

Britain, Gandhi and Nehru

The Thirty First Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture

Gopalkrishna Gandhi

Chatham Hall, London
November 24, 2010

It is ~~so~~ with deep sorrow and
deeper humiliation that I have
to announce utter failure on my
part to secure an agreed solution
of the communal question through
~~an~~ informal conversations on
the part of among and with the
representatives of different groups.
Myself I apologise to you, Mr
Prime Minister and the other
colleagues for the waste of a pre-
cious week. My ^{only consolation} ~~satisfaction~~
lies in the fact that when I accepted
the burden of carrying on these
talks, I knew that there was
not much hope of success and
still more in the fact that I ~~have~~
not aware of having ~~neglected~~
~~any~~ spared any effort to reach
a solution. But ~~it~~ to say that
the conversations have, to our utter
shame, failed, is not to say the whole
truth. Causes of failure were in-
herent in the composition of

The first page of Gandhi's statement written with his left hand (to give the right one rest) at 3 a.m. on October 8, 1931 and read in the Minorities Committee of the Second Round Table Conference, London, the same morning, after a very strenuous night and only half an hour's sleep

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*This lecture is dedicated to the memories of
James D.Hunt and Sarvepalli Gopal
biographers, respectively, of Gandhi and Nehru*

Twenty years ago, if a lecture commemorating Nehru and devoted largely to Gandhi had started with a Beatles quote, the audience would have been surprised. And it would not have been amused.

Ten years ago a Beatles beginning might not have caused surprise.

Today, it will neither surprise nor amuse.

We live in jaded times.

As I worked on this lecture, my mental disc started playing ‘Ticket to Ride’. John Lennon has said the song demanded a licence to certain women in Hamburg. Paul McCartney said it was about a rail ticket to the town of Ryde. Both, perhaps, were giving us a ticketless ride.

Time has its circularities.

The song’s line ‘She must think twice, She must do right by me’ seemed to echo the outraged words about another rail ticket, held

by Barrister M K Gandhi, when protesting, in 1893¹, the conductor who ordered him out of his compartment at Maritzburg, South Africa.

‘... I have a first class ticket,’ Gandhi said.

‘That doesn’t matter’, the official replied, ‘you must go’.

‘... I insist on going on with it.’

‘No, you won’t... I shall have to... push you out...’

‘You may. I refuse to get out voluntarily.’

That began Gandhi’s contestations with Empire.

‘Fair enough’, you could interject, ‘but we are in the twenty-first century, not the nineteenth. The script has changed. Empire belongs to history books and history books are not the most favoured read today. Besides, more persons of Indian descent live in Britain now – 1.5 million of them – than persons of English origin ever touched Indian soil. There are 10 British nationals of Indian origin in the House of Commons and 22 in the House of Lords, the richest man in Europe is an Indian residing in Britain, more Indians read Shakespeare than do Geoffrey’s Chaucer’s direct descendants, more crosswords are solved by Indians than by the compatriots of Cohen & Cohen, more Indians play cricket than the countrymen of W.G. Grace, more Quaker Oats are eaten and more Single Malts imbibed in India’s clubs and restaurants than in all the B&Bs and pubs of London put together. And India herself, no basket case of an ex-colony that Macaulay and Curzon might have conjured, is a formidable techno-economic powerhouse that was only touselled by the global meltdown when financial giants here had their crania turned front to back. In these changed world dynamics, you might ask, is any purpose, any purpose at all, served by this invoking of

¹ The incident is believed to have occurred on 31 May, 1893. Gandhi’s *Autobiography* (A), p.67-68.

an old and rather depressing tale which would have belonged to the dead past had a certain gentleman called Richard Attenborough not made a certain film we are unable to forget? And just when we were about to say ‘Look, it needed a Brit to make a film on Gandhi!’ you returned the compliment by getting your Shekhar Kapoor to stump us by his ‘Elizabeth’! ’.

The interjection would be both natural and valid.

Yes, the Empire does belong to the past. As do those two Indians, Gandhi and Nehru.

Does Britain belong to the past, too? A six month British-visa holder should not attempt an answer to that.

But the ‘purpose’ of a lecture invoking Gandhi and Nehru can be put like this: ‘Whether there is such a thing as a ‘dead’ *past*, I would not know. But in times when so much of the *present* is about death, about our stave-fencing of ourselves against being killed, about preparing for death, individual and collective, about building armies, arsenals and air-strike capabilities to inflict death, strategies to deflect it, tactics to defer it, and when so much of the *future* is also dying, dying before our eyes, from the cracking up of Greenland’s ice-caps to the shrinking of rain-forests and the asphyxiation of helpless life-forms in and around our oceans caused by rank callousness going by the innocent-sounding name of ‘oil-spills’, there is such a thing as a *living past*’. There is also such a thing, in the Open University of Human Experience, such a thing as Senior Faculty.

And in that unpolluted and cleansing sphere of time, where ‘life’ as opposed to mere ‘living’ holds out a possibility of survival, the example of two men who respected the people they fought to free their own people from, two men who had the courage to hard-talk

their own kind at the risk of losing their constituencies of faith and hope, two men who dared to trust, who instinctively abjured wrongdoing and who had that now-extinct gift described by the philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as the ‘laughter of the innocent’, those two men make that living past worth bringing to our rather dead present and dying future.

Gandhi’s first sense of Britain was awesome. It came from an oblique Gujarati doggerel² doing the rounds in his school. It beckoned him to:

Behold the mighty Englishman! He is five cubits tall.

Because being a meat-eater, he rules the Indian small.

A mighty, tall and meat-eating ruler came to be held – beheld – with awe in the teenager’s mind as Britain’s real-life presence, leading him to believe that ‘if the whole country took to eating meat the English could be overcome’.

‘Overcoming the English’ was a widely shared Indian aim, even at that time. Keeping millions of India’s goats under the knife in pursuance of that aim was, of course, his own adolescent spin.

The vegetarian teenager’s assay into meat-eating was distasteful. His first known encounter with an Englishman, some five years later, was disastrous. Frederick Lely, Administrator of Porbandar, flatly denied the aspiring Mohandas any help to go to London to

²A, p. 12. This is Mahadev Desai’s trans-creation of the original in Gujarati by poet, essayist, dramatist and historian Narmadshankar Dave (1833-1886). There is no reference to meat in the original lines cited.

read the Law. ‘Do your B.A. first’, he said curtly and dismissed the young visitor.

Mohandas was disheartened but not deflected. Raising money, selling family jewellery³, he stayed with his plan to do more than become a barrister – in his words – ‘...to see England, the land of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilisation’⁴.

Once out on P&O’s S.S.*Clyde* in the September of 1888, he started what very bored or very boring people start, a diary. ‘I am not a man who would after having formed any intention leaves it easily’, he writes⁵ in one of its early pages.

Taking in lungfuls of London’s air he commenced – he was not quite nineteen – yet another manuscript, a primer-cum-motivator for would-be barristers coming out of India. He called it *Guide to London*⁶. ‘Who should go to England?’ he asked in it and answered: ‘...all who can afford (it) should go to England’. He was not looking for an unhindered saunter in Soho. Nor one in Bond Street which he described as ‘the centre of fashionable life in London’. Being in London meant, for him, reading *The Daily News*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, making himself soups of

³ The family spent about Rs 13,000 on the venture, an amount which James Hunt describes in ‘Gandhi in London’ (Promilla & Co., New Delhi, 1978) as ‘the whole capital of the family’.

⁴ Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), *Vol. 1, page 42*. Interview in ‘The Vegetarian’, June 13, 1891.

⁵ London Diary, CWMG, *Vol. 1, pp. 9-10*.

⁶ Gandhi wrote this 20,000 word manuscript (CWMG, *Vol. 1, page 68* onwards) to be of assistance to young Indian students aspiring to studying in England and ‘as a postscript to his own struggle for a career in the law’, Pyarelal in *Mahatma Gandhi: Early Phase*, p.285.

the ‘read-while-you-watch-it cook’ variety, spending long hours in the Inner Temple Library, walking eight miles every day even in ‘the coldest weather and densest fog’, attending Dr Joseph Parker’s noon-day sermons in the Temple Church and, not to forget, scouring the city for vegetarian restaurants where he quickly acquired a dietetic constituency. Speaking to an obviously rapt gathering at The Waverley Restaurant, he declared ‘I never saw a boiled potato in India’⁷.

An exact contemporary of his in London knew the salts of life. With two ‘O’s, two ‘F’s and two ‘W’s to his six-stand ten-syllable name, Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde squandered everything except his inexhaustible capital of wit. His three-part name compressed self-consciously into two initials before his two-syllabled surname, M.K.Gandhi scrounged on everything except his insatiable quest for right living, keeping count of ‘...every little item such as omnibus fares or postage or a couple of coppers spent on newspapers...entered and the balance struck every evening...’⁸. Wilde’s famous remark could well have been addressed to Gandhi : ‘The only thing worse than being talked about is not to be talked about’.

The fame of Lewis Carroll as a writer has obscured his skill as a photographer. If Carroll had photographed his fellow-Londoner some private collector would have been the owner today of a memorable and unaffordable album of sepia prints – ‘Gandhi by Carroll’. And if that volume were to reach Sotheby’s or Christie’s its sale might have been announced under various illustrated Carrollisms : Gandhi at The Porridge Bowl on 278 High Holborn, caption: ‘Sometimes I have believed in six impossible things before breakfast’. Gandhi in his Tavistock Street bed-sit giving himself an unconvincing haircut , caption: ‘We are all mad here’. Gandhi

⁷ CWMG, *Vol. 1, p. 40*

⁸ A, *p. 32*.

standing tentatively outside his London dance class, captioned: ‘Will you come and join the dance, will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, won’t you join the dance?’

If Carroll missed Gandhi, Gandhi missed much more.

The obsessive walker could not but have encountered, only to rebuff, a certain slice of London society on its streets. But we get not one wafting scent of that experience. The newspaper-devouring Gandhi could not but have read of the deeds of Jack the Ripper as, wielding sharp weapons, he mastered the human anatomy. Gandhi, wielding short scissors, mastered narrative censorship.

Nor is there a reference in Gandhi to his own fellow-countryman then befuddling London as Queen Victoria’s Indian ‘Munshi’, the be-turbaned Abdul Karim . We should just assume that an encounter between one who was to be ejected from a train into history and another who was to be ejected from the Queen’s household into a vivid biography⁹ by Shrabani Basu was just not meant to happen.

Other narrow misses are to be regretted even more. Max Mueller, then at his prime in Oxford as an interpreter of the East eluded Gandhi’s attention. As did Alfred Tennyson , whose remarkable *Akbar’s Dream* ought to have brought the pious Indian to his door. Quite amazingly, Gandhi also missed meeting or noticing H.G Wells then teaching not far from Gandhi’s home in Kensington, and John Ruskin, the extraordinary Englishman whose *Unto This Last* was to change his thinking , indeed, his life.

The young ascetic did not encounter Pre-Raphaelitism, then at the zenith of its Attic abjurings. As also the exciting universe of new thought on the origins of life. The world of class struggle and

⁹ *Victoria and Abdul*, Rupa & Co., 2010

proletarian justice passed him by as well (Karl Marx had died but five years earlier). Debates on the Rosse-Herschel positions on the nebulas which were influencing politics and cosmology, besides astronomy, meant nothing to the man who remains doggedly focused on the routine of looking for and finding only that which he wanted.

But behind the repetitious routine, like the prayer in a slow-turning rosary, there was something happening inside the man who was to change the history of the colonized world and, indeed, of the way vast human affairs are conducted.

Contrary to what may be imagined, that ‘something’ was not religious belief but an unmistakable political awakening. One that told him the rule of British law was something he could learn but could also *use*. England was not the land of unsympathetic officials of the Raj alone. It was home to different kinds of people and to different schools of thought.

Gandhi attended¹⁰ at Woking Cemetery in 1891 the funeral of one such ‘different’ person, the non-Believing sympathizer of Indian causes, Charles Bradlaugh who believed with such ardour in justice in British India as to be called ‘MP for India’. No ‘MP for India’ in 1890, no Indian MPs in The House of Commons today.

Another political leader who cast a spell on Gandhi was the Parsi, Dadabhai Naoroji, later to be the first Indian or ‘man of colour’ to be elected to the House of Commons by all of three votes. Gandhi derived his sense of Britain and India sharing a political destiny from Naoroji as also his ‘first acquaintance with the extent of Indian poverty’¹¹. The title of Naoroji’s book ‘Poverty and Un-British Rule’ (1901) made a political statement. By that deft phrase – Un-British – Naoroji gave to the common noun – ‘British’ – the status

¹⁰A, p.44.

¹¹ *Navajivan*, 7 September, 1924.

of an uncommon adjective. An ill-governed Raj perpetuating inequalities was, simply, Un-British. Because of his three vote win, Naoroji came to be called Narrow Majority. But how decisive that slender strength in the House was ! I might add, Naoroji was a Liberal MP.

Annie Besant enjoyed no majority at all, broad or narrow. But she had spell-binding charisma. A colleague of Bradlaugh's , Besant powerfully espoused the 'Indian cause' at first politically but later spiritually as well, as a Theosophist. Gandhi was drawn like an iron filing to the magnet in her.

The atheist Bradlaugh, the Liberal Naoroji and the Theosophist Besant readied him for the trajectory that would place him in orbit. And that came on a third continent.

Gandhi believed¹² he was born in India but 'made' in South Africa. A scion of the Modh Vania clan of Saurashtra, Mohandas could have gone to South Africa from his home in Gujarat without any interlude in Britain. But that have 'made' him the equivalent of a 'grocer' setting up trade. It would not have made him the transformational figure he became. For that the interlude in Britain was essential. 'No South Africa, No Mahatma; No London, No South Africa'.

Gandhi had been in South Africa some seven years , and already a leader of Indian South Africans when news of Queen Victoria's death on January 22, 1901 reached him in Durban. The following loyal telegram¹³ was dispatched by him to the bereaved royal family:

¹² In a post-prayer speech in Delhi on 28 June, 1946.

¹³ Pietermaritzburg Archives: C. S. O. 1071/1901.

Durban, *January 23, 1901*

BRITISH INDIANS NATAL TENDER HUMBLE CONDOLENCES TO THE
ROYAL FAMILY IN THEIR

BEREAVEMENT AND JOIN HER MAJESTY'S OTHER CHILDREN IN
BEWAILING THE EMPIRE'S LOSS IN THE DEATH OF

THE GREATEST AND MOST LOVED SOVEREIGN ON EARTH.

GANDHI

In composing and sending this, Gandhi was but a step short of the effusion that emanated from a devoted versifier in Calcutta, quoted in this very Lectureship¹⁴ by Sarvepalli Gopal. The Calcuttan, in a state of grief, but yet capable of rhyme had written:

*Dust to dust,
Ashes to ashes,
Into her grave
The Great Queen dashes.*

Was Gandhi's loyalty recognized, rewarded?

The Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 saw Gandhi demonstrating his loyalty yet again at the head of a 1000 strong volunteer corps within inches of danger. Unarmed and non-combatant they may have been, but these uniformed men were integral to the proceedings.

The historic rebellion of the Zulu, in the wake of the brutal 'manhunt'¹⁵ that led to the deaths at the mouth of the cannon of their leader Bambata and a dozen others, again saw Gandhi standing – and marching – with stretcher-bearers alongside the Briton.

¹⁴ Twelfth Nehru Memorial Lecture on *The English Language in India after Independence and its Future Role, 1988*

¹⁵ A, p.162.

These acts of solidarity cost Gandhi dear in terms of human choices. They continue to cost dearly in terms of historical analyses. But they carried little weight with Britain. In 1906, a new ordinance obliged every Indian man, woman and child above eight years in the Transvaal to be finger-printed. For Gandhi that procedure, meant for criminals, was Un-British. He led a delegation to London to seek the enactment's disallowance on the principle of 'Equal Rights for Indians'. Among the influential politicians he met was 32-year old Winston Churchill Parliamentary Under-secretary for the Colonies. Colonial Office records show¹⁶ the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Colonial Office, Ommanney minuting, 'I think the law should be disallowed...' But the next noting on the file is 'in the highly irregular red ink' of Winston Churchill: '... Dawdle or disallow – preferably the former.' When the file with several recommendations to the contrary reached Churchill again, he repeated on the file cover, again in red ink, just one word: 'Dawdle!'. On that same visit to London, Gandhi made another adversarial acquaintance, Indian this time. It was to define his politics. Fellow-Gujarati, Shyamji Krishnavarma, ideologue of the Indian school of violence and V D Savarkar, the future leader of the Hindu Mahasabha did not believe freeing India violently was wrong. On the contrary.

Gandhi and these two patriots of a different school had a long argument in which neither side convinced the other. On another visit to London in 1909, leading another deputation from South Africa, his path would have crossed Krishnavarma's once more, had the gentleman not left the country in some precipitation, following the killing in London of Sir Curzon Wylie, political aide to Secretary of State for India almost the very day that Gandhi arrived. The young assassin, Madanlal Dhingra had been influenced by Krishnavarma's and Savarkar's political philosophy. Gandhi

¹⁶ James D.Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, Promilla & Co.,1978, pp. 85-6.h

lost no time in holding Dhingra's prompters more guilty than the fiery Panjabi.

If official dawdling by an insensitive Britain was unacceptable to Gandhi, so was anarchist caboodling. On his return voyage, he wrote a monograph, *Hind Swaraj*¹⁷. One might even say, the thing write itself. Chastising political violence in that catechistic tract, he asks the Krishnavarmas and Savarkars : 'Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassination ?'

Gandhi's interlocutor in the narrative asks him: 'But you admit that the English have been frightened by these murders?' Gandhi's answer is : 'The English are both a timid and a brave nation.'

He has been inspired and disappointed, led and led on. He has been educated by Britain's negative and positive examples and, equally, by the fatal fascinations of anarchism, this time of his own countrymen. He has seen in the contrary schools of his experience of Britain , first as a student and later as a deputationist, what is and what is not British, what is and what is not civilized, what is and what is not civilization. He is certainly not timid with Britain, and he is brave with fellow-Indians as well.

And he is going to draw the un-timid and the brave towards him. In Britain, in South Africa and in India.

¹⁷ Written on the ship's notepaper in Gujarati between 13 and 22 November, 1909 'because I could not restrain myself' on board the *Kildonan Castle*, on his return voyage from England to South Africa, the tract was described by Gandhi himself as 'an original work'.

The year before Gandhi met Churchill, a sixteen year old was brought by his adoring father to the great school at Harrow. The school report for that year says of ‘Joe’ as he was known to some at school , ‘Inaccurate in French grammar, Latin poor, but... Progress good – has brains.’ A year later, in 1907, the boy with brains entered Trinity College, Cambridge, visited Ireland, ‘was impressed by the Sinn Fein movement’ and in the rapid leaps of a politically-charged mind accused his father of being ‘immoderately moderate’ towards the British empire and recommended to him a radical book that had just been published, Sydney Brooks’ *New Ireland* which said ‘nothing could be secured from England by whining’¹⁸.

Unlike the student Gandhi, Jawaharlal’s years in England were not wrapped around food, fads or fetishes. He recognized the higher altitudes of contemporary thought without difficulty and returned to India in 1912, imbued by Fabian ideas and simmering with plans for a political career. He also brought with him an unmistakable ‘attitude’, influenced by the same towering figure, the autumnal Parsi statesman, Dadabhai Naoroji. In Nehru’s words¹⁹: ‘...If a thing was bad, it would be called ‘un-British’; if a Britisher in India misbehaved, the fault was his, not that of the system.’

Jawaharlal was to come into Gandhi’s orbit as a shining new asterism, albeit a Triton running counter to all other bodies circling Neptune, not only asking Indians to throw off any sense of inferiority but display a truly evolved mind. ‘Less than ten years ago’, Jawaharlal said during his trial in 1922, ‘I returned from England after a lengthy stay there... and in my likes and dislikes I was perhaps more an Englishman than an Indian. I looked upon the world almost from an Englishman’s standpoint. And so I returned to India as much prejudiced in favour of England and the English as it was possible for an Indian to be’.

¹⁸ S.Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru, A Biography*, OUP,1976, vol. 1, p.22

So here were two pre-eminent leaders of the Indian struggle, using the term ‘British’ as a positive adjective, wanting the respect of equality and the equality of respect in that association. But mutuality wore a hood.

Seeing Gandhi’s walk-away success in the Great Salt March in the April of 1930, and sensing the way world opinion and, especially, American opinion about the Raj was turning, the Viceroy Lord Irwin invited Gandhi for talks. One strong man in London, out of office and out of reach from red-ink pots, was understandably outraged. Churchill’s reaction is famous, but for the wrong reasons. ‘A seditious Middle Temple lawyer posing as a fakir’ and ‘striding half-naked up the steps of the viceregal palace’ are phrases that belong neither to the world of wit nor of civilized speech and can be left to acidify there. It is the latter half of the statement that ought, really, to command the historian’s attention. Churchill is astounded by the effrontery of Gandhi in wanting: ‘... to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor’. In using that phrase, ‘on equal terms’, Churchill paradoxically conceded exactly what Gandhi and Nehru aspired. And he showed by negative example the difference between what Bernard Shaw might have called ‘The Civilised Politician’s Guide to Political Negotiation’ and blustering.

In London for the Second Round Table Conference in 1931, Gandhi said in his opening speech ‘Time was when I prided myself on being and being called a British subject; I have ceased for many years to call myself a British subject; I would rather be called a rebel than a subject. But I have aspired, I still aspire, to be a citizen, not of the empire, but in a Commonwealth; in a partnership – if possible, if God wills it, an indissoluble partnership – but not a partnership super-imposed upon one nation by another...’.

¹⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, John Lane (1936), p. 426

Rajmohan Gandhi writes²⁰ in his biography of the Mahatma, ‘On the evening of 13 September, he had a long talk, at the Dorchester, with ...Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald...Gandhi found MacDonald feeling helpless; it was the depression, unemployment was high, the pound was falling and the Premier’s base was weak...In any case India was not England’s chief concern...’

Sounds familiar!

With his dear friend, the English priest C.F.Andrews by his side, Gandhi was asked:

‘How far would you cut India off from the Empire?’

He answered: ‘From the Empire entirely; from the British Nation not at all.’

‘Empire-ship must go’, he said, ‘(but) India should love to be an equal partner with Britain sharing her joys and sorrows...But it must be a partnership on equal terms’. Questioners in Britain are sharp. ‘To what extent’, he was asked, ‘would India be prepared to share the sorrows of England?’ His answer was swifter ‘To the fullest extent’.

From the two plain-clothed security men, Evans and Rogers, sent by Scotland Yard, to the *maitre* at the Dorchester who happened to have taken the same dancing lessons as Gandhi in 1889, from Bernard Shaw, Charlie Chaplin, Maria Montessori, the cartoonist Low to the mill-hands at Lancashire and, not to forget, the children of London’s East End trailing him wherever he walked in that suburb, he met and won the hearts of thousands. Innocent laughter abounded. An autograph-hunter was asked by Gandhi:

²⁰ *Mohandas*, Rajmohan Gandhi (2006), p.354-5.

‘How many children do you have?’

‘Eight, sir. Four daughters and four sons.’

‘ Oh, I have four sons. So I can run with you half the way’.

The visit was a triumph, the Conference a failure. A week had elapsed, no more, since his return home, that Gandhi was arrested. During that week, he had not forgotten to send two English watches to the London Sergeants, Evans and Rogers. The watches, he instructed those sent to purchase them, had to be English.

The ‘sorrows of England’ were soon to acquire a ballistic sharpness. After a meeting with the hard-lining wartime Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 5 September 1939, Gandhi said : ‘I could not contemplate without being stirred to the very depth the destruction of London which had hitherto been regarded as impregnable...’

And Nehru, viscerally opposed to Nazism and Fascism, and instinctively, therefore, on the side of the Allies, the Harrovian yet asked why, if the war was for freedom, India was being denied a chance to participate in it as a free nation, a chance that Congress had won overwhelmingly in countrywide elections held in 1937. ‘We want to combat Fascism’, he wrote²¹, ‘ but we will not permit ourselves to be exploited by imperialism...’

The offers of an honourable partnership were ignored and both Gandhi and Nehru were jailed, along with hundreds of political leaders and workers. Gandhi was jailed altogether some six times in British India, spending over five years in prison, his wife dying a prisoner. Nehru spent almost double the time that Gandhi did, in the Raj’s prisons. He was physically beaten as well. But neither was going to repay history’s arrears by creating new ones.

²¹ ‘The Choice Before Us’, article in *The National Herald*, 5 October 1938 quoted by S.Gopal in *Jawaharlal Nehru, A Biography*, vol.1, p.252.

By the time the war ended it was but a matter of time before India would be free, but the transfer of power was to be to two pairs of Indian hands, representing the sub-continent's two main political movements. One of them, with Gandhi's aura and Naoroji's and Besant's above it, was Nehru's, the other was to be Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah's.

The Prime Minister-in-waiting brooded over the effects of the war on Asia. Convinced that Asian nations will have to work together as they emerged from the ashes, he visited countries around the Bay of Bengal, Singapore being among them.

History has two authors, design and chance.

In Singapore, Nehru was received, contrary to myopic directives from London, by Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander. Neither could have known then how and with what effect they would come to work together. And Nehru came to see, for the first time, as she 'crawled out of the milling crowd' of Indian soldiers that had thronged to greet the future Prime Minister of India, Edwina Mountbatten. 'That was an unusual introduction for us', Nehru has written²² with a restraint natural to one who has studied in Trinity College, Cambridge, and wholly becoming in a gentleman.

If this three-way acquaintance had all the ingredients of civility, a rebuff awaited the larger approximation.

The Raj threw out Congress', Gandhi's and Nehru's offers of support in the war. That was an error of incalculable proportions.

²² Interview to Dorothy Norman, *Nehru: The First Sixty Years* (London, 1965), vol. 2, p. 221.

And it was not just a political error but a civilisational error. Had the offer not been summarily thrown out, the history and the political geography of the sub-continent may have moved differently and perhaps with better results for the people of that region.

But not just for the people of the region.

A place for free and undivided India in Britain's War Cabinet would have been occupied by Nehru and presumably by Jinnah. Those two would doubtless have tried to shape some aspects of the war and, most certainly, the post-war peace.

And, who knows, the experience might have also shown to both the possibility of working together in a federative arrangement that might have evolved into something better than the Partition, in just four and a half months, of a country and a civilization.

Lord Mountbatten has spoken of that grim sequence in the third of these Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lectures²³. The thirty-first in the series owes it to the last Governor General of British India and independent India's first, to treat his first-hand recounting with respect.

But who can deny that a great chance, a civilisational chance, unparalleled in political history, of a non-violent movement leading to the dismantling of political hegemony with grace and goodwill, was disfigured at the very altar of its anointing? Who can deny that a violent contestation between India and Britain, making it possible for power to be transferred instead of being seized, for a page in history to be turned rather than be ripped apart, was averted only to see the blood-letting transposed on to the sub-continent itself?

²³ 12 November, 1970.

Two million dead at the time, and many times that number displaced would be a monumental regret for history, anytime and anywhere.

The reality is worse.

That tragic story has a sequel and it belongs to today, moving out of history books which no one seems to want to the headlines of today's and tomorrow's newspapers.

A remarkable thinker and economist, who had collaborated with Gandhi over many years, J C Kumarappa, was asked in an interview²⁴ in London, a fortnight before the birth of the two independent nations if he really thought that the British desired to create a Pakistan. His answer is vitally important: "I am certain of it", he said "Why, through the influence they will retain over a Moslem buffer-state, they will be able both to affect the policies of the Arab League countries, in which their oil interests are vitally involved, and to resist Russian penetration of the Near and Middle East. Remember, Russian ambitions are reflected in the new territorial demands of Afghanistan."

'The Clash of Civilisations' is a phrase we have heard of, learnt of, unheard and unlearned, in recent years. Preceding that imaginative proposition was the hard reality of another very tangible clash, namely, the clash of Western ambitions.

One man, crucial to the proceedings, seems to have revised some of his thinking rather drastically. Nehru's niece, Nayantara Sahgal tells us²⁵ that when her mother Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit paid her first formal call as India's High Commissioner on Prime Minister Winston Churchill, he seemed conscious of past mistakes and described

²⁴ 'India's Path to Freedom : J. C. Kumarappa Interviewed in London', *Peace News*, August 1, 1947.

²⁵ *Jawaharlal Nehru – Civilising a Savage World*, Nayantara Sahgal, Penguin Viking, 2010, p 59.

Nehru as ‘the light of Asia’, and ‘one who had conquered mankind’s two worst enemies, hate and fear’.

Sixty three years on, whatever the division of India may have come to mean to the people of those sharded spaces in welfare terms and whatever influence Britain and the West have retained or not retained over Pakistan, it has led to a grim return of hate and fear. The western flank of what was the Raj, has been sucked into India’s near and extended neighbourhood and is today the scene of proceedings as tragic as they are dangerous to peace, not just in the region, but globally and to human security. Baluchistan and the North West Frontier were crucial to the Partition discussions. Today, can Pakistan be thought of without reckoning with Afghanistan, or Afghanistan without taking into account the training, arming and motivating of insurgents? This mutation of a dream for two nations into a nightmare involving many will, hopefully, be captured retrospectively by a rescued generation in literature or on the moving images of screens. But we, of the trapped generation, must face it in all its living horrors.

The possibility of nuclear, biological and chemical devices being stolen and taken up into the air by non-State players looms over all the capitals of the world. Gandhi’s fears for London during the Great War are not less valid today, but more. Hate, high-speed now, triggers high-tech terror. ‘Might’ has escaped from the engraved carafes and patented bottles of the State to the belt-pouches of global bandits. It is not beyond the means of ‘terror’ and certainly not beyond its intentions to co-opt biological, chemical, nuclear arsenals unleashing high-voltage disasters. While the possibility of nuclear gadgets falling into non-State hands is real, I think we should know that it will be far more easy for them to access biological and chemical wherewithal with which to target those they perceive to be their enemies who are, in the main,

representatives of life-styles that excite not just competitive rivalry but active animosity. Cultural messages are scripted along the lines of the resultant alienations. Consequently, life-styles are targeted as much as political institutions and apparatuses. From New York to Bali, from London to Mumbai, from Moscow to Lahore, violent schemata are abroad, combining irrational prejudices with state-of-art technologies.

The record of Governments in tackling this challenge has been, at best, mixed. This no surprise, because the challenge is mixed. Definitions are involved, as are jurisdictions. Injustices are involved, human rights are invoked, one minute as the cause of violence, the other minute as the victim of counter violence. There was a time when the world was told there are good terrorists and bad terrorists. One set wore haloes, another sported horns. Tail-forks and cloven hooves could be taken on and off, depending on which side of the hill the beast was climbing.

Heads of Security and Intelligence are not Gandhi who can say 'Off with haloes, horns, hoods and hooves, if you come seeking justice, let me see a clean pair of hands'. On the contrary, the grimmer the hand the less likely it is to show the finger-print's swirls.

Such 'Heads' do not sit in obscure Government buildings alone. They are to be found within terror organizations no less, strategizing operations against States as also against their own people who may be of a different way of thinking, even of worship.

The contestation is no longer a simple good versus bad affair, between justice and injustice, right and wrong. It is between the manipulations of justice and injustice and the interplay of cause and effect when the end is not victory or defeat but is in fact no end at all, but an endless prolonging of attrition. There was a time when Cabinets planned policy, War Offices strategy, and field units

worked on tactics. Now tactics have become policy and policy is about tactics. Can this bring that definitional difference which a terror-weary, war-tired and tense world is waiting for? Policy-makers must re-visit the concept of terrorism and counter-violence so as to bring to account those outfits that deliberately target civilians, or do not care if civilians suffer rather than land whole countries and peoples into warlike situations. The whole issue of violence and terrorism in the world needs to be viewed afresh, the issue being how can oppression, and the perception of oppression be removed without recourse to violence leading to counter-violence? And this is where Gandhi and Nehru have something to contribute.

It seems essential, natural and, if one believes in such things, destined that Britain and India should play a role together, from within the Commonwealth and through 'the principal empowered arm of the UNO', its Security Council, of which India is now a non-permanent member, to address the question of terrorism and of piracy in fresh and innovative ways. The presence on that body today of South Africa and Brazil, with India, gives a chance for precisely such ways to unfold.

Nayantara Sahgal has written²⁶ "During the 1930s (Nehru) condemned Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, Japan's of Manchuria, the fascist war on Republic Spain and the Nazi takeover of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia." It is the same objectivity that enabled him to lash out against the attack on Egypt in 1956 and speak up against the Soviet action in Hungary, though many found his criticism of Moscow not strong or quick enough.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp 9-10 and 55-56.

It is this across-the-counter truth-telling that made Nehru an internationalist which is different, is it not, from being or 'going global'. Internationalism is an outlook, globalism is about being inflatable in vinyl, polythene or plastic mounted on a swing meridian swiveling at 360 degrees in all directions. One advertisement for a classroom table-top globe could be a Globalised Board Room motto: "Allow the globe to rotate, but also to turn upside down for ease in viewing the southern hemisphere". Global markets, global trading, global networking are about getting connected to mutual – or almost mutual – benefit. Internationalism is less about getting connected as getting coordinated to common perspectives and purposes.

Meeting terrorism is a common purpose. Is meeting the causes underlying terror an equally common purpose?

It may be asked if India, with its inheritance in Kashmir can be expected to help the world face issues like terrorism and its causes? This reminds me of a question that was put to Gandhi in London in 1931: 'Are you completely fit for independence?' The reply was 'If we are not', he replied, 'we will try to be.' And I might add that the fact that Pakistan voted for India in its bid for a non-permanent seat in the UNSC is a good augury.

The 9/11 school of global terror is a tangle of 'referred' agonies radiating from pressure points along and around the Raj's western boundaries. Likewise, the global meltdown of 2008 can be likened to a stroke caused by the blocked arteries of capital flow. The damage has been contained but the return of the experience is a grim possibility.

‘Might’, many cubits tall today, can once again be connected symbolically to meat. Chris Patten, in his absorbing work *What Next?* has a succulent chapter titled ‘Les Big Macs’ which is about how the world’s market like the human mouth grows wider and wider and rounder and rounder as does the Mac.

There are three sentences in the chapter which say it all. The short sentences, themselves resembling a just-bitten-into Mac, are:

‘McDonald’s.

In France.

Full.’

The human co-efficient of this image is to be seen in an instructive take-off on Michelangelo’s sixteenth century ‘David’ in Florence. It is a contemporary figurine of the lithe David, this one wearing no more than Michelangelo’s does, but with the BMR of a spoilt adolescent grown to the most hideous flabbiness. J.B.S.Haldane’s brilliant essay, ‘On Being The Right Size’²⁷ tells us how Giant Pope and Giant Pagan in the illustrated *Pilgrim’s Progress* were ten times as high, ten times as heavy and ten times as thick as Christian, so that every square inch of giant bone had to support ten times the weight a square inch of human bone had to. With each step that the monsters took, their bones could crack and crumble.

Stock exchanges and Trade Centres will understand that. The penny-counting student Gandhi would have understood that and recommended life-style changes that could place our dinner plans for tonight in some difficulty.

²⁷ First published in 1928.

Late in 2008, my London-based nephew Vinayak Bhattacharjee, gave me news, over a drink, I might add, with unconcealed shock of the sudden collapse earlier that day of the unshakeable corporate house of Lehman Brothers. “How does such a thing happen?” I asked, incredulous.”At the end of the day, uncle” he explained, “the old saying that financial markets are driven by fear and greed is true. Lehman has become a victim of these basic human weaknesses”.

Above the two nightmares of global terror and greed-induced global meltdown, and emanating basically from the same source, namely, insatiable human greed, looms the greatest and most dangerous of all, the alarmingly fast degradation of those resources of nature on this planet that sustain life. They are collapsing at our hands.

We are Polonius, described by Hamlet as being at dinner. Not where we eat but are eaten. By ourselves. There is no ‘might’ here, no height, no right. Just bulge, as destructive of itself as of that which may come under it. Techno-commercialism also brings with it, Martin Rees has reminded us, the real fear of techno-errors of the kind repeated off-shore oil-spills, Bhopal and Chernobyl have introduced us to.

All this surely points to the critically urgent need for an initiative that takes time by the forelock and, focusing away from finance and emission targets, from international treaties, agreements and stalemates, moves purposefully on to what national governments can do in practice. Here, I believe the Commonwealth, offering the kind of equal partnership Gandhi had envisioned and Nehru had worked to establish, can play a critical role, for every variant of the world’s ecological experience is a Commonwealth reality. If the United Nations is a mosaic of the world’s anxieties, the Commonwealth is a mural of the world’s opportunities, with Britain giving the *fresco* its *secco*.

Gandhi's 1909 description of Britain as being at once timid and brave can no longer be applied to Britain today any more than to any other country or people. The two-beaked cap of 'now-timid, now-bold' fits the human head everywhere, as it faces the grim realities of degradation, despoliation and destruction.

If timidity and bravery are well shared in the world, so also are sorrows. The 'sorrows of England' or those of any other nation are now endured in ethnographically rich company.

India has followed its own lights in the matter of development strategies, not Gandhi's. Kumarappa was asked in the same London interview that I cited earlier, if Gandhi's ideals were accepted by the masses and the leaders in India. He responded in the negative. Rather, he argued, that "the evidence is that the Congress Indians will out-British the British. Our own capitalism will be as rapacious as yours".

'Dawdling' about adapting to and mitigating climate change is therefore a dangerous endemicity in today's world.

Is anyone learning? Governments, depending on which part of the hemisphere they belong to, cling to parts of hemispheric truth. One tells the other it must proceed slow, the second tells the first it must reverse fast. One tells the other 'You must be blind, the way you burn your coal per hour, cut your forests per minute, let your ground water sink per second'. The other retorts 'You must be crazy, the way you burn per capita, spew per capita, spill and splurge per capita...'

Truth stands divided, reminding me of my late brother Ramchandra Gandhi's prayer at the dentist's parlour : 'Dear doctor, the tooth, please, the whole tooth, and nothing but the tooth'.

But there are voices of sanity belonging to both hemispheres which, to use a phrase I recently heard Prince Charles employ, ‘raise their heads above the parapet’.

Outstanding Britons like Martin Rees, Anthony Giddens and Chris Patten have alerted humanity to the perils facing it today. Martin Rees tells²⁸ us with the weight of a planetarium’s concave immensity that there is a fifty-fifty chance that civilisation as we know it will survive this century. Anthony Giddens, evaluating²⁹ the politics of climate change asks us with a social scientist’s weapon of inconvenient polemics ‘A new Dark Ages, a new enlightenment, or perhaps a confusing mixture of the two – which will it be?’

Chris Patten, the political realist that he is, says³⁰ it like he is helping a harassed UNSC delegation put an agenda note ready: ‘There is ... plenty we can do, not believing ourselves omnipotent but recognizing that both on our own and together we – that is the family we... the global we – can go on muddling through, sometimes solving, sometimes managing, sometimes simply enduring our predicaments, the hazards of sharing this planet.’

Sharing the planet, sharing its sorrows (to quote Gandhi), in both its hazards and in its opportunities requires what Gandhi and Nehru would have called ‘an honourable partnership’ and an innovative one.

HRH the Prince Charles has, by his work on rain forests, by his START initiative and, no less, by his plain speaking about climate-change skeptics, shown the way to a sharing of this planet, with

²⁸ *The Final Century*, Martin Rees (Arrow Books, 2004) p. 186.

²⁹ *The Politics of Climate Change*, Anthony Giddens (Polity Press, 2009) p. 230.

³⁰ *What Next?*, Chris Patten (Allen Lane, 2008) p. 447.

our carbon footprint resembling Christian's, not those of the two Giants. He said in a 'Daybreak' interview : 'It may be very convenient to believe that somehow all these greenhouse gases... will disappear through holes in the space – it doesn't happen like that'.

If, twenty years ago a Nehru lecture in London invoking Gandhi had ended with the Beatles, the audience would have said 'it oughtn't to happen like that'. Ten years ago, it would have shrugged its shoulders. Today, when the Beatles are scattered in many worlds, none of you will mind my fantasizing the Beatles singing and playing their instruments, their jerkins quivering, with one change. Pete Best, who had been given an exit ticket in Hamburg, has been recalled, recalled to drum, not replacing but complementing Ringo Starr, and they are all giving us an old song, the song being 'Ticket to Ride', of course but with a new line addressed to the Governments and the industrial giants of the world and also, separately and specially, to the terrorist outfits of the world, the new line being 'You Should Think Twice, You Should Do Right By Us.'

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