

ANALYSEN

Soviet View of Mahatma Gandhi

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In evaluating Mahatma Gandhi, Soviet scholars have always endeavored to identify him from a class viewpoint even though they frequently disagreed on the definition of the various classes and on the attitude to be taken toward them. Mahatma Gandhi, though he came from the bourgeois class, always considered himself a socialist and a "true servant of the peasants and of the workers". He was firmly of the opinion that "even a King can be a socialist by becoming a servant of the people". He once told Nehru that "even when I die, you will have to admit that Gandhi was a true socialist"¹. But Gandhi disliked Russian communism because, according to him, it assumed the essential selfishness of human nature. He, on the other hand, wanted to base his socialism and communism on non-violence and on the harmonious cooperation of labor and capital, landlord and tenant. He advocated that better relations between labor and capital, landlord and tenant could be brought about by a change of heart on both sides. He was also convinced that a millionaire's wealth should go to the community and warned the Indian capitalists that unless they parted with it voluntarily, a violent revolution in India could not be checked.

A non-violent system of government (he declared) as clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. . . A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give, and sharing them for the common good².

For all these reasons, attempts by Soviet scholars to evaluate Gandhi from the class viewpoint have so far been frustrated, and Gandhi has remained a source of trouble to them.

Soon after the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin took a benevolent attitude toward Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. For with the advent of Gandhi on the Indian political scene, the Indian National Congress became a mass movement with a revolutionary purpose. Gandhi also performed an indispensable function; he catalyzed the development of Indian nationalism by his ability to unite the illiterate peasants with the Western-educated elite. Under his leadership the Indian National Congress burgeoned and became a genuinely popular political party.

The upsurge of the national liberation movement in 1918 under his leadership drew the attention of the Bolshevik leaders and greatly stirred them. An article in "Zhizn natsionalnosti", organ of the Commissariat of the Nationalities, described Karl Marx as having foreseen that "the communist revolution must be preceded by a

¹ Tendulkar, D. G., *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, VIII, Bombay, 1951 to 1954, pp. 40-41.

² Fischer, Louis, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, London, Cape, 1951, p. 355.

number of nationalist revolutions of the oppressed people, and first of all India . . ."³ Lenin also began to take an interest in the development of the national liberation movement in India. In 1919 when the Indian National Congress launched a new campaign for the independence of India, Lenin predicted that it would soon develop into an "international movement"⁴. He was also firmly convinced that the Indian National Congress would follow the Bolshevik example for the emancipation of their country and declared:

In that same India, where 300 million of Britain's serfs are oppressed, awariness is awakening and the revolutionary movement is growing everyday. They are all looking at one star, the star of the Soviet Republic because they know it has made tremendous sacrifices in the cause of the struggle against the imperialists and has withstood terrible trials⁵.

At the second congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1920 Lenin maintained the view that Soviet Russia should support the national liberation movements in Asia, including India, regardless of their ideological basis. He also held the view that since every stage of social revolution is historically determined, colonial countries like India should have their own bourgeois democratic revolution before the stage of proletarian revolution could be entered upon. It was the duty of the communists to help the colonial liberation movement under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie, regarding the latter as an objectively revolutionary power. To Lenin, Gandhi as the leader of the mass movement like the Indian National Congress was a revolution⁶ revolutionary. But a young Indian revolutionary, M. N. Roy, opposed any notion that Gandhi could play a revolutionary role. He characterized the Gandhian movement as "purely reactionary" and argued that Gandhi was but a "religious and cultural revivalist". In support of his argument Roy cited Plekhanov's judgment of Russian Populist and Social Revolutionary Movements which he said corresponded to Gandhism in India⁷.

As the Bolshevik's policy for India and other colonial countries was being shaped, the political scene in India was taking an increasingly radical line. News of the Soviet Union also began to stir Indian nationalists and Marxist literature was widely distributed in India. But most important, it was during this period that Mahatma Gandhi launched his civil disobedience movements, which resulted in a nationwide protest against British rule. The British government in India was gravely alarmed at the rising tempest of the mass movement. As Indian soil began to tremble under the leadership of Gandhi, the "Communist International" published an article to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi for leading the Indian masses toward the national independence of India and declared:

At a first glance, Gandhi appears to be a demented prophet of non-violence and peace. But a close acquaintance with his teaching and tactics convinces us that he has con-

³ Quoted in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C. North, *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927, A Documentary Survey* (Hereafter Xenia and North), Stanford, Calif. Stanford University Press, 1957, p. 161.

⁴ Lenin, *Sochineniia*, XXXIII, p. 313.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXX, p. 365.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXV, pp. 352-355; also M. N. Roy's *Memoirs*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, February 24 and May 18, 1952.

⁷ M. N. Roy's *Memoirs*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 18, 1952.

sciously selected the only path open to Indian patriots under the present regime of oppression... Under the present circumstances there can be no question of an armed revolt in India. For this reason, there remains only one course — to attempt to unify the national consciousness by other means until the day comes when its powers will be seen as irresistible.

The article also lauded the boycott movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi as “the symbol and weapon of the mass” for the coming struggle and stated:

We have no intention to inquire into the question how far the boycott can be justified from the economic viewpoint... for it is based primarily upon emotional factors... We are more interested in the wide perspective — the undoubted existence in India of a widespread consciousness of national solidarity, the national enthusiasm and the desire to finish with the existing government, all this heralds an inevitable intensification of the struggle.

Discussing Gandhi's spinning-wheel movement the article went on:

Gandhi's call back to the spinning-wheel has a direct and practical aim... Just as the teaching of non-violence, independent of its ideal content, brought advantages in that, it cleared the way for a nationwide propaganda which would inevitably hit out against governmental repressions, so too the thought at the basis of the boycott has a twofold significance: on the one hand, it fosters local industry preventing the import of foreign goods and, on the other, brings nationalist ideas among the masses and places upon them the accomplishment of practical aims so that, by means of a widespread propaganda among the people, it might further unify it for a more resolute striving toward the ultimate goal⁸.

Amidst this enthusiasm, on February 12, 1922, Gandhi suddenly called off the mass movement throughout India after he learned that a group of peasants had burned a police station at Chauri Chura, killing several policemen. This signal of retreat brought the mass movement to a dead halt. It annoyed M. N. Roy and the Bolshevik leaders. Roy denounced Gandhi's action as a “betrayal of the revolutionary rank and file by the non-revolutionary and reactionary leadership”.⁹ In an article in “Novy Vostok”, a Soviet spokesman also asserted that “this shows that the Congress movement has come into an impasse, that it is losing its authority”. Nevertheless, he lauded the positive aspects achieved by the Gandhian movement. “The boycott movement”, he said, had done its “task” and had brought “positive gain” to the aim of national struggle. It gave to the national movement a mass character and it was able “to unite Moslems and Hindus in a demand for national independence for India. This was a very important accomplishment.”¹⁰ Not only did Roy and the Bolshevik leaders demonstrate their anger toward Gandhi's action to call off the mass movement, but even Nehru became “angry”. “Chauri Chura”, he declared, “may have been and was a deplorable occurrence and wholly opposed to the spirit of the nonviolent movement; but were a remote village and a mob of excited peasants in an out-of-the-way place going to put an end, for some time at least, to our national struggle for freedom?”¹¹ But Gandhi said to him:

⁸ Kommunistische Internationale, No. 19, 1921, pp. 189–196.

⁹ Roy, M. N., and Roy, Evelyn, *One Year of Non-Cooperation from Ahmedabad to Gaya*, Calcutta, CPI, 1923, p. 60.

¹⁰ *Novy Vostok*, No. 1, 1922, pp. 104–118.

¹¹ Nehru, *Jawaharlal, An Autobiography, with Musings on Recent Events in India*, London, The Bodley Head, 1958, p. 82.

I assure you that if the thing had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially violent struggle. It is undoubtedly true that non-violence is spreading like the scent of the otto of roses throughout the length and breadth of the land, but the foetid smell of violence is still powerful and it would be unwise to ignore or underrate it. The cause will prosper by this retreat. The movement had consciously drifted from the right path. We have come back to our moorings, and we can again go straight ahead¹².

But Nehru was not appeased. He argued that "for the National Congress as a whole the non-violent method was not, and could not be, a religion or an unchallengeable creed or dogma. It could only be a policy and a method promising certain results, and by those results it would have to be finally judged. Individuals might make of it a religion or incontrovertible creed. But no political organization, so long as it remained political, could do so."¹³ Nevertheless, he accepted non-violence as a practical instrument to fight the British.

We are disarmed (he said) and most of us did not even know the use of arms. Besides, in a contest of violence, the organized power of the British government, or any state, was far greater than anything that could be raised against it. Armies might mutiny, but unarmed people could not rebel and face armed forces... Armed rebellion seemed out of the question for the Indian people¹⁴.

At that time the Comintern also began to support Roy in taking bolder steps to create a communist organization in India for the liberation of the country and continued attacking Gandhi. Believing in great prospects of the communist movement in India the Soviet journal "Novy Vostok" asserted that "Gandhi's tactic has now been outdated. For further leadership of the mass, there is need of new mottos and slogans — more topical, more active and closer to the people."¹⁵ Roy also continued to assail Gandhi "not as a revolutionary but as a reactionary"¹⁶. But Stalin and the Russian Communist Party did not share Comintern's view on India. An article in the "Kommunistischeskaia Revoliutsiia" praised Gandhi and the Indian bourgeoisie for "conducting an open warfare by peaceful and non-violent means against the British domination" and for "succeeding in unifying under one common national banner two historically hostile elements: the Hindus and the Moslems"¹⁷.

During this period Gandhi also adopted a friendly attitude toward Soviet Russia. He refused to accept a British suggestion that Soviet Russia had an aggressive design on India. "I have never believed in the Bolshevik menace", he wrote in the summer of 1921¹⁸. Nevertheless, he confessed that "I am yet ignorant what exactly Bolshevism is. I have not been able to study it. I do not know whether it is good for Russia in the long run. But I do know that in so far as it is based on violence and denial of God, it repels me."¹⁹ When after Lenin's death the Bolshevik leaders

¹² A Bunch of Old Letters: Written mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and Some Written by Him, London, Asia Publishing House, 1960, p. 24.

¹³ Nehru, Jawaharlal, An Autobiography, p. 84.

¹⁴ Nehru on Gandhi: A Selection, arranged in the order of events, from the Writings and Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru, New York, The John Day, 1948, pp. 10–11.

¹⁵ Novy Vostok, No. 9, 1922, p. 90.

¹⁶ Roy, M. N., India in Transition, Geneva, J. B. Parget, 1922, p. 236.

¹⁷ Kommunistischeskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 13–14, 1923, pp. 23–28.

¹⁸ Young India, May 4, 1921.

¹⁹ Ibid., December 11, 1924.

invited him for a visit to Soviet Russia, Gandhi turned down the invitation because "an attempt to use me for violent purpose is bound to fail".²⁰ His negative attitude toward the Bolshevik revolution angered Stalin and his supporters. Thereafter, the Comintern asserted that "Gandhi has ceased to play the role of being a positive factor in Indian national politics"²¹. At a later date Soviet scholars regretted that Gandhi did not realize "to the full the essence of the great transformations" that took place in Russia as a result of the Bolshevik revolution²².

By early summer of 1925 Roy launched a new campaign against Gandhi. He denounced Gandhi for alleged "deliberate sabotage" of the Indian independence movement and held the view that Gandhi had become a spent force in India²³. Stalin also began to argue like Roy about the national bourgeoisie in India; he no longer expected that a revolution in cooperation with the national bourgeoisie under Gandhi was possible. There was a lack of appreciation of Gandhi's potential role in India's freedom movement. In May 1925 Stalin noted that in the case of India the national bourgeoisie had been split into a "revolutionary" and a "conciliatory" group and held the view that the latter group had already come to terms with British imperialism. Under the circumstances Stalin prepared to unmask the "conciliatory" group under Gandhi²⁴.

In the summer of 1928 at the Sixth Congress the Comintern asked the Indian communists to oppose all phrases of the Swarajists and Gandhists about the passive resistance and advance the irreconcilable slogan of armed struggle for the emancipation of India. Why? because

tendencies like Gandhism in India thoroughly imbued with religious conceptions, idealize the most backward and economically reactionary forms of social life, see the solution of the social problems not in proletarian socialism, but in a reversion to the backward form, preach passivity, and repudiate the class struggle, and in the process of the development of the revolution became transformed into an openly reactionary force. Gandhism is more and more becoming an ideology directed against mass revolution. It must be strongly combated by communism²⁵.

During this period Gandhi also expressed conflicting views on Bolshevism. He did, however, confess that he had not been "able to fully understand" the meaning of Bolshevism.

All that I know (he declared) is that it aims at the abolition of the institution of private property. This is only an application of the ethical ideal of nonpossession in the realm of economics, and if the people adopted this ideal of their own accord or could be made to accept it by means of peaceful persuasion, there would be nothing like it. But from what I know of Bolshevism, it not only does not preclude the use of force, but freely sanctions it for the expropriation of private property and maintaining the collective ownership of the same. And if that is so, I have no hesitation in saying that the Bolshevik regime in its present form cannot last for long. It is my firm conviction that nothing enduring can be built on violence. But be that as it may, there is no questioning the fact that the Bolshevik ideal has behind it the purest sacrifice of countless men and women

²⁰ Ibid., December 1, 1924.

²¹ *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 1, 1925, p. 133.

²² *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, October 6, 1968.

²³ *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 5, 1925, pp. 149–168.

²⁴ Stalin, *Sochineniia*, VII, p. 147.

²⁵ Degras, Jane, ed., *The Communist International, 1919–1943*, II, Oxford, 1960, pp. 519 and 544–545.

who have given up their soul for its sake; an ideal that is sanctified by the sacrifices of such master spirits as Lenin cannot go in vain, a noble example of their renunciation will be emblazoned forever and quicken and purify the ideals as time passes²⁶.

It appeared that Gandhi neither made any serious study of Marx and Lenin, nor had he studied Russian history. But in the post Stalin era, a Soviet scholar claimed that Gandhi studied Lenin's work as far back as 1928 and considered Lenin an "out-standing thinker of our time"²⁷. There is no truth in this assertion. According to Pyarelal, Gandhi's Secretary, not until his detention during World War II did Gandhi read works of Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and "some books about the Reds in China"²⁸.

During this period a lack of unanimity concerning Gandhi and his philosophy prevailed among the Soviet leaders and the Comintern. An article on Gandhi in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia indicated these differences. It stated that "until 1919 the Indian National Movement, the Kernel of which was Congress, was limited to the circles of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. Gandhi accomplished the association with it of the million-fold mass of the peasants and workers."²⁹ Soon thereafter a major article appeared in the "Revolutsionnyi Vostok" denouncing Gandhi in these words:

Gandhi stands for the perpetuation of what is the basic source of inequality — the very institution of caste. For Gandhi knows that the prejudice of millions is a vast power. Gandhi is prepared to utilize the foulest remnant of the Indian middle ages — the caste prejudices of millions of Indians — so as to prevent somehow the penetration into holy India of the devilish civilization of the modern world... His hatred of contemporary civilization can be seen in his glorification of the past, instead of showing up the evils of capitalist society... In Gandhi one hardly finds a severe criticism of the imperialist exploitation of India, of the torment of the population by the police — in fact, of all that characterizes a colonial regime... Gandhism is a reactionary theory, Gandhism in action, the Gandhism which influenced the political action of the mass, was the great obstacle on the path of their liberation and became a counter-revolutionary force. To this, the history of the first Indian revolution is witness³⁰.

In February 1930 Otto Kuusinen asserted that Gandhi feared the Indian masses more than British imperialism. His "sham" struggle was designed to keep the mass movement under bourgeois control and his boycott movement was a "boycott against Indian revolution". He also assailed the non-violence as a "strategy of counter-revolution"³¹. In July 1930 the Chinese Communists also denounced Gandhi as "the agent of British imperialism". "The Indian Nationalist Party under the direction of Gandhi", it said, "is just like the Kuomintang of China. Both are the tools of imperialism. We must not have the slightest illusion toward Gandhi. We must oppose him in order to guarantee the victory of the revolution."³² In the fall of the year there appeared another article in the "Communist International" denouncing Gandhi and Gandhism as a kind of "reformism" to draw away people's attention from "revolution". In a most detailed statement on Gandhi and his philosophy Reisner wrote:

²⁶ Young India, November 15, 1928.

²⁷ Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 1, 1967.

²⁸ Harijan, March 31, 1946.

²⁹ Bolshaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1st edition, Moscow, 1929, pp. 514–517.

³⁰ Revolutsionnyi Vostok, 1929, pp. 95–97.

³¹ International Press Correspondence, March 20, 1930, pp. 241–242.

³² Ibid., July 31, 1930, pp. 666.

The class expression of Gandhi is an expression of Indian bourgeoisie and an expression of the bourgeois-national movement in India... The theory and practice of Gandhism are that historically created weapon which the Indian bourgeoisie has fashioned for itself so as to guide the revolutionary movement on to a reformist path — in that harmless Gandhian teaching, dosed up with non-violence and non-resistance, distracted toward all kinds of symbolical actions and away from their direct class interests, can the masses be a support for the treacherous compromise of the bourgeoisie with imperialism.

The author asserted that Gandhi and Gandhism were in no way the “reflected image” of the Indian revolution. On the contrary, Gandhi and Gandhism were “true reflections of treacherous role of the Indian bourgeoisie. He also assailed Gandhi for his “petty fogging reformist demands such as the lowering of the land tax and abolition of the sale tax” and asserted:

Gandhi does not dare to attack caste divisions, he merely renovates them a little; Gandhi does not dare openly to attack the Indian oppressors and the foul exploitation of the people by the temples, but merely asks the exploiters to become just a tiny bit more progressive; Gandhi does not oppose superstitions and prejudices, but merely brings them up to date and paints them up in a bourgeois manner. In place of the “new sky and new earth” propounded by the French bourgeoisie in its revolutionary years the prophet of the Indian bourgeoisie has to be born a saint and a man of fasts, has to stand out in defense of exploitation and caste, shamefacedly has to idealize the revolting Asian quality of the middle ages — in all this as the unavoidable pomade, the trappings of the deception, fooling and disorientation of the Indian peasant and artisan³³.

At the Sixteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party Stalin also assailed Gandhi. “The gentlemen of the bourgeoisie expect to flood these countries with blood and to rely on police bayonets, calling to their help people like Gandhi”, he declared. “Tsarism also tried in its day to rely on police bayonets... As for the helpers of the type of Gandhi, Tsarism had a whole herd of them in the shape of liberal compromisers of every kind which, however, led to nothing but confusion to the end.”³⁴ Following Stalin’s attack on Gandhi, the Soviet dominated League against Imperialism issued a call to its followers in India in which it charged that “Gandhi and his lieutenant (Nehru) stand self-exposed as traitors to the cause of freedom and independence of India” and asserted that the Indian National Congress as represented by Gandhi and Nehru had “practically gone over to the camp of the British imperialists”. The League then expelled the Indian National Congress from its ranks³⁵.

Thereafter, Soviet attacks on Gandhi and his philosophy continued unabated. In June 1933 an article in the “Communist International” asserted that Gandhism “was and is the philosophy of the bourgeoisie and the landlords” and that “it was and is the teaching of the cowardly anti-revolutionary bourgeoisie, linked up with the landlord system and its deadly fear of a national revolution.”³⁶ Despite the torrent of abuse Gandhi continued to take a sympathetic view toward the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1931 he once more characterized the British propaganda of Soviet invasion of India as an “insult to Russia” and asked “Is Russia’s one business to rule over those people, who are not willing to be ruled by Britain”?³⁷

³³ Kommunistische Internationale, No. 20, 1930, pp. 1130—1138.

³⁴ Degras, Jane, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1925—1932, II, pp. 443.

³⁵ International Press Correspondence, March 19, 1931, pp. 294—295.

³⁶ Kommunistisches Internationales, June 10, 1933, pp. 56—62.

³⁷ Young India, July 2, 1931.

During the United Front era, an attempt was made by the Soviets to win the support of Gandhi. In April 1939 the Indian communists extended the "hand of cooperation" to Gandhi because "under current conditions" he served a "progressive role". A prominent Indian communist leader also advised the fellow communists not to continue their "old attitude toward Gandhism and the Gandhian leadership"³⁸. For a while Gandhi thus returned to Soviet favor. But in the summer of 1940, evidently encouraged by Hitler's proposal to share the division of India together with fascist Japan, the Soviet leaders adopted a harsh attitude toward Gandhi and his philosophy. The first hint of the changing approach came in June 1940 when the Comintern published an article urging the Indian communists to destroy the "illusion of Gandhism" in the Indian masses³⁹. The Soviet Communist party approved Comintern's call and accused the Indian National Congress of alleged protection of the interests of the Indian capitalists and industrial bourgeoisie⁴⁰.

On the threshold of World War II, Soviet diplomacy drew the attention of Gandhi. The Stalin-Hitler Pact pained him greatly. He, however, wistfully hoped that "the unnatural combination of Germany and the Soviet Union will result in a happy though unintended fusion whose shape no one can fortell"⁴¹. When in 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, communism directly affected him. Under his leadership the Indian National Congress opposed the British war effort and earned Soviet wrath. The Soviets criticized the Indian National Congress for its persistent campaign for the freedom of India and showed no interest in India's independence. In order that India might better serve the Soviet Union, Stalin asked the Indian communists to adopt a pro-war line and held the view that India had a "great role" to play in the war⁴².

In August 1942 when the Indian National Congress adopted the "Quit India" resolution demanding the independence of India, the Soviets not only rejected it, but even demonstrated their sympathy with the British position in India. At that time British imperialism became a lesser evil to the Soviets than Indian nationalism. A Soviet writer plainly told the Indians that it was not the time for independence because "the war against fascist aggression requires the maximum mobilization of all Indian forces"⁴³. A book which appeared in the Soviet Union in 1943 went so far as to assert that the "Indian masses are prepared to support actively the war measures of the British government"⁴⁴.

Soon after the end of World War II the Soviets launched a new campaign against Gandhi and his philosophy. In October 1946 a Soviet orientalist assailed Britain for utilizing the "influence of Gandhism among the Indian national bourgeoisie" and denounced Gandhi for propagating "non-violence to evils" and for "disarming the masses morally and ideologically". He also attacked Gandhi personally, asserting that "though Gandhi travels in third class mixing in this way with the simple people, actually Gandhi is deeply hostile to the people". He assailed the Congress

³⁸ National Front, April 30, 1939.

³⁹ *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 6, 1940, pp. 108–114.

⁴⁰ *Bolshevik*, July 1940, pp. 56–76.

⁴¹ *Harijan*, September 30, 1939.

⁴² *Bolshevik*, No. 9, 1941, pp. 27–37.

⁴³ *Mirovoe khoziastvo i mirovaia politika*, No. 11–12, 1942, pp. 46–57.

⁴⁴ *Britanskaia Imperiia*, Moscow, 1943, p. 227.

leaders for alleged "capitulation" to imperialism by agreeing to British terms for political settlement and asserted that the Indian big bourgeoisie feared the masses more than they feared British imperialism. They did not want full independence for India and instead made a "mutually profitable deal" with the British⁴⁵. Another Soviet scholar asserted that Gandhi never came forward against the "oppression of the masses by the imperialists" and always "justified the forcible suppression of the mass movement by the police"⁴⁶. Even after his assassination in 1948 the Soviets continued their vitriolic attack against Gandhi and his philosophy. In November 1946 a Soviet scholar declared:

The attempts to utilize the authority of Gandhi for "defense of democracy" in India are extremely harmful and dangerous. Gandhi has never headed the armed struggle against imperialism and has never come out against traitors from among the Indians. On the contrary, he has always been the principal traitor of the mass national liberation movement. The struggle against Gandhism — the ideology of counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie of India — is impossible without a struggle against the authority of Gandhi, who has constantly betrayed the popular movement by his tremendous services to the British enslavers of India⁴⁷.

The Indian communists quickly agreed with him and assailed Gandhi for his alleged playing a "hampering and reactionary role" in the development of the liberation movement in India⁴⁸. During this period the Soviets minced no words in denouncing Gandhi and his philosophy. "In a demagogical manner", Dyakov declared, "Gandhi preached class peace with landowners and capitalists to Indian workers and peasants... Gandhism has become the avowed national ideology of the Indian capitalists and landowners."⁴⁹ Moreover, according to Dyakov, "Gandhi subjected the Indian masses to the major bourgeoisie, brought them up in a spirit of slavish reformism, impeded the development of the class struggle and thereby the conversion of the Indian mass liberation movement into an anti-imperialist revolution. Gandhi never was a revolutionary. He was always an active and irreconcilable enemy of revolution."⁵⁰ The second edition of the Soviet Encyclopedia published in 1952 also identified Gandhi as "the author of the reactionary political doctrine, the so-called Gandhism".

In the years of the First World War (it declared) Gandhi, as before, supported British imperialism... At the same time he conducted agitation for the extension of the political rights of the Indian big bourgeoisie and landlords. The role of Gandhi in the development of the national liberation movement reflected the traitorous position of the big Indian bourgeoisie and liberal landlords⁵¹.

The article also suggested that Gandhi had "demagogically posed as an advocate of the Indian independence" and that Gandhism had become "the ideological weapon of the Indian big bourgeoisie closely connected with the feudal landlords and money lenders". The article drew a strong protest from the Indian government. In

⁴⁵ Bolshevik, October 1946, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Dyakov, A. M., *Natsionalnyi vopros i angliiskii imperializm v Indii*, Moscow, 1948, p. 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *Crisis of the Colonial System*, Bombay, People's Publishing House, 1951, p. 32.

⁴⁸ *Communist III*, January 1950, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Dyakov, A. M., *Indiia i Pakistan*, Moscow, 1950, p. 15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *Indiia vo vremia i posle vtoroi mirovoi voyny, 1939—1949*, Moscow, 1952, p. 162.

⁵¹ *Bolshaiia sovetkaia entsiklopediia*, Vol. X, 2nd ed., 1952, pp. 203—204.

a leading article the Indian newspaper "The Hindu" deplored the "fantastically tendencious and perverted account of Gandhi current in the Soviet Union. This was a proof that respect for objective truth is not one of the Communist virtues and the distortion of facts to suit the Stalinist thesis has been practised in various forms for over three decades."⁵²

Soon after Stalin's death in March 1953 the post-Stalin leaders began to reappraise their views toward Gandhi and Gandhism. In early 1955, when the new Soviet leaders decided to flatter India, the question of Gandhi and Gandhism began to appear in the Soviet press. The new Soviet policy called for a doctrinal re-evaluation of Gandhi and his philosophy. If the Soviet Union wanted to create a new image in India, it was essential to have a new assessment of Gandhi and his teachings. After all, Gandhi is enormously popular with the Indian masses and to oppose him is to risk the enmity of millions of Indians. In the pursuit of the goal an editorial in the *Kommunist* took the Soviet indologists to task for not properly interpreting the role of Gandhi in India's independence movement. "In considering the role of Gandhi in the struggle against imperialism", it said, "our oriental scholars have not always taken as their point of departure the concrete historical circumstances in India itself."⁵³ A few weeks later when reviewing Nehru's book, the *Discovery of India*, two noted Soviet scholars said that though Nehru sometimes had exaggerated the importance of Gandhi, nevertheless it was "entirely proper" to give Gandhi, as Nehru did, a great place in India's liberation movement⁵⁴.

More evidence of the new Soviet line on Gandhi and Gandhism was provided by Khrushchev and Bulganin during their visit to India in November–December 1955. In the course of their sojourn in India, each of them made several references to Gandhi. On November 2 Bulganin, referring to Gandhi, declared:

The Soviet people sympathized from the bottom of their hearts with the unselfish and courageous struggle which your people waged against colonial oppression for the independence of your country. We know how greatly important in that struggle were the ideas and guidance of the outstanding leader of the Indian national movement, Mahatma Gandhi.

On the same day Khrushchev also declared that Russian translation had been made of the writings of Gandhi "who had such thorough knowledge of the country and its great people, and who had played such a great role in your country"⁵⁵. A few days later Bulganin once again referring to Gandhi declared:

You had an outstanding leader who did much for your country. I am speaking of Mahatma Gandhi, who is held in high esteem in your country as a glorious patriot and friend of the people. We pay tribute to his memory and to the work of his successor, Jawaharlal Nehru. . . We, Lenin's pupils, do not share Gandhi's philosophical views, but we consider him an outstanding leader who did much for the development of the peaceloving attitude in your country and for the struggle for independence⁵⁶.

After the visit of the Soviet leaders to India, Moscow undertook measures to rewrite the Indian history in an attempt to give Gandhi the right place in India's

⁵² The Hindu, October 13, 1954.

⁵³ *Kommunist*, No. 8, 1955, pp. 78–83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 9, 1955, pp. 98–106.

⁵⁵ *Pravda*, November 22, 1955.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, November 25, 1955.

freedom movement. At the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, Otto Kuusinen in his speech noted that "sectarian" errors had been made by the Soviet orientalists in the evaluation of the role of Gandhi and asked them to give a clear appraisal of the part played by Gandhi in Indian history. Giving a tribute to Khrushchev and Bulganin for recognizing the importance of Gandhi in Indian history Kuusinen declared:

The great political importance of the fact. In their statements in India comrades Khrushchev and Bulganin justly acknowledged the outstanding role played in the history of the Indian people by Mahatma Gandhi... By so doing comrades Khrushchev and Bulganin actually took the initiative in correcting those sectarian errors which have found reflection in recent years in some of the statements made by the Soviet orientalists in the publications of the Communist International. Solely on the basis of criticism of Gandhi's philosophical views, which as is known are at great variance with the view of Marxism-Leninism, some of our publicists were at that time so one-sided that they totally denied that Gandhi played a positive role in history⁵⁷.

Thereupon a most authoritative criticism of earlier Soviet writings on India appeared in the Soviet journal "Soviet Orientology". It referred to past Soviet errors on India and stated that the study of Eastern Affairs in the Soviet Union had been greatly prejudiced by failure to understand the national liberation movement. The Marxist-Leninist thesis is well known: during the general crisis of capitalism the proletariat in colonial and dependent countries can become the leader of the national liberation movement. But from this proposition the incorrect evaluation had been drawn that only the proletariat can ensure victory in the struggle for national liberation. When India and certain other Eastern countries achieved freedom, many orientalists were unable to adequately evaluate the event in the history of the East. It was treated as the final deal of the bourgeoisie with imperialism. In particular, the political line of the bourgeoisie in India and the Indian National Congress headed by Gandhi had "for many years been represented in this way"⁵⁸.

Following the criticism, the Soviet scholars on India began to apologize for their "errors" and "wrong evaluation" of the role of Gandhi. Zhukov published a letter in the Soviet political journal, *New Times*, acknowledging his "errors" during the Stalin era and apologizing for his past remarks on Gandhi⁵⁹. The Director of the Oriental Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Guber, vigorously criticized the Soviet scholars for their "wrong formulations" of the role of Gandhi in Indian history and described Gandhi as an "ardent patriot"⁶⁰. Other Soviet scholars blamed Stalin for their "errors". In their discussions on the role of Gandhi in Indian history two Soviet scholars writing in a Soviet journal stated:

The question concerning which class Gandhi represented in his ideology has aroused great discussions both among Indian and English authors and among Soviet students on India. The following points of view had been held: Gandhi was a representative of the landowners; Gandhi was a representative of the national bourgeoisie; Gandhi was a representative of the peasants. This is a very difficult question to decide. Gandhi was an extremely complicated figure. If one approaches Gandhi as a political leader and ideologists, then one must recognize that he acted as a representative of the national

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, February 20, 1956.

⁵⁸ *Sovetskoe Vostokovedenie*, No. 1, 1956, pp. 3-12.

⁵⁹ *New Times*, February 2, 1956, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁰ *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn*, No. 3, 1956, pp. 61-63.

bourgeoisie. The fact that all the political activity of Gandhi was mainly with his striving for the independence of India testifies also to the fact that he could in no case have been a representative of the landowner class. In summing up, we should say the following: Basically Gandhi played a positive role in the development of a national liberation movement. It was precisely as a result of Gandhi's activity as a leader of the Indian National Congress that the organization transformed into a mass party. Our unconditionally negative attitudes toward Gandhi's non-violent tactics have been refuted by the facts. The National Congress, adopting those tactics under conditions of a general stirring of the anti-imperialist movement, succeeded in inspiring very broad, and also backward masses for the struggle⁶¹.

The new attitude toward Gandhi and his philosophy was soon reflected in the publications of articles hailing Gandhi as the "father of the Indian nation" and in many other ways. In their articles the Soviet scholars now emphasized Gandhi's role as a "fighter of peace", his opposition to the caste system and his work for Hindu-Moslem unity⁶². In 1959 the Soviet Union published Gandhi's autobiography. Thereafter, for a while there was no discussion about Gandhi and Gandhism in the Soviet press. But soon after Khrushchev's removal in the autumn of 1964, the philosophy of Gandhi came up for discussion. The Soviet decision to revive the discussions on Gandhi and his philosophy was motivated by its foreign policy objectives. In the post-Khrushchev era the Soviet leaders began to re-examine their policy toward India in the light of the domestic changes which had come about since Nehru's death. The massive economic assistance, trade and cultural campaign had not brought the Soviet goal near to its realization. The people of India had remained apathetic to the Soviet ideology and the communist party of India had been badly split between Moscow and Peking. Under the circumstances the Soviet Union needed a new approach toward India. In this context the Soviets saw Gandhi's socialist ideas as a valuable means to attain their objectives. The name of Gandhi is still an important symbol in India. It is still sacred to the Indian masses. The essence of the Gandhian ideology, service to the people, has still remained untouched. If the Soviets can gain a reputation for loyalty to this ideal, they may find many devoted Gandhians to carry their banner. Satyagraha could be employed to initiate mass mobilization and then turn such mobilization toward the path of violence and finally into Leninist forms of revolutionary struggle. Moreover, the Soviet support of parliamentary methods for the Indian communists to come to power has narrowed their differences over the Gandhian concept of non-violence. India has also espoused a number of Marxist tenets in the industrialization of the country. All this has increased the prospect of an ideological rapprochement between communism and Gandhism.

In pursuit of the new policy, a Soviet scholar in his discussion of Gandhi's social teachings expressed the view that "despite reformist character" of Gandhi's social teachings, "Gandhi's sociological concepts contain certain revolutionary potentials that have not been fully exhausted." He noted the "relative growth" of Gandhian sociology in the formation of "new relations" between the working people and the bourgeoisie of India since India's independence and held the view that since the winning of independence the Indian bourgeoisie had abandoned a "number of tenets" of Gandhism and endeavored to use Gandhi's sociological doctrine for its

⁶¹ Sovetskoe Vostokovedenie, No. 5, 1956, pp. 21-34.

⁶² Sovremenni Vostok, No. 2, 1958, pp. 23-25.

own interests. This had created a "contradiction" between Gandhism and the interests of the "most reactionary circles of Indian bourgeoisie". He, therefore, urged that attempts should be undertaken to present Gandhi's teachings as an "expression of social protest" and a "dream of justice" to satisfy the demands of the working people of India. By doing so, he argued, the working people would prevent the bourgeoisie, primarily the "most reactionary sector of the bourgeoisie" from using the name of Gandhi "which is still very popular among the masses of the Indian people" and "which is still sacred to millions of Indians" for their political interests⁶³. Following the Soviet advice the Communist party of India decided to follow Gandhi's example of mass struggle in order to "rouse the wrath of the Indian masses against the evils which Gandhi tried to remove"⁶⁴.

The Soviet scholars also endeavored to demonstrate the closeness between Mahatma Gandhi and the great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, in an attempt to present their ideological unity.

It is wellknown (wrote a Soviet scholar) what powerful influence the great writer had exerted on the moulding of the philosophy and liberation strivings of Mahatma Gandhi, who called Tolstoy his "guide" . . . The very influence of Tolstoy on Gandhiji was historically conditioned by the international importance which Russia began to acquire at the turn of the 19th century . . . just at the time, when Gandhiji was getting acquainted with the internationally famous doctrine of Tolstoy, history was pushing Russia to the very center of the transformation of the world . . .⁶⁵

It is interesting to note that 46 years before, a Soviet spokesman had assailed Gandhi for his very closeness to Tolstoy's ideology.

Religious morality, the primeval village, the spinning-wheel and homewoven cloth (he said) just as its embodiment in passive resistance to evil — this is the symbol of faith of Gandhism. Basically, these are the same traits which characterize Tolstoyism. One is, therefore, quite justified in applying to Gandhism the judgment given by Lenin on the teaching of Tolstoy. "The teaching of Tolstoy is undoubtedly utopian and, in its content, reactionary in the most exact meaning of the word." But in Tolstoy, the great artist, the critical element was at least strongly developed and this could, as Lenin showed, at a certain stage of development in practice bring benefit to certain layers of the population, contrary to the reactionary and utopian traits of Tolstoyism . . . But Gandhi was no artist of the word, however.⁶⁶

Pursuing its new policy, the Soviet Union inaugurated Mahatma Gandhi centenary celebrations in October 1968 to pay homage to the Indian leader. Speaking at the occasion, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Firyubin, declared: "Mahatma Gandhi is known in the Soviet Union as a great friend of the masses all over the world. The Soviet people and the government are most happy that these celebrations to mark the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth are being held all over the world."⁶⁷ A statement by the Soviet news agency, Novosti, described Mahatma Gandhi as "not only a fighter for the freedom of India, but also a martyr to the cause of freedom of humanity"⁶⁸. Soviet scholars also described Gandhi as a "real democrat", a "great

⁶³ Voprosy Filosofii, No. 1, 1965, pp. 95–108.

⁶⁴ Hindustan Times, April 18, 1969.

⁶⁵ Indian Express, November 7, 1968.

⁶⁶ Revoliutsionnyi Vostok, No. 7, 1922, p. 117.

⁶⁷ PTI dispatch from Moscow, October 4, 1968.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Hindustan Times, October 5, 1968.

leader" and the Gandhi centenary a "great event in the life of all progressive peoples all over the world"⁶⁹. While the Soviet leaders and major Soviet newspapers continued to praise Gandhi, an obscure Soviet journal "Social Sciences Today" published an article to say that Gandhism could not be considered as an international ideology suitable for national liberation struggles in the former colonial countries. Gandhism, it pointed out, was an "Indian form of anti-imperialist ideology which promoted anti-colonial unity of Indians and powerful upsurge of national liberation struggle" in India⁷⁰. This reservation indicates that the Soviet ideologists have still not succeeded in evaluating Gandhi and his philosophy, and that Gandhi has still remained a source of trouble to them. So far, only the Chinese Communists have publicly refuted the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence as an "attempt to dampen the militant spirit of the revolutionary people" and took the Indian government to task for allegedly "peddling the absurdity of the so-called non-violence doctrine" in an attempt to bind "the oppressed peoples and nations hand and foot and prevent them from resisting aggression with force"⁷¹.

⁶⁹ India News, April 5, 1969.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Times of India, October 2, 1969.

⁷¹ New China News Agency, October 12, 1968.