

- 7 James M Gustafson, "Situation Versus Principles," in *Theology Digest*, No. 14, 1966, pp 188-194. Also Stanley Hauerwas, "Love's Not all You Need," in *Cross Currents*, No. 22, 1972-73, pp. 225 ff.
8. For an overall criticism of the Western civilization which is consumeristic by its very nature, see *Hindi Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), Reprint 1962.
- 9 T.S. Avinashilingam, ed. *Inculcation of Social, Ethical, and Spiritual Values in Education* (Colombatore: Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, 1983).
- 10 Ilya Novik, *Society and Nature* (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1979), English translation by H. Campbell Creighton, 1981.
11. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 27th Print 1974, p. 326.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
13. One may usefully refer to John Desrochers, *Education for Social Change*. (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1987).

Gandhi Marg (July-Sept '81)

## Gandhi's Last Fast

Vinay Lal

AT HIS PRAYER meeting on the evening of 12 January 1948, Gandhi announced that he would commence, at noon on the following day, a fast of an indefinite duration. Unknown to him, this was to be his last fast unto death, for death, that great equalizer of all inequities, snatched him away less than three weeks later. Gandhi survived his fast but he could not escape the three bullets that his assassin, Nathuram Godse, pumped into his frail and yet muscular body on that fateful Friday which fell on 30 January 1948. Gandhi outlived this last fast, as he had all his previous fasts, but he could not outlive its implications. At the very moment when the announcement of his impending fast was being flashed over the world, Godse and his chief collaborator, Narayan Apte, who heard the news as it came put over their office teleprinter, made up their minds to kill him.<sup>1</sup>

India was then, in the last days of the Mahatma's life, a cauldron of seething fury, hatred, and communal carnage. Partition, to the creation of which the leaders of the Congress party had agreed when Jinnah could not be dissuaded from relinquishing his claim for a Muslim-majority State, carried with it the promise of an abatement of the communal fighting which began in earnest when the Muslim League, acting under Jinnah's instructions, announced Direct Action Day to demonstrate Muslim support for the creation of Pakistan. On 16 August 1946, the day fixed by the Muslim League for the observance of Direct Action, Calcutta became, in the words of the *Statesman*, a "bloody shambles." The British military officer stationed in that area observed that "it was unbridled savagery which homicidal maniacs let loose to kill and to maim and burn. The underworld of Calcutta was taking charge of the citizen."<sup>2</sup> Hindus retaliated with swiftness. At Noakhali in Eastern Bengal (now in Bangladesh), in Bihar, indeed in large parts of the vast areas through which the Ganga flows, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs found themselves enmeshed in what appeared to be a fight to the finish. Gandhi walked from village to village, entrusting the negotiations over India's future largely to his colleagues. On that momentous day when independence dawned and when the sky was rent with the sound of rejoicing, Gandhi was nowhere to be seen in

Delhi. While the country was celebrating its deliverance from the yoke of foreign rule, from the residence he had taken in Behaghata, a suburb of Calcutta, Gandhi was observing a twenty-four-hour fast, praying for the freedom of his countrymen from the more terrible yoke of anger and hatred.

Far from eliminating communal fighting, partition had the effect of entrenching the communal feeling that had in the past year appeared to rise like a slumbering giant. For Sir Cyril Radcliffe, chairman of the commission appointed to draw a boundary between India and Pakistan, the division of Bengal and Punjab was merely a thankless task but, for the residents of those areas, it represented a nightmarish reality.<sup>3</sup> Hindus and Sikhs fled across the border into India and Muslims crossed into Pakistan: a mass exodus of some ten million people, uprooted from their traditional homes, many fleeing in panic, desirous only to find safety, others clamouring for revenge. Gandhi had arrived in Calcutta on 8 August to "contribute his share in the return of sanity in the premier city of India."<sup>4</sup> Independence produced a lull in the rioting; on 15 August it was reported that Hindus and Muslims were fraternizing in the streets of Calcutta; and on 20 August Gandhi's prayer meeting at Khengrapati was attended by over 4,00,000 people representing various classes, communities, and shades of opinion.<sup>5</sup> It pleased Gandhi so immensely that at this prayer meeting the flags of Pakistan and the Indian Union were flown together.

Meanwhile Gandhi was receiving letters urging him, now that Calcutta appeared to be free from communal disturbances, to go to Punjab. Gandhi had all along been eager to return to Noakhali, but on the evening of 31 August, a demonstration against his peace mission induced him to prolong his stay in Calcutta. As he told his secretary Pyarelal: "My resolve to go to Noakhali has collapsed after this evening's happenings. I cannot go to Noakhali or, for that matter, anywhere, when Calcutta is in flames. Today's incident to me is a sign and a warning from God."<sup>6</sup> News of rioting continued to pour in and, as Gandhi pondered over the nature of his duty, it came to him that he was called upon to immediately commence fasting. The press statement announcing the fast reaffirmed Gandhi's faith that fasting, which had "hitherto proved infallible" for him, alone could accomplish what his words could not—"touch the hearts of all the warring elements," in Calcutta and even in Punjab. The termination of the fast was conditional upon the return of sanity to Calcutta.<sup>7</sup> In subsequent statements to delegations, comprised of members of the different faiths, which called upon him during his fast, Gandhi described in fuller detail the condition that would have to be met before he agreed to break the fast. He would need the assurance that, whatever may be the conditions prevailing in the rest of Bengal and the country, there would never be recrudescence of communal madness in Calcutta. Gandhi asked that the Muslims "come and tell him that they now felt safe and

secure." Then only he would believe that the fast need not be prolonged. If he were hoodwinked into abandoning his fast by the promises of people who had not had a sincere change of heart but were merely desirous of preserving his life, he would have to undertake an unconditional, irrevocable fast unto death. A "temporary lull" followed by a "worse conflagration" would suggest to him that false pledges had been given "merely to keep him" alive. Gandhi advised the deputation that came to see him on the third day of the fast that if the safety of the Muslims could not be guaranteed, its members should desist from attempting to make him give up the fast. He said: "But mind you, my blood will be upon your head if you say one thing and mean another; rather than thoughtlessly hurry, let me prolong my fast a little longer. It will not hurt me. When a man fasts, it is not the gallons of water he drinks that sustains him, but God."<sup>8</sup>

On 4 September the deputation came to see Gandhi armed with the news that Calcutta was quiet (not a single incident of violence had been reported from any part of the city). Finally, when the fast was in its seventy-third hour, Gandhi broke it—but not until representatives of the Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim organizations had signed a declaration in which they pledged that they would sacrifice their lives rather than permit a recrudescence of the communal fighting.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi was inclined to leave for Punjab at once, but delayed his departure by a few days upon being asked to stay longer to ensure the consolidation of the peace that he had wrought. These few days in Gandhi's life have often been described as among the greatest moments of his political career. C. Rajagopalachari's assessment of Gandhi's action was in this vein in which he said: "Gandhiji has achieved many things, but there has been nothing, not even independence, which is so truly wonderful as his victory over evil in Calcutta. He has been the successful one-man Boundary Force in Bengal, when forces numbering 50,000 have failed elsewhere."<sup>10</sup>

THUS there is a considerable pre-history which in fact extends much further back to 1924, when Gandhi fasted for 21 days on behalf of Hindu-Muslim friendship, to Gandhi's last fast for communal harmony in January 1948. Gandhi arrived in Delhi on 9 September 1947 and, as soon as he was apprised of the riots that had shaken the capital, he decided to further postpone his trip to Punjab. D.G. Tendulkar, in his exhaustive biography of Gandhi, has given a minute account of how the Mahatma spent the last months of his life. He was writing regularly on a host of problems in his weekly journal, *Harijan*. Congressmen came to him for advice; and though the reins of power were in other hands, Birla House—where Gandhi was lodged—continued to remain a seat of activity at the highest level of State policy. Unfailingly he conducted the evening prayer meetings in the

spacious lawns of Birla's residence. But chief among the problems that occupied Gandhi's attention was the state of the relationship among the Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. Gandhi visited the numerous refugee camps that had sprung up in and around Delhi: some sheltered Muslims who, despite having been driven out of their homes in Delhi and elsewhere, had elected to stay on in India; and other camps harboured Hindus who had fled from Western Punjab. He pleaded with each community not to abandon reason, not to surrender to their baser instincts, and not to throw themselves before the altar of vengeance. Gandhi used the same language to describe the relationship that he desired should obtain between India and Pakistan. If a Hindu or a Muslim who came to him with a grievance claimed to be unable to cohabit with members of the other religion, could India and Pakistan be expected to conform their behaviour to commonly accepted norms of decency and tolerance, much less live on brotherly terms? Gandhi moved with relative ease in his practice of Satyagraha, in his thinking and in his argumentation, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, and vice versa. He saw the disagreements between India and Pakistan reflected in the behaviour of Muslims and Hindus around him. Never a reductionist, he would nonetheless have considered the mutual lack of trust and suspicion as the fundamental, though not insurmountable, obstacle in the development of cordial relations. When one found that one's trust was not being reciprocated, then—far from withdrawing one's trust and treating the other in the same coin—one would have to continue placing one's trust in the other until he had been won over. This, as shall be seen, was the compelling logic behind his fast—a fast that was undertaken when relations between the two countries had deteriorated considerably, even as Delhi continued to burn, with the refugees staging ever more larger demonstrations to procure better housing, additional rations, and the assurance of safety.

Empires had been built at Delhi; they had also floundered there. The importance of Delhi was not lost upon Gandhi. He described it as "the Eternal City," "the heart of India," the one place to which the various people who populated the country had an equal right. Inveighing against those who recognized Delhi as the city of Hindus or Sikhs only, he emphasized that

Delhi is the metropolis of India. If, therefore, we really in our hearts do not subscribe to the two-nation theory, or in other words, if we do not regard the Hindus and the Muslims as constituting two distinct nations, we shall have to admit that the picture that the city of Delhi presents today is not what we have envisaged always of the capital of India.<sup>11</sup>

Expressing his fear that control over Delhi was fast being lost, Gandhi told one friend that "if it goes, India goes and with that goes the last hope of world peace."<sup>12</sup> His apprehensions about the loss of Delhi were no doubt encouraged by his vision about the centrality of

Delhi in Indian experience and history—its centrality, now as the capital, in the past as the city which gave refuge to the Pandavas, the forces of good. Now it was serving as the home to hundreds of thousands of refugees; and if there, in Delhi, peace could not be maintained, justice not effected, would it appear to the world that in India communalism was being fought with courage and moral conviction? Gandhi realized fully well that so long as the Muslims in Delhi were unable to gain full redressal, Pakistan would exploit the situation as evidence of the discrimination of minorities in a Hindu-majority State and of hostility towards itself at the more international level.

AND so it was in Delhi that Gandhi began his last fast at noon on 13 January. Following his usual practice, he described the events that had rendered his action necessary, the conditions that would have to be met before he could contemplate its termination, and the uselessness of both dissuading him from taking the proposed step and capitulating, without a sincere change of heart, to his demands. The condition he stipulated for its termination, as may well be expected, was "a reunion of hearts of all communities without any outside pressure, but from an awakened sense of duty."<sup>13</sup> He told the members of the deputation that came to see him that they were "to turn the searchlight inward" and, if they could not find a "responsive echo in their hearts" to what he stood for, they were to continue to oppose him.<sup>14</sup> They knew "he was not a man to shirk [from] another fast," should he later discover that they had deceived him with false intentions, or that he had deceived himself through his impatience into breaking the fast prematurely.

"With God as my supreme and sole counsellor, I felt that I must take the decision without any other adviser," Gandhi said.<sup>15</sup> The announcement was startling in its suddenness, recorded the Governor-General's press secretary in his journal, and had a resounding impact on everyone.<sup>16</sup> Neither Nehru nor Patel had been consulted prior to the evening prayer on 12 January about the impending fast. When Mountbatten was informed the same evening, he at first tried to reason with Gandhi, but realized almost immediately that Gandhi's decision represented a brave move to bring about a new spirit of reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> That these three men, who between themselves occupied the most important positions in the Indian government, had no inkling of the step that Gandhi was about to take, is one measure of how far the dictates of Gandhi's conscience superseded, as in the days before independence, his expectations of officialdom. Gandhi was by no means averse to using legal, democratic means, when they were available, to rectify social wrongs or redress grievances, but he had little faith in the ability of government and its functionaries to effect permanent change and bring people to a state of heightened awareness about their duties and rights as social beings. That Gandhi's last fast should have

taken place in Delhi, with the legally constituted government in the hands of largely those who had struggled by his side during the nationalist movement, and understood—however minimally—his world viewpoint; that the fast should, moreover, have as its objectives not only the attainment of communal harmony, but—as shall presently be discussed—the conversion of a government which had, despite the idealism with which the freedom struggle had been conceived and waged, succumbed to the compulsions of *realpolitik*—all this is extraordinary, a telling commentary on Gandhi's novel conception of political behaviour and estimation of his own prowess and ability to imprint his presence on the body politic.

Gandhi's fasts were never merely acts of defiance undertaken in indifference to considerations of whether they were likely to have an impact on specific individuals or groups. Each fast was directed against someone and, as was habitual with him, he would specify, either in the announcement preceding the fast or in subsequent replies to queries from reporters and friends, whom the fast was intended to influence. To a Sikh friend he gave the rather characteristic response: "My fast is against no one party or group exclusively, and yet it excludes nobody. It is addressed to the conscience of all, even the majority community in the other dominion."<sup>18</sup> But when accused by some people of undertaking the fast for the sake of Muslims, Gandhi confessed that they were right.<sup>19</sup> Yet, on another occasion, he described his fast as an action undertaken on behalf of all minorities:

My fast, as I have stated in plain language, is undoubtedly on behalf of the Muslim minority in the Indian Union and, therefore, it is necessarily against the Hindus and Sikhs of the Union and the Muslims of Pakistan. It is also on behalf of the minorities in Pakistan, as in the case of the Muslim minority in the Union. . . . The fast is a process of self-purification for all.<sup>20</sup>

The fast was not exclusive, in so far as it sought to stir the conscience of the entire nation, and encouraged men of goodwill to emerge from their lethargy and prove their mettle in action. In the Gandhian view, if "evil" at times appears to dominate, it is because goodness is satisfied with being merely good, whereas evil is forever striving to find new prey. But, what is equally a tenet of Gandhian thinking, good can only break out of the shell of inertia if change is sought at a level where the issues and actors can be clearly identified. To those who were not without intellectual equipment, Gandhi would have given one, usually the more expansive, explanation; to others, less literate, precluded by the dint of circumstances from being preoccupied with thoughts of anything other than sheer sustenance, he would have given a simpler, less demanding but not contradictory, explanation. Gandhi had not privileged his immediate family, so that he could genuinely embrace the entire country as his very own, and as a father would attend to the varying needs of his own children, so Gandhi engaged in

public discourse with an eye to the needs and circumstances of his audience. In him several levels of explanation and performance coexisted harmoniously.

It has also been argued that the last fast was directed against the Government of India. Some people have even named Vallabhbhai Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister and the boss of the Congress machine, as the man whom it was specifically intended to influence. When partition became an accomplished fact, the resources and financial holdings of undivided India were apportioned between the two countries. Pakistan's share of the assets amounted to fifty-five crores of rupees, then equivalent to about \$200,000,000 of the gold reserve, but this amount was held back by the Government of India when Pakistan's troops forcibly entered Kashmir. Gandhi was unhappy over the stance adopted by the Indian government. His view was that while India should not brook such armed intervention into its territory, there was no moral justification in withholding from Pakistan assets to which it was legally entitled. He saw in the position of the Indian government an abdication of its moral duty and the rejection, barely six months after independence, of the ideals which came to be associated with the freedom struggle under his leadership. It could with some justice be claimed that the struggle in India had been waged not primarily through the use of force, but with a dedication to truth. Was India now going to readily surrender the prerogative it had earned of showing the world how morality ought to impinge upon politics?

IT is thus not at all implausible that Gandhi had all this squarely in his mind and that he hoped to bring the government round to his point of view. This hypothesis is reinforced by the information gleaned from the account of Campbell-Johnson, Mountbatten's Press Secretary, who recorded in his diary that the evening before the fast "Gandhi went out of his way to ask [Mountbatten] for a frank opinion about India's refusal to pay to Pakistan the fifty-five crores from the cash balances." Gandhi presumably wanted to ascertain whether he could rely upon the support of at least Mountbatten, for whom Nehru had great respect, and whose advice was repeatedly solicited by the Indian leaders. Mountbatten reassured him that he considered the step taken by the government as "unstatesmanlike and unwise," whereupon Gandhi said that he "proposed to take the matter up with Nehru and Patel."<sup>21</sup> But the interpretation put upon these events by Manohar Malgonkar is not entirely unwarranted: he argues that when Nehru and Patel came to see Gandhi to talk him out of his fast, he imposed another condition: "India must pay Rs 55 crores to Pakistan or see Gandhi die, and never mind if the country was at war with Pakistan."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Malgonkar is predisposed towards this view as it strengthens his thesis that the fast had the effect of making the conspirators who were already

planning his assassination more determined to carry out their resolve. Among the conspirators was Madanlal Pahwa, a young refugee from Punjab and, as Manohar Malgonkar and others have noted, the fast generated more ill-will towards Gandhi among the refugees who in fact marched for a few nights by Gandhi's residence, shouting the slogans: "marie hain to marne do" and "khoon ka badla khoon se lenge" (if he wants to die, let him die! We shall avenge blood with blood).<sup>23</sup> It is also true that when Patel sent word to Gandhi informing him of his willingness to do anything that he might wish, the Mahatma urged that priority be given to reconsidering the government's decision to withhold Pakistan's share of the assets.<sup>24</sup>

On the strength of this evidence and other announcements by Gandhi, it has been argued that the fast was really directed against Patel. Alan Campbell-Johnson, who was spending those days with the Maharaja of Bikaner, reports that K.M. Pannikar, then the Maharaja's secretary and an astute political observer, was emphatically of this view.<sup>25</sup> After Gandhi arrived in Delhi, differences began to surface, according to the popular account, between the master and his former disciple. Not only was Patel diverging significantly from Gandhi's teachings, but it was commonly believed that he did not harbour friendly sentiments towards the Muslims and that he had been instrumental in determining the cabinet policy to deny Pakistan its share of the assets of undivided India. Gandhi is then reported to have said: "Vallabhbhai, I always thought you and I were one. I begin to see that we are two."<sup>26</sup> The fast, then, aimed to bring Patel to heel, and strengthen the hands of Nehru, whose views collided sharply with Patel's. Those who allow Patel more credit would say that Gandhi, unable to choose between the two, wished to heal through his fast this rift that threatened to rent asunder the very nation.<sup>27</sup>

Gandhi, for his part, admitted in public that Sardar Patel was known to have subscribed to the feeling that Muslims could not be trusted but added that most Hindus also "held this view."<sup>28</sup> Then why reprove Patel alone? He wanted his Muslim League friends to give through their conduct the lie to this view with which Patel and other Hindus were identified. He also reminded the public that Patel enjoyed the confidence of Nehru and that if he were indeed "an enemy of the Muslims, Panditji could ask him to retire."<sup>29</sup> Gandhi affirmed that Patel was, if no longer his "yes-man," still an "esteemed friend." On 15 January, newspapermen conveyed to Gandhi a message, to which they sought a response, that an impression had been created "that the fast is more intended to bring about a change of heart in Sardar Patel and thereby amounts to a condemnation of the policy of the Home Ministry." Gandhi in his reply firmly rejected this view: "The suggested interpretation never crossed my mind. If I had known that my statement could bear any such interpretation, I should certainly have dispelled the doubt in anticipation." The public, and particularly

Patel's critics, were rather too zealous in praising Nehru to the hilt, but it must not be forgotten that Patel and Nehru could not with such ease be isolated from each other. Nor should anyone doubt that Patel, whom he had affectionately dubbed as his "yes-man," was "too masterful," too much his own man, to merely remain forever under his tutelage. And then Gandhi confessed candidly that when "power descended on the Sardar, he saw that he could no longer successfully apply the method of nonviolence which he used to wield with signal success. I have made the discovery that what I and the people with me had termed nonviolence was not the genuine article, but a weak copy known as passive resistance."<sup>30</sup> Patel was not to be accused of betraying or degrading the trust which the public had placed in him. He had departed from the ideals of nonviolence, but it had been the Mahatma's own error of judgment that had led him to believe that these ideals were now entrenched in public and social life. Would anybody still "dare," after Gandhi had placed before them all this information, to call his fast "a condemnation of the policy of the Home Ministry?"<sup>31</sup>

Whatever may have been the intentions with which Gandhi embarked upon his fast, less than twenty-four hours after its commencement Nehru called a meeting of his cabinet on the lawns of Birla House "to consider afresh the issue of Pakistan's share of the cash balances." On the night of 15 January, the government announced a reversal of its earlier policy. The agreement with Pakistan would now be implemented immediately "to remove the one cause of suspicion and friction" between the two nations. The communique further stated that the decision was the "government's contribution, to the best of their ability, to the nonviolent and noble efforts made by Gandhiji in accordance with the glorious traditions of this great country, for peace and goodwill."<sup>32</sup>

Gandhi was immensely pleased. In his written message read before those who gathered at his prayer meeting, which he could not attend on account of his greatly weakened health, Gandhi commended the Cabinet in glowing terms for having acted with deliberation and yet with promptness to alter, what was no easy matter, a "deliberate settled policy" conceived at the highest level. The Cabinet deserved "the warmest thanks from the whole country" for acting with such responsibility and integrity. No government could take such a weighty step "merely because it is likely to win the hasty applause of an unthinking public." What then actuated this change of policy? "It was my fast," stated Gandhi, with rather surprising, if not uncharacteristic immodesty, or at least with undisguised faith in his ability to influence men and institutions. The fast, Gandhi claimed, had "changed the whole outlook": the government's gesture of unmixed goodwill would put relations between Pakistan and India on a friendly footing, and impel Pakistan to also act honourably. Gandhi then defended his fast

with a maxim derived from English usage: "when the common law seems to fail, equity comes to the rescue." The fast had enabled the Government of India to step outside the bound of law and consider anew, mainly from the ethical standpoint, the desirability of withholding Pakistan's share of the assets. Gandhi's defence of his fast as a recourse to equity when the mechanisms of law had ceased to operate, which also epitomizes his belief that injustices cannot be legislated away, but must stem from a change of heart, has unfortunately received no attention, and has, in the midst of the plethora of books, mostly biographical, that have sprung up around him and his activities, been reduced to a wholly insignificant detail.

Vincent Sheean says quite flatly that the government agreed to present the requisite sum of money in the hope that it would thereby "ease Mr Gandhi's mind."<sup>33</sup> The supposition here is that the members of the Cabinet were not convinced that Pakistan had a claim which in moral and political terms could be justified but that the government capitulated so that they could alleviate the old man's fears and put his mind to rest. Despite Gandhi's usual strictures against caving in to his demands merely to preserve his life when there was not a commensurate change of heart, every fast—and the last one not excepted—provoked men into action: committees were constituted, oaths taken, pledges drawn up, and peace missions sent into the most volatile neighbourhoods. Perhaps the Cabinet did feel coerced into accepting a decision which they had otherwise found unpalatable on pain of having their conscience tormented with the knowledge that the death of their leader could be laid at their hands. In all the years when the British were at the helm of affairs, Gandhi had survived his fasts and his prison imprisonments. Would the public forgive its leaders if he were to die due to the perceived neglect by Indian leaders of the duties thrust upon them by independence? Inadvertently coercion was an element in every fast.

BUT if coercion it was and if he had to reason to exult in his triumph in the days when his power was thought to be waning, one would have thought that Gandhi's mind would have been eased thereby and the fast swiftly brought to its termination. But apparently his mind was not eased sufficiently. For, he rejected the suggestions he received to end, pursuant to "this great act of the Union Government," his fast.<sup>34</sup> The condition he had imposed remained unfulfilled. The condition was that "the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs of Delhi bring about a union, which not even a conflagration around them in all the other parts of India or Pakistan will be strong enough to break."<sup>35</sup> Delhi had to become "peaceful in the real sense of the term" before the fast could be broken. It was not his life, but the existence of India, that was in question. How long could a country survive atavistic outbreaks of

violence and attempts to fracture its unity? India's "honour" had to be "saved," and it was immaterial how long he had to fast to bring people to a realization of how ruinous was the course of mindless killing upon which they were set.<sup>36</sup>

Gandhi's medical advisers were of the opinion that now, by the evening of 16 January, the fast could be fatal, though what was even more feared was the risk of permanent impairment of several vital organs. But as Gandhi stated quite pungently, the fast was not undertaken "after consultation with medical men, be they however able," and the public should know that neither could it terminate on their advice, though if the country still had any use for him, the people would hurry up "to close their ranks."<sup>37</sup> Yet, hurry though they might, Gandhi persistently refused to break his fast. He was then asked if a specific test would satisfy him that Delhi had returned to sanity—as indeed it had. "Just then," to follow Tendulkar's succinct narration of the events, "a telegram from Karachi came." The Muslim refugees who had been driven out of Delhi inquired whether they could return to Delhi and re-occupy their homes. "That is the test," Gandhi remarked as soon as he read the telegram.<sup>38</sup> The indefatigable Pyarelal, Gandhi's principal personal secretary, immediately set out with the telegram for the city and by night he had secured signed declarations from 1,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees to the effect that they would welcome the return of Muslims to the homes from which they had been forcibly ejected, even though they themselves would now have to return to the refugee camps in the height of Delhi's winter.

On 17 January, Gandhi spoke at the prayer meeting from his bed and again urged the representatives of the various communities and groups in the city not to mislead him at that "sacred juncture" of his life with a view to making him terminate the fast. He was never happier than when he was fasting for the spirit; and this fast, in particular, had brought him "higher happiness" than he had ever experienced.<sup>39</sup> That same evening, subsequent to the release by Gandhi's doctors of a medical bulletin which placed his life in great danger, Maulana Azad, the foremost Indian Muslim of his day, addressed a large peace rally in Delhi, where he informed the gathering that Gandhi had mentioned seven concrete conditions to which the representatives of all the parties would have to be signatories before the fast could end. Perhaps in the urgency of the moment, no one considered asking Gandhi whether he was justified in imposing new conditions, given that the laws of satyagraha discountenance taking such a step when the original objective was clearly within reach. Had such an objection been raised, pat would have come his response: the seven conditions were not added as an afterthought, or because their fulfilment seemed assured, but they were necessarily contained within the overarching condition that communal strife must cease and that a true union of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh hearts be effected. The seven conditions guaranteed to the

Muslims, *inter alia*, freedom of movement, the return of their mosques, the right "to carry on their business as before," and the unhindered celebration of their annual festival at the Khwaja Qutab-ud-Din Mazar. Did not communal harmony entail these guarantees which should, to begin with, never have been necessary? The signatories also pledged themselves to "live in Delhi like brothers and in perfect amity. . . . protect the life, property, and faith of Muslims," and prevent the occurrence again of such events as had taken place.<sup>40</sup> Thus, on 18 January, at forty-five minutes past noon, ended the last fast of Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi had himself described his last fast as "my greatest fast"<sup>41</sup> to his devoted English disciple, Mirabehn. C. Rajagopalachari, never one to hitch himself blindly to another man's bandwagon, declared that though on similar occasions in the past he had wrangled with Gandhi,<sup>42</sup> he would not do so this time as now the Mahatma was the only sane man. Speaking at a Sikh gurudwara on the fourth day of the fast, Rajagopalachari eulogized Gandhi in these spirited words: "Gandhiji has become insolvent because he has taken upon himself all the debts of our people. Today, he has gone to a great banker, namely God, in order to repay the money."<sup>43</sup> Telegrams, characterized only by the dull uniformity of their message of congratulation, poured in and the Mahatma expressed anew his long-cherished desire to live "to full span of life" which, according to "learned opinion," is 125 years, though some say 133 years.<sup>44</sup> Thousands of refugees had been fasting alongside Gandhi, and even Nehru, unknown to Gandhi, had begun a sympathetic fast on 17 January. Vincent Sheean had been told by his informants in the capital that "talk of war with Pakistan had been quite common" but after the fast such talk had "vanished utterly."<sup>45</sup> And in the capital, though in the capital alone, no untoward happenings were reported.

Viewed from the standpoint of less conventional criteria, and less through the eyes of the protagonist and his supporters and more through the lens of history, other conclusions begin to emerge. It cannot be gainsaid that Gandhi, pained by the violent communal strife to which he was a witness, undertook his fast mainly in the interest of promoting communal harmony, ensuring the safety of Muslims, eradicating the baneful legacy that violence leaves behind, demonstrating the power that comes with *tapasya* and an unwavering dedication to truth, and—in the more general sense—reducing the violence that appeared to be endemic to Indian society. In this respect, there was nothing unusual about this fast. On similar occasions in the past also, he had taken the same step, with this difference: whereas in 1922 and 1924 particularly gruesome acts of violence prompted his fasts,<sup>46</sup> both Calcutta and Delhi were relatively quiet, and had gone through their worst phases of communal violence, when Gandhi commenced fasting. In fact, reporters in Delhi asked him why he had undertaken the fast

when at that time there were no disturbances in Delhi, and Gandhi's response was that it would have been foolish of him to wait until all the Muslims had been thrown out of Delhi "by subtle undemonstrative methods," which to him was akin to "killing by inches." It can, then, perhaps, be argued that in the absence of communal violence, the fast would not have been undertaken. But the presence of violence, or the threat of it, was only a necessary, though not sufficient, reason for Gandhi to have imposed upon himself at his advanced age this intolerable penance.

Vincent Sheean, who was present in Delhi during the second half of January 1948, seemed to think that Gandhi had ended his fast rather prematurely. In his biography of Gandhi, *Lead Kindly Light*, Sheean writes that among the press correspondents speculation was rife as to why Gandhi had chosen to end his fast at the particular moment, and the inclination was to find something "calculating in the whole business." Sheean says that the true explanation suddenly struck him: "Gandhi ended his last fast [when he did] because the sun did not shine that day." The sun did shine every previous day of the fast and Gandhi would lie on a cot in the garden of Birla House and bask in the warmth of the sun's rays. Besides, some of Gandhi's earliest memories of his mother, Sheean recalls from Gandhi's autobiography, were associated with the sun. Sheean concludes that "the darkness of the morning, the [seven-point] pledge to peace and the memory of his mother all combined together to make up the utterance which he called "the inner voice," that which guided him through all the last thirty or forty years of his life, and said imperiously, "fast no more."<sup>47</sup> Although Sheean suggests no other motives that moved Gandhi to fast, his account may be read to support the view that it was not only the attainment of communal harmony that was desired. For, the fast was terminated not so much on the ground that this harmony seemed assured but for other reasons. Another point that deserves consideration is that though representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Sangh, both communal organizations known for their antagonism to the Muslims, were signatories to the pledge, the Mahasabha's secretary published a statement immediately after the conclusion of the fast dissociating the Mahasabha from the "suicidal policy" implied by the Mahatma's actions and the conditions contained in the pledge. The fast, he charged, had only succeeded in weakening the position of the Hindus.<sup>48</sup>

I have earlier hinted that the fast was aimed simultaneously at ameliorating the lot of Muslims in India and prodding the Indian government into a reconsideration of its policies with respect to Pakistan. Gandhi was inquiring whether the Government of India, now a free agent, would permit, as he surely desired, the intrusion and

acceptance of moral values in the shaping and conduct of its foreign policy. This argument can, moreover, be reconciled with Gandhi's own emphatic rejection of the suggestion that the fast was in any way against Patel or a condemnation of the Home Ministry. Patel's communalism, alleged or real, and the Indian government's pragmatic decision to withhold Pakistan's share of the assets of united India lest the money be used, to further wage war in Kashmir were, from the standpoint of Gandhi, only symptomatic of the early abandonment by the entire Indian government and its functionaries of that moral probity which Gandhi had hoped would suffuse political behaviour in post-independence India. In the last major document to which Gandhi's name is attested, he recommended the dissolution of the Congress and suggested that party members should constitute themselves into a Lok Sevak Sangh and disperse throughout the country to do social work in India's villages. Political freedom had been attained; but what of the other freedoms, social, economic, and moral, which were more intangible, and harder to attain precisely because the "antagonists," who prevented their realization, were harder to identify. Whatever the difficulties the country had encountered in attaining independence, constructive work demanded greater perseverance, tolerance, and dedication, the demolition of cherished beliefs, ingrained habits of thinking, and routine behaviour. Radical politics would have to be rooted in radical praxis. Independence could be demanded from Britain, the alien element on Indian soil. But social justice and economic parity were to be attained only by making the demands on one's ownself and then on one's own countrymen. A man could not demand of others the redressal of grievances or the conferment of certain privileges which he was not willing to grant to others. And the same principle applied in foreign relations with other nations. Let India show that the wrongful incursion of Pakistan's troops into its territory would not be ignored. But this violation of its sovereignty would not induce it to ignore its own obligation of delivering to Pakistan its rightful share of the wealth of undivided India. But such magnanimity, and so it would be by the standards of everyday politics, where one wrong is matched by two, could not ordinarily be expected of a country in which a substantial minority feared the loss of its life and property. And democracy, Gandhi had said, is to be judged by how it treats its minorities. If the Muslims in India had legitimate grievances which were not being redressed, could it be expected that India's relations with other countries would be conducted honourably? Aggrieved though he was over the denial of elementary human rights to Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan, Gandhi considered it morally binding on the Hindus and Sikhs of India to treat the Muslims as their own brethren. Gandhi demanded that we should acquit ourselves like soldiers on the battlefield and then only we can acquire the moral authority to demand of

others that they accept the principle of equity. Thus, in the circumstances of the fast, these considerations came together.

Speaking before the United Nations Security Council at Lake Success, where India's complaint against Pakistan over the invasion of Kashmir was being heard, Sir Mohamed Zafarullah Khan, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, said that "a new and tremendous wave of feeling and desire for friendship between India and Pakistan is sweeping the sub-continent in response to the fast."<sup>49</sup> A skeptic may justly respond that such pronouncements from official lips are in the nature of embellishments, superfluous but pleasing to the senses. Numerous Pakistanis testified that after partition, and no doubt even more after the last fast and his martyrdom, Gandhi's standing among the Muslims of Pakistan increased tremendously, so much so that he ceased to be their *bête noire*.<sup>50</sup> Gandhi himself appeared to think that his fast had generated much sympathy among the Muslims of Pakistan and he had received several telegrams, "not one of dissent." If in the Union of India the night of despair and darkness were dispelled, it could not be otherwise in Pakistan. He saw in Pakistan signs in that direction and Mountbatten likewise hoped that the fast would be "the great gesture for Pakistan to act in the same way." But Manohar Malgonkar says quite categorically that the fast "affected Pakistan not at all. If anything, there had been a renewed frenzy of communal massacres" of which the papers carried "properly watered down reports."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the situation continued to remain intolerable for Hindus and, though forty million Muslims remained in India, Pakistan was soon depleted of the greater part of its Hindu population. B.R. Nanda, whose biography of Gandhi enjoys the reputation of fairness and impartiality, appears to have given in this respect an overly optimistic assessment of the fast which, he says, "had a refreshing impact on Pakistan, where it punctured the subtle web of propaganda which for ten years had represented Gandhi as an enemy of Islam."<sup>52</sup> Among the public in Pakistan the fast may indeed have generated feelings of goodwill towards the people of India and it may be argued that it is at this level, not so much in changing official thinking, that Gandhi would have desired to be successful. One indication of how much his name and contribution to the achievement of independence continued to be maligned is that in the *History of the Freedom Movement* sponsored by the Pakistan Historical Society in Karachi, he was cast as the archvillain who obdurately persisted in opposing the rights of Pakistanis to their emergence as a sovereign people. Writing, for example, about the failure of the Jinnah-Gandhi talks in September 1948, it attributed the failure mainly to "Gandhi's total disregard of the two-nation idea which was the fundamental basis of the Muslims' demand embodied in the Lahore resolution and his rejection of the Muslims' right of self-determination."<sup>53</sup>



If the last fast be viewed strictly in terms of its immediate objective, namely the attainment of communal harmony, it may well be termed a "success." It would be disingenuous to argue that this, however, was only ostensibly Gandhi's objective. But it cannot be doubted that in the last few weeks, perturbed as he was by the thought that his life had been a resounding failure and robbed of his will to live 125 years at the sight of the destruction of all the ideas he had cherished, he must have been thinking of the larger principles that were now at stake. Each civil disobedience movement, each satyagraha campaign, each fast, whatever the circumstances, however insistent the demand for independence, was first an attempt to hone the public conscience and its guardians to an acceptance of the place of moral values in political and social life. No sooner had Gandhi arrived in India after a long span of over twenty years in South Africa than he had begun to speak of the necessity of realizing in practice the "spiritualizing" of the political life and the political institutions of the country.<sup>54</sup> Politics, he told the students gathered before him at the Y.M.C.A. on an April afternoon in 1915, "cannot be divorced from religion" and significantly, among the truths which he felt he had recovered for humanity during his ceaseless experimentation in life, and which finds its way into the last paragraphs of his autobiography, is that "those who say that religion had nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."<sup>55</sup> It would be ephemeral to say only that Gandhi refused to be drawn into the compartmentalization of life that was so characteristic of his time. In a society more given to religion, and the placation of deities for the amelioration of worldly distress, Gandhi emphasized "the centrality of politics."<sup>56</sup> Saints stood condemned for having abjured politics—and what is politics but the realization that in the welfare of all is contained one's own good? Politicians, even those few deserving of the sobriquet of "statesmen," had erred in the opposite direction of shunning morality for a more worldly political existence. The marriage of politics and morality, so that one would cease to even think of them as different, was the only marriage to which Gandhi was sworn.

*Dharmakshetre kurukshetre* ("on the field of Dharma, on the field of the Kurus")—so begins the *Bhagavad Gita*, which forms a part of the *Mahabharata*. On the field of Kurukshetra, the Pandavas and Kauravas fought that battle of which the fires are still burning, the embers still alive. Both sought mastery in the political realm. But, whereas the Kauravas, driven by greed and the craving for power, villainously resorted to trickery and deceit, the Pandavas, at least in the person of Yudhishtira, came to vindicate truth and arm political power with the strength of virtuousness. Many centuries later, the battle was reenacted; and it was not so much a battle of the indigenes against the aliens on the time-worn plains of India, as between realpolitik and Gandhi's politics. As Gandhi stated in an interview in February 1924: "I have plunged into politics simply in search of truth . . .

. . . I want to show how to epitomize the Mahabharata."<sup>57</sup> This refrain runs through Gandhi's writings. "My devotion to Truth," he wrote in his autobiography, "has drawn me into the field of politics."<sup>58</sup> Politics was not perhaps the choicest of professions but a man who aspired after truth could not keep out of any field of life. It was not to advance his own interests, or merely to retrieve his kingdom, but to uphold dharma, which is all-embracing and inescapable, that Yudhishtira fought the Kauravas. Likewise, so Gandhi claimed, he took part in politics, which "encircle[s] us today like the coils of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries," without letting the politician in him dominate any decision of his.<sup>59</sup>

The bond between politics and religion, understood not as faith or religious practice but as ethical precepts, that Gandhi was attempting to establish was subversive of the political culture of those Hindus who, with the advent of independence, and even before it, were coming into power. For this kind of experimentation, Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, had utter disdain, and indeed during his trial he denounced Gandhi for having undertaken "experiments . . . at the expenses [sic] of the Hindus."<sup>60</sup> Godse mocked Gandhian politics in no uncertain terms for being "supported by old superstitious beliefs such as the power of the soul, the inner voice, the fast, the prayer and the purity of mind,"<sup>61</sup> and though he expressed satisfaction that the Nehru government was showing greater realism in the shaping of its policy vis-a-vis Pakistan, he feared that Gandhi's influence on the thinking of India's leaders was such that he would have to be eliminated if the development of India were to occur on sounder lines: "I felt that the Indian politics in the absence of Gandhiji would surely be practical, able to retaliate, and would be powerful with the armed forces . . . People may even call me and dub me as devoid of any sense or foolish, but the nation would be free to follow the course founded on reason which I consider to be necessary for sound nation-building."<sup>62</sup> That Gandhi had to stake his very life during the last fast is one measure of how far he had failed, at least in his own estimation, in the battle against realpolitik. But the fact that he was killed in less than two weeks after the termination of the fast is another measure of how far he had succeeded, particularly in the last days of his life, in the same battle.

#### Notes and References

1. Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1981), p. 77.
2. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 7, p. 193.
3. Mountbatten advanced the rather disingenuous, if not ludicrous, argument that as all the parties were equally dissatisfied with the Radcliffe Award, "the best

- evidence of its fairness seemed to rest in the undoubted equality of their displeasure." The words are of his press secretary, Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (London: Robert Hale, Ltd., 1951), p. 167. Mountbatten, son of a royal family, never experienced suffering, but like many others of his ilk, was quite adept at making a mockery of others' sufferings.
4. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 72.
  5. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82, 91.
  6. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
  8. *Harjan*, 14 September 1947.
  9. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, pp. 107-108.
  10. Partly quoted in D.G. Tendulkar, 111. For the full quotation, see Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: 1937-72* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1984), excerpted in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 22 July 1984, p. 34.
  11. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 253.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
  13. *Delhi Diary* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948), p. 237.
  14. Homer A. Jack, ed., *Gandhi Reader* (Indiana, 1956), p. 461.
  15. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 247.
  16. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 265.
  17. Years later, Mountbatten recalled his meeting with Gandhi: "I realized this time it [the fast] might prove fatal and I tried to dissuade him, but he spoke with such genuine distress of his profound unhappiness at the continuing bad communal atmosphere in Delhi that when I thought it impossible to change his mind, I felt that I must support him." See Francis Watson and Hallam Tennyson, *Talking of Gandhi* (London: BBC, 1969; Indian edition, Bombay: Sangam Books, 1976), p. 124.
  18. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 250.
  19. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
  21. See Francis Watson and Hallam Tennyson, *Talking of Gandhi*.
  22. Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, p. 97.
  23. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9. The question is whether Gandhi had set the payment of Rs 55 crores to Pakistan as one of the conditions for the termination of his fast. The *Delhi Diary*, in which Gandhi's speeches, announcements, and prayer meetings from this period are recorded, gives no confirmation of Malgonkar's view. Had not the government agreed to pay Pakistan the requisite amount, it would have been possible to reach a more definite conclusion. But the capitulation of the government to Gandhi's position in the days that he was fasting cannot be adduced as evidence for Malgonkar's position.
  24. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 252.
  25. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 268.
  26. *Ibid.*, pp. 268-9.
  27. A part of Campbell-Johnson's entry in his diary for 12 January reads thus: "Gandhi's intervention over the unilateral proposal to impose a sanction against Pakistan by withholding the fifty-five crores under the partition of assets is

- likely to give edge to a Government crisis. For, he had clearly reacted very strongly against this move, and seems to be prepared to face a head-on collision with Patel about it."
- "Nehru and Patel have undoubtedly been drifting apart. . . Gandhi may well hope by a supreme effort to heal the breach between the two great men in the Indian government, realising that he alone has the status to do it, and that if he fails, not only the Congress Party but the entire regime would be placed in deadly peril."
28. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 257.
  29. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-52.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
  31. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.
  32. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. 8, p. 260. See also Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, pp. 98-99.
  33. Vincent Sheean, *Lead Kindly Light: Gandhi and the Way to Peace* (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 171.
  34. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 261.
  35. *Harjan*, 25 January 1948.
  36. *Delhi Diary*, pp. 333-34.
  37. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, pp. 261-62.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
  39. *Delhi Diary*, p. 348.
  40. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, pp. 263-64.
  41. Quoted in B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958; revised abridged edition, New Delhi: Blackie & Son, 1975), p. 262.
  42. Before commencing his fast in Calcutta, Gandhi prepared a statement which he showed to C. Rajagopalachari, the new Governor of West Bengal. Rajaji, as he was popularly known, tried to talk Gandhi out of his fast, and upon finding that he was having no success, pounced upon a part of the statement where Gandhi seems to have left himself open to attack. So meticulous was Gandhi that he invariably also stated what amenities, if any, he would permit himself during the fast. Now Gandhi had said that he would allow sour lemon juice to be added to his water, presumably to avoid nausea, but Rajaji objected that this ought not to be necessary, if he had put himself entirely in God's hands. Gandhi conceded that he had allowed it out of weakness and that as a satyagrahi he should not have allowed himself the liberty of hoping that the fast was to be outlived, other than by the "timely fulfillment of the condition." Nitmal K. Bose, who was then serving as Gandhi's secretary and interpreter, recalled some year that Gandhi then took a pencil and scored out the portion referring to the sour lemon juice. In Bose's words, "now this was the man whom we saw, not merely great, but immensely great." See D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. 8, p. 102; and F. Watson and H. Tennyson, *Talking of Gandhi*, p. 115.
  43. Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: 1937-72*.
  44. Vincent Sheean, *Lead Kindly Light*, p. 170.
  45. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 270.

46. At the height of the civil disobedience movement of 1920-22, it was reported that at Chauri Chaura, on 5 February 1922, a procession, incensed by the harassment of some of its members by the local police, cornered twenty-two constables, who had run out of ammunition, into the police-station, which was then set afire. All the constables were burnt to death or, as they emerged from the station, hacked to pieces. On receiving this news, Gandhi at once issued orders for suspension of the civil disobedience movement throughout the country, much to the chagrin of even his most devoted followers in the Congress party, who failed to see why a stray incident in a remote Indian village justified the suspension of a movement that was believed to have brought the country very close to the doors of freedom. Although the incident at Chauri Chaura cannot be described as a communal disturbance, it is of one piece with the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1924 and 1946-48, in so far as they all represented a regression to that atavism which delights in orgiastic outbreaks of violence and which, Gandhi must have suspected, lurked deep in the Indians' psyche. In the event, Gandhi imposed on himself a five days' fast to atone for the callous misdeeds of his countrymen (see D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 2, pp. 82-87). Similarly, in 1924, it was the riots at Kohat which prompted Gandhi to undertake a fast for twenty-one days. He had been greatly disturbed for some time over Hindu-Muslim riots; and then, when 36 people were killed at Kohat, and the entire Hindu population evacuated the town, the light came to him: "I was writhing in deep pain. News of Kohat set the smouldering mass aflame. I passed two nights of restlessness, I knew the remedy." Quoted in Harold E. Fey, "Why Gandhi Fasts," *The Christian Century* (24 February 1943), pp. 230-31; D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 2, p. 148.
47. Vincent Sheean, *Lead Kindly Light*, pp. 174-75. The author's account is to be treated with some skepticism that one ordinarily reserves for miracles. Sheean happened to be in Birla House when Gandhi was assassinated; and he further writes that in the very instant that his mind registered this shock, bolts began to appear on his hand. He describes this as a psychosomatic phenomenon—no great novelty—but not to be dismissed lightly either (pp. 203-4).
48. Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, p. 107.
49. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 8, p. 272.
50. See, for example, Watson and Tennyson, *Talking of Gandhi*, p. 17.
51. Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, p. 148.
52. B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 262.
53. See *History of the Freedom Movement* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1970), Vol. 4 (1936-1947), Parts I and II, p. 206.
54. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 1, p. 166.
55. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Trans. Mahadev Desai, 2nd ed. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), last chapter entitled "Farewell," p. 371.
56. The phrase is Ashis Nandy's. See his "Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi," in his *At the Edge of Psychology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 72. This essay is brimming with perceptive insights and has helped me to develop some of my arguments.
57. Cited by T.K. Mahadevan, "An Approach to the Study of Gandhi," in S.C. Biswas, ed., *Gandhi, Theory, and Practice: Social Impact and Contemporary Relevance* (Srinia: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), p. 50. "The

- forerunners of Gandhi," writes Mahadevan, "are the great epic heroes of Hindu India—Hrishchandra, Rama, and Yudhishthira."
58. M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, p. 371.
59. *Young India*, 12 May 1920.
60. Quoted in Tapan Ghose, *The Gandhi Murder Trial* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1973), p. 218, and cited by Ashis Nandy, "Final Encounter," p. 71.
61. Quoted in Tapan Ghose, *Gandhi Murder Trial*, p. 229; and by Ashis Nandy, "Final Encounter," p. 91.
62. Quoted in G.D. Khosla, "The Crime of Nathuram Godse," in *The Murder of the Mahatma* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), p. 242, and cited by Ashis Nandy, "Final Encounter," p. 91.