

Article 2

The Noncooperation Movement Hocus-Pocus (1920-21)

**“And thus I clothe my naked villany
With odd old ends stolen out of holy writ;
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.”**

- **William Shakespeare, *Richard III***

Gandhi’s year-long Noncooperation Movement of 1920 is a famous landmark in the Freedom Movement of India. It captured the hearts and imagination of the Indians then and now. But contrary to popular misconception, the agenda for this movement was *not swaraj* (self-rule) per se. The main agenda was the Khilafat Movement and the Punjab atrocities were tacked on as a subsidiary clause.

“On August 18, 1920, he [Gandhi] made a daring speech in Calicut: ‘I am here to declare for the tenth time that by shaping and by becoming a predominant partner in the peace terms imposed on the helpless Turkey, the Imperial Government have intentionally flouted the cherished sentiments of the Muslim subjects of the Empire. What the Government did in the Punjab mercilessly was its double wrong. The people of India must, therefore, have a remedy to redress the double wrongs—the remedy of non-cooperation which I consider it perfectly harmless, absolutely constitutional and yet perfectly efficacious.’”¹

Absolutely *no* mention of swaraj; in fact, as yet the Congress had not passed a resolution in favor of the Noncooperation Movement.

August 1, 1920, India was in mourning; her beloved national leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak had passed away that morning. Did Gandhi give Tilak his due on this day of his passing? No.

“Then came the first of August, 1920, and also the news of the sudden death of Tilak, the Hercules of Indian Nationalism. The nation bowed in mourning. ‘Never before in the history of India was such nation-wide grief witnessed.’ Gandhi felt a great personal loss; however, he did not postpone the programme of noncooperation. The movement was formally inaugurated on the 1st of August, 1920, by Gandhi with the return of the Kaiser-e-Hind gold medal and the Zulu

¹ *The Turkish Question: Mustafa Kemal and Mahatma Gandhi*, by R. K. Sinha. Adam publishers & Distributors, Delhi, 1994. The speech is in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XVIII*, pp 177-79.

war medal granted by the British Government to him for his humanitarian works in South Africa,”²

There is something *so* shabby about inaugurating a national movement—especially one which only *purported* to be for the cause of India’s freedom—on the very day of the death of India’s great and beloved national leader, Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

On an aside, I wish to mention that the author Sinha is putting a misleading euphemism upon Gandhi’s medals. These medals were actually bestowed upon “Sergeant” Gandhi and are specially given to people who rendered distinguished service in the advancement of the interests of the British Raj. It is more proof of Gandhi’s loyalty to the British Raj.

On September 4, 1920, a special session of the Congress met to pass a resolution on the Noncooperation Movement.

“The session started hot with discussions. In Gandhi’s opinion non-cooperation was postulated only with a view to obtaining redressal of the wrongs done to the Turkish and Punjab. He did not like to include any more items in his programme of agitation. It, however, did not appeal to Sjt. Vijaya Raghavachari, supported by many others, who argued that if non-cooperation was to be declared, why should it be with reference to particular wrongs? The absence of swaraj was the biggest wrong that the country was laboring under non-cooperation. How could an unfree India help a wronged Turkey?”³

This was the Congress position. But when the resolution for the Noncooperation Movement was passed it was unchanged in its essence and the word swaraj tacked on as a sop to the conscience.

“The Congress is of the opinion that there can be no contentment in India without redress of the two aforementioned [Khilafat cause and Punjab atrocities] wrongs and that the only effectual means to vindicate national honor and to prevent repetition of similar wrongs in future is the establishment of swarjya. This Congress is further of opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India but to approve of and adopt the policy of progressive non-violent Non-cooperation inaugurated by Mr. Gandhi until the said wrongs are righted and swarajya is established;”⁴

It is *utterly* shameful that swaraj should be added in this dismal way as an adjunct to the Khilafat cause in the Noncooperation Movement.

- Were the Indians aware what their Mahatma’s real agenda was?

² *Ibid*, page 91.

³ *Ibid*, page 95

⁴ *History of Freedom movement in India, Volume III*, by R. C. Majumdar. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963; page 86.

- Are they aware even today? No.

The Indians threw up their jobs, students gave up their schools—heart and soul they all participated in the Noncooperation Movement with the one thought held close: their Mahatma will get them freedom in one year.

- How did the Mahatma—who couldn't bring himself to make an outright demand for swaraj in his agenda—make an outright demand for freedom to the Viceroy?

He didn't! One needs to look deeper into the nitty-gritty of the Noncooperation Movement to learn the truth behind the myth. Also, what exactly did Gandhi conceive by swaraj? That question shall be answered by and by. All through the year of the Noncooperation Movement, Gandhi had kept the Congress hanging by not defining this.

The truth behind the myth of Chauri Chaura:

It is common knowledge that Gandhi was *so* pained by the Chauri Chaura incident⁵—this one single incident of violence—that he called off the Noncooperation movement. This myth has been so much touted that almost no one doubts its veracity. Gandhi is firmly established as the Man of Principles. This, naturally, would lead one to believe that the Noncooperation Movement was unassociated with any violence until the Chauri Chaura incident.

One would be very wrong!

In justification of his stance on the Chauri Chaura incident Gandhi has said:

“I personally can never be party to a movement half violent and half non-violent, even though it may result in the attainment of so-called swaraj, for it will not be swaraj as I have conceived it.”⁶

Yet as is shown below, Gandhi swallowed many instances of violence throughout the Noncooperation Movement. Some such instances of violence are:

1) The National Volunteers:

Gandhi could hardly have failed to know of the true character of the National Volunteers organization of the Noncooperation Movement. R. C. Majumdar records in his *History of the Freedom movement of India* (to be referred to as *HFM I* henceforth), *Volume III*:

⁵ A sub-inspector in Chauri Chaura had assaulted protesters of the Nonviolent Movement at Mundera Bazar. On February 5, 1922, protesters assembled before the police station in Chauri Chaura demanding an explanation from the guilty official. The police opened fire on them ...! When they had exhausted all their ammunition they locked themselves up inside the police station and refused to come out. The maddened protesters then set fire to the police station. The police remained inside the burning building and were burned to death.

⁶ *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume 22; page 351.*

Page 106:

“Though pledged to non-violence their [the National Volunteers] activities were described by the Government as subversive of order and discipline. ‘Attempts to usurp functions of police, intimidation and use violence to enforce *hartals* and social and commercial boycott, or under guise of *swadeshi* or temperance movements in order to impair authority of Government and terrorize political opponents, have been prominent features of their recent activities’.”

The overall tone of the noncooperation movement was not nonviolent, either.

page 121:

“The activity of the non-cooperation party redoubled. . . . Hostility to Government increased, encouraging the tendency towards general lawlessness. The volunteer movement became more formidable: intimidation was freely practiced and the police were molested in the exercise of their duty.”

However, the most *horrendous* case of violence in the Noncooperation Movement is the Moplah riots.

2) The Moplah Riots:

The Moplahs of the Malabar area rose in revolt, on August 20, 1921, and not only indiscriminately raped, killed, and converted the Hindus but also killed Europeans and damaged Government property. Their very *worst* act was ripping open the womb of pregnant Hindu women and pulling the unborn baby out.

Gandhi remained unmoved by these horrors. Here are some of his comments on the riots themselves as well as the Moplahs:

Gandhi-quote from his magazine, *Young India*, September 8, 1921: “The Moplahs are among the bravest in the land. They are god-fearing. Their bravery must be transformed into purest gold.”

“Forcible conversions are horrible things but Moplah bravery must commend admiration.”⁷

“Gandhi did not feel much for the rapes and murders and forcible conversions. He had declared that he would sacrifice a million men for his principles! Three months earlier he had said: ‘I think that only god-fearing people can become true

⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, Dhananjay Keer. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973; page 401.

noncooperators.’ And now he hailed the murderous Moplahs as god-fearing men!”⁸

Gandhi’s calm acceptance of the violent Moplah riots: “Hindus must find the causes of Moplah fanaticism. They will find that they are not without blame. They have hitherto not cared for the Moplah. It is no use now becoming angry with the Moplahs or Mussalmans in general.”⁹

Gandhi-quote in his *Young India* of September 29, 1921: “The ending of the Moplah revolt is a matter not only of urgency, but of simple humanity. The Hindus must have the courage and the faith to feel that they can protect their religion in spite of such fanatical eruptions. ... Be the Moplahs be ever so bad, they deserve to be treated as human beings.”

Here is how Keer records it in his biography of Gandhi:

“It was not only the Muslims in the Khilafat Conference and the Muslim League who ignored the criminality of the barbaric Moplah action in Malabar, but the Congress under the truth-seeker did so by declaring there were only three cases of forcible-conversions! It showed to what level the Gandhi-dominated Congress had fallen in placating the Muslims.”¹⁰

There was some attempt made by the Congress to deny the Khilafat roots of the Moplah riots. Among the 450 plus pages of the Government communications of *The Mapilla Rebellion*,¹¹ I found the banner of the Moplah riots, which clearly gives this the lie!

Khilafat. Allah is Great.
Old and weak, young and strong,
Those who walk, who are rich, poor,
Armed and unarmed, hale and hearty, halt ¹² and infirm,
Let everyone, in godlike guise set forthwith to battle.

3) Other Riots:

There were a spate of riots, especially in Mumbai and Bengal, during the visit of the Prince of Wales. Police were killed then too.

“When the Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) visited Bombay in November 1921, protests degenerated into mob violence with looting. Some policemen were

⁸ *Ibid*; page 403.

⁹ *The collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 22*, Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1966; page 269.

¹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi*, by Dhananjay Keer; page 414-415

¹¹ *The Mapilla Rebellion*: <http://archive.org/details/cu31924023929700>

¹² Those having difficulty in walking.

beaten to death; in three days of riots 58 Bombay citizens were killed, and four hundred were injured.”¹³

Any one of these (and more) should have shocked the nonviolent soul of the Mahatma, and moved him into putting an end to his Noncooperation Movement.

- Why then did Gandhi wait until the end of the year of Noncooperation to call off the Movement using Chauri Chaura incident as an excuse . . . ?

The answer lies here:

The Noncooperation Movement was carrying on without any serious reprisals from the Government; the British watched the antics indulgently. The crunch came with the scheduled visit of the Prince of Wales to India. It was a matter of pride for the Indian Government that the Prince of Wales be warmly welcomed and be graciously received in India. The Congress disagreed. His visit was boycotted by the Congress.

Now the Government unsheathed their swords and declared “open war against the noncooperators.” The Congress was not cowed. The movement grew from strength to strength. At this point (December 1921), the Viceroy Reading approached C. R. Das with a proposition. Netaji Subhas Bose’s account of it is recorded in R. C. Majumdar’s *HFM I, Vol. III*, pages 143-45:

“Bose writes that Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, who had kept away from the 1921 movement, ‘came to interview Deshabandhu Das in the Presidency jail with a message from the Viceroy’, thus clearly implying that it was the Viceroy who took the initiative. . . .

‘The offer that he [Malaviya] brought was that if the Congress agreed to call off the civil disobedience movement immediately, so that the Prince’s visit would not be boycotted by the public, the Government would simultaneously withdraw the notification declaring Congress volunteers illegal and release all those who had been incarcerated thereunder. They would further summon a Round Table Conference of the Government to settle the future constitution of India. . . .

Rightly or wrongly, he [Deshbandhu Das] said, the Mahatma had promised *swaraj* within one year. That year was drawing to a close. Barely a fortnight was left and within this short period something had to be achieved in order to save the face of the Congress and fulfill the Mahatma’s promise regarding *swaraj*. The offer of the Viceroy had come to him as a godsend. . . .

¹³ *World Peace Efforts since Gandhi*, Sanderson Beck; World Peace Communications.

The above logic was irrefutable and I felt convinced. . . . a telegram was sent to Mahatma Gandhi recommending his acceptance of the proposed terms of settlement. A reply came to the effect that he insisted on the release of the Ali brothers and their associates as a part of the terms of settlement and also on an announcement regarding the date and composition of the Round Table Conference. Unfortunately, the Viceroy was not in a mood for any further parleying . . . Ultimately, the Mahatma did come round, but by then it was too late. The Government of India, tired of waiting, had changed their mind. The Deshabandhu was beside himself with anger and disgust. The chance of a lifetime, he said, had been lost. The feeling . . . was that the Mahatma had committed a serious blunder.”

Through 1921, Gandhi had been reiterating his promise to the Indians of swaraj in one year. He had even gone as far as to say “I should not like to remain alive next year if we have not won swaraj by then. I am, in that event, likely to be pained so deeply that the body may perish—I would desire that it should.”¹⁴

It would be a disaster for the Congress and Gandhi, to say the least, to have nothing in hand—never mind swaraj—to show the Indians at the end of the year. The Congress was clearly looking for an excuse to end the Noncooperation Movement.

In the backdrop of this atmosphere in 1922:

- **February 1:** Gandhi wrote a challenging letter to the Viceroy.
- **February 5:** The Chauri Chaura incident took place.
- **February 6:** The Viceroy came out with a press release—which was practically a Declaration of War—in reply to Gandhi’s letter.
- **February 6:** Gandhi wrote a letter—one which clearly indicates the Congress displeasure re his actions. “I observe that my action in writing to the Viceroy has not pleased the Committee.” CWMG, V 22, page 343.
- **February 9:** Gandhi is strongly urged to suspend the Noncooperation Movement by prominent Congress members who had been endeavoring to bring about a Round Table Conference.¹⁵
- **February 10:** Gandhi, in a speech to Congress workers in Bardoli, now declares re the Chauri Chaura incident that the “country at large has not at all accepted the teaching of

¹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi*, Keer, page 405.

¹⁵ *H of F M*, V III, R. C. Majumdar; page 156.

non-violence. I must, therefore, immediately stop the movement for civil disobedience.”¹⁶
The Congress rank and file objected to this “Mahatma’s retreat.” They thought it would disgrace India in the eyes of the world.

- **February 12:** The Working Committee meets at Bardoli and passes the resolution to call off the Noncooperation Movement.
- **February 25:** The resolution was adopted by the A.I.C.C.

And the myth was born.

The Congress and Gandhi had extricated themselves very cleverly from their promise of swaraj in one year to the Indians.

What was the consequence of this?

- The Indian Independence Movement was brought to a screeching halt for many, many years to come.
- And the British Raj reigned supreme, unthreatened.

The Hoax of Gandhi’s “swaraj” in the Noncooperation Movement of 1921:

In 1921, in the year of the Noncooperation Movement, a new Congress creed was passed.

“The new creed declared: ‘That the object of the Congress is the attainment of swaraj by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.’”¹⁷

But what exactly did the word “swaraj” mean? Its literal meaning is “self-rule.” But many Congress members felt the need to clearly define what was meant by “attaining swaraj.”

“There were amendments suggesting that the word swaraj be qualified by the word ‘democratic’ or replaced by the words ‘full responsible Government within the British Commonwealth’ or by asking for a debate on the clause ‘all legitimate and peaceful means.’ But the new creed was passed.”¹⁸

“So Gandhi purposely kept swaraj undefined. Whether the pressure from the Muslim leaders, who were expecting an invasion of India by the Afghan ruler Amanullah, prevailed, is a point worth considering.”¹⁹

¹⁶ *CWMG, V 22, page 377*

¹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi, Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, by Dhananjay Keer; page 365.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, page 365.

¹⁹ For proof of the part Gandhi played in this scheme of the Afghan invasion—an utter betrayal of the Indian freedom cause—read Swami Shradhanand’s article of 1926 (from a series of 26 articles exposing the Congress) written shortly before he was murdered. (Neo Maulana, page 124 @

By the end of the Noncooperation Movement (supposedly to gain “swaraj,” which the Indians assumed meant self-rule), swaraj was still not defined . . . ! Keer writes:

“Some more light must be shed on Gandhi’s opposition to the resolution of independence. He had been shelving the fact of defining the meaning of independence for the previous twelve months. . . . The Khilafatist Muslim leaders preferred to keep the word swaraj undefined as they were awaiting the overrunning of India by Afghan forces. At the Nagpur Congress, Gandhi and Mohamed Ali had opposed B. C. Pal’s amendment to Gandhi’s draft, adding the word ‘democratic’ to the word swaraj. Pal wrote later in Mohamed Ali’s *Comrade*: ‘I learned that swaraj was left without any definition because the moment we tried to do so, the unity in Congress would break up.’ Now that the treaty was signed between Afghanistan and India, the Muslim leaders became desperate and so Hazrat Mohani struggled hard to force the Congress to declare independence.”²⁰

But Gandhi still did not allow it. He prevented Hazrat Mohani’s resolution of complete independence from being passed through Congress.

“‘Let us not,’ he [Gandhi] added, ‘get into waters whose depth we do not know.’ The proposal, if passed, would take them to unfathomable depths. Creeds were not simple things which they could change as they did their clothes.”²¹

Mohani had claimed that Jawarharlal Nehru supported his resolution. Nehru issued a complete denial to this. Mohani got no support from Nehru.

“Pandit Nehru, who was in Lucknow jail at the time, expressed his entire dissent from Maulana Hazrat Mohani’s resolution. If he had the good fortune, he added, to attend the Congress, he would certainly have opposed the Maulana,”²²

On January 5, 1922—**before the Noncooperation movement supposedly aiming for freedom was called off**—Gandhi said in his magazine *Young India*:

“It will be unlawful for us to insist on independence. For it will be vindictive and petulant. It will be a denial of God.”

Why had he deluded the Indians that they were sacrificing their lives for freedom of India in his Noncooperation Movement, then?

<http://www.anurupacinar.com/pdf/Inside%20Congress,%20twenty-six%20articles%20exposing%20the%20Congress,%20by%20Swami%20Shraddhananda.pdf>

²⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi*, by Keer, page 415.

²¹ *Ibid*, page 414.

²² *Ibid*, page 416.

“About two months later, M. Paul Richard, a French Author, declared in an interview in the *Lokmanya*, that Gandhi had said to him:

‘I do not work for freedom of India. I work for non-violence in the world.’”²³

- He dared say this after the tremendous violence that had taken place during his Noncooperation Movement.
- He dared say this after so many Indians had made tremendous sacrifices (being unaware of his true agenda) to participate in his Noncooperation Movement, believing in his promise of swaraj—self-rule—in one year.

Gandhi: The Man of Truth?

With Gandhi, inevitably, one discovers there is one face for the Indians and another behind the scenes, whether it be in the Congress or before the Viceroy.

We have already seen a large sample of it in during the time of his Kheda Satyagraha. The sentiments he avowed publicly then were:

“Champaran and Kaira affairs are my direct, definite, and special contribution to the war. Ask me to suspend my activities in that direction, and you ask me to suspend my life.”²⁴

What he said to the Viceroy in a secret letter sent in the same envelope:

“**Further I desire relief regarding the Kaira trouble.** Relief will entirely disengage me from that preoccupation which I may not entirely set aside. It will also enable me to fall back for war purposes upon my co-workers in Kaira and it may enable me to get recruits from the district.”

Not only did he express a desire to be relieved from the “Kaira trouble,” he suggested a bargain that would, he hoped, induce the British to do so!

And when questioned by people re the content of his secret letter, he said:

“My first letter to His Excellency the Viceroy was meant for him alone. I cannot give publicity to the views which I expressed to him as to a gentleman and a friend.”

[From Gujarati]

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. IV.

²³ *Ibid*, page 416

²⁴ In his letter to the Viceroy on April 29, 1918, which was to be published in the papers.

We have seen again in the time of the Noncooperation Movement how Gandhi fired up the Indians into fighting for what they thought was their freedom, signified in the term “swaraj.”

But we have seen that the swaraj that Gandhi was fighting for was not freedom and certainly could not have led there.

Things didn't change much as time went by. Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's biography, *The Viceroy at Bay*, by John Glendevon, has very revealing sidelights on Gandhi.

Page 116:

“Linlithgow admired the ability with which Gandhi succeeded in ousting Bose although his methods were ‘of the most questionable constitutional validity,’ and getting his own nominee, Rajendra Prasad, elected in Bose's place.”

Yes, the Man of Truth, the Mahatma, was certainly never above scheming and plotting to get his way. There was Truth and then there was Gandhi's “Truth.”

To continue:

“Meanwhile the Viceroy had conveyed to Birla and Mahadeo Desai his surprise at the contrast in tone between Gandhi's personal letters to him and the kind of statement which the Mahatma was making in public. On being assured that he need not take the latter remarks too seriously, as they were meant to appeal to the public, he suggested that Mr. Gandhi might reserve his sharper arrows for his private correspondence and appear in his more human and gentle guise in the statements he released for public consumption.”

At the time these events and others in the freedom movement were taking place, there was no way for the duped Indians to know of the two faces of their Mahatma: the public one they saw, and the private one for carrying on the actual politics.

But today, when so much documentation is available, and what was private is now also public, there is no reason for Indians, or anyone else, to still be burying their heads in the sand.

Anurupa Cinar
Author of *Burning for Freedom*