CHAPTER IV

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GANDHI AND SOME EMINENT REVOLUTIONARIES

The very essence of non-violence, as advocated by Gandhi during his two major movements, presupposed the existence of an interaction between him and the revolutionaries who persistently followed violent methods in the same period. Contrary to the belief that there was no communication between the two, this period witnessed increased correspondence, wherein both tried to exchange their views and ideas. Gandhi was continuously looking for effective arguments and concrete measures for checking the activities of his ‘misguided’ friends. The period after 1922, witnessed Gandhi airing his opinions about violence in general, reacting strongly, and condemning every assassination or attempted murder, and the revolutionaries questioning the validity and applicability of Gandhian principles and techniques. They considered their own methods to be impeccable, while describing the other’s as a great hindrance, in the cause of India’s independence. Reactions of Gandhi and the revolutionaries to each other’s policies, programmes, methods and strategies on the basis of the available correspondence, between them will be discussed in this chapter.
SANYAL’S OPEN-LETTER TO GANDHI

The very first known open letter was written to Gandhi by a well known revolutionary Sachindranath Sanyal.* He was associated with the Anushilan Samiti even during the first phase of the Revolutionary movement and had started the "Youngmen’s Association" in Benaras for the specific purpose of spreading the idea of sedition. Later, he came into contact with Rash Behari Bose who attempted to bring together the revolutionaries of Punjab and Bengal for effecting an armed rebellion. Sanyal, thus became a party to the preparations for the planned uprising in the Punjab and the United Provinces in 1915. The failure of these plans led to his arrest in the Benaras Conspiracy Case and he was imprisoned for life but he was released under the Royal Amnesty in the year 1920, alongwith other revolutionaries. Sanyal was one of the few who had not responded to Gandhi’s clarion call during the Non-cooperation movement.

After keeping a low profile for two years, he again emerged on the revolutionary scene, immediately after Gandhi’s withdrawal of his Civil Disobedience movement at Bardoli. He was instrumental in the establishment of a new revolutionary outfit, the Hindustan Republican Association, in the year 1924. It was the first organisation formed

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* Collected Works, op.cit., vol XXVI, pp. 136-41, "A Revolutionary’s Defence"; Young India, February 12, 1925.
outside Bengal with a definite constitution and specified ideology tilting towards socialism.

Sanyal wrote a pamphlet "The Revolutionary" and later "An Appeal to My Countrymen" wherein he tried to outline the organisation and ideology of his party. He wrote about his jail experiences in his book "Bandi Jivan" which was instrumental in motivating many young men to join the Revolutionary movement in the 1920's. His intellectualism and acumen forced him to react strongly when Gandhi referred to the activities of the revolutionaries in his Presidential Address at the Belgaum Congress in 1924.

Gandhi had agreed in his address that both violence and non-violence exerted pressure on the government but said that the pressure of the former was the result of anger and ill will while the latter's pressure was due to goodwill and gentleness. He pointed out that the revolutionaries, through their violent methods would be rendering no service to the poor and that they would be retarding the country's progress. He placed the organised violence of the Government and the activities of the revolutionaries at par and desired to display to both, the effectiveness of his own soul-force.

Gandhi's call to the people to boycott violence on the ground that the repercussions of such acts had always been counter productive, was bound to elicit the response of the revolutionaries. Sanyal wrote to Gandhi and boldly
pointed out that his Non-cooperation movement had failed because Gandhi’s ideal was not in keeping with Indian Culture and traditions and that it savoured of imitation. He also criticised Gandhi’s expectation that England would ever be generous. Reminding Gandhi of his promise to retire when the revolutionaries would re-emerge in the Indian political arena after their silence, he asked Gandhi to retire, as his experiment with non-violence was over. He claimed that the revolutionaries who had promised to desist from violent activities were now free to strike again. He told Gandhi that the revolutionaries had not involved the masses in their struggle as they had a better knowledge of the mass psychology. He blamed Gandhi for misjudging their sentiments. He also tried to convince Gandhi that the Indians should rather arm themselves, keeping in view the British might. He concluded that, Gandhi who preached tolerance had been violently intolerant of the revolutionaries and should, therefore, keep away from them if he could not help them.

In his reply, Gandhi said that he never made any promise to retire at a particular time in a particular manner but he declared that he would retire if he felt that India preferred to follow the path of a bloody revolution. While agreeing that people’s response to the Non-cooperation movement was sufficient, he regretted that the message of non-violence still had not permeated deep into the Indian...
society. He refuted Sanyal’s statement that his philosophy was an "indifferent mixture" or "meritless" and asserted that it represented the true meaning of the Gita and held that it would be tested on its own merit. He indicated his approval of the revolutionary’s heroism and sacrifice but expressed the belief that they should not be wasted. He felt that his non-violence was the principle of the strongest and so could be pitted against the revolutionaries’ brave deeds. However, he denied that he was ever intolerant of the revolutionaries and suggested to them to take up constructive programmes so that they would learn to be more patient.

Sanyal’s letter to Gandhi clearly shows that he was well aware of Gandhi’s professed beliefs, strategies and programmes. His direct attack on the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence as being "an imperfect physical mixture of Tolstoyism and Buddhism, and not a chemical mixture of East and West" shows his awareness about the sources of Gandhian Satyagraha. He probably felt that Gandhi, after having acquired knowledge from various sources, could not assimilate them into an inseparable whole. Hence, his distinction between a physical and a chemical mixture. According to him, the ideal of non-violence was not consistent with Indian culture. The way in which it was presented by Gandhi, he felt did not represent either the spirit of forgiveness of the Indian rishis or that of non-violence of the Indian Yogins.
Sanyal’s condemnation of non-violence on the ground of it being an indifferent mixture, somehow, appears to be shallow, when viewed in the light of the success it had already achieved in the field of politics. It might have been a mixture alright, as Gandhi himself agreed. The indelible imprint left by the understanding of different faiths - Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity - coupled with his knowledge of Tolstoy’s insistence on the efficacy of positive love, as the law of life, resulted in his perfect understanding of non-violence as the ethical aspect of his political strategy. What he presented as an ideal was, therefore, not indifferent but absolute in its conception. He claimed that non-violence was universally applicable to all countries and people. He also argued that there was no limit to the extent to which it can be applied. He, therefore, believed non-violence to be the truth as he saw it. R.R. Diwakar too opined, "Gandhi’s non-violence or love is a positive, active force to be hurled at all evil and injustice, as powerful as violence but less harmful, more dignified and elevating to both the parties."

Striking at the very root of Gandhian non-violence Sanyal said that it was not in consonance with Indian

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1. *Young India*, August 8, 1929.

thinking. He argued that "The non-violence that India preaches is not non-violence for the sake of non-violence, but non-violence for the good of humanity and if the good of humanity demanded violence and bloodshed India would never hesitate to adopt it. Sanyal, however, appears to have overlooked the fact that non-violence, if it demanded bloodshed would no more be real non-violence. Besides, it appears that Gandhi too had sensed the streak of violence, superfluous in the Indian society, even when he was in South Africa. That is why he devised a method based on non-violence and directed his efforts to avoid violence and bloodshed. B.R. Nanda opined, "Gandhi knew that violence was latent in India and so insisted on non-violence long before he came to India." 3

Sanyal's criticism of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence being the outcome of his despair was also wrong because Gandhi conceived it as an effective alternative to the use of force, that brought about only temporary changes. It was used because Gandhi believed in its righteousness. Even after 1922, he believed that India had the capacity to offer a non-violent battle to the Britishers and that India would come to her own, through Satyagraha in the near future. He emphatically denied that he ever despaired of the efficacy

3. Personal Interview with B.R. Nanda on March 18, 92.
of non-violence. It is probable that Sanyal had some misgivings about the nature of non-violence as envisaged by Gandhi and, therefore, he could not perceive its efficacy as an invaluable weapon in politics.

Sanyal also doubted the validity of the Gandhian programmes on the ground that Gandhi was not well equipped to lead it. He explained that the response to Gandhi's call was phenomenal and the spirit of sacrifice and sincerity on the part of his followers was easily traceable. In spite of it, if the programme did not succeed, Sanyal said that it was due to Gandhi's lack of leadership qualities. He said that what "India needed at that time was a true leader, a leader like Guru Gobind Singh or Guru Ramdas and Shivaji."

Sanyal's vague claim that Gandhi's leadership qualities were not good enough to guide the people through is not valid. Gandhi definitely was a leader of the masses. His leadership potentialities had manifested themselves when he led the Champaran struggle, after which the people of India were definitely taken in by his novel technique of action. By 1925, his stature as a leader had really gone up and he had emerged as an unconventional leader who could muster the support of the masses easily. It was, in fact, this capacity to lead the masses that brought him into

limelight during the non-cooperation days. * Gandhi might not be included in the category of Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Ramdas or Shivaji but he was undoubtedly a leader of his own merit.

However forceful Sanyal's arguments might have been, one cannot help noticing some lacunae in his understanding of the Gandhian strategies. While asking Gandhi to resign from political activities, he mentioned that Gandhi's experiment with the non-violent Non-cooperation movement was over. It is true that the movement as such was over by the time Sanyal wrote the letter, but Gandhi had not given up his experimentation. While advocating the suspension of the Non-cooperation movement, on the ground that the nation was not ready for it, Gandhi himself expressed the opinion that the proposed suspension was a part of his experiment. 5

Immediately, after his release in 1924, Gandhi got totally involved in his constructive programmes, which he considered to be a part and parcel of his Satyagraha. His constructive programmes were taken up to strengthen the moral spirit of the people and motivate them for participating in his future programmes. It was definitely a continuous process that Gandhi had initiated.

* Vide Supra, pp. 59-61.

5. Collected Works, op.cit., vol. XXV, p. 489, Gandhi's Presidential Address at Belgaum Congress 1924; Young India, December 26, 1924.
Unlike Gandhi, Sanyal appears to have felt that the people could not have been more non-violent than what they were during the days of the Non-cooperation movement. He vehemently opposed Gandhi’s statement that the people were not non-violent enough during the Non-cooperation movement and said that they were so non-violent that it appeared to be cowardice on their part. Time proved him wrong. The people of India displayed an outstanding spirit of non-violence during the days of the Civil Disobedience movement which was also led by Gandhi. Gandhi, therefore, seems to have realised the potentialities of the Indians to be non-violent and his faith in them was not misplaced.

Sanyal’s claim that the Non-cooperation movement lacked a worthy ideal too does not hold true. Gandhi’s aim at that time was to make the British realise the evil effects of their rule, by refusing to cooperate with the evil. He succeeded in his attempt because, undoubtedly the movement was able to hold sway over the masses and the British government realised that it was losing its grip over them. It was a worthy ideal to fight for. Sanyal, seems to have, considered non-violence as the ideal because he said that the ideal Gandhi preached during the Non-cooperation movement was not in keeping with Indian culture and tradition. He could not have said that asking for Swaraj was not in keeping with the Indian culture and tradition.
Sanyal had twice mentioned that Gandhi’s arguments were like a lawyer’s than a prophet’s. Gandhi on many occasions argued like a lawyer. He never claimed that he was a prophet at any time. There is no doubt that he tried to bring religion and politics together. Religion for him had a much deeper meaning and by giving a religious incline to his Satyagraha, he tried to inject a spirit of morality into politics. It, therefore, may not be appropriate to call him a prophet or a religious teacher for that reason alone.

But it is true at the same time that some of Sanyal’s arguments were valid under the prevailing circumstances. His letter throws light on his total lack of faith in the British Government, unlike Gandhi who believed in the inherent goodness of his adversary. He vehemently criticised Gandhi’s readiness to compromise with the British Empire.

It may be argued that Sanyal’s reading of the situation was more appropriate, as England would never be just and generous out of her free will. It was further corroborated by the later developments in Gandhi’s career. But the fundamental factors underlying his Satyagraha at that time would not allow him to consider the British government as his enemy. He said, "This Satyagraha did not fail me in South Africa, Kheda or Champaran and in a host of other cases I could mention. It excludes all violence or hate. Therefore, I cannot and will not hate Englishmen. Nor will I bear their
yoke. I must fight unto death the unholy attempt to impose British methods and British institutions in India. But I combat the attempt with non-violence."  

Sanyal was also piqued by Gandhi’s criticism that the revolutionaries, by their actions retarded the country’s progress. He was right in pointing out that they were instrumental in bringing about political changes and also in promoting the courage and spirit of self sacrifice amongst the people. On the other hand, it is also true that the increased activity of the revolutionaries resulted in the adoption of severe repressive measures and increased governmental expenditure. Moreover, for Gandhi, in politics, it was not only the ends that mattered but also the actions. He wrote,"In practical politics, actions count and not mere motives or "mental attitudes" bereft of acts or results." If the actions were violent, their result would never be permanent. But the revolutionaries, being tenacious in their purpose of freeing their motherland, did not bother to wait, watch, ponder or analyse as to whether the progress they achieved would be permanent or temporary. Sanyal appears to be satisfied with the immediate results while Gandhi’s programme aimed at a better and higher ideal.

7. Ibid., vol. XXIV, p. 231.
Both of them had differences of opinion regarding the involvement of the masses in the struggle for freedom. Sanyal claimed that the revolutionaries had a better knowledge of mass psychology and, therefore, they did not venture to handle them. He held the view that Gandhi, on the other hand, brought in the masses without realising the repercussions. Gandhi’s unique achievement at this time, however, was his complete control over the Indian masses. In fact, Gandhi’s adoption of non-violence, his application of non-cooperation and his political strategies were conceived with the masses in mind. Satyagraha, according to Gandhi, could be utilised by every member of the society, men and women, the young and the old, the rich and the poor and everyone else. "The basic principle on which the practice of non-violence rests is that what holds good in respect of oneself equally applies to the whole universe."\(^8\) Gandhi’s fault however, lay in his failure to observe that non-violence had not yet become the creed of the people and that it might be very difficult for them to reach that stage.

As a true revolutionary, thus, Sanyal through his open letter implied that Gandhi’s principles and practices, attitudes and criticism were not flawless. He could not agree with Gandhi that India should be a self-governing state within the imperialistic British Empire. He explained that a

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8. Harijan, November 12, 1938.
revolutionary who was ready to sacrifice the maximum for his motherland would never retard the progress of his country. He had complete faith in the efficacy of the Revolutionary movement in promoting the political and moral development of the people of India. The biggest difference between him and Gandhi is, however, manifested by the fact that the revolutionary fervour found its outlet only in a certain small section of the society, whereas the impact of the Gandhian philosophy was felt by a larger section of the Indians. The correspondence between Gandhi and Sanyal shows that both were faithful to their creed. Sanyal did reveal to Gandhi that the followers of the revolutionary cult might not be convinced so easily by the new techniques of action introduced by him. Sanyal, through his letter, tried to instil a sense of pride among the Indians by pointing out that they were capable of heroic deeds and self-sacrificing tendencies.

Gandhi, on the other hand, believed in cautioning youngmen like Sanyal against their violent policies. He made it clear that he would not be willing to participate in a struggle where the masses displayed a preference for a bloody revolution. He also was very clear in defining his principle that he believed to be true and practical. He said that the revolutionaries should be more receptive to constructive
criticism because criticism of the revolutionaries meant that he felt for them and wanted to correct their ways.

Surprisingly, one finds Gandhi evasive in his reply to Sanyal’s letter regarding the other allegations levelled against him, as issues that had no connection with the real issue at stake. He could have taken time to explain his stand. He could have corrected Sanyal’s misunderstanding of his ideal, he could have explained that his non-violence was a chemical mixture, one whole principle, destined to help the world, a world that is tired of armed rebellions, mindless killings and wars between nations. While recognising the heroism and bravery of a revolutionary, he failed to explain why the revolutionary’s act was a hurdle in the progress of the nation. It was due to this fact - the fact that Gandhi’s answer was not sufficiently explicit that another letter was written to him by Manmathnath Gupta as a sequel to the first.

**MANMATHNATH GUPTA’S CORRESPONDENCE WITH GANDHI**

Manmathnath Gupta, a former member of the HRA, was actively involved in the Kakori Train Robbery and was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment. A prolific writer of the post independence era, he deals exclusively with the role of the revolutionaries in his books. In his recent writings, he is highly critical of Gandhi’s attitude towards
the revolutionaries and his achievements. He claims to have written two letters to Gandhi as a sequel to Sanyal’s letter because Sanyal was arrested in 1925 and could not continue with the correspondence.*

Manmathnath, in his letter, tried to probe deep into Gandhi’s mind and sought his clarification on certain matters. The correspondence brings about vividly the hypothesis and the method of functioning of both Gandhi and the revolutionaries. Both were critical of each other’s policies aiming at the specific purpose of conversion of the opponent.

Manmathnath appears to be perturbed about Gandhi’s understanding of the revolutionary methods and also his discrimination against the revolutionaries. He wanted to know the causes for Gandhi’s unalloyed criticism of the revolutionary party. He was sore over Gandhi’s attitude towards the revolutionaries and for his opinion that the revolutionaries "were less sacrificing, less noble and lesser lovers of the country" as compared to the other parties - Moderates, Swarajists and Nationalists. Expressing his anguish, he said that Gandhi was ready to make compromises with such parties though their policies were not in tune with Gandhian thinking, but not with the revolutionaries whom he appeared to abhor.

Gandhi, in reply, pointed out that the allegation was wrong and in his opinion their sacrifice, nobility and love were not only a waste of effort but also had harmed the country by their being ignorant and misguided. In fact, the revolutionaries' disregard for the lives of their opponents was responsible for Gandhi's indifference towards them as their attitude was inconsistent with his philosophy.

The basic difference in their approach centred round their attitude towards the adversary. While Gandhi advocated love and charity towards the opponent and wanted to appeal to his conscience, the revolutionaries' reaction to the opponent was of an ordinary individual who, when wronged and harmed, would show disregard for his adversary and indulge in retaliation and violence. Realising this, Gandhi took the first step to convert the dissenters by making it amply clear that it was the revolutionaries' disposition towards the enemies that created a conflict situation, which in turn forced the government, to come down heavily on the people with repressive laws.

Manmathnath's justification of violence and warfare on the basis of India's past history and Gita's preachings of destruction of evil for a noble cause did not elicit Gandhi's approval. His view of the Indian masses not being influenced by war, was justified because only the kshatriyas in the Indian society fought wars, and they formed only a small part.
of the population. His interpretation of the Gita too did not allow him to support Manmathnath's view and he emphatically denied that the revolutionaries could ever assume the role of God in finishing off the evil by totally eliminating it.

Manmathnath was also critical of Gandhi's claim that swarajya would be brought in by the spinners. Spinning for freedom was not acceptable even to many congressites, not to talk of the revolutionaries. Lekh Ram Sharma, a revolutionary, said that he himself took to spinning more because the "Charkha" was a novel idea and not because he believed in it.9 Another revolutionary - turned - Gandhian Surendra Mohan had narrated his conversation with Gandhi wherein he had argued that "charkha" was not indispensable in their fight for freedom. But the masses wanted him (Gandhi) and he would not lead them without "charkha." So, the people accepted the "charkha" and agreed to spin.10

Manmathnath considered Gandhi's policy to be of philosophical cowardice and effortlessness and challenged him that fighting against a satanic government would be better than being philosophical. Gandhi, knew that he had to adopt an active measure but the revolutionaries preferred to use violent methods, while Gandhi chose non-violence for obtaining the same objective. Manmathnath's claim that

Gandhi's decision to desist from war meant cowardice does not seem to be well grounded, as the latter's choice of non-violence too required a strong moral and spiritual character and the same amount of preparation. As pointed out by Sunderlal, "The non-violent way of resistance requires its own peculiar preparation and discipline, just as the violent way requires its preparations, drill, training and discipline. The preparation for the violent way is more objective and external while the preparation for the non-violent way is rather subjective and internal."\(^{11}\) Besides, Gandhi himself said, "If the method of violence takes plenty of training the method of non-violence takes even more training, and that training is much more difficult that the training for violence."\(^{12}\) One can therefore, say that the policy of non-violence did not mean the prevalence of effortlessness. Non-violence cannot imply cowardice because it demanded, physical, moral and spiritual strength from the participants.

G.N. Dhawan opined that a follower of non-violence must develop internal strength by waging a victorious conflict against his own feeling of resentment which might otherwise express itself in retaliation and hatred. The

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strength which expresses itself in self discipline and enlightened forgiveness is not the strength of the body, but of the soul and is open to the weakest in body."\textsuperscript{13}

Gandhi, however, did not agree with Manmathnath that the revolutionary methods dispelled cowardice from the heart of the villagers and held that had it been the case, his attitude towards the revolutionaries would have been softer. He also questioned the validity of the latter’s claim that a revolutionary "does the good and dies." He upheld that the revolutionary "does the evil and dies." He was not prepared to endorse the view that killing, assassination or terrorism could ever be considered as good. He emphasised, if a person dying on the gallows was not innocent of another’s blood, he could never have had ideas that deserved to ripen.

It is clear that Gandhi, thus, had spelt out what was right in his eyes and gave a choice to the revolutionaries either to accept it or leave it, thereby implying that his stand was not liable to change. Analysing the results of the revolutionary activities on the masses from his viewpoint, Gandhi pointed out that "we cannot claim to be the descendants of the military classes to which Shivaji, Ranjit or Pratap belonged." But, he did not hesitate to call many of those heroes as misguided patriots. However, he

rationalised, that the circumstances which motivated those heroes were different. He was all humility while stating that he was not qualified enough to teach any philosophy because he was still practising it himself. He explained that he was satisfied in taking one step at a time and asked the revolutionaries to keep in mind the prevailing situation in India before taking any positive step in the direction in which they wanted to move.

The correspondence between the two indicates Gandhi's mental attitude towards the revolutionaries. Unhesitatingly, he characterised them as being dangerous, ignorant and misguided. The revolutionaries were, to some extent, misguided in those days as many of them accepted later that they did realise the futility of individual murders and assassinations at a later stage.

Lekh Ram Sharma opined that, "In those days, the revolutionaries did not realise that just by killing one or two minor British officials, freedom cannot be won. In the heat of the moment, the revolutionaries being young, wanted to achieve something and, therefore, believed in individual assassinations." Bhupati Majumdar also believed so when he mentioned that educated youngmen did not realise that by giving up their lives in fighting, they could not get

14. Personal Interview with Lekh Ram Sharma on June 20, 1989 at Kalka.
independence.\textsuperscript{15} The same view was endorsed by Durga Das Khanna who had mentioned that Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev were also aware of it.\textsuperscript{16}

However, to call the revolutionaries ignorant would be carrying things too far. The revolutionaries, having come mostly from the class of students, were well acquainted with various aspects of Indian life. Books were circulated secretly and read avidly. From the revolutionaries' viewpoint it might also not be apt to say that they did not know their work. Theoretically, they had clear-cut ideologies and proper organisations. They had even outlined the type of government they wanted. But Gandhi's weapon of moral power proved far more effective than their's, in the prevalent circumstances. Gandhi, however, through his arguments, proved his point to the revolutionaries and won the first round. He was blunt, frank and candid in his appraisal, took a strong stand and explained where the revolutionaries erred, but left it to the revolutionaries either to accept or reject his principles and programmes.

In his second letter, Manmathnath reminded Gandhi, of his views about the revolutionary's role, at the time of the partition of Bengal, wherein he had appreciated them. Gandhi replied that he still upheld the same views of the distinct

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{15} Bhupati Majumdar, \textit{Oral History Transcript, op.cit.}, p. 9.
\bibitem{16} Durga Das Khanna, \textit{Oral History Transcript, op.cit.}, p. 71.
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service, rendered by the revolutionaries to the country's cause. But, according to him, bravery and self-sacrifice need not include killing. He apparently made an effort in his letter to drive home to the revolutionary the futility of killing individuals. In fact, he wanted the revolutionaries to retain the spirit of self-sacrifice along with bravery and he further suggested the fusion of such a spirit with non-violence.

Manmathnath also reminded Gandhi of the latter's attitude towards the fast kept by MacSwiney whom he (Gandhi) had referred to as the "spotless lamb" and questioned his attitude towards Gopal Mohan Saha's fast. Gandhi, however, conceded in his reply that he was ignorant of the method of "Conspiracy, bloodshed and terrorism" used by MacSwiney and considered it an error on his part.

He also agreed with Manmathnath that an individual, who remained non-violent in spite of his ability to strike, alone was truly non-violent, thereby making it obvious that non-violence was the weapon of the strong. He finally made a reasonable appeal, to the revolutionary by asking him to pray with him for weeding out his (Gandhi's) own failings and hoped that winning freedom through non-violence might give them an opportunity to work together in an independent India.

Throughout the correspondence, Gandhi was trying to wean the revolutionaries (represented by Manmathnath) towards
his methods, based on truth and non-violence. He did not lose sight of his objective anywhere. His move towards his goal of convincing his opponents was steady, though Manmathnath was not convinced of Gandhi’s ideology. The latter does not provide any valid reason for his non-acceptance of the Gandhian principles and reiterated his own interpretation of Gita, the inconsistencies in Gandhian thinking and the efficacy of physical force.

Manmathnath also could not agree that there was any common ground between himself and Gandhi whereas Gandhi was ready to accept the same. Gandhi, however, emerged as a personality with clear consciousness, steadfastness in his thinking, an open approach to the problems and readiness to agree with the revolutionary wherever he could. He proved by his arguments that his ideal had a solid foundation and was worthy of being adopted by a revolutionary whose bravery and self sacrificing attitude would add to the strength of his principles.

**GANDHI’S LETTER TO WOMEN REVOLUTIONARIES**

**KAMLA DASGUPTA**

Kamla Das Gupta who became a member of the Jugantar in 1929, had written to Gandhi in 1927 when she found the "nationalist feelings resurgent, restless all over India
under the influence and inspiration of Gandhi." In it, she had expressed a desire to join the Sabarmati Ashram and devote herself to national work under his guidance. In reply, Gandhi asked her to seek her parent's approval, through patience, perseverance and humility because she would need their assent for joining his ashram. While answering her second letter he suggested that she should meet Satis Chandra Das Gupta and his wife, of Sodepur who had lived in the ashram, to know more about it.

She, however, did not join Gandhi or his ashram. She was also attracted during this time by revolutionaries like Rasik Lal and Dinesh Mazumdar, though she herself accepted that Gandhi still remained dominant and, in her mind, his image seemed sharper, clearer and also more intimate. Surprisingly, she joined the Jugantar in 1929 and later in February 1932, accompanied Bina Das who attempted to shoot at the Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson, and was convicted for three years.

This correspondence,* having been carried out before Kamla Das Gupta became a revolutionary, can have no bearing


18. Ibid.

* Kamla Das Gupta refers to her letters in her interviews with NMML; Gandhi's letters, (a) Collected Works, op.cit., vol. XXXIV, p. 263, (b) Collected Works, op.cit., vol. XXXIV, p. 388,
on the subject under discussion. But, the fact that she
joined the Jugantar after trying to contact Gandhi, shows
that she might have been disillusioned with him at some
stage.

**BINA DAS**

Bina Das of Bengal, also wrote to Gandhi some time in
1928 though her letter is not traceable. Gandhi’s reply*
reveals that she had questioned Gandhi about the use of
physical force. Gandhi does not seem to have been aware of
Bina Das’s identity as a revolutionary. In his reply, he
clearly said that the use of physical force was preferrable
to cowardice. He had advocated the courage to die whether
for self defence or for the cause of one’s country. It may
be pointed out that, in this case, Gandhi was talking in
general and not particularly to a revolutionary.

**GANDHI’S REPLY TO RAJA MAHENDRA PARTAP’S LETTERS.**

Raja Mahendra Partap was another person who believed
in violence, and corresponded regularly with Gandhi. As
early as 1925, Gandhi, in a letter, to him had clarified that
violence and non-violence could never coexist. Later, Gandhi
published one of his letters in his Young India in July 1929.

* Collected Works, op.cit., vol. XXXVII, p. 372, Gandhi’s reply to
Bina Das.
From the Raja's letter, one can make out his interpretation of "Ahimsa." According to him, even if a follower of ahimsa tolerated the conditions where violence was practised, then he would be an abetter, aiding himsa. Though he appreciated Gandhi's Khadi movement, he was doubtful of its efficacy in the struggle for freedom. He was conscious of Gandhi's role in awakening the people. He believed in the destruction of all British organisations on the ground that they represented violence. Gandhi had been literally withholding all his earlier letters as he himself mentioned. It appears that Raja Mahendra Partap's explanation of the meaning of ahimsa had Gandhi's approval and so he published the same while ignoring the others. He (Raja) admitted that he too was a supporter of Ahimsa, who believed in not tolerating or aiding violence. But there was a difference between him and Gandhi. While the Raja considered the activities of the British government alone as violence, for Gandhi the violence of the revolutionaries too came under the same category. Another revolutionary, Babunand also mentioned that the violence of the revolutionaries and that of the alien government were different from each other. According to him, the revolutionary violence was meant for shaping the ideas of the public. But the violence of the government was organised and repressive.19

THE "CULT" AND THE "PHILOSOPHY" OF THE BOMB

The next occasion when the revolutionaries chose to answer Gandhi was when he wrote against the attempt on the life of Lord Irwin on December 23, 1929. Gandhi wrote an article, "The Cult of the Bomb" in Young India and as an answer to his criticism of the revolutionaries' act, Yashpal and Bhagwati Charan, two prominent members of the HSRA wrote a pamphlet "The Philosophy of the Bomb" and it was circulated in the month of January 1930. But Yashpal himself agreed that Bhagwati Charan had made a greater contribution in writing that letter.

Bhagwati Charan had left college on Gandhi's call during the Non-cooperation movement and had joined the National College at Lahore, where he came into contact with the revolutionaries. He distributed Sanyal's pamphlet, "The Revolutionary" all over Punjab. He was one of the architects of the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha and its Manifesto (1928) was written by him under the guidelines provided by Bhagat Singh. He was also an absconder in the Lahore Conspiracy Case with Chandra Shekar Azad and he had a close contact with him. Around this time, Bhagwati Charan started


living in Delhi and was actively engaged in making bombs along with Yashpal. According to Shiv Verma, Bhagwati Charan was aware of the Viceroy's moves and he strongly disapproved of the meeting to be held between Gandhi and the Viceroy stating that "it would be of no use to the masses of India."22 Along with Yashpal, he wanted to plant a bomb along the railway track of the Viceroy's train. But his programme was not approved by the Central Committee of the party. The plan, however, was carried out though the Viceroy escaped unhurt. Gandhi reacted strongly to this act and wrote the article "The Cult of the Bomb" in Young India.

This article reveals how Gandhi continued to be agitated by the manifestations of violence, in the political life of India. He was, by this time, convinced that violence was nothing but the outward sign of the prevalent restlessness and agitation in the minds of the people. He, therefore, came to the conclusion that there would be no more violence once the cause for the agitation was eliminated. His article shows that he still had faith in the revolutionaries and found them amenable to reasoning. He also believed firmly that they could be motivated to desert their path and join him. By that time, his faith in non-violence had also grown deeper.

Through this article, he launched a three-pronged attack on the revolutionaries by pointing out to them that

their violent acts increased the military expenditure; the reforms gained by such acts were minimal and that it may one day be used against one's own people. Gandhi of course could think clearly and predict that violence, once adopted, would always impede the progress of reforms. He was way ahead of others in sifting out the evil results of violent acts that might permanently scar the society. But regarding his other points of criticism, it may well be argued that any movement, whether peaceful or violent, is sure to increase the military expenditure of the government. One cannot hold that revolutionaries' acts alone would spark off an increased expenditure. And then, according to him, the reform measures introduced by the government as a result of violent acts, were paltry as against the needs of the people but they were in fact only the first step. They might have helped the masses to move towards their goal but they could not have brought about complete freedom.

By pointing out the good results of his Non-cooperation movement, Gandhi made earnest attempts to attract the attention of the revolutionaries. His argument to convince them was carried on at two levels (a) that mankind was habitually non-violent (b) and in the duel between violence and non-violence, the latter had always been successful. According to him, mass non-violence and mass discipline were very essential for observing mass Civil
Disobedience. He, therefore, wanted the people to perceive the truth in his statement and keep away from endorsing the violent activities.

But the revolutionaries, in the 1930’s, hardly had any faith in Gandhi’s preachings or the activities of the Congress. Moreover, many revolutionaries were openly critical of Gandhi’s method of functioning. According to Shiv Verma, Bhagwati Charan was one who did not want the revolutionary party to work in accordance with Gandhi’s convenience. He did not like his party to follow Gandhi or support the working of the Congress. 23 Therefore, Gandhi’s appeal to the people to ignore the revolutionary activities touched him to the quick and provoked him to write "The Philosophy of the Bomb." This pamphlet, while trying to remove the misunderstanding about the revolutionaries’ views and ideology, also explained the stand taken by them and their differences from the Gandhian views. It also clarified that constructive criticism of their functions would not be ignored.

The pamphlet analysed deeply the meaning of violence and non-violence and arrived at the conclusion that neither the revolutionaries nor Gandhi represented their character in the real sense of the term. The revolutionaries objected to the use of the term violence for representing their

ideologies because according to them, violence was always committed for injustice, and so, they held that their activities could be called by any name other than violence. According to them, it was a combination of soul-force and physical force. Thus, they gave a totally different outlook to their programme which had hitherto been referred to as the violent activities.

They further clarified, that a revolution based on armed conflict alone would bring about the deliverance of their country, ushering in a new social order. It also included terrorism as its inevitable pilot scheme to forewarn their opponents. The pamphlet tried to reiterate that they were working on a format used in the earlier revolutions. Gandhi, on the other hand, projected something novel, not tried earlier on a mass scale on the political level.

They criticised the Congress for passing the resolution against the attempt on the life of the Viceroy, rather than diverting its energies against the real enemy, the British Government, but were happy to find that it was passed by a thin majority. In their view, it meant that a large number of Congressmen supported the cause of the revolutionaries. They, however, did not agree with Gandhi, that the masses shunned the revolutionary acts and claimed that the masses were with them because their gospel was simple and straight.
Gandhi's preaching of love and self-suffering, does not appear to have had any impact on the revolutionary thinking nor were they convinced of the effects of non-violence. Unlike, Gandhi, who expressed happiness at the Viceroy's escape, the revolutionaries resented that they did not succeed in their attempt. Though they were happy to find that the Congress under Gandhi's leadership had adopted the goal of complete independence, which they were also striving for, yet they could not endorse the Congress policy in toto because it also included Gandhian non-violence. They, however, still hoped for their methods to be endorsed by the Congress, later.

They were right in indicating that they raised the question of complete independence much before others. But, their statement that the revolutionaries never claimed the reforms as their achievement is unexpected because they always had stressed that many of the changes brought about by the alien government were due to their efforts. Sanyal had raised the same issue before Gandhi in 1925.*

By quoting the instances of Russia and Turkey, they again stressed that violence never hampered the progress of a country. They had overlooked Gandhi's claim that the conditions in India were absolutely different and, hence,

whatever was applicable and useful elsewhere need not produce the same results in India too.

The revolutionaries were also firm in their thinking that the mass awakening was not the result of the preaching of non-violence alone. They grudgingly admitted that non-violence was a novel idea, but they did not appreciate its efficacy in the political field. Moreover, the revolutionaries were still not convinced by Gandhi’s technique of Satyagraha. For them, it was just an ordinary method of agitating against an opponent leading towards compromise alone. While the launching of Civil Disobedience meant the dawn of a "new era" to Gandhi "a countrywide programme of mass action based on revolutionary principles alone" could have resulted in a "new era" according to the revolutionaries. The symbolic acts like the celebration of Independence Day, and the unfurling of flags were meaningless to the revolutionaries, in the light of the fact that the country was yet to be freed from its alien domination.

The articles clearly bring out the fact that neither party was ready to compromise with the other regarding the method to be adopted for obtaining the country’s independence. Otherwise, they were ready to appreciate each other’s achievement, and they expressed a desire to work in unison in an independent India. Both claimed that they had the mass support, so crucial for achieving the purpose. In
reality, however, the mass support and approval swayed from one to the other, Gandhi’s new technique was approved, followed and applauded by the people, and they were also emotionally stirred to a large extent when the revolutionary activities revealed the tenacity of their objectives of obtaining freedom at any cost.

The revolutionaries also seem to be influenced by Gandhi’s views on various other matters. For example Rash Behari Bose wrote to Gandhi for eliciting the antecedents of a person, meaning thereby that he respected Gandhi’s opinion, as an individual.*

Similarly, Colonel Bedy who called himself as the secretary of the Revolutionary party, also entered into correspondence with Gandhi. Realising, that Gandhi would have nothing to do with violence in any form, Bedy called him as a comrade. He also displayed his readiness to keep away from the secret activities and individual murders for three years, but wanted Gandhi to make a concerted attempt to win freedom for the country by applying his non-violent technique of action within that time.24

He warned Gandhi that the failure of his method in the specified period would mean the breaking out of a civil

* Rash Behari Bose’s letter written to Gandhi on February 10, 1932, GHML, New Delhi, S.N. I6471.

24 Young India, August 20, 1930; Colonel Bedy’s letter to Gandhi.
war in India. He used the columns of Young India to appeal to the other revolutionaries that they should all stay away from their overt acts and give a second chance to Gandhi. Gandhi, on the other hand was not very sure of the source of the letter because he had no knowledge of any Colonel Bedy. But even then, he was contented to accept the whole thing at its face value, because the letter promised the discontinuation of the overt activities. He was glad, that three years without any overt acts would go a long way in promoting his cause. But as the events proved, the revolutionaries never took rest during the days of civil disobedience, beginning from March 1930.

**CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GANDHI AND SUKHDEV**

When Gandhi was trying to negotiate with the British Government, in the first half on 1931, he received a letter from a famous revolutionary, Sukhdev, of the Lahore Conspiracy Case. It is said to have been carried by the revolutionary’s brother and given to Mahadev Desai at the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931. But Gandhi received the letter after Sukhdev was hanged.*

Alongwith Bhagat Singh and Shivram Rajguru, Sukhdev was also involved in Saunder’s murder. He was looking after

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* Young India, April 23, 1931, Sukhdev's letter to Gandhi and Gandhi's reply.
the Punjab branch of the HSRA and was also a member of its Central Committee. A close friend of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev was intelligent and had a good memory and a clear thinking. Shiv Verma opined that Sukhdev was a good organiser, a strict disciplinarian and was also keen about his cadre.

When the negotiations between Gandhi and Irwin were being carried out, the letter was written by Sukhdev, who according to M.D. Thapar was perturbed because Gandhi appealed repeatedly to the revolutionaries to withdraw their movement. He further mentioned that Sukhdev was restless because he felt that Gandhi was giving more importance to the Congress while neglecting the role of the revolutionaries. It appears that Sukhdev was critical of Gandhi’s actions since the days of non-cooperation. According to Durga Das Khanna, Sukhdev and Bhagat Singh criticised Gandhi sharply (sometime in 1925) because they felt that he had roused the passions of the people through his movement but withdrew it for no adequate reason. He further mentioned that Sukhdev was a bit more trenchant in his criticism of Gandhi. Proper reasoning alone could have satisfied an intelligent person...

like Sukhdev who wrote a letter to Gandhi, irrespective of his impending death.

In his open letter to Gandhi, Sukhdev indirectly pointed out that the Revolutionary movement could not be called off on Gandhi’s appeals because such changes were generally brought about only when the leaders decided to change their tactics on the basis of the peculiar demands of time. He was foresighted enough to see that the Gandhi-Irwin Pact could not solve all the problems and so told Gandhi not to consider the pact as the final stage. As far as he was concerned, it was the Lahore Resolution that should be given prominence. He opined that the period of peace was mainly for the reorganisation of better forces and the preparation for the next stage of the struggle.

He provided an apt appraisal of the situation by pointing out that the Lahore Resolution had not been given up, though a truce had been effected. Similarly, he held that the revolutionaries too could not give up their goal of independence. He analysed the causes of the suspension of a movement and its implications at a later time. He reiterated that solid ideals, and clear suggestions alone would make them change their path. He implied that Gandhi’s appeals were only sentimental without any strong foundation. By explaining the circumstances in which the revolutionaries could change their method of functioning, he displayed his
flexibility or readiness to move with the demand of the time and the situation.

He expressed his resentment over Gandhi's failure to get the revolutionary prisoners released. He seemed to have realised that death was imminent for him and knew that it would promote the cause of the revolutionaries. He expressed deep concern over the condition of the other revolutionary prisoners because they were not lucky enough even to acquire public sympathy. He implored Gandhi to talk directly to the revolutionary leaders, in order to convince them rather than appealing to them publicly. He further wanted Gandhi to discuss the specific factors rather than the general issues that impeded the progress of the national movement. He pointed out that the prevailing circumstances forced the revolutionaries to pursue only the destructive part of their programmes though they did attach great importance to the constructive part too.

He felt that the repeated appeals of Gandhi to the revolutionaries might weaken their determination. He asked Gandhi either to deal directly with the revolutionary leaders in order to convince them or keep away from their path, allowing them to take care of themselves while moving towards their lofty ideal - the formation of a Socialist Republic.

Gandhi gave due recognition to Sukhdev, by publishing his letter in Young India and stating that he was "not one of
the many" because many do not seek the gallows for political freedom. Surprisingly, he agreed that it was not easy to withhold recognition of the revolutionaries’ love of the country and their courage, though their deeds were awful. He did not agree with Sukhdev that his appeals were only sentimental and claimed that every argument of his was based on reasoning and indisputable facts. He projected once again the same arguments that he had earlier forwarded to counteract the revolutionary moves. Even after witnessing the popular support to the Lahore case prisoners, he insisted that the movement was not backed by the masses. He was of course right in mentioning that the mass violence was not in keeping with the Indian culture.

He implied that acquiring freedom through the method of the revolutionaries would require more time. Inspite of the protest of the revolutionaries who doubted the efficacy of non-violence, he still insisted that non-violence would be the only method and declared that his success was delayed because of the attitude of the revolutionaries.

Gandhi’s claim that the bureaucracy was baffled by the non-violent struggle was to a large extent true. In fact, it was the greatest strength of his movement and Gandhi knew it well. But, at the same time it is also true that the violent acts of the revolutionaries forced the government to open negotiations with Gandhi. He completely denied that his
actions would ever promote the crushing of the movement by the bureaucracy. According to him, his public appeals had an impact on some of the revolutionaries and he claimed that many had joined him. However, according to Shiv Verma, Gandhi was able to convert only "about a dozen" revolutionaries to his side. Inspite of Gandhi’s claim that many revolutionaries were attracted to his policies, a majority of them clung to their ideal of winning independence through violence whether in the social, political or religious field.

BARINDRA KUMAR GHOSE WRITES TO GANDHI

Barindra Kumar Ghose, another veteran revolutionary, also corresponded with Gandhi because he wanted to bring about revolutionary changes in the Indian society.* He was the youngest brother of Aurobindo Ghose and was a founder member of the Jugantar. It came into prominence because of the fact that its members desired daring action for throwing out the Britishers. Barindra was convicted and sent to the Andamans in the Manicktolla Conspiracy case, and was released under the Royal Amnesty. He has two books to his credit and was known in the revolutionary circles for his radical ideas.


* Barindra Kumar Ghose’s letter to Gandhi, May 26, 1931, GMML, New Delhi, S.N. 17142.
Barindra’s letter to Gandhi written in 1931, refers to another letter written earlier. He was concerned with both social and political matters, and visualised a new India. His vision and understanding of the term freedom had widened to a large extent since the first decade of the 20th century. He aspired for freedom in different fields, religious, social and political, for the Indians. He seemed to be impatient to remove the defects in the Indian Society in one go, but realised that it would require an army of workers, balanced and free from prejudices for carrying out the task. Though willing to wipe out old faiths, belief and systems, he realised that whatever is true, will not die and it will renew itself. Like Gandhi, he too believed that the West had brought imperfect half-truths and ideals to India. He was bold enough to tell Gandhi that, he needed financial assistance for executing his aim. He did not want to hide the fact that he was a revolutionary and mentioned that he was Aurobindo Ghose’s brother.

Besides them, some other revolutionaries like Durga Das Khanna, a member of the HSRA, Arun Chandra Guha, a Jugantar member, and Prithvi Singh Azad, a Ghadr member, had also written to Gandhi. Khanna said that he wrote to Gandhi in the twenties because he could not make up his mind about joining the freedom movement. Mahadev Desai’s reply seems to have disillusioned him and he joined the revolutionary group
of Bhagat Singh. Guha, too mentioned that he alongwith Bhupendra Kumar Dutta, wrote to Gandhi in 1938 though non-violence still had not become his creed. In 1941 he again wrote to Gandhi who replied that his (Guha’s) acceptance of non-violence in communal conflict and the like was enough for his (Gandhi’s) purpose. Baba Prithvi Singh Azad whose voluntary surrender to the police was effected through the mediation of Gandhi, stayed in his ashram. He had also corresponded with Gandhi on varied matters in the forties.

Surprisingly, none of the letters written by the revolutionaries show any inclination on their part to desist from their mode of functioning. The message conveyed through their letters is loud and clear. Gandhi’s reply and his patient explanation show that he was convinced about his own philosophy. Irrespective of his attempts to convert them, a majority of the revolutionaries remained unconvinced by the Gandhian ideology. There were, however, a few revolutionaries who did come into contact with him and became his ardent followers. Kaka Saheb Kalelkar, Mama Saheb Phadke, Mohanlal Pandya, Chhote Lal, Sunderlal Pandit and others were influenced by his ideology and so subsequently changed the mode of their functioning.