CHAPTER - IV

GANDHI'S IDEA'S AND HIS ROLE IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: 1915-28
CHAPTER - IV

GANDHI’S IDEAS AND HIS ROLE IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: 1915-28

From the previous chapter on formative years of M.K. Gandhi, it becomes sufficiently evident that he was a unique personality. He had his own perception, vision and ideas on almost every important issue he was confronted with. On one side, his ideas and ideology were deeply embedded in Indian tradition and value system and on the other, these were to some extent influenced by his reading of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau as also by his critical appraisal of Western civilization and thought. Gandhi never claimed to be a thinker or philosopher in the conventional sense of the term but his ideas do present a cohesiveness of its own kind. All the seemingly different aspects of his thinking were in fact inextricably intertwined.

What had enriched his ideas and ideology was the fact that many of these had taken a definite shape in the course of his practical experiences and his political struggle in South Africa. There, he developed a passion for social justice which later also remained the focus of his struggles throughout his life.

The present chapter endeavours to examine as to how Gandhi utilized his ideas and ideology to reorient the Indian national movement or India’s struggle for freedom against the British Raj, as also to bring justice to the dridranarayan and the exploited. When
Gandhi returned to India finally from South Africa on 9 January 1915, Indian political scene was about to hot up after about a period of quin-quinnieum and a half. The Indian National Congress was coming out of the situation it had landed in soon after the Surat split. The Viceroyalty of Lord Hardinge and certain international developments, too, indicative of ominous period ahead. The Muslim League which had became disenchanted and disillusioned with the British attitude towards the Muslims and their Khalipha, the Sultan of Turkey was inclined to modify its policies and approach towards the Indian National Congress. The Moderates and the Extremists too were realising the futility of split and separation and were coming nearer to each other. Congress-League entente was in the offing. Still much was yet to crystallize into a definite plan or shape.

This period augured well for a leader like Mahatma Gandhi. However, he did not jump headlong into Indian politics at this moment partly because of advice of Gokhale and partly may be of his own choosing. Even otherwise since the beginning of World War I he was playing the role of loyalist and was contributing his mite in the service of the British Raj. No wonder the moment he reached Bombay, Gokhale sent him a word that the governor was desirous of seeing him. He met the governor immediately who during the course of the meeting said: “I ask one thing of you. I would like you to come and see me whenever you propose to take any steps concerning Government.” I replied: “I can very easily give the promise, in as much as it is my rule, as a Satygrahi, to understand the viewpoint of
the party I propose to deal with, and to try to agree with him as far as may be possible. I strictly observed the rule in South Africa and I mean to do the same here.” Lord Willingdon thanked me and said: “You may come to me whenever you like, and you will see that my Government do not wilfully do anything wrong.” To which I replied: “It is that faith which sustains me.”

Soon, thereafter, Gandhi went to Poona, met Gokhale, decided to join the Servants of India Society but later withdrew his application for membership as it was opposed by some members because of differences between Gandhi’s ideals and methods of work and those of the members of the Servants Society. From Poona, Gandhi moved in quick succession to Rajkot, Porbandar, Shantiniketan, Rangoon, Kumbh Mela at Hardwar, etc. All these wanderings were a part of his homecoming but reflect how his thinking and ideas were at work in their own little ways. He was approached at Viramgam by a tailor Motilal for taking up the cause of the railway passengers who had to suffer hardships on account of customs cordon. So much confidence he had in Gandhi’s leadership that when Gandhi asked him: “Are you prepared to go to jail?” He replied firmly: “We will certainly go to jail provided you lead us.” On Gandhi’s intervention customs cordon was later on removed. At Burdwan, Gandhi discussed the vows of third class passengers with the station master and at Calcutta, while going to Rangoon to meet Dr. Mehta, discomforts of the deck passengers with the steam ship company. At Kumbh Mela, his social service instinct come into play
and Gandhi along with the Phoenix Party offered to cover up the excreta with earth and to see its disposal. Wherever Gandhi went, he received a lot of attention or what might be called a hero’s welcome both from the educated and the common masses. Gandhi writing in his autobiography says that it was in Hardwar that: “I realised what deep impression my humble services in South Africa had made throughout India.” In a nutshell, the people had high hopes from him and were expecting that he would resort to satyagraha here in India as well to solve their hardships and problems. At Shantiniketan, Andrews [C.F.] specifically pose this question to Gandhi: “Do you think,” he asked me: “that a time will come for Satyagraha in India? And if so, have you any idea when it will come?” Gandhi replied, that: “it was difficult to say.” He had already given a promise to Gokhale that for one year he would travel in India for gaining experience and express no opinion on public questions. Gokhale even did not share some of Gandhi’s ideas in Hind Swaraj and hoped that Gandhi would correct them after his stay in India. Gandhi kept the promise given to Gokhale, though the latter left for his heavenly abode on 19 February 1915 at Poona, within about a month of taking the promise from Gandhi.

Even after completing his tour of one year, Gandhi’s association with the activities of the Indian National Congress remained limited. Instead he focussed his attention on problems associated with the exploitation of the peasantry in Champaran and Kheda. It was at Champaran, Gandhi undertook to challenge the might of the Indian
British rulers for the first time. Champaran Satyagraha was launched by Gandhi to save the poor tenants from the clutches of the European indigo planters. “The Champaran tenant was bound by law to plant three out of every twenty parts of his land with indigo for his landlord. This system was known as the tinkathia system, as three kathas out of twenty (which make one acre) had to be planted with indigo.” His taking up of the cause of Champaran tenants was a bold experiment in truth and ahimsa. The officials could not imagine a situation when a single individual, unaffected personally by the acts of omission and commision, would take up the cause of the hapless ‘ryots’ and transform the atmosphere from one of fear into that of organized fearless defiance, entirely enthused by the truthfulness of their cause. It has been pointed out that: “All the movements under Gandhi had one thing in common. That was the absence of violence with emphasis on Satyagraha.” The lesson learnt in South Africa was virtually corroborated in Champaran so far as Gandhi’s dauntless and self-abnegating values were concerned. He did not involve the Congress in his avowed defiance of official orders and decided to tackle it at his own level. This enabled him to feel the pulse of the people and revealed the strength of organized individuals. As time went on, the Gandhian ‘Organization’ became increasingly differentiated from that of the Congress, and in a sense a parallel system to a parallel system. The Indian National Congress was itself regarded as a parallel system to that of the British Government and Gandhi’s method at organization was parallel to the Congress.
“Wherever Gandhi moved”, says Krishnalal Shridharani, “whether it was a remote village, or outside in the jungle, it became a sort of hub of the country.” The Congress never was a hub but ‘coalesced’ into a political and legally constituted entity. Gandhi’s own parallel organization had no constitutional substance.

In 1918, Gandhi faced a problem slightly different from the one at Champaran. The reference is to Kaira (Kheda) district of Gujarat which was ravaged by almost total failure of crops and subsequent famine conditions. Gandhi supported the cause of the peasants and finally the Government revised the decision and announced that those peasants who could pay the revenue need do so, and others could do likewise the next year. This Satyagraha movement started by Gandhi to improve the lot of the peasants of Kheda, highlighted his concern for facts and reality related to the peasants’ helplessness to pay revenue. It is important to note that Gandhi perceived an economic issue and its wide ranging implications. He succeeded in transforming an economic grievance into a political cause affecting a very substantial social segment. It was meant to be a call for peasantry everywhere to unite and defy callous dictates of the government. To conclude, it may be said that Champaran and Kheda Satyagrahahas led to the establishment of a close rapport between Gandhi and the Indian peasantry which stood him in good stead while leading the Indian national movement 1920’s onwards.
Soon after Champaran and Kheda, Gandhi took up the cause of industrial labour in Ahmedabad at the instance of Anusuya Sarabhai. The issue at point was the disallowing of the plague bonus and the offer of inadequate increase in dearness allowance in lieu thereof. The weavers were demanding 50 percent as dearness allowance whereas the mill-owners offered only 20 percent. Gandhi who believed in truth and non-violence proceeded in the matter so as to secure justice to both the parties. However, due to the unreasonable and adamant attitude of the mill-owners, Gandhi and the workers got involved in a long struggle with the mill-owners. M.K. Gandhi had to virtually resort to a full-fledged Satyagraha. He applied his principles of truth, justice and non-violence in a very meaningful and effective manner. Shiv Kumar Goel is of the view that: "He not only educated and trained the workers in the art of conducting a non-violent struggle for their just demands but also inculcated in them a right kind of perspective about capital-labour relationship. He wanted workers’ integrated development which could be possible only if there was significant improvement in their economic, social, cultural, moral and educational standards. And such a change in their lives was feasible only if capital-labour realises that they were integral part of an organic whole and their independence on each other was so indispensable that the well-being of one without the other was virtually impossible. Both must learn to work in co-operation and harmony, as class war had no place in Gandhi’s ideology and industrial relations." As a true satyagrahi, he insured that workers demands were just, their struggle
was non-violent and was free from any ill-will and animosity. In a nutshell, he conducted the whole struggle in such a disciplined manner that it earned the workers not only good-will of the local administration, mill-owners and the public in general but also approbation from many. All this gave a new dimension to the principles of trade unionism. The workers ultimately triumphed, but it was a triumph of Gandhian methods. In the years to come, organization on non-violent lines by the workers, arbitration and development of healthy industrial relations became largely a way of life with the textile workers of Ahmedabad who gradually organise themselves on Gandhian lines leading to the emergence of the famous Labour Textile Association.

It was, however, neither Champaran nor Kheda nor Ahmedabad which brought Gandhi on the helm of affairs of the Indian National Congress. It were the Rowlatt Bills passed on 17 March 1919 which shook his faith in the British government and turned him from a loyalist to a rebel. While Gandhi was recuperating from acute dystentery, he read about the Rowlatt Committee’s Report, the recommendations of which startled him and he suggested to Shankarlal Banker and Umar Sobani and Vallabhbhai that “we ought to offer Satyagraha at once. If I was not laid up like this, I should give battle against it all alone, and expect others to follow suit.” Gandhi called a small meeting to discuss the issue further and later formed Satyagraha Sabha of which he became the President. Gandhi, however, soon realized that the Sabha was not likely to live long as his emphasis
on truth and ahimsa had begun to be disliked by some of its members. Yet the agitation against the Rowlatt Committee’s Report soon gathered volume and intensity even as the government grew more and more determined to give a fact to its recommendations and the Rowlatt Bill was published as an act on 18 March 1919. Gandhi addressed private as well as public letters to the Viceroy clearly telling him that the government’s action left him no other course except to resort to Satyagraha but it was all in vain. Gandhi called upon the country to observe a general hartal which would help the people to purify themselves before launching for the struggle for repeal of the Rowlatt Act. “The date of the hartal was first fixed on 30 March 1919, but was subsequently changed to 6 April.” Gandhi stated, “Satyagraha is a process of self-purification and ours is a sacred fight and it seems to me to be in the fitness of things that it should be commenced with an act of self-purification. Let all the people of India, therefore, suspend their business on that day and observe the day as one of fasting and prayer.” Louis Fischer claimed that “the hartal was Gandhi’s first political act in India against the British government of India.” K.S. Bharathi stated: “No established political party or leader came forward to show the way during Rowlatt Bills. In this circumstances Gandhi came forward with his call for Satyagraha in the event of Rowlatt Bills becoming law. The spectacular, though uneven, response to this call in various parts of the country marked the emergence of Gandhi as the dominant figure in Indian politics.”
What followed this call, i.e., hartal in different parts of India including: Delhi, Bombay, Lahore, Amritsar etc., Gandhi’s detention, imposition of martial law in Punjab, Jallianwala Bagh massacre, setting up of Hunter Inquiry Committee, its boycott by the Congress and appointment of non-official Inquiry Committee and later the tagging of Punjab wrongs and khilafat question, cow-protection question vis-a-vis Gandhi’s opposition to it, all are well known. Gandhi was not allowed to visit Punjab nearly for about six months. When Gandhi visited Lahore on 17 October 1919, the people flocked to him in overwhelmingly large numbers. Gandhi says that the scene “can never be effaced from my memory. The railway station was from end to end one seething mass of humanity.” He obtained first hand knowledge of the tales of Government’s tyranny and the arbitrary despotism of its officers and Gandhi, now, realised that only a fraction of the truth has been published. He was full of anger and pain.

These quick happenings virtually catapulted Gandhi on to the platform of the Congress as its leader. In his autobiography, he says: “I must regard my participation in Congress proceedings at Amritsar as my real enterance into the Congress politics. My attendance at the previous Congresses was nothing more than an annual revival of allegiance to the Congress.” Gandhi had to contend himself not only with elevating the nature of resistance, but had to cultivate the leadership and associates of the Congress, and the masses, to forge an integral and sustainable protest movement without deviating from the
essentials. In this context Judith M. Brown writes, “Whereas the essentials of Gandhi’s perception of politics and the alternatives of protest could not be compromised, he sought to induct and perfect variations of resistance to the official mercurial policy proclivities.”

Saddled with new and heavy responsibilities, Gandhi not only undertook to fight the tyranny, the high handedness of the British Raj seriously, but also decided to transform the Congress from elite to a mass organization. C.F. Andrews and G. Mukherjee opines, “Indeed, before Gandhi decided to be in the Congress and extend his kind of resistance through the institutional framework already established, he was aware of the entrenched ‘constitutionalism’ which was the guiding maxim of the Congress. The annual sessions were marked for the delegate’s and leader’s suave political idiom and cultivated expression of critical evaluation of official policies and measures.”

Gandhi writes in his autobiography: “The Congress at that time had practically no machinery functioning during the interval between session and session, or for dealing with fresh contingencies that might arise in the course of the year. The existing rules provided for three secretaries, but ... only one of them was a functioning secretary, and even he was not a full timer ... The Congress was too unwieldy a body for the discussion of public affairs. There was no limit set to the number of delegates in the Congress or to the number of delegates that each province could return, some improvement upon the existing chaotic condition was thus felt by everybody to be an imperative necessity. I undertook the responsibility of framing a Constitution ...
with the assumption of this responsibility I may be said to have made
my real enterance into the Congress politics.”

The post Rowlatt Bill political and tragic developments and
what transpired at the Khilafat Conference in Delhi continued to
agitate the mind of Gandhi. The Muslims were all prepared to fight
the British Raj if the khilafat wrongs were not undone. They were
ready to adopt the strategies of partition of Bengal days, i.e., of
swadeshi, boycott of foreign cloth and so on. Gandhi, while speaking
at the Khilafat Conference held in Delhi in November 1919, differed
with the Muslim leaders in either combining the Khilafat and cow
protection issues or the Khilafat and Punjab wrongs. He contended:
“If Muslims wish to respect Hindu susceptibilities by ceasing the
slaughter of cows, they could do so, and it had nothing to do with the
Caliphate. If Hindus wished to support Muslims desires for the
Caliphate of Islam they should do so without attempting to make a
bargain on cow-protection.” Similarly, he felt that Punjab question
was a local issue and its mixing up with the Khilafat question would
be a serious indiscretion. Yet, Gandhi appreciated the joint fight of
the Hindus and the Muslims in remedying the different crucial issues
the country was then faced with. It was here that he used the word
non-co-operation for the first time. He himself says in his
autobiography that: “I could not hit upon a suitable Hindi or Urdu
word for the new idea, and that put me out somewhat. At last I
described it by the word ‘non-co-operation’, an expression that is used
for the first time at this meeting. As the Maulana [Hasrat Mohani] was
delivering his speech, it seems to me that it was vain for him to talk about effective resistance to a government with which he was co-operating in more than one thing, if resort to arms was impossible or undesirable. The only true resistance to Government, it, therefore, seem to me, was to cease to co-operate with it. Thus I arrived at the word non-co-operation. I had not then a clear idea of all its implications. I, therefore, did not enter into details." Gandhi only advised to the Musalmans that if the government continued to betray a great cause like Khilafat, they were entitled to non-co-operate with the government and were not bound to retain government titles and honours or to continue in government service. Gandhi undertook to inform and educate the masses, by extensive tours and through the columns of *Young India* and *Navajivan*. Gandhi gave a clarion call for surrender of titles; boycott of official functions, educational institutions, courts and councils, and foreign goods; and also called upon all Indian troops not to participate in wars abroad. By all this, Gandhi succeeded in stirring the conscience of the common man. He was successful in making common man aware of the political situation and their own deplorable condition.

The word non-co-operation though used by Gandhi in the Muslim Conference in Delhi, however, gained real currency only after the launching of the non-co-operation movement or the passing of non-co-operation resolution by the Congress at its special session held in September 1920 at Calcutta, later at the annual session held at Nagpur. From the autobiography, it appears that Gandhi was all along
concerned about the inclusion of the word non-violent in any resolution that might be passed in this context. He says that he had a "long discussion on the subject [of non-co-operation] with the late Maulana Abdul Bari and the other Ulema especially with regard to the extent to which a Musalman could observe the rule of non-violence. In the end they all agreed that Islam did not forbid its followers from following non-violence as a policy, and further, that, while they were pledged to that policy, they were bound faithfully to carry it out. At last the non-co-operation resolution was moved in the Khilafat Conference, and carried after long deliberation." Next Gandhi got the non-co-operation Resolution passed at the Gujarat Political Conference. It was only, thereafter, that the issue was discussed at Calcutta and Nagpur. At Nagpur, some members like Vijayaraghavachariar, Motilal Nehru pointed out that in his resolution non-co-operation was postulated only with a view to obtaining a redress to the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs, and there is no mention of swaraj, the biggest wrong that the country was labouring under. Hence the resolution was modified to incorporate the demand for swaraj. At the Nagpur session, some amendments were suggested by Deshbandhu, and a slight amendment to the clause about the boycott of schools was pressed by Lala Lajpat Rai and these were accepted by Gandhi and the resolution was passed unanimously. This read as under: "This Congress desires to lay special emphasis on non-violence, being the integral part of the non-co-operation resolution and invites the attention of the people to the fact that non-violence in word and
deed is essential between people themselves, as in respect of the
government, and this Congress is of opinion that the spirit of violence
is not only contrary to the growth of a true spirit of democracy but
actually retards the enforcement (if necessary) of the other stages of
non-co-operation.

It resolved that the object of the Indian National Congress is
the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and
peaceful means. The people of India should refrain from taking any
part in functions or festivities in honour of H.R.H. the Duke of
Connaught, during his forthcoming visit to India... It expresses its
fullest sympathy with the workers of India in their struggle for
securing their legitimate rights through the organisation of Trade
Unions ... taking effective steps to raise a National Fund to be called
the All-India Tilak Memorial Swarajya Fund for the purpose of
financing the foregoing National Service and the Non-co-operation
Movement in general.”

The passing of this resolution marked a definite stage in
Gandhi’s political career in India. His programme of non-violent
non-co-operation was accepted both by the Muslims’ Conference and
the Indian National Congress. From a loyalist and a co-operative,
Gandhi turns a rebel and a non-co-operative and from virtually a
non-entity or a suppliant Gandhi becomes the acknowledged leader or
the supreme Commander of the Indian national movement. He was
successful in forging and strengthening the Hindu-Muslim unity. He
converted the Indian National Congress into a mass organization inviting and ensuing public participation at the national level. He instilled new hopes in the masses for a better and self-reliant and self-respecting India. He introduced ‘Charkha’ at a large scale to fulfil the expectations of Swadeshi. “The spinning-wheel could possibly be considered medieval, but whereas it was once a symbol of slavery it was now, in Gandhi’s view, a symbol of freedom, unity and equality. The restoration of the village industry meant the return of the life to the villages.”

Throughout the whole of 1921 Gandhi and his lieutenants proceeded to extend the scope of the Congress activities in directions in somewhat diametrically opposed to those persons who had remained in control until the year 1919, yet he succeeded and succeeded with a bang. S.R. Mehrotra while investigating: “How did the Mahatma perform this miracle?” says as under: “Gandhi had no political past in India. He had made himself and earned his reputation in a foreign land. He belonged to no particular group or faction in India politics. He was neither a Moderate nor an Extremist. Of all Indian politicians of the time, he had the best claim to be regarded as a national, All-India leader, though he was firmly anchored in his native Gujarat. Gandhi returned to India with an unsullied and unsurpassed reputation, and, despite his strange manners and peculiar views (or was it because of them?), he managed not only to preserve that reputation, but also to enhance it by taking up popular causes, such as those concerning the peasants and workers, the third-class railway
passengers and untouchables, *Swadeshi* and the vernaculars. Unlike most Indian political leaders of his day, Gandhi had the experience of having worked - while in South Africa - with all sections of the Indian community. Gandhi was a strange mixture of the Victorian liberal, Indian patriot, philosophical anarchist and simple-lifer (sic). He was a curious combination of the saint and the statesman, of the traditional and the modern, of the conservative and the radical, of the nationalist and the universalist, of the realist and the visionary. He was all things to all men.”

No wonder, writes S.R. Mehrotra: “with the coming of Gandhi and launching of the non-violent non-co-operation the Congress entered the era of mass politics.” “It was Gandhi who was assigned the responsibility of framing a new constitution for the Congress.”

The Constitution he framed and accepted by the Nagpur session fixed the number of delegates to the Congress session in the proportion of one to fifty thousand of the population and provincial allotments were accordingly made. The country was divided into twenty-one ‘provinces’ on a linguistic basis, each headed by a provincial Congress Committee. The ‘provinces’, in turn, were sub-divided into districts, taluquas or tehsils, towns and villages, each lower body electing representatives to the Committee immediately above it and ultimately to the All-India Congress Committee, the highest executive organ of the party. The All-India Congress Committee was to consist of about 300 members and conduct all Congress business between the annual sessions. It was also to function as the subjects committee for the
Congress session. The All-India Congress Committee was to appoint a Working Committee, consisting of the President, the general secretaries, the treasures and 9 other members, which was to perform such functions as may be delegated to it from time to time by the All-India Congress Committee. It became in fact the real decision making organ of the Congress. “The primary membership of the Congress was thrown open to all persons over the age of 21 who expressed in writing their acceptance of the object and methods of the Congress and paid an annual subscription of 4 Annas.”

It was the charismatic personality of Gandhi, his spiritualized politics or the Mahatma and the great organiser in him that brought millions to the Indian national movement and his slightest word became a law for them. In 1921 when the non-co-operation movement was at its height, India waited anxiously for what he would do next. The success of the movement made more impatient nationalists to urge him to go beyond non-co-operation into outright civil disobedience. Gandhi did accept the suggestion ultimately and decided to join a campaign of civil disobedience under his own direction in one circumscribed district, that is, Bardoli in the Bombay presidency. He went to Bardoli on 29 January 1922 and prepared to set about his task. He spoke at Bardoli Taluka Conference and the Conference passed resolution that: “Bardoli Taluka would immediately commence civil disobedience unless working Committee decided otherwise or unless Round Table Conference was held.” Gandhi, immediately, on 1 February 1922 in a letter to Viceroy,
informed him of Bardoli’s decision to commence mass civil disobedience unless Viceroy declared in clear terms policy of absolute non-interference with non-violent activities, freed Press from all administrative control and released all non-violent non-co-operation prisoners.\(^{38}\) He emphasized, as always, the importance of prayer and a reliance upon religious faith in any pure action. While he was busy in organising for a total paralysis of all British authority in this small district, the news reached him on 8 February 1922 of a dreadful atrocity at Chauri Chaura. The horror of hacking the constables to pieces and throwing them into the raising flames so much depressed the Mahatma that he felt compelled to cancel the entire campaign of non-co-operation and civil disobedience not only in the Bardoli district but everywhere in India. Gandhi wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru from Bardoli dated 19 February 1922 and gave vent to his feelings, “Chauri Chaura news came like a powerful match to ignite the gun-powder, and there was a blaze. I assure you that if the thing had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle.”\(^ {39}\) Vincent Sheean says: “In penitence for the crime committed at Chauri-Chaura he fasted for five days while both India and Great Britain looked on in amazement. It seemed hardly possible, at that time, that a man could go so far toward revolution - bloodless and peaceful, but still revolution - and then call it off with a prayer .... To Indians who protested, the Mahatma said patiently: “The drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but
there is no doubt that it is religiously sound." Gandhi to whom police dreaded to arrest in 1921, was arrested soon thereafter on 10 March 1922. Many people turned against him but he struck to his resolve that non-violence could not be compromised under any circumstances. This shows Gandhi's moral courage to forego gains and successes even if it amounted to restricting the pace of the movement.

The understanding and consideration displayed by Gandhi speaks of his discerning perception of the prevailing situation, in turn, managing a virtual crisis within the Congress party. Though Gandhi commanded a majority behind him yet he could not turn deaf to the voices of dissent. He also realised that the political situation was changing fast. On the one side, the disintegrated state of politics had offered an opportunity to the British to re-establish their old relations with the Muslims and bring them back into the loyalist fold and on the other side, the non-co-operation and the boycott programme had ceased to attract many. The title holders were now less prepare to surrender their titles than they were in the hayday of non-co-operation. Lawyers had reverted to their practice sooner for flocking back to the government educational institutions, and for Swadeshi and boycott of foreign cloth only half-hearted support was available. In a nutshell, the Congress men had lost the will to continue the struggle although they still talk of non-co-operation and boycott. Many Congress leaders in order to avoid a lapse into futility and passivity, consider the less exacting alternative of council-entry as a means of keeping up the spirit of resistance. This led the Congress to
be divided into two factions. One group led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru came to be called ‘pro-changers’ and the others as ‘no’changers’. The former formed the Swarajist party on 1 January 1923 to fight the elections and the latter turned towards the Gandhian three point constructive programme - Khadi, Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability. For Gandhi, “Hindu-Muslim Unity means not unity only between Hindus and Musalmans but between all those who believe India to be their home, no matter of what faith they belong.”

The programme of Hindu-Muslim unity was aimed at reducing the communal conflicts and tensions that followed the withdrawal of the Non-Co-Operation: the removal of untouchability was intended both to uplift the harijans and to remove the social stigma on Hinduism which had wide ramifications and affecting the cohesiveness of the Hindu society. He regarded untouchability as not part of Hinduism but its excreta or outgrowth. As regards Khadi it was meant to resuscitate rural India. In order to make khadi programme a success, Gandhi built a network of independent organisations like the All-India Khadi Board and later the All-India Spinners’ Association, which would remain a constantly ready nucleus for political struggle whenever Gandhi deemed fit to call it into being.” This included impressive relief work (often far outdistancing government efforts) in emergencies like floods (as in Bengal in 1922, and Gujarat in 1927), national schools, the promotion of Khadi and other cottage crafts, anti-liquor propaganda, and social work among low castes and
untouchables. In February 1924 Gandhi was released from jail. The two year spell in jail helped Gandhi to brood over his personal priorities and his role in public affairs. He read over 150 books; reading for the first time the whole of the *Mahabharata* and the six systems of Hindu philosophy in Gujarat. He steeped himself afresh in his Hindu heritage. Reading and the solitary reflection promoted by rhythmic handwork merely confirmed his views on religion and politics, as he admitted on his release. In a letter to Hakim Ajmal Khan on 14 April 1922, Gandhi described his jail life and how spinning was increasingly important to him as an aid to meditation and a means of coming 'nearer to the poorest of the poor, and in them to God.' He professed to be 'as happy as a bird' and not to feel that he was accomplishing less here than outside the prison. He said: "To be here is a good discipline for me and separation from my fellow co-workers was just the thing required to know whether we were an inorganic whole or whether our activity was one man's show - a nine day's wonder." Judith M. Brown says, "Gandhi re-emerged from Yeravda with clearer priorities and a stronger conviction that he must pursue his own path even if he could find no companions to share it. He had become a man with a much surer sense of himself and his potential public role than the fumbling pragmatist of his first years back in India." The first thing Gandhi wanted to do, when he was free, was to try to restore handspinning and handweaving in the villages to provide employment for the villagers. "On 22 September 1925,
Gandhi presided over the All-India Congress Committee meeting and a resolution to establish All-India Spinners' Association was passed. He also stressed on Hindu-Muslim unity and appealed to people to take to spinning and Khaddar. He stressed that child marriage as a custom must stop as he himself was the victim of that custom when he had to marry at the young age of thirteen. "On 3 January 1926 in Navajivan, Gandhi announced his decision to retire voluntarily from public work for one year to stay at and attend to the Ashram and to have rest."

After meeting Gandhi in 1927, Lord Irwin described Gandhi as "rather remote, and moving in a rarefied atmosphere divorced from the political facts of the situation ... his main interest now lies in social matters, and he is reluctant to re-enter the arena of politics." Whatsoever might be the reasons, during the period between 1924 and 1928, Gandhi mainly remained preoccupied with social and spiritual questions and constructive work. These years from 1922 to 1928 were for Gandhi a time of stock-taking.

To conclude this section, it will be said that the decade that followed the formative years of Gandhi was as crucial in his life as were the years prior to 1915. His ideas and ideology now find much wider application and in the process strengthened his faith and confidence inspite of varied odds and dissent. As regards Subhas Chandra Bose and his interaction with Gandhi during the period between 1921 (i.e. when Bose joins Indian politics) and 1928, it was
rather limited and oblique and minimal as has been discussed in the subsequent chapter.
References

1. Gandhi had coined the word *dridranarayan* for the poor, the starving, toiling, unemployed, half-naked and dumb millions. It was of no use talking to them about modern progress. A.N.Kapoor, V.P.Gupta (ed.) *A Dictionary of Gandhian Thought*, (New Delhi, Ambe Books, First Edition, 1995), p.82.


3. Gopal Krishan Gokhale established Servants of Indian Society in 1905 with the object of drawing together youngmen with a spirit of dedication and training them to serve the country through careful study of its problems.


7. It was Gokhale who gave to India the ‘mantra’ - “politics must be spiritualised” and Gandhi proclaimed him as his “political guru”. Gokhale’s advice that Gandhi should take over the obligations of the movement in India played a decisive role. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, The Early Phase*, Vol. I (Ahmedabad, Navajivan, 1965), p. 138.
8. Ibid., p. 603.


11. M.K. Gandhi issued a circular on 27 March 1918 which read as under:

   “On behalf of the people, the Gujarat Sabha, the honourable Messrs G.K. Parekh and V.J. Patel and Messrs Deodhar, Amritlal Thakkar and Joshi of the Servants of India Society made inquiries about the crops and all came to the conclusion that the *Kharif* crop practically came to nothing ...” (Circular regarding Kheda situation. Hindu Ananth Ashram, Nadiad). *CWMG*, Vol. 14, p. 281.


13. A Committee under Justice Rowlatt recommended two measures. One of these Black Bills was passed on 17 March 1919. It gave the bureaucracy power to put anybody they
wished in the preventive detention without trial for as long as they liked.


27. On 5 September 1920 the resolution passed was: “the Congress is of opinion that there can be no contentment in India without redress of two (Punjab wrongs and Khilafat issue) and that the only effectual means to vindicate national honours and to prevent a repitition of similar wrongs in future, is the establishment of Swarajya. This Congress is further of the opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India but to approve of and adopt the policy of progressive non-violent non-co-operation until the said wrongs are righted and Swarajya is established.” CWMG, Vol. 18, “The Non-co-operation Resolution”, pp. 230-31.


31. Cf.L.F. Rushbrook Williams, India in 1921-22, Vol. 4. (Delhi, Anmol, 1985), p. 44. “The year 1921, as we shall see, wrought a great change both in the character of the Congress and in the position of Mr. Gandhi himself. At the beginning of the year, he had approached this body almost in the character of a
suppliant; before the end of the year he was to stand forth as the acknowledged dictator, not only of the non-co-operation movement, but also of the remodelled Congress organisation which lent that movement its most formidable strength.”


34. *An Autobiography*, p. 748. In the Constitution that he had presented, the goal of the Congress was the attainment of *Swaraj* within the British Empire if possible and without if necessary.


36. E.M.S. Namboodripad writes: “One of the Gandhian struggle adopted by the Congress was that it inspired the middle and poor section of the people to enter into the anti-imperialist struggle. *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, (Trivandrum, Social Scientist, 1986), p. 202. Sumit Sarkar is of the opinion that: “the currency which Mr. Gandhi’s name has acquired even in the remotest villages is astonishing. No one seems to knew quite who or what he is, but it is an accepted fact that what he says is so, and what he orders must be done .... Gandhi is not thought of as being antagonistic to government.” *Popular* *Movements* and *‘Middle-Class’ leadership in late Colonial India:*

138


38. Ibid., p. 520.


41. Young India 25.2.1920, p.3.

42. What the Khadi scheme involves was the decentralization of the means of production and distribution of one of life’s necessities. This in turn implied the decentralization of the cultivation and processing of cotton .... Gandhi said: “I would rule out all machinery, even as I would reject this very body, which is not helpful to salvation, and seek the absolute liberation of the soul. From that point of view, I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain because, like the body, they are inevitable.” Young India 20.11.1924, p. 386.

43. CWMG, Vol. 25, pp. 83-85. Here is Gandhi’s jail reading list.


