a head at the Tripuri session of the Congress. There were two major reasons for the crisis. One was the line of propaganda adopted by Bose against Sardar Patel and the majority of the top Congress leadership whom he branded as rightists. He openly accused them of working for a compromise with the Government on the question of federation, of having even drawn up a list of prospective central’ ministers and therefore of not wanting a leftist as the president of the Congress ‘who may be a thorn in the way of a compromise and may put obstacles in the path of negotiations.’ He had, therefore, appealed to Congressmen to vote for a leftist and ‘a genuine anti-federationist.’ In the second part of his autobiography, Subhas put forward his thinking of the period even more crudely: ‘As Congress President, the writer did his best to stiffen the opposition of the Congress Party to any compromise with Britain and this caused annoyance in Gandhian circles who were then looking forward to an understanding with the British Government.’ ‘The Gandhiists’, he wrote, ‘did not want to be disturbed in their ministerial and parliamentary work’ and ‘were at that time opposed to any national struggle.’ The Congress leaders, labelled as compromisers, resented such charges and branded them as a slander. They pointed out in a statement: ‘Subhas \_\_\_ Babu has mentioned his opposition to the federation. This is shared by all the members of the Working Committee. It is the Congress policy.’ After Subhas’s election, they felt that they could not work with a president who had publicly cast aspersions on their nationalist bonafides. Earlier, Gandhiji had issued a statement on 31<sup>st</sup> January saying: ‘I rejoice in this defeat’ because ‘Subhas Babu, instead of being President on the sufferance of those whom he calls rightists, is now President elected in a contested election. This enables him to choose a homogeneous cabinet and enforce his programme without let or hindrance.’



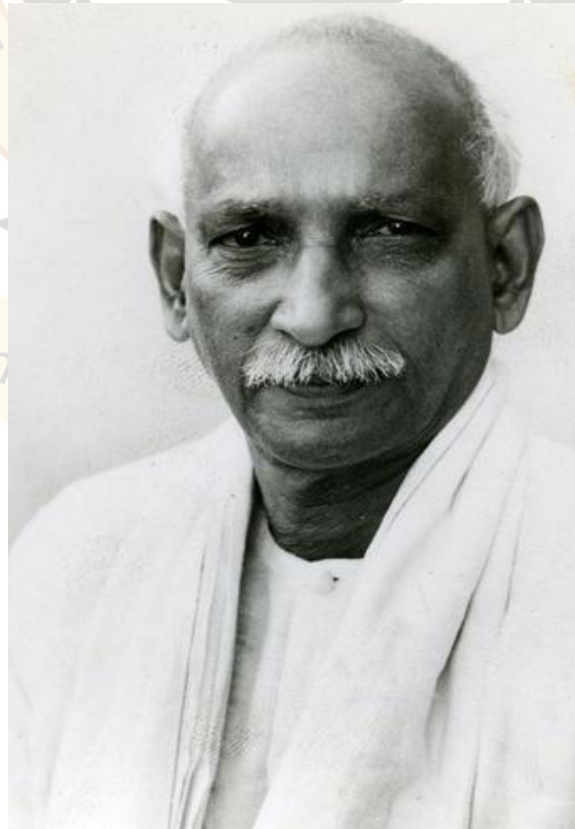
### **Gandhiji with Subhash Chandra Bose and Vallabh Bhai Patel**

Jawaharlal Nehru did not resign along with the twelve other Working Committee members. He did not like the idea of confronting Bose publicly. But he did not agree with Bose either. Before the elections, he had said that in the election no principles or programmes were at stake. He had been unhappy with Bose's aspersions on his colleagues. Nor did he agree that the fight was between the Left and the Right. His letter to Subhas on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1939 would bear a long quotation: 'I do not know who you consider a leftist and who a rightist. The way these words were used by you in your statements during the presidential contest seemed to imply that Gandhiji and those who are considered as his group in the Working Committee are the rightist leaders. Their opponents, whoever they might be, are the leftists. That seems to me an entirely wrong description. It seems to me that many of the so-called leftists are more right than the so-called rightists. Strong language and a capacity to criticize and attack the old Congress leadership is not a test of leftism in politics... I think the use of the words left and right has been generally wholly wrong and confusing. If, instead of these words we talked about policies it would be far better. What policies do you stand for? Anti-federation, well and good. I think that the great majority of the members of the Working Committee stand for that and it is not fair to hint at their weakness in this respect.' However, more importantly, basic differences of policy and tactics were involved in the underlying Bose-Gandhian debate. They were partially based on differing perceptions of the political reality, and differing assessments of the strength and weakness of the Congress and the preparedness of the masses for struggle. Differing styles regarding how to build up a mass movement were also involved.

Subhas Bose believed that the Congress was strong enough to launch an immediate struggle and that the masses were ready for such struggle. He was convinced, as he wrote later, 'that the country was internally more ripe for a revolution than ever before and that the coming international crisis would give India an opportunity for achieving her emancipation, which is rare in human history.' He, therefore, argued in his presidential address at Tripuri for a programme of immediately giving the British Government a six-months ultimatum to grant the national demand for independence and of launching a mass civil disobedience movement if it failed to do so.' Gandhiji's perceptions were very different. He, too, believed that

another round for mass struggle was necessary to win freedom, for Indians were facing 'an impossible situation.' Already, in the middle of July 1938, he had written: "The darkness that seems to have enveloped me will disappear, and that, whether with another battle more brilliant than the Dandi March or without, India will come to her own."° But, he believed, the time was not yet ripe for an ultimatum because neither the Congress nor the masses were yet ready for struggle. Indians should first 'put our own house in order.' Making his position clear in an interview on 5 May 1939, Gandhiji declared: 'He (Subhas Bose) holds that we possess enough resources for a fight. I am totally opposed to his views. Today we possess no resources for a fight. . . There is no limit to communal strife. . . We do not have the same hold among the peasants of Bihar as we used to... If today I am asked to start the "Dandi March," I have not the courage to do so. How can we do anything without the workers and peasants? The country belongs only to them. I am not equipped to issue an ultimatum to the Government. The country would only be exposed to ridicule.' Gandhiji's views were above all based on his assessment of the Congress organization. He was convinced that corruption and indiscipline had vitiated its capacity to fight. As we have seen earlier, during 1938 and early 1939, he repeatedly and publicly raised the issues of mutual rivalries and bickerings among Congressmen, bogus membership and impersonation at party elections, efforts to capture Congress Committees, and the general decline of authority in the Congress.

The internal strife reached its climax at the Tripuri session of the Congress, held from 8 to 12 March 1939. Bose had completely misjudged his support and the meaning of his majority in the presidential election. Congressmen had voted for him for diverse reasons, and above all because he stood for militant politics, and not because they wanted to have him as the supreme leader of the national movement. They were not willing to reject Gandhiji's leadership or that of other older leaders who decided to bring this home to Subhas. Govind Ballabh Pant moved a resolution at Tripuri expressing full confidence in the old Working Committee, reiterating full faith in Gandhiji's leadership of the movement and the Congress policies of the previous twenty years, and asking Subhas to nominate his Working Committee 'in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.' The resolution was passed by a big majority, but Gandhiji did not approve of the resolution and refused to impose a Working Committee on Subhas. He asked him to nominate a Committee of his own choice.



**Pattabhi Sitaramayya**



Subhas Bose refused to take up the challenge. He had placed himself in an impossible situation. He knew that he could not lead the organization on his own, but he was also not willing to accept the leadership of the majority. To place the best construction on his policy, he wanted Gandhiji to be the leader of the coming struggle but he wanted Gandhiji to follow the strategy and tactics laid down by him and the left-wing parties and groups. Gandhiji, on the other hand, would either lead the Congress on the basis of his own strategy and style of politics or surrender the position of the leader. As he wrote to Bose: 'if your prognosis is right, I am a back number and played out as the generalissimo of *Satyagraha*.' In other words, as Rajendra Prasad later wrote in his *Autobiography*, Gandhiji and the older leaders would not accept a situation where the strategy and tactics were not theirs but the responsibility for implementing them would be theirs.'

Bose could see no other way out but to resign from the presidentship. Nehru tried to mediate between the two sides and persuade Bose not to resign, while asking Gandhiji and the older leaders to be more accommodative. But Bose would not resign from his position. On the one hand, he insisted that the Working Committee should be representative of the new radical trends and groups which had elected him, on the other, he would not nominate his own Working Committee. He preferred to press his resignation. This led to the election of Rajendra Prasad in his place. The Congress had weathered another storm. Bose could also not get the support of the Congress Socialists and the Communists at Tripuri or after for they were not willing to divide the national movement and felt that its unity must be preserved at all costs. Explaining its position, the CPI declared after Tripuri that the interests of the anti-imperialist struggle demanded not the exclusive leadership of one wing but a united leadership under the guidance of Gandhiji." P.C. Joshi, General Secretary of the CPI, wrote in April 1939 that the greatest class struggle today is our national struggle,' that the Congress was the main organ of this struggle, and that the preservation of its unity was a primary task.' Subsequently, in May, Subhas Bose and his followers formed the Forward Bloc as a new party within the Congress. And when he gave a call for an All-India protest on 9 July against an AICC resolution, the Working Committee took disciplinary action against him, removing him from the presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and debarring him from holding any Congress office for three years. World War II broke Out On 1 September 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Earlier Germany had occupied Austria in March 1938 and Czechoslovakia in 1939. Britain and France, which had been following a policy of appeasement towards Hitler, were now forced to go to Poland's aid and declare war on Germany. This they did on 3 September 1939. The Government of India immediately declared India to be at war with Germany without consulting the Congress or the elected members of the central legislature. The Congress, as we have seen earlier, was in full sympathy with the victims of fascist aggression, and its immediate reaction was to go to the aid of the anti-fascist forces. Gandhiji's reaction was highly emotional. He told the Viceroy that the very thought of the possible destruction of the House of Parliament and Westminster Abbey produced a strong emotional reaction in him and that, fully sympathizing with the Allied Cause, he was for full and unquestioning cooperation with Britain. But a question most of the Congress leaders asked was — how was it possible for an enslaved nation to aid others in their fight for freedom? The official Congress stand was adopted at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee held at Wardha from 10 to 14 September to which, in keeping with the nationalist tradition of accommodating diversity of opinion, Subhas Bose, Acharya Narendra Dev, and Jayaprakash Narayan were also invited. Sharp differences emerged in this meeting. Gandhiji was for taking a sympathetic view of the Allies. He believed that there was a clear difference between the democratic states of Western Europe and the totalitarian Nazi state headed by Hitler. The Socialists and Subhas Bose argued that the War was an imperialist one since both sides were fighting for gaining or defending colonial territories. Therefore, the question of supporting either of the two sides did not arise. Instead the Congress should take advantage of the situation to wrest freedom by immediately starting a civil disobedience movement.



### **Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose**

Jawaharlal Nehru had a stand of his own. He had been for several years warning the world against the dangers of Nazi aggression, and he made a sharp distinction between democracy and Fascism. He believed that justice was on the side of Britain, France and Poland. But he was also convinced that Britain and France were imperialist countries and that the War was the result of the inner contradictions of capitalism' maturing since the end of World War I. He, therefore, argued that India should neither join the War till she herself gained freedom nor take advantage of Britain's difficulties by starting an immediate struggle. Gandhiji found that his position was not supported by even his close followers such as Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad. Consequently, he decided to support Nehru's position which was then adopted by the Working Committee. Its resolution, while unequivocally condemning the Nazi attack on Poland as well as Nazism and Fascism, declared that India could not be party to a war which was ostensibly being fought for democratic freedom while that freedom was being denied to her, If Britain was fighting for democracy and freedom, she should prove this in India. In particular, she should declare how her war aims would be implemented in India at the end of the War, Indians would then gladly join other democratic nations in the war effort to starting a mass struggle, but it warned that the decision could not be delayed for long. As Nehru put it, the Congress leadership wanted 'to give every chance to the Viceroy and the British Government.'

The British Government's response was entirely negative. Linlithgow, the Viceroy, in his well considered statement of 17 October 1939 harped on the differences among Indians, tried to use the Muslim League and the Princes against the Congress, and refused to define Britain's war aims beyond stating that Britain was resisting aggression. As an immediate measure, he offered to set up a consultative committee whose advice might be sought by the Government whether it felt it necessary to do so. For the future, the promise was that at the end of the War the British Government would enter into consultations with representatives of several communities, parties, and interests in India and with the Indian princes' as to how the Act of 1935 might be modified. In a private communication to Zetland, the Secretary of State, Linlithgow



was to remark a few months later: **‘I am not too keen to start talking about a period after which British rule will have ceased in India. I suspect that that day is very remote and I feel the least we say about it in all probability the better.’** On 18 October, Zetland spoke in the House of Lords and stressed differences among Indians, especially among Hindus and Muslims. He branded the Congress as a purely Hindu organization. It, thus, became clear that the British Government had no intention of loosening their hold on India during or after the War and that it was willing, if necessary, to treat the Congress as an enemy.

The reaction of the Indian people and the national leadership was sharp. The angriest reaction came from Gandhiji who had been advocating more or less unconditional support to Britain. Pointing out that the British Government was continuing to pursue ‘the old policy of divide and rule,’ he said: ‘The Indian declaration (of the Viceroy) shows clearly that there is to be no democracy for India if Britain can prevent it. . . The Congress asked for bread and it has got a stone.’ Referring to the question of minorities and special interests such as those of the princes, foreign capitalists, *zamindars*, etc., Gandhiji remarked: ‘The Congress will safeguard the rights of every minority so long as they do not advance claims inconsistent with India’s independence.’ But, he added, ‘independent India will not tolerate any interests in conflict with the true interests of the masses.’ The Working Committee, meeting on 23 October, rejected the Viceregal statement as a reiteration of the old imperialist policy, decided not to support the War, and called upon the Congress ministries to resign as a protest. This they did as disciplined soldiers of the national movement. But the Congress leadership still stayed its hand and was reluctant to give a call for an immediate and a massive anti-imperialist struggle. In fact, the Working Committee resolution of 23 October warned Congressmen against any hasty action.

While there was agreement among Congressmen on the question of attitude to the War and the resignation of the ministries, sharp differences developed over the question of the immediate starting of a mass *satyagraha*. Gandhiji and the dominant leadership advanced three broad reasons for not initiating an immediate movement. First, they felt that since the cause of the Allies — Britain and France — was just, they should not be embarrassed in the prosecution of the War. Second, the lack of Hindu-Muslim unity was a big barrier to a struggle. In the existing atmosphere any civil disobedience movement could easily degenerate into communal rioting or even civil war. Above all, they felt that there did not exist in the country an atmosphere for an immediate struggle. Neither the masses were ready nor was the Congress organizationally in a position to launch a struggle. The Congress organization was weak and had been corrupted during 1938-39. There was indiscipline and lack of cohesion within the Congress ranks. Under these circumstances, a mass movement would not be able to withstand severe repressive measures by the Government. It was, therefore, necessary to carry on intense political work among the people, to prepare them for struggle, to tone up the Congress organization and purge it of weaknesses, to negotiate with authorities till all the possibilities of a negotiated settlement were exhausted and the Government was clearly seen by all to be in the wrong. The time for launching a struggle would come when the people were strong and ready for struggle, the Congress organization had been put on a sound footing, and the Government took such aggressive action that the people felt the absolute necessity of going into mass action. This view was summed up in the resolution placed by the Working Committee before the Ramgarh Session of the Congress in March 1940. The resolution, after reiterating the Congress position on the War and asserting that ‘nothing short of complete independence can be accepted by the people,’ declared that the Congress would resort to civil disobedience ‘as soon as the Congress organization is considered fit enough for the purpose, or in case circumstances so shape themselves as to precipitate a crisis.’ An alternative to the position of the dominant leadership came from a coalition of various left-wing groups: Subhas Bose and his Forward Bloc, the Congress Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Royists, etc. The Left characterized the War as an imperialist war and asserted that the war-crisis provided the opportunity to achieve freedom through an all-out struggle against British imperialism. It was convinced that the masses were fully ready for action and were only waiting for a call from the leadership. They accepted that hurdles like the communal problem and weaknesses in the Congress organization existed; but they were convinced that these would be easily and automatically swept away once a mass struggle was begun.

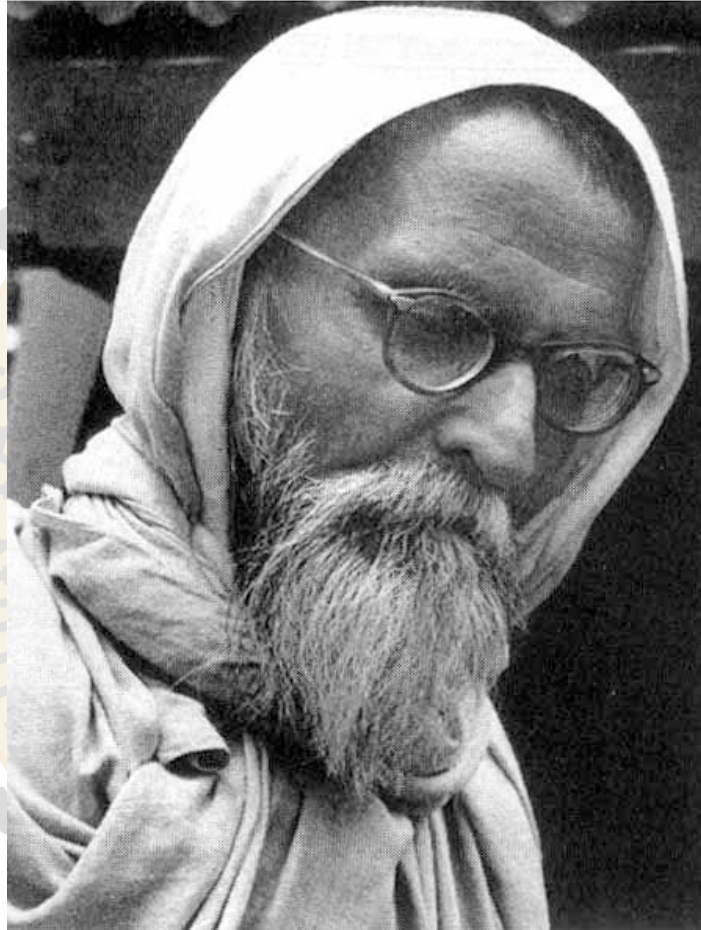


Organizational strength, they said, was not to be built up prior to a struggle but in the course of the struggle. Making a sharp critique of the Congress leadership's policy of 'wait and see,' the Left accused the leadership of being afraid of the masses, of having lost zest for struggle, and consequently of trying to bargain and compromise with imperialism for securing petty concessions. They urged the Congress leadership to adopt immediate measures to launch a mass struggle. While agreeing on the need for an immediate struggle, the Left was internally divided both in its understanding of political forces and on the Course of political action in case the dominant leadership of the Congress did not accept the line of immediate struggle. Subhas Bose wanted the Left to split the Congress if it did not launch a struggle, to organize a parallel Congress and to start a struggle on its own. He was convinced that the masses and the overwhelming majority of Congress would support the Left-led parallel Congress and join the movement it would launch. The CSP and CPI differed from this view. They were convinced that Bose was grossly overestimating the influence of the Left and no struggle could be launched without the leadership of Gandhiji and the Congress. Therefore an attempt should be made not to split the Congress and thus disrupt the national united fronts but persuade and pressurize its leadership to launch a struggle. Jawaharlal Nehru's was an ambivalent position. On the one hand, he could clearly see the imperialistic character of the Allied countries, on the other, he would do nothing that might lead to the triumph of Hitler and the Nazis in Europe. His entire personality and political thinking led to the line of an early commencement of civil disobedience, but he would do nothing that would imperil the anti-Nazi struggle in Europe and the Chinese people's struggle against Japanese aggression. In the end, however, the dilemma was resolved by Nehru going along with Gandhiji and the majority of the Congress leadership.

But politics could not go on this placid note for too long. The patience of both the Congress leadership and the masses was getting exhausted. The Government refused to budge and took up the position that no constitutional advance could be made till the Congress came to an agreement with the Muslim communalists. It kept issuing ordinance after ordinance taking away the freedom of speech and the Press and the right to organize associations. Nationalist workers, especially those belonging to the left-wing, were harassed, arrested and imprisoned all over the country. The Government was getting ready to crush the Congress if it took any steps towards a mass struggle. In this situation, the Indians felt that the time had come to show the British that their patience was not the result of weakness, As Nehru put it in an article entitled 'The Parting of the Ways,' the British rulers believed that 'in this world of force, of bombing aeroplanes, tanks, and armed men how weak we are! Why trouble about us? But perhaps, even in this world of armed conflict, there is such a thing as the spirit of man, and the spirit of a nation, which is neither ignoble nor weak, and which may not be ignored, save at peril.' Near the end of 1940, the Congress once again asked Gandhiji to take command. Gandhiji now began to take steps which would lead to a mass struggle within his broad strategic perspective. He decided to initiate a limited *Satyagraha* on an individual basis by a few selected individuals in every locality. The demand of a *Satyagrahi* would be for the freedom of speech to preach against participation in the War. The *Satyagrahi* would publicly declare: 'It is wrong to help the British war-effort with men or money. The only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance.' The *Satyagrahi* would beforehand inform the district magistrate of the time and place where he or she was going to make the anti-war speech. The carefully chosen *Satyagrahis* — Vinoba Bhave was to be the first *Satyagrahi* on 17 October 1940 and Jawaharlal Nehru the second — were surrounded by huge crowds when they appeared on the platform, and the authorities could often arrest them only after they had made their speeches. And if the Government did not arrest a *Satyagrahi*, he or she would not only repeat the performance but move into the villages and start a trek towards Delhi, thus participating in a movement that came to be known as the '*Delhi Chalo*' (onwards to Delhi) movement.

The aims of the Individual *Satyagraha* conducted as S. Gopal has put it, 'at a low temperature and in very small doses' were explained as follows by Gandhiji in a letter to the Viceroy: 'The Congress is as much opposed to victory for Nazism as any Britisher can be. But their objective cannot be carried to the extent of their participation in the war. And since you and the Secretary of State for India have declared that the whole of India is voluntarily helping the war effort, it becomes necessary to make clear that the vast majority of the people of India are not interested in it. They make no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that rules India.'

Thus, the Individual *Satyagraha* had a dual purpose — while giving expression to the Indian people's strong political feeling, it gave the British Government further opportunity to peacefully accept the Indian demands. Gandhiji and the Congress were, because of their anti-Nazi feelings, still reluctant to take advantage of the British predicament and embarrass her war effort by a mass upheaval in India. More importantly, Gandhiji was beginning to prepare the people for the coming struggle. The Congress organization was being put back in shape; opportunist elements were being discovered and pushed out of the organization; and above all the people were being politically aroused, educated and mobilized. By 15 May 1941, more than 25,000 *Satyagrahis* had been convicted for offering individual civil disobedience. Many more — lower level political workers — had been left free by the Government.



**Acharya Vinoba Bhave**

Two major changes in British politics occurred during 1941. Nazi Germany had already occupied Poland, Belgium, Holland, Norway and France as well as most of Eastern Europe. It attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. In the East, Japan launched a surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour on 7 December. It quickly overran the Philippines, Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Burma. It occupied Rangoon in March 1942. War was brought to India's doorstep. Winston Churchill, now the British Prime Minister, told the King that Burma, Ceylon, Calcutta and Madras might fall into enemy hands. The Indian leaders, released from prisons in early December, were worried about the safety and defence of India. They also had immense concern for the Soviet Union and China. Many felt that Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union had changed the character of the War. Gandhiji had earlier denounced the Japanese slogan of 'Asia for Asiatics' and asked the people of India to boycott Japanese products. Anxious to defend Indian territory and to go to the aid of the Allies, the Congress Working Committee overrode the objections of Gandhiji and Nehru and passed a resolution at the end of December offering to fully cooperate in the defence of India and the Allies if Britain agreed to give full independence after the War and the substance of power immediately. It was at this time that Gandhiji designated Jawaharlal as his chosen successor. Speaking before the AICC on 15 January 1941, he said: 'Somebody suggested that Pandit Jawaharlal and I were



estranged. It will require much more than differences of opinion to estrange us. We have had differences from the moment we became co-workers, and yet I have said for some years and say now that not Rajaji (C. Rajagopalachari) but Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says that he does not understand my language, and that he speaks a language foreign to me. This may or may not be true. But language is no bar to union of hearts. And I know that when I am gone he will speak my language.'

## THE CRIPPS MISSION

As the war situation worsened, President Roosevelt of the USA and President Chiang Kai-Shek of China as also the Labour Party leaders of Britain put pressure on Churchill to seek the active cooperation of Indians in the War. To secure this cooperation the British Government sent to India in March 1942 a mission headed by a Cabinet minister Stafford Cripps, a leftwing Labourite who had earlier actively supported the Indian national movement.



**Sir Richard Stafford Cripps with Mahatma Gandhi**

Even though Cripps announced that the aim of British policy in India was 'the earliest possible realization of self- government in India,' the Draft Declaration he brought with him was disappointing. The Declaration promised India Dominion Status and a constitution-making body after the War whose members would be elected by the provincial assemblies and nominated by the rulers in case of the princely states. The Pakistan demand was accommodated by the provision that any province which was not prepared to accept the new constitution would have the right to sign a separate agreement with Britain regarding its future status. For the present the British would continue to exercise sole control over the defence of the country.

Amery, the Secretary of State, described the Declaration as in essence a conservative, reactionary and limited offer. Nehru, a friend of Cripps, was to write later: 'When I read those proposals for the first time I was profoundly depressed.' Negotiations between Cripps and the Congress leaders broke down. The Congress objected to the provision for Dominion Status rather than full independence, the representation of the princely states in the constituent assembly not by the people of the states but by the nominees of the rulers, and above all by the provision for the partition of India. The British Government also refused to accept the demand for the immediate transfer of effective power to the Indians and for a real share in the responsibility for the defence of India. An important reason for the failure of the negotiations was the



incapacity of Cripps to bargain and negotiate. He had been told not to go beyond the Draft Declaration. Moreover, Churchill, the Secretary of State, Amery, the Viceroy, Linlithgow, and the Commander-in-Chief, Wavell, did not want Cripps to succeed and constantly opposed and sabotaged his efforts to accommodate Indian opinion. Stafford Cripps returned home in the middle of April leaving behind a frustrated and embittered Indian people. Though they still sympathized with the anti-fascist, especially the people of China and the Soviet people, they felt that the existing situation in the country had become intolerable. The time had come, they felt, for a final assault on imperialism.

## THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT (QIM)

'Quit India,' *'Bharat Choro'*. This simple but powerful slogan launched "the legendary struggle which also became famous by the name of the 'August Revolution.'" In this struggle, the common people of the country demonstrated an unparalleled heroism and militancy. Moreover, the repression that they faced was the most brutal that had ever been used against the national movement. The circumstances in which the resistance was offered were also the most adverse faced by the national movement until then — using the justification of the war effort, the Government had armed itself with draconian measures, and suppressed even basic civil liberties. Virtually any political activity, however peaceful and 'legal,' was at this time an illegal and revolutionary activity. Why had it become necessary to launch a movement in these difficult conditions, when the possibility of brutal repression was a certainty? For one, the failure of the Cripps Mission in April 1942 made it clear that Britain was unwilling to offer an honourable settlement and a real constitutional advance during the War, and that she was determined to continue India's unwilling partnership in the War efforts. The empty gesture of the even those Congressmen like Nehru and Gandhiji, who did not want to do anything to hamper the anti fascist War effort (and who had played a major role in keeping in check those who had been spoiling for a tight since 1939), that any further silence would be tantamount to accepting the right of the British Government to decide India's fate without any reference to the wishes of her people. Gandhiji had been as clear as Nehru that he did not want to hamper the anti-fascist struggle, especially that of the Russian and Chinese people. But by the spring of 1942 he was becoming increasingly convinced of the inevitability of a struggle. A fortnight after Cripps' departure, Gandhiji drafted a resolution for the Congress Working Committee calling for Britain's withdrawal and the adoption of non-violent non-cooperation against any Japanese invasion, Congress edged towards Quit India while Britain moved towards arming herself with special powers to meet the threat. Nehru remained opposed to the idea of a struggle right till August 1942 and gave way only at the very end.' Apart from British obduracy, there were other factors that made a struggle both inevitable and necessary. Popular discontent, a product of rising prices and war-time shortages, was gradually mounting. High-handed government actions such as the commandeering of boats in Bengal and Orissa to prevent their being used by the Japanese had led to considerable anger among the people. The popular willingness to give expression to this discontent was enhanced by the growing feeling of an imminent British collapse. The news of Allied reverses and British withdrawals from South-East Asia and Burma and the trains bringing wounded soldiers from the Assam-Burma border confirmed this feeling.

Combined with this was the impact of the manner of the British evacuation from Malaya and Burma. It was common knowledge that the British had evacuated, the white residents and generally left the subject people to their fate. /Letters from Indians in South-East Asia to their relatives in India were full of graphic accounts of British betrayal and their being left at the mercy of the dreaded Japanese. It not only to be expected that they would repeat the performance in India, in the event of a Japanese occupation? In fact, one major reason for the leadership of the national movement thinking it necessary to launch a struggle was their feeling that the people were becoming demoralized and, that in the event of a Japanese occupation, might not resist at all, In order to build up their capacity to resist Japanese aggression, It was necessary to draw them t of this demoralized state of mind and convince them of their own power. Gandhiji, as always, was particularly clear on this aspect. The popular faith in the stability of British rule had reached such a low that there was a run on the banks and people withdrew deposits from post-office savings accounts and started hoarding gold, silver and coins. This was particularly marked in East U.P. and Bihar, but it also took place in Madras Presidency. So convinced was Gandhiji that the time was now ripe for struggle that

he said to Louis Fischer in an interview in the beginning of June: 'I have become impatient. . . I may not be able to convince the Congress I will go ahead nevertheless and address myself directly to the people.' He did not have to carry out this threat and, as before, the Congress accepted the Mahatma's expert advice on the timing of a mass struggle. Though Gandhiji himself had begun to talk of the coming struggle for some time now, it was at the Working Committee meeting at Wardha on 14 July, 1942 that the Congress first accepted the idea of a struggle. The All-India Congress Committee was then to meet in Bombay in August to ratify this decision. The historic August meeting at Gowalia Tank in Bombay was unprecedented in the popular enthusiasm it generated. Huge crowds waited outside as the leaders deliberated on the issue. And the feeling of anticipation and expectation ran so high that in the open session, when the leaders made their speeches before the many thousands who had collected to hear them, there was pin-drop silence.

Gandhiji's speech's delivered in his usual quiet and Un-rhetorical style, recount many who were in the audience, had the most electrifying impact. He first made it clear that 'the actual struggle does not commence this moment. You have only placed all your powers in my hands. I will now wait upon the Viceroy a' plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress demand. That process is likely to take two or three weeks.' But, he added: 'you may take it from me that I am not going to strike a bargain with the Viceroy for ministries and the like. I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom. Maybe, he will propose the abolition of salt tax, the drink evil, etc. But I will say: "Nothing less than freedom." He followed this up with the now famous exhortation: 'Do or Die.' To quote: 'Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is. "Do or Die" We shall either free India or die in the attempt: we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery.'

Gandhiji's speech also contained specific instructions for different sections of the people. Government servants would not yet be asked to resign, but they should openly declare their allegiance to the Congress, soldiers were also not to leave their posts, but they were to 'refuse to fire on our own people'. The Princes were asked to 'accept the sovereignty of your own people, instead of paying homage to a foreign power.' And the people of the Princely States were asked to declare that they '(were) part of the Indian nation and that they (would) accept the leadership of the Princes, if the latter cast their lot with the People, but not otherwise.' Students were to give up studies if they were sure they could continue to remain firm independence was achieved. On 7 August, Gandhiji had placed the instructions he had drafted before the Working Committee, and in these he had proposed that peasants 'who have the courage, and are prepared to risk their all' should refuse to pay the land revenue. Tenants were told that 'the Congress holds that the land belongs to those who work on it and to no one else.' Where the *zamindari* system prevails . . . if the *zamindar* makes common cause with the ryot, his portion of the revenue, which may be settled by mutual agreement, should be given to him. But if a *zamindar* wants to side with the Government, no tax should be paid to him.' These instructions were not actually issued because of the preventive arrests, but they do make Gandhiji's intentions clear.

The Government, however, was in no mood to either negotiate with the Congress or wait for the movement to be formally launched. In the early hours of 9 August, in a single sweep, all the top leaders of the congress were arrested and taken to unknown destinations. The Government had been preparing for the strike since the outbreak of the War itself, and since 1940 had been ready with an elaborate Revolutionary Movement Ordinance. On 8 August, 1940, the Viceroy, Linlithgow, in a personal letter to the Governors made his intentions clear: 'I feel very strongly that the only possible answer to a 'declaration of war' by any section of Congress in the present circumstances must be a declared determination to crush the organization as a while.' For two years, Gandhiji had avoided walking into the trap set for him by refusing to make a rash and premature strike and had carefully built up the tempo through the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement, organizational revamping and a consistent propaganda campaign. But now, the Government was unwilling to allow him any more time to pursue his strategy. In anticipation of the AICC's passing the Quit India resolution, instructions for arrests and suppression had gone out to the provinces.



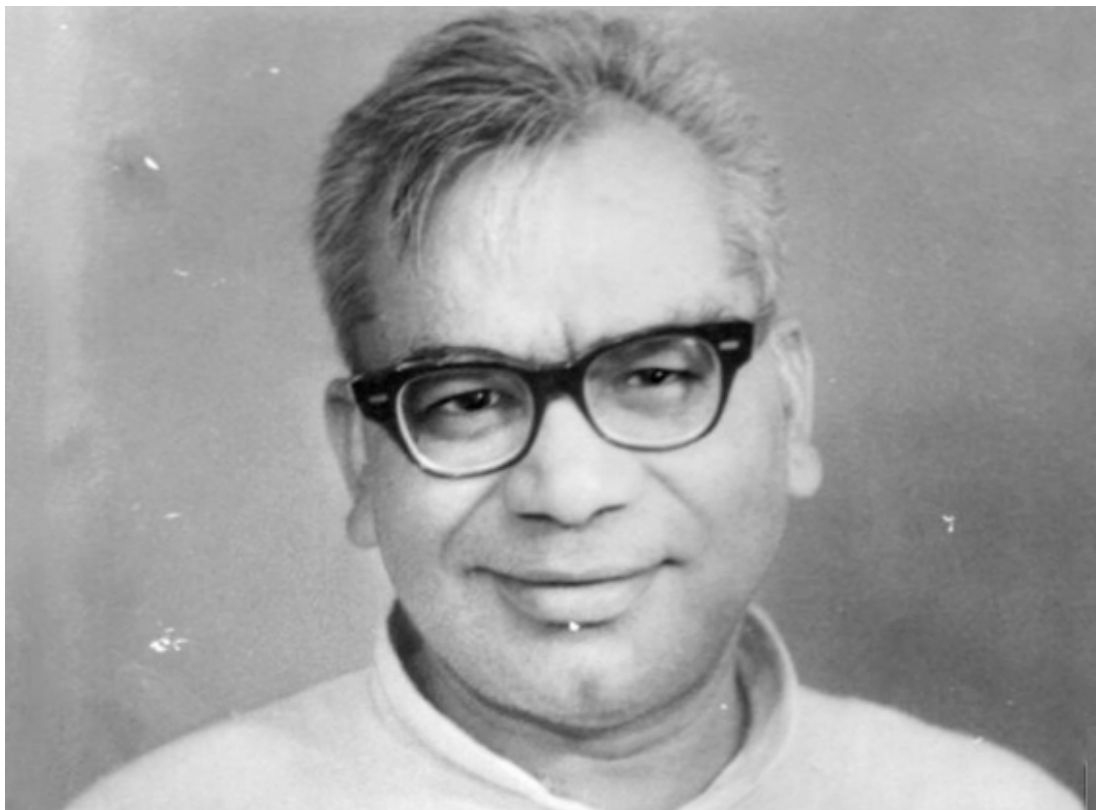
## UNDERGROUND ACTIVITY DURING THE QIM

The sudden attack by the Government produced an instantaneous reaction among the people. In Bombay, as soon as the news of arrests spread lakhs of people flocked to Gowalia Tank where a mass meeting had been scheduled and there were clashes with the authorities. There were similar disturbances on 9 August in Ahmedabad and Poona. On the 10th Delhi and many towns in U.P. and Bihar, including Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi and Patna followed suit with *hartals*, public demonstrations and processions in defiance of the law. The Government responded by gagging the press. The *National Herald* and *Harijan* ceased publication for the entire duration of the struggle, others for shorter periods. Meanwhile, provincial and local level leaders who had evaded arrest returned to their homes through devious routes and set about organizing resistance. As the news spread further in the rural areas, the villagers joined the townsmen in recording their protest. For the first six or seven weeks after 9 August, there was a tremendous mass upsurge all over the country. People devised a variety of ways of expressing their anger. In some places, huge crowds attacked police stations, post offices, *kutcheries* (courts), railway stations and other symbols of Government authority. National flags were forcibly hoisted on public buildings in defiance of the police. At other places, groups of *Satyagrahis* offered arrest in *tehsil* or district headquarters.

Crowds of villagers, often numbering a few hundreds or even a couple of thousand, physically removed railway tracks. Elsewhere, small groups of individuals blew up bridges and removed tracks, and cut telephone and telegraph wires. Students went on strike in schools and colleges all over the country and busied themselves taking processions, writing and distributing illegal news-sheets: hundreds of these *patrikas* came out all over the country. They also became couriers for the emerging underground networks' Workers too struck work: in Ahmedabad, the mills were closed for three and a half months, workers in Bombay stayed away from work for over a week following the 9 August arrests, in Jamshedpur there was a strike for thirteen days and workers in Ahmednagar and Poona were active for several months.

The reaction to the arrests was most intense in Bihar and Eastern U P, where the movement attained the proportions of a rebellion. From about the middle of August, the news reached the rural areas through students and other political activists who fanned out from the towns. Students of the Banaras Hindu University decided to go to the villages to spread the message of Quit India. They raised slogans of 'Thana jalao' (Burn police station), 'Station phoonk do' (Burn the railway stations) '*Angrez Bhag Gaya*' (Englishmen have fled). They hijacked trains and draped them in national flags. In rural areas, the pattern was of large crowds of peasants descending on the nearest *tehsil* or district town and attacking all symbols of government authority. There was government firing and repression, but the rebellion only gathered in momentum. For two weeks, Tirhut division in Bihar was totally cut off from the rest of the country and no Government authority existed. Control was lost over Patna for two days after firing at the Secretariat. Eighty percent of the police stations were captured or temporarily evacuated in ten districts of North and Central Bihar. There were also physical attacks on Europeans. At Fatwa, near Patna, two R.A.F. officers were killed by a crowd at the railway station and their bodies paraded through the town. In Monghyr, the crews of two R.A.F. planes that crashed at Pasraha on 18 August and Rulhar on 30 August were killed by villagers. Particularly important centres of resistance in this phase were Azamgarh, Ballia and Gorakhpur in East U.P. and Gaya, Bhagalpur, Saran, Purnea, Shahabad, Muzaffarpur and Champaran in Bihar.





**Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia**

According to official estimates, in the first week after the arrests of the leaders, 250 railway stations were damaged or destroyed, and over 500 post offices and 150 police stations were attacked. The movement of trains in Bihar and Eastern U.P., was disrupted for many weeks. In Karnataka alone, there were 1600 incidents of cutting of telegraph lines, and twenty- six railway stations and thirty-two post offices were attacked. Unarmed crowds faced police and military firing on 538 occasions and they were also machine-gunned by low-flying aircraft. Repression also took the form of taking hostages from the villages, imposing collective fines running to a total of Rs 90 lakhs (which were often realized on the spot by looting the people's belongings), whipping of suspects and burning of entire villages whose inhabitants had run away and could not be caught. By the end of 1942, over 60,000 persons had been arrested. Twenty-six thousand people were convicted and 18,000 detained under the Defence of India Rules. Martial law had not been proclaimed, but the army, though nominally working under the orders of the civilian authorities, often did what it wanted to without any reference to the direct officers. The repression was as severe as it could have been under martial law.

The brutal and all-out repression succeeded within a period of six or seven weeks in bringing about a cessation of the mass phase of the struggle. But in the meantime, underground networks were being consolidated in with prominent members such as Achyut Patwardhan,, Aruna Asaf Ali, Ram Manohar Lohia, Sucheta Kripalani, Chootubhai Puranik, Biju Patnaik, R.P. Goenka and later, after his escape from jail, Jayaprakash Narayan had to begin to emerge. This leadership saw the role of the underground movement as being that of keeping up popular morale by continuing to a line of command and a source of guidance and leadership to activists all over the country. They also collected and distributed money as well as material like bombs, arms, and dynamite to underground groups all over the country. They, however, did see their role as that of directing the exact pattern of activities at the local level. Here, local groups retained the initiative. Among the places in which local underground organizations were active were Bombay, Poona, Satara, Baroda and other parts of Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra, U P, Bihar and Delhi. Congress Socialists were generally in the lead, but also active were Gandhian ashramites, Forward Bloc members and revolutionary terrorists, as well as other Congressmen.

Those actually involved in the underground activity may have been few, but they received all manner of support from a large variety of people. Businessmen donated generously. Sumati Morarjee, who later became India's leading woman industrialist, for example, helped Achyut Patwardhan to evade detection by providing him with a different car every day borrowed from her unsuspecting wealthy friends. Others provided hideouts for the underground leaders and activists. Students acted as couriers. Simple villagers helped by refusing information to the police. Pilots and train drivers delivered bombs and other material across the country. Government officials, including those in the police, passed on crucial information about impending arrests. Achyut Patwardhan testifies that one member of the three-man high level official committee formed to track down the Congress underground regularly informed him of the goings on that committee.

The pattern of activity of the underground movement was generally that of organizing the disruption of communications by blowing up bridges, cutting telegraph and telephone wires and derailing trains. There were also a few attacks on government and police officials and police informers. Their success in actually disrupting communications may not have been more than that of having nuisance value, but they did succeed in keeping up the spirit of the people in a situation when open mass activity was impossible because of the superior armed might of the state. Dissemination of news was a very important part of the activity, and considerable success was achieved on this score, the most dramatic being the Congress Radio operated clandestinely from different locations in Bombay city, whose broadcast could be heard as far as Madras. Ram Manohar Lohia regularly broadcast on this radio, and the radio continued till November 1942 when it was discovered and confiscated by the police.

### **GANDHIJI'S FAST AND REFUSAL TO CONDEMN ONGOING VIOLENCE**

In February 1943, a striking new development provided a new burst of political activity. Gandhiji commenced a fast on 10 February in jail. He declared the fast would last for twenty-one days. This was his answer to the Government which had been constantly exhorting him to condemn the violence of the people in the Quit India Movement. Gandhiji not only refused to condemn the people's resort to violence but unequivocally held the Government responsible for it. It was the 'leonine violence' of the state which had provoked the people, he said. And it was against this violence of the state, which included the unwarranted detention of thousands of Congressmen that Gandhiji vowed to register his protest, in the only way open to him when in jail, by fasting.

The popular response to the news of the fast was immediate and overwhelming. All over the country, there were *hartals*, demonstrations and strikes. Calcutta and Ahmedabad were particularly active. Prisoners in jails and those outside went on sympathetic fasts. Groups of people secretly reached Poona to offer Satyagraha outside the Aga Khan Palace where Gandhiji was being held in detention. Public meetings demanded his release and the Government was bombarded with thousands of letters and telegrams from people from all walks of life — students and youth, men trade and commerce, lawyers, ordinary citizens, and labour organizations. From across the seas, the demand for his release was made by newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian*, *New Statesmen*, *Nation*, *News Chronicle*, *Chicago Sun*, as well as by the British Communist Party, the citizens of London and Manchester, the Women's International League, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Ceylon State Council. The U.S. Government, too, brought pressure to bear. A Leaders' Conference was held in Delhi on 19-20 February and was attended by prominent men, politicians and public figures. They all demanded Gandhiji's release. Many of those otherwise unsympathetic to the Congress felt that the Government was going too far in its obduracy. The severest blow to the prestige of the Government was the resignation of the three Indian members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, M.S. Aney, N.R. Sarkar and H.P. Mody, who had supported the Government in its suppression of the 1942 movement, but were in no mood to be a party to Gandhiji's death.

But the Viceroy and his officials remained unmoved. Guided by Winston Churchill's statement to his Cabinet that 'this our hour of triumph everywhere in the world was not the time to crawl before a miserable old man who had always been our enemy,'<sup>o</sup> they arrogantly refused to show any concern for Indian feel-

ing. The Viceroy contemptuously dismissed the consequences of Gandhiji's possible death: 'Six months unpleasantness, steadily declining in volume, little or nothing at the end of it.' He even made it sound as if he welcomed the possibility: 'India would be far more reliable as a base for operations. Moreover, the prospect of a settlement will be greatly enhanced by the disappearance of Gandhi, who had for years torpedoed every attempt at a settlement.' 'While an anxious nation appealed for his life, the Government went ahead with finalizing arrangements for his funeral. Military troops were asked to stand by for any emergency. 'Generous' provision was made for a plane to carry his ashes and for a public funeral and a half-day holiday in offices.' But Gandhiji, as always, got the better of his opponents, and refused to oblige by dying. The fast had done exactly what it had been intended to do. The public morale was raised, the anti-British feeling heightened, and an opportunity for political activity provided. A symbolic gesture of resistance had sparked off widespread resistance and exposed the Government's high-handedness to the whole world.' The moral justification that the Government had been trying to provide for its brutal suppression of 1942 was denied to it and it was placed clearly in the wrong.

## PARALLEL GOVERNMENTS

A significant feature of the Quit India Movement was the emergence of what came to be known as parallel governments in some parts of the country. The first one was proclaimed in Ballia, in East U P, in August 1942 under the leadership of Chittu Pande, who called himself a Gandhian. Though it succeeded in getting the Collector to hand over power and release all the arrested Congress leaders, it could not survive for long and when the soldiers marched in, a week after the parallel government was formed, they found that the leaders had fled.' In Tamluk in the Midnapur district of Bengal, the *Jatiya Sarkar* came into existence on 17 December, 1942 and lasted till September 1944. Tamluk was an area where Gandhian constructive work had made considerable headway and it was also the scene of earlier mass struggles. The *Jatiya Sarkar* undertook cyclone relief work, gave grants to schools and organized an armed *Vidyut Vahini*. It also set up arbitration courts and distributed the surplus paddy of the well-to-do to the poor. Being located in a relatively remote area, it could continue its activities with comparative ease.

Satara, in Maharashtra, emerged as the base of the longest lasting and effective parallel government. From the very beginning of the Quit India Movement, the region played an active role. In the first phase from August 1942, there were marches on local government headquarters the ones on Karad, Tasgaon and Islampur involving thousands. This was followed by sabotage, attacks on post offices, the looting of banks and the cutting of telegraph wires. Y.B. Chavan, had contacts with Achyut Patwardhan and other underground leaders, was the most important leader. But by the end of 1942, this phase came to an end with the arrest of about two thousand people. From the very beginning of 1943, the underground activists began to regroup, and by the middle of the year, succeeded in consolidating the organization. A parallel government or *Prati Sarkar* was set up and Nani Patil was its most important leader. This phase was marked by attacks on Government collaborators, informers and talatis or lower-level officials and Robin Hood-style robberies. *Nyayadan Mandals* or people's courts were set up and justice dispensed. Prohibition was enforced, and 'Gandhi marriages' celebrated to which untouchables were invited and at which no ostentation was allowed. Village libraries were set up and education encouraged. The native state of Aundh, whose ruler was pro-nationalist and had got the constitution of his state drafted by Gandhiji, provided invaluable support by offering refuge and shelter to the *Prati Sarkar* activists. The *Prati Sarkar* continued to function till 1945.'





**Aruna Asaf Ali**

The Quit India Movement marked a new high in terms of popular participation in the national movement and sympathy with the national cause in earlier mass struggles, the youth were in the forefront of the struggle. Students from colleges and even schools were the most visible element, especially in the early days of August (probably the average age of participants in the 1942 struggle was even lower than that in earlier movements). Women especially college and school girls, played a very important role. **Aruna Asaf Ali** and **Sucheta Kripalani** were two major women organizers of the underground, and Usha Mehta an important member of the small group that ran the Congress Radio. Workers were prominent as well, and made considerable sacrifice by enduring long strikes and braving police repression in the streets.

Peasants of all strata, well-to-do as well as poor, were the heart of the movement especially in East U.P. and Bihar; Midnapur in Bengal, Satara in Maharashtra, but also in other parts including Andhra, Gujarat and Kerala. Many small zamindars also participated especially in U.P. and Bihar. Even the big zamindars maintained a stance of neutrality and to assist the British in crushing the rebellion. The most spectacular was the Raja of Darbhanga, one of the biggest zamindars, who refused to let his armed retainers to be used by the Government and even instructed his managers to assist the tenants who had been arrested. A significant feature of the pattern of peasant activity was its total concentration on attacking symbols of British authority and a total lack of any incidents of anti-zamindar violence, even when, as in Bihar, East U.P. Satara, and Midnapur, the breakdown of Government authority for long periods of time provided the opportunity. Government officials, especially those at the lower levels of the police and the administration, were generous in their assistance to the movement. They gave shelter, provided information and helped monetarily. In fact, the erosion of loyalty to the British Government of its own officers was one of the most striking aspects of Quit India struggle. Jail officials tended to be much kinder to prisoners than in earlier years, and often openly expressed their sympathy. While it is true that Muslim mass participation in the Quit India movement was not high, yet it is also true that even Muslim League supporters not act as informers. Also, there was a total absence of any communal clashes, a sure sign that though the movement may not have aroused much support from among the majority of the Muslim masses, it did not arouse their hostility either.

The powerful attraction of the Quit India Movement and its elemental quality is also demonstrated by the fact that hundreds of Communists at the local and village levels participated in the movement despite

the official position taken by the Communist Party. Though they sympathized with the strong anti-fascist sentiments of their leaders, yet they felt the irresistible pull of the movement and, for at least a few days or weeks, joined in it along with the rest of the Indian people. The debate on the Quit India Movement has centered particularly on two issues. First, was the movement a spontaneous outburst, or an organized rebellion. Second, how did the use of violence by the people in this struggle square with the overall Congress policy of non-violent struggle? First, the element of spontaneity of 1942 was certainly larger than in the earlier movements, though even in 1919-22, as well as in 1930-31 and 1932, the Congress leadership allowed considerable room for an initiative and spontaneity. In fact, the whole pattern of the Gandhian mass movements was that the leadership chalked out a broad programme of action and left its implementation at the local level to the initiative of the local and grass roots level political activists and the masses. Even in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, perhaps the most organized of the Gandhian mass movements, Gandhiji signalled the launching of the struggle by the Dandi March and the breaking of the salt law, the leaders and the people at the local levels decided whether they were going to stop payment of land revenue and rent, or offer Satyagrahi against forest Laws, or picket liquor shops, or follow any of the other items of the programme. Of course, in 1942, even the broad programme had not yet been spelt out clearly since the leadership was yet to formally launch the movement. But, in a way, the degree of spontaneity and popular initiative that was actually exercised had sanctioned by the leadership itself. The resolution passed by the AICC on 8 August 1942 clearly stated: 'A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instruction or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress committees can function. When this happens, every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide.'

Apart from this, the Congress had been ideologically, politically and organizationally preparing for the struggle for a long time. From 1937 onwards, the organization had been revamped to undo the damage suffered during the repression of 1932-34. In political and ideological terms as well, the Ministries had added considerably to Congress support and prestige. In East U.P. and Bihar, the areas of the most intense activity in 1942 were precisely the ones in which considerable mobilization and organizational work had been carried out from 1937 onwards.' In Gujarat, Sardar Patel had been touring Bardoli and other areas since June 1942 warning the people of an impending struggle and suggesting that non-revenue campaigns could well be part of it. Congress Socialists in Poona had been holding training camps for volunteers since June 1942) Gandhiji himself, through the Individual Civil Disobedience campaign in 1940-41, and more directly since early 1942, had prepared the people for the coming battle, which he said would be 'short and swift.' In any case, in a primarily hegemonic struggle as the Indian national movement was, preparedness for struggle cannot be measured by the volume of immediate organizational activity but by the degree of hegemonic influence the movement has acquired over the people.

### **VIOLENCE DURING QIM AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE QIM**

How did the use of violence in 1942 square with the Congress policy of non-violence. For one, there were many who refused to use or sanction violent means and confined themselves to the traditional weaponry of the Congress. But many of those, including many staunch Gandhians, who used 'violent means' in 1942 felt that the peculiar circumstances warranted their use. Many maintained that the cutting of telegraph wires and the blowing up of bridges was all right as long as human life was not taken. Others frankly admitted that they could not square the violence they used, or connived at with their belief in nonviolence, but that they did it all the same. Gandhiji refused to condemn the violence of the people because he saw it as a reaction to the much bigger violence of the state. In Francis Hutchins' view, Gandhiji's major objection to violence was that its use prevented mass participation in a movement, but that, in 1942, Gandhiji had come round to the view that mass participation would not be restricted as a result of violence.

The great significance of this historic movement was that it placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. After Quit India there could be no retreat. Any future negotiations with the British Government could only be on the manner of the transfer of power. Independence

was no longer a matter of bargain. And this became amply clear after the War. With Gandhiji's release on 6 May 1944, on medical grounds, political activity regained momentum. Constructive work became the main form of Congress activity, with a special emphasis on the reorganization of the Congress machinery. Congress committees were revived under different names — Congress Workers Assemblies or Representative Assemblies of Congressmen — rendering the ban on Congress committees ineffective. The task of training workers, membership drives and fund collection was taken up. This reorganization of the Congress under the 'cover' of the constructive programme was viewed with serious misgivings by the Government which saw it as an attempt to rebuild Congress influence and organization in the villages in preparation for the next round of struggle? A strict watch was kept on these developments, but no repressive action was contemplated and the Viceroy's energies were directed towards formulating an offer (known as the Wavell Offer or the Simla Conference) which would pre-empt a struggle by effecting an agreement with the Congress before the War with Japan ended. The Congress leaders were released to participate in the Simla Conference in June 1945. That marked the end of the phase of confrontation that had existed since August 1942.



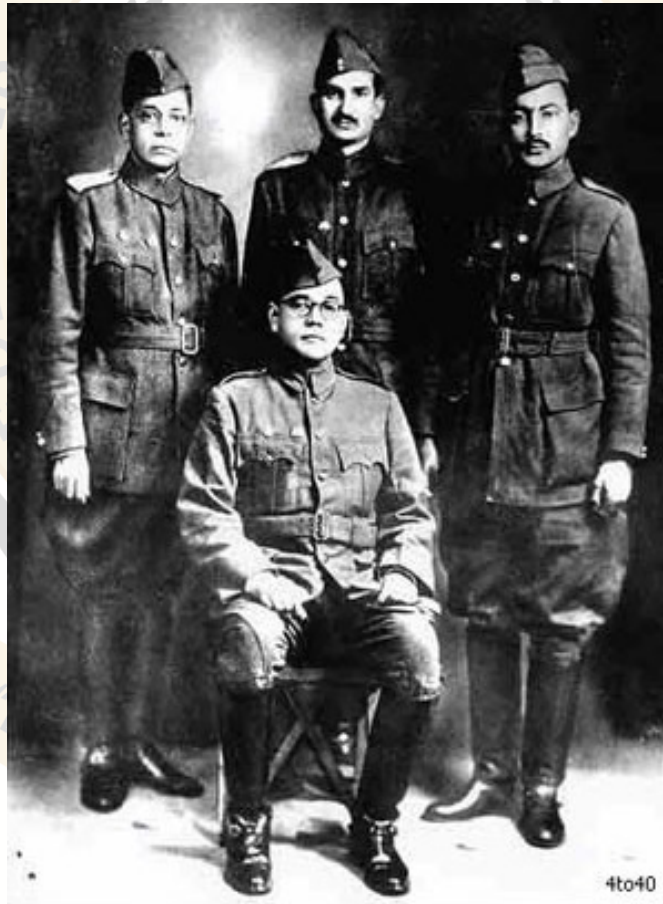


## UNIT-XXXIII

# INA, RIN AND POST WAR DEVELOPMENTS

### INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY (INA)

The idea of the INA was first conceived in Malaya by Mohan Singh, an Indian officer of the British Indian Army, when he decided not to join the retreating British army and instead went to the Japanese for help. The Japanese had till then only encouraged civilian Indians to form anti-British organizations, but had no conception of forming a military wing consisting of Indians. Indian prisoners of war were handed over by the Japanese to Mohan Singh who then tried to recruit them into an Indian National Army. The fall of Singapore was crucial, for this brought 45,000 Indian POWs into Mohan Singh's sphere of influence. By the end of 1942, forty thousand men expressed their willingness to join the INA. It was repeatedly made clear at various meetings of leaders of the Indian community and of Indian Army officers that the INA would go into action only on the invitation of the Indian National Congress and the people of India. The INA was also seen by many as a means of checking the misconduct of the Japanese against Indians in South-East Asia and a bulwark against a future Japanese occupation of India.



**Netaji Subhas Bose with the officers of INA**

The outbreak of the Quit India Movement gave a fillip to the INA as well. Anti-British demonstrations were organized in Malaya. On 1 September 1942 the first division of the INA was formed with 16,300 men. The Japanese were by now more amenable to the idea of an armed Indian wing because they were contemplating an Indian invasion. But, by December 1942, serious differences emerged between the Indian army officers led by Mohan Singh and the Japanese over the role that the INA was to play. Mohan Singh and Niranjan Singh Gill, the senior-most Indian officer to join the INA, were arrested. The Japanese, it turned out, wanted only a token force of 2,000 men, while Mohan Singh wanted to raise an Indian National Army of 20,000.



### Netaji with members of the Azad Hind Fauj

The second phase of the INA began when Subhas Chandra Bose was brought to Singapore on 2 July 1943, by means of German and Japanese submarines. He went to Tokyo and Prime Minister Tojo declared that Japan had no territorial designs on India. Bose returned to Singapore and set up the Provisional Government of Free India on 21 October 1943. The Provisional Government then declared war on Britain and the United States and was recognised by the Axis powers and their satellites. Subhas Bose set up two INA headquarters, in Rangoon and in Singapore, and began to reorganize the INA. Recruits were sought from civilians, funds were gathered, and even a women's regiment called the Rani Jhansi regiment was formed. On 6 July 1944, Subhas Bose, in a broadcast on Azad Hind Radio addressed to Gandhiji, said: 'India's last war of independence has begun. . . Father of our Nation! In this holy war of India's liberation, we ask for your blessing and good wishes.' One INA battalion commanded by Shah Nawaz was allowed to accompany the Japanese Army to the Indo-Burma front and participate in the Imphal campaign. But the discriminatory treatment which included being denied rations, arms and being made to do menial work for the Japanese units, completely demoralized the INA men. The failure of the Imphal campaign, and the steady Japanese retreat thereafter, quashed any hopes of the INA liberating the nation. The retreat which began in mid-1944 continued till mid-1945 and ended only with the final surrender to the British in South-East Asia. But, when the INA men were brought back home and threatened with serious punishment, a powerful movement was to emerge in their defence.

### POST- WAR NATIONAL UPSURGE

The end of World War II marked a dramatic change. From then till the dawn of freedom in 1947 the political stage witnessed a wide spectrum of popular initiative. We are constrained to leave out of our purview the struggles of workers, peasants and people of the native states, which took the form of the country-wide strike wave, the Tebhaga Movement, the Warlis Revolt, the Punjab *kisan* morchas, the Travancore people's struggle (especially the Punnappa-Vayalar episode) and the Telengana Movement. These movements had an anti-imperialist edge — as the direct oppressors they challenged were also the vested interests that constituted the social support of the Raj — but they did not come into direct conflict with



the colonial regime. We shall confine ourselves to that stream of anti-imperialist activity which directly challenged the legitimacy of British rule and was perceived to be doing so by the colonial authorities.

The end of the War was greeted in India with a vast sigh of relief. Its few benefits such as windfall gains and super-profits for the capitalists and employment opportunities for the middle classes were far outweighed by the ravages and miseries wrought by it. The colony reeled under the heavy yoke of the war effort. Famine, inflation, scarcity, hoarding and black-marketing plagued the land. The heroic action of a leaderless people notwithstanding, the Quit India Movement was snuffed out in eight weeks. Pockets of resistance, where the torch was kept ablaze, could not hold out for long. When Congress leaders emerged from jail in mid-June 1945, they expected to find a demoralized people, benumbed by the repression of 1942, bewildered by the absence of leadership and battered by the privations that the War brought. To their surprise, they found tumultuous crowds waiting for them, impatient to do something, restless and determinedly anti-British. Repression had steeled the brave and stirred the conscience of the fence-sitter. Political energies were surfacing after more than three years of repression and the expectations of the people were now heightened by the release of their leaders. The popular belief was that the release would mark the beginning of a period of rapid political progress. Crowds thronged the gates of Almorah jail on hearing that Jawaharlal Nehru was to be released. They waited a long while outside Bankura jail where Maulana Azad was lodged. When the Congress Working Committee met, more than half a million people lined the streets of Bombay, braving the rain to welcome their leaders. Similar scenes were witnessed when the leaders went to Simla to attend the conference called by the Viceroy. Villagers from places far away from Simla converged and sat atop trees, waiting for hours to catch a glimpse of their leaders.

The Labour Party, which had come to power in Britain after the War, was in a hurry to settle the Indian problem. As a result the ban on the Congress was lifted and elections declared. People were elated at the prospect of popular ministries and turned out in large numbers at election meetings — 50,000 on an average, and a lakh or so when all India leaders were expected. Nehru, a seasoned campaigner of the 1937 elections, confessed that he had not previously seen such crowds, such frenzied excitement. Except in constituencies where nationalist Muslims were put up, candidates did not really need to canvass for votes or spend money. The election results indicated that people had not only flocked to the meetings but had rallied behind the Congress at the ballot-box too. The Congress won over 90 percent of the general seats (including twenty-three of the thirty-six labour seats) in the provincial elections while the Muslim League made a similar sweep in the Muslim constituencies. But, perhaps, the most significant feature of the election campaign was that it sought to mobilize Indians against the British, not merely voters for the elections. This was evident from the two issues which were taken up and made the main plank of the election campaign — the repression in 1942 and the Indian National Army trials. The question of official excesses during 1942 was taken up by Congress leaders soon after release from jail. Glorification of martyrs was one side of the coin, condemnation of official action the other. Congressmen lauded the brave resistance offered by the leaderless people, martyrs' memorials were erected in many places and relief funds organized for sufferers. Stories of repression were recounted in grim detail, the officials responsible condemned, often by name, promises of enquiries held out, and threats of punishment freely made. While such speeches, which the Government failed to check, had a devastating effect on the morale of the services, that was more alarming for the officials was the rising crescendo of demands for enquiries into official actions. The forthcoming elections were likely to bring the Congress ministries back to power, significantly in those provinces where repression had been most brutal. The U.P. Governor, Wylie, confessed on 19th February, 1946 that officials in U.P. in 1942 'used on occasion methods which I cannot condone and which, dragged out in the cold light of 1946, nobody could defend.' The Viceroy concluded that only a 'gentleman's agreement' with the Congress could resolve the matter.



## THE INA TRAILS

However, the issue which most caught the popular imagination was the fate of the members of Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA), who were captured by the British in the eastern theatre of War. An announcement by the Government, limiting trials of the INA personnel to those guilty of brutality or active complicity, was due to be made by the end of August, 1945. However, before this statement could be issued. Nehru raised the demand for leniency at a meeting in Srinagar on 16 August 1945 — making the proposed statement seem a response to his call rather than an act of generosity on the part of the Government. Hailing them as patriots, albeit misguided, Nehru called for their judicious treatment by the authorities in view of the British promise that 'big changes' are impending in India. Other Congress leaders soon took up the issue and the AICC at its first post-War session held in Bombay from 21 to 23 September 1945, adopted a strong resolution declaring its support for the cause. The defence of the INA prisoners was taken up by the Congress and Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru, K.N. Katju, Nehru and Asaf Ali appeared in court at the historic Red Fort trials. The Congress organised an INA Relief and Enquiry Committee, which provided small sums of money and food to the men on their release, and attempted, though with marginal success, to secure employment for these men. The Congress authorized the Central INA Fund Committee, the Mayor's Fund in Bombay, the AICC and the PCC offices and Sarat Bose to collect funds. The INA question was the main issue highlighted from the Congress platform in meetings held all over the country — in fact, very often it was difficult to distinguish between an INA and an election meeting. In view of Nehru's early championing of the INA cause and the varied involvement of the Congress later, the oft made charge that the Congress jumped on to the INA bandwagon and merely used the issue as an election stunt does not appear to have any validity. The INA agitation was a landmark on many counts. Firstly, the high pitch or intensity at which the campaign for the release of INA prisoners was conducted was unprecedented. This was evident from the press coverage and other publicity it got, from the threats of revenge that were publicly made and also from the large number of meetings held.

Initially, the appeals in the press were for clemency to 'misguided' men, but by November 1945, when the first Red Fort trials began, there were daily editorials hailing the INA men as the most heroic patriots and criticizing the Government stand. Priority coverage was given to the INA trials and to the INA campaign, eclipsing international news. Pamphlets, the most popular one being 'Patriots Not Traitors,' were widely circulated, 'Jai Hind' and 'Quit India' were scrawled on walls of buildings in Ajmer. Posters threatening death to '20 English dogs' for every [INA man sentenced, were pasted all over Delhi. In Banaras, it was declared at a public gathering that 'if INA men were not saved, revenge would be taken on European children.' One hundred and sixty political meetings were held in the Central Provinces and Berar alone in the first fortnight of October 1945 where the demand for clemency for INA prisoners was raised. INA Day was observed on 12 November and INA Week from 5 to 11 November 1945. While 50,000 people would turn out for the larger meetings, the largest meeting was the one held in Deshapriya Park, Calcutta. Organized by the INA Relief Committee, it was addressed by Sarat Bose, Nehru and Patel. Estimates of attendance ranged from two to three lakhs to Nehru's five to seven lakhs.

The second significant feature of the INA campaign was its wide geographical reach and the participation of diverse social groups and political parties. This had two aspects. One was the generally extensive nature of the agitation, the other was the spread of pro-INA sentiment to social groups hitherto outside the nationalist pale. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau Conceded: 'There has seldom been a matter which has attracted so much Indian public interest, and, it is safe to say, sympathy.' 'Anxious enquiries' and 'profuse sympathies' were forthcoming from the 'remotest villages' from all men, 'Irrespective of Caste, colour and creed.' Nehru confirmed the same: 'Never before in Indian history had such unified sentiments and feelings been manifested by various divergent sections of the Indian population as it had been done with regard to the question of the Azad Hind Fauj.' While the cities of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and the towns of U.P. and Punjab were the nerve centres of the agitation, what was more noteworthy was the spreading of the agitation to places as distant as Coorg, Baluchistan and Assam. Participation was of many kinds — some contributed funds, others attended or organized meetings, shopkeepers downed shutters and political parties and organizations raised the demand for the release of the prisoners. Munic-

ipal Committees, Indians abroad and Gurdwara committees subscribed liberally to INA funds. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar donated Rs 7000 and set aside another Rs 10,000 for relief. The Poona City Municipality, the Kanpur City Fund and a local district board in Madras Presidency contributed Rs 1,000 each. More newsworthy contributions were those by film stars in Bombay and Calcutta, by the Cambridge Majlis and the *tongawallas* of Amraoti. Students, whose role in the campaign was outstanding, held meetings and rallies and boycotted classes from Salem in the south to Rawalpindi in the north. Commercial institutions, shops and markets stopped business on the day the first trial began, 5 November 1945, on INA Day and during INA Week. Demands for release were raised at *kisan* Conferences in Dhamangaon and Sholapur on 16 November 1945 and at the tenth session of the All India Women's Conference in Hyderabad on 29 December 1945. 'Even English intellectuals, birds of a year or two's sojourn in India, were taking a keen interest in the rights and wrongs, and the degrees of wrong, of the INA men,' according to General Taker of the Eastern Command. Diwali was not celebrated in some areas in sympathy with the NA men. Calcutta Gurdwaras became a campaigning centre for the NA cause. The Muslim League, the Communist Party of India, the Unionist Party, the Akalis, the Justice Party, the Abrars in Rawalpindi, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh League supported the NA cause in varying degrees. The Viceroy noted that 'all parties have taken the same line though Congress are more vociferous than the others.' The most notable feature of the INA agitation was the effect it had on the traditional bulwarks of the Raj. Significant sections of Government employees, loyalist sections and even men of the armed forces were submerged in the tide of pro-INA sentiment. Many officials saw in this a most disquieting trend. The Governor of Northwest Frontier Province warned that 'every day that passes now brings over more and more well-disposed Indians to the anti-British camp'. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau observed that 'sympathy for the INA is not the monopoly of those who are ordinarily against Government,' and that it was 'usually the case that INA men belonged to families which had traditions of loyalty.' In Punjab (to which province 48.07 per cent of the INA men released till February 1946 belonged) the return of the released men to their villages' stimulated interest among groups which had hitherto remained politically unaffected. Local interest was further fuelled by virtue of many of the INA officers belonging to influential families in the region. P.K. Sehgal, one of the trios tried in the first Red Fort trial, was the son of Dewan Achhru Ram, an ex-Judge of the Punjab High Court. The gentlemen with titles who defended men accused of war time treason did not glorify' the action of INA men — they appealed to the Government to abandon the trials in the interest of good relations between India and Britain. Government officials generally sympathized privately, but there were some instances, as in the Central Provinces and Berar, where railway officials collected funds.

The response of the armed forces was unexpectedly sympathetic, belying the official perception that loyal soldiers were very hostile to the INA 'traitors'. Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) men in Kohat attended Shah Nawaz's meetings and army men in UP and Punjab attended INA meetings, often in uniform. RIAF men in Calcutta, Kohat, Allahabad, Bamrauli and Kanpur contributed money for the INA defence, as did other service personnel in U.P. Apart from these instances of overt support, a 'growing feeling of sympathy for the INA' pervaded the Indian army, according to the Commander-in-Chief. He concluded that the 'general opinion in the Army is in favour of leniency' and recommended to Whitehall that leniency be shown by the Government. Interestingly, the question of the right or wrong of the NA men's action was never debated. What was in question was the right of Britain to decide a matter concerning Indians. As Nehru often stressed, if the British were sincere in their declaration that Indo-British relations were to be transformed; they should demonstrate their good faith by leaving it to Indians to decide the INA issue. Even the appeals by liberal Indians were made in the interest of good future relations between India and Britain. The British realised this political significance of the INA issue. The Governor of North-West Frontier Province advocated that the trials be abandoned, on the ground that with each day the issue became 'more and more purely Indian versus British.'

The growing nationalist sentiment, that reached a crescendo around the INA trials, developed into violent confrontations with authority in the winter of 1945-46. There were three upsurges — one on 21 November 1945 in Calcutta over the INA trials; the second on 11 February 1946 in Calcutta to protest against the seven year sentence given to an INA officer, Rashid Ali; and the third in Bombay of 18 February 1946



when the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) went on strike. The upsurges followed a fairly similar pattern an initial stage when a group (such as students or ratings) defied authority and was repressed, a second stage when people in the city joined in, and finally a third stage when people in other parts of the country expressed sympathy and solidarity. The first stage began with the students' and ratings' challenge to authority and ended in repression. On 21 November 1945, a procession of students, consisting of Forward Bloc sympathizers and joined by Students Federation activists and Islamia College students, marched to Dalhousie Square, the seat of the Government in Calcutta, and refused to disperse. Upon a lathi-charge, the processionists retaliated with stones and brickbats which the police, in turn, met with firing and two persons died, while fifty-two were injured. On 11 February 1946, Muslim League students led the procession, Congress and Communist student organizations joined in and this time some arrests were made on Dharamatola Street. This provoked the large body of students to defy Section 144 imposed in the Dalhousie Square area and more arrests, in addition to a lathi-charge, ensued.

## THE RIN REVOLT

The RIN revolt started on 18 February when 1100 naval ratings of *HMIS Talwar* struck work at Bombay to protest against the treatment meted out to them — flagrant racial discrimination, unpalatable food and abuses to boot. The arrest of B.C. Dutt, a rating, for scrawling 'Quit India' on the *HMIS Talwar*, was sorely resented. The next day, ratings from Castle and Fort Barracks joined the strike and on hearing that the *HUJS Talwar* ratings had been fired upon (which was incorrect) left their posts and went around Bombay in lorries, holding aloft Congress flags. threatening Europeans and policemen and occasionally tweaking a shop window or two. The second stage of these upsurges, when people in the city joined in. was marked by a virulent anti-British mood and resulted in the virtual paralysis of the two great cities of Calcutta and Bombay. Meetings and processions to express sympathy, as also strikes and *hartals*, were quickly overshadowed by the barricades that came up. the pitched battles fought from housetops and by-lanes, the attacks on Europeans, and the burning of police stations, post offices, shops, tram depots, railway stations, banks, grain shops, and even a YMCA centre. This was the pattern that was visible in all the three cases. The RIN revolt and popular fury in Bombay alone accounted for, according to official estimates, the destruction of thirty shops, ten post offices, ten police *chowkis*, sixty-four food grains shops and 200 street lamps. Normal life in the city was completely disrupted. The Communist call for a general strike brought lakhs of workers out of their factories into the streets. *Hartals* by shopkeepers, merchants and hotel-owners and strikes by student workers, both in industry and public transport services almost brought the whole city to a grinding halt. Forcible stopping of trains by squatting on rail-tracks, stoning and burning of police and military lorries and barricading of streets did the rest. The third phase was characterized by a display of solidarity by people in other parts of the county. Students boycotted classes, *hartals* and processions were organized to express sympathy with the students and ratings and to condemn official repression. In the RIN revolt, Karachi was a major centre, second only to Bombay. The news reached Karachi on 19 February, upon which the *HMIS Hindustan* along with one more ship and three shore establishments, went on a lightning strike. Sympathetic token strikes took place in military establishments in Madras. Vishakhapatnam. Calcutta, Delhi, Cochin, Jamnagar, the Andamans, Bahrain and Aden Seventy eight ships and 20 shore establishments, involving 20,000 ratings, were affected. RJAF men went on sympathetic strikes in the Marine Drive, Andheri and Sion areas of Bombay and in Poona, Calcutta, Jessore and Ambala units. Sepoys at Jabalpur went on strike while the Colaba cantonment showed ominous 'restlessness.'

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RIN REVOLT AND POPULAR UPRISINGS

What was the significance of these events? There is no doubt that these three upsurges were significant in as much as they gave expression to the militancy in the popular mind. Action, however reckless, was fearless and the crowds which faced police firing by temporarily retreating, only to return to their posts, won the Bengal Governor's grudging admiration. The RIN revolt remains a legend to this day. When it took place, it had a dramatic impact on popular Consciousness. A revolt in the armed forces, even if soon suppressed, had a great liberating effect on the minds of people. The RIN revolt was seen as an event which marked the end of British rule almost as finally as Independence Day, 1947. But reality and how men per-



ceive that reality often proves to be different, and this was true of these dramatic moments in 1945-46. Contemporary perceptions and later radical scholarship have infused these historical events with more than a symbolic significance.' These events are imbued with an unrealized potential and a realized impact which is quite out of touch with reality. A larger than life picture is drawn of their militancy, reach and effectiveness. India is seen to be on the brink of a revolution. The argument goes that the communal unity witnessed during these events could, if built upon, have offered a way out of the communal deadlock.

When we examine these upsurges closely we find that the form they took, that of an extreme, direct and violent conflict with authority, had certain limitations. Only the most militant sections of society could participate. There was no place for the liberal and conservative groups which had rallied to the INA cause earlier or for the men and women of small towns and villages who had formed the backbone of the mass movements in earlier decades. Besides, these upsurges were short-lived, as the tide of popular fury-surfed forth, only to subside all too quickly. Interestingly, Calcutta, the scene of tremendous enthusiasm from 11 to 13 February 1946, was relatively quiet during the RIN revolt a week later. One lakh workers went on a one day strike, but the rest of the city, barring the organized working class, remained subdued, despite a seven-day ratings strike in Calcutta which had to be broken by a siege by troops. In addition, the upheavals were confined to a few urban centres, while the general INA agitation reached the remotest villages. This urban concentration made it easy for the authorities to deploy troops and effectively suppress the upsurge. The communal unity witnessed was more organizational unity than unity of the people. Moreover, the organizations came together only for a specific agitation that lasted a few days, as was the case in Calcutta on the issue of Rashid Mi's trial. Calcutta, the scene of 'the almost revolution' in February 1946, according to Gautam Chattopadhyaya, became the battle ground of communal frenzy only six months later, on 16 August 1946.

The communal unity evident in the RIN revolt was limited, despite the Congress, League and Communist flags being jointly hoisted on the ships' masts. Muslim ratings went to the League to seek advice on future action, while the rest went to the Congress and the Socialists; Jinnah's advice to surrender was addressed to Muslim ratings alone, who duly heeded it. The view that communal unity forged in the struggles of 1945-46 could, if taken further, have averted partition, seems to be based on wishful thinking rather than concrete historical possibility. The 'unity at the barricades' did not show this promise. Popular perceptions differ from reality when it comes to the response these upsurges, especially the JUN revolt, evoked from the colonial authorities. It is believed that 'the RAN revolt shook the mighty British Empire to its foundations.' In fact these upsurges demonstrated that despite considerable erosion of the morale of the bureaucracy and the steadfastness of the armed forces by this time, the British wherewithal to repress was intact. The soldier-Viceroy, Wavell, gave a clean chit to the army a few days after the naval strike: 'On the whole, the Indian army has been most commendably steady.' Those who believed that the British would succumb to popular pressure if only it was exerted forcefully were proved wrong. It was one thing for the British Government to question its own stand of holding the INA trials when faced with opposition from the army and the people. It was quite another matter when they faced challenges to their authority. Challenges to the peace, the British were clear, had to be repressed.

Events in November 1945 in Calcutta had the troops standing by, but the Governor of Bengal preferred to and was able to control the situation with the police. Troops were called in on 12 February 1946 in Calcutta and thirty-six civilians were killed in the firing. Similarly, during the JUN revolt, ratings were forced to surrender in Karachi and six of them were killed in the process. Contrary to the popular belief that Indian troops in Bombay had refused to fire on their countrymen, it was a Maratha battalion in Bombay that rounded up the ratings and restored them to their barracks. In Bombay, troops subdued not only the ratings but also the people, who had earlier supported the ratings with food and sympathy and later joined them in paralyzing Bombay. The British Prime Minister, Attlee, announced in the House of Commons that Royal Navy ships were on their way to Bombay. Admiral Godfrey, of the RIN gave the ratings a stern ultimatum after which troops circled the ships and bombers were flown over them. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* referred to the virtual steel ring around Bombay. Two hundred and twenty eight civilians died in Bombay while 1046 were injured.

The corollary to the above argument is the attribution of the sending of Cabinet Mission to the Impact of the RIN revolt. R.P. Dutt had yoked the two together many years ago – On February 18 the Bombay Naval strike began. On 19 February, Attlee *in the House of Commons* announced the decision to despatch the Cabinet mission.' This is obviously untenable. The decision to send out the mission was taken by the British Cabinet on 22 January 1946 and even as announcement on 19 February 1946 had been slated a week earlier. Others have explained the willingness of the British to make substantial political concessions at this point of time to the combined impact of the popular militant struggles. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the British decision to transfer power was not merely a response *to* the immediate situation prevailing in the winter of 1945-46, but a result of their realization that their legitimacy to rule had been irrevocably eroded over the years. The relationship between these upsurges and the Congress is seen *as* one of opposition, or at best dissociation. These agitations are believed to have been led by the Communists, the Socialists or Forward Blocists or all of them together. The Congress role is seen as one of defusing the revolutionary situation, prompted by its fear that the *situation* would go out of its control or by the concern that disciplined armed forces were vital in the free India that the party would rule soon. The Congress is seen to be immersed in negotiations and ministry-making and hankering for power. The belief is that if the Congress leaders had not surrendered to their desire for power, a different path to independence would have emerged.

In our view, the three upsurges were an extension of the earlier nationalist activity with which the Congress was integrally associated. It was the strong anti-imperialist sentiment fostered by the Congress through its election campaign, its advocacy of the INA cause and its highlighting of the excesses of 1942 that found expression in the three upsurges that took place between November 1945 and February 1946. The Home Department's provincial level enquiry into the causes of these 'disturbances' came to the conclusion that they were the outcome of the 'inflammatory atmosphere created by the intemperate speeches of Congress leaders in the last three months.' The Viceroy had no doubt that the primary cause of the RIN 'mutiny' was the 'speeches of Congress leaders since September last." In fact, the Punjab CID authorities warned the Director of the Intelligence Bureau of the 'considerable danger,' while dealing with the Communists, 'of putting the cart before the horse and of failing to recognize Congress as the main enemy.' These three upsurges were distinguishable from the activity preceding them because the form of articulation of protest was different. They took the form of a violent, flagrant challenge to authority. The earlier activity was a peaceful demonstration of nationalist solidarity. One was an explosion, the other a groundswell.

The Congress did not give the call for these upsurges; in fact, no political organization did. People rallied in sympathy with the students and ratings as well as to voice their anger at the repression that was let loose. Individual Congressmen participated actively as did individual Communists and others. Student sympathizers of the Congress, the Congress Socialist Party, the Forward Bloc and the Communist Party of India jointly led the 21 November 1945 demonstration in Calcutta. The Congress lauded the spirit of the people and condemned the repression by the Government. It did not officially support these struggles as it felt their tactics and timing were wrong. It was evident to Congress leaders that the Government was able and determined to repress. Vallabhbhai Patel asked the ratings to surrender because he saw the British mobilization for repression in Bombay. He wrote to Nehru on 22 February 1946: 'The overpowering force of both naval and military personnel gathered here is so strong that they can be exterminated altogether and they have been also threatened with such a contingency.' Congress leaders were not the only ones who felt the need to restore peace. Communists joined hands with Congressmen in advising the people of Calcutta in November 1945 and February 1946 to return to their homes. Communist and Congress peace vans did the rounds of Karachi during the JUN revolt.

The contention that 'fear of popular excesses made Congress leaders cling to the path of negotiations and compromise, and eventually even accept Partition as a necessary price,' has little validity. Negotiations were an integral part of Congress strategy, a possibility which had to be exhausted before a mass movement was launched. As late as 22 September 1945 this had been reiterated in a resolution on Congress policy passed by the AICC: 'The method of negotiation and conciliation which is the keynote of peaceful

policy can never be abandoned by the Congress, no matter how grave may be the provocation, any more than can that of non-cooperation, complete or modified. Hence the guiding maxim of the Congress must remain: negotiations and settlement when possible and non-cooperation and direct action when necessary.'

In 1946, exploring the option of negotiation before launching a movement was seen to be crucial since the British were likely to leave India within two to five years, according to Nehru. The Secretary of State's New Year statement and the British Prime Minister's announcement of the decision to send a Cabinet Mission on 19 February 1946 spoke of Indian independence coming soon. However, pressure had to be kept up on the British to reach a settlement and to this end preparedness for a movement (built steadily through 1945 by refurbishing the organization, electioneering and spearheading the [NA agitation) was sought to be maintained. But the card of negotiation was to be, played first, that of mass movement was to be held in reserve. Gandhiji, in three statements that he published in *Harm*, on 3 March 1946, indicated the perils of the path that had been recently taken by the people. 'It is a matter of great relief that the ratings have listened to Sardar Patel's advice to surrender. They have not surrendered their honour. So far as I can see, in resorting to mutiny they were badly advised. If it was for grievance, fancied or real, they should have waited for the guidance and intervention of political leaders of their choice. If *they* mutinied for the freedom of India, they were doubly wrong. They could not do so without a call from a prepared revolutionary party. They were thoughtless and ignorant, if they believed that by their might they would deliver India from foreign domination... 'Lokamanya Tilak has taught us that Home Rule or *Swaraj* is our birthright. That *Swaraj* is not to be obtained by what is going on now in Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi... 'They who incited the mutineers did not know what they were doing. The latter were bound to submit ultimately. . . Aruna would "rather unite Hindus and Muslims at the barricade than on the constitution front." Even in terms of violence, this is a misleading proposition. If the union at the barricade is honest there must be union also at the constitutional front. Fighters do not always live at the barricade. They are too wise to commit suicide. The barricade life has always to be followed by the constitutional. That front is not taboo forever. 'Gandhiji went on to outline the path that should be followed by the nation: 'Emphatically it betrays want of foresight to disbelieve British declarations and precipitate a quarrel in anticipation. Is the official deputation coming to deceive a great nation? It is neither manly or womanly to think so. What would be lost by waiting? Let the official deputation prove for the last time that British declarations are unreliable. The nation will gain by trusting. The deceiver loses when there is correct response from the deceived . . . The rulers have declared their intention to 'quit' in favour of Indian rule. 'But the nation too has to play the game. If it does, the barricade must be left aside, at least for the time being.'





# UNIT-XXXIV

## FREEDOM AND PARTITION

### ROLE OF THE BRITISH REGARDING PARTITION

The contradictory nature of the reality of 15 August 1947 continues to intrigue historians and torment people on both sides of the border to this day. A hard-earned, prized freedom was won after long, glorious years of struggle but a bloody, tragic Partition rent asunder the fabric of the emerging free nation. Two questions arise. Why did the British finally quit? Why was Partition accepted by the Congress? The imperialist answer is that independence was simply the fulfilment of Britain's self-appointed mission to assist the Indian people to self-government. Partition was the unfortunate consequence of the age old Hindu-Muslim rift, of the two communities' failure to agree on how and to whom power was to be transferred. The radical view is that independence was finally wrested by the mass actions of 1946-47 in which many Communists participated, often as leaders. But the bourgeois leaders of the Congress, frightened by the revolutionary upsurge struck a deal with the imperialist power by which power was transferred to them and the nation paid the price of Partition. These visions of noble design or revolutionary intent frustrated by traditional religious conflict or worldly profit, attractive as they may seem, blur, rather than illumine, the sombre reality. In fact, the Independence-Partition duality reflects the success-failure dichotomy of the anti-imperialist movement led by the Congress. The Congress had a two-fold task: structuring diverse classes, communities, groups and regions into a nation and securing independence from the British rulers for this emerging nation. While the Congress succeeded in building up nationalist consciousness *sufficient* to exert pressure on the British to quit India, it could not complete the task of welding the nation and particularly failed to integrate the Muslims into this nation. It is this contradiction — the success and failure of the national movement — which is reflected in the other contradiction — independence, but with it Partition.

The success of the nationalist forces in the struggle for hegemony over Indian society was fairly evident by the end of the War. The British rulers had won the war against Hitler, but lost the one in India. The space occupied by the national movement was far larger than that over which the Raj cast its shadow. Hitherto un-politicized areas and apolitical groups had fallen in line with the rest of the country in the agitation over the INA trials. As seen in the previous chapter, men in the armed forces and bureaucracy openly attended meetings, contributed money, voted for the Congress and let it be known that they were doing so. The militancy of the politicized sections was evident in the heroic actions of 1942 and in the fearlessness with which students and others expressed their solidarity with INA and RIN men. The success of the nationalist movement could be plotted on a graph of swelling crowds, wide reach, and deep intensity of nationalist sentiment and the nationalist fervour of the people. A corresponding graph could also be drawn of the demoralization of the British officials and the changing loyalties of Indian officials and loyalists, which would tell the same story of nationalist success, but differently. In this tale, nationalism would not come across as a force, whose overwhelming presence left no place for the British. Rather, it would show the concrete way in which the national movement eroded imperialist hegemony, gnawed at the pillars of the colonial structure and reduced British political strategy to a mess of contradictions. An important point to be noted is that British rule was maintained in part on the basis of the consent or at least acquiescence of many sections of the Indian people. The social base of the colonial regime was among the *zamindars* and upper classes etc., the 'loyalists' who received the main share of British favours and offices. These were the Indians who manned the administration, supported government policy and worked the reforms the British reluctantly and belatedly introduced. The British also secured the consent of the people to their rule by successfully getting them to believe in British justice and fairplay, accept the British officer as the *mai-baap* of his people, and appreciate the prevalence of *Pax Britannica*. Few genuinely believed in '*Angrezi Raj ki Barkaten*', but it sufficed for the British if people were impressed by the aura of stolidity the Raj exuded and concluded that its foundations were unshakable. The Raj to a large

extent ran on prestige and the embodiment of this prestige was the district officer who belonged to the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the 'heaven-born service' much vaunted as 'the steel frame of the Raj.'

When the loyalists began to jump overboard, when prestige was rocked, when the district officer and secretariat official left the helm, it became clear that the ship was sinking, and sinking fast. It was the result of years of ravage wrought from two quarters — the rot within and the battering without. Paucity of European recruits to the ICS, combined with a policy of Indianization (partly conceded in response to popular demand), ended British domination of the ICS as early as the First World War. By 1939 British and Indian members had achieved parity. Overall recruitment was first cut in order to maintain this balance, and later stopped in 1943. Between 1940 and 1946, the total number of ICS officials fell from 1201 to 939, that of British ICS officials from 587 to 429 and Indian ICS officials from 614 to 510. By 1946, only 19 British ICS officials were available in Bengal for 65 posts.<sup>2</sup> Besides, the men coming in were no longer Oxbridge graduates from aristocratic families whose fathers and uncles were 'old India hands' and who believed in the destiny of the British nation to govern the 'child-people' of India. They were increasingly grammar school and polytechnic boys for whom serving the Raj was a career, not a mission. The War had compounded the problem. By 1945, war-weariness was acute and long absences from home were telling on morale. Economic worries had set in because of inflation. Many were due to retire, others were expected to seek premature retirement. It was a vastly-depleted, war-weary bureaucracy, battered by the 1942 movement that remained. However, much more than manpower shortage, it was the coming to the fore of contradictions in the British strategy of countering nationalism that debilitated the ICS and the Raj. The British had relied over the years on a twin policy of conciliation and repression to contain the growing national movement. But after the Cripps Offer of 1942, there was little left to be offered as a concession except transfer of power — full freedom itself. But the strategy of the national movement, of a multi-faceted struggle combining non-violent mass movement with working Constitutional reforms proved to be more than a match for them. When non-violent movements were met with repression, the naked force behind the government stood exposed, whereas if government did not clamp down on 'sedition,' or effected a truce (as in 1931 when the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed) or conceded provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act 1935, it was seen to be too weak to wield control and its authority and prestige were undermined. On the other hand, the brutal repression of the 1942 movement offended the sensibilities of both liberals and loyalists. So did the government's refusal to release Gandhi, even when he seemed close to death during his 21 day fast in February-March 1943, and its decision to go ahead with the INA trials despite fervent appeals from liberals and loyalists to abandon them. The friends of the British were upset when the Government appeared to be placating its enemies — as in 1945-46, when it was believed that the Government was wooing the Congress into a settlement and into joining the government. The powerlessness of those in authority dismayed loyalists. Officials stood by, while the violence of Congress speeches rent the air. This shook the faith of the loyalists in the might of the 'Raj.' If the loyalists' crisis was one of faith, the services' dilemma was that of action. Action could be decisive only if policy was clear-cut — repression or conciliation — not both. The policy mix could not but create problems when the same set of officials had to implement both poles of policy. This dilemma first arose in the mid-1930s when officials were worried by the prospect of popular ministries as the Congressmen they repressed during the Civil Disobedience Movement were likely to become their political masters in the provincial Ministries. This prospect soon became a reality in eight provinces.

Constitutionalism wrecked services morale as effectively as the mass movement before it, though this is seldom realized. If fear of authority was exorcised by mass non-violent action, confidence was gained because of 'Congress Raj.' People could not fail to notice that the British Chief Secretary in Madras took to wearing *khadi* or that the Revenue Secretary in Bombay, on tour with the Revenue Minister, Morarji Desai, would scurry across the railway platform from his first-class compartment to the latter's third-class carriage so that the Honourable Minister may not be kept waiting. Among Indian officials disloyalty was not evident, but where loyalty to the Raj was paraded earlier, 'it was the done thing to parade one's patriotism and, if possible, a third cousin twice removed who had been to jail in the civil disobedience movement.' But most importantly, the likelihood of Congress returning to power became a consideration with officials when dealing with subsequent Congress agitations. There was no refusal to carry out orders, but in some



places this consideration resulted in halfhearted action against the individual disobedience movement in U.P. in 1940 and even against the 1942 rebels in East UP and Bihar. But action was generally harsh in 1942 and this was to create concrete entanglements between repression and conciliation at the end of the War when Congressmen were released and provincial Ministries were again on the cards. Morale of officials nosedived when Congressmen's demands for enquiries and calls for revenge were not proceeded against on the ground that some latitude had to be allowed during electioneering. The previous Viceroy, Linlithgow, had pledged that there would be no enquiries, but the services had little faith in the Government's ability to withstand Congress pressure. The then Viceroy, Wavell, confessed that enquiries were the most difficult issue posed by the formation of provincial Ministries. By the end of the War, the portents were clear to those officials and policy-makers who understood the dynamics of power and authority. The demand for leniency to INA men from within the army and the revolt in a section of the RJA further conveyed to the far-sighted officials, as much as a full-scale mutiny would to others more brashly confident, that the storm brewing this time may prove irrepressible. The structure was still intact, but it was feared that the services and armed forces may not be reliable if Congress started a mass movement of the 1942 type after the elections, which provincial Ministries would aid, not control. The Viceroy summed up the prospect: 'We could still probably suppress such a revoke' but 'we have nothing to put in its place and should be driven to an almost entirely official rule, for which the necessary numbers of efficient officials do not exist.' Once it was recognized that British rule could not survive on the old basis for long, a graceful withdrawal from India, to be effected after a settlement had been reached on the modalities of transfer of power and the nature of the post-imperial relationship between Britain and India, became the overarching aim of British policy-makers. The British Government was clear that a settlement was a must both for good future relations and to bury the ghost of a mass movement. Since failure could not be afforded, the concessions had to be such as would largely meet Congress demands. With the Congress demand being that the British quit India, the Cabinet Mission went out to India in March 1946 to negotiate the setting up of a national government and to set into motion a machinery for transfer of power. It was not an empty gesture like the Cripps Mission in 1942 — the Cabinet Mission was prepared for a long stay. The situation seemed ripe for a settlement as the imperialist rulers were cognisant of the necessity of a settlement and the nationalist leaders were willing to negotiate with them. But rivers of blood were to flow before Indian independence, tacitly accepted in early 1946, became a reality in mid 1947. By early 1946 the imperialism nationalism conflict, being resolved in principle, receded from the spotlight. The stage was then taken over by the warring conceptions of the post-imperial order held by the British, the Congress and the Muslim League. The Congress demand was for transfer of power to one centre, with minorities' demands being worked out in a framework ranging from autonomy to Muslim provinces to self-determination on secession from the Indian Union — but after the British left. The British bid was for a united India, friendly with Britain and an active partner in Commonwealth defence. It was believed that a divided India would lack depth in defence, frustrate joint defence plans and be a blot on Britain's diplomacy. Pakistan was not seen by Britain as her natural future ally, as the Government's policy of fostering the League ever since its inception in 1906 and the alignment today between Pakistan and the Western imperialist bloc may suggest.

British policy in 1946 clearly reflected this preference for a united India, in sharp contrast to earlier declarations. Attlee's 15 March 1946 statement that a 'minority will not be allowed to place a veto on the progress of the majority' was a far cry from Wavell's allowing Jinnah to wreck the Simla Conference in June- July 1945 by his insistence on nominating all Muslims. The Cabinet Mission was convinced that Pakistan was not viable and that the minorities' autonomy must somehow be safeguarded within the framework of a united India. The Mission Plan conceived three sections, A — comprising Madras, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, C.P. and Orissa; B — consisting of Punjab, NWFP and Sind; and C — of Bengal and Assam — which would meet separately to decide on group constitutions. There would be a common centre controlling defence, foreign affairs and communications. After the first general elections a province could come out of a group. After ten years a province could call for a reconsideration of the group or union constitution. Congress wanted that a province need not wait till the first elections to leave a group, it should have the option not to join it in the first place. It had Congress- ruled provinces of Assam and



NWFP (which were in Sections C and B respectively) in mind when it raised this question. The League wanted provinces to have the right to question the union constitution now, not wait for ten years. There was obviously a problem in that the Mission Plan was ambivalent on whether grouping was compulsory or optional. It declared that grouping was optional but sections were compulsory. This was a contradiction, which rather than removing, the Mission deliberately quibbled about in the hope of somehow reconciling the irreconcilable.

The Congress and League interpreted the Mission Plan in their own way, both seeing it as a confirmation of their stand. Thus, Patel maintained that the Mission's Plan was against Pakistan, that the League's veto was gone and that one Constituent Assembly was envisaged. The League announced its acceptance of the Plan on 6 June in so far as the basis of Pakistan was implied in the Mission's plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping. Nehru asserted the Congress working Committee's particular interpretation of the plan in his speech to the AICC on 7 July 1946: 'We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly.' The implication was that the Assembly was sovereign and would decide rules of procedure. Jinnah seized the opportunity provided by Nehru's speech to withdraw the League's acceptance of the Mission Plan on 29th July, 1946.

### THE SIMLA CONFERENCE AND JINNAH'S COMMUNAL BLACKMAIL

The dilemma before the Government was whether to go ahead and form the Interim Government with the Congress or await League agreement to the plan. Wavell, who had opted for the second course at the Simla Conference a year earlier, preferred to do the same again. But His Majesty's Government, especially the Secretary of State, argued that it was vital to get Congress cooperation. Thus, the Interim Government was formed on 2nd September 1946 with Congress members alone with Nehru as *de facto* head. This was against the League's insistence that all settlements be acceptable to it. The British in 1946, in keeping with their strategic interests in the post-independence Indian subcontinent, took up a stance different from their earlier posture of encouraging communal forces and denying the legitimacy of nationalism and the representative nature of the Congress. Continuance of rule had demanded one stance, withdrawal and post-imperial links dictated a contrary posture. However, Jinnah had no intention of allowing the British to break with their past. His thinly veiled threat to Attlee that he should 'avoid compelling the Muslims to shed their blood... (by a) surrender to the Congress had already been sent out and the weapon of Direct Action forged. Jinnah had become 'answerable to the wider electorate of the streets.' With the battle cry, *Lekar rahenge Pakistan, Larke lenge Pakistan*. Muslim communal groups provoked communal frenzy in Calcutta 16 August 1946.

Hindu communal groups retaliated in equal measure and the cost was 5000 lives lost. The British authorities were worried that they had lost control over the 'Frankenstein monster' they had helped to create but felt it was too late to tame it. They were frightened into appeasing the League by Jinnah's ability to unleash civil war. Wavell quickly brought the League into the Interim Government on 26 October 1946 though it had not accepted either the short or long term provisions of the Cabinet Mission Plan and had not given up its policy of Direct Action. The Secretary of State argued that without the League's presence in the Government civil war would have been inevitable. Jinnah had succeeded in keeping the British in his grip. The Congress demand that the British get the League to modify its attitude in the Interim Government or quit was voiced almost from the time the League members were sworn in. Except Liaqat Ali Khan, all the League nominees were second-raters, indicating that what was at stake was power, not responsibility to run the country. Jinnah had realized that it was fatal to leave the administration in Congress hands and had sought a foothold in the Government to fight for Pakistan. For him, the Interim Government was the continuation of civil war by other means. League ministers questioned actions taken by Congress members, including appointments made, and refused to attend the informal meetings which Nehru had devised as a means of arriving at decisions without reference to Wavell. Their disruptionist tactics convinced Congress leaders of the futility of the Interim Government as an exercise in Congress-League cooperation. But they held on till 5th February 1947 when nine members of the Interim Government wrote to the Viceroy demanding that the League members resign. The League's demand for the

dissolution of the Constituent Assembly that had met for the first time on 9th December 1946 had proved to be the last straw. Earlier it had refused to join the constituent Assembly despite assurances from His Majesty's Government in their 6th December 1946 statement that the League's interpretation of grouping was the correct one. A direct bid for Pakistan, rather than through the Mission Plan, seemed to be the card Jinnah now sought to play.



### **JINNAH'S COMMUNAL BLACKMAIL ( AS HE REFUSED TO LISTEN EVEN TO THE MAHATMA)**

This developing crisis was temporarily defused by the statement made by Attlee in Parliament on 20 February, 1947. The date for British withdrawal from India was fixed as 30 June 1948 and the appointment of a new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, was announced. The hope was that the date would shock the parties into agreement on the main question and avert the constitutional crisis that threatened. Besides, Indians would be finally convinced that the British were sincere about conceding independence, however, both these hopes were introduced into the terminal date notion after it had been accepted. The basic reason why the Attlee Government accepted the need for a final date was because they could not deny the truth of Wavell's assessment that an irreversible decline of Government authority had taken place. They could dismiss the Viceroy, on the ground that he was pessimistic, which they did in the most discourteous manner possible. The news was common gossip in New Delhi before Wavell was even informed of it. But they could not dismiss the truth of what he said. So the 20 February statement was really an acceptance of the dismissed Viceroy, Wavell's reading of the Indian situation. The anticipation of freedom from imperial rule lifted the gloom that had set in with continuous internal wrangling. The statement was enthusiastically received in Congress circles as a final proof of British sincerity to quit. Partition of the country was implied in the proviso that if the Constituent Assembly was not fully representative (i.e. if Muslim majority provinces did not join) power would be transferred to more than one central Government. But even this was acceptable to the Congress as it meant that the existing Assembly could go ahead and frame a constitution for the areas represented in it. It offered a way out of the existing deadlock, in which the League not only refused to join the Constituent Assembly but demanded that it be dissolved.



**Liaqat Ali Khan**

Nehru appealed to Liaqat Ali Khan: "The British are fading out of the picture and the burden of this decision must rest on all of us here. It seems desirable that we should face this question squarely and not speak to each other from a distance." There seemed some chance of fulfilment of Attlee's hopes that the date would force the two political parties in India to come together. This was an illusory hope, for Jinnah was more convinced than ever that he only had to bide his time in order to reach his goal. This is precisely what Conservative members of Parliament had warned would happen, in the contentious debate that following the 20th February statement. Godfrey Nicolson had said of Cripps' speech — "if ever there was a speech which was a direct invitation to the Muslim League to stick their toes in and hold out for Pakistan that was one." The Punjab Governor, Evan Jenkins was equally emphatic — "the statement will be regarded as the prelude to the final communal showdown," with everyone out to "seize as much power as they can — if necessary by force." Jenkins' prophecy took immediate shape with the League launching civil disobedience in Punjab and bringing down the Unionist Akali- Congress coalition ministry led by Khizr Hayat Khan. Wavell wrote in his diary on 13th March 1941 -- "Khizr's resignation was prompted largely by the statement of February 20."

This was the situation in which Mountbatten came to India as Viceroy. He was the last Viceroy and charged with the task of winding up the Raj by 30th June 1948. Mountbatten has claimed to have introduced the time limit into the 20 February settlement: "I made the great point about it. I had thought of the time and I had great difficulty in bringing him (Attlee) upto it. . I think the time limit was fundamental. I believe if I'd gone out without a time limit, I'd still be there." This is so obviously untrue that it should need no refutation, but Lapierre and Collins in *Freedom at Midnight* and others have passed off as history Mountbatten's self-proclamations of determining history singlehandedly. The idea of a fixed date was originally Wavell's, 31 March 1948 being the date by which he expected a stage of responsibility without power to set in. Attlee thought mid-1948 should be the date aimed at. Mountbatten insisted it be a calendar date and got 30th June 1948. Mountbatten's claim of having plenipotentiary powers, such that he need make no reference back to London, is equally misleading. It is true that he had more independence than the Viceroys preceding him and his views were given due consideration by the Labour Government. Yet he referred back to London at each stage of the evolution of his Plan, sent his aide Ismay to London and finally went himself to get Attlee and his Cabinet to agree to the 3rd June Plan. Mountbatten had a clear cut directive from His Majesty's Government, he did not write his own ticket, as he has claimed. He was directed to explore the options of unity and division till October, 1947 after which he was to advise His Majesty's Government on the form transfer of power should take. Here again he soon discovered that



he had little real choice. The broad contours of the scenario that was to emerge were discernible even before he came out. Mountbatten found out within two months of his arrival that more flogging would not push the Cabinet Mission Plan forward. It was a dead horse. Jinnah was obdurate that the Muslims would settle for nothing less than a sovereign state. Mountbatten found himself unable to move Jinnah from this stand: 'He gave the impression that he was not listening. He was impossible to argue with... He was, whatever was said, intent on his Pakistan.'

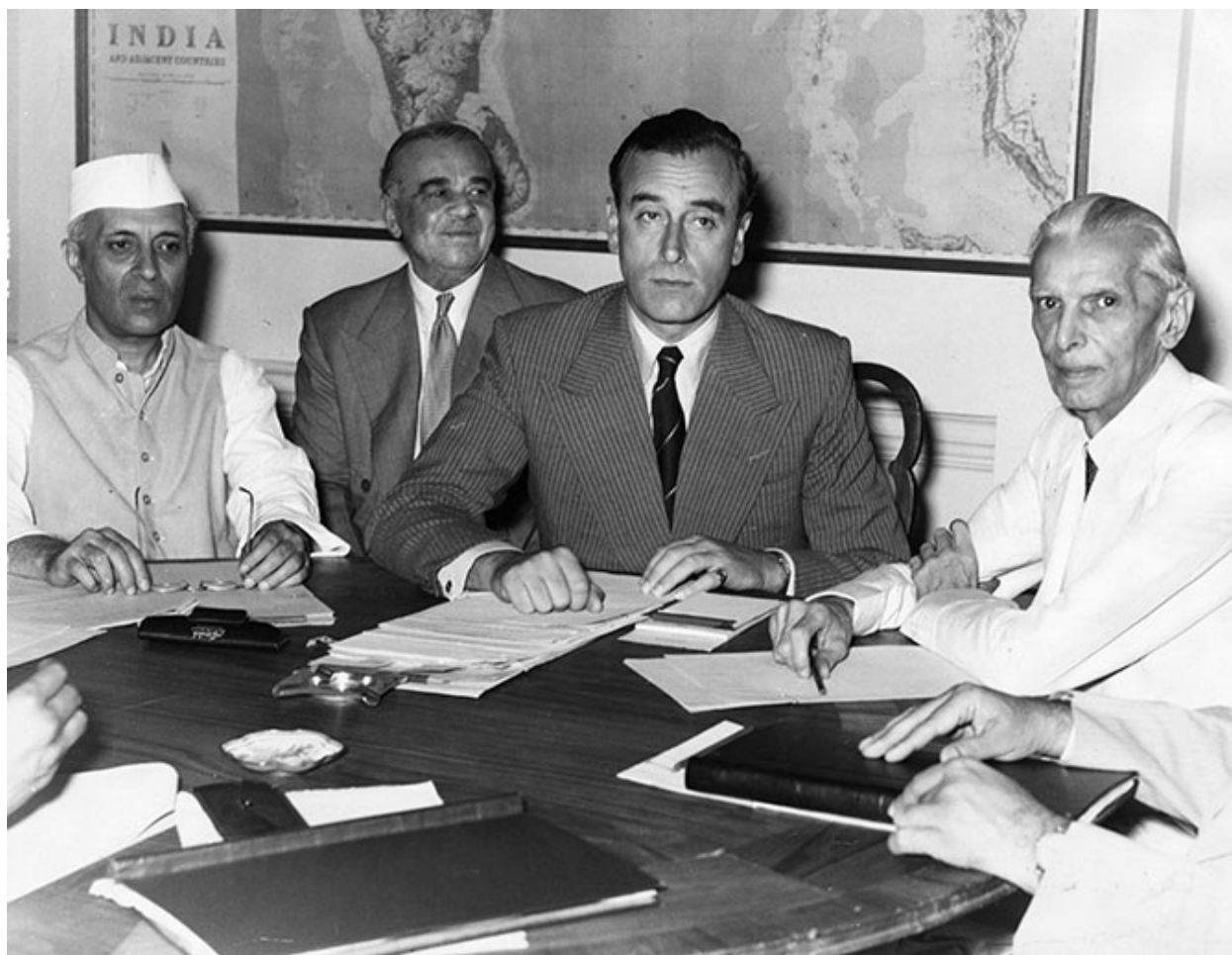
The British could keep India united only if they gave up their role as mediators trying to effect a solution Indians had agreed upon. Unity needed positive intervention in its favour, including putting down communal elements with a firm hand. This they chose not to do. Attlee wrote later— 'We would have preferred a United India. We couldn't get it, though we tried hard.' They in fact took the easy way out. A serious attempt at retaining unity would involve identifying with the forces that wanted a unified India and countering those who opposed it. Rather than doing that, they preferred to woo both sides into friendly collaboration with Britain on strategic and defence issues. The British preference for a united Indian subcontinent that would be a strong ally in Commonwealth defence was modified to two dominions, both of which would be Britain's allies and together serve the purpose a united India was expected to do. The poser now was, how was friendship of *both* India and Pakistan to be secured?

Mountbatten's formula was to divide India but retain maximum unity. The country would be partitioned but so would Punjab and Bengal, so that the limited Pakistan that emerged would meet both the Congress and League's positions to some extent. The League's position on Pakistan was conceded to the extent that it would be created, but the Congress position on unity would be taken into account to make Pakistan as small as possible. Since Congress were asked to concede their main point i.e. a unified India, all their other points would be met. Whether it was ruling out independence for the princes or unity for Bengal or Hyderabad's joining up with Pakistan instead of India, Mountbatten firmly supported Congress on these issues. He got His Majesty's Government to agree to his argument that Congress goodwill was vital if India was to remain in the commonwealth.

## THE MOUNTBATTEN PLAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The Mountbatten Plan, as the 3rd June, 1947 Plan came to be known, sought to effect an early transfer of power on the basis of Dominion Status to two successor states, India and Pakistan. Congress was willing to accept Dominion Status for a while because it felt it must assume full power immediately and meet boldly the explosive situation in the country. As Nehru put it, 'Murder stalks the streets and the most amazing cruelties are indulged in by both the individual and the mob.' Besides Dominion Status gave breathing time to the new administration as British officers and civil service officials could stay on for a while and let Indians settle in easier into their new positions of authority. For Britain, Dominion Status offered a chance of keeping India in the Commonwealth, even if temporarily, a prize not to be spurned. Though Jinnah offered to bring Pakistan into the Commonwealth, a greater store was laid by India's membership of the Commonwealth, as India's economic strength and defence potential were deemed sounder and Britain had a greater value of trade and investment there.

The rationale for the early date for transfer of power, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 as securing Congress agreement to Dominion Status. The additional benefit was that the British could escape responsibility for the rapidly deteriorating communal situation. As it is, some officials were more than happy to pack their bags and leave the Indians to stew in their own juice. As Patel said to the Viceroy, the situation was one where you won't govern yourself, and you won't let us govern.' Mountbatten was to defend his advancing the date to 15th August, 1947 on the ground that things would have blown up under their feet had they not got out when they did. Ismay, the Viceroy's Chief of Staff, felt that August, 1947 was too late, rather than too early. From the British point of view, a hasty retreat was perhaps the most suitable action.



### Lord Louis Mountbatten with Nehru and Jinnah

That does not make it the inevitable option, as Mountbatten and Ismay would have us believe. Despite the steady erosion of government authority, the situation of responsibility without power was still a prospect rather than a reality. In the short term the British could assert their authority, but did not care to, as Kripalani, then Congress President, pertinently pointed out to Mountbatten. 'Moreover, the situation, rather than warranting withdrawal of authority, cried out for someone to wield it. If abdication of responsibility was callous, the speed with which it was done made it worse. The seventy-two day timetable, 3rd June to 15th August 1947, for both transfer of power and division of the country, was to prove disastrous. Senior officials in India like the Punjab Governor, Jenkins and the Commander-in-Chief, Auchinleck, felt that peaceful division could take a few years at the very least. As it happened, the Partition Council had to divide assets, down to typewriters and printing presses, in a few weeks. There were no transitional institutional structures within which the knotty problems spilling over from division could be tackled. Mountbatten had hoped to be common Governor-General of India and Pakistan and provide the necessary link but this was not to be as Jinnah wanted the position himself. Hence even the joint defence machinery set up failed to last beyond December 1947 by which time Kashmir had already been the scene of a military conflict rather than a political settlement. The Punjab massacres that accompanied Partition were the final indictment of Mountbatten. His loyal aide, Ismay, wrote to his wife on 16 September 1947: 'Our mission was so very nearly a success: it is sad that it has ended up such a grim and total failure.'<sup>9</sup> The early date, 15th August 1947, and the delay in announcing the Boundary Commission Award, both Mountbatten's decisions, compounded the tragedy that took place. A senior army official, Brigadier Bristow, posted in Punjab in 1947, was of the view that the Punjab tragedy would not have occurred had partition been deferred for a year or so. Lockhart, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 15 August to 31 December 1947, endorsed this view: 'Had officials in every grade in the civil services, and all the personnel of the armed services, been in position in their respective new countries before Independence Day, it seems



there would have been a better chance of preventing widespread disorder.' The Boundary Commission Award was ready by 12th August, 1947 but Mountbatten decided to make it public after Independence Day, so that the responsibility would not fall on the British. Independence Day in Punjab and Bengal saw strange scenes. Flags of both India and Pakistan were flown in villages between Lahore and Amritsar as people of both communities believed that they were on the right side of the border. The morrow after freedom was to find them aliens in their own homes, exiled by executive fiat.

### WHY DID THE CONGRESS ACCEPT PARTITION ?

Why and how did the Congress come to accept Partition? That the League should assertively demand it and get its Shylockian pound of flesh, or that the British should concede it, being unable to get out of the web of their own making seems explicable. But why the Congress wedded to a belief in one Indian nation, accepted the division of the country, remains a question difficult to answer. Why did Nehru and Patel advocate acceptance of the 3rd June Plan and the Congress Working Committee and AICC pass a resolution in favour of it? Most surprising of all, why did Gandhi acquiesce? Nehru and *Patel's* acceptance of Partition has been popularly interpreted as stemming from their lust for quick and easy power, which made them betray the people. Gandhiji's counsels are believed to have been ignored and it is argued that he felt betrayed by his disciples and even wished to end his life, but heroically fought communal frenzy singlehandedly 'a one man boundary force,' as Mountbatten called him. It is forgotten that Nehru, Patel and Gandhiji in 1947 were only accepting what had become inevitable because of the long term failure of the Congress to draw in the Muslim masses into the national movement and stem the surging waves of Muslim communalism, which, especially since 1937, had been beating with increasing fury. This failure was revealed with stark clarity by the 1946 elections in which the League won 90 per cent Muslim seats. Though the war against Jinnah was lost by early 1946, defeat was conceded only after the final battle was mercilessly waged on the streets of Calcutta and Rawalpindi and the village lanes of Noakhali and Bihar. The Congress leaders felt by June 1947 that only an immediate transfer of power could forestall the spread of Direct Action and communal disturbances.







### **Patel and Nehru were bemused and angry at Jinnah's Call for Direct Action**

The virtual collapse of the Interim Government made Pakistan appear to be an unavoidable reality. Patel argued in the AICC meeting on 14th June, 1947 that we have to face up to the fact that Pakistan was functioning in Punjab, Bengal and in the Interim Government. Nehru was dismayed at the turning of the Interim Government into an arena of struggle. Ministers wrangled, met separately to reach decisions and Liaquat Ali Khan as Finance Member hamstrung the functioning of the other ministries. In the face of the Interim Government's powerlessness to check Governors from abetting the League and the Bengal provincial Ministry's inaction and even complicity in riots, Nehru wondered whether there was any Point in continuing in the Interim Government while people were being butchered. Immediate transfer of power would at least mean the setting up of a government which could exercise the control it was now expected to wield, but was powerless to exercise. There was an additional consideration in accepting immediate transfer of power to two dominions. The prospect of balkanisation was ruled out as the provinces and princes were not given the option to be independent—the latter were, in fact, much to their chagrin, cajoled and coerced into joining one or the other dominion. This was no mean achievement. Princely states standing out would have meant a graver blow to Indian unity than Pakistan was.

The acceptance of Partition in 1947 was, thus, only the final act of a process of step by step concession to the League's intransigent championing of a sovereign Muslim state. Autonomy of Muslim majority provinces was accepted in 1942 at the time of the Cripps Mission. Gandhiji went a step further and accepted the right of self-determination of Muslim majority provinces in his talks with Jinnah in 1944. In June 1946, Congress conceded the possibility of Muslim majority provinces (which formed Group B and C of the Cabinet Mission Plan) setting up a separate Constituent Assembly, but opposed compulsory grouping and upheld the right of NWFP and Assam not to join their groups if they so wished. But by the end of the year, Nehru said he would accept the ruling of the Federal Court on whether grouping was compulsory or optional. The Congress accepted without demur the clarification by the British Cabinet in December, 1946 that grouping was compulsory. Congress officially referred to Partition in early March 1947 when a resolution was passed in the Congress Working Committee that Punjab (and by implication Bengal) must be partitioned if the country was divided. The final act of surrender to the League's demands was in June 1947 when Congress ended up accepting Partition under the 3rd June Plan.

The brave words of the leaders contrasted starkly with the tragic retreat of the Congress. While loudly asserting the sovereignty of the Constituent Assembly, the Congress quietly accepted compulsory grouping and abandoned NWFP to Pakistan. Similarly the Congress leaders finally accepted Partition most of all because they could not stop communal riots, but their words were all about not surrendering to the blackmail of violence. Nehru wrote to Wavell on 22nd August 1946: 'We are not going to shake hands with murder or allow it to determine the country's policy.' What was involved here was a refusal to accept the reality that the logic of their past failure could not be reversed by their present words or action. This was hardly surprising at the time for hardly anybody had either anticipated the quick pace of the unfolding tragedy or was prepared to accept it as irrevocable. It is a fact that millions of people on both sides of the new border refused to accept the finality of Partition long after it was announced, and that is one major reason why the transfer of population became such a frenzied, last-minute affair. Wishful thinking, clinging to fond hopes and a certain lack of appreciation of the dynamics of communal feeling characterized the Congress stand, especially Nehru's. The right of secession was conceded by the Congress as it was believed that 'the Muslims would not exercise it but rather use it to shed their fears.' It was not realised that what was in evidence in the mid-1940s was not the communalism of the 1920s or even 1930s when minority fears were being assiduously fanned, but an assertive 'Muslim nation,' led by an obdurate leader, determined to have a separate state by any means. The result was that each concession of the Congress, rather than cutting the ground from under the communalists' feet, consolidated their position further as success drew more Muslims towards them. Jinnah pitched his claim high, seeing that Congress was yielding. Hindu communalism got a chance to grow by vaunting itself as the true protector of Hindu interests, which, it alleged, the Congress was sacrificing at the altar of unity.

Another unreal hope was that once the British left, differences would be patched up and a free India built by both Hindus and Muslims. This belief underestimated the autonomy of communalism by this time — it was no longer merely propped up by the British, in fact it had thrown away that crutch and was assertively independent, defying even the British. Yet another fond hope was that Partition was temporary — it had become unavoidable because of the present psyche of Hindus and Muslims but was reversible once communal passions subsided and sanity returned. Gandhiji often told people that Pakistan could not exist for long if people refused to accept Partition in their hearts. Nehru wrote to Cariappa: 'But of one thing I am convinced that ultimately there will be a united and strong India. We have often to go through the valley of the shadow before we reach the sun-lit mountain tops.'

The most unreal belief, given what actually happened was the one that Partition would be peaceful. No riots were anticipated. No transfers of population planned, as it was assumed that once Pakistan was conceded, what was there to fight over? Nehru continued to believe as always in the goodness of his people, despite the spate of riots which plagued India from August 1946 onwards. The hope was that madness would be exorcised by a clean surgical cut. But the body was so diseased, the instruments used infected, that the operation proved to be terribly botchy. Worse horrors were to accompany Partition than those that preceded it.

## **GANDHIJI: PARTITION AND FREEDOM**

What about Gandhiji? Gandhiji's unhappiness and helplessness have often been pointed out. His inaction has been explained in terms of his forced isolation from the Congress decision making councils and his inability to condemn his disciples, Nehru and Patel, for having succumbed to the lust for power, as they had followed him faithfully for many years. At great personal sacrifice. In our view, the root of Gandhiji's helplessness was neither Jinnah's intransigence nor his disciples' alleged lust for power. but the communalisation of his people. At his prayer meeting on 4th June 1947 he explained that Congress accepted Partition because the people wanted it: 'The demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it . . . But the Congress can feel the pulse of the people. It realized that the Khalsa as also the Hindus desired it.' It was the Hindus' and Sikhs' desire for Partition that rendered him ineffective, blind, impotent. The Muslims already considered him their enemy. What was a mass leader without masses who would follow his call? How could he base a movement to fight communalism on a commu-



nalised people? He could defy the leaders' counsels, as he had done in 1942, when he saw clearly that the moment was right for a struggle. But he could not 'create a situation,' as he honestly told N.K. Bose, who asked him to do so. His special ability, in his own words, only lay in being able to instinctively feel what is stirring in the hearts of the masses' and 'giving a shape to what was already there.' In 1947, there were no 'forces of good' which Gandhiji could 'seize upon' to 'build up a programme' — "Toy I see no sign of such a healthy feeling.



### Noakhali Riots

And, therefore, I shall have to wait until the time comes.' But, political developments did not wait till a 'blind man groping in the dark all alone' found a way to the light. The Mountbatten Plan confronted him and Gandhiji saw the inevitability of Partition in the ugly gashes left by riots on the country's face and in the *rigor mortis* the Interim Government had fallen into. He walked bravely into the AICC meeting on 14 June, 1947 and asked Congressmen to accept Partition as an unavoidable necessity in the given circumstances, but to tight *it* in the long run by not accepting it in their hearts. He did not accept it in his heart and kept alive, like Nehru, his faith in his people. He chose to plough a lonely furrow, walking barefoot through the villages of Noakhali, bringing confidence h his presence to the Muslims in Bihar and preventing riots by persuasion and threats of a fast in Calcutta.





**Gandhiji in Noakhali**

*Ekla Cholo* had long been his favourite song — ‘if no one heeds your call, walk alone, walk alone.’ He did just that. 15th August 1947, dawned revealing the dual reality of independence and Partition. As always, between the two of them, Gandhiji and Nehru mirrored the feelings of the Indian people. Gandhiji prayed in Calcutta for an end to the carnage taking place. His close follower, Mridula Sarabhai, sat consoling a homeless, abducted 15-year-old girl in a room somewhere in Bombay. Gandhiji’s prayers were reflective of the goings on in the dark, the murders, abductions and rapes. Nehru’s eyes were on the light on the horizon, the new dawn, the birth of a free India. ‘At the stroke of the midnight hour when the world sleeps India shall awake to light and freedom.’ His poetic words, ‘Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny,’ reminded the people that their angry bewilderment today was not the only truth. There was a greater truth — that of a glorious struggle, hard-fought and hard-won, in which many fell martyrs and countless others made sacrifices, dreaming of the day India would be free. That day had come. The people of India saw that too, and on 15 August — despite the sorrow in their hearts for the division of their land danced in the streets with abandon and joy.

## THE MID-NIGHT FREEDOM SPEECH: TRYST WITH DESTINY



*“Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny; and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.*

*A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new -- when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India, and her people, and to the still larger cause of humanity.*

*At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries which are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her successes and her failures. Through good and ill fortunes alike, she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again.*

*The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?*

*Freedom and power bring responsibility. That responsibility rests upon this assembly, a sovereign body representing the sovereign people of India. Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labor, and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now. Nevertheless, the past is over, and it is the future that beckons to us now.*

*That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we might fulfill the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity.*

*The ambition of the greatest man<sup>1</sup> of our generation has been to wipe "every tear from every eye." That may be beyond us, but so long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.*

*And so we have to labor and to work, and work hard, to -- to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart.*

*Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom; so is prosperity now; and so also is disaster in this one world that can no longer be split into isolated fragments.*

*To the people of India, whose representatives we are, we make appeal to join us with faith and confidence in this great adventure. This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell."*

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