

# Gandhi's Swaraj

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This essay briefly traces Gandhi's ideas about *swaraj*, their articulation in 1909 in *Hind Swaraj*, the quest to actualise these ideas, the turns that history gave to them, and the journey that made Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi a lonely man in August 1947.

"I am a man possessed by an idea" – Gandhi to Louis Fischer in 1942.

"I made it [the nation] and I unmade it" – Gandhi to P C Joshi in 1947.

"I don't want to die a failure. But I may be a failure" – Gandhi to Nirmal Bose in 1947.<sup>1</sup>

On the midnight of 14-15 August 1947, when Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, coined the phrase – "tryst with destiny" – that has become part of India's national lexicon, and India erupted in jubilation, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was far away from the celebrations. He was in a slum in eastern Calcutta. When asked by a journalist for a message on the day of India's independence, he said it was a day for fasting and prayer.

The Father of the Nation was not present at the birth of the independent Indian nation. On the same day, 15 August 1947, in the city of Karachi someone placed a fez on Gandhi's statue.<sup>2</sup> The significance of the act is open to interpretation: it could have been a symbol of unity or a sign of mockery. It would not be an exaggeration, even from just these two pieces of evidence, to suggest that what India had achieved on 15 August, was not something that Gandhi had visualised as *swaraj*. By August 1947, he had become India's prophet outcast.

In this essay I want to trace briefly Gandhi's ideas about *swaraj*, his quest to actualise these ideas and the turns that history gave to them and to his journey that made him a lonely man in August 1947. Gandhi's ideas about *swaraj* were articulated most cogently and most powerfully in that remarkable text called *Hind Swaraj*, which he wrote in 1909 in Gujarati and published in English in 1910 in South Africa after the government of Bombay proscribed the Gujarati version. It was written in 10 days between 13 and 22 November 1909 on board *Kildonan Castle*, a ship that Gandhi took to return to South Africa from London. It was written on the ship's stationery. Gandhi wrote at a furious pace and

when his right hand got tired he used his left hand. That physical tiredness did not diminish Gandhi's powers of concentration was evident from the fact that the manuscript had only 16 lines that had been deleted and a few words that had been altered.<sup>3</sup>

The ideas presented in that book grew out of Gandhi's reflection, his reading and his experiences in South Africa. It is significant that when he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi had not immersed himself in Indian society and politics. His experiments in India still lay in the future. In fact, *Hind Swaraj* served as the basis of these experiments. Gandhi's purpose in writing the book was, he wrote, "to serve my country, to find out the Truth and to follow it". He also believed that the views he had presented in the book were held not by him alone but were, in fact, "the views...held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilisation". He asked his readers to believe him when he said that the views "are also held by thousands of Europeans".<sup>4</sup> Gandhi's use of the phrase, "what is known as civilisation", is worth flagging at this point since I will have occasion to come back to it very soon. *Hind Swaraj* remained the touchstone of his beliefs and actions throughout his life, it was the fountainhead of his inspiration: he never changed his views on the fundamental principles he set out in this text, even though he was open to the possibility of his views being proven wrong. It is worth noting that *Hind Swaraj* is the only work that Gandhi himself translated from Gujarati to English. Even his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, was translated by his secretary, Mahadev Desai.

## Only Way to a Swaraj

In May 1919, just before he embarked on his first major mass movement in India, Gandhi wrote, commenting on *Hind Swaraj*, "After years of endeavour to put into practice the views expressed in the following pages, I feel that the way shown therein is the only true way to *swaraj*".<sup>5</sup> And towards the end of his life in October 1945, he wrote emphatically to Jawaharlal Nehru, "I fully stand by the kind of

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governance which I have described in *Hind Swaraj*.” He went on to add very significantly, “If I were the only one left who believed in it, I would not be sorry”.<sup>6</sup> The clarity of the exposition and Gandhi’s lifelong commitment to the ideas put forward in it have made one modern commentator describe the *Hind Swaraj* as “the *point d’ appui* of Gandhi’s moral and political thought”.<sup>7</sup>

This might be the appropriate place to briefly rehearse the views that Gandhi presented in this text. In a preface to the Gujarati edition of *Hind Swaraj* written in 1914, Gandhi described himself as “an uncompromising enemy of the present day civilisation in Europe”.<sup>8</sup> It was this unrelenting hostility to European or western civilisation that is manifest in *Hind Swaraj*. He was referring to western/European civilisation when he used the words “what is known as civilisation”. Gandhi believed that western civilisation was only one in name. In the *Hind Swaraj*, he launched an attack on every aspect of western civilisation in order to prove how evil and how harmful it was. The text also contains Gandhi’s alternative to modern civilisation and a programme of action and behaviour that Indians must follow to make that alternative a reality.

Gandhi equated modern civilisation with the western one because the west was the principal site of all that is considered modern. What he actually attacked was a particular form of western civilisation, the one that emerged with the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. A year before writing the *Hind Swaraj*, he had written, “Let it be remembered that western civilisation is only a hundred years old, or to be more precise, fifty”.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi interpreted the industrial revolution as having brought about a radical transformation in people’s lives and in people’s attitudes to themselves and to the world around them. Fundamental to this transformation was the premise that through Reason and Science human beings were capable of mastering nature and thus fulfilling their desires and wants. This, Gandhi believed, inevitably led to greed, to competition and finally to violence. Therefore, violence was embedded in modern civilisation and this made it satanic and immoral. It was not enough to

reject industrialisation; Gandhi made a critique in *Hind Swaraj* of the entire intellectual scaffolding of modern civilisation – science, history, political and social institutions and so on. All that is associated with modernity and modern civilisation, Gandhi repudiated.

### Alternative to Modern Civilisation

The alternative to modern civilisation thus had to be located outside its domain and among people who were untouched by modern civilisation and uninfluenced by it. It was in this context that India, according to Gandhi, was uniquely placed since millions of Indians lived in the villages and were thus not tainted by modernity and its pernicious features. “Real or genuine civilisation”, in contrast to “what is known as civilisation”, was to be found in the villages of India. In the traditional village world of India life was governed by a common morality by which each member performed his duty. This made it the exact opposite of modern society whose members chased their own self-interested and individualistic goals. He said in April 1945, “I know the European mind well enough to know that when it has to choose between abstract justice and self-interest, it will plump for the latter.”<sup>10</sup> The challenge to modern civilisation in India would have to come from the people who lived in the villages, the peasantry.<sup>11</sup>

How was this challenge to be articulated? Gandhi was emphatic that it would have to be non-violent. He gave two reasons for this. One, since the peasantry would be at the forefront of the resistance, it would be non-violent since the peasants were essentially non-violent: in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi wrote, “They [the peasants] do not know the use of the sword, and they are not frightened by the use of it by others.” He believed, “In India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life”.<sup>12</sup> Indians, especially the peasants, are essentially non-violent. Gandhi wrote, “We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us. This is passive resistance.”<sup>13</sup> Thus modern civilisation in India, represented by British rule, would be opposed passively, through non-violent means. The second reason that Gandhi

gave was equally important and fundamental. He said that to oppose modern civilisation in India through violence would be to Europeanise India or to take it along the path of modernity. Gandhi’s aim was exactly the opposite. Opposition to British rule would be non-violent. Gandhi gave a name to this form of struggle, *satyagraha*.

The term *satyagraha* has an interesting origin. When Gandhi began his movement in South Africa, he first used the term passive resistance. As the struggle advanced Gandhi found “passive resistance” to be inadequate to express the substance of his movement. It also appeared to him “shameful” that the Indian struggle should be known only by an English name. A small prize was, therefore, announced in *Indian Opinion* to be awarded to the reader who invented the best designation for the new struggle. Maganlal Gandhi suggested the word *sadagraha* meaning “firmness in a good cause”. Gandhi liked the word but as it did not fully represent the whole idea, he changed it to *satyagraha*, “the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence”.<sup>14</sup>

### Satyagraha and Swaraj

Gandhi linked *satyagraha* to *swaraj* in two ways. In the Gujarati version of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi used *swaraj* to denote both self-rule and self-government.<sup>15</sup> *Swaraj* was an ideal for the individual and for the nation. To be a devotee of *satyagraha*, Gandhi said, an individual had to be capable of self-rule: “*Swaraj* has to be experienced by each one for himself”.<sup>16</sup> Gandhi laid down a code of conduct that would help individuals attain *swaraj*. Every individual who chose the path of *satyagraha* would learn to regulate his own life by observing perfect chastity, adopting poverty, following truth and cultivating fearlessness.<sup>17</sup> A *satyagrahi*, leading a disciplined and ethical life, would be an exemplar for other individuals and the pursuit of such a life on the part of all individuals would be the necessary precondition for *swaraj*. *Swaraj* at the individual level where “each person will become his own ruler”<sup>18</sup> would lead to *swaraj* for the nation.

In Gandhi’s philosophy, *swaraj* for the nation did not mean merely political

independence from British rule. Swaraj, for Gandhi, was something more substantive, involving the freedom of each individual to regulate their own lives without harming one another. Gandhi certainly did not want British rule to be replaced by another form of rule where western institutions of governance and civil society would be run by Indians instead of white men. That would be to have “English rule without the Englishman”. He wrote that such a process “would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the swaraj I want.”<sup>19</sup> Swaraj from Gandhi’s perspective would have to be located not only outside the domain of British political suzerainty but also beyond the satanic touch of western civilisation. Gandhi called this alternative *Ramrajya*, which he rendered into English as “enlightened anarchy”. The word anarchy indicated that there would be no state, and the word enlightened suggested that society would be composed of disciplined individuals regulating their own lives. Elaborating on this idea he wrote in January 1939,

The power to control national life through national representatives is called political power. Representatives will become unnecessary if the national life becomes so perfect as to be self-controlled. It will then be a state of enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler. He will conduct himself in such a way that his behaviour will not hamper the well-being of his neighbours. In an ideal state there will be no political institution and therefore no political power.<sup>20</sup>

In Gandhi’s ideal of swaraj there would be complete and continual reciprocity among and participation by every member of society. He elaborated thus:

Swaraj and Ramrajya are one and the same thing...We call a State Ramrajya when both the ruler and his subjects are straightforward, when both are pure in heart, when both are inclined towards self-sacrifice, when both exercise restraint and self-control while enjoying worldly pleasures, and, when the relationship between the two is as good as that between father and son. It is because we have forgotten this that we talk of democracy or the government of the people. Although this is the age of democracy, I do not know what the word connotes; however, I would say that democracy exists where the people’s voice is heard, where love of the people holds a place of prime importance. In my Ramrajya, however, public opinion

cannot be measured by counting of heads or raising of hands. I would not regard this as a measure of public opinion...The rishis and munis after doing penance came to the conclusion that public opinion is the opinion of people who practise penance and who have the good of the people at heart.<sup>21</sup>

This was the ideal or the utopia, if you like, that Gandhi pursued in his private and his public life. He admitted in a long letter to Nehru in 1945 that he had indeed idealised the Indian rural world. He told Nehru

You will not be able to understand me if you think that I am talking about the villages of today. My ideal village still exists only in my imagination. After all every human being lives in the world of his own imagination. In this village of my dreams the villager will not be dull – he will be all awareness. He will not live like an animal in filth and darkness. Men and women will live in freedom, prepared to face the whole world. There will be no plague, no cholera and no smallpox. Nobody will be allowed to be idle or to wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to do body labour.<sup>22</sup>

His many experiments with truth were concerned with taking himself and his country closer to the goal of swaraj. We know from his remarkable autobiography that in his personal life, he chose to adopt a life of chastity and simplicity. He opted for poverty since as a barrister-at-law, both in South Africa and in India, he could have lived in relative affluence in the style of a westernised gentleman. His lifestyle was frugal in the extreme. Fearlessness or *abhaya* became a part of Gandhi’s life ever since that night of 31 May 1893 when he was summarily ejected from a first class carriage of a train in Maritzburg in Natal, South Africa. Gandhi had self-consciously trained himself for satyagraha.<sup>23</sup>

### Personal Anguish

The attempt to self-regulate his life and to live it according to his own precepts and ideals was no easy matter for Gandhi. It often caused him personal anguish and made him appear cruel and dogmatic to his dear ones, but this did not deter him from continuing with his experiment to achieve swaraj. Two examples of this anguish could perhaps be given here. One concerns the complete alienation of Gandhi from his eldest son Harilal, who took to drink and became a complete wastrel. In early 1915, Harilal wrote a “Half-Open

Letter” to his father in which he spelt out what he thought were the principal reasons for their separation and the ensuing bitterness. Harilal wrote,

Our views about education are the main reason for the difference of opinion of the last 10 years...You have suppressed us [sons] in a sophisticated manner...You have never encouraged us in any way... You always spoke to us with anger, not with love...You have made us remain ignorant...I asked to be sent to England. For a year I cried. I was bewildered. You did not lend me your ears...I am married with four children. I cannot...become a recluse.<sup>24</sup>

Harilal felt that Gandhi had imposed his own views on his children and had thus hindered their education and development. The education Harilal referred to was obviously western education that Gandhi had rejected. The life that Harilal refused to live was that of one living in an ashram following the vows of chastity and poverty like a recluse. From this accusatory letter of his eldest born, Gandhi emerges as a self-absorbed, if not selfish, individual who was more concerned with his own pursuit of Truth than with the feelings and lives of his sons. Harilal paid the price of being the son of a satyagrahi. Yet an unbreakable bond remained in the form of Kasturba, and Harilal would not let his father forget that the achievements of the Mahatma had been possible because of the support that Kasturba had provided. There is the account of a poignant meeting of the parents with their eldest son in a railway station. I quote below from the recollections of Narayan Desai, son of Mahadev, who witnessed the encounter:

One day when our train stopped at a station on our way back to Wardha, we heard a cry from the crowd different from the usual: *Mata Kasturba Ki Jai* (victory to mother Kasturba).

It was Harilalkaka. He was emaciated... From a pocket of his ragged clothes he took an orange and said, “Ba, I have brought this for you”. Breaking in, Babu said, “Didn’t you bring anything for me?”. “No, nothing for you...All the greatness you have achieved is only because of Ba. Don’t forget that!”.

No amount of pleading on the part of both parents could persuade Harilal to come with them. The train left the platform. “Amidst the cries of *Gandhiji ki jai*”, Narayan Desai continues, “we could still hear the faint cry, *Mata Kasturba ki jai*”.<sup>25</sup>

Harilal, it would seem, wanted to contrast the selflessness of his mother with the selfishness of his father. One can only imagine the pain that this relationship caused all three. On Harilal's life had fallen the shadow of Gandhi's quest. What is not known – and is also difficult to conjecture – is if Gandhi felt that his quest for swaraj had done violence to his son. Harilal was the first victim of Gandhi's swaraj.<sup>26</sup>

The other example relates to the death of Kasturba. During the final stage of her last illness, their youngest son, Devdas, brought penicillin that he had imported, Gandhi advised against using it on Kasturba. He told Devdas, "Why don't you trust god? Why do you wish to drug your mother even on her death bed?" He was not willing to compromise his position on western medicine even when it meant the death of his wife. He told one of his close associates, "How God has tested my faith! If I had allowed you to give her penicillin, it could not have saved her. But it would have meant bankruptcy of faith on my part." Yet the decision could not have been easy for him. At the cremation of Kasturba, he was seen crying, the first time his devoted disciple Mirabehn (Madeline Slade) had seen him shed tears, and he said, "The best half of me is dead. What am I going to do now?"<sup>27</sup>

### Swaraj in Gandhi's Public Life

I turn now to the more public aspects of Gandhi's life where he tried to implement his ideas about swaraj. The great mass movements that he launched through the Congress Party are the obvious embodiments of this experiment. Here we find that Gandhi's swaraj often stumbled when faced with the hard realities of politics. Again and again, the energy and enthusiasm of the people that he mobilised through a non-violent movement spilled over into militancy. The politics of the people refused to respect the limits imposed by Gandhi's swaraj.<sup>28</sup> This often compelled Gandhi to call off the movement or to reduce its pace and momentum. Gandhi would not compromise on the issue of violence. "Non-violence", he was to say in his speech at his first trial in 1923, "is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed".<sup>29</sup> The clash

between Gandhi's creed of non-violence and the politics of popular protest was best exemplified by what happened in Chauri Chaura in February 1922 during the Non-Cooperation Movement.

On 5 February 1922 in Chauri Chaura, near Gorakhpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh, a crowd of 4,000 Hindus and Muslims attacked a police outpost and burnt alive 22 policemen. The crowd chanted *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* while it carried out the carnage. A shocked Gandhi owned responsibility for the violence – he called it "The Crime of Chauri Chaura"<sup>30</sup> – and called off the Non-Cooperation Movement. How did this happen? How could people carry out an act of violence and brutality with the name of the apostle of non-violence on their lips? The answer lies in the manner Gandhi's persona was perceived and in the impact of his message.

Gandhi had visited Gorakhpur only once, addressed one meeting there and had returned to Benares but for months before his arrival, as Shahid Amin has shown in an outstanding essay, stories and rumours about Gandhi had been circulating about him in the region.<sup>31</sup> All these stories, reported in the local press, were about Gandhi's *pratap* – power or glory. Some related to individuals and families receiving special boons because they had chosen to follow the Gandhian creed and others to curses falling on those who defied Gandhi's orders or tested and opposed his power. Gandhi, in the eyes of the common people of Gorakhpur, had been cast as the traditional Hindu holy man and had become the object of worship. Women begged for alms in his name, and they performed *vrata* and *aradhana* (fast and worship) for him. This perception was not unrelated to Gandhi's chosen lifestyle and beliefs. In a very perceptive essay, M N Srinivas noted how Gandhi's choice to be the renouncer in the traditional Hindu mould, even though he refused to don the garb of a sanyasi, was intrinsic to his appeal and to his work.<sup>32</sup> His life of abstinence and simplicity and his continuous emphasis on purity reinforced this popular image of Gandhi as the holy man, the Mahatma.

The perception of Gandhi's *pratap* also led to seeing him as an alternative source of authority to the British government.

Shahid Amin has noted that in Gorakhpur peasants spoke of Gandhiji's swaraj or Mahatmaji's swaraj. Gandhi notes bearing a superficial resemblance to the one rupee note circulated and its non-acceptance as legal tender was interpreted by the peasants as opposition to Gandhi. What did the local peasantry mean by swaraj? They perceived it, the investigations into the Chauri Chaura incident revealed, "as a millennium in which taxation would be limited to the collection of small cash contributions or dues in kind from fields and threshing floors, and [in] which the cultivators would hold their lands at little more than nominal rents".<sup>33</sup> The peasants of Gorakhpur had thus reinterpreted Gandhi's swaraj to suit their own world and its problems. There were other equally significant features of this reinterpretation. In the words of Amin

...there was for the peasant volunteers of Chauri Chaura a transformation in the spirit of that ubiquitous cry, 'Gandhi Maharaj ki jai'...the *jaikar* of Gandhi had become a militant avowal of the organised strength of peasant volunteers, a cry which mobilised and struck terror in the hearts of waverers and enemies alike. For the peasants of north India this had ceased in effect to be a Gandhian cry; it was now a cry with which an attack on a market or a thana was announced. 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai' had, in this context, assumed the function of such traditional war cries as 'Jai Mahabir' or 'Bam Bam Mahadeo'...Thus a 'jaikar' of adoration and adulation had become the rallying cry for direct action. While such action sought to justify itself by a reference to the Mahatma, the Gandhi of its rustic protagonists was not as he really was, but as they had thought him up.<sup>34</sup>

The creed of Gandhi's swaraj and the way it was received and interpreted by the peasants were radically different. Neither Gandhi nor the Congress had any control over the manner in which the masses decoded the message of the Mahatma. Gandhi had somewhat anticipated this when he had written in *Hind Swaraj*, "Those in whose name we speak we do not know, nor do they know us".<sup>35</sup> It was thus not always possible to regulate the masses and to keep the movements within the limits of satyagraha and non-violence. This tension was embedded in the mass movements called by Gandhi and thus the paradox of violent acts with the name of Gandhi on the lips of the actors. Gandhi's

swaraj, in its public dimension, could not quite rid itself of this baggage and Gandhi for his own inner *swaraj* often had to engage himself in fasts to cleanse himself of the evil of violence committed by the people. Towards the end of his life Gandhi confessed that non-violent resistance against British rule had not gone quite according to his plan and vision. He wrote, "People followed my advice and took to non-violent resistance against the British government because they wanted to offer some sort of resistance. But their non-violence, I must confess, was born of their helplessness. Therefore, it was the weapon of the weak".<sup>36</sup> Gandhi's *swaraj* became a victim of the mass forces that Gandhi himself unleashed.

### Nehru's Scepticism

It would be simplistic to suggest that the obstacles to Gandhi's *swaraj* came only from the masses and their tendency to turn violent while defying British rule. Criticism was made and hurdles were erected by people very close to Gandhi. Take the case of Jawaharlal Nehru. As early as 1936 Nehru had written in his autobiography that the ideas of *Hind Swaraj* represented an "utterly wrong and harmful doctrine, and impossible of achievement". He added,

Personally, I dislike the praise of poverty and suffering...Nor do I appreciate the ascetic life as a social ideal...Nor do I appreciate in the least the idealisation of the 'simple peasant life'. I have almost a horror of it, and instead of submitting to it myself I want to drag out even the peasantry from it, not to urbanisation, but to the spread of urban cultural facilities to rural areas.<sup>37</sup>

It will not be an exaggeration to say that what Gandhi was rejecting, Nehru was embracing. If Gandhi considered a civilisation based on industrial production and science to be satanic, Nehru was its unabashed admirer. In *The Discovery of India*, he wrote, "There is something very wonderful about the high achievement of science and modern technology".<sup>38</sup> He said he was "all for tractors and big machinery and I am convinced that the rapid industrialisation 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".<sup>39</sup> Nehru underlined the obvious conclusion that

"there is a fundamental difference between his [Gandhi's] outlook on life generally and what might be called the modern outlook".<sup>40</sup> But Nehru also noted a more profound divergence: "Gandhiji", he noted, "is always thinking in terms of personal salvation and of sin, while most of us have society's welfare uppermost in our minds".<sup>41</sup> The calling of the two men were radically different, if not opposed. This was reflected in their world views and in the vision they had for India. It surprised no one that as prime minister of independent India, Nehru inaugurated a programme of large-scale industrialisation in which the State was a principal actor. This was not a project of which Gandhi would have approved. Within a few years of his death, Gandhi's *swaraj* was nothing more than an idea.

Long before independence, the breach between Gandhi's *swaraj* and Nehru's politics was becoming apparent. In 1938, Nehru met Clement Attlee and Stafford Cripps in Goodfellows, Cripps's house in the Cotswolds. This was perhaps the first attempt to arrive at a negotiated transfer of power in India. At the meeting, Attlee and Cripps conceded the Congress' demand that India be allowed to decide on its own constitution through a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage. They, however, added a significant caveat: election to the constituent assembly would be subject to minority representation. Another condition was that after the making of a constitution, the government of free India would be required to sign a treaty that would enable Britain to discharge her obligations and protect her interests for an interim period of 15 years.<sup>42</sup> In this first parley, already some of Gandhi's basic principles – non-acceptance of minority representation and rejection of British or western interests – were being surrendered or compromised by none other than his cup-bearer.

Nehru's drift away from Gandhi's *swaraj* was also evident in the enthusiasm with which he went about forming the National Planning Committee in 1938. He was the chairman of the committee, a post he accepted, he was to recall later, "not without hesitation and misgiving". The acceptance came because "the work was after my own heart

and I could not keep out of it".<sup>43</sup> The original idea behind the Planning Committee "had been to further industrialisation"<sup>44</sup> since, according to Nehru, vintage 1946, "It can hardly be challenged that, in the context of the modern world, no country can be politically or economically independent...unless it is highly industrialised and has developed its power resources to the utmost". It followed that "an attempt to build up a country's economy largely on the basis of cottage and small-scale industries is doomed to failure".<sup>45</sup> Thus Nehru favoured industrialisation over the rural economy. What is equally important is his belief that a country has to develop its "power resources to the utmost". Industrialisation and the development of "power resources" would be carried out in Nehru's programme under a strong and centralising state in a position to allocate and distribute economic resources. This was not exactly Gandhi's vision of "enlightened anarchy" where the state had been rendered redundant.<sup>46</sup>

### Drift of Congress from Gandhi

Nor was Nehru alone: the Congress was itself moving away from the main thrust of Gandhi's ideas. Nowhere was this more explicit than in the manner in which Congress leaders grasped the poisoned chalice of a negotiated transfer of power leading to independence with India partitioned. As the second world war drew to a close, it was clear that the British for their own interests would pull out of India. The timetable and the manner of the withdrawal were open to discussion. The Congress leadership never challenged this notion of a transfer of power that would be achieved through parleys across a table. Such an "escape from empire" – one scholar's telling phrase – created conditions in which, according to James Grigg, the finance member of the government of India, "Birla and Bentham [could] hunt together for quick profits".<sup>47</sup> Gandhi could not see himself as being part of this process. Gandhi attended the Congress Working Committee at the end of June 1946. At the meeting, he asked Pyarelal, his secretary, to read out the letter he had written to Cripps, and left immediately.

Pyarelal writes, "The final phase of negotiations with the Cabinet Mission

marked the beginning of that cleavage between Gandhiji and some of his closest colleagues which in the final phase of the transfer of power left them facing different ways".<sup>48</sup> He stayed away from negotiations, choosing instead to travel to places affected by communal violence. On 20 February 1947 – the day Attlee announced in the House of Commons that the British would leave India latest by June 1948 – Nehru complained to Gandhi, "You are too far away for consultation and you refuse to move out of East Bengal".<sup>49</sup> Gandhi's alternative to the negotiations and his vehement opposition to the partition of India in any form were clear from his statements. On 2 May 1947, he told three young socialists, Aruna Asaf Ali, Achyut Patwardhan and Asoka Mehta: "In my opinion, the Congress should in no circumstance be party to partition. We should tell the British to quit unconditionally...Why should we make ourselves accessory to what we hold to be evil"?<sup>50</sup>

### Isolation

Gandhi realised his own isolation. In 1946 and 1947, he spoke of how he was left to plough his lonely furrow, and remarked that his voice was one in the wilderness.<sup>51</sup> On one occasion, his comments about his own isolation even seemed to predict what would happen to him in independent India. In May 1947, he lamented, "Who listens to me today?...I am being told to retire to the Himalayas. Everybody is eager to garland my photos and statues. Nobody really wants to follow my advice".<sup>52</sup> At a prayer meeting on 26 September 1947, he expressed his complete disillusionment with the path that India was taking under an independent dispensation:

Today I am a back number. I have been told I have no place in the new order, where we want machines, navy, air force and what not. I can never be party to that. If you can have the courage to say that you will retain freedom with the help of the same force with which you have won it, I am your man.<sup>53</sup>

Gandhi's swaraj had been unmade by the men he had made.

On 30 January 1948, he was murdered by a Hindu fanatic who wanted India to be a strong and powerful Hindu state. Minutes before he kept his tryst with his murderer, Gandhi had been talking to Patel

and had forgotten the time for his prayer meeting, despite the best efforts of Manu and Abha, his timekeepers as he affectionately called them. As he walked to the prayer ground, he chided them, "I am late by 10 minutes. I hate being late."<sup>54</sup> These were his recorded last words before he embraced eternity with the name of Rama on his lips. "I hate being late" – the man who said this moments before his death was perhaps too early for India's swaraj.

### NOTES

- 1 These three statements of Gandhi will be found on pages 478, 664 and 615, respectively of *The Oxford India Gandhi: Essential Writings*, edited and compiled by Gopalkrishna Gandhi (Delhi 2008).
- 2 This incident is narrated in R J Moore, *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the India Problem* (Oxford, 1983), p 356.
- 3 The text of *Hind Swaraj* is available in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG) 90 Vols (New Delhi, 1958), Vol 10; it is also reprinted in Rudrangshu Mukherjee (ed.), *The Penguin Gandhi Reader* (New Delhi, 1993), pp 3-66; and in A J Parel (ed.), *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 1997). The circumstances in which the text was composed is taken from the last named book p xiv. Also see Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire* (Delhi, 2006), pp 151-56.
- 4 *Hind Swaraj* in *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 3.
- 5 Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 3 Vols (New Delhi, 1986), i, p 278.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 285.
- 7 R Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York, 1973), p 24; cited in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986), p 85.
- 8 Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of M G*, i, p 277.
- 9 Quoted in Parel, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p xviii.
- 10 CWMG, Vol, 79, p 421.
- 11 This argument is presented in many parts of *Hind Swaraj*.
- 12 See *Hind Swaraj* in *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 51.
- 13 *Ibid*.
- 14 D G Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, 8 Vols (Bombay, 1951), i, p 103.
- 15 This important point is noted by Parel in his introduction to *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p liii.
- 16 See *Hind Swaraj* in *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, pp 37-38.
- 17 *Ibid*, p 52.
- 18 *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 79.
- 19 *Hind Swaraj* in *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 12.
- 20 *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 79.
- 21 CWMG, Vol 35, pp 489-90.
- 22 Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of MG*, i, p 286. In 1942, Gandhi had spelt out his vision of village swaraj thus: "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependency is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its own cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it could grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible

every activity will be conducted on the cooperative basis". *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 80.

- 23 This incident is recollected in Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Delhi, repr, 2007), pp 113-14.
- 24 Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas*, p 197.
- 25 *Ibid*, p 400.
- 26 Gandhi admitted this when he wrote in 1940, "My Eldest Son Was the Direct Victim of My Experiments...": CWMG, Vol 72, p 355; cited in Gopalkrishna Gandhi (compiled and edited), *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 457.
- 27 Gandhi's comment to Devdas Gandhi will be found in *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 520; the statement about "Bankruptcy of Faith" in S Nayyar, *Kasturba: A Personal Reminiscence* (Ahmedabad, 1960), p 101; for Mirabehn's recollection about Gandhi's tears, see E Morton, *Women behind Mahatma Gandhi* (London, 1954), p 241; for the statement, "The Best Half of Me" see A Gandhi, *Kasturba: A Life* (Delhi, 2000), p 302.
- 28 This point is made by Ranajit Guha, "Discipline and Mobilise" in P Chatterjee and G Pandey (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol VII (Delhi, 1992), pp 69-120.
- 29 This speech is reproduced in Rudrangshu Mukherjee (ed.), *Great Speeches of Modern India* (Delhi, 2007), pp 80-85.
- 30 CWMG, Vol, 22, pp 415-21.
- 31 Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-22" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol III (Delhi, 1984), pp 1-61.
- 32 M N Srinivas, "Gandhi's Religion" in M N Srinivas, *Collected Essays* (Delhi, 2002), pp 355-61.
- 33 Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma", p 52.
- 34 *Ibid*, p 54.
- 35 *Hind Swaraj* in *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 36.
- 36 In the *Harijan*, 4 August 1946, CWMG, Vol 85, pp 54-55.
- 37 Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London, 1936), pp 510-11.
- 38 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta, 1946), p 492.
- 39 *Ibid*, p 488.
- 40 *Ibid*, p 485.
- 41 *Autobiography*, p 511.
- 42 See Moore, *Escape from Empire*, p 6; also see Peter Clarke, *The Cripps Version: The Life of Sir Stafford Cripps* (London, 2002), p 118.
- 43 Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p 474.
- 44 *Ibid*, p 475.
- 45 *Ibid*, p 490.
- 46 Since the focus of this essay is Gandhi's idea of swaraj, his differences with Nehru may appear here to be too sharply drawn. In spite of their differences on the vision expressed in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi and Nehru were in complete agreement on a vast number of critical issues. Both believed in democracy and dialogue; both were advocates of Hindu-Muslim unity; both saw themselves as Indians first; and both were committed to India's freedom. Over and above these areas of agreement, there was an unbreakable bond that held Gandhi and Nehru together. In Gandhi's words, "Our bond is not merely political. It is much deeper. I have no measure to fathom that depth. This bond can never be broken" (Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of MG*, i, p 287).
- 47 Moore, *Escape from Empire*, p 26.
- 48 Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, 2 Vols (Ahmedabad, 1956), i, p 239.
- 49 Cited in *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 624.
- 50 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, ii, p 162 (emphasis in the original).
- 51 The lonely furrow statement will be found in *ibid*, p 163; "Mine May Be a Voice in the Wilderness": he wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel on 1 August 1946, see CWMG, Vol 85, p 102.
- 52 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, ii, p 209; cited in *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 642.
- 53 *Penguin Gandhi Reader*, p 279.
- 54 See Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, ii, p 772.