CHAPTER 9

Conflict and Convergence

The most important feature of Indian national life for a quarter of a century from 1920 was the predominance of Gandhi, which, as I pointed out earlier, Viceroy Chelmsford was inclined to laugh away and Winston Churchill would later scoff at and another Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, would try to minimize; but it was there all the time, and for one reason or another, British Imperialism failed to cope with it. It is not to our purpose here to discuss this phenomenon. What is relevant here is that the emergence of Gandhi meant a weakening of Vivekananda's influence, for there was no affinity between the two great men. The Swami had considerable powers of organization; he was also an original thinker, and it was his philosophic thinking, expressed with great force and lucidity, which made his message inspiring even to people who had no grasp of philosophy. The Mahatma, on the other hand, was a man of action with little flair for philosophic thinking, and his knowledge of history was limited, whereas Vivekananda's mind ranged with confidence over the whole of human history and civilization. The only common point between these great men was their insistence on courage and fearlessness, and they practised this virtue, each in his own way.

Soon after the great Nagpur session of the Congress, Gandhiji came to Calcutta to open the National College on 4 February 1921. Two days after, he delivered a speech at Belur Math on Vivekananda's birthday, in course of which he said that he had thoroughly studied Swamiji's works, and it had deepened his patriotism. There is nothing wrong, and also nothing new, in this compliment. Soon after this he began writing his autobiography (My Experiments with Truth), in which, however, he mentions Vivekananda only to say that they had never met. What is more significant is that in describing the progress of his 'Experiments' Gandhiji never once speaks of Vivekananda or his influence, and in his elaborate Gandhi Chronicle bio-
grapher Tendulkar mentions Mahatmai's opening of the National College but not the visit to Belur or the impromptu speech on Vivekananda.

There is little in common, as I have said, between Vivekananda's attitude and Gandhiji's. Gandhiji's favourite song—was it composed by himself?—was 'Ishwara and Allah are your names, O King Rama, the scion of the clan of Raghus'. This would not tally with the views of Vivekananda, who made a distinction between the concepts of the Vedantic Absolute or the Impersonal Spirit and the personal God whom we worship as Ishwara or Allah or even Rama as an incarnation of Godhead. Vivekananda admires the Islamic ideal as being similar to the Vedantic, but he also criticizes it whenever there are associations of a personal God, such as references to angels. Moreover, he did not believe in the existence of a ruler of the universe or in any incarnation of Godhead. Using the phraseology of Hinduism, we might say that Mahatmai was a follower of the Bhakti cult—love for and devotion to a personal God, whereas Vivekananda believed in a synthesis of Knowledge (Jnana), Action (Karma) and Love (Bhakti), and in this synthesis he gave primacy to knowledge.

There is a good deal of difference also in their attitude to violence and non-violence. For Mahatmai non-violence was a passion, a philosophy and the essence of his religion. When closely questioned, he recognized a few exceptions where violence could be used, but those exceptions are so trivial as not to deserve any mention at all. Non-violence was, as it were, a congenital trait of his character. He had come of a family of Vaishnavas, a sect of Hinduism, whose faith is based on love and abstinence from violence. There was yet another force. 'Jainism', says he, 'was very strong in Gujarat, and its influence was felt everywhere.... This was the tradition into which I was born and bred.' Gandhiji was not a philosopher who explored the meaning of truth, but the greatest among those who experimented with truths handed down by Buddhist, Jain, and Vaishnava saints, and his chief asset was his quiet fearlessness which his opponents could not assess correctly and cope with adequately. He was soft-spoken, conciliatory in his attitude, and had interminable patience. But this was partly deceptive. Although he was eager to negotiate and compromise, his op-
ponents, whom he always called his friends, found that beyond a
certain point he would not budge and would stick to his position
with great tenacity. A nation of cricketers who claimed to have
won the Battle of Waterloo in the cricket fields of Eton found
in him a bowler who was unplayable.

Very different was Swami Vivekananda, a monist who took
both good and evil as inseparable elements of life and who
would never make a fetish of violence and non-violence. Life
is activity, he would say, and activity means resistance, that
is to say, resistance can never be passive. Evil is an inalienable
part of life, but we live only by keeping it in check, by sub-
du ing it when possible and accepting it where necessary. If we
did not actively resist evil, tyrants and oppressors, the Attilas
and the Tamerlanes, would pile misery upon misery, but one of
our fundamental instincts is to lessen misery, to do good because
it is good to do good. When we are engaged in a life-and-death
struggle with an enemy that is armed to the teeth, it is poor
principle and bad policy to boggle at violence.

If Gandhiji had read Vivekananda not merely ‘thoroughly’
but with understanding, he would have been able to avoid
blunders which have cost India so dear. Like Tilak, he talked of
Hindu–Muslim unity, as if Hindus and Muslims were two
different peoples, but Hindus had no interest in the Muslim Cali-
phate, neither, it seemed, had Muslims any interest in Swaraj,
which was demanded only by Hindus. I do not want to em-
phasize Mahatma J’s ignorance of the historical side of the
question. But a ‘thorough’ study of Vivekananda should have
taught him that a nation was a geographical unit, that the
word ‘Hindu’ is in a sense meaningless, that the one religion of
India is spirituality, shared equally by people who professed
‘Hindu’ polytheism and Islamic monotheism. Hindus would
be able to shed their caste prejudices and privileges by
coming into contact with Muslims, who in their turn would
learn to be more tolerant, but the basic religion of the people
on this side of the Indus is monism, which the Aryans had
arrived at earlier but which Muslims practised with greater
thoroughness. If he knew all this, Gandhiji would not have
tried to arrive at Hindu-Muslim unity by means of bargaining
and compromise, because they were already one people. And
if Swaraj was desirable, both Hindus and Muslims would gain
by it equally, and the question of bargaining would not arise at all.

Familiarity with Vivekananda’s teaching would have taught Gandhiji another lesson, the unwisdom of making a regional language the language of the nation, for that would destroy the ‘vitality’ of the other Indian languages, and he would not have given the nation the Greek gift of the linguistic redistribution of provinces. Swamiji once toyed with the idea of making Sanskrit the language of India but gave it up because it was very difficult to learn, and it had other limitations too. Mahatmaji’s fondness for Hindi has given rise to what is called Hindi imperialism and its corollary, regional chauvinism. Hindi fanatics maintain a low profile when they are confronted with aggressive opposition, but remain unconverted. Hindi is defended as a link-language when there is a protest against its imposition, but in the recent World Hindi Conference held in New Delhi, speakers brandished it as the Raja-bhasha (‘the language of the rulers’). What, it may be asked, would be Vivekananda’s solution? The answer will be found in the language used by him in his major writings and speeches.

II

What, then, was Mahatma Gandhi’s principal contribution to the national movement, which, so far as the Congress was concerned, had till his advent confined itself to airing its grievances and annually placing before the Government a petition for reforms? Aurobindo Ghose called this exercise a ‘petitionary delusion’, remarking sarcastically that the lawyers who joined this cavalcade were really anxious for a High Court judgeship. He had in mind the examples of M. G. Ranade, Badruddin Tyabji and Chandravarkar—two of them Congress Presidents. It was also described as the ‘politics of mendicancy’, a striking phrase often ascribed to Asutosh Chowdhury, but he too was rewarded with a judgeship and became quiet. The Extremists put pressure on the Congress to replace the petition for reforms by a demand for Swaraj to be attained through passive resistance. Aurobindo Ghose gave a subtle and incisive analysis of the philosophy of passive resistance, but he lacked the capacity to organize a public movement. Possibly because of his con-
Connection with secret revolutionary work, it would have been inadvisable for him to put into practice a doctrine which he was elaborating under cover of anonymity. Tilak was a great scholar and organizer, but I have a feeling that he was not very clear-headed as a thinker. In spite of my admiration for Tilak's massive scholarship and his fearless espousal of the nationalist cause, I confess to a lurking suspicion that there was a chink in his political philosophy. His first great achievement was the Ganapati festival, which, in spite of its militancy and magnitude, was, after all, a sectarian affair. In 1916 he was a party to the Lucknow Pact, which, by accepting separate electorates, became a milestone in the path to Pakistan. In 1918 he made the curious suggestion that the communal problem might be solved by the joint singing of political and religious songs. In the last phase of his long and distinguished career, he substituted responsive co-operation for passive resistance!

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a different sort of man. Simple and frail, he was direct and forthright, and he had an imponderable reserve of moral strength and moral courage. That is why even when he thought and acted quizzically, he could not be accused of resorting to guile or trickery. I remember that although revolutionaries were aiming at violent disruption of the Government in power, they never avowed it openly, and even in 1919 people were afraid to shout Bande Mataram in public. Gandhi brought about a new era of open and unabashed criticism of the Government, and the bureaucracy, accustomed to deal with secret, underground sedition, were bewildered by a man who was not afraid to call a spade a spade, thus making fools of administrators and diplomats who always said one thing and meant another. Even as early as July 1918, he defined Swaraj as 'part and partnership' in the British Empire, and that is what the British Government said too, but he pricked the bubble by pointing out that this partnership meant the opening of a new chapter in Indo-British relationship by the ending of all racial distinctions between whites and coloured peoples. It was during these negotiations that going out on a recruiting campaign, he issued leaflets in which the opening sentence was, 'Among the many misdeeds of the British rule in India, history will look upon the act of depriving a whole nation of arms as the blackest. If we want to learn the
use of arms, here is a golden opportunity.' I did not know of this speech then, but I remember that soon after this, in my village school, which was a nest of Anushilan revolutionaries, we had gathered to welcome some members of the disbanded Bengali Regiment, and there was a heated exchange of words between ebullient young men eager to welcome the war heroes with shouts of Bande Mataram on the one hand and the cautious Headmaster and the hesitating Police Inspector who feared Governmental wrath on the other. The debate ended inconclusively because a message was soon received that the soldiers would not come at all!

A year later, I was in Calcutta, a First-Year student, an ‘innocent abroad’. I was amazed to hear of the special session of the Indian National Congress (1920), which was held in Calcutta and in which Gandhi presented a full list of the disastrous results of British rule in India which left no option for Indians except all-out non-co-operation with this Government. The Non-co-operation Resolution, provisionally passed at the special session of the Congress, was ratified at the annual session at Nagpur, and after that there was no turning back, no way to stem the surging tide of discontent which swept over the whole of India. At every public meeting, big or small, the ‘Satanic’ Government was mercilessly castigated, and it was difficult to draw the line between what was sedition and what was not. Hereafter there was no end of trickery on the part of His Majesty’s Government in London, with the tempo of oppression ever on the increase in India. But the British Government in India was doomed. Mahatma Gandhi had brought revolution into the streets; it was now an open affair. And that was Gandhi’s contribution to the freedom movement, which armed revolutionaries, who did not believe in non-violence, also readily admitted.

III

In 1921 Subhaschandra Bose passed into the Indian Civil Service, but he resigned forthwith and sailed back to India with the intention of serving the country as a freedom-fighter. Non-co-operation was then in full swing, and landing in Bombay, he hastened to see the Mahatma, who was there at that
time. Subhas Bose’s old friends in Calcutta were not surprised at his resigning the job; rather they were surprised that he had competed for it at all. The interview with the Mahatma was not very satisfactory for Subhas, nor, I think, for Gandhiji, who asked him to see Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. The meeting with Das was very inspiring; here was the leader he wanted and the leader gave him plenty of work. The first important assignment was organizing a boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to the city of Calcutta. Another Prince of Wales had years ago visited India and received a warm welcome. In 1911–12, when the Prince’s father and mother came to India as King and Queen, there was a grand Delhi Durbar, a gala affair in which the whole of India participated. But in 1921, on the day of the Prince’s arrival in Bombay (17 November), there was large-scale rioting in the city lasting for four days. Here was a pointer to a new direction; for disaffection was open and widespread. The Prince arrived in Calcutta on 25 December in a tense atmosphere. Subhaschandra had been entrusted by Deshbandhu Das with the work of organizing a hartal or a total cessation of work. It was a signal success. A new power had entered the Indian political scene.

Subhaschandra Bose, it is said, was of a religious temperament, and early in life he was attracted to the Ramakrishna Mission and imbibed Vivekananda’s teaching. Later on, he became a distinguished student of philosophy and showed preference for Hegelianism, but Vivekananda’s influence never waned. Little wonder that even as a college student, he was a patriot and a rebel and also a leader. He was in Presidency College only for a year, when there was a volume of feeling against an Englishman who taught history and traduced Indians. The discontent ended with an assault on the Professor, and Subhaschandra was expelled as the leader of the movement, of which almost all the other members were senior students. Later on, both the assailant and the victim remembered this incident without bitterness. Subhaschandra wrote in his autobiography that the Principal by expelling him helped him develop his personality, and E. F. Oaten, for that was the Professor’s name, admitted towards the end of his life that at that time Subhaschandra probably did the right thing. As far as I remember, the Professor expressed his recantation in verse.
Subhaschandra was in sympathy with armed revolutionaries even before proceeding to England, though I cannot say if he was actively connected with any particular group, and it is probable that till then he was not involved in any violent action. But his inclination and his influence were soon manifest through an isolated incident. In January 1924 Gopinath Saha shot dead Earnest Day, mistaking him for the Police Chief Charles Tegart, and was, after a simple trial in which he did not defend himself, sentenced to death and hanged. The Bengal Provincial Conference, which met soon after, passed a resolution recording its appreciation, not of the violent means adopted, but of Saha’s courage and self-sacrifice. This was gall and wormwood to the British authorities and also embarrassing to the Congress, which had pledged itself to non-violence. It was quite clear even then that Subhaschandra had, within a short time, come to occupy an important position for himself, and through him the armed revolutionaries had started making an impact on the Congress. True to his vow, Mahatmaji made the All-India Congress Committee pass a resolution condemning the action of Gopinath Saha. More importantly, Gandhiji wept to see Desbandhu Das and some others openly voting against his resolution. What is even more significant was that here was ‘a little cloud, like a man’s hand’, which would become formidable—and irresistible. The British Indian Government also sensed the threat and quickly sent Subhaschandra to Mandalay Jail in Burma under Regulation III of 1818, from where he was to return with a new halo of glory. His friends and followers remained where they were and carried on their activities with renewed vigour.

Gandhiji, too, was growing from strength to strength. In 1920 Viceroy Lord Chelmsford had dismissed the programme of Non-co-operation as ‘foolish’, but he left India in April 1921, four months after the ratification of this programme by the Congress at the end of December 1920. It was his successor Lord Reading who had to face the music when the Prince of Wales reached riot-torn Bombay on 17 November 1921. The European community was strongest in Calcutta, where some face-saving device had to be thought of so that the Prince’s visit in December might be saved. It is now an open secret that it was at the Viceroy’s initiative that negotiations for a com-
promise between the Government and Gandhi and his associates were started through Pandit Malaviya and Jinnah. The negotiations failed, and the Prince's visit was greeted with a hartal.

Some prominent leaders had already been put into jail and the Government decided to continue the process of repression, which culminated in the arrest of Gandhi himself on 10 March 1922 on a charge of sedition. The 'Great Trial', which began on 18 March, ended quickly, for Gandhiji pleaded guilty, adding characteristically, '... the only course open to you, Mr Judge, is... either to resign your post or to inflict on me the severest penalty.' This was a refreshing contrast to Tilak's 21-hour-long speech in 1908. Judge Broomfield pronounced the same sentence as had been awarded to Tilak—six years' imprisonment. But rebellion—sedition would be an incomplete expression—was now an open affair. It was stalking the entire country—cities and towns as well as villages and hamlets. From the sea of human heads one saw and the conversation of even illiterate persons one heard, one would have thought that possibly there were only two Indians who were genuinely loyal to the British Raj—the two Indian members of the Rowlatt Committee!

Government must have been somewhat unnerved by this surging tide of open discontent. Judge Broomfield, who convicted Gandhiji, was himself hesitant and wished away the sentence he pronounced. That seemed to be the Executive's view too. On 12 January 1924 Gandhiji was suddenly taken ill with appendicitis and operated on by Colonel Maddock. The operation was successful, and even before his release from the hospital on 10 March, a nervous Government had issued orders for his release from jail as early as 5 February. Who would face the consequences if, for some reason or other, this prisoner died while in custody? Truly, as Einstein was to remark later on, he was 'a man who [had] confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior'.

IV

With the expanding influence of Gandhi's thought and methods in Indian politics entered another force which I would call
Marxian socialism. Socialism is as old as Jesus Christ, if not older. Bernard Shaw admits this; Toynbee, challenging the Marxian socialist’s claim to originality, says that Christian socialism had been preached and practised before Marxian socialism. But there is something original about Marxian socialism which distinguishes it from all other forms of socialism as well as from all other religions which it seeks to replace. A detailed examination of Marxism will not be germane to this discussion. Here it will be sufficient to measure the novelty of its impact on Indian politics and also its agreement with and difference from the Gandhian way of thinking and action.

Socialism posits an equal, or, at least, an equitable distribution of wealth and the abolition or the maximum possible reduction of private property, which leads to hoarding or exploitation. The king was, and theoretically even now is, the master of all the land in his kingdom. The good king of the Raghu clan, says poet Kalidasa, was like the sun who sucks up moisture only to give it back a thousandfold in the shape of rain which fertilizes the earth and makes it fruitful. Shorn of poetical exaggeration, it means that the king makes a fair distribution of what moderns would call G.N.P. or Gross National Product among his people, reserving little for himself. This is a kind of socialism that fits in with the philosophy of Gandhi, who said that all property belonged to God (‘Gopal ki’), and rulers or owners must regard themselves as trustees. This is humanitarianism, akin to Christian socialism, but modern Marx-orientated socialism will reject it as Utopianism. And because Gandhi knew it, he said in 1916—incidentally the year in which he first met ‘socialist’ Jawaharlal Nehru—‘I am no socialist’. He had not then read Marx, which is not surprising. One does not need to read Marx’s Capital to be a Marxist, as Bernard Shaw noted after his first experience of Marx enthusiasts. Gandhi must have perceived the growing influence of Marxian socialism when he made the above statement, and he also came to realize that Congress would have to make room for some kind of socialism. In 1926–27 he wrote that he did not fight shy of capital, but he wanted to end capitalism, and that his ideal was equal distribution.

Lenin established the socialist state along Marxist lines, as far as possible, but Marx’s theories were based on figures
derived from Britain, an industrialized, capitalist country, whereas Lenin made his experiment in Russia, which was more feudal than capitalist. This did not change the tenor of Marxist propaganda to which industrial labouring classes are more susceptible than the peasantry engaged in agriculture. And no wonder it is by way of the trade union movement that Marxist ideas entered India.

There were humanitarian attempts at ameliorating the condition of labourers, but the first move to organize them was made by B. P. Wadia in 1918, on a somewhat limited scale. The father of the trade union movement was, however, N. M. Joshi, who established the first All-India Trade Union Congress, and for many years he was the chief spokesman of the Indian Labour movement. But before long Marxists infiltrated into the movement and gave it a radical turn. There was a split because the Marxists wanted to affiliate the whole movement to Moscow. In 1929 the British Indian Government started elaborate legal proceedings against Marxist conspirators, including certain foreign agents like Bradley and Spratt; the suit, known as the Meerut Conspiracy case, went on for four years and a half, the length of the trial being itself an indication of extensive preparations on both sides.

The Congress was not slow to capture the trade union movement, and Jawaharlal Nehru, who, at Gandhi’s instance, was made General Secretary in 1924, was a convinced socialist. Possibly it was due to the influence of Jawaharlal, towards whom he was being increasingly attracted, that Gandhiji defined his attitude to the prevailing socialist movement, as I have referred to above. In 1928 the Congress opened a Labour Research Department of its own, and in 1929 Jawaharlal Nehru and also his father, the great Motilal, were busy making arrangements for the defence of the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. In 1934 the Socialist Party, which had been formed earlier, joined the Congress. Calling itself the Congress Socialist Party, it tried to maintain its identity as a separate group, while accepting the creed of the Congress. Socialists of a deeper dye joined the Communist Party of India.

In the present context, I shall take the Communists and Socialists together as a new force which grew up in Gandhi’s Congress and outside, with their common programme of con-
centrating attention on the amelioration of the poverty of the masses—the landless peasantry as well as the exploited industrial workers. They did not believe in Gandhi’s non-violence, although those who joined the Congress might desist from their more radical activities for the time being. There was another thing which was to assume some importance as time passed. Armed revolution as well as Gandhian non-violent civil disobedience aimed at the attainment of national independence, but Marxism was an international movement. Some Indian revolutionaries, who later on took to Marxism, had tried to wrest freedom during the First World War; they even sought German assistance in their great venture. But many Marxists, old and new, thought that in the Second World War, in which there was originally almost the same alignment of forces as in the First, there occurred a qualitative change in the character of the war as soon as Germany attacked Russia, for Imperialist Britain became overnight an ally in a People’s War! A point that deserves to be noted is that the old freedom fighters from Aurobindo to Jyotin Mukherji were all inspired by religious devotion, and Gandhiji also was a God-fearing man who believed in non-violence as a religion. But the socialists, national or international, were guided by purely mundane motives.

V

Subhaschandra entered the Congress world in 1921 when Gandhi had become its master; even dissentients like Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru accepted Gandhi’s leadership almost unquestioningly. Das died in 1925, and thereafter Motilal’s dissidence was muted. It is not possible to say how far Motilal’s attitude was influenced by Mahatmaji’s growing fondness for his son. Gandhiji’s principal opponent was British Imperialism, which now did its best to promote the cause of Hindu-Muslim difference to counter Gandhi’s growing influence.

Blind allegiance is bound to produce egotism, and egotism leads to self-deception. Gandhiji wanted what he later on called a ‘homogeneous’ Congress that would act according to his direction, and he mistook the Congressmen’s acquiescence for agreement and their alacrity in obedience for independence
of thought and action. Subhaschandra was made of a different stuff. A devout follower of Vivekananda, whom he openly says he would have accepted as his guru if only Swamiji were alive, Subhaschandra, left to himself, would not see the thing as Mahatmaji saw it. The Hindu-Muslim problem would not occur as a problem to Vivekananda who thought that basically these communities preached the same religion; neither would Subhas and his followers view it in the same light as Gandhi. When Subhas set out on his last great venture, most of his close associates, from his driver Abad Khan to his Commander-in-Chief Shah Nawaz Khan, were Muslims, and although the I.N.A. was not free from bickerings, as no organization can be, it was untouched by communal squabbling. As a follower of Vivekananda, Subhaschandra could have little moral objection to violence, if violence was necessary for the conquest of evil; for him non-violence was only a political weapon of which Mahatmaji had made excellent use—and that was all. No wonder that the gulf between Mahatmaji and Subhas widened from day to day. No one in 1924 could make any mistake about who pushed the laudatory resolution on Gopinath Saha through the Bengal Provincial Conference and also who was behind Chittaranjan’s opposition to it at the A.I.C.C. Mahatmaji is said to have told Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, in 1931 that Subhas was his ‘opponent’ and was capable of ‘denouncing’ him. We may place beside this Subhas Bose’s summing-up of Gandhiji: ‘In contrast with the Deshbandhu, the role of the Mahatma has not been a clear one. In many ways he is altogether an idealist and a visionary. In other respects, he is an astute politician. At times he is obstinate as a fanatic; on other occasions he is liable to surrender like a child.’

Mahatmaji wanted a promise from armed revolutionaries that they would suspend their violent activities to give his non-violent non-co-operation full scope, but after a year or so, in 1922, on account of a stray incident of violence at Chauri-Chaura, with which revolutionary organizations had no connexion, he himself suspended his movement. The revolutionaries, now released from their promise, surveyed the situation and arrived at certain conclusions. This is the inference I have made from ‘sundry contemplation’ of my studies and observations. Mahatma Gandhi had made their task easier by making
revolution open and popular, and this advantage they must utilize and in two ways. First, some of them might join the Congress and non-co-operation, and under cover of peaceful demonstrations, recruit and organize young men for their own cadres. Secondly, in the movement for independence, which was the objective, a time must come when the difference between violence and non-violence would be difficult to draw. So one of their immediate aims was to get a resolution passed in the Congress, defining political independence—complete and unqualified—as the objective of the Indian National Congress. No more quibbling about Swaraj, Home Rule or Responsive Co-operation, but Independence, pure and simple. They got a resolution passed in 1927 at Madras, but it was diluted in 1928 in Calcutta; it was finally ratified in 1929, and after that there was no looking back.

These revolutionaries did not, at any time, lose their faith in violence or become pacifists. Not only did they retain their old convictions; after Chauri-Chaura and the first of Gandhi’s strange ‘surrenders’, they began hatching new plans of action, and there was also a shift in their objective. In 1908—9 Barindra Ghose made an open confession of his activities and some of his associates followed him, all of them saying that their ‘mission [was] over’. So far as I know, Aurobindo, who inspired and directed these revolutionaries, nowhere outlined his theory or plan of armed resistance. In later life, when writing his notes (On Himself), he only said that concerted armed resistance in the early years of the century was not impossible, but he would not lift the veil on what he or others connected with him had planned or attempted. Some writers on the Indian revolutionary movement have expounded Aurobindo’s theory of the human explosive, which means that if here and there a young man or a batch of young men killed unpopular Englishmen and in the process embraced martyrdom, the tremendous effect would help awaken a somnolent nation and thus prepare for a mass upheaval. The idea seems to be somewhat Utopian, but there is no doubt that there was some such notion behind the first ventures, notably the spectacular bomb outrage on Lord Hardinge engineered by Rashbehari Bose. Yet immediately afterwards Rashbehari tried to launch an armed rising with the help of deserting army units but the attempt failed dis-
astrously even before it had started. Jyotin Mukherji planned a large scale rising with foreign assistance, and he made Fort William in Calcutta his first target. If it fell through, it was not for inadequate planning or preparation but on account of developments he could not foresee. But even he was not without his own idea of ‘the human explosive’, for just before his last encounter he is reported to have remarked that before leaving the world, they would do something that would give a shock to their people and stir them to embark on more extensive and more vigorous action. All these ideas and ventures may, I believe, be traced to Vivekananda’s exhortation about a ‘man-making religion’.

I see in these sporadic but sustained activities the emergence of a new idea and a new strategy. That was to take the hated foreign ruler at his word. Government officials called them terrorists but their own Government was based on terrorism, and the revolutionaries would meet terrorism with counter-terrorism. Confining myself to Bengal, I can say that Oaten returned to India but not to the College in which he had been assaulted. As he was given a comfortable berth in the Secretariat, it became a joke even amongst his own colleagues to say that he was ‘kicked upstairs’. After this incident, European officials in the Education Department began to count their days till retirement, and most of them retired prematurely. After the assault on Writers’ Buildings, the formidable mansion looked more like a large prison for white people than an administrative building. As I have written about the matter elsewhere, I would only say that the British bureaucrat, the British trader and the British journalist lived in the midst of luxury and power, but they were practically prisoners in golden cages, and that was because they were terrorized by the so-called terrorists.

VI

In spite of Gandhiji’s suspension of Non-co-operation, he was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment. The revolutionaries now resumed their activities, and although each group had its own organization, there was now greater cohesion between one group and another, thanks mainly to the influence of Subhas-
chandra Bose, who was a mentor to all of them and could with their support play an increasingly important part in the Indian National Congress. There were feuds between different groups, one group supporting J. M. Sen Gupta while the other would support Subhas, but ultimately the differences were resolved and Subhas became the leader of all the militant nationalists in Bengal and all over India. The reader will form an idea of the movement of political thought and action in the twenties and thirties if I refer briefly to a few important incidents and political trials.

On 9 August 1925 there was a train robbery near a small station named Kakori, and although the dacoits escaped safely with the booty, a stray bullet from a revolver carried by them happened to kill a passenger who had come to see his ailing wife in the women’s compartment. The investigations carried on by the police revealed an all-India conspiracy to engineer a national uprising for which the money looted from the train would be needed. The proceedings started by the police culminated in the famous Kakori Conspiracy Case which dragged on for about two years, and ended with the conviction of several persons.

There were certain aspects of the trial which had more than local and temporary significance. First, the elaborate scale on which the revolutionaries conceived their plan shows that they had covered the whole of northern India under what they called the Hindusthan Republican Association. The leaders were Pratul Ganguli of Dacca Anushilan Samiti, Surya Sen of the Chittagong Yugantar group (though he did not take a prominent part here), Sachin Sanyal, the most distinguished revolutionary of Benares, Ramprasad Bismail of Shahjahanpur, Govindachandra Kar of Lucknow and Jogeshchandra Chatterji, who shuttled between one place and another. Also connected with the attempted rising were revolutionaries who became famous later on—Jatin Das, Chandrashekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh. The largest contingent came from U.P.—Shaharanpur, Lucknow, Etawah, Allahabad, Meerut, Etah, Rai Bareilly. It is to be noted that it is these revolutionaries of Bihar, U.P., Punjab and the Frontier Province and beyond who would later on arrange for Subhas Bose’s escape out of India.
A second feature of this far-flung Kakori conspiracy is the infiltration of communist thinking. The Hindusthan Republican Association had a Hindusthan Republican Army, but it soon began to be called Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army. The influence of Socialists was regarded by some with disfavour as may be seen from the continued recriminations between Sachin Sanyal, a staunch nationalist, and Jogesh Chatterji who had pronounced Marxist leanings. Some of these Marxists kept their fingers crossed, co-operating and non-co-operating with the Congress with an eye fixed on the Communist International. Others were keen on giving the nationalist movement a socio-economic bias, but would have no further truck with internationalism.

A striking feature of the Kakori case was the brutality of the sentences awarded. The overt acts were no more than a train dacoity which involved the accidental killing of a man who had come out to attend to his ailing wife travelling in another compartment. Yet on the basis of information supplied by a professional spy and supported by two approvers, the Judges hanged three men and sentenced four to transportation for life and thirteen others to rigorous imprisonment ranging from four to ten years. The monstrosity of the punishment was commented on by newspapers, and some elderly people might have nostalgically thought of the days of judges like Lawrence Jenkins, C. P. Beachcroft and Saradacharan Mitra. To me the sentences seem to indicate the panic-stricken mood of the bureaucracy—judges, magistrates and policemen.

The most refreshing feature of the proceedings was the attitude of Ashfaqulla, the only Muslim member of the group, who went underground, was arrested after a year, and then in a separate trial sentenced to death. In course of interrogation, the authorities tried to win him over by saying that the revolutionaries, who were led by Ramprasad, were Hindus, and as a Muslim he should not work for Hindu Raj, because that would be against his faith and against the interests of his community. Ashfaq’s reply was memorable: ‘Ramprasad is not a Hindu to me; he is a Hindusthani. Not Hindu freedom but Hindusthan’s freedom is his objective. Had he been inspired by Hindu freedom, even then I would have joined hands with him. If I were to choose between Hindu masters and British masters
..., I would have chosen the Hindu masters as after all they would have been Indians' (quoted from Jogeshchandra Chatterji: In Search of Freedom). Here, if anywhere outside Vivekananda’s speeches, we have the authentic ring of Vivekananda’s voice. This was towards the end of 1927.

On 8 April 1929 Bhagat Singh and his friend Batukeshwar Datta created a sensation by dropping leaflets and bombs on the floor of the Central Assembly. Bhagat Singh had already a warrant of arrest issued against him on a charge of murdering Saunders, a police official, in December 1928, and he and his associates Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to death. Jatin Das, who along with these Punjab revolutionaries had been implicated in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, embraced death by hunger-strike on 13 September 1929 on the issue of better treatment of political prisoners. What is significant is that there was now a perceptible change in the attitude of the Congress—and also of Mahatma. Gandhiji, when starting the Civil Disobedience Movement in April 1930, said in course of a prefatory speech, ‘The British rule in India has brought about moral, material and cultural ruination of this country. I am out to destroy this system.’ He spoke like a violent revolutionary, though his action was non-violent. When after his release in 1931 Gandhiji was asked to see the Viceroy and negotiate a pact, he did, under the influence of his own followers, press for the commutation of the death sentence on Bhagat Singh and his comrades. He failed to persuade the Viceroy and the executions took place on 23–24 March. At the Congress Session held at Karachi a week after, Gandhiji had to face a black flag demonstration and then hold a ‘peace-talk’ with Subhas Bose, the leader of the Nawjawan Sabha to which Bhagat Singh and his friends belonged. At the open session, a condolence resolution on these martyrs was passed immediately after the resolution mourning the death of Motilal Nehru and Mohammed Ali. This shows that by then we had travelled a long way in seven years from the day when the A.I.C.C. passed a resolution condemning the patriotic but violent act of Gopinath Saha. Gandhi and Subhas seemed to be coming nearer each other.

It was in 1930, when Gandhiji was absorbed in the Civil Disobedience movement, that the port town of Chittagong
in East Bengal was rocked by a violent revolutionary uprising led by Surya Sen, popularly known as Masterda. At one time secretary of the local Congress Committee, he had, under cover of non-violent educational and political work, planned and executed a large-scale raid on what was one of the principal centres of British trade, making the white men, official and non-official, quake in their shoes. Much has been written about this uprising, and I witnessed its aftermath with my own eyes. To my mind this was another example of British terrorism cowed by the counter-terrorism of a band of dedicated and determined revolutionaries.

Some other significant incidents took place in the early thirties. After advancing towards the Extremists, Gandhiji took a step backwards and suggested an amendment to the Congress Constitution, substituting ‘truthful and non-violent’ for ‘peaceful and legitimate’ means. He also issued a statement in 1934 suspending the Civil Disobedience Movement. To Subhas Bose, who was then in Europe, this suspension was a weak-kneed surrender. It was now that Mahatmaji also cut off his connexion with the Congress and announced it at the open session in Bombay. It is curious but significant that although not a member of the Congress, he continued to guide its deliberations for another decade, until Independence was assured. Does it not show that his immediate followers had not then come of age and could not take any decision on their own? On the other hand, from what Subhas saw in Europe he took heart for the struggle which he thought could not be far off, and he must have been encouraged by the first session of the Congress Socialists, which was held at Patna in 1934. He knew that these men would be with him in the use of means that were ‘legitimate’ rather than ‘non-violent’.

The rest of the story—eventful, exciting and tortuous—has been told many times over and may, for the purposes of the present review, be summarized in a few sentences. Subhaschandra Bose came back to India to reorganize the various groups that acknowledged his leadership and to mobilize them for the coming showdown—first at the Congress. Gandhiji, who had earlier described Subhas as his ‘opponent’, and who, in spite of his professed retirement, was the real master of the Congress, came to stay at the house of the Boses and offered
Subhas the Presidency of the session to be held at Haripura in 1938. It was in this manner that he had won over Jawaharlal Nehru in 1929, but Subhas, who was made of sterner stuff, accepted the offer and used his Presidency for a survey of the political situation and the alignment of forces in the Congress, and then made himself ready for a confrontation. He stood as a candidate for the office of President in 1939 and got elected, defeating Gandhiji’s nominee. The Second World War had started, and Subhas proposed in a brief Presidential speech that an ‘ultimatum’ be served on the British Indian Government, asking them to hand over power to Indians within six months. Subhas Bose was outmanoeuvred and replaced by a more pliant President with a ‘homogeneous’ Working Committee. Subhas escaped out of India and made arrangements for returning home with the assistance of Britain’s enemies and at the head of an Indian National Army. This daring venture sent a thrill throughout India and the man most affected was the apostle of non-violence—the Mahatma himself, whose changed attitude was disconcerting even to Sir Stafford Cripps, who came to India as the plenipotentiary of the British Cabinet. Mahatmaji seemed to have been transformed; on 9 August 1942 he served an ultimatum on the British Government, which is popularly known as the Quit India Resolution and which the Congress endorsed at his behest.

Two parallel lines seemed to have met; and as the I.N.A. under Subhas Bose approached from the eastern side with Japanese assistance, there was sabotage on a large scale in India, in which the dividing line between violence and non-violence was effaced, an important part being taken by followers of the Congress. As Viceroy Wavell aptly twitted Congress President Maulana Azad, husband Asaf Ali was a member of the non-violent Working Committee while his wife Aruna Asaf Ali had gone underground and caused large-scale scuttling of Indo-British war efforts. What was more important, the advance of the Indian National Army helped undermine greatly the loyalty of the Indian forces under the Commander-in-Chief. By itself this did not bring independence, but as I have shown elsewhere, it was one of the four factors which combined to drive the British out of India.

When Subhas Bose marched towards India, the slogan was
'On to Delhi'. That army had to withdraw, and Subhas left to others the task of unfurling the flag of Indian independence at the Red Fort, from where the last Indian ruler, Emperor Bahadur Shah, had been transported to Burma after the Mutiny. The ceremony that was held on 15 August 1947 at Delhi might, in Vivekananda's language, be described as the 'Vengeance of History'.
CHAPTER 10

Today and Tomorrow

After a prolonged struggle India became independent in August 1947 through negotiations carried on for about four years from 1942 to 1946. The freedom thus won aroused mixed feelings, of joy at getting rid of foreign domination and sorrow because two large slices in the northwest and the northeast had to be sacrificed to the newly created state of Pakistan. The negotiations were carried on from India’s side by leaders of the Congress who were followers of Mahatma Gandhi, but Gandhi himself was opposed to the vivisection of the country. A man who for about three decades had fought for Hindu–Muslim unity had now to witness the spectacle of the country partitioned on the basis of the insuperable lack of unity between Hindus and Muslims. But I believe he was himself partly to blame for this tragi-comic dénouement, because he had, at the start of the campaign, mixed up the problem of Indian independence with the retention of the territorial possessions of a different country, an untenable innovation in India’s political history. Swami Vivekananda, to whom Mahatmaji expressed his gratitude in unequivocal terms, would not have understood this division of the people who lived on this side of the river Indus or Sindhu, who had a basic common religion, with many sectarian differences, and who for centuries had lived together under a common administration.

Mahatmaji was a deeply religious man who tried to follow his religion scrupulously in his daily life, and he gave exposition to it in his writings as also in his daily prayer-meetings. After the Partition and the carnage which accompanied it—his immediate followers did not foresee and later could do little to stop it—these prayer meetings became a superfluous, and one day it was while on his way to a prayer meeting that he was shot dead by a Hindu fanatic who was deeply distressed by the massacres that might have been avoided. Maulana Azad says that some people, including a member of the Working Com-
mittee, complained against Vallabhbhai Patel that as the Head of the Home Department Patel did not make adequate arrangements for the Mahatma’s safety.

Mahatma Gandhi was dead within six months of the attainment of freedom, and he received the honorific of the Father of the Nation. Requiescat—there let him rest in peace. His disciples, whom in the Working Committee he had guided for about two decades, now proceeded to the work of governing and rebuilding the country. In course of the survey that follows, I shall generally refer only to Jawaharlal Nehru, who became Prime Minister and whom Mahatmaji, affectionately called Bapuji, had been grooming for the task from 1924 when he was made General Secretary of the Congress. I shall refer to him because he was the most vocal member of Mahatmaji’s ‘homogeneous’ group, and he was certainly the first among a body of equals. Jawaharlal Nehru did not believe in religion, which, he thought, was only a mass of rituals. ‘We have to get rid of that narrowing religious outlook, that obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculations, that loosening of the mind’s discipline in religious ceremonial and mystical emotionalism which comes in the way of our understanding ourselves and the world.’

No wonder Nehru wanted to establish a sovereign secular State, free, as far as possible, from speculation about heaven and hell. Vivekananda also had severely condemned mysticism and occultism. ‘Mysticism’ is a controversial word, but ‘occultism’ is easier to grasp; it always betokens something super-natural. Vivekananda never referred to a heaven above the earth, neither did he believe in a God who created and dominated the universe. Nehru was interested also in socialism, by which is meant a form of social organization that advocates the ownership and control of the means of production, capital, land, property, etc. by the community as a whole, and an equitable distribution of the national income among all classes of people. In India people had been woefully impoverished during two centuries of British rule, when the country had been administered in the interests of a foreign power and of a few natives who helped to sustain that power and enriched themselves by utilizing the opportunities created by this process of exploitation. Vivekananda, though no blind admirer of the material
prosperity of the West, gave a call for an unremitting war on the grinding poverty he saw around him in India. Nehru, too, was so keenly alive to this aspect of the problem that when heckled for his acceptance of the Partition, he said that they had become weary of endless negotiations which were delaying the introduction of their ‘economic policies’. Nehru’s daughter, who succeeded her father in 1966—the brief interregnum of Lal Bahadur Shastri may be left out of account—piously carried on the tradition of her father. Not satisfied with mere practice, she amended the Constitution of India in 1972 (forty-second amendment) by adding the adjectives ‘secular’ and ‘socialist’ to the Preamble so that India became in theory, as it had already become in practice, a sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic.

On stepping into the corridors of power in September 1946, Nehru, however, seems to have forgotten his old passion for economic reform and seized on the External Affairs portfolio. India was then a dominion directly administered by His Majesty through the Secretary of State for India, and the Viceroy, who, as the title indicates, was His Majesty’s representative on the spot. India could, at that time, have no direct relations with foreign powers, and the Viceroy’s Executive Council had no Member in charge of External Affairs; only the Viceroy had a Foreign Secretary directly under him. In 1946 Viceroy Wavell had merely agreed to desist from exercising his special powers and to accept the decisions of his new Council; but he had never thought of creating such a portfolio, and indeed, with mixed feelings of consternation and amusement, he reported to the Secretary of State that the Vice-President had begun to send his personal representatives at Government expense to foreign countries! Obviously the Vice-President had not learnt how to wait and ponder.

In less than two months (2 September–26 October) the Muslim League joined the Interim Government, and immediately there was friction on the question of the allocation of portfolios. The Viceroy wanted to give one important portfolio to the Muslim League and nobody could say that the proposal was unfair. But what were the important portfolios? Home, Finance, Defence and External Affairs. Nehru would not hand over the External Affairs portfolio to the League, neither would
Sardar Patel budge an inch from Home. As Wavell had decided on giving Defence neither to a Hindu nor to a Muslim, but to the Sikh member, there remained Finance which went to Liaquat Ali, leader of the Muslim League contingent. How Liaquat Ali, assisted by Chowdhury Mohammed Ali, used the Finance portfolio as a means of checkmating the ‘Hindu Congress’ until its leaders were finally persuaded to agree to a division of the country has been told too often to need recounting here. I mention this only to show that if the leaders were really interested in the economic development of a poor country, they would not have parted with the Finance portfolio so cavalierly.

II

Installed in power in a truncated India, the Congress members did not address themselves to the task of solving the internal problems of conquering poverty or illiteracy. They had set up a Constituent Assembly on 6 December 1946, which deliberated for about three years and then drafted a Constitution to which the members swore allegiance towards the end of November 1949 so that it might come into force on 26 January 1950. Till then India, which now was rechristened the Indian Union, was governed by a Governor-General—first Lord Mountbatten, then Chakravorti Rajagopalachari, from whom Rajendra Prasad took over in 1950. The first elections in free India were held in 1952. Looking back, it seems that the whole exercise was uncalled for. As soon as the decision to divide India into the Indian Union and Pakistan had been taken and the division effected, the members of the existing Central Assembly might have addressed themselves to the task of governing India under the old rules, making such changes—like the introduction of joint electorates or integration of the native states—as might be necessary. Earlier, that was the step urged upon the British Government by the American President F. D. Roosevelt, who said that at the time of the American Revolution and immediately after its successful completion, the Colonies began administering the country under a temporary arrangement, making changes here and there, and then after the experience of a few years, a written Constitution came into being. Britain
did not heed that advice, because in a negotiated settlement she would be able to get rid of the white man's burden by finally driving a wedge between the two warring communities. But having accepted that arrangement, it was up to the new Indian rulers first to effect a recovery from the disaster of a man-made famine, the ravages of war and the traumatic experience of the exchange of population, particularly in Punjab and Bengal and also in Sind.

There was no obstacle to making the necessary changes, for even the rulers of the native states were for quite some time retained as Rajpramukhs; and even after the abolition of the office of Rajpramukh they were for a long time given a substantial privy purse. But Sardar Patel must go down in history as the masterful architect of the Integration of States, and Nehru, who took a much larger view, wanted to dominate the world's stage as a statesman comparable to Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. That is why before trying to solve any of the grim problems facing the country, he imposed on the starving nation a grandiose General Election which was gratuitous and expensive. As far back as 1885, when a handful of men met in Bombay, they called their gathering the Indian National Congress, and whatever its limitations, it maintained its national character ever since; and even Swami Vivekananda, who did not have much respect for its work, had a word of praise for it because of its all-India outlook. The British rulers saw this too, and tried to tarnish its national image by sponsoring the establishment of the All India Muslim League, and then by imposing on the country the vicious system of separate electorates for Muslims. All important people among non-Muslims protested against it, but only Aurobindo Ghose suggested the boycotting of these new Councils. By gradual steps separate electorates led to two separate countries, but after this operation the Congress became, in spite of the existence of small non-Congress parties, a truly national institution once again. Jawaharlal Nehru knew very well that the party of which he was the head would return to power, and yet he went through the costly exercise of a general election in imitation of British Parliamentary elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. Although Great Britain was smaller and less populous than his own province of U.P., it had reached its present stage
of democracy through centuries of gradual development. It was a gratuitous infliction on a people largely poor and illiterate, no matter how it might raise Nehru’s image abroad as the head of the world’s largest democracy.

And he did not stop to consider that the election would be a highly expensive affair for the Government and more so for his party, which would have to contest all the seats and return a large number of candidates, the majority of them unable to invest even a fraction of the minimum expenditure necessary for entering the legislative bodies, provincial and central. Although the majority of the population were and continue to be poor, and the politicians by and large were not rich, there were then—as there are now—a minority of rich men who would be only too glad to foot the bill provided they could get an adequate return. It was these men who had at one time helped, first, Mahatmaji’s Sabarmati Ashram and then the struggling Congress with donations. But now these industrialists began to invest money in political enterprises, that is to say, supply funds to Congress and also other parties with a view to extracting the maximum profit out of their investment. And from money to black money, it is but one step. Not that Jawaharlal Nehru did not see the stranglehold of black money on the country’s economy, because he, who before assuming power is reported to have said that he would hang hoarders and blackmarketeers on the nearest lamp-post, did not mention the subject during his seventeen years of office.

III

It was Jawaharlal Nehru’s administration of the External Affairs ministry and his Constitution that proved most ruinous to the country. These Greek gifts have been the greatest drag on our economy and polity. Even before assuming office as Prime Minister, Jawaharlal had, as I have pointed out already, begun sending plenipotentiaries abroad. On becoming Prime Minister of a large and independent country, he began establishing expensive embassies far and wide without stopping to consider how far they would serve the interests of the half-starved millions of India. Most of these embassies were only luxurious establishments which had little business to transact.
Sarat Bose drew pointed attention to the extravagance of this exercise, but Subhas Bose being dead, his brother’s voice carried little weight. Even where embassies might be necessary, as in England, France, China, Russia and America, for example, these establishments should have been planned on a modest scale. There was a time when on account of difficulties and delays in travel and communication, ambassadors had often to take decisions on the spot and had thus to play an important role in the administration. But with modern facilities in communication, when heads of Governments can directly speak to one another and send wireless messages, the area of ambassadorial activity has shrunk considerably; the ambassadors are only observers who have also to deliver messages and send reports. Unfortunately, even this one important function the Indian ambassador failed to discharge adequately on the one critical occasion in free India’s history, and that might have been one of the causes of the Chinese disaster of 1962.

While the External Affairs ministry bears the palm, each ministry is lavish and wasteful in its way, and he that runs may read that our finances are in the doldrums. War on poverty is on our lips, but there is all-round extravagance at the top and grinding poverty below, with all normal canons of balancing income and expenditure thrown to the winds. We all knew that prices depended on the ratio between supply and demand, but in free India we are getting accustomed to bumper harvests followed by no effect or sometimes an adverse effect on rising prices. In the old days there were seasonal changes in prices, but now we find that once there is a rise in prices, there is often no sign of their coming down. Every public declaration that there is a fall in the wholesale price index, or that inflation has been checked, or that money supply has been restricted is followed by an announcement that additional instalments of dearness allowance have become due—an open confession that Government is unwilling or unable to control the national economy.

In the face of this amazing prodigality and the failure to control prices and check the growth of population, all plans and programmes seem to be empty fribble. In spite of six Plans, unemployment and poverty are growing by leaps and bounds. Our witty Ditcher in the Capital pertinently comments, ‘Take
a pinch of fantasy, add some day-dreams, garnish with wishful thinking, serve with optimistic assumptions as sauce and there you have our Five Year Plans.' The Plans were inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru, who wanted to compete with the democratic U.S.A. and the socialist U.S.S.R., but they have gone awry. His daughter sensed that the nation was hungry for a new message, and she fed it with her 20-point programme and a new 20-point programme, but the programmes have become as stale as the plans, and I wonder if the Prime Minister herself now takes them seriously. I would just reproduce some telling figures mentioned in a talk over the All-India Radio by one of our distinguished elder economists. According to this survey, towards the end of the Sixth Plan, 48 per cent of the population, nearly 32 crores, live below the poverty line; of the total national income one-third is controlled by 10 per cent at the top and the remaining two-thirds are shared by 90 per cent, including the 48 per cent below the poverty line. Furthermore, the number of unemployed people registered with the employment exchanges is 20 million and there must be another 10 million not registered. In spite of all our talk of universal compulsory primary education, 64 per cent of the population are still illiterate. The target of the annual national growth rate was 5 per cent, but no more than 3 per cent was attained, and even this was offset by a population growth of 2.25 per cent, so that the net progress is negligible and the economy may be said to be stagnant, in spite of loud proclamations to the contrary.

IV

Jawaharlal Nehru says in his Autobiography that democracy and capitalism are incompatible, but the expensive and complex administrative and political machinery which he imposed on a poor and largely illiterate nation has only succeeded in consummating this misalliance. As will be clear from the above statistics, which are derived from Governmental reports, 10 per cent of the population hold the other 90 per cent in bondage; the disparity will be even greater if we take into account the grim wolf of black money with his privy paw daily devouring whatever is left for the unemployed and underemployed majority. The three pillars of democracy are the Legislature,
the Executive and the Judiciary, and their functions are defined loosely and vaguely in a Constitution, for which the draftsmen are not to blame; for no one can precisely state what the framers had not clearly thought out. Politically, the most dubious concept for India was parliamentary democracy on adult franchise, which, in Britain, a small and prosperous country, had taken about five hundred years to reach its present stage. Any man of common sense would have taken a few minutes to realize that such an expensive experiment in a poor, largely illiterate country would bring all parties under the grip of businessmen and industrialists, who alone had the means to finance the enterprise. I have already said that their attitude had by this time undergone a change; the benefactors who at one time had given ex gratia donations now came forward as investors who demanded their pound of flesh, and soon there grew up a new class of entrepreneurs who found that a more profitable but slightly roundabout way lay through the black market. This market is black, but its pensioners are well known, and under their protection the energetic entrepreneurs can organize ‘lobbies’ which enable them to exert pressure on the government and make huge profits. The Executive is drawn from the Legislatures, and so these two pillars of democracy in a largely uneducated and desperately poor country can safely be managed through investments made by big money.

There remained the third pillar—the Judiciary, which might occasionally create inconvenience, but it too can be reduced to the position of an onlooker. I believe that most judges are honest, though one cannot but have occasional qualms. For example, I once read reports about some discussions in the Supreme Court about the transfer of Chief Justices of some High Courts. I do not precisely remember whether their Lordships were sitting on a Committee or on a Division Bench, but one thing struck me as peculiar. There were reported differences amongst them about who should be transferred and who should be left undisturbed. So the question was one of personalities and not of principles, as is being made out now. Yet it is not a question of individual honesty, although that is not unimportant, but the whole system is now on trial. Why?

The judicial system is held together by two sets of people, both belonging to the legal profession—judges on the Bench
and advocates of the Bar. The judges are generally promising and relatively young advocates, who, in consideration of their ability and character, have been raised to the Bench. The Bar is dominated by senior advocates who, by reason of their exceptional ability and varied experience, have risen to the top of the profession. They charge fabulous fees, flit from one court to another, from state to state and from lower courts to the Supreme Court. As judges are required to deliver judgements only after giving due consideration to the arguments advanced by both parties, these advocates, experienced and resourceful, can stall the process of justice by getting adjournments, stay orders, ad interim injunctions, sometimes taking advantage of divergent decisions under the same Act in different courts, and in this way, although the number of judges has increased all along the line from the lower judiciary to the Supreme Court, the number of pending suits has increased at a much faster pace. The legal process has thus become not only ruinously expensive but also extremely dilatory, resulting virtually in a denial of justice to many poor and helpless victims of oppression, exploitation, violence and cruelty. While our Constitution proclaims the equality of all men before the eye of law, in practice we find that here, as in other spheres of our social, political and economic life, this claim is a huge hoax.

V

Jawaharlal Nehru believed in secularism and socialism, and he also admitted that he derived his faith in these objectives from the Marxists. He differed from them on only one point, and that was their insistence on violence. As he felt that socialism was attainable through the consensus of the people whose fate was now in his hands, he introduced the system of parliamentary democracy with what effect on the economy I have summed up above.

It might be useful to examine the philosophic basis of the secular and socialist doctrines Nehru derived from Marxism. The starting-point of Marx's philosophy is materialism which rejects all forms of religion. 'In simple words, I hate the pack of gods'—this is the title quite appropriately chosen by G. Volkov for the first essay on Marx's thought in his authoritative
handbook Birth of a Genius. Marx (1818–1883) was a man of massive scholarship, and he took almost all knowledge for his province. His influence on thought and action in the twentieth century is enormous. Two of the largest countries in the world today—Russia and China, though they differ very much in their attitudes and actions, swear by Marx, and the impact of his thought on many other countries also is perceptible, even palpable. Marx claims to be a scientific and rational analyst of history and his devotees regard him as an infallible prophet. It will be necessary, therefore, to examine the basic tenets of a philosophy that has exercised so much influence on our political and economic thought. Marx’s secularism may be best expressed in his own words: ‘It is not the consciousness of man that determines his existence—rather, it is his social existence that determines his consciousness.’ Here there is a basic flaw, because without consciousness existence is possible, but not social existence which contemplates men and women as consciously coming together. While proclaiming the sole existence and authority of matter, Marx said: ‘The ideal is nothing more than the material when it has been transferred and translated into the human brain.’ It is the duty and responsibility of science to show how changes are effected; that is why science makes large use of demonstrative experiments. But Marx has nowhere shown how matter absorbed by the brain can be translated into its opposite—the immaterial idea.

There is the same grandeur, the same large-heartedness and the same incompleteness in all other pronouncements of Marx. Philosophers, Marx said, have done enough to know the world; it was time to change it. But although, as the Marxists claim, he came to England with his revolutionary ideas formed, as is manifest from his Manuscripts of 1844, he spent a goodly decade or so in the British Museum to finalize his ideas and programmes embodied in Das Kapital, which was not published until 1867. In fact, man knows the world as he changes it, and he changes the world as he knows it. This is proved unmistakably by Marx’s own admission and that of his collaborator Engels, whom he called his alter ego. In the famous Communist Manifesto, issued by Marx and Engels in 1847–48, they proclaimed that they believed in a violent disruption of the capitalist world, but having watched the progress of
capitalist reforms in England, where many of the objectives outlined in the Manifesto had been already attained, Marx admitted, with characteristic nobility and characteristic incompleteness, in a letter to Hyndman (d. 8 Dec. 1880); ‘If you say that you do not share the views of my party for England I can only reply that that party considers an English revolution not necessary, but—according to historic precedents—possible.’ Engels is reported to have written in a similar vein in the preface to the first edition of the English translation of *Das Kapital*. This admission shakes the foundation of the Marxist edifice and makes the communist revolution an unnecessary exercise in violence.

I might refer to other undesirable aspects of Marxist thought which made an onslaught on traditional values. The Communist Manifesto declares that in the coming struggle between capitalists and the proletariat, the latter have nothing to lose but their chains, and they have the whole world to conquer. But the authors did not realize that the proletariat had many other things to lose—their sense of responsibility and with it their ‘obligation to work’, which, from its context in the Manifesto, was meant for the chastening of the idle rich who are to be eliminated. But Marx and Engels did not fully realize that the capitalist shark might be replaced by the proletariat shirker.

Starting from a fanciful premise that it is not consciousness that determines life but life that determines consciousness, Marx arrives at conclusions that are patently contradictory. The fact is that there is a perpetual interplay between circumstances or laws of nature and consciousness, neither succeeding in dominating the other. From Marx’s failure to recognize this interaction stems the self-contradictory Marxist dictum that freedom is the recognition of necessity, but by its definition freedom means getting out of the compulsion of necessity, and necessity also is a clog on liberty that tends towards licence. If the recognition of necessity were the criterion of freedom, the manacled slave would be the most free man in the world, because at every step he would relish the benefits of necessity.

Marx was a large-hearted philanthropist and a grand visionary who deeply felt the sufferings of poor people as few thinkers have done, and dreamt in a grand way of ameliorating
their condition. But he was an incomplete and unscientific thinker, because whenever he had to explain how the desired transformation would be consummated, he fumbled. If I can borrow Dantesque phraseology, I might say that Marx contemplated three stages: First, the feudalist-capitalist Inferno; the second stage would be the Socialist Purgatorio, where the united struggle of the proletariat would eliminate the idle rich and establish the socialist state which would purge away profiteers and rebels, and this would lead to the stateless, classless, self-administered communist Paradiso, where, Engels assures us, the state would ‘wither away’. But a state that has seized power by violence naturally refuses to wither away except before a show of superior violence, and what is worse, far from uniting, the liberated workers of the world are ranged in different camps, each anxious to eliminate difference by violence, and all swearing by Marxism, which, as Bernard Shaw pertinently pointed out, has become a religion which it is difficult to regard as reasoned philosophy.

VI

Our India was conceived as a secular, socialist state on the Russian model. The idea was Jawaharlal Nehru’s, though he did not approve of the violent way prescribed by Marx and adopted by Lenin. I do not know why Jawaharlal, who spoke so much of secularism and socialism, did not use them in the Preamble to our Constitution, but, as I have said, his daughter has dutifully completed her father’s work through an amendment. From his early days Jawaharlal had cultivated what he himself called a secular attitude, which was, in fact, an attitude of indifference to all religions. As he himself said, he did not want to look beyond the earth, and thought that all its problems should be tackled rationally and scientifically. Though he sought support for this attitude in the teachings of Vivekananda, who was opposed to ‘occultism and mysticism’—and this also is what Nehru meant by secularism—he failed to grasp the import of Vivekananda’s teaching, which he knew at second hand, mostly through Romain Rolland. It is a fact that Swamiji did not believe in a heaven beyond the earth, but it would be wrong to say that Vivekananda’s attitude was secular or materialistic; although he praised Western materialism, it
was part of Vivekananda's greatness that he rose above secularism.

Here I need not go to the origins of the word 'secular', and shall content myself with its significance in current usage. The C.O.D. records two meanings of the word—'worldly' and 'sceptical', and both shades of meaning will be clear if we remember its use in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book XII):

> Then shall they seek to avail themselves of names
> Places and titles, and with this to joine
> *Secular* power, though feigning still to act
> By *spiritual* . . . (italics mine)

So secularism is that which seeks names, places, titles and wealth; its opposite is not religiosity but 'spirituality'. 'The strength of India', says our newest political leader, 'lies in the fact that all religions are equal here.' But this secular attitude, which stems from a basic scepticism towards spiritual values, is also our weakness. All religions are equal only in the sense that they try to comprehend the Absolute through symbols, which, without the basic 'spirituality' emphasized by Swamiji, are only material objects. Once you fail to grasp this underlying truth, you will fear religions like hobgoblins and will live as readily with communal frenzy as with mounting corruption. Once the Gandhi cap was the insignia of rectitude and courage, but is it not today looked upon as a badge of hypocrisy and chicanery? For us all religions are equal, because we do not believe in spirituality which is the soul of Religion.

Socialism, made popular in the modern world by Saint Simon (1760–1825), Fourier (1772–1832) and Robert Owen (1804–1892), is a tricky concept of which no one has been able to give an acceptable definition. 'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs', said Marx, but Lenin replaced it by 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.' Bernard Shaw rejects both the formulas. 'To each according to his needs' would produce a race of men of whom Shaw drew a typical portrait in Alfred Doolittle, who represents the 'undeserving poor'; he eats as much as any deserving person and drinks a lot more. The objection to Lenin's formula is that it is impossible to make an equitable assessment of work; secondly, it would multiply classes and sharpen class distinctions. Shaw argues that the
only alternative left is that all should be paid equally in a socialist state. But as this tendency is gaining ground, we find that it is a ‘disincentive’, and production is likely to suffer if energy and initiative are not adequately rewarded. Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter, the two greatest leaders in free India, often talk of socialism, but neither of them has, so far as I am aware, defined it precisely.

VII

What has been said above will show that modern, post-Independence India has turned its back on Vivekananda’s teaching, which its leaders have not cared to ponder. At the risk of reiterating what I have said in some detail earlier, I would remind the reader that the cardinal point in Vivekananda’s many lectures and essays and letters is that every nation has a ‘theme’ or mission, and India’s mission is spirituality, by which he did not mean looking to a God above as creator and ruler, but cultivating the moral values which are independent of intellectual disciplines. He was grateful to Western materialism for helping to throw open the doors of life to everyone, for teaching us to conquer nature by instilling into us the virtues of discipline and organization, and also for throwing open to discussion the treasures hidden in our own scriptures. But all this is only supplementary to self-realization, to the discovery that the Absolute is the Spirit within us (Soham), Thou Art That (Tat Tvamasi). Using a picturesque metaphor, he said that the Tartar we have caught is within us. This is very different from Jawaharlal Nehru’s exposition of Vivekananda’s teaching in The Discovery of India and in a lecture on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda which he delivered on the occasion of his visit to the Delhi Ramakrishna Mission on 20 March 1949, and also from Nehru’s own views, which are largely derived from Marxist materialism.

Another important point where modern Indian leaders depart from Vivekananda’s teaching is in their craze for internationalism and in their obsessive desire to play a part on the world stage. This is spectacular but suicidal and also productive of self-deception, because it leads us to fancy that we are solving our problems when we are really fighting shy of them. In the
Mission lecture referred to in the preceding paragraph, Nehru argues that Vivekananda’s nationalism was international. Far from it. Although as a religious teacher Vivekananda expounded a philosophy which all creeds might accept, he never thought of propagating a universal religion; to him the idea was as fantastic as the founding of a universal empire. While with his philosophy of Advaita, which proclaims the divinity and solidarity of all human beings, he was concerned with the betterment of man everywhere, materially and morally, by nationalism Vivekananda understood only one thing and that was attachment to the motherland. As Sister Nivedita said, India was the ‘queen of his adoration’.

‘So long as the millions die in hunger and ignorance,’ Vivekananda had declared, ‘I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them!’ It is because we have departed from his teaching, which laid such stress on the conquest of illiteracy and poverty, that we have wasted our energy and money on grandiose projects that have nothing to do with the basic needs of the common man in India. Indeed, our neglect of these problems has been so criminal that when our leaders now talk of conquering poverty or educating the masses, nobody takes them seriously. ‘Millions of rupees’, said Vivekananda in 1894, ‘have been spent only that the temple-doors at Varanasi or Vrindaban may play at opening and shutting all day long! . . . And all this while the living god is dying for food, for want of education!’ If Vivekananda had been alive in 1983, he would have made exactly the same comment, only replacing temples of Varanasi and Vrindaban by the acrobatics at the Asiad, the inanities at the Non-Aligned Meet or the extravagant hospitality at the conclave of the Heads of a moribund Commonwealth.

All our projects come out limping and all our grand visions fade into nothingness because we have failed to come to grips with our real problems.

VIII

I have drawn a bleak picture of independent India, but it was unavoidable. The freedom that we accepted about four decades
ago was itself born of a supercilious disregard of patriotic values. The nation came into its own only by consenting to sacrifice a part of itself. It is this mentality, this lack of faith in our strength or lack of attachment to the motherland that has led us from one unreality to another. All this has happened because we strayed away from Swamiji’s ideal of spirituality for the make-shifts of diplomacy. No wonder the nation mistook glib promises for performance, expediency for principles and tawdry splendour for inner strength. But cynicism, which suffers from an inner contradiction, soon becomes cynical about itself, and it must ultimately veer round to Swamiji’s ‘perennial philosophy’, his ‘man-making religion’, which takes all Existence (sat), matter and mind, Good and Evil, in its stride; it is this comprehensiveness which is knowledge (chit), and this knowledge is the source of happiness and joy (ananda).

No one has spoken more eloquently than Vivekananda of the salutary effects of material science or secular education, which has helped to rid us of superstition and the stranglehold of ‘privilege’. But unless secular thinking is illumined by spiritual education, we shall commit the blunders that have brought the West to the brink of disaster. Modern Western civilization, with its stockpiling of arms, is basically a civilization of fear, and the way of life it has brought into fashion cannot give peace and happiness.

To my mind, not the least important aspect of Vivekananda’s philosophy and programmes is the enunciation of priorities. First in importance is universal education, which must be both secular and spiritual. Independent India’s most grievous blunder was to start with an enormous political machinery for its people, the majority of whom were not only ignorant but illiterate. There can be no uniform criterion of education, but as far as possible, all men should have equal opportunity, and education should be both secular and spiritual, with the proviso that spiritual education should not be confused with the teaching of any particular creed, but that it should enable the learner to realize the value and limitation of all creeds, and above all, the primacy of spirit over matter.

The second priority is economic betterment, which should go hand in hand with the dissemination of knowledge. The aim of economic activity should be to give sufficiency to people
of all classes. In the preceding pages, I have considered the views of three of the greatest socialists of the modern world—Marx, Lenin and Bernard Shaw—and shown that not only did these socialists differ from one another but none had clear and cogent ideas on the proper distribution of wealth. Unhampered by any dogma, Vivekananda thought clearly on the subject and gave the right guidelines to our economists. Everybody expects reward for his work, but if he is properly educated, he would be aware also of his altruistic instincts; he would never forget that we do good work mainly because it is good to do good. The balance between self-gratification and renunciation would vary from man to man, but it would not be difficult to arrive at a norm if sufficient stress is laid on spiritual education. In this way we shall be able to establish a socialistic society in which equality will coexist with inequality.

And third in order of priority will be the evolution of a political system that will be subject to modification from time to time, but our principal objective will be to avoid the Scylla of tyranny and the Charybdis of corruption. This may at first sound Utopian, but it will not be difficult to compass if we remember that although all men strive to make their own fortunes, no man is a mere bundle of selfish impulses, that it will not matter if some enterprising people are given adequate incentives for their initiative provided no one is allowed to starve and no tyrant is allowed to throttle freedom of thought, expression or association. Then we shall be able to say with Shelley:

The world’s great age begins anew,
The golden years return,

Another [India] shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath like sunset to the skies
The splendour of its prime.