# CHAPTER XXIV

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I N May, June and July 1942, one felt a suffocating airlessness

in India. Indians seemed desperate. British generals, U.S.

General Joseph W. Stilwell and a small armed remnant, and

thousands of Indian refugees were straggling out of Burma to

escape the conquering Japanese. Japan was next door to India.

England apparently lacked the strength to protect India from

invasion. Vocal Indians were irritated and exasperated by their

utter helplessness. There was the national emergency; tension

was mounting; danger threatened; opportunity knocked; but

Indians had no voice and no power to act.

Gandhi found the situation intolerable. Resignation was alien

to his nature. He believed and had taught a vast following that

Indians must shape their own destiny.

The Cripps mission awakened many hopes; India might gain

the right to guide her fate. Now the hopes were dashed. Indians

were to be supine spectators in an hour of decision. Anger swept

the country.

In the light of subsequent events, it appears clear that 1942 or

1943 or 1944 was the best time to grant India independence.

For, since Britain and other United Nations would keep their

troops in the country as long as the war lasted, the transfer of

power to a provisional Indian government could be achieved

smoothly and with the least likelihood of riots, chaos, or attempts

at a separate peace with Japan. Real power would remain in

British hands. This would have avoided the hundreds of thou¬

sands of deaths and the millions of human torments atid tragedies

which attended the liberation of India in 1947.

Gandhi could not have foreseen the black future, but he did

sense the urgent need of an immediate change. He was determined

to exert maximum pressure on England for the early establish¬

ment of an independent national government.

Gandhi’s formula was: £ not to put any obstacle in the way of

the British forces’; not to assist the British actively; and to offer

complete passive resistance to the Japanese.

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‘If the Japanese come, 5 Indians asked, ‘how are we to resist

them non-violently? 5

‘Neither food nor shelter is to be given, 5 Gandhi replied in the

June 14th, 1942, Harijaiiy ‘nor are any dealings to be established

with them. They should be made to feel that they are not

wanted. But of course things are not going to happen quite so

smoothly as the question implies. It is a superstition to think that

they will come as friendlies ... If the people cannot resist fierce

attack and are afraid of death, they must evacuate the infested

place in order to deny compulsory service to the enemy. 5

On July 26th, answering similar questions in Harijan , Gandhi

wrote, ‘I would rather be shot than submit to Japanese or any

other power. 5 He recommended the same preference to his

friends.

Gandhi, the absolute pacifist, would have wished India to give

an unprecedented demonstration of a successful non-violent

defeat of an invading army. Yet he was not so unrealistic as to

forget that a fierce war to the death of countries raged. In

Harijan of June 14th, 1942, Gandhi declared, ‘Assuming that the

National government is formed and if it answers my expectations,

its first act would be to enter into a treaty with the United Nations

for defensive operations against aggressive powers, it being common

cause that India will have nothing to do with any of the Fascist

powers and India would be morally bound to help the United

Nations. 5

Asked by Reuters in London to amplify this encouraging

pronouncement, Gandhi cabled, ‘There can be no limit to what

friendly independent India can do. I had in mind a treaty

between the United Nations and India for the defence of China

against Japanese aggression. 5

Would Gandhi, then, assist the war effort? No. United Nations

armies would be tolerated on Indian soil and Indians could enlist

in the British Army or render other help. But if he had anything

to say, the Indian Army would be disbanded and the new Indian

national government would use ‘all its power, prestige and'

resources 5 to bring about world peace.

Did he expect this to happen? No. ‘After the formation of the

National Government 5 , he said, ‘my voice may be a voice in the

wilderness and nationalist India may go war-mad. 5

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Nationalist India might well have gone ‘war-mad 5 if only to

shake off the oppressive frustration of inaction. Nehru, Azad and

Rajagopalachari were eager to have a national government for

its own sake, to be sure, but also in order to fight the war. They

were militantly anti-fascist. Nehru said, ‘We would fight in every

way possible with non-violence and with arms, by making it a

people’s war, by raising a people’s army, by increasing produc¬

tion . . .’ But if Britain did not enable them to do these things,

they must continue the struggle for independence. ‘Passivity on

our part at this moment’, Nehru declared, ‘would be suicidal

... It would destroy and emasculate us.’ Fear of India’s emas¬

culation was an everpresent motive. ‘Today the whole of

India is impotent,’ Gandhi complained in the same context. In

different ways, both Nehru and Gandhi were concerned with

building up the manhood of their people. Gandhi wanted to give

them inner strength through confidence. He inspired that feeling

in his Indian and foreign visitors.

As the summer of 1942 wore on, it became clear that London

would not depart from the spurned Gripps proposal. Nehru had

waited for a sign from Washington; he had hoped Roosevelt

would prevail upon Churchill to make another move in India.

No sign came. Some Congressmen wondered whether the country

would respond to a call for civil disobedience, and some feared that

it would respond violently. Gandhi had no doubts. He was

registering a nation’s blind urge to self-assertion.

He did not contemplate the overthrow of the British govern¬

ment. ‘A non-violent revolution,’ he explained, ‘is not a pro¬

gramme of seizure of power. It is a programme of transformation

of relationships ending in a peaceful transfer of power. . . .’

‘British rule in India must end immediately,’ the Working

Committee of Congress resolved in Wardha on July 14th; foreign

domination ‘even at its best’ is an evil and a ‘continuing injury’.

The frustration left by the Cripps Mission ‘has resulted in a rapid

and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain and a growing

satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms. The Working

Committee view this development with grave apprehension, as

this, unless checked, will inevitably lead to a passive acceptance

of aggression. The Committee hold that all aggression must be

resisted . . . The Congress would change the present ill-will

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against Britain into good-will and make India a willing partner

in a joint enterprise . . . This is only possible if India feels the glow

of freedom’.

Congress, the resolution continued, did not wish to embarrass

the Allied powers; it is therefore ‘agreeable to the stationing of the

armed forces of the Allies in India. . . .’

If this appeal failed, the resolution concluded, Congress will

‘be reluctantly compelled 5 to start a civil disobedience campaign

which ‘would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma

Gandhi 5 .

The resolution still required the approval of the larger All-India

Congress Committee summoned to convene in Bombay early in

August. From Sevagram, meanwhile, Gandhi issued an appeal

‘To Every Japanese’. ‘I must confess 5 , he began, ‘that though I

have no ill-will against you, I intensely dislike your attack upon

China . . . you have descended to imperial ambition. You will

fail to realize that ambition and may become the authors of the

dismemberment of Asia, thus unwittingly preventing world

federation and brotherhood without which there can be no hope

for humanity. 5

He warned Tokyo not to exploit the situation to invade India.

‘You will be sadly disillusioned if you believe that you will receive

a willing welcome from India ... we will not fail in resisting

you with all the might that our country can muster. . . .’

Then he went to Bombay. To jA. T. Steele, of the New York

Herald Tribune , Gandhi said,‘If anybody could convince me that

in the midst of war, the British government cannot declare India

free without jeopardizing the war effort, I should like to hear the

argument. 5

‘If you were convinced, 5 Steele asked, ‘would you call off the

campaign ? 5

c Of course, 5 Gandhi replied. ‘My complaint is that all these

good people talk at me, swear at me, but never condescend to

talk to me. 5

Linlithgow had talked to him in 1939 an d 1940, but not there¬

after.

Several hundred Congress leaders assembled for the A.I.C.C.

session on August 7th, and after deliberating all day of the 7th

and 3 th, they adopted a slightly modified version of the Wardha

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resolution; they dotted one i by declaring that an Indian govern¬

ment would resist aggression ‘with all the armed as well as the

non-violent forces at its command’ — this was an un-Gandhian

touch inserted by the Nehru-Azad school — and crossed one

bridge before they reached it by cautioning the Congress rank

and file that if their leaders were arrested and prevented from

issuing instructions they must obey the general instructions which

read, ‘non-violence is the basis of this movement’.

Shortly after midnight of August 8th, Gandhi addressed the

A.I.C.C. delegates. ‘The actual struggle does not commence this

very moment,’ he emphasized. ‘You have merely placed certain

powers in my hands. My first act will be to wait upon His

Excellency the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of

the Congress demand. This may take two or three weeks. What

are you to do in the meanwhile? I will tell you. There is the

spinning wheel. . . But there is something more you have to do

. . . Every one of you should, from this very moment, consider

himself a free man or woman and even act as if you are free and

no longer under the heel of this imperialism . . .’ He was reversing

the materialistic concept that conditions determine psychology.

No, psychology could shape conditions. ‘What you think, you

become,’ he once said.

The delegates went home to sleep. Gandhi, Nehru and scores

of others were awakened by the police a few hours later — before

sunrise — and carried off to prison. Gandhi was sent into a palace

of the Aga Khan at Yeravda, near Poona. Mrs. Naidu, Mirabehn,

Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal Nayyar, arrested at the same time,

were quartered with him. The next day, Kasturbai got herself

arrested by announcing that she would address a meeting in

Bombay at which Gandhi had been scheduled to speak. She and

Dr. Sushila Nayyar, who had been giving her medical care, joined

the Gandhi jail company. The British were very accommodating.

In an interview with the Viceroy after my week with Gandhi I

conveyed the message entrusted to me at Sevagram: Gandhi

wished to talk with Linlithgow. The Viceroy replied, ‘That is a

matter of high policy and will have to be considered on its

merits’; 1942 was Churchill’s first opportunity in office to cope

with a vcivil disobedience movement in India. The British

government preferred suppression to discussion.

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The moment the prison doors closed behind Gandhi the sluice

gates of violence opened. Police stations and government build¬

ings were set on fire, telegraph lines destroyed, railroad ties pulled

up and British officials assaulted; a number were killed. Indivi¬

duals and groups dedicated to destruction roamed the country¬

side. Soon a powerful underground movement sprang into

existence led, in most cases, by members of the Socialist party, a

segment of the Congress party. Socialist leaders Jaiprakash

Narayan, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali and others, political children of

Gandhi but recent students of Karl Marx, acquired the halos of

heroes as they moved secretly across the land fomenting rebellion.

Staid citizens harboured and financed them while the British

police hunted them. His Majesty’s writ no longer ran and his

officials no longer appeared in many areas where Indians set up

independent village, town and district governments. These

were, in most cases, skeleton structures whose propaganda value

exceeded their administrative effectiveness. Yet in some regions,

notably in Tilak’s traditionally militant Maharashtra, it was not

till 1944 that the British returned to rule.

Even Gandhi was in a bellicose mood. With that irrepressible

ability to take the centre of the stage, the jailed Mahatma’s

personality broke through the walls of the Aga Khan’s desolate

palace and besieged the mind first of the British government and

then of the Indian people.

He was no sooner in jail than he wrote a letter to Sir Roger

Lumley, the governor of Bombay, protesting against his own

transportation from the train to the prison by car while his

comrades went by motor truck. He wanted no privileges, he

said, ‘except for the special food’. The palace, he wrote, was

‘commodious’; could not Sardar Patel, who had been ill, and his

daughter who nursed him, be moved into it? The final point:

on the train he had seen in a paper the Government’s justification

of its policy; it contained ‘some grossly inaccurate statements

which I ought to be allowed to correct. This and similar things I

cannot do, unless I know what is going on outside the jail’. Yet

newspapers had been forbidden to him.

Lumley’s secretary replied he could not have newspapers or

Patel. He might write personal letters to his family.

Didn’t the Government know, Gandhi answered, that ‘for over

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thirty-five years I have ceased to live a family life’ and had been

living an ashram life? He wanted to be in touch with the various

voluntary organizations he had founded for Harijan uplift,

khadi, the development of a national language, etc. The Govern¬

ment then made a concession: he could write to ashram members

on personal questions but not about the organizations. Gandhi

refused to avail himself of the privilege.

Gandhi now turned on the Viceroy. Ever since President

Roosevelt’s intervention in the Indian crisis and Churchill’s offer

to ‘assuage’ United States public opinion by resigning, a gigantic

propaganda battle had been going on to win American approval

of British policy in India. Gandhi knew this. In his first letter

from jail to the Viceroy on August 14th, Gandhi accused

the Government of ‘distortions and misrepresentations’. The

letter was many pages long. Linlithgow, addressing ‘Dear Mr.

Gandhi’, answered in a paragraph that ‘it would not be

possible for me either to accept your criticism’ or change the

policy.

Gandhi waited several months. On New Years Eve, 1942, he

wrote, ‘Dear Lord Linlithgow, This is a very personal letter ... I

must not allow the old year to expire without disburdening my¬

self of what is rankling in my breast against you. I have thought

we were friends . . . However what has happened since August

9th makes me wonder whether you still regard me as a friend. I

have not perhaps come in such close touch with any occupant

of your throne as with you.’ Then he voiced what apparently

hurt him most: ‘Why did you not, before taking drastic action,

send for me, tell me your suspicions and make yourself sure of

your facts? I am quite capable of seeing myself as others see me.’

The Government had made the charge that he was responsible for

the violence throughout the country and expected him to condemn

it. How could he when he had only the official version? By

accusing him without giving him freedom to reply, by holding

him and his followers in prison despite their good intentions, the

Government had ‘wronged innocent men’.

Therefore, Gandhi concluded, he had decided to ‘crucify the

flesh by fasting’. This was a last resort and he would be glad not

to fast. ‘Convince me of my error or errors and I shall make

ample amends. You can send for me . . . There are many other

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ways if you have the will. . . May the New Year bring peace to

us all! I am, Your sincere friend, M. K. Gandhi.’

The Viceroy received this letter fourteen days later; minor

officials had delayed it. He answered in a letter marked ‘Personal’.

It was a two-page letter. Newspapers had been supplied to

Gandhi’s prison after the early period without them. He knew of

the arson and murders. Linlithgow was therefore ‘profoundly

depressed . . . that no word of condemnation for that violence

and crime should have come from you’. If Gandhi wished to

dissociate himself from these acts ‘You know me well enough after

these many years to believe that I shall be only too concerned to

read with the same close attention as ever any message which I

receive from you . . . Yours sincerely, Linlithgow.’

T had almost despaired of ever hearing from you,’ Gandhi’s

reply began. ‘Please excuse my impatience. Your letter gladdens

me to find that I have not lost caste with you. My letter of

December 31st was a growl against you. Yours is a counter-growl

. . . Of course I deplore the happenings that have taken place

since August 9th. But have I not laid the blame for them at the

door of the Government of India? Moreover, I could not express

any opinion on events which I cannot influence or control and of

which I have but a one-sided account... I am certain that noth¬

ing but good could have resulted if you had stayed your hand and

granted me the interview which I had announced, on the night of

August 8th, I was to seek . . . convince me that I was wrong and I

will make ample amends. . . .’

Linlithgow responded quickly saying he had no choice ‘but to

regard the Congress movement and you as its authorized and

fully empowered spokesman ... as responsible for the sad cam¬

paign of violence and crime’. He repelled Gandhi’s charge that

the Government was at fault. He asked the Mahatma to ‘repudiate

or dissociate yourself from the resolution of August 8th and the

policy which the resolution represents’ and to ‘give me appropriate

assurances as regards the future . . .’ He had asked the Governor

of Bombay to forward Gandhi’s letter without delay.

It was the Government, Gandhi’s return letter stated, that

‘goaded the people to the point of madness’. The Congress

resolution of August 8th was friendly to the United Nations and

to England: The Government’s violence was ‘leonine’. The arrests

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started the trouble. Yet the Viceroy blamed him for the violence

though he had worked all his life for non-violence. ‘If then I

cannot get soothing balm for my pain, I must resort to the law

prescribed for Satyagrahis, namely, a fast according to capacity/

It would commence on February 9th and end twenty-one days

later. ‘Usually, during my fasts, I take water with the addition of

salt. But nowadays, my system refuses water. This time therefore

I propose to add juices of citrus fruit to make water drinkable.

For my wish is not to fast unto death, but to survive the ordeal, if

God so wills. The fast can be ended sooner by the government

giving the needed relief/

The Viceroy replied immediately, on February 5th, with a

many-page letter. He still held Congress responsible for ‘the

lamentable disorders’. Sir Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member

of Linlithgow’s Executive Council, had made a full statement of

this charge in the assembly and this would be sent to the prisoner.

The letter reiterated the charge and added details. ‘Let me in

conclusion say how greatly I regret, having regard to your health

and age, the decision’ to fast. He hoped he would not fast. But it

was Gandhi’s responsibility. ‘I regard the use of a fast for political

purposes as a form of political blackmail for which there is no

moral justification, and understood from your own previous

writings that this was also your view.’

Besides, Gandhi had written that one may fast only against

those who love you, not against a tyrant.

By return post, Gandhi denied that his decision to fast was

contrary to his previous writings. ‘I wonder whether you yourself

have read those writings . . . Despite your description of it as “a

form of political blackmail”, it is on my part an appeal to the

Highest Tribunal for justice which I have failed to secure from

you. If I do not survive the ordeal I shall go to the Judgment

Seat with the fullest faith in my innocence. Posterity will judge

between you as a representative of an all-powerful government

and me a humble man who tried to serve his country and humanity

through it.’

Two days before the fast was to commence the Government

offered to release Gandhi for its duration. He and his associates

in prison could go wherever they liked. Gandhi refused. If he

was released, he said, he would not fast. Thereupon, the Govern-

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ment announced that he would be responsible for any results;

meanwhile, he could invite into the jail any doctors he wanted to

have and also friends from the outside.

The fast commenced on February ioth, 1942, a day later than

scheduled. The first day he was quite cheerful and for two d^ys

he took his customary morning and evening half-hour walks. But

soon the bulletins became increasingly disquieting. On the sixth

day, six physicians, including British official doctors, stated that

Gandhi’s condition had ‘further deteriorated’. The next morning

Sir Homi Mody, Mr. N. R. Sarker and Mr. Aney, three Indians

in the Viceroy’s Executive Council, whose membership indicated

their pro-government and anti-Congress attitude, resigned from

the Council in protest against the government accusations which

had caused Gandhi to undertake the fast. A debate on the fast

took place in the Central Legislature. From all over the country,

the Government was bombarded with demands to release the

Mahatma. Eleven days after the fast began, Linlithgow rejected

all suggestions to liberate Gandhi.

Dr. B. C. Roy came from Calcutta to attend Gandhi. The

British physicians urged intravenous feeding to save the Mahatma.

The Indian physicians said it would kill him; he objected to

injections. The body could reject medicines taken orally, Gandhi

always argued, but it was helpless before injections, and his mind

therefore rebelled against them; they were violence.

Crowds gathered around Yeravda. The Government allowed

the public to come into the palace grounds and file through

Gandhi’s room. Devadas and Ramdas, his sons, arrived.

Horace Alexander, the British Friend, attempted to intervene

with the Government. He was rebuffed. Mr. Aney, who had just

resigned from the Viceroy’s Council, visited the sinking Mahatma.

Gandhi had been taking water without salt or fruit juice.

Nausea plagued him. His kidneys began to fail and his blood

became thick. On the thirteenth day of the fast the pulse grew

feeble and his skin was cold and moist. Kasturbai knelt before a

sacred plant and prayed; she thought his death was near.

Finally, the Mahatma was persuaded to mix a few drops of

fresh moosambi fruit juice with the drinking water. Vomiting

stopped; he became more cheerful.

On March 2nd, Kasturbai handed him a glass containing six

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ounces of orange juice diluted with water. He sipped it for twenty

minutes. He thanked the doctors and cried copiously while doing

so. He lived on orange juice for the next four days and then went

on a diet of goat’s milk, fruit juice and fruit pulp. His health

improved slowly.

India’s prominent non-Congress leaders now started agitating

for Gandhi’s release and for a new government policy of concilia¬

tion. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and others asked permission to see

Gandhi; Linlithgow refused.

On April 25th, William Phillips, Roosevelt’s personal envoy in

India and former United States Under-Secretary of State, said to

foreign correspondents before leaving for home, C I should have

liked to meet and talk with Mr. Gandhi. I requested the appro¬

priate authorities for permission to do so and I was informed that

they were unable to grant the necessary permission.’

Linlithgow’s behaviour had induced unwonted bitterness in

Gandhi, and when the Viceroy, whose usual five-year term had

been prolonged because of the war emergency, was finally pre¬

paring to leave India, Gandhi wrote to him on September 27th,

1943, as follows:

Dear Lord Linlithgow, On the eve of your departure from India

I would like to send you a word.

Of all the high functionaries I have had the honour of knowing

none has been the cause of such deep sorrow to me as you have

been. It has cut me to the quick to have to think of you as having

countenanced untruth, and that regarding one whom you at one

time considered your friend. I hope and pray that God will some

day put it into your heart to realize that you, a representative of a

great nation, have been led into a grievous error. With good

wishes, I still remain your friend, M. K. Gandhi.

Linlithgow replied on October 7 th:

Dear Mr. Gandhi, I have received your letter of September 27th.

I am indeed sorry that your feelings about any deeds or words of

mine should be as you describe. But I must be allowed, as gently

as I may, to make plain to you that I am quite unable to accept

your interpretation of the events in question.

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As for the corrective virtues of time and reflection, evidently

they are ubiquitous in their operation and wisely to be rejected

by no man. I am sincerely, Linlithgow.

Before and after the fast, Gandhi wrote long letters, some of

which were of pamphlet length, to Sir Reginald Maxwell, Lord

(formerly Sir Herbert) Samuel and others, seeking to controvert

their public assertions about events and conditions in India. But

none of them was published and his letter to Samuel, sent on

May 15th, 1943, was not delivered in London until July 25th,

1944. Throughout, Gandhi continued to maintain that he could

‘accept no responsibility for the unfortunate happenings’ in India,

that he was neither anti-British nor pro-Japanese and that he

could have been dissuaded from taking any steps against the

Government.

The facts are: Gandhi never launched the civil disobedience

movement. Congress had merely authorized him to launch it,

but he had stated that it would not begin until he gave the

order. First he would seek an interview with the Viceroy. The

country was in a violent mood; Gandhi knew it; conceivably he

might have chosen a form of civil disobedience, like the Salt

March, which did not lend itself to mass violence. Had Gandhi

remained at liberty he might have prevented his followers from

engaging in the destruction of property and persons. He might

have fasted against them. At least, he could have curbed the

general violence. He would not have added to it. The British

gained nothing from Gandhi’s arrest except the satisfaction,

tempered by headaches, of having him under lock and key.

Gandhi’s freedom would have mollified many Indians. His

arrest inflamed them. It deepened the wide-spread impression

that England did not intend to part with power in India. Hence

the revolt. It was intensified by the 1943 famine in Bengal in

which, according to British official figures, a million and a half

Indians died. Indians said the Government might have prevented

the famine or, at a minimum, undertaken emergency feeding.

That was one of Wavell’s first steps on ascending the Viceroy’s

throne in October 1943.

For Gandhi, this stay in prison was an unrelieved tragedy. The

widespread violence and his inability to deal with it made him

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unhappy. The Government’s accusation that he was to blame for

the disturbances when it knew his devotion to non-violence and

when it knew that he had never actually started civil disobedience

impressed him as unfair and untrue; the injustice pained him. It

was to protest against the charge — not to force the British to

release him — that he had fasted. A perfect yogi might have

remained indifferent to what others said. Gandhi was not com¬

pletely detached.

The tragedy was deepened by personal loss. Six days after

Gandhi entered the Aga Khan’s palace, Mahadev Desai, who

was arrested with him, had a sudden heart attack and lost

consciousness. ‘Mahadev, Mahadev,’ Gandhi called.

‘If only he would open his eyes and look at me he would not

die,’ Gandhi said.

‘Mahadev, look, Bapu is calling you,’ Kasturbai exclaimed.

But it was the end.

Mahadev Desai, who was past fifty, had served Gandhi de¬

votedly and efficiently for twenty-four years as secretary, adviser, j

chronicler, friend and son. The Mahatma was stunned by the

death. He went daily to the spot in the palace grounds where the

ashes were buried.

Soon a still greater personal sorrow overtook Gandhi.

Gandhi spent much time in prison teaching his wife Indian

geography and other subjects. She failed, however, to memorize

the names of the rivers of the Punjab, and on examination by

Gandhi she said Lahore, which is the capital of the Punjab, was

the capital of Calcutta, a city which is the capital of Bengal. He

had little success in his persistent efforts to improve her reading

and writing of Gujarati. She was seventy-four.

Ba, or Mother, as everybody called Mrs. Gandhi, still paid

homage to Brahmans for their high-caste status and regarded

them as possessing special endowments; she asked one Brahman

who worked in the jail when they would be released. But she had

rid herself of anti-untouchable prejudices, was a regular spinner

and a sincere but not uncritical Gandhian. One day she was

annoyed with Gandhi and said to him, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to

pick a quarrel with the mighty Government? You did not listen

to me and now we all have to pay the penalty. The Government

is using its limitless strength to crush the people.’

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‘Then what do you want me to do . . . write to the Government

and ask for their forgiveness? 5

No, she did not ask that. But, she exclaimed, ‘Why do you

ask the British to leave India? Our country is vast. We can all

live there. Let them stay if they like, but let them stay as

brothers. 5

‘What else have I done? 5 Gandhi replied. ‘I want them to go

as rulers. Once they cease to be our rulers, we have no quarrel

with them. 5

Ah, yes, she agreed with that. She apparently worshipped

him without understanding.

Kasturbai had been ailing, and in December 1943 she became

seriously ill with chronic bronchitis. Dr. Gilder and Dr. Nayyar

tended her, but she asked for Dr. Dinshah Mehta, a nature cure

expert who had treated Gandhi, and an Aryuvedic or Indian-

medicine practitioner. In deference to her wishes, Gandhi bom¬

barded the Government with letters to admit them. The practi¬

tioner tried all his art for a number of days during which the

modern-medicine physicians withdrew from the patient. When

he confessed defeat, Dr. Gilder, Dr. Nayyar and Dr. Jivraj Mehta

resumed their efforts, but they too failed. The Government gave

permission for her sons and grandsons to visit her. Ba especially

asked for her first-born, Harilal, who had been estranged from

his parents.

Gandhi sat by his wife’s bed for many hours. He ordered all

medicines to be stopped and all food except honey and water. It

was more important, he said, for her to have peace with God.

‘If God wills it, 5 he said, ‘she will pull through, else I would let

her go, but I won’t drug her any longer. 5

Penicillin, then rare in India, was flown from Calcutta; Devadas

had insisted on it. ‘Why do you not trust God? 5 Gandhi said to

him. ‘Do you wish to drug your mother even on her deathbed? 5

Gandhi had not known that penicillin was given by injection.

On being told, he forbade it. Most of the day, Gandhi sat on her

bed, holding her hand. Fellow prisoners sang Hindu hymns.

On February 21st Harilal arrived, summoned hastily by the

Government. He was drunk and had to be removed from

Kasturbai’s presence. She cried and beat her forehead. (Harilal

attended his father’s funeral without being recognized and spent

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W I L L-PO W E R

that night with Devadas. He died, a derelict, in a tuberculosis

hospital in Bombay on June 19th, 1948.)

The next day, her head resting in Gandhi’s lap, she died. At

the funeral, Gandhi offered a prayer borrowed from Hindu,

Parsi, Moslem and Christian scriptures. Devadas lit the pyre.

The ashes were buried beside those of Mahadev Desai in the

prison grounds.

When Gandhi returned from the cremation, he sat on his bed

in silence and then, from time to time, as the thoughts came, he

spoke: T cannot imagine life without Ba . . . Her passing has left

a vacuum which never will be filled . . . We lived together for

sixty-two years ... If I had allowed the penicillin it would not

have saved, her . . . And she passed away in my lap. Gould it be

better? I am happy beyond measure.’

Gandhi had been in correspondence on political issues with the

new Viceroy, Lord Wavell. Immediately after Kasturbai’s death,

Waved said in a letter to the Mahatma, T take this opportunity

to express to you deep sympathy from my wife and myself at the

death of Mrs. Gandhi. We understand what this loss must mean

to you after so many years of companionship.’

Gandhi was touched. In his reply he wrote, ‘Though for her

sake I have welcomed her death as bringing freedom from living

agony, I feel the loss more than I had thought I should.’ Then he

explained their intimate relationship to Waved, whom he had

never met. ‘We were a couple outside the ordinary,’ he said.

Their continence, after the age of thirty-seven, ‘knit us together

as never before. We ceased to be two different entities . . . The

result was that she became truly my better half’.

Six weeks after Kasturbai’s passing, Gandhi suffered a severe

attack of benign tertian malaria, during which he was delirious.

Temperature rose to 105. A blood count showed a very high

germ content. At first he thought he could cure it with a fruit-

juice diet and fasting; he accordingly refused to take quinine.

After two days he relented; he took a total of thirty-three grains

of quinine in two days and the fever disappeared. In ad sub¬

sequent examinations, parasites were absent and the malaria

never recurred.

On May 3rd Gandhi’s physicians issued a bulletin saying his

anaemia was worse and his blood pressure low. ‘His general condi-

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GANDHI IN INDIA

tion is again giving rise to severe anxiety.’ Agitation for his

release swept India. A heavy armed guard was placed around the

prison. At 8 a.m., May 6th, Gandhi and his associates were

released. A subsequent analysis showed that he had hookworm

(ankylostomiasis) and amoebiasis of the intestines.

This was Gandhi’s last time in jail. Altogether, he spent

2089 days in Indian and 249 days in South African prisons.

Gandhi went to Juhu, by the sea near Bombay, where he stayed

in the home of Shantikumar Morarji, whose father was from

Porbandar, Gandhi’s birthplace. Mrs. Naidu and Mrs. Pandit,

Jawaharlal Nehru’s sister, were there at the same time.

Mrs. Morarji suggested that the Mahatma see a moving picture

film; he had never seen either a silent movie or a talkie. After

some urging, he agreed. Mission to Moscow was being exhibited

in a nearby suburb. Mechanical equipment and the film were

brought to the Morarji home and, together with about one

hundred other persons, Gandhi viewed Mission to Moscow .

‘How did you like it?’ Mrs. Morarji asked.

‘I didn’t like it,’ he said. He hadn’t liked the ballroom dancing

and the women in scanty dresses; he considered it improper.

Friends complained that he had viewed a foreign picture, not

one of Indian manufacture. He accordingly saw Ram Rajya ,

based on an ancient legend of an ideal moral king.

For his relaxation, somebody read Gandhi a delightful, tranquil

children’s book by Pearl S. Buck entitled The Chinese Children Next

Door.

The doctors were curing Gandhi and he was curing himself

with silence, ‘medical silence’, he called it. At first it was total;

after a few weeks, he would speak between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.,

which was prayer-meeting time.

After several weeks he plunged into work again.

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