
UNIT 32 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND ITS STRATEGIES*

Structure

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32.1 INTRODUCTION

A prolonged political movement can be studied by focusing on six major components – political objectives, programme and ideology, strategy, leadership, social base and class character. All the six components are important. Even though each one is connected to the other, none is a substitute or can be reduced to the other. The importance of the strategy for a prolonged struggle, such as the Indian National Movement, was immense. It provided continuity to the different phases of the struggle. The British imperialism was a complex phenomenon and could not be fought in a simple one-to-one combat. It required an elaborate set of techniques. The techniques had to be flexible enough to change according to the change in time and context. Yet the techniques had to be enduring and sustained enough to survive a mere change in the leadership. It is interesting that the change in leadership of the Movement did not necessarily bring about a change in the strategy. This Unit addresses itself to some salient questions pertaining to the strategy of the national movement.

32.2 DID THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT HAVE A STRATEGY?

On this question there have been two extreme views expressed in the various history writings. Interestingly both the views have denied either the importance or the very existence of a strategy for the movement. There was a traditional view often found in the nationalist history writings which highlighted the role of ideas and idealism, courage and sacrifices as the crucial elements in the movement. The assumption was that the freedom won in 1947 was primarily the product of courage, conviction and selfless sacrifice displayed by the leaders and their followers. Such a view obviously ignored the role of strategy in the movement.

The view on the other extreme was exemplified by some of the writings from the Cambridge School of history writing. This School often saw the movement

not as a “whole” but divided into multiple activities and interests. This was a fragmentary view of the national movement which did not see the movement as connected in time and space. So according to this view, the earlier phase of the movement was not connected to the latter phase and the political energies generated were concentrated at the local, provincial and the all-India levels. These levels often flowed into different directions. Also political activities were inspired not so much by ideas but ‘interests’. In other words, the Cambridge School tended to develop a picture of the movement which was an assemblage of multiple fragments and interests, and not as a connected structured whole. Even such a view will obviously not look at strategy as a significant component of the movement.

As against these two views, the real discussion on strategy developed in some of the Marxian writings on the Movement, particularly those of Bipan Chandra. He argued that the movement as a whole was connected in time and space. It accommodated within itself multiple activities, techniques and tactics. But the movement, particularly in the Gandhian phase, was marked by the presence of a centralised strategic framework. This strategic framework performed an axial role during the course of the movement. It is therefore very important to focus on strategy as a crucial component of the national movement.

32.4 THE NATURE OF COLONIAL STATE

There is a strong co-relation between the nature of the State and the range of strategic options that can be employed against that State. The manner in which power is acquired and exercised is crucial for the manner in which that power can be challenged. In other words, the question of strategy can be understood better if we place it in the context of the nature of the colonial State in India.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the leading Italian Marxist thinker, gave us the clue to the relationship between the nature of the State and the nature of the struggles against it. Gramsci was grappling with a very important issue in Marxian thinking. He was wondering why the Bolshevik-type revolution, which succeeded in Tsarist Russia, did not appear likely to succeed in the capitalist democratic societies of Western Europe. His search for an answer to this question led him to focus on the nature of the State, as the main clue to the answer. He then argued that the nature of State in Western European societies was basically different from the Tsarist Russia and therefore the revolutionary struggle in these societies would have to be of a different nature. He divided the main strategies of struggle against state power into a war of manoeuvre (WoM) and a war of position (WoP). He argued that if power was heavily concentrated within the State, then WoM would be successful against it. This was the case for instance in Tsarist Russia, in which it was possible to smash state power in one blow. But in situations in which power was more diffused among various institutions and the State was fortified by a complex system of multiple ‘trenches’, the WoM will not be effective and a different strategy will be required. The 20th century capitalist societies were societies of this kind. This, according to Gramsci, was the main reason why socialist revolutions had not been successful in such situations. For such situations, Gramsci recommended the strategy of WoP.

All States in history had ruled with the help of a combination of ‘force’ and ‘consent’. No State had ruled exclusively and solely on the basis of naked force.

However in the modern states, force became more diffused and the area of consent became enlarged. Modern capitalist states ruled by creating a 'rule of law' which became a major source of legitimacy. This legitimacy enabled modern capitalist states to create zones of consent. In other words modern capitalist states ruled through 'hegemony' which was a combination of force and consent. Against such a hegemonic state, in which a large part of the society stood behind the state, the strategy of violent overthrow (as happened in Tsarist Russia) would not be possible. Instead, in such situations it would be more useful to resort to a 'war of position' i.e., a bit by bit struggle carried out in phases for small victories which would then be accumulated so as to turn into a grand success. Gramsci also called it 'trench warfare'. A favourable situation for a war of position is when the "consciousness of material impotence on the part of the great mass confronts a minority of oppressors". This would be a long-term struggle which would initially start from a situation of imbalance, in which the enemy would be stronger. But the strategy for war of position will seek to change this situation in stages.

It is interesting that although Gramsci had specified the strategy of WoP as effective against the democratic capitalist states, he was able to see that this strategy was being employed in the Indian national Movement. Even though he was in jail and would have had very limited exposure to the world outside, still he noticed some of the distinctive features of the Gandhi-led-struggle in howsoever limited a manner. Gramsci wrote in his Prison Diary:

'Thus India's political struggle against the English knows three forms of war: war of movement, war of positions and underground warfare. Gandhi's passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare. Boycotts are a form of war of position, strikes of war of movement, the secret preparations of weapons and combat troops belongs to underground warfare'.

What is the relevance of Gramscian thinking for our discussion of the Strategy of the national movement? He had in mind two models of state power – the authoritarian model of a state with power concentrated directly within the state and the model of democratic European societies with power diffused and dispersed among multiple institutions. Interestingly the colonial state in India was different from both these types.

Although Gramsci gave us the important conceptual category of 'war of position' for the dominant strategy for the national movement, he did not really specify the exact conditions in which the WoP was to be carried out. He also did not take up the question of violence and non-violence. It was here that Gandhian practice took this debate forward. Gandhi broadly agreed with the Marxian position that the State was an instrument of organised violence. But he did see the 20th century State as much more entrenched which could not be overthrown by a violent armed struggle. He wrote: "British domination has been as much sustained by British arms as it has been through the legislatures, distribution of titles, the law courts, the educational institutions, the financial policy and the like." All these had created some areas of consent which necessitated a non-violent struggle.

Gandhi had started developing his understanding of the British colonial state during his encounters with it in South Africa. During his Satyagraha in South

Africa, Gandhi experienced that there was a powerful public opinion in England, capable of influencing government decisions. Gandhi developed an admiration for the British democracy. At the same time he also noticed powerful conservative elements in British thinking. He is reported to have said sometime before the First World War: “The British are said to love liberty for themselves and for others....but they have a faculty for self-delusion that no other nation has.” He also added a quality he admired among English people: “I have found Englishmen amenable to reason and persuasion and as they always wish to appear, it is easier to shame them than others into doing the right thing.” (Quoted in B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics*, p. 68).

The presence of seemingly contradictory strands in British thinking has been articulated very succinctly by D.A. Low. He has called it an ambiguity between the dominant strands of self-image among the British. One was a liberal-democratic strand and the other was a conservative-imperialist one. On the one hand the British saw themselves as the leaders of the world who had the responsibility for promoting democracy and self-government in the world. At the same time there was also a conservative-imperialist self-image that fed into some of the policy decisions. In this self-image, colonies, particularly India, were seen as an important and integral component of the British Empire. It was believed that, minus the colonies, Great Britain would be easily reduced to a little Britain. Both the strands of thought were present in British thinking and policy making towards India. Therefore sometimes concessions were made (as in 1917 declaring self-government as the goal of British policy in India and in the Government of India Act of 1935 granting provincial autonomy). But on other occasions very repressive measures were also adopted (as in the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919 and the suppression of nationalist agitations after 1932 and in 1942).

This duality in British thinking and in policy formulation was articulated very well by Viceroy Ripon, when he said: “There are two policies lying before the choice of the Government of India; the one is the policy of those who have established a free press, who have promoted education, who have admitted natives more and more largely to the public service in various forms, and who have favoured the extension of self-government; the other side is that of those who hate the freedom of the press, who dread the progress of education, and who watch with jealousy and alarm everything which tends, in however limited a degree, to give the natives of India a larger share in the management of their own affairs.” (S.R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of Indian National Congress*, pp. 305-06).

It is clear that Gandhi was acutely aware of this aspect of the British rule and incorporated it in the strategy he formulated vis-a-vis British imperialism.

32.4 MAKING OF THE GANDHIAN STRATEGY

Gandhian strategy of the anti-imperialist struggle was not codified in one place in the form of a blue-print or a manifesto. It was not prepared before the struggle was launched. It evolved in a process taking cognizance of current experiences and incorporating them in a strategic framework. Gandhian strategy was based on his understanding of the British rule and also his experiences in South Africa. His strategy of non-violent non-cooperation was borne out of his basic disenchantment with the existing nationalist politics. He understood the

limitations of the politics of Indian Moderates, based as it was on constitutional methods. Such a politics had its own limits. It could easily be co-opted through the offers of concessions. At any rate such a politics was based on the premise of a good will on the part of the rulers. The futility of such politics was demonstrated during the struggle against the partition of Bengal in which during 1903-05 the Moderate leaders made a plea to the British not to partition Bengal. Some of them hoped, quite naively, that once the British were convinced that there was an overwhelming consensus against the partition plan, they would see reason and not go ahead with their proposed partition. However none of that happened and the Moderate leaders themselves began to see the futility of their political techniques. The other alternative was underground political violence. Such politics emanated from the Swadeshi movement when many young people in Bengal, disillusioned with the failure of the Swadeshi movement, began to explore the option of political violence. The politics of underground violence was tried out in Bengal and was suppressed by the British.

Gandhi saw the futility of both these techniques. He was therefore searching for an alternative to both the extremes, which would avoid the pitfalls of both. He found the answer in non-violent non-co-operation. His non-cooperation was posited against the Moderate techniques which were ineffective at best and also ran the risk of being co-opted. And his non-violence was posited against the methods of violent revolutionaries, which could not last long and would eventually be suppressed. However in treating non-violence as a part of his strategy of struggle, one should not underplay his total and uncompromising commitment to non-violence. Non-violence was an effective strategy for the movement, but for Gandhi its significance was much more than purely strategic. He was fully committed to it and convinced of its moral superiority.

While discussing the making of Gandhian strategy, one has to refer to the struggle Gandhi launched in South Africa during 1908-14 against the discrimination practised by the South African government against the Indian population there. It is interesting that Gandhi tried all the techniques in South Africa before practising them in India. Gandhi set up a Press “International Printing Press” in Pretoria in 1904. He started a journal *Indian Opinion* in Johannesburg before starting *Young India* and *Harijan* in India. He set up two Ashrams in South Africa – Phoenix and Tolstoy, before setting up Ashrams in Ahmedabad and in Wardha. During his Satyagraha in South Africa, Gandhi practised non-cooperation, boycott and also took a long march from Natal to Transvaal along the lines of his famous Dandi march in 1930 as part of his Salt Satyagraha. He also showed willingness for a pact or a negotiation with the government of South Africa. The only weapon he did not try in South Africa was the fast. Fasting as a political method was tried out by Gandhi for the first time in 1918 during his leadership of the strike by the Ahmedabad Mill Workers.

After returning to India Gandhi wrote an important book *Satyagraha in South Africa*, in which he spelt out the basic outline of his technique of Satyagraha. He presented Satyagraha as an effective technique against any act of tyranny. In an essay in his journal *Young India* in 1924, he defined Satyagraha in the following words:

‘Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience are but different branches of the same tree called *Satyagraha*. It is my *Kalpadruma* [a sacred tree, according to Hindu

mythology, which fulfils all the desires] – my *Jam-i-Jam* [a divine cup according to Islamic mythology] – the universal provider. Satyagraha is search for truth; and God is truth. Ahimsa or non-violence is the light that reveals that Truth to me. *Swaraj* for me is part of that Truth. This *Satyagraha* did not fail me in South Africa, Kheda or Champaran and in a host of other cases I could mention. It excludes all violence or hate I have repeatedly stated that Satyagraha never fails and that one perfect Satyagrahi is enough to vindicate Truth.....Satyagraha is an attribute of the spirit within. It is latent in every one of us. Like *Swaraj*, it is our birth right’.

To sum up this section, Gandhian strategy did not exist at any point in time in the form of a fully finished blue-print. It was constantly evolving with new elements being added to it. While understanding the process in which his strategy was shaping up, two factors – his dissatisfaction with the entire range of the existing nationalist politics and experiences in South Africa, need to be kept in mind.

32.5 ESSENCE OF THE GANDHIAN STRATEGY

It was primarily under Gandhi that the national movement acquired a clear-cut and long-term strategic framework. It was clear-cut because there were to be no ambiguities and confusions. It was long-term in the sense that it was not confined to any single episode or activity. All the different activities were connected to each other through a common strategy. The strategy was not to throw out British imperialism, but to create such conditions as to make it impossible for them to stay on in India. In other words, it was to be a strategy, not of the removal of imperialism through one big push, but through a prolonged struggle, carried out in various phases. The essence of Gandhian strategy can be understood better from a quote from Bipan Chandra:

The basic strategic perspective of the Indian National Congress was to wage a long-drawn out hegemonic struggle or in Gramscian terms a war of position – a struggle for the minds and hearts of men and women, constantly expanding its influence among the people through different channels and its different movements and phases or stages. The strategy had two basic thrusts. It was hegemonic and it alternated between phases of extra legal mass struggle and phases of truce functioning within the four walls of the law or in Gramscian terms between phases of war of manoeuvre and war of position. But both phases were geared to expanding the influence of the national movement among the people. The basic strategy was the same, but the tactics differed in different phases and over time. It was, moreover, not a strategy of gradual reform or ‘compromise’ with colonialism or of seeking co-option into it or of ‘sharing’ power and privilege with it. It was a strategy of active struggle by building reserves of hegemonic power with a view to wresting political power from the colonial state. Even though it represented an alternative not only to the path of armed struggle but in many ways also to the Leninist strategic framework, it shared with the latter a common strategic objective, the capture of state power. (Bipan Chandra, *Indian National Movement: The Long-Term Dynamics*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 40).

One necessary pre-condition for practising this strategy was to find out the nature of the adversary. Gandhi understood that the British did not rule India through pure force and coercion. They ruled India by trying to capture the minds and

hearts of the Indian people. In other words they tried to rule India by trying to establish their hegemony. The role of the national movement therefore was to try and erode the hegemony established by the British and establish a counter hegemony of the national movement, and to wage a struggle for the minds and hearts of the people.

The British established their hegemony in two major ways – by proving the benevolence of the British rule and by establishing its invincibility. The entire duration of the national movement – from the early to the Gandhian phase – was essentially a sustained demolition of the twin notions of British benevolence and British invincibility. The early nationalist leadership tried to counter the notion of the British benevolence with the idea of economic nationalism, i.e., that idea that the British rule was against the economic interests of Indian people as a whole. The Movement in its Gandhian phase built on this and tried to erode the invincibility of the British rule by successfully carrying out agitations against it. The following may be treated as some of the essential ingredients in the Gandhian strategy of struggle against British imperialism:

- It was based on acquiring a proper and scientific understanding of the nature of the adversary. Gandhi was quite clear that not all strategies can be effective in all situations. He understood that the colonial state in India was different from Hitler's Germany or Tsarist Russia. It was semi-authoritarian or based on a kind of legal authoritarianism. British rule was based on force but also on the creation of certain civil institutions. British created constitutional spaces and were also ready to offer concessions at times. Moreover it was a government which was accountable to British parliament and a vigilant public opinion in England. This nature of the British rule, and its understanding by Gandhi, played some role in the formulation of the specific Gandhian strategy against it. Gandhi was clear that the same strategy of counter hegemonic struggle may not be equally effective in all situations, and the strategies had to be context-specific.
- The struggle was to be fought with the help of the masses. The major strength of the Movement was to come from the masses and not from the intelligentsia or any particular class or any trained cadre. This required practicing the politics of class adjustment as against that of class-conflict. It was often not easy to reconcile the interests of conflicting classes involved in the same struggle. Reconciling the national interests with the class interests often became a very challenging task during the course of the Movement. People, including the peasants and workers were to be mobilized on an anti-imperialist plank.
- Masses were to be mobilised on some strong moral basis. Racial or religious issues were avoided in campaigns of mass mobilisations. Khilafat movement was more of an exception than a rule. Two important moral issues, which were taken up, were the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 and the Salt Satyagraha in 1930. The choice of raising important moral issues and avoiding strictly racial or religious issues was very significant. It ensured that the Movement did not degenerate into counter-racism against the British people. Also the Movement enjoyed considerable support in British society and Media which often took up the Indian cause. The avoiding of religious issues was also necessary to ensure that the Movement did not take up the grievances of one religious community against another.

- The Movement was a continuous struggle but was to be fought through different stages. It alternated between phases of struggle and those of truce. Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn in 1922 and was followed by a prolonged period of constructive programme. It consisted of promotion of Khadi and spinning, promoting village industries, creating alternative national education, working for communal unity and harmony, struggle against untouchability, and boycott of foreign goods and liquor. Likewise the end of the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement in 1934 was followed by a constitutional phase in which Congress contested elections to provincial assemblies and formed a government in seven provinces. Thus phases of open confrontation with the authority were alternated by phases of working within the existing legal and constitutional framework.

One major reason for carrying out the struggle in different phases was realisation by Gandhi that masses did not have inexhaustible reserves of energy and that they needed a break from active phases of struggle. Their capacity for making sacrifices (heavy fines, imprisonment, loss of jobs, loss of land among other) was finite and could not be taken for granted. Bipan Chandra writes: "...by its very nature a mass movement could not be carried on or sustained indefinitely for even for a prolonged period, that a mass movement must ebb sooner or later, that no mass movement could be on the rise permanently, that mass movements had to be short-lived, and that period of rest and consolidation, of 'breathing time' must intervene so that the movement could consolidate, recuperate and gather strength for the next round of struggle." (Bipan Chandra, *Indian National Movement*, p. 51). However, the fact that the struggle was launched in phases, should not be taken to mean that there a break between phases or that the broad objectives of the Movement did not carry from one phase to the other. Gandhi himself pointed out many times that it was essentially *one* struggle and would continue till the final objective was met. After the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement, he wrote: "...suspension of civil disobedience does not mean suspension of war. The latter can only end when India has a Constitution of her own making."

- Yet another aspect of the strategy was to occupy and capture whatever space was released by the British. In this manner power was not to be claimed in one go but bit-by-bit. So once the constitutional arena was opened up, however slowly and in a limited manner, it was utilized by the Movement after the Government of India Act of 1919 offering Dyarchy and after the Act of 1935 offering provincial autonomy. The idea was to extend the national movement to various spheres of socio-political life. So, just as the national movement entered villages through Gandhi's constructive programme, it also entered the legislative bodies through its constitutional activities. All these diverse activities were connected to each other through a common strategy.
- Finally, insistence on non-violence was very central to the strategy of the Movement. It was considered necessary that a prolonged struggle by the masses – as against a cadre-based underground movement – had to be non-violent. The human cost of mass participation in a violent struggle could be very high. Also a violent movement would find it difficult to mobilise masses on a sustained basis. It may be therefore argued that non-violence enabled

the Movement to acquire a wider support and a mass base. It should thus be clear that for the Movement it was a strategic necessity. Gandhi himself explained the strategic relevance of non-violence to his followers before starting his famous Dandi March in March 1930:

“Though the battle is to begin in a couple of days, how is it that you can come so fearlessly? I do not think any of you would be here if you had to face rifle-shots or bombs? But you have no fear of rifle-shots or bombs. Why? Supposing I had announced that I was going to launch a violent campaign, not necessarily with men armed with rifles, but even with sticks or stones, do you think the Government would have left me free until now? Can you show me an example in history (be it in England, America or Russia) where the state has tolerated violent defiance of authority for a single day? But here you know that the Government is puzzled and perplexed.” (Quoted in Mridula Mukherjee, ‘Introduction’, in Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi’s Emissary*, New Delhi, 2008, pp. xix-xx).

32.6 GANDHIAN STRATEGY: SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Once we begin to recognize the presence of a centralised strategic framework, we can also begin to see the link between the diverse sets of activities of the national movement. The focus on strategy also enables us to offer a fresh perspective on some of the contentious and controversial aspects of the Movement. In particular two major political decisions taken by Gandhi – withdrawal of the movement after violence in Chauri Chaura in 1922 and Gandhi – Irvin Pact signed in 1931 – have aroused considerable debate, both during their times and in subsequent history writings.

The withdrawal of the non cooperation movement after violence at Chauri Chaura has been understood in different ways. In its own times, it was considered to be a matter of political choice between violence and non-violence. Given Gandhi’s uncompromising stand on this question, it was believed to be at the heart of Gandhi’s decision to call off the movement. Leading Marxist historian R.P. Dutt looked at this question very differently. In his view, it indicated and confirmed the ‘bourgeois’ character of the Movement because Gandhi did not want the Movement to go out of control and turn against the propertied classes. Sumit Sarkar, in his article “The Logic of Gandhian Nationalism”, explained the Gandhi-Irvin Pact by invoking the class character of the Movement. According to him, the Pact was signed because there was considerable pressure exercised by the capitalist class and the Pact was intended to protect the interests of the capitalist class. It was also the fear of the movement getting out of control, and the preference for a ‘controlled mass movement’ (as against a spontaneous mass movement), which was seen as the real reason behind many decisions taken by the leadership. These explanations were then generalized to construct an over-all picture of the national movement, supposedly fought under the control of the dominant capitalist class.

However, alternative explanations and generalisations can be found if we turn the searchlight towards ‘strategy’ as a crucial element behind various decisions taken by Gandhi. Withdrawing a phase of the Movement can then be seen as an integral part of Gandhian strategy. Also, constantly exploring the space for the

possibility of a truce or a settlement was also a part of the same strategy. As Gandhi himself said: “An honest satyagrahi should always be ready for a honourable settlement.” Pacts and settlements were always an essential ingredient in Gandhian strategy.

Chauri Chaura was the last time Gandhi withdrew the movement citing violence as the main reason. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, there were instances of violence in Sholapur and also in some pockets in the North West Frontier Province. But Gandhi did not withdraw the struggle. The Quit India movement had turned violent as a whole. But Gandhi refused to condemn this violence on the ground that this violence was a reaction to the much larger violence inflicted by the colonial state.

However, while focusing on ‘strategy’ as an important component of the Movement, it is necessary not to look upon it as fixed or frozen. No blueprint of the strategy existed. It was never formally codified by Gandhi at any point. The strategy actually grew with practice. In this sense, the leaders of the Movement were teachers and learners at the same time. They were educating the participants of the struggle even as they were learning about it. The leaders were constantly experimenting, growing, changing and learning from previous experiences. All these, rather than any pre-existing codified doctrine, were the building blocks in the making of the strategy.

It was perhaps the essence of Gandhian strategy that the ultimate objective – overthrow of British imperialism – was not achieved in a sledge hammer way, but so gradually and in such a phased manner that the actual coming of independence did not appear very dramatic and spectacular. This aspect of Gandhian strategy was spelt out beautifully by the contemporary British historian Arnold Toynbee: “He [Gandhi] made it impossible for the British to go on ruling India, but at the same time he made it possible for us to abdicate without rancour and without dishonour.... In helping the British extricate themselves from this [imperial] entanglement, Gandhi did them a signal service for it is easier to acquire an empire than to disengage from one.” (Quoted in B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics*, p. 71).

32.7 ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIC VISIONS

Gandhi’s was the dominant strategy of the anti-imperialist struggle; but it was not the only one. During the course of Gandhi’s leadership over the movement, there also existed rival and contending ideas of how to struggle against British imperialism.

One major challenge to the mainstream Gandhian strategy came from Jawaharlal Nehru, particularly in the 1930s. This was the period when Nehru was getting increasingly disillusioned with Gandhi’s politics and growing distant from him. Nehru began to be very inspired by socialist ideas and grew convinced that the future choice for the entire world was between “some form of Communism and some form of Fascism”. He became convinced about the desirability of Communism at a global level. At a national level, however, he looked upon the anti-imperialist struggle as an important pre-condition for the emergence of Socialism. Nehru travelled through the country, met many people, and was convinced that since 1857 there had never been such extraordinary bitterness

among the Indian people against British government, and such a passionate desire to get rid of it. This for Nehru was a revolutionary moment and he felt that this revolutionary mood was being distracted by Gandhi's focus on rural uplift and Harijan movement around 1933-34. Nehru was convinced that the moment for the big social transformation had arrived. British rule could be overthrown; the autocratic system of princely states would end; land system would be changed; and industries would be brought under public control. All this could be achieved in a short span of time. The removal of British imperialism would ignite the spark and other things would happen through a Domino effect. This was a radically different perspective and it brought Nehru to a brink of a political separation from Gandhi.

Briefly, the outline of Nehru's alternative strategy consisted of the following: The anti-imperialist struggle had reached a stage when there should be uncompromising and sustained confrontation with imperialism till it was overthrown. There could be no compromise or any setback on this. There could be no meeting ground and no reversion either to constitutionalism or to Gandhian constructive work. It was for this reason that Nehru was completely opposed to Congressmen forming governments in provinces under the Government of India Act, 1935. He saw it as a compromise with imperialism. Nehru's strategy was basically one of seizure of power, albeit through a non-violent mass struggle.

However Nehru knew that Gandhi did not share his worldview and soon discovered that it would be difficult to convert Gandhi to his position. He also underestimated Gandhi's influence on the Congress. Nehru realized that he would not be able to convert Congress to his new worldview. Therefore in order to push his revolutionary project, he would have to abandon the Congress. In this project Nehru had the support of some Socialist Congress leaders, who had formed a Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934. But Nehru also discovered that apart from a revolutionary project, he did not share very much in common with the Congress Socialists. Thus, Nehru's alternative strategy remained only on paper and in Nehru's thoughts and writings. It could not transform into a social force. Nehru did not have the organisational resources and did not want to abandon Congress as the vehicle for the anti-imperialist struggle. Nehru also realised that his pushing for an alternative strategy might split the Congress and the Movement. And Nehru was not ready to split up the anti-imperialist forces. After contemplating his alternative strategy during the early part of 1930s, Nehru eventually came around to accepting Gandhian strategy from 1937 onwards and agreed to fight the struggle more or less on terms stipulated by Gandhi.

There were other occasions when challenges were thrown up to Gandhi's leadership and strategy. For instance Subhash Chandra Bose tried, as Congress president in 1938 and 1939, to alter the trajectory of the anti-imperialist struggle. The conflict that followed resulted in Bose's alienation from the Congress and eventually his expulsion from Congress and his forming a separate 'Forward Block'. But without a doubt, Nehru's was the most serious attempt to challenge the dominant Gandhian strategy. As it happened, no major breaks occurred in the Congress strategy and the national movement continued to be fought under Gandhi's leadership following his strategy.

32.8 SUMMARY

The Indian nationalist movement, particularly during the Gandhian phase, was fought with the help of a clear-cut, long-term strategy. Gandhi was the architect of this strategy. The various changes, which occurred in the activities and the tactics of the Movement, were carried out broadly *within* the same strategy. This strategy did not exist in an *a priori* manner. Nor was there a ready-made blueprint for it. It grew and evolved with experiences. It was also not codified in any single piece of writing by Gandhi. Yet there are many indications (in Gandhi's writings, in his activities and also in the writings of some of his contemporaries) that Gandhi was pursuing the Movement with an acute sense of strategy.

This was a strategy not of a direct overthrow of imperialism, but of a prolonged bit-by-bit struggle, conducted in many phases. The main objective of the strategy was to create such conditions in which the British would find it impossible to rule India and would be compelled to leave. This strategy was partly a result of the nature of British imperialism in India, and an acute understanding of that nature by the leadership of the Movement. The British did not rule India with brute force but in a semi-authoritarian manner, by creating a support base among Indians and by trying to reach out to their minds and hearts. As against this, the strategy of the national movement was to try to erode the hegemony of the colonial rulers and replace it with the counter-hegemony of the national movement.

Non-violent struggle, active participation of the masses, struggle to be launched in stages, phases of agitation to be alternated with phases of constructive programme, readiness for a settlement or a compromise (as in Gandhi-Irwin pact of 1931), making use of whatever constitutional spaces that were released by the British, constantly enlarging the orbit of the national movement to newer groups and areas, were some of the essential components of the Gandhian strategy.

This strategic framework of Gandhi received the most serious challenge from Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1930s. He proposed an alternative strategy of one big round of struggle against imperialism without any breaks, retreats or compromises till imperialism was overthrown. Such a militant struggle, according to Nehru, would also prepare the Indian society for a radical transformation of the social order along socialist lines. However, Nehru soon realised that there was not enough support for his strategy within Congress and that his pushing for an alternative might split the Congress and the anti-imperialist movement. Nehru also realised that Congress was the most effective platform for the anti-imperialist struggle and that any weakening of the Congress would also weaken the struggle. Therefore Nehru did not push his alternative vision to the point of the break and, by 1937, retreated by agreeing to fight British imperialism within the parameters of the Gandhian strategy of struggle.

32.9 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the nature of the state in colonial India.
- 2) Describe the Gandhian strategy to fight against imperialism in India.
- 3) What were other strategies which were presented as alternatives to the Gandhian strategy?