

Nationalist Response in the Wake of World War II

Congress Crisis on Method of Struggle

In the aftermath of the civil disobedience movement, there was some disarray within the Congress. In Gandhi's perception there was rising corruption and indiscipline in the organisation. He was also unhappy with the rivalries and petty squabbles among the Congress leaders. There were issues of bogus membership and unethical means employed in trying to getting into the Congress committees and controlling them. Gandhi firmly believed that the Congress should first put its house in order before the movement could again be launched; besides, he also felt the masses were not in the mood for a struggle. There were others who felt that the struggle should continue.

■ Haripura and Tripuri Sessions: Subhash Bose's Views

Subhash Chandra Bose was president of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. His main area of work lay in the organisation of the youth and promoting the trade union movement. Subhash Bose did not agree with Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress on many aspects of the struggle for freedom. He along with Jawaharlal Nehru opposed the Motilal Nehru Report which spoke for dominion status for

India. Bose was all for full independence; he also announced the formation of the Independence League. When the Lahore Congress session under Jawaharlal Nehru's presidency adopted a resolution that the Congress goal would be 'Poorna Swaraj', Bose fully endorsed the decision. He was again fully active in the Salt Satyagraha Movement in 1930, forcing the government to arrest him. He was vehemently against the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931, especially as the government refused to negotiate on the death sentence for Bhagat Singh and his associates. From all this we get a clear idea that Bose was a man of action and radical ideas.

Haripura

At the Congress meeting in Haripura, Gujarat, in February 1938, Bose was unanimously elected president of the session. He was firm in his belief that the Congress ministries in the provinces had immense revolutionary potential, as he said in his presidential address. Bose also talked of economic development of the country through planning and was instrumental in setting up a National Planning Committee later.

The session adopted a resolution that the Congress would give moral support to those who were agitating against the governance in the princely states.

In the following months, the international situation was highly disturbed; there were clear signs that Europe was going to be embroiled in war.

1939: Subhash Wins but Congress

Faces Internal Strife

In January 1939, Subhash Bose decided to stand again for the president's post in the Congress. Gandhi was not happy with Bose's candidature. Bose said he represented the "new ideas, ideologies, problems and programmes" that had come out of the "the progressive sharpening of the anti-imperialist struggle in India". However, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad,

J.B. Kripalani and some other members of the Congress Working Committee pointed out that it was in the various Congress bodies, such as the working committee, that ideologies and programmes were developed; moreover, the position of the Congress president was more of a constitutional one, representative and symbolic of the unity of the nation. They favoured the candidate supported by Gandhi, namely, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Subhash Bose won the election by 1580 votes against 1377; he got the full support of the Congress Socialist Party and the communists. Gandhi congratulated Bose on his victory but also declared that "Pattabhi's defeat is my defeat." Now it became a Gandhi versus Bose issue.

Tripuri

In March 1939 the Congress session took place at Tripuri, in the Central Provinces (near Jabalpur in present Madhya Pradesh). It was obvious that all was not well within the Congress. The working committee, the ruling body of the Congress, is not elected, but nominated by the president; the election of the president is thus a constitutional opportunity through which the membership expressed the nature of the leadership of the Congress. With Bose's victory the polarisation in terms of ideology and method of future struggle was clear. Thus the election of Bose, in the face of the opposition of the official machine, led to a sharp inner crisis.

Subhash Bose had accused the working committee leaders of being ready to reach a compromise with the government on the matter of federation. Now, those leaders felt they could not work with a president who had publicly cast doubts on their nationalistic principles and resigned from the working committee.

Bose was ill when the Tripuri session took place, but he attended it and in his presidential speech he prophesied that an imperialist war was about to take place in Europe. He declared: "In the first place, we must give clear and

unequivocal expression to what I have been feeling for some time past, namely, that the time has come for us to raise the issue of Swaraj and submit our national demand to the British government in the form of an ultimatum..." He was in favour of giving a six-month ultimatum to Britain to grant the national demand of independence; if the ultimatum was rejected, he said, a mass civil disobedience movement should be launched.

In his opinion, as Bose was to write later, the Congress was strong enough just as the masses were ready for such a struggle. He felt that advantage should be taken of the international crisis to strive for independence.

Gandhi, on the other hand, was firm in the belief that it was not the time for such ultimatums as neither the Congress nor the masses were yet ready for struggle. He was also aware that there were communal discord and class strife and a lack of unified vision and that this would undermine any movement.

A resolution was moved by Govind Ballabh Pant, reaffirming faith in Gandhian policies and asking Bose to nominate the working committee "in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji", and it was passed without opposition from the socialists or the communists. Apparently, the Left was not keen on discarding Gandhi's leadership. However, Gandhi said that he would not like to impose a working committee on the president and that, since Bose was the president, he should choose the members of the working committee and lead the Congress.

Bose continued his effort to win Gandhi's confidence but did not succeed. Bose refused to nominate a new working committee. Bose wanted an immediate struggle led by Gandhi, whereas Gandhi was firm in his belief that the time was not ripe for struggle. The problem was that ideologically Gandhi and Bose were on different platforms. Gandhi was not willing to lead a Congress struggle based on the radical lines preferred by Bose, even as Bose was not willing to

compromise on his ideas. Gandhi was of the view that he would either lead the Congress on the basis of his own strategy and style of politics or surrender the position of the leader. In his reply to a letter from Bose, Gandhi wrote: "The views you express seem to be so diametrically opposed to those of the others and my own that I do not see any possibility of bridging them."

Bose had misjudged the support he had got in his election. Even the socialists and the communists for the most part were not keen on a split in the Congress. They realised that a split would reduce the Left (which was not very consolidated at the time) to a splinter group. They preferred a united Congress led by Gandhi, as the national struggle was of utmost importance and the Congress was at the time the main organ of this struggle.

In the circumstances, Bose saw no option but to resign. He resigned from the president's post in April 1939. This led to the election of Rajendra Prasad as president of the Congress. The crisis in the Congress had been overcome for the present.

In May, Bose and his followers formed the Forward Bloc (at Makur, Unnao) as a new party within the Congress. But when he gave a call for an all-India protest on July 9 against an AICC resolution, the Congress Working Committee took disciplinary action against Bose: in August 1939, he was removed from the post of president of the Bengal Provincial

Among the resolutions at Tripuri was an interesting one relating to China: "The Congress sends its greetings to the people of China and its deepest sympathy in their trials and privations in their struggle against ruthless and inhuman imperialism. It congratulates them on their heroic resistance.

"The Congress expresses its approval of the sending of a Medical Mission on its behalf to the people of China and trusts that this Mission will continue to receive full support, so that it may carry on its work of succour effectively and be a worthy symbol of Indian solidarity with China."

Congress Committee besides being debarred from holding any elective office in the Congress for a period of three years.

Gandhi and Bose: Ideological Differences

Gandhi and Subhash Bose had a deep respect for one another despite their hugely differing ideologies. Each appreciated the work done by the other in the national struggle for freedom.

In 1942, Gandhi called Bose the “Prince among the Patriots”. When the death of Bose was reported, Gandhi said that Netaji’s “patriotism is second to none... His bravery shines through all his actions. He aimed high and failed. But who has not failed.” On another occasion Gandhi said, “Netaji will remain immortal for all time to come for his service to India.”

Bose was fully aware of Gandhi’s importance as a symbol of Indian nationalism and called him “The Father of Our Nation” in a radio broadcast from Rangoon in 1944 even though in the same speech he expressed his own conviction that force was the only way to win freedom from the British. When forced to resign at the Tripuri session, Bose said he would “yield to none in my respect for his (Gandhi’s) personality”, adding that “it will be a tragic thing for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India’s greatest man.” Later, Bose said that the “service which Mahatma Gandhi has rendered to India and to the cause of India’s freedom is so unique and unparalleled that his name will be written in letters of gold in our National History—for all time”.

Incidentally, both men considered socialism to be the way forward in India, though in slightly different ways. Gandhi did not subscribe to the Western form of socialism which he associated with industrialisation, but agreed with the kind

of socialism advocated by Jayaprakash Narayan. Both Gandhi and Bose were religious men and disliked communism. Both worked against untouchability and spoke for women's emancipation. But they differed widely in their ways and methods and in their political and economic ideologies.

■ Non-Violence versus Militant Approach

Gandhi was a firm believer in ahimsa and satyagraha, the non-violent way to gain any goal. He believed that it was the way in which the masses could be involved. He objected to violence firstly because an unarmed masses had little chance of success in an armed rebellion, and then because he considered violence a clumsy weapon which created more problems than it solved, and left behind hatred and bitterness which could not be overcome through reconciliation.

Bose believed that Gandhi's strategy based on the ideology of non-violence would be inadequate for securing India's independence. To his mind, violent resistance alone could oust the alien imperialist rule from India. He considered the Gandhian civil disobedience campaign as an effective means of paralysing the administration, but did not think it to be efficacious unless accompanied by a movement aimed at total revolution that was prepared, if necessary, to use violence.

■ Means and Ends

Bose had his eye on the result of the action. When war clouds hung over Europe, he saw the situation as an opportunity to take advantage of the British weakness. He believed in seizing whatever opportunity was available to carry forward the struggle for freedom. He openly criticised the British for professing to fight for the freedom of the European nations under Nazi control but refusing to grant independence to its own colonies, including India. He had no compunction in taking the help of the Nazis or the Fascists and later of Imperial Japan—the 'Axis powers' as they came to be called when the war broke out—even though he believed in freedom

and equality and other liberal ideals and disapproved of the arrogant racialism of the Nazis and the suppression of democratic institutions in Nazi Germany (as his writings show). However, he admired the Nazis and the Fascists for their discipline. Bose's supporters point out that his association with Germany and Japan was dictated by revolutionary strategy and not by ideological kinship. In other words, he was just a pragmatist; he was against the Fascist theory of racial superiority and the Fascist acceptance of capitalism.

Gandhi felt that the non-violent way of protest that he propagated could not be practised unless the means and ends were equally good. One could not just use any means to achieve an end however desirable that end may be. It would be against the truth that should guide one in all actions. Besides, he had a deep dislike for the ideas of the Fascists and the Nazis and would not think of using them to ally against the British, especially when the latter were in a difficult situation. He saw Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan not just as aggressors but as dangerous powers. Gandhi himself said: "The difference of outlook between him (Bose) and me as to the means is too well known for comment."

Bose acknowledged that Gandhi's methods had their importance when he said in his speech from Tokyo: "Though personally I believe that this method will not succeed in bringing us complete independence, there is no doubt that it has greatly helped to rouse and unify the Indian people and also to keep up a movement of resistance against the foreign government."

■ Form of Government

In his early writings, Bose expressed the opinion that democracy was the acceptable political system for India. But later, he seemed to have veered towards the idea that, at least in the beginning, a democratic system would not be adequate for the process of nation rebuilding and the eradication of

poverty and social inequality. In an address to students in Tokyo University in 1944, Bose is quoted as saying: “You cannot have a so-called democratic system, if that system has to put through economic reforms on a socialistic basis. Therefore we must have a political system—a State—of an authoritarian character....”

[When Bose proclaimed, on October 21, 1943, the formation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India), he held on to his post as Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army, and also named himself head of state, prime minister, and minister for war and foreign affairs. He anticipated retaining the position of head of state in a free India. This, say some scholars, indicated the authoritative streak in Bose.]

As early as 1930, Bose expressed the opinion that in India there should be “a synthesis of what modern Europe calls Socialism and Fascism. We have here the justice, the equality, the love, which is the basis of Socialism, and combined with that we have the efficiency and the discipline of Fascism as it stands in Europe today.” He called this ‘*samyavada*’. Bose admired discipline and orderly approach to anything. He admired these qualities in the Fascists of Italy and in the Nazis of Germany. Indeed, it is clear from his letters that, despite his dislike of colonial power and his desire to oust the alien British rule from India, he was impressed by the methodical and systematic approach of the British and their disciplined way of life.

Bose, however, was not a Nazi or a Fascist, for he supported empowerment of women, secularism and other liberal ideas. Neither was Bose a communist: he considered himself “a socialist, but that was a very different thing from being a communist”. He laughed at the idea of internationalism as espoused by the communists; he said nationalism was important before going on to internationalism. He also felt that the theoretical ideals found in Marx’s writings could not be applied in India without a lot of modification. Nor did

he discard religion which was important to him. Bose was a leftist in the sense that he was an anti-imperialist and believed in attaining complete independence. After the achievement of independence, Bose considered leftism would mean socialism; the reconstruction of national life would have to be on a socialist basis. Indeed, it would appear from many of his writings that, after an initial stage of authoritarian rule, there could be formed “a new India and a happy India on the basis of the eternal principles of liberty, democracy and socialism.”

Gandhi's ideas on government can be found in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909); it was “the nearest he came to producing a sustained work of political theory.” Gandhi's idealised state, his *Ramrajya*—a utopia, in fact—did not need a representative government, a constitution, an army or a police force. Capitalism, communism, exploitation and religious violence would be absent. Instead, the country was to be modelled on the India of the past. In many ways, Gandhi's writings call for a pre-modern, morally-enlightened and apolitical Indian state. Swaraj lays stress on self-governance through individuals and community building. “At the individual level Swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing self-reliance.”

Gandhi said: “I look upon an increase in the power of the state with greatest fear, because although while apparently doing good by minimising exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which is at the root of progress”. He was sceptical of the party system and sure that representative democracy could not provide people with justice. He advocated a stateless society in which life becomes perfect.

Gandhi was opposed to centralisation. He believed in decentralisation of political as well as economic power, and this could come about only by beginning from the basic unit. In his vision of swaraj, society would be composed of

“innumerable... ever-widening, never-ascending” village republics. The basic unit would be the village whose people will always abide by the ideals of truth and non-violence. Every village would be a self-sufficient republic or panchayat. (Self-sufficiency did not mean that in times of need help could not be taken from other villages.) The panchayat, the unit of local self-government, will consist of five persons – male and female – elected annually. It would represent the village community and be the custodian of all authority. Moreover, it would be an autonomous political institution in the context of village administration.

Significantly, Gandhi said: “In the ideal State. . . there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realised in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that the government is best which governs the least –is worthy of consideration.” As Judith Brown writes, Gandhi “seems to have visualised a loose linkage of independent village republics as the ideal form of the State... he can therefore properly be called an anarchist.” In Gandhi’s view, democracy would not be possible without high morality. It is morality that develops a sense of responsibility in human beings, and the strength of this sense of responsibility would help them to respect and protect the rights of each other. Gandhi laid more emphasis on duties than on rights.

■ Militarism

Subhas Bose was deeply attracted to military discipline and was thankful for the basic training he received in the University Unit of the India Defence Force. He volunteered to form a guard of honour during the ceremonial functions at the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1930. And it was done on a massive and grand scale. Bose, in full dress uniform, reviewed his ‘troops’. Gandhi and most of his supporters were uneasy with this display.

Gandhi was against the military on the whole. His *Ramrajya*, being built on the concept of truth and non-

violence and self-regulation would be a perfect place and would not require either police or grandiose armies. All effort must be made to arrive at peace rather than go to war. War, said Gandhi, “demoralises those who are trained for it. It brutalises men of naturally gentle nature.” The main causes of war, according to Gandhi, were racialism, imperialism and fascism (in the context of the Second World War). He also listed economic inequality and exploitation as additional causes of war and instability in the international system. If these were eradicated, there need not be any war. He was not against defensive war: if the innocent were attacked, there was no option but to defend oneself. So, of course, the military was required for self-defence, but it was to be on minimal scale.

■ Ideas on Economy

Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj had its own brand of economic vision. He wanted a decentralised economy without state control. Gandhi dismissed both capitalism and Western socialism—the former for its exploitative excesses and the latter for its connection to industrialisation. Both, he believed, led human beings to crave for luxury and self-indulgence. Gandhi wanted people to get rid of greed and make do with just the bare necessities of life. He developed the idea of village *Sarvodaya*. He advocated a “back to the roots” vision when production was “simultaneous with consumption and distribution and the vicious circle of money economy was absent. Production was for immediate use and not for distant markets.” What he wanted was the revival of ancient village communities in which agriculture prospered, industry was decentralised business was through small scale cooperative organisations. He also wanted the participation of people at all levels. In a letter he wrote to Henry Polak in 1909, Gandhi expressed the view that India’s salvation lay in unlearning what had been learnt; he wanted the railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors, and other modern trappings to be

discarded, and the so-called upper classes to learn to live the simple life of the peasant.

He was against largescale industrialisation. He had strong objections to labour saving machinery. "Men go on saving labour, till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation". He was not against instruments and machinery that saved individual labour. He wrote that "mechanisation is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case in India".

The capitalist who amassed wealth was a thief, according to Gandhi. In his opinion, if a person had inherited wealth or had made a lot of money through trade and industry, the amount was to be shared with the entire society and must be spent on the welfare of all. He put forward his theory of trusteeship under which he wanted the capitalists to be trustees, and as such would take care of not only themselves but also of others. The workers would consider the capitalists as their benefactors and would keep faith in them. So there would be mutual trust and confidence, and as a consequence the ideal of economic equality could be achieved.

Bose considered economic freedom to be the essence of social and political freedom. He was all in favour of modernisation which was necessarily to be brought about by industrialisation. He believed that India's downfall in the political and material sphere had been brought about by the people's inordinate belief in fate and the supernatural accompanied by an indifference to modern scientific developments, especially in the field of war weapons. He felt the backward agriculture had to be modernised. The labour that was ousted from the agricultural sector as a result of such modernisation could be helped only with the development of industry, which could absorb the surplus labour from agriculture.

In his speech at the Haripura Congress session, Bose

expressed his opinion that, for India to progress, a comprehensive scheme of industrial development under state-ownership and state-control would be indispensable. And he spoke about the need to set up a planning commission to advise the national government. He also spoke about abolition of landlordism and liquidation of agricultural indebtedness. He was much impressed by the success attained by the Soviet Union in economic development through rapid industrialisation within a short period of time.

Bose had his reasons for demanding industrialisation for India. It would solve the problem of unemployment. Socialism, he said, was to be the basis of national reconstruction and socialism presupposed industrialisation. Moreover, industrialisation was necessary if India were to compete with foreign countries. Industrialisation was also necessary for improving the standard of living of the people at large. Bose classified industry into three categories: heavy, medium, and cottage. Heavy industries, he said, form the backbone of the national economy. But he was fully aware of the great importance of cottage industries. "Industrialisation does not ... mean that we turn our back on cottage industries. . . . It only means that we shall have to decide which industries should be developed on a cottage basis and which on a large-scale basis."

■ Religion

Gandhi said "God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these, God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live."

Gandhi was primarily a man of religion. He had a steadfast view on religion, and his religion was the basis of all his other ideas. Truth and non-violence were the two principles that helped Gandhi in evolving a comprehensive view of religion that went beyond narrow sectarianism. For

Gandhi there is no higher way of worshipping God than serving the poor and identifying God in them.

He considered different religions to be merely the different paths towards the same destination. Gandhi out of his own experiences and readings came to the conclusion that all religions are based on the same principles, namely, truth and love. He claimed that religion is a binding force and not a dividing force. He said that each person should follow his or her own religion freely. He would not conceive of a state without religion, for the basic tenets of his religion were at the base of his idea of state too.

Subhash Bose believed in Upanishadic teachings. He revered the Bhagavad Gita and was inspired by Vivekananda. He was also inspired by the India of the past as reinterpreted by thinkers. According to many scholars, Hindu spirituality formed the essential part of his political and social thought throughout his adult life. However, he was free of bigotry or orthodoxy. He was for total non-discrimination on the basis of religion and in context he took up the Hindus' cause when he demanded that Hindu prisoners be given the right to do Durga Puja just as Muslims and Christians were allowed to celebrate their festivals. Bose motivated Indians towards freedom struggle through Hindu symbolisms as appropriate for the audience. On December 9, 1930, he called upon the women to participate in the liberation struggle, invoking the imagery of Durga, a form of Shakti, ready to vanquish evil. However, he was not a sectarian. He named his force Azad Hind Fauz, and there were many non-Hindus in that army and who were close to him. The INA was to be a mixture of various religions, races, and castes with total social equality of all soldiers. They were served food cooked in the common kitchen and shared space in common barracks breaking the age old caste bonds and practices. Common celebrations of all religious festivals took place in the INA.

Bose was a secularist with an impartial attitude to all religions. He said that Free India must have an absolutely

neutral and impartial attitude towards all religions and leave it to the choice of individuals to profess or follow a particular religion of his faith. Religion is a private matter, the State has nothing to do with it. He opined that economic issues cut across communal divisions and barriers.

■ Caste and Untouchability

Gandhi's goals for society were mainly three: eradicating untouchability, maintaining the varna distinctions of the caste system and strengthening tolerance, modesty and religiosity in India.

Gandhi believed that one way of reinvigorating India was to wipe out untouchability, which he considered to be a pernicious practice preventing millions of peasants from realising their dreams and aspirations. It was incompatible with Swaraj. He said that if any Shastra propounded untouchability that Shastra should be abandoned. He, however, supported the varna system; he believed that the laws of caste were eternal, and were the base for social harmony. In the India that Gandhi visualised, each village would be organised around the four-fold divisions with every member of society doing his or her own duty. As there would be a complete system of reciprocity, according to Gandhi, no one would be subject to feelings of differences in status.

Bose looked forward to an India changed by a socialist revolution that would bring to an end the traditional social hierarchy with its caste system; in its place would come an egalitarian, casteless and classless society. Subhas Bose completely rejected social inequality and the caste system. He spoke in favour of inter-caste marriages. In his public speeches, Bose spoke vehemently against untouchability. He was inspired by Vivekananda in his belief that the progress of India would be possible only with uplift of the downtrodden and the so-called untouchables.

■ Women

In Gandhi's words, "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women." Gandhi played an important

role in uplifting the status of women in India.

Gandhi was instrumental in bringing women out of their homes to take part in the struggle for freedom. It was, as scholars point out, the most radical of his ideas. It involved bringing women out of the purdah – a system that was prevalent among Hindus as well as Muslims of the time. It involved the possibility of being jailed and thus being separated from their families. These were steps that were revolutionary for those times.

Apart from bringing women into the struggle for swaraj, he vehemently opposed various social ills affecting women like child marriage, the dowry system and female infanticide, and the treatment of widows.

He considered men and women to be equal and declared that men should treat women with respect and consideration. However, in the matter of the roles of men and women, Gandhi would be regarded as patriarchal and traditional by present standards. He wrote in 1937: “I do believe that woman will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with man. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicking man. She has to be the complement of man.” Again, in 1940, he wrote: “Whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence, the vocations of the two must also be different. Her duty of motherhood....requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread winner, she is the keeper and the distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care, the race must become extinct.”

Gandhi considered women to be the presiding deities of the home. It was their *dharma* to take care of the home. “If they do not follow *dharma*, the people would be totally

destroyed,” said Gandhi. However, Gandhi also said that *dharma* did not imply brutish behaviour from men treating women as chattel. Women should not tolerate ill-treatment from their husbands. But he did not ask women to walk out of their homes and launch agitations, personal or public, against their plight or a satyagraha within their exploitative domestic environments. He did say in 1940 that domestic slavery of woman is a symbol of our barbarism, and she should be “freed from this incubus”. He also wrote: “Women may not look for protection to men. They must rely on their own strength and purity of character and on God, as did Draupadi of old.”

Clearly, his ideal woman, as Judith Brown observes, was not the ‘modern woman’, free of the restraints imposed on her physically, socially and economically by virtue of her being born female. He drew his symbol of his ideal woman from the figure of Sita who bore patiently and bravely all the injustices heaped on her by Rama. “Gandhi preached female virtues of bravery and independence, and a capacity to bear suffering; the model he offered to Indian women was the virtuous and faithful wife,” says Judith Brown.

Subhash Bose had a more robust view of women. Differing from the German National Socialists (Nazis) and the Italian Fascists, who stressed the masculine in almost all spheres of social and political activity, Bose considered women to be the equals of men, and thus they should be prepared to fight and sacrifice for the freedom of India. He arduously campaigned to bring women more fully into the life of the nation. In his presidential address at the Maharashtra Provincial Conference in May 1928, he declared: “The status of women should be raised and women should be trained to take a larger and more intelligent interest in public affairs... it is impossible for one half of the nation to win freedom without the active sympathy and support of the other half.”

When, as Congress President in 1938, Bose set up the Planning Commission, he insisted that there should be a

separate planning commission for women. This commission was chaired by Rani Lakshmi Bhai Rajawade and was to deal with the role of women in planned economy in future India.

Later, in 1943, he called on women to serve as soldiers in the Indian National Army. This was a most radical view. He formed a women's regiment in the INA in 1943, named the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Many women were enthused to join the regiment commanded by Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan (Sahgal after marriage). While those less suited to combat duties were employed as nurses and in other support roles, the majority were trained as soldiers. They were given the same treatment as the men and received no special privileges.

In Bose's view, women should be given a high position in the family as well as in society. He believed in female emancipation, in liberating women from age-old bondage to customs and man-made disabilities, social, economic and political. He wanted women to get all-round education including not only literacy, but physical and vocational training. He was all for abolition of purdah and also supported widow remarriage. Women, he said, should also be made conscious of their social and legal rights as well as their duties as citizens.

■ Education

Gandhi was against the English system of education as also against the use of English as a medium of instruction. He wanted education to be in the vernacular. He advocated free and compulsory education for all-boys and girls between 7 and 14 years.

In Gandhi's view education should be an integrated approach to the full development of the personality; it should include physical training and high moral principles along with intellectual and cognitive development. He differentiated between learning and education, knowledge and wisdom, literacy and lessons of life. According to him, "Literacy in itself is no education".

To Gandhi morality had to be a part of education. Taking a leaf from Plato, Gandhi said that education should be a means of attaining knowledge and wisdom that ultimately place the seeker on the spiritual path. The end of education was not merely a means to make a career and achieve social status. Education should be a means to enlightenment. Gandhi also wanted the Hindu scriptures to be a part of education as they propounded discipline and self-restraint.

He conceived his Nai Talim or basic education for all in 1937. Nai Talim aimed to impart education that would lead to freedom from ignorance, illiteracy, superstition, psyche of servitude, and many more taboos that inhibited free thinking of a free India. This scheme of education was to emphasise on holistic training of mind and body, so along with academics, there was to be purposeful manual labour. Handicrafts, art and drawing were the most fundamental teaching tools in Nai Talim. As Gandhi wanted to make Indian villages self-sufficient units, he emphasised on vocational education which increases the efficiency of students in undertaking tasks in those villages and make the village a self-sufficient unit.

Subhash Bose was for higher education, especially in the technical and scientific fields, as he wanted an industrial India. He said, “National Reconstruction will be possible only with the aid of science and our scientists.” He wanted Indian students to be sent abroad for “training in accordance with a clear and definite plan so that as soon as they returned home, they may proceed straight away to build up new industries”.

Second World War and Nationalistic Response

On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland – the action that led to the Second World War. On September 3, 1939, Britain declared war against Germany and the British

Government of India declared India's support for the war without consulting Indian opinion.

■ **Congress Offer to Viceroy**

Though the Congress did not like the unilateral action of the British of drawing India into the war without consulting the Indians, it decided to support the war effort conditionally. The hostility of the Congress to Fascism, Nazism, militarism and imperialism had been much more consistent than the British record. The Indian offer to cooperate in the war effort had two basic conditions:

1. After the war, a constituent assembly should be convened to determine political structure of a free India.
2. Immediately, some form of a genuinely responsible government should be established at the Centre.

The offer was rejected by Linlithgow, the viceroy. The Congress argued that these conditions were necessary to win public opinion for war.

■ **CWC Meeting at Wardha**

The official Congress position was adopted at the Wardha session of the Congress Working Committee, but before that different opinions were voiced on the question of Indian support to British war efforts.

Gandhi, who had all sympathy for Britain in this war because of his total dislike of the fascist ideology, advocated an unconditional support to the Allied powers. He made a clear distinction between the democratic nations of western Europe and the totalitarian Nazis and fascists. He said that he was not willing to embarrass the British government during the war.

Subhas Bose and other socialists, such as Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan, who had been invited by the Congress to attend the Wardha meeting so that different opinions could be discussed, had no sympathy for either side in the war. In their opinion, the war was being fought by imperialists on both sides; each side wanted to protect its colonial possessions and gain more territories to

colonise, so neither side should be supported by the nationalists. In fact, they thought it was the ideal time to launch a civil disobedience movement, to thus take advantage of the situation and snatch freedom from Britain.

Jawaharlal Nehru was not ready to accept the opinion of either Gandhi or of the socialists. He was clear in his mind about the difference between democratic values and fascism.

He believed that justice was on the side of Britain, France and Poland, but he also believed that Britain and France were imperialist powers, and that “the war was the result of the inner contradictions of capitalism maturing since the end of World War I”. He, therefore, advocated no Indian participation till India itself was free. However, at the same time, no advantage was to be taken of Britain’s difficulty by starting an immediate civil disobedience movement.

Gandhi was more or less isolated in his stand. In the end he decided to go with Nehru’s position, which was adopted by the Congress Working Committee.

The CWC resolution condemned Fascist aggression. It said that (i) India could not be party to a war being fought, on the face of it, for democratic freedom, while that freedom was being denied to India; (ii) if Britain was fighting for democracy and freedom, it should be proved by ending imperialism in its colonies and establishing full democracy in India; (iii) the government should declare its war aims soon and, also, as to how the principles of democracy were to be applied to India after the war.

The Congress leadership wanted “to give every chance to the viceroy and the British Government”.

Government Attitude and Congress Ministries’ Resignation

The government’s response was entirely negative. Viceroy Linlithgow, in his statement, made on October 17, 1939, tried

to use the Muslim League and the princes against the Congress. The government

- refused to define British war aims beyond stating that Britain was resisting aggression;
- said it would, as part of future arrangement, consult “representatives of several communities, parties and interests in India, and the Indian princes” as to how the Act of 1935 might be modified;
- said it would immediately set up a “consultative committee” whose advice could be sought whenever required.

■ Government’s Hidden Agenda

Linlithgow’s statement was not an aberration, but a part of general British policy—“to take advantage of the war to regain the lost ground from the Congress” by provoking the Congress into a confrontation with the government and then using the extraordinary situation to acquire draconian powers. Even before the declaration of the War, emergency powers had been acquired for the Centre in respect of provincial subjects by amending the 1935 Act. Defence of India ordinance had been enforced the day the War was declared, thus restricting civil liberties. In May 1940, a top secret Draft Revolutionary Movement Ordinance had been prepared, aimed at launching crippling pre-emptive strikes on the Congress. The government could then call upon the Allied troops stationed in India. It could also win an unusual amount of liberal and leftist sympathy all over the world by painting an aggressive Congress as being pro-Japan and pro-Germany.

British Indian reactionary policies received full support from the Prime Minister of Britain, Winston Churchill, and the Secretary of State, Zetland, who branded the Congress as a purely Hindu organisation.

It became clear that the British government had no intention of loosening its hold, during or after the war, and was willing to treat the Congress as an enemy.

Gandhi reacted sharply to the government's insensitivity to Indian public opinion—"... there is to be no democracy for India if Britain can prevent it." Referring to the minorities and other special interests, Gandhi said, "Congress will safeguard minority rights provided they do not advance claims inconsistent with India's independence."

Congress Ministries Decide to Resign

On October 23, 1939, the CWC meeting

- rejected the viceregal statement as a reiteration of the old imperialist policy;
- decided not to support the war; and
- called upon the Congress ministries to resign in the provinces.

Debate on the Question of Immediate Mass

Satyagraha

After Linlithgow's statement of October 1939, the debate on the question of immediate mass struggle began once again. Gandhi and his supporters were not in favour of an immediate struggle because they felt that the

- allied cause was just;
- communal sensitiveness and lack of Hindu-Muslim unity could result in communal riots;
- Congress organisation was in shambles and the atmosphere was not conducive for a mass struggle; and
- masses were not ready for a struggle.

They instead advocated toning up the Congress organisation, carrying on political work among the masses, and negotiating till all possibilities of a negotiated settlement were exhausted. Only then would the struggle be begun.

In January 1940, Linlithgow stated, "Dominion status of Westminster variety, after the war, is the goal of British policy in India."

In its meeting in Allahabad in November 1939, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution observing

that “the course of the war and the policy pursued by the British and the French governments and in particular the declarations made on behalf of the British government in regard to India, seem to demonstrate that the present war, like the World War of 1914-18, is being carried on for imperialist ends, and the British imperialism is to remain entrenched in India. With such a war and with this policy the Congress cannot associate itself, and it cannot countenance the exploitation of India’s resources to this end.” It was reiterated that India’s independence and of the right of Indians to frame their constitution through a constituent assembly should be recognised and that it was only through such a constituent assembly that communal and other problems could be tackled.

The **Ramgarh session** of the Congress was held in March 1940 with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in the president’s chair. All agreed that a battle must be waged but there was disagreement over the form. It was decided to leave the form and timing to Gandhi. But even now, Gandhi was in favour of continued cooperation at the provincial level. He said that he would offer the British moral support during the war but on a non-violent basis. However, Jawaharlal Nehru reiterated that complete independence for India must be a precondition for Congress support to the British war effort. Subhash Bose continued with his strong militant stand of direct action against the colonial government forcing it to agree to the grant of freedom. Once again he pointed out that Britain’s difficulty was to be seized as India’s opportunity.

The Congress finally declared at the session that the people of India would accept nothing short of complete independence. Indian freedom could not be in the form of dominion or any other status within the imperial structure. Sovereignty, said the Congress resolution, must rest with the people, whether in the States (the princely states) or the provinces. It was also decided that “Congress would resort to civil disobedience as soon as the Congress organisation

is considered fit enough or if circumstances precipitate a crisis.”

Pakistan Resolution—Lahore (March 1940)

The Muslim League passed a resolution calling for “grouping of geographically contiguous areas where Muslims are in majority (North-West, East) into independent states in which constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign and adequate safeguards to Muslims where they are in minority”.

August Offer

Hitler’s astounding success and the fall of Belgium, Holland and France put England in a conciliatory mood. As the war in Europe had undertaken a new turn, the dominant Congress leadership was again in a dilemma. Both Gandhi and Nehru strongly opposed the idea of taking advantage of Britain’s position.

The Congress was ready to compromise, asking the British government to let it form an interim government during the war period but the government was not interested.

The government came up with its own offer to get the cooperation of India in the war effort. Linlithgow announced the August Offer (August 1940) which proposed:

- dominion status as the objective for India;
- expansion of viceroy’s executive council which would have a majority of Indians (who would be drawn from major political parties);
- setting up of a constituent assembly after the war where mainly Indians would decide the constitution according to their social, economic and political conceptions, subject to fulfilment of the obligation of the government regarding defence, minority rights, treaties with States, all India services; and
- no future constitution to be adopted without the consent of minorities.

■ Responses

The Congress rejected the August Offer. Nehru said, "Dominion status concept is dead as a doornail." Gandhi said that the declaration had widened the gulf between the nationalists and the British rulers.

The Muslim League welcomed the veto assurance given to the League, and reiterated its position that partition was the only solution to the deadlock.

■ Evaluation

For the first time, the inherent right of Indians to frame their constitution was recognised and the Congress demand for a constituent assembly was conceded. Dominion status was explicitly offered.

In July 1941, the viceroy's executive council was enlarged to give the Indians a majority of 8 out of 12 for the first time, but the British remained in charge of defence, finance and home. Also, a National Defence Council was set up with purely advisory functions.

Individual Satyagrahas

The government had taken the adamant position that no constitutional advance could be made till the Congress came to an agreement with the Muslim leaders. It issued ordinance after ordinance taking away the freedom of speech and that of the press and the right to organise associations.

Towards the end of 1940, the Congress once again asked Gandhi to take command. Gandhi now began taking steps which would lead to a mass struggle within his broad strategic perspective. He decided to initiate a limited

June 1941: Germany attacks Russia and Russia is dragged into the War.

December 1941: Japan attacks Pearl Harbour.

March 1942: After having overrun almost the whole of South-East Asia, Japan occupies Rangoon.

satyagraha on an individual basis by a few selected individuals in every locality.

The aims of launching individual satyagraha were—(i) to show that nationalist patience was not due to weakness; (ii) to express people's feeling that they were not interested in the war and that they made no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that ruled India; and (iii) to give another opportunity to the government to accept Congress' demands peacefully.

The demand of the satyagrahi would be the freedom of speech against the war through an anti-war declaration. If the government did not arrest the satyagrahi, he or she would not only repeat it but move into villages and start a march towards Delhi, thus precipitating a movement which came to be known as the 'Delhi Chalo Movement'.

Vinoba Bhave was the first to offer the satyagraha and Nehru, the second. By May 1941, 25,000 people had been convicted for individual civil disobedience.

Gandhi Designates Nehru as his Successor

The Congress leaders, released in December 1941, in the midst of Japan's aggressive actions, were anxious to defend Indian territory and go to the aid of the Allies. The CWC overrode Gandhi's and Nehru's objections and passed a resolution offering to cooperate with the government in the defence of India, if

- (i) full independence was given after the war, and
- (ii) substance of power was transferred immediately.

It was at this time that Gandhi designated Nehru as his chosen successor.

Nehru and Gandhi differed in temperament and attitudes towards modernity, religion, God, State and industrialisation. Nehru was indifferent to religion, Gandhi believed deeply in his own version of God; Nehru believed that industrialisation

was the only solution to the acute and widespread poverty of India, while Gandhi called for the reviving of the rural economy. Nehru believed in the powers of the modern State to elevate and reform society, while Gandhi was sceptical of State power, trusting instead to the conscience and willingness of individuals and communities. Despite having so many differences, Nehru revered Gandhi, and Gandhi, in turn, believed in Nehru more than his own sons. Both teacher and disciple had fundamental similarities—patriotism in an inclusive sense, i.e., they identified with India as a whole rather than with a particular caste, language, region or religion. Both believed in non-violence and democratic form of government.

Rajmohan Gandhi, in his book, *The Good Boatman*, writes that Gandhi preferred Nehru to the alternatives because he most reliably reflected the pluralist, inclusive idea of India that the Mahatma himself stood for. The alternatives—Patel, Rajaji, Azad, Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad—had somewhat sectional interests and affiliations. But Nehru was a Hindu who could be trusted by Muslims, a north-Indian who was respected in south India, and a man who was admired by women. Like Gandhi, Nehru was genuinely an all-India leader, who gave Indians hope—that they could build a more prosperous and peaceful society.

Cripps Mission

In March 1942, a mission headed by Stafford Cripps was sent to India with constitutional proposals to seek Indian support for the war. Stafford Cripps was a left-wing Labourite, the leader of the House of Commons and a member of the British War Cabinet who had actively supported the Indian national movement.

■ Why Cripps Mission was Sent

- Because of the reverses suffered by Britain in South-East Asia, the Japanese threat to invade India seemed real now and Indian support became crucial.

- There was pressure on Britain from the Allies (USA, USSR, China) to seek Indian cooperation.
- Indian nationalists had agreed to support the Allied cause if substantial power was transferred immediately and complete independence given after the war.

■ Main Proposals

The main proposals of the mission were as follows.

1. An Indian Union with a dominion status would be set up; it would be free to decide its relations with the Commonwealth and free to participate in the United Nations and other international bodies.
2. After the end of the war, a constituent assembly would be convened to frame a new constitution. Members of this assembly would be partly elected by the provincial assemblies through proportional representation and partly nominated by the princes.
3. The British government would accept the new constitution subject to two conditions: (i) any province not willing to join the Union could have a separate constitution and form a separate Union, and (ii) the new constitution-making body and the British government would negotiate a treaty to effect the transfer of power and to safeguard racial and religious minorities.
4. In the meantime, defence of India would remain in British hands and the governor-general's powers would remain intact.

■ Departures from the Past and Implications

The proposals differed from those offered in the past in many respects—

- The making of the constitution was to be solely in Indian hands now (and not 'mainly' in Indian hands—as contained in the August Offer).
- A concrete plan was provided for the constituent assembly.
- Option was available to any province to have a separate constitution—a blueprint for India's partition.

- Free India could withdraw from the Commonwealth.
- Indians were allowed a large share in the administration in the interim period.

■ Why Cripps Mission Failed

The Cripps Mission proposals failed to satisfy Indian nationalists and turned out to be merely a propaganda device for the consumption of the US and the Chinese. Various parties and groups had objections to the proposals on different points—

The Congress objected to:

- (i) the offer of dominion status instead of a provision for complete independence;
- (ii) representation of the princely states by nominees and not by elected representatives;
- (iii) right to provinces to secede as this went against the principle of national unity; and
- (iv) absence of any plan for immediate transfer of power and absence of any real share in defence; the governor-general's supremacy had been retained, and the demand that the governor-general be only the constitutional head had not been accepted.

Nehru and Maulana Azad were the official negotiators for the Congress.

The Muslim League

- (i) criticised the idea of a single Indian Union;
- (ii) did not like the machinery for the creation of a constituent assembly and the procedure to decide on the accession of provinces to the Union; and
- (iii) thought that the proposals denied the Muslims the right to self-determination and the creation of Pakistan.

Other groups also objected to the provinces' right to secede. The Liberals considered the secession proposals to be against the unity and security of India. The Hindu Mahasabha criticised the basis of the right to secede. The

depressed classes thought that partition would leave them at the mercy of the caste Hindus. The Sikhs objected that partition would take away Punjab from them.

The explanation that the proposals were meant not to supersede the August Offer but to clothe general provisions with precision cast doubts on the British intentions.

The incapacity of Cripps to go beyond the Draft Declaration and the adoption of a rigid “take it or leave it” attitude added to the deadlock. Cripps had earlier talked of “cabinet” and “national government” but later he said that he had only meant an expansion of the executive council.

The procedure of accession was not well-defined. The decision on secession was to be taken by a resolution in the legislature by a 60 per cent majority. If less than 60 per cent of members supported it, the decision was to be taken by a plebiscite of adult males of that province by a simple majority. This scheme weighed against the Hindus in Punjab and Bengal if they wanted accession to the Indian Union.

It was not clear as to who would implement and interpret the treaty effecting the transfer of power.

Churchill (the British prime minister), Amery (the secretary of state), Linlithgow (the viceroy) and Ward (the commander-in-chief) consistently torpedoed Cripps’ efforts.

Talks broke down on the question of the viceroy’s veto.

Gandhi described the scheme as “a post-dated cheque”; Nehru pointed out that the “existing structure and autocratic powers would remain and a few of us will become the viceroy’s liveried camp followers and look after canteens and the like”.

Stafford Cripps returned home leaving behind a frustrated and embittered Indian people, who, though still sympathising with the victims of Fascist aggression, felt that the existing situation in the country had become intolerable and that the time had come for a final assault on imperialism.

Views

I have not become His Majesty's first Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.

Winston Churchill

The offer of Cripps really gave us nothing. If we accepted his offer, we might have cause to rue it in future. In case the British went back on their word, we should not even have the justification for launching a fresh struggle. War had given India an opportunity for achieving her freedom. We must not lose it by depending upon a mere promise.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Summary

● Congress Stand on World War II:

It would cooperate in the war effort if:

- (i) freedom was given after the War.
- (ii) some form of genuinely responsible government was immediately set up.

September 1, 1939: World War-II broke out and Britain declared India's support for war.

September 10-14, 1939: At CWC meeting at Wardha:

- Gandhi was for unconditional support to Britain's war efforts.
- Subhash Bose and Leftists were for taking advantage of Britain's difficulties and starting a mass movement to dislodge colonialism.
- Nehru recognised the imperialist nature of the war, but was against taking advantage of Britain's difficulties, even as he was against Indian participation in the war.
- The CWC resolved—No Indian participation unless freedom is granted; Government should declare its war aims soon.

● Linlithgow's Statement (October 17, 1939)

Britain's war aim is to resist aggression.

All interest groups are to be consulted to modify 1935 Act for future.

Immediately a "consultative committee" is to be formed for advising functions.

- **Congress Response**

No Indian support to the war
Congress ministries in provinces to resign
But no immediate mass struggle to be launched

- **March 1940**

'Pakistan Resolution' passed at Lahore session of Muslim League

- **August Offer (August 1940)**

Dominion status to be the long-term objective
After the war, constituent assembly to be formed comprising mainly Indians
Minorities' consent to be essential for any future settlement.
Congress rejects the Offer

- **October 1940**

Congress launches individual satyagraha; 25,000 satyagrahis court arrest

- **March 1942**

Japan reaches Rangoon after having overrun almost the whole of South-East Asia.

- **Cripps Mission (March 1942)**

It offers—

- * an Indian Union with dominion status, with right to withdraw from Commonwealth.
- * after war, a constituent assembly elected by provincial assemblies to frame the constitution.
- * freedom to any province unwilling to join the Union to have a separate agreement with Britain.

Meanwhile, defence of India to remain in British hands.

The Congress objects to—

- * dominion status
- * right of provinces to secede
- * no immediate transfer of power
- * retention of governor-general's supremacy.

The Muslim League objects to—

- * Pakistan not being explicitly offered
- * the machinery for creation of Constituent Assembly.