

GANDHI AFTER INDEPENDENCE *

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A GREAT DEAL IS BEING WRITTEN AND SPOKEN ABOUT GANDHIJI DURING this centenary year, but most of it is about his great spiritual and moral qualities or about his philosophy or about what he did during his lifetime. As far as I know, very little attention has been paid to what Gandhiji was thinking of doing after independence. I do not mean to give offense to anyone when I say that the political followers of Mahatma Gandhi in pre-independence days did not believe in Gandhiji's philosophy, nor in his non-violence as a science of action and change, in short, revolution. They joined Gandhiji's satyagraha movements as a matter of political convenience, for no one before or since — no individual, no organization, no revolutionary, no politician has stirred up the people of India as Gandhiji did. Because of this very superficial interest in the deeper things which Gandhiji stood for, his political followers turned their backs on him after his death. Many people wonder why those who had sat at the feet of Mahatma or by his side, who were his colleagues for decades, suddenly forsook him. Indeed, this had begun to happen during his lifetime, during the few months which were given to him after independence. He was aware of it, and he even wrote in the HARIJAN how he had become a spent bullet. Because of this unconcern with the revolutionary philosophy of Gandhi no attempt was made to give serious thought to what Gandhiji had proposed should be done during his lifetime but certainly after he was gone.

I should like to remind you here of two or three things in this connection:

First, on the 15th August, 1947, Gandhiji was not in Delhi and he was not taking any part in the rejoicings of the day. He happened to be in Calcutta and there he remarked that this was not the swaraj for which he had led the struggle. The swaraj of his conception had yet to come. To bring about this swaraj was going to be the next task or job of his life.

Secondly, it was not as if Gandhiji had left his meaning of swaraj vague when he took the leadership of the Congress and the people of India to take them towards the goal. True, he did not give a picture complete in every detail, but he did give a fairly good idea of what kind of India he wanted to reconstruct. His ultimate goal, as you know, was Sarvodaya. This may have been an ideal society, never to become a reality. Nonetheless it was an ideal towards which Gandhiji wanted to strive—a society of the

* Edited transcript of a talk delivered on February 18, 1969 under the auspices of the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom, New Delhi.

equal and the free; a society in which there was no State or in which the State had shrunk to very small dimensions so that the people managed their affairs themselves; a society which was at peace within itself and at peace with the world outside; a society which aspired to be an equal member of the world community; a society in which the individual gave more attention to the performance of his duty, and only subsidiary attention to his rights because he understood that his rights flowed from his duties—such a society in which each lived for all and all lived for each was, however, of the future. I mentioned duties and rights, so I must hasten to explain that I do not mean that Gandhiji did not believe in the rights of the individual. Of course, he did. He believed in the rights of the individual, the rights of the worker, the rights of everyone. But in his ideal society the individual would first willingly and voluntarily serve his fellowmen and only then consider himself deserving of rights as a reward for the services rendered.

Although Gandhiji, as you know, was one of the greatest idealists that ever lived, he was at the same time one of the greatest realists that ever lived. He was a practicalist. He therefore knew that there were different stages through which the country, the society, the Indian people would have to pass. The Swaraj for which he was going to work immediately was an intermediate stage in its evolution. Gandhiji described this intermediate stage also fairly well.

He conceived of Swaraj as growing from the individual's own swaraj, that is, self-discipline, self-government spread over the whole society. Even this intermediate stage was not to be imposed from above but was to be created by the people themselves. Gandhiji was enough of a realist to understand that the requirements for a non-violent individual were so difficult and so high that it was not possible for common people to attain them. But he said that as the inventions and discoveries of science had made it possible even for a small boy to get incandescent light by merely pressing a button, so the science of non-violence, when developed by rare individuals capable of rising to great heights, would make it possible for even common people to practice it. He conceded that it might not be possible for all to practise the ultimate programme of non-violence, but contended that if the masses tried to follow the ways of non-violence this would be a revolution, too. He always believed in the individual and the people rather than in institutions and even less in such things as the State. He wanted people themselves to create this kind of swaraj by self-development of the individual and the community.

Now the third point to which I want to draw your attention is this: Gandhiji as a practicalist understood well the value of organization. For example when he needed an instrument to fight for the freedom of India he took the Congress. The Congress was in a very bad state at the time he came upon the scene. You will doubtless remember the struggle between

the moderates and the extremists. The moderates were then in power and the extremists were almost sulking in the background. Gandhiji took over this organization and transformed it into a powerful instrument, which could bend people to its will.

When Gandhiji spoke of people's action, he was already thinking of how to create a new organization out of the old Congress which would be his instrument for the gigantic task which he had placed before himself. He put down his thoughts on the reorganization of the Congress Party in a draft resolution for consideration by the All India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.). Judging by the language of the resolution and by the fact that he had struck off some words and put in new words, it seems he was still working on it. [In his own way Gandhiji was a great stylist of the English language. He combined in his style simplicity, lucidity and force.] The final form in which Pyarelal published in the *HARIJAN*, was given a day before Gandhiji's assassination on January 30, 1948.¹ I would like to read out to you only its first paragraph to refresh your memory. This is how the resolution begins:

"Though split into two, India having attained political independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, that is, as a propaganda vehicle and a parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, economic and moral independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages, as distinguished from its cities and towns."² India according to him had still to attain "social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages." It was thus a three-fold objective that he placed before himself. I shall take them one by one.

THE SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE MASSES: The most important feature of the social structure of India is the caste system from which stems untouchability. Caste system and untouchability have affected even those religions which do not believe in caste, such as Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. For example, Brahmin Christians marry only Brahmin Christians in the western coast of India; the Muslim community also has its higher castes and lower castes—Sheikhs and Saiyyads and Ansaris and so on; and Sikhs have Sikh Harijans. This is where we are after 21 years of political independence. The legislation against untouchability notwithstanding, untouchability is very much prevalent even in towns but in our villages it is glaring. Social independence, there is no doubt, is yet to come.

¹ See Pyarelal's *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*. Vol. II, pp. 678-679, where a photo copy of the handwritten draft of Gandhiji appears.

² Loc. cit.

NOTE: I think that as a result of discussions with his colleagues he might have been persuaded to change his formulation, because I do not see why the masses of the cities should be left out. I do not think he would have refused to see that it was wrong. JPN

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF THE MASSES: This means freedom from exploitation and inequalities. Precious little has so far been achieved in this direction.

MORAL INDEPENDENCE: I think only Gandhiji could have thought of this concept of moral independence. Socialists and Communists, I am sure, think in terms of economic and social independence, of a casteless and classless society. This is common ground between them and Gandhi. But for moral independence and its implications socialists and communists have little concern. As I look around and see how we behave I do not think we of the middle classes of India really are morally independent. During the freedom days we had a phrase: slave mentality. This was the phrase we used in respect of the people who were supporting the foreign power. With independence it was assumed that we had gotten rid of this mentality. But have we? Take the behavior of any *burra sahib* towards his subordinates, towards his peons, his clerks—it is the same mentality at work. The whole question of the ethics of independent, equal, democratic people is a subject to which some of our sociologists should pay their attention.

Then Gandhiji goes on to enunciate the fourth objective: ascendancy of the civil over military power. This is how he put it: “The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India’s progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies.”

In the non-violent future Sarvodaya society there would of course be no army because the State itself might not be there. Even if it was there it would be like the alarm chain in a railway train, to be activated only in cases of emergency. In normal times the State would not be seen. It would be hidden somewhere and the people would carry on without the State. But, for the present, when the State was there and the military was there, the ascendancy of the civil over military power, Gandhi said, must be ensured. Please remember that he said this in January 1948. No Nasser, no Ne Win, no Ayub Khan and no Suharto had appeared so far upon the Asian-African stage and yet Gandhi had the prescience to see that the struggle between the civil and the military power for ascendancy was bound to take place in India’s march towards democratic goal. He was firmly of the view that the army must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies.

Now we come to the last part of the resolution: “For these and other similar reasons, the A.I.C.C. resolves to disband the existing congress organization and flower into (sic)* a Loksevak Sangh under the following rules with power to alter them as occasion may demand.”³ Here Gandhiji

* There is something missing here, for it is grammatically wrong. JPN

³ This is the famous sentence which some of our socialist friends are fond of using for propaganda purposes, particularly during election time. JPN

was thinking of dividing the Congress organization. He was realistic enough to understand that somebody had to run the people's government. Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel, and maybe a few others could be left to do that, but what would the thousand upon thousand of workers, freedom fighters, be doing? He was therefore preparing to mobilize them organizationally and place before them a concrete programme of action. What this concrete programme was is not stated in the draft. But you can see that he was trying to take over again the organization which he had taken over earlier from the old Congress leaders and made into a revolutionary weapon. He was now thinking of taking it over in order again to make it a revolutionary weapon to work for another revolution. Pyarelal reports Gandhiji as saying that his first job would be to reform politics. That is why he emphasized that Congress and Congressmen must lay a self-denying ordinance upon themselves and renounce power and devote themselves to building the non-violent power of the masses, not the violent power of the army and the police and the rest of the administration that the British Government had left behind. I may add parenthetically that Mr. Nehru not only took over this administration intact but went on strengthening it. Gandhiji wanted to purify politics and turn it into an instrument of service rather than of domination and self-aggrandizement. You can see what has happened. You can turn your mind to those days and compare the situation then to the present situation.

Pyarelal says that the other two tasks to which Gandhiji wanted to address himself were organization of the youth and mobilization of the masses. The need for these arose from the increasing tendency to officialize nation-building activities and to adopt a policy of development in which the common man had little say and which was largely beyond his comprehension.

Gandhiji's plan was put upon the shelf. And we have not had the intelligence to discover what it was that was put upon the shelf. In spite of the fact that it is there for everyone to see and read and in spite of the fact that some authors of the Sarvodaya movement have often talked about it, I have sometimes found that after I have spent an hour or two speaking about this very question, somebody comes up to the platform and tells me, "This, Jayaprakashji, is all right, but why did you renounce politics?" The only answer I can give to questions like this is: After listening to the whole Ramayana, you want to know whose wife Sita was? ⁴ This is indicative and a part of our slave mentality. We of the middle class suffer from it because we are a creation of slavery. Many people think that Macaulay did a great service to India by giving us this educational system.⁵ I do not think so.

⁴ Refers to an old Indian saying about the people who fail to notice even the most obvious. Sita the wife of Rama is one of the central characters in the Ramayana epic. (Ed.)

⁵ Refers to the Lord Macaulay's famous *Minutes on Education*, 1835. He was a member of Governor General's Council and advocated the teaching of English language,

I think nobody did more disservice to India by just one single act. This education cut us completely off from the roots of our civilization, from the roots of our life, from the roots of our history and made us all absolutely rootless, hanging by the coat tail of foreign powers. Hardly any educated Indian today thinks that it is possible to do anything by ourselves. He believes that whatever is possible to be done can be done only by the Government. This I call slave mentality. It is evidence of the fact that morally we are still slaves. And when Gandhi talked of moral independence this is what he had in mind.

I am talking to a very educated audience here. Can you name a single country which made its progress in the western world in the last one hundred years entirely because of what the State did? Till the Russian revolution, in all these countries the State was what you call a liberal State, which maintains an army, which maintains some kind of organization for keeping order, which passes some regulatory laws. For the rest, it was the individual, either singly or in co-operation with others, who did everything else, whether it was industry, and agriculture, whether it was scientific research and invention, whether it was exploration or anything else. It was private enterprise, not in the capitalist sense, but in the real sense of the word. The free people of these countries were not waiting for their governments to solve their problems. There certainly were some things which the government alone could do. For the rest, it was the people who themselves acted. The miracle of Germany or the miracle of Japan after the last war is certainly not the doing of their respective governments. The people worked hard, even children cooperated, and built up from scratch or to say, from the bottom, a new country, a new society. Imagine what would have happened to our country and where we would have been today if from the 15th August, 1947 millions and millions of us—young and old, men and women—had put our shoulders to the wheels, working for the country in whichever way it was possible. There is so much to do in our own little neighborhood. But instead of doing it ourselves we wait for somebody else—maybe the Corporation or the Metropolitan Council or the Delhi Administration—to do it for us. If the Indian people had been on the move, if the people had been mobilized for people's action, if the leaders had not depended on this outmoded system of administration which the Britisher had created for their own purposes, imagine where India would have been today! Not at the top of the world, I know. But it would have certainly been one of the leading nations in Asia and Africa. And please remember, we of the middle classes, we who belong to the intelligentsia, we are the greatest criminals in this respect. We have no faith in ourselves and we have no faith in the people. Everyone wants to become a member of this assembly or

literature and history in Indian schools to make the people "Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in manner and in intellect." (Ed.)

that assembly, a footling minister at least and thinks that in that way alone can he serve his country. Assemblies, parliaments, ministers have all their proper place, but they cannot do everything.

After the Russian Revolution a new kind of State came into existence for the first time in history. The Fascists and Nazis took it for a model not for communist purpose, but for their own special purpose. Even in these totalitarian countries the building of, for example, a new Russia, a new China was not entirely the handiwork of the government of these countries. They realized that the people had to be mobilized. They mobilized them partly by working upon their emotions, inspiring them to endeavour, to sacrifice, to suffer, and partly by compulsion. The entire cultural revolution in China was the mobilization of the youth of the country for purposes which the rulers had in mind. Gandhiji was thinking of mobilizing the youth for different purposes in the Indian context. These things have not been attempted in the last twenty one years. Gandhiji wanted to do them. This is the sum and substance of Gandhi after independence.

This draft resolution shows that Gandhiji was going to take the most revolutionary step of his revolutionary life. It is really a great pity that history was denied the opportunity of seeing how a great revolutionary leader, called after his death the Father of the Nation, used his matchless weapon to mobilize the people and how he created through service and non-violent organization a new society, and how through non-violent resistance controlled the State and the rulers. I have said this many times in mass meetings, but I do not remember having said this to an educated, sophisticated audience like this ever before.

One day some years back I was travelling from Patna to my Ashram in Gaya district, a distance of a hundred miles, in a jeep. I had with me a Japanese young man who was going to see the Ashram and meet four other Japanese who were then working in the Ashram. As we motored along, this young Japanese was very keenly observing things on the roadside. On the way we stopped at a well for a drink of water. We had not gone more than 60 miles when my young companion turned to me and said: "Jayaprakash Narayan, you people say that India is a very poor country. I don't think India is a poor country." I was taken aback. "What," I asked him, "have you seen in the villages that you have passed through except mud huts with thatched roofs? Where have you seen any evidence of prosperity?" He said, "Well, this is daytime but I observe in every village people sitting under the shade of a tree or on the verandah talking and smoking. Now, if people can sit around without doing anything during daytime, during working hours, they must surely have enough to eat? In my country, Japan, we have to work hard. If we did not work hard we would not be able to survive. Every able-bodied person has to work, on the farm or in the factory; sick people are in hospitals; old men and women

might be in the home, but even they would be doing something, maybe painting pottery or doing something of that kind." All I could say to this was mutter excuses: "You know, we have unemployment in this country. These people do not have enough work. That is why they are sitting around doing nothing." When he spoke now there was annoyance in his voice and on his face too. "No work to do!" said he, "do you remember the well we stopped at for a drink? Didn't you see that all around the well there were little puddles where dirty water collected; leaves were rotting; and there was no end of flies and mosquitoes. And they drink that water! What prevents them from bringing some dry earth from the field and filling the puddles up and keeping the well clean?"

Now, tell me, what could I say to that? I would invite you to go to any village in India, not in prosperous Punjab or around Delhi, and have a look at the wells. You go to Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, or to Andhra, you will find village wells in a terrible state. They spread all kinds of disease. But people draw water from them and are altogether insensitive to the surrounding filth. Was I to say to my young Japanese friend, "we have in this country a democracy the likes of which you do not have and therefore these people in the villages wait for Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru to bring a bhoomi sena, a land army, to do the cleaning?" Which land army could do this? It is impossible for any State to do all the things that must be done so that our country goes forward.

America is the most affluent country in the world, the most prosperous country. I was in Philadelphia a few months back and went with my Quaker friends to see a weekend camp, a weekend camp in which I found a dozen students of the University of Pennsylvania, some blacks and some whites, some boys and some girls. This was a ghetto area of Philadelphia. The boys and girls had brought food from their homes, had their lunch together and were going to work eight hours in that little cottage of a Negro. And what were they doing? They were papering the walls, and filling up all the little holes with some kind of substance which they had brought with them. Now, even in America, in prosperous America, if the students feel that there is need to go to the slums and do this kind of work, don't you think that in India this kind of work should be multiplied by not a hundred-fold but a thousand-fold, maybe a hundred thousand-fold? It was of this that Gandhi was thinking.

The great leaders of the revolutions of modern times—the French revolution, the American revolution, the Russian revolution, the Turkish revolution, the Cuba revolution, the Algerian revolution, after the success of the revolution became the top dogs, the rulers. I am not suggesting that they did it for love of power. They did it perhaps to realize the objectives of the revolution through the instrument of the state. But Gandhi did not do this, for what he wanted to do just could not be done by state power.

He himself said that his work far from being finished was just going to begin. Imagine a man of seventy-nine talking like this and saying that he wanted to live to the age of 125 years in order to accomplish this task! He realized the limitations of government action. And you can see it for yourself. You can see that whenever a development project was a centralized project, like Bhakra Nangal or Rourkela or Bhilai, something was accomplished, though at great cost both of money and of time. But wherever the plan was a dispersed plan and had to be carried out over wide areas of the country, it invariably failed. It failed because of lack of popular cooperation. This is a kind of upside down picture. It is the people who should be doing and it is the government which should be cooperating. That was what Pyarelal meant when he said that the people were not involved.

Gandhiji wanted to change this. How he would have gone about it we do not know. He had a genius for making big things out of small things. You remember how much ridicule was poured over the Dandi march before it was begun. Some of you were too young then to remember. Some of you may not have been born. But quite a few of you may have read H. V. Iyenger's articles in the *Indian Express*. He was a sub-divisional officer or something of that kind and was posted in some district in Gujarat. A day or two before the Dandi March was to begin he applied for leave which was readily granted.⁶ The District Magistrate, Mr. Iyenger's boss, wasn't worried about the March at all. "This will fizzle out. Nothing will come out of it." Mr. Iyenger says that when he arrived in Madras there was a telegram already waiting for him: "Come back immediately." He was called back because the whole of Gujarat, the entire country, was on fire. Gandhi devised simple programmes. Indeed, the programmes had to be so simple that every child could follow it. Take, for example the Salt Satyagraha. Even children got involved. They took their bags, went to the Collector's office and shouted: "We have violated the salt law." Similarly in the 1942 Movement⁷ in Bihar, a British sergeant caught hold of a boy hardly 12-15 years, tied a rope around his legs and lowered him into a well and when his head was touching the water, shouted from above "Say you regret it, say you will not do it again, or else I shall drown you." Up came the reply from deep down the well (it brings tears to one's eyes) "Quit India, quit India." One knew then that the day of the empire was done, that it could not continue much longer.

But how Gandhiji would have brought capitalism and feudalism to an end, what programme he would have devised for economic, social and moral independence of the Indian people, nobody knows. All we can say is that

⁶ Refers to the famous Salt March (or Salt Satyagraha) of 1930. Salt was a British government monopoly in India, nobody could make it or buy it except from the government. Mahatma Gandhi and his followers started the March from Ahmedabad to a place called Dandi, on the west coast of India 200 miles away, on March 12, 1930 and reached Dandi on April 5, 1930. (Ed.)

⁷ Also known as Quit India Movement of 1942. (Ed)

he wanted to substitute service with power and through service create a new force in society. People lament those days now. Where, they ask, has the spirit of self-sacrifice fled? Gandhiji wanted to keep that spirit alive by calling people away from seats of power and position, back into wilderness with a program of service which is the discipline of non-violence. Even as the violent army has its course of discipline, just so the non-violent corps of satyagrahi has a course of discipline. It helps him establish rapport with the people, so that when the call is given, when a programme is placed, there is an immediate upsurge.

You know what happened after Gandhiji's death. The politicians, as I said at the beginning, put his programme on the shelf. Nehru never mentioned it. One day I talked of people's action etc. and he said, "What do you mean? The State is there. We have so many hundreds of thousands of public servants. Where is the need for any other public servants?" I think he was disillusioned later when he realized the limitation of the administrative system or machine. It is a great pity.

The other day I was invited to speak at the founding day of the Yugoslav Republic. Reading the documents they had given me, I discovered the very significant fact that when the Partisans defeated the Nazis Tito had already a programme for the full utilization of the spirit and the energy of the partisans. And he gave a call for voluntary service: "Let us join hands to build the roads, to repair the bridges, to repair the schools and hospitals and build new ones." This program for voluntary service lasted for three whole years. And it is said that it was this that gave momentum to the whole pace and programme of the Yugoslav society, which resulted in the highest rate of growth in the world during one of these years, 13 per cent. This record has not been bettered. Japan with all its high rate of growth reached a level of 11 per cent in one year.

And in our country? If you go to our villages and look around, you will find thousands and thousands of freedom fighters who are disappointed and feel frustrated. They are eating out their hearts, not because they did not become members of legislatures or ministers, but because they have nothing in the way of nation-building to do. On the other hand, as you know, there is so much to do in the country. After all, only a few hundred people, or may be a few thousand, are needed to man the legislatures and the ministries. What were the rest of those hundreds of thousands who went to prison in the course of the freedom struggle to do? For want of a programme which could engage them, they have all been immobilized.

I wonder if all this means anything to you. Being a Gandhian, I have a purposeful attitude towards even intellectual activities. I believe that even our research should be purposive. Not that I am against fundamental research, but I hold that even fundamental research should be related to the fundamental problems of science, social and physical of India. It is in this

spirit that I have given you some idea of what Gandhi proposed to do after independence. If what I have said makes any sense to you, you should do your bit. I am not inviting you to put on *khaddar* or to become a Gandhian.⁸ But in whatever way it is possible for you to help your neighbors, to help your fellow human beings, please consider this to be your responsibility and your duty as a citizen of free and democratic India. I am sure if we had the kind of dictatorship that Germany had under Hitler, or that Russia had under Stalin, or that China has under Mao, we would be compelled to do things. And if we resisted, we would be sent to labour camps, there to starve and yet work sixteen to twenty hours a day; part of the time we might have been made to dig our own graves. No matter whether one was the greatest professor or the greatest scientist living, one would be compelled to fall in line. And falling in line was not enough, either, one had to make the contribution asked for and in the manner that was laid down. I am not suggesting that in totalitarian countries all this is done entirely by force or by striking terror. There sure is the spirit of patriotism at work; there is the desire to create a new society; there are new ideals to pursue; although they all shine brightly only for a time and then start getting dimmer and dimmer; there are all sorts of other incentives.

But we have chosen democracy and these methods are not for us. Democracy, however, is worth nothing and cannot last unless the citizen realizes his responsibility and discharges it willingly—his responsibility not only to his family, not only to the job he is doing, but also to the community at large. This is what Gandhiji wanted to teach us. This was part of his concept of moral independence—the creation of a new and responsible citizen of India.

⁸ Khaddar means hand spun and hand woven cloth. (Ed.)