# CHAPTER VIII

THE FUTURE OF INDIA

G andhi seldom made an adverse criticism without suggest¬

ing a concrete cure. He had criticized the Congress party

and the new government of independent India. What did

he propose?

Gandhi was quick to see that the freedom of India raised the

question of freedom in India. How could India remain a

democracy?

There was only one major party, the Congress party, and it

enjoyed vast prestige as the party of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel,

the party which had fought and won the battle for liberation from

Britain. Other parties like the Hindu Mahasabha and the

Communists were insignificant.

The question Gandhi pondered was: Could the Congress party

guide and curb the Government? He had not studied political

conditions in the Soviet Union or Franco Spain or other totalita¬

rian countries, but by intuition he arrived at conclusions which

others had reached after long experience and analysis: he realized

that a one-party system could actually be a no-party system, for

when the Government and party are one, the party is a rubber

stamp and leads only a fictitious existence.

If the one important party of India, the Congress, did not

maintain an independent, critical attitude towards the Govern¬

ment, who could act as a brake on any autocratic tendencies that

might develop in the Government?

Without free criticism and potent opposition, democracy dies.

Without political criticism and opposition, a nation’s intellect,

culture and public morality stagnate; big men are purged and

small men become kowtowing pygmies. The leaders surround

themselves with cowards, sycophants and grovelling yes-men

whose automatic approval is misread as a tribute to great¬

ness.

Could the Congress party, with aid from Gandhi and from the

free press, prevent such a development in India?

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On November 15th, 1947, in the presence of Gandhi, Professor

J. B. Kripalani, president of Congress, informed the All-India

Congress Committee that he was resigning his position. He had

not been consulted by the Government nor been taken into its

full confidence. Although ‘it is the party from which the govern¬

ment of the day derives its power 5 , Kripalani said, the Government

ignored the party. Gandhi, Kripalani revealed, felt that in these

circumstances the resignation was justified.

Nehru and Patel were the heads of the Government. They were

also leaders of the Congress party. Their popularity and hold on

the Congress machine enabled them to dominate the party.

They identified themselves with the party. Why then should they

accept the Congress president as a curb on their power? Why

should they give him a veto on their proposals?

The choice of a successor to Kripalani assumed key importance.

The election of a puppet who obeyed the Government would

signalize the elimination of effective political opposition.

Gandhi attended the meeting of the Congress Working Com¬

mittee which was to elect the new president. It was the Mahatma’s

day of silence. When nominations were opened, he wrote the

name of his candidate on a small piece of paper and passed it to

Nehru. Nehru read the name aloud: Narendra Dev, the Socialist

leader. Nehru supported Narendra Dev’s candidature. Others

opposed it.

The Socialists were then still inside the Congress party. But

their ideological, political and personal differences with right-

wing Congressmen presumably encouraged Gandhi in the belief

that they might be able to control and check certain trends within

the Government.

The morning session of the Working Committee closed at

10 a.m.; no vote was taken.

At noon, Nehru and Patel summoned Rajendra Prasad and,,

without consulting Gandhi, urged him to be a candidate for the

presidency of Congress. Dr. Prasad, a member of the Working

Committee, was a lawyer who first met Gandhi in Champaran in

1917 during the struggle for the indigo sharecroppers.

Prasad went to Gandhi in Birla House at 1 p.m. and told the

Mahatma about the offer. ‘I don’t like it,’ Gandhi said.

‘I cannot remember ever having dared to oppose Gandhi,’ Dr.

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Prasad stated in recounting these events. ‘Even when I differed

with him I felt he must be right and followed him.’

On this occasion, too, Prasad agreed with Gandhi and promised

to withdraw his candidacy.

Subsequently, however, Prasad was persuaded to change his

mind. He became the new Congress president. He was a gentle,

modest, compliant, retiring, well-intentioned, high-minded per¬

son more inclined to serve than to lead. He was sixty-three.

Gandhi had been defeated by the Congress machine and by the

key men in the Government.

Gandhi now tried a different approach.

During the first half of December 1947 he held a series of

conferences with his most trusted collaborators outside the

Government. They were the Constructive Workers, the men and

women who directed the several organizations set up by Gandhi

over the years to remove untouchability, spread the use of

Hindustani as the national language, extend basic education,

improve food cultivation, develop village industries and encourage

hand spinning. The Constructive Workers were devoted to non¬

violence; they believed in Gandhi not merely because he was the

chief instrument of India’s political independence but because

they considered him the chief agent for India’s social reform.

Gandhi wanted all these organizations to combine. But he did

not want the Constructive Workers ‘to go into power politics; it

would spell ruin. Or else why,’ Gandhi asked, ‘should not I

myself have gone into politics and tried to run the Government

my way? Those who are holding the reins of power today would

easily have stepped aside and made room for me, but whilst they

are in charge they carry on only according to their own lights.

‘But I do not want to take power into my hands,’ Gandhi

assured his friends. ‘By abjuring power and devoting ourselves

to pure, selfless sendee of the voters we can guide and influence

them. It would give us far more real power than we shall have by

going into the government. A stage may come when the people

themselves may feel and say that they want us and no one else

to wield power. The question could then be considered. I shall

most probably not be alive then.’

Unable to guide Congress, Gandhi planned to build a new

vehicle which would push the Government and, in an emergency,

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carry the Government’s load. It would be in politics without

seeking political power except as a last resort. Instead of trying

to win votes it would teach the masses ‘to use their votes intel¬

ligently’, Gandhi said.

‘Under adult suffrage,’ he declared, ‘if we are worth our salt,

we should have such a hold on the people that whomsoever we

choose would be returned.’ To assist in this task Gandhi wanted

to attract more intellectuals. ‘Our intelligentsia’, he told the

conference of Constructive Workers, ‘are not lacking in sympathy.

Reason, as a rule, follows in the footsteps of feeling. We have not

sufficiently penetrated their hearts to convince their reason.’ That

is a key to Gandhi: heart and mind were one, but heart ruled.

Why could not the constructive welfare work be done by the

Congress party or by the Government? a delegate asked.

‘Because Congressmen aren’t sufficiently interested in con¬

structive work,’ Gandhi replied simply. ‘We must recognize the

fact that the social order of our dreams cannot come through the

Congress party of today. . . .

‘There is so much corruption today,’ Gandhi asserted, ‘that it

frightens me. Everybody wants to carry so many votes in his

pocket, because votes give power.’ (Kripalani described the

trouble as ‘red-tapism, jobbery, corruption, bribery, black¬

marketing and profiteering’.) Therefore, Gandhi emphasized,

‘banish the idea of the capture of power and you will be able to

guide power and keep it on the right path . . . There is no other

way of removing the corruption that threatens to strangle our

independence at its very birth’.

He w'ho is immune to the temptation of power can best oppose

the men in power, Gandhi felt. His limited experience told him

that legislators and judges were too close to the machinery of

power to check-and-balance the executive; only those outside

government, he contended, could check-and-balance those in

government.

Yet even his own high authority was no match for the power of

a government born of his efforts and whose members touched his

feet in obeisance.

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