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ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Shri Yeshwantrao Balwantrao Chavan

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17<sup>th</sup> December, 2008

To

The Director,  
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Madam,

Yashwantrao Chavan Trust in Mumbai has been established in memory of late Shri Y.B. Chavan who was Chief Minister of Maharashtra and Deputy Prime Minister of India. The trust undertakes activities to propagate his ideas. Shri Sharad Pawar, Union Minister of Agriculture and Consumers Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is the President of the Trust.

The trust has a plan to publish biography of late Shri Y.B. Chavan for which a copy of the interview given by him which is available in Oral History Division of your Library is required by the writer for the purpose of studying. Only a part of it not the entire interview will be reproduced, if required.

I shall be grateful if you kindly supply the copy of the late Shri Y.B. Chavan's interview to the bearer of the letter.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

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**NEHRU MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY**  
**ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

Shri Yeshwantrao Balwantrao Chavan

FOREWORD



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Sari Y.B. Chavan (interviewee), recorded by

Dr Hari Dev Sharma(interviewer), Gate page,  
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BIO-DATA

Chavan, Yeshwantrao Balwantrao: b. 12 March 1913; educ., Karad, Kolhapur and Poona; organised student movement (1930); participated in Civil Disobedience movement (1932); imprisoned for his political activities (1932); was Royist first but later dissociated himself from Roy's movement on the issue of second world war; President, Satara D.C.C. (1941); directed underground movement in Satara district (Aug. 1942-May 1943) until his arrest at Phaltan; Secretary, Maharashtra P.C.C. (1948-50); Member, Bombay Legislative Assembly (1946); Parliamentary Secretary (1946); started a Marathi daily Prakash at Satara (1948); Minister for Civil Supplies, Bombay (1952); Chief Minister, Bombay State and later Maharashtra (1956-1962); as Minister held various portfolios at the centre (1962-77); Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs (July 1979-Jan. 1980); died on 25 Nov. 1984.

## Main points covered in the Interview

Early life and influences; impact of Salt Satyagraha in rural areas; evaluation of Gandhiji; Satyashodhak movement; about Prabhat Pheri songs and political novels in Marathi; impact of Gandhiji on him; reaction to Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931); Karachi Congress session (1931); on his mother and an incident relating to his arrest (1932); on his associates (1930-32); arrest and jail life (1932-33); M.N. Roy and Indian Communists; Individual Satyagraha in Satara district; Dr Ambedkar and nationalist movement; on his own thinking process; ideological studies in jail; Congress Socialist Party; jail life; his contribution to Atmaram Patil's election (1936), and comparison with today's elections; Quit India movement; AICC session in Bombay, arrest of leaders, underground activities, distinction between violence to life and violence to property, Patri Sarkar and his arrest (1943).

Oral History Interview

with

Shri Y.B. Chavan

New Delhi

July 1, 1978

by

Dr Hari Dev Sharma

for The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

Dr Hari Dev Sharma: What were the formative influences on you?

Shri Y.B. Chavan: Well, I can tell you about the formative influences on me. Like millions of children of poor peasants, I was born in a small village of two thousand population. But I spent most of the childhood time not in my own town, but in nanihal as you may call it. And that house was the house of a small peasant who had about five acres of land. As my father died very early, my education was interrupted there for a couple of years. I went to primary school rather late in my life. But I used to go to the farms to look after the cattle, spent my time there, mixed with people of different communities, particularly the boys of the Muslim community. There was a backward class community, called Ramoshis in my neighbourhood. As a matter of fact, influences of all the communities was on me. I was never brought up in one kind of exclusive atmosphere. Near my household there were families of weaver class also.

My maternal uncle, my aunt and my cousins were brought up in that atmosphere. I was in that village up to the age of seven. I know what poverty is. I remember, only for the sake of formality, they used to



light the lamp in the evening, but we used to go to bed early to save kerosene. We were told that we must make the maximum use of sunlight to read or play or do whatever we liked. We used to sit in the moonlight, talk about things, read and tell stories. It was a typical life of millions of peasant boys anywhere in the country. This is what I would say about my early days.

Later on, my mother with my elder brothers started living in Karad, which became my hometown, when I shifted from that small village, Devarashtra, to this place. I spent the rest of my early life here and completed my matriculation. This place was rather a very active place, politically. There was a high school, a few primary schools, two civil courts, quite a good bar and a few doctors. So there was an atmosphere of education and politics. I came to know all about the national movement and its developments in the country in that small town.

Sharma: Was there any eminent local politician there?

Chavan: Yes, there were quite a few of them. G.S. Alteker, who later on became Member of Parliament, is still living. Batane, a local merchant, was a very brave and patriotic man. Gokhale, who is now nearly in his eighties, was a graduate. He never took a job and devoted his life to public service. But the most important influence to which I would like to refer to, when I was growing, was

that of Satyashodhak movement on my family.

Sharma: That was a very powerful movement.

Chavan: That was a very powerful movement in the rural areas, amongst the non-Brahmins of those days. My elder brother, Ganpatrao, was quite an enthusiastic worker in that movement. Naturally, I was very much influenced by the great Jyotiba Phule. I came to know about him and respected him from quite an early age. I must say that I had heard his name even before I had heard the names of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi. This was the type of influence that Jyotiba Phule had there.

But, later on, I became more interested in reading historical novels and newspapers. Then I understood that I was not much interested in what I was hearing in my house. I wanted to know something more about what was happening outside. And the most powerful influence on me came, when Jatindranath Das was on fast and I was reading about him in the papers. He was dying every day -- a slow death--and when ultimately he died, it had a tremendous impact on me. I thought that there was something very high in life, for which one could sacrifice one's life. And what was that? One must try to find it out. Who were the people who were trying for it? That was why I got attracted towards a wider national and patriotic movement. I tried to read about Tilak, G.G. Agarkar and G.K. Gokhale.

I joined the school named after Lokamanya Tilak in my hometown, where I read a lot about Lokamanya Tilak. And once you get into this thing, then you get a little more broaden. I started going to the library, cultivating new types of friends, began new types of associations and came completely under that influence. I thought that Jyotiba Phule's movement was certainly progressive, but the politics in that movement was rather sectarian. It was called non-Brahmin movement. It ceased to attract me

Sharma: Had it turned into an anti-Brahmin movement?

Chavan: Yes, it had. It was called non-Brahmin movement.

Sharma: That is all right, non-Brahminism in that sense, but don't you think that it is quite another thing to be anti-Brahmin?

Chavan: There was an element of anti-Brahminism there. People saw that in the villages they (Brahmins) were the landlords, in the towns they had lots of money, acquired through right or wrong ways, and they exploited in the name of being Brahmins. They were better-living people, with better opportunities in life. Opportunities of education were refused to the non-Brahmins because the Brahmins monopolised everything.

Sharma: Did you ever come across a phenomenon in which, for example, a Brahmin doctor discriminated against

a non-Brahmin patient, charged him more, or was neglectful?

Chavan: I cannot say that, at least I do not know of any such instance. This was a general feeling. It is very difficult to prove all these things.

Sharma: Anyhow, that feeling was there at that time.

Chavan: Yes. Positions and privileges were given to them in politics, in social life, in religious life and in cultural life. Even in the village a Brahmin occupied a very important place. He was a landlord. He was what we used to call kulkarni in Maharashtra villages, record-keeper. They were quite expert record-keepers. He was a hated person in the village.

Sharma: But I think his profession was that.

Chavan: I am not justifying it now. But the impression it gave to the people was that he was associated with this class. That is what I say, that I got out of these influences very early in my life. I said: It is all irrational.

Sharma: As you read more, you outgrew that influence?

Chavan: I outgrew that influence very early in my life. As I have told you, I became quite attracted towards the national movement. I read a lot about Savarkar, a very adventurous life of patriotism, his sufferings for the country. I thought that there was some higher

cause for which one could suffer and one could work hard for that. People were sacrificing their lives and were facing many other difficulties. The life of Lokamanya himself became quite attractive proposition to me. He started going to jail early in his life. He was an educated person, a very intelligent person. He dedicate his whole life for the nation. I thought that this was something very heartening. So my values changed early in life. But I (must say that), I had to outgrow all this with deliberate efforts. Then I was completely in a different association, patriotic associations and names like Lala Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru and Deshabandhu C.R.Das became quite attractive to me.

Sharma: Did Hari Narayan Apte's novels attract you?

Chavan: Yes, I mentioned to you that I read historical novels. I remember having read Hari Narayan Apte's novels such as Ushakal, Gad Ala Pan Sinh Gela and Suryoday. Then I was attracted towards another historical novelist, who wrote about Shivaji's period. He was Nathmadhav? So this was a watershed in my life. I remembered Jatin Das incident because for a growing child's mind, it was a watershed. Those people (supporters of Satya Shodhak movement) were merely finding faults with Brahminism, because there was, really speaking, a sort of keen competition for services. Opportunities in services

and education were denied to the non-Brahmin class. They were monopolised by the Brahmin class who were getting all the advantages under British rule. This was the basic thing. I felt that, this was rather superficial, artificial. I got out of it. But, at the same time, the progressive impulses of the Satya Shodhak movement remained, that social equality had got its own place in the scheme of things. It was impressed upon my mind very early. Even when I joined the national movement and started talking about Swaraj, the content of Swaraj, it became a very relevant issue for me. Therefore, the Karachi Resolution of 1931 was something very important document for me --as important as the Resolution of Independence passed at the Lahore Congress. It was an attempt, where it was tried for the first time to define what Swaraj should mean. I had been to the Karachi Congress as a volunteer from my town. I was about, I believe, eighteen years old. I had already been to jail in 1930. So I was qualified for becoming a volunteer and people in my town collected funds for me, and Batane, a Congress leader, who was our hero, took me with him. I was then reading in the fourth or fifth class in a middle school. As I started going to school late, I was comparatively older than other boys in my class; I knew something a little more.

Sharma:

Could you give us a picture of the political atmosphere in your district towards the close of

1920?

Chavan: Before 1930, the influence of the non-Brahmin movement was predominant. I remember, in 1920 elections took place for the Councils and the Congress never contested those elections. In my district they were predominantly dominated by the non-Brahmin community, if I may give you my impressions.

But the things started changing from 1930. In 1930, Gandhiji's Dandi March brought about a psychological transformation in the rural side. People became interested in the Congress movement; and even as a schoolboy, I started participating in the movement. Local leaders assigned us duty to go to the villages and talk to the people. I started giving public addresses, organising small meetings in the villages. and, I remember, a number of people used to flock to those meetings -- say 100 or 200 people in a village. Everywhere, boys of sixteen or seventeen went to address those meetings, and transformation started coming in after 1930.

Sharma: By the way, what did you talk to them?

Chavan: We talked to them what Gandhiji was talking about the British regime, cause of our poverty, completely ruining our self-respect as a nation, about Lokamanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi. These leaders had taken over from what Shivaji had done for our country

(i.e. bringing Swaraj) and how they went to jail. So we talked about these patriotic things and sold Khadi to them.

Sharma: Was the Congress Committee quite strong in your area?

Chavan: I won't say it was an organisation as such. It was by and large a new sentiment, a new movement that attracted the people. Organisation was in the towns, cities, not in the villages. It came after the mid-1930s.

Sharma: From the time of Lokamanya Tilak, there was feeling in Maharashtra that Gandhi and Lokamanya were a sort of opponents, their ways were different. What do you say?

Chavan: I tell you, those things were confined to a certain elite class. I never had that feeling, Tilak versus Gandhi. Positive aspects of Gandhi and Tilak were to reach the people.

Sharma: You mean to say that this hair-splitting was done only by the elite at a higher level?

Chavan: That was only confined to the Brahmin elite, it was not a Maharashtra thing. Tilak was a great leader, a great patriot. That was what the people knew. What Gandhiji was doing was continuing his work of fighting against British rule.

Sharma: Who were your political mentors?



Chavan: Well, I won't say there was only one mentor as such or that I learnt from one single individual and imbibed it. I read things, I had known a lot of good things, lectures I heard, I learnt from many people. I learnt from the general atmosphere and social upheaval that was going on. But I can't point out one individual figure from whom I learnt. I was a typical product of a movement, if I can say so.

Sharma: Were you ever interested or attracted towards revolutionary movement also?

Chavan: I was. There was a romanticism about the terrorist movement-- life of Savarkar, then came Bhagat Singh and others. It was the same period. One or two friends of mine were interested in that. But the 1930 movement completely changed my outlook towards the terrorist movement. Because it was a mass movement, a mass upsurge and people's action. I outgrew this terrorist movement. For some time it might have influenced me. But it had not made a definite impact on me.

Gandhiji's Dandi March was an active political movement started from Ahmedabad and every day it went on. I remember, we used to gather in small groups and tried to read every small news that was published in the papers and got influenced by it. Public meetings were held practically every day in my town. We used to go to the meetings and listen to the stories of Gandhiji's life and how he would go on. This certainly built up the atmosphere.

In my own hometown, one of my friends, who is still living Shri Hari Bhau Lad, was lame, but a very brave person. He broke the Salt Act and went to jail for six months. And he was our hero. We thought that we had all gone to jail. The main point I am making is that the 1930 movement, the Salt Satyagraha, made an impact on the people in the rural areas. For me what was important was that the rural life was getting influenced, because I was, though living in a city, a part of the rural life. Transformation was coming. A completely new movement was taking hold of the people's mind. Whatever impression or attraction was there in my mind for terrorist people (individually I had admiration for them because they were brave people) their method never henceforward attracted me.

Sharma: Did the 1930 movement affect women also?

Chavan: It did, because I found a large number of women had started coming out and some of them were addressing those meetings. It was quite a liberating force in 1930. Gandhiji was a liberator of women in more than one sense. Of course, that was the beginning, but it came in a big way later on in the 1940s.

Sharma: Coming of women into public life, was it a new phenomenon in Maharashtra?

Chavan: Well, the movement for women's education and liberation had started quite early in Maharashtra.

In fact, Mahatma Phule was the first man who started talking about women's education. and also D.K. Karve even before Mahatma Gandhi. Karve did many things in this respect. And Gandhiji also confined himself to those ideas and made a mass impact on the people.

Sharma: Did Gandhiji become quite popular among non-Brahmins also?

Chavan: Oh, yes. He was the first national leader who made them forget non-Brahminism and made that impact that the nation was something more important. And within three or four years, (1930 to 1934), there was one election and the Congress won it straightaway. N.V. Gadgil, who was the Brahmin candidate, won that election. And this sort of thing no longer affected the people.

Sharma: What do you think was the secret of Gandhiji's popularity all over India, in all classes and all castes? How would you explain this phenomenon?

Chavan: Well, you see, people thought that he was the man who had sacrificed everything and led a simple life-- his life was completely an open book for everyone to see. He had complete identification with people's life.

Sharma: They thought he was one of them?

Chavan: He was one of them and for them. This was the message which had reached the hearts of the people. It was a magical thing. I have seen it happen. It

happened not only with all of us, but with others also.

Though later on, as I grew and read more about politics and other political philosophies, I started having doubts about Gandhiji's philosophy in many respects; but I never had any doubt about his greatness and his being the leader of Indian politics. Therefore, though I became a socialist later on, I was always a socialist with my feet on earth, thanks to Gandhiji.

Sharma: Do you mean to say that you owe your realism to him?

Chavan: I do. I do owe my realism to Gandhiji. Gandhiji was very a farsighted and most realistic person. Though sometimes he talked about things which we never understood, for example, Ram Rajya, we know that it means Daridranarayan. These phrases we had understood. But I must say that it was ultimately what the people thought, what the people would like to do; to be away from the people was unrealistic. As long as the people would like to go and do, that was realistic. Throwing a bomb was not possible for all the people, therefore, it was unrealistic. Satyagraha, joining some processions, some meetings, shouting slogans against British imperialism, wearing khadder and giving up drinking of tea or liquor, these were some of the things in which the common man could participate. This was a realistic movement.

Sharma: Did he come to your area before 1930?

Chavan: As a boy, I saw him in 1920 in my town of Karad. He came along with Shaukat Ali.

Sharma: Going back to the Satya Shodhak movement, it was such a powerful movement that it involved a large number of people.

Chavan: It was.

Sharma: Who were the leaders who spearheaded this movement in your area?

Chavan: In my area, there were a large number of district leaders who spearheaded this movement. I remember, Bhau Saheb Kambe's name, who was active in my hometown and in surrounding areas. Later on, Bhaskarrao Jadhav, the leader from my district, was elected on the ticket of this movement and he became Minister of Agriculture. A.B. Latthe was another leader from Kolhapur. He later on became Diwan of Kolhapur. Then there were Kesavarao Vichare, Dhongi Patel and others.

Sharma: What part did Shahu Maharaj play in this?

Chavan: Shahu Maharaj played an important part as he was one of the heroes of this movement. He did quite a lot to bring about a change in social outlook. As a king, he started many new things for poor people, for untouchables, for women, for removing religious superiority of the Brahmin class as a caste. People took inspiration

from the persons, I mentioned to you. People also took inspiration from Bahu Maharaj in the field of education of the masses.

Sharma: He must have rendered financial help also?

Chavan: That I don't know.

Sharma: You mentioned singing parties. Did they make use of the theatre also?

Chavan: Well, tamashas we call it. Shahirs who used to sing "Powadas". Tamasha was a mass theatre. It was a very powerful media of propaganda and it used to affect the rural masses tremendously. Once or twice I attended the tamashas. I remember the tamasha of Rambhau Ghatge of Kale, near by my village. The man had completely dedicated himself to this type of work.

Sharma: The themes were social?

Chavan: Themes were social, how exploitation took place, how in the name of God, people were fooled, particularly by the Brahmin-- the so-called middleman between God and the people. Then, how kulkarni class exploited the poor peasants; how in the name of law pleaders exploited the people and how the poor people were opposed to these privileges.

Sharma: Awakening?

Chavan: This was only a sort of awakening in

the sense of self-respect. Education of women and children was also the message of the Satya Shodhak movement.

Sharma: As a matter of fact, it combined both entertainment and education?

Chavan: It was both. But it was more an education than entertainment. Tamasha was also an entertainment, because it was done through song and dance.

Sharma: Did it produce some outstanding actors and dancers?

Chavan: There were in those days actors, but I won't say outstanding actors. They were known people. For example, Ram Bhaughatge of Kale. His name was a common name. When his tamasha came, people used to flock in thousands.

Sharma: What finally led to degeneration of this movement? Was it a slow process?

Chavan: I think it was because people saw that they were not trying to deal with the deeper issues and had only a negative approach and were trying to curry favour with the government. General people got the impression that they were not struggling against the government. The real cause of poverty and inequality was the foreign domination --that analysis was not coming from them. When this analysis started coming from big leader like Gandhiji, Jawaharlalji, naturally these things were

easily repressed. It was a sight to see those things happening before my own eyes. As I said, I outgrew the movement, in an atmosphere in my hometown and in my home changed completely. It (tamasha) just collapsed. Those leaders who held this view of non-Brahmin movement (I am not talking about Satya shodhak but of non-Brahmin political wing of it) lost the confidence of the people immediately.

People of Gandhiji's tradition came, because a large number of people from the villages went to jail in the 1930 and 1932 movements. Though I was a student, I went to jail for a few weeks in 1930 and for eighteen months in 1932. When we came back we were rather important people, important not in the sense of having social status but in the sense that the people wanted to know from us, they would like to listen to us. And this was important.

Sharma: Would you say that the Satya shodhak movement had become a preserve of a few individuals, politically?

Chavan: Yes, it had become preserve of a few individuals and they themselves, as it happens in all movements, became its exploiters.

Sharma: So the villagers understood that one exploiter was being replaced by another?

Chavan: Quite right.

Sharma: And they saw a ray of hope in the



national movement?

Chavan: They saw better opportunities.

Sharma: You were telling us about the role of the theatre in the propagation of the ideals of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Was such a thing done in the 1930 movement by the Congress also?

Chavan: Not exactly, because in 1930 instru-  
ments were different. In those days public meetings and prabhat pheries used to be organised. But I don't think we had to resort to tamashas in the 1930 movement, not at least in my district.

Sharma: Do you recall if there were some poems at that time?

Chavan: Oh yes, Now I have forgotten most of them. Prabhat pheri songs were quite popular in those days. Early morning, by 4.30 or 5 o'clock people used to come out, say some slokas and move practically in all the lanes of the town in which I was living. Those were inspiring songs and slokas, in which there was a call to the people to be united and to have faith in Gandhiji and his principles of non-violence and discipline to fight the bureaucratic government.

During Ganesh Chaturthi in our place, melas, as we called them, used to be held, where singing parties in different localities were formed and most of

the songs were patriotic songs, full of patriotic stories, history etc., but not tamashas during the 1930-32 movement.

Sharma: Did you have any poet, say like Zaver Chand Menghani in Maharashtra?

Chavan: We had our own patriotic poets. Savarkar was one of them, who wrote patriotic songs. I do not straightaway remember the names. But that tradition of 1930 was kept throughout in the 1932 and 1942 movements. Vasant Bapat and Kusumagraja of Nasik composed poems for the 1942 movement. I may mention that they are popular even now. We had our long tradition of patriotic poets. But in 1930 prabhat pheri songs were composed by even local poets. Every town had its own poets who composed poems and made them popular in those areas. A young boy named Shankar Shahir Nikam, who belonged to my part popularised songs written by Madgulkar, who composed many songs, in rural colloquial language, which were very popular in the rural areas, at that time. In 1942, popular songs were composed by this famous poet Madgulkar who also belongs to that tradition of patriotic poets. He died very recently. His songs were very popular. I remember one, in that a peasant was trying to tell his wife the story of Swaraj.

Sharma: In some languages, different movements have been taken note of by novelists, for example, there is a novel on the 1942 movement in Bengali; there is one

by Meghani on the 1920 movement; Prem Chand had written on the 1930 movement. Some of them were participants and also literary figures. What was the position in Maharashtra?

Chavan: Not basically on those themes. There are one or two novels on the background of the movements, for example, Vishnu Sakharan Khandekar and Madkholkar have written political novels. In fact, Madkholkar was one person who had introduced contemporary political novels on the background of Dr Khare's controversy, for instance. So most of the important political figures in Madhya Pradesh politics, you can see in that novel. They were like that.

Sharma: Do they come alive in that?

Chavan: They do. Khandekar has taken the background of these novels, but not in the same way as Prem Chand - I have read his novels. I have not read Meghani but I have heard about him. Prem Chand has made it a living theme; *[these] are* not of that type; nothing compared to that.

Sharma: How were you first arrested in 1930?

Chavan: Well, prabhat pheries were banned in those days. Once while we were leading a prabhat pheri, they came and took me away and kept me in the local jail for a few weeks. They wanted to prosecute me, but by that time the Gandhi-Irwin Pact came about and they allowed us to

Sharma: What was the impact of Gandhiji on you?

Chavan: Gandhiji's impact was there all the time as the leader of the national movement - as Father of the Nation. But in 1932 movement when I was in jail for a longer period. I started reading about socialism, about political movements in other countries, and my views broadened. And then I became somewhat sceptical about his economics of khadi, village industries, although in the beginning khadi was very attractive to me. But whether that could be a hundred per cent model for India's economy became a matter of doubt. And later on, I developed the inclination that the modern India could not be built on those concepts.

Sharma: How did you react to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact?

Chavan: The Gandhi-Irwin Pact was quite all right, because it gave a breathing time and a feeling of victory to the people. That was necessary. It was a very important Gandhian technique, if I may say so. When you were leading a movement of non-violent people against a very well-organised military power like Britain, you could not give them a feeling of complete defeat all the time. This compromise gave a feeling of elation to the people, that people's struggle succeeded. Irwin had to call Gandhiji and had to arrive at some sort of agreement. So I reacted very well to the Pact.

Sharma: Do you recall the atmosphere at the Karachi session of the Congress?

Chavan: Yes, I do remember. The Karachi Congress was dominated by the Bhagat Singh affair and the Gandhi Irwin Pact also. There was a feeling of elation. But emotionally it was Bhagat Singh who dominated the scene. Sardar Patel was President of the Congress at that time. This is the impression that I have.

But I was more interested in the Karachi Congress Resolution\*, what exactly it meant. It was something very new in terms of the Congress. So far there were a talk about dominion status, full swaraj and round table conference. But what we could do if Swaraj came. For the first time, there was something specific in which I was interested. So it was a session of struggle and its triumph, and also at the same time a tragic feeling for Bhagat Singh-- an emotional mix-up was there.

Sharma: Did you see M.N. Roy also in the session?

Chavan: No. I did not know that he was there, but later on I heard that he was there and he had his part in the drafting of this 1931 Resolution as well.

Sharma: After your return from the Karachi Congress and your next arrest in 1932, what were your activities?

Chavan: I went back to school again. The

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\* On Fundamental Rights

group of students that we had formed was there. We used to meet and discuss matters. We carried on prabhat pheries, participated in Ganesh utsav, melas and had our own Sahu Chhatrapati mela. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact came about in March (1931) and in the month of January 1932 the movement was started and I was arrested on the 26th January. I could not complete my academic year.

Sharma: How did your guardians view your political activities?

Chavan: My guardian at that time was my eldest brother, who was a government employee. He did not very much care as to what I was doing. He used to live in some other town. So there was not much of interference from him. Other brother was also a school-going boy, but he was more under the influence of the non-Brahmin movement.

My main guardian was my mother. And she never felt that what I was doing was bad. Many people told her that this would bring trouble for her eldest son who was a government employee. She used to ask me: Your brother would be in trouble, have you thought of that? I said: What have I to do with that? He is doing his work and I am doing mine. Am I doing a wrong thing? I asked her. I told her that I was doing what Gandhiji and Tilak were saying. She used to believe me. My mother was a great person, I tell you. All the cultural traditions, all the sanskars, I can say, are from my mother. She never came in my way.

Sharma: Sanskars mean more than mere influences?

Chavan: There is something deeper. That is why I use the word sanskaras which carry much more connotation; there is no proper word for it in English.

We were poor, depending upon what my elder brother used to send for the family. We were kept in the town of Karad because we wanted to complete our education there. My mother used to say: Do anything, but don't give up your education. And I used to ask her: Tell me if I am in a bad company. I used to have constant dialogue with her. She knew my friends. They used to come to my house. She was a mother to them also.

Sharma: What do you owe to her?

Chavan: I owe these things to her because she did not come in my way. I used to take untouchable and Muslim friends to my house. She never objected to that. She responded to this new thing, though she was an uneducated peasant woman from a village. She had a receptive mind which was open to right type of influences in society. She talked with me and tried to find out....

Sharma: She must have been a very sensitive person. It requires great sensitivity.

Chavan: She was a religious-minded person. She used to listen to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata stories. As she was a widow, naturally, everywhere she was harrassed. But she used to tell us: Don't do wrong things,

don't bother about anybody, don't get frightened of anybody. I will tell you a very interesting story about her. It is *also* well known and is published in a Marathi book, about my life. When I was arrested in 1932, I was called before the magistrate on the third day and he straightaway sentenced me to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment and imposed some fine. It was a shock, because at that time the people used to be sentenced to three to six months. But for a boy of eighteen years old, eighteen months' imprisonment was rather very serious. So one of my school teachers, who was well inclined towards me and our family, wanted to persuade me to apologise and get out of jail. He went to the police officer and pleaded: Chavan is from a poor family, he will easily pass matriculation in a year or two. The police officer asked him to persuade me. The next day my mother and the teacher came to see me. (They told me that she was asked to sit with the police officer). I was taken out to see my mother, but when my mother saw me with the police on two sides, (mother is mother, after all) she had tears in her eyes. When I saw tears in her eyes, there were tears in my eyes too, and I immediately sat down there. The teacher thought that possibly tears were out of fear. So he told me that he had a talk with the police officer who had asked me to apologise. Suddenly, before I could react, my mother reacted and said: I have not come to ask you for doing this sort of a thing, this teacher is telling on



his own. Don't do anything which will bring shame to you. She felt sorry.

Sharma: The advice must have steeled your heart.

Chavan: Absolutely. I felt proud. I still feel proud of her. She was brave.. This was a very dramatic incident in my life. I do not know how I would have reacted if she had weakened and tried to persuade me to apologize. But on her own she told me not to apologize. She said that the teacher himself wanted to accompany her to the cutcherry, to which she had agreed. But she did not understand the political implications of it. This was the human side of it.

Sharma: When you were a boy or a young man, did you come under some religious influences also?

Chavan: The only religious influence was, when my mother used to ask me to accompany her to a temple and listen to the story of Valmiki's Ramayana. She used to listen to the Marathi explanation of the original Ramanaya in Sanskrit and then used to explain it to us. I still remember her beautiful way of explaining. I went with her to Pandharpur, which is a famous temple and Vithoba is the presiding deity there. Yatra was held twice a year there. I went in the month of Kartik-- Kartik Ekadashi. It was nearly a hundred miles from our place. We went in a bullock-cart and sometimes walked. I was about twelve years

old at that time. Those religious associations of mine were owing to my mother. I went there because my mother wanted it. But otherwise it did not mean anything special to me.

Sharma: If I may put it differently, did atheism ever come in your life?

Chavan: Not as such. One thing, I did not believe in idol worship. What is the meaning of this? It is a very absurd thing. I have never felt that there is something like a personal God somewhere.

Sharma: This is a very crude form of belief in God.

Chavan: But otherwise, I never became an atheist as such. I believed in prayer, all through.

Sharma: In 1930, in the coastal areas, the people broke the Salt laws but in greater part of Maharashtra they had Jungle Satyagraha. What were the Jungle laws they broke? How did the people suffer under them? Could you give some idea?

Chavan: In 1932, in my district and in some other parts of Maharashtra Jungle Satyagraha took place. People used to cut grass and take animals to the grassland without permission. Beside the Salt Satyagraha in the coastal areas, another form of Salt Satyagraha took place in our parts. Whatever salt was prepared, it was brought to the cities to be sold at public meetings, that was

illegal salt. We went to sell it. So the one who sold it and the one who purchased it were arrested.

Sharma: They brought it from the coastal areas?

Chavan: They brought it and sold it.

Sharma: Only to show the violation of law?

Chavan: Only to show the violation of law.

Sometimes they used to ban prabhat pheries, which were a very powerful weapon in those days. After 1932, I did not hear about prabhat pheries. But in 1930 and 1932 prabhat pheries were very powerful.

Sharma: Who were your friends who worked with you?

Chavan: A very large number of them. In the course of time some of them went to jail. Doiphode was a good friend of mine, who went to jail with me in 1932, from my hometown. He had a small business which he left. We were tried together and convicted at the same trial. Gaurihar Sinhasane, Kashinath Deshmukh, they were the people who were all working together.

Sharma: Did they stay in public life?

Chavan: Most of them stayed in public life. There were some others who were my colleagues in the student movement in 1930. Many of them left because it was a young association. But the names I mentioned, they remained in public life.

Sharma: I am asking you this because as a young man one responds to certain events, it is a youthful exuberance, you desire to do something but then you fade out.

Chavan: It happens like that in many cases. But some of them did remain active even after that also.

Sharma: After Gandhiji came back from the Round Table Conference, in the U.P., the U.P.C.C. started a no-rent campaign. Was there any such thing in Maharashtra?

Chavan: No, there was no such organised thing as no-tax campaign in Maharashtra. Nor was there any oppression against the people, excepting in some areas where in 1930, the satyagraha had taken an intense form. There was some sort of discontentment. Younger people were critical of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. They were talking about the failure of R.T.C. In the meanwhile, Lord Willingdon had taken over as Governor-General and there was a feeling that he would start repression in India again and try to recover the prestige which Lord Irwin had lost by having arrived at an agreement with Gandhiji. So that group was expecting some trouble after Gandhiji's return.

Sharma: Willingdon's Governorship of Bombay was disliked by the Bombay nationalists.

Chavan: He was never popular. His associations were known to people in Bombay at that time.

Sharma: What shape did the movement take in 1932 in Maharashtra?

Chavan: Well, I went to jail in the very first phase. I think the movement started sometime in the first week of January and I was arrested on 26th of January.

Sharma: They must have considered you very dangerous?

Chavan: No. We had already decided that this time we must do it in a more organised way and must not seek arrests as such. So I did not seek arrest in 1932. We wanted a little more demonstration, as they started with very quick arrests of a large number of leaders. So there was some sort of collapse in the movement. The young group of mine, along with other friends, decided to make 26th January quite a demonstrative affair. So that night we prepared a large number of tiranga jhandas, cyclostyled bulletins and wall posters. Our group went in operation after 12 o'clock that night. And in that operation one was to go and hoist the flag on the Municipal office building. Different groups were given different duties. I was in charge of this operation. The operation went on very well. But in the course of that Doiphode, whom I have mentioned earlier, while sticking wall posters, got arrested. The police interrogated him in a tough manner. He disclosed my name. The next morning nothing happened, I went to school. I was in my classroom. The police straightaway

came to the school and went to the headmaster. Then they asked me: Did you do it? I said: I did it. Again they asked me: Are you going to continue to do it? I said: Yes, if I am allowed, I will continue to do that. So I was arrested in the classroom itself and from there I went to jail. I felt a little sorry for having gone to school that day. But I thought that if I did not go to school, there would be suspicion. There would be weakness in the people, who were working with me. So I thought, I must go and behave normally.

In 1932, jail was a very important epoch in my own life. It changed me and educated me very well.

Sharma: Jail was university for you?

Chavan: Absolutely. I went to university later on. I experienced university life in jail in 1932 and part of 1933. I was in jail for about fifteen months; I got three months' remission.

Sharma: For good behaviour?

Chavan: That was a normal sort of thing --two and a half or three months remission they used to give. But that was the period which was very valuable in my life. That period laid down the foundations of my emotional make-up, my political thinking, my general outlook towards life.

Sharma: Were you kept in one jail only?

Chavan: I was in two jails, for about a year in Yeravda camp jail and the remaining three months in Visapur jail.

Sharma: Were you released from Visapur jail?

Chavan: I was released from that jail.

Sharma: Could you give us some idea of your reading in jail, books, authors?

Chavan: When we went to Yervada camp jail, we were the first batch. Then there were nearly 1200 to 1300 prisoners. There used to be barracks. In each barrack there used to be 100 prisoners. A large number of students and educated persons were there.

Acharya Bhagwat, who was an aggressive Gandhian, was also in that camp. He was a born teacher. He wanted to do something about the school-going children who were there. So he rearranged the people and found a barrack which was later known as barrack no.12. I became a member of that barrack.

Acharya Bhagwat, Raosaheb Patwardhan were there for few months. S.M. Joshi came to that jail later. H.R. Mahajani, who became very famous as a Marathi editor, was also there. V.M. Buskute, formerly a non-cooperator, became a communist in that jail.

Sharma: He did a book on Mulshi Petha Satyagraha.

Chavan: Yes, V.M. Busknte. Acharya Bhagwat started practically a class for us. He used to read to us Sanskrit poetry, Shakuntala by Kalidas and Savarkar's poetry. Raosaheb Patwardhan and others managed to see that new books came to the jail. Mahajani, S.M. Joshi were all socialists. They were in different groups and had different political approaches. Every day we had the opportunity to listen to everybody and came in contact with everybody. Then a large number of books started coming in and we read a lot about Gandhiji. In a nearby barrack, Ramdas Gandhi, Sumitra's father, was with us in jail. There I read Bertrand Russell's Roads to Freedom, for the first time. I read his book with difficulty because I was just in matriculation class. But with the help of people there and a dictionary, I could read that.

There were lectures on socialism. Acharya Bhagwat used to give lectures on Gandhism -- a very powerful teacher. He read Tagore to us. It was such an intense intellectual life. Books were lying all around. We used to ask others what they were reading and to tell us about that. They used to arrange reports and evening lectures. So somebody used to come and communicate to us what he was reading. It was a very interesting thing. I recall having read Radhakrishnan's Kalki...

Sharma: ...or The Future of Civilization, a very interesting book.



Chavan: I remember to have read a small book, What I Believe by Bertrand Russell.

Sharma: You were first introduced to Roy's ideology by Charles Mascarenhas.

Chavan: Charles Mascarenhas and some other people. Some of the letters that Roy was sending out to his friends from jail were shown to us as letters of Roy. I believe political comments were there in them. I got interested in him because I had heard his name as a revolutionary before. He had played an important role in the Communist movement of the world. He had played a role in establishing the Communist Party of India. He had made his own contribution towards Chinese Communism.

I came out of jail in 1933. From 1934-35, I was under the influence of the Congress Socialist Party of Achyut Patwardhan and Jayaprakash Narayan. There I came in contact with people who had come under communist influence by that time. For instance, Lakshman Shastri Joshi, H.R. Mahajani, Wamanrao Kulkarni came under the influence of Roy's group. So I was a little more inclined towards them. This was as far as associations were concerned.

But from the view point of political revolution, etc., I found one or two very interesting aspects of it. Particularly, Roy was advocating to develop a parallel political organisation which could become a

constituent assembly, ultimately. His theory of constituent assembly was related to it. He was feeling that the Congress Party was such a party that had the potentials of becoming a better constituent assembly. But one must try to make use of it with a revolutionary purpose and revolutionary determination. That it should be developed, with the help of political movements and people's support, into a revolutionary party, so that it becomes ultimately a constituent assembly to bring about a revolution. This had some sort of logical appeal to my mind and I thought that here was a highly intellectual leader who had a revolutionary path.

Then, his criticism of Gandhiji that he goes by certain religious ideology which has no definite social, economic and revolutionary concepts. So how could he bring about a revolution through a compromise? This was the thrust of Roy's comments.

I went from my hometown to Poona where he gave three lectures on Marxism and I heard them. He was not an eloquent speaker. He used to put his points logically. I was deeply impressed by his personality. And I thought that he was the man who was associated with the 1931 resolution, he should have a prominent role in the leadership of the Congress so that he could influence the Congress leadership, its policies and their formulation in days to come. That is how I came under his influence. It is in this sense that I was part of Roy's group. But

I can't say that I was a Royist, in the sense V.M. Tarkunde, V.B.Karik and Lakshman Shastri were. They were deeply and intellectually involved and their commitments were total.

Sharma: In Roy's book India's Message there is a criticism of Gandhiji.

Chavan: He often criticised Gandhiji. That criticism in the earlier stages appealed to me also and seemed to be logical.

Sharma: How was he as a speaker?

Chavan: He was a great conversationalist, but I don't think he was very impressive as a speaker. I heard his three lectures in Poona which were interesting.

Sharma: He could put his ideas across to the audience?

Chavan: He did put his ideas across to the audience in a very clear-cut propositions.

Sharma: Do you mean to say that he appealed more to the head than to the heart?

Chavan: Yes, I would say that. He was basically an intellectual who never cared for emotions.

Sharma: Never played on emotions?

Chavan: Never. A sheer intellectual political personality.

Sharma: He was very tall.

Chavan: He was tall, looked scholarly and revolutionary. The impressions were very appealing for a younger man. This was my association with Roy, nothing more than that. I met him once or twice. Once we invited him to preside over a peasant conference or some district political conference in our district. I was one of the important workers there. And, that conference itself had started a controversy between our group and the established leadership. They practically broke that conference. They didn't like Roy's coming to our district to preside over the conference. They said that it was a challenge to the Gandhian leadership. We were not taking it in that sense.

But, later on, during the Second World War period, I slipped out of his movement because his analysis about the war was something which was not acceptable to me. I had personal attachment to Roy's movement and I tried to digest it, but I couldn't accept it. His theory was that the Second World War was started by accident-- it was an accidental war, and, therefore, the real war must be fought between Communism and Fascism, between the progressive Communist forces and the fascist forces. So it was by sheer accident that England and France on one side, and Germany on the other, started this war. Therefore, he said that in this war we couldn't take sides and fight against the British. Ultimately, this war would convert into a people's war. This was his analysis. But to my patriotic mind, it didn't appeal. I thought there

was a revolutionary condition in India and world war was a situation for universal revolutionary movement. So this was the time when we must fight imperialism.

My mind, therefore, rejected Roy's analysis and I parted company with my friends. But after that I was in mental agony for nearly six to nine months. But there was no alternative, because the Congress Party itself was not deciding as to what should be done. The Congress leadership was of the view that they should form a national government and work for dominion status. These arguments went on.

And that was the time when the Communists in my district and in my state started a movement. It was at that time that I wanted to join the Communist Party. I said: This was the party rising to the occasion and giving a very good programme of revolutionary action to the people. So this was the period in which I was caught up in a serious mental conflict. But then I talked to my people in my district and they said that if I joined that party I would be isolated. So I restrained myself. Then soon Gandhiji started the Individual Satyagraha and there was some programme and I again had my usual activities in the Congress Party.

Sharma: What books of Roy did you read?

Chavan: It is very difficult to remember, what books I read of Roy, as such. But I regularly

read his articles in Independent India. In early stages, some booklets of Roy were given to us in which the theory of decolonisation was explained. But later on I read some of the books he got published.

Sharma: In 1939, was Roy still a Communist?

Chavan: Yes. He was a Communist. In 1939 he was a Marxist. Humanism came later.

Sharma: You had quite a few meetings with him. What did you discuss?

Chavan: In one meeting at Tasgaon in 1938, we discussed the resolutions to be adopted at that time. We drafted the resolution in Marathi and he wanted to know what they meant. He gave some ideas about it. He explained to us as to how we should project our ideas to the people in the conference. The other meeting was brought about by Atmaram Patil. When I started parting my ways with them during the war period, they took me to him in Bombay. I was there for half an hour or so. He explained some of the doubts that I had in my mind about his analysis of the war. He very logically explained what he meant by war. But when I came out, I came away.

Sharma: Was he quite comradely or overbearing in his manners?

Chavan: No. He was a very friendly person. Maybe when you meet a person quite often, you can say more. From the little contact that I had with him, I had

the impression that he was always willing to explain and understand others.

Sharma: Was he a man of courage in the physical sense?

Chavan: Well, looking to his revolutionary activities, naturally he was a man of courage.

Sharma: But in one of his letters written from jail, there is a sentence, where he says that he would not go to jail again. I think, during this period, he was probably not prepared to go to jail again and suffer.

Chavan: It would be very unfair to say about a man who had suffered all his life that he was not prepared to go to jail, sacrifice. I know that. It is a futile way of leading a revolutionary life, going and sitting in jail. And jail-going has been glorified in the political context. He was not that sort of jail goer. He went to jail for more than five years. And he was a man who wanted to work hard and organise. Concept of jail-going for the sake of sacrifice was not his idea. This is what I understood.

Only because he says in his letter that he would not like to go back to jail does not mean that he lacked courage. His whole life was full of courageous things - the way he changed his life, the way he prepared this country for a revolutionary change. As a matter of fact, he thought it futile, unproductive and unrevolutionary to sit in jail, doing nothing. But Gandhiji believed that jail was a kind

of tapasya. He created some sort of atmosphere in the country, in the people's minds. It had its own relevance. I don't say that it had not. It also worked in the Indian context. But only because Roy had said that, I don't say that he was not a courageous man.

Sharma: What was the purpose of the League of Radical Congressmen which he had started?

Chavan: The League of Radical Congress men was a group within the Congress. They were part of the Congress. Though they professed ideas of Communism, they were Congressmen at that time, just like the Congress Socialist Party, which was there within the Congress Party. The Congress was working as a sort of national front. But when Roy left the Congress, he formed the Radical Democratic Party.

Sharma: His attitude towards the Congress changed after he lost the Presidential election to the Ramgarh Congress against Maulana Azad. Now, do you think that he left the Congress in disgust or frustration or he became really conscious of the fact that nothing could be done by the Congress?

Chavan: I think he left because he was not able to convert the Congress to his point of view. The Congress leadership was quite powerful and its influence was strong. Finally, there were differences about their analysis of the war and the Indian situation and how it could be tackled. I think it was because of that that he left the Congress.



I did not go with him, as I did not want to leave the Congress.

Sharma: What was your reaction to Roy's acceptance of government donations for his trade union?

Chavan: I did not like it. And whatever they did after--war effort and their own effort-- was not of my liking. I severely criticised them publicly about it that I had a feeling that they were working as some sort of government agency.

Sharma: What were the reasons for your not joining the Communist Party? Was it simply because your friends were not with you?

Chavan: No, because my attraction towards it was temporary. As my party was not giving any programme of fight and had taken completely a different view, I became rather impatient. And this party was giving a programme. That was some sort of temporary attraction. But, I must say, that at that time it was a very powerful attraction. The Marxist analysis had its own influence on my mind in those days and even today. It explained many historical developments more logically than any other thought or philosophy could do.

Sharma : But this somersault must have come to you as a great shock?

Chavan: The somersault came as a great shock to me, but, there also was one very pleasant surprise. This was what Roy was suggesting in his discussions, that

this war would develop into a people's war. His approach was somewhat vindicated intellectually so far as his analysis on the war was concerned, that these Fascist forces would ultimately turn against the Communists and there would be a major war between the Communist forces on the one side and the Fascist forces on the other. According to Roy the main aim and objective of Fascism was to destroy Soviet Russia in the European war (so that it would not become the centre of) new political progressive socialist force. So it came true. In June 1941, the Communists started saying what Roy was saying from 1939 onwards.

Sharma: But although the Communists had been acting as agents of the Communist International.

Chavan: The Communist Party was a part of the Communist International movement and, therefore, they normally took instructions from the Third International. I would not say that they were not patriotic, but sometimes it looked as if they were taking instructions from outside.

Sharma: I won't say they were not patriotic, but they did not judge the Indian situation on their own?

Chavan: Well, it has happened in the history of the Indian Communist movement many times, their analysis of the Indian situation did not justify them and had gone wrong many times. During the war time particularly, their whole analysis went wrong. Even today they do not have a

very powerful movement in India, but ultimately one must go by the historical results. Even after nearly fifty years of (existence) the party did not make any impact. Only the breakaway group has made some impact in Kerala and Bengal. I am not only talking in terms of elections. The Communist Party even with its cadre and (organisation) did not make that impact that the Communist Party should make in the Indian conditions. But they were quite a group which tried to influence with formulation of Indian policies on certain major issues also. Their thinking and ideas certainly played a role in influencing (the people). So I would not just dismiss it as a miscellaneous force because they are a part of the international movements. They did represent certain thrusts of international thinking.

Sharma: And they organised labour, kisans?

Chavan: Basically, they were for the exploited people, the working class, landless labour and all those. The values they nurtured became important values even for non-Communists, for democratic movements.

Sharma: And I think some of their leaders like Dr G Adhikari and S.V. Gate lived like common people.

Chavan: I agree with you. Their life was life of sacrifice. They were a very disciplined cadre and had suffered much. At least, the first generation of their leadership, I should say, was a very valuable leadership, their personal life, their dedication, their sacrifice, their intellectual capacity.

Sharma: Honesty of purpose.

Chavan: The ideological loyalty to the Party, etc. The names that you mentioned like G. Adhikari, Ghate, S.V. Deshpande, even Randive ( he also belongs to the first generation of the leadership and is still one of the Leaders of the C.P.M.) are very dedicated persons and have lived a life of poverty and ideology also at the same time.

Sharma: How was the Individual Satyagraha conducted in Satara district?

Chavan: I was then President of the District Congress Committee. D.K. Gosavi, who was from my district, was President of the Pradesh Congress Committee. He used to take names of those who offered themselves for the Individual Satyagraha for Gandhiji's approval. Some of the people from my district were approved to offer satyagraha. I was not allowed to offer satyagraha. But we kept on propagating it at private meetings and discussions.

Sharma: So, in 1940, you did not go to jail?

Chavan: In 1940, I did not go to jail. In 1939-40, I was only a student, but even then I was President of the District Congress Committee. I had lost one year because I could not study. Though I did not go to jail, I used to look after those people who went to jail and kept in touch with them and organised the District

Congress Committee.

Sharma: Did this satyagraha make any impact?

Chavan: I should say, yes, impact in the sense that it kept the party going. In the absence of any programme the younger element was getting rather disturbed, I was one of them. I was completely frustrated. At least this programme gave us ideas of establishing civil liberties. Naturally, Gandhiji devised a new mode of offering satyagraha. He might have his own reasons for that. He came out with some other programmes some time later. That was our hope and faith, which ultimately did happen in 1942. When other leaders in the Congress were not in favour of it, Gandhiji did want to start the Quit India movement. I supported it.

So Individual Satyagraha made its own contribution, keeping cadres of the Congress Party and people engaged in activity. People thought that yes, the Congress in its own way was playing a part in resisting the war effort in a symbolic way. They did not want to go and join the war effort like the leftist parties which were identifying themselves with the war effort. It was rather a very curious situation at that time.

Sharma: Was the activist in you satisfied with this kind of weak protest?

Chavan: Well, I should say, that there was some substitute because attraction to the party organisation

was great, loyalty to the party, colleagues and friends. I was satisfied and my frustration disappeared as my party was doing something. I accepted the presidentship of the District Congress Committee temporarily because the elected President was allowed to offer satyagraha and go to jail. So I was looking after the Congress work. I went round, talked to the people, gave them reasoning behind the Individual Satyagraha, how symbolically it was a fight against the war and a fight against imperialism. So that gave some sort of outlet to my energies as an activist.

Sharma: Was the Congress organisation quite widespread in your district?

Chavan: In my district, yes, it was. There were all the workers, who had gone to jail in 1930, those people who had joined us during the election campaigns of 1934 and 1937 and the younger generation to which I belonged. Some of them had started going to colleges and universities. I think our party was quite strong in my district.

Sharma: As President of the District Congress Committee, what efforts did you make to broad-base the party?

Chavan: I went round the district and held meetings of the Congress workers, kept in touch with the young people in Kolhapur and Poona colleges and other

centres of education, and brought them into the mainstream of our Congress movement. I was expecting that this would develop into a great struggle. This was my own expectation in 1940-41 and it came true.

Sharma: What was the character of the party? Was it still city-based?

Chavan: No, it was not city-based. We had certainly the support of the city, but in the 1940s the party had quite a good support in the rural areas. That is why, I say the party was a very broad-based mass party, in my district at least.

Sharma: People from lower castes also came.

Chavan: Lower castes, villagers, peasantry also came. But one thing I must say, the followers of Dr Ambedkar for whom I had a great admiration, even then, kept away from this movement. Our movement could not make any impact on them.

Sharma: On the Harijans?

Chavan: I am not talking about the Harijans only, Dr Ambedkar's Mahar caste. They are the largest in number in our State.

Sharma: He belonged to that caste.

Chavan: He belonged to that caste. They were not in the independence movement. Their social programmes and social urges were quite revolutionary with which we

felt much sympathy, and felt like participating in that. But when it came to the British power, we were isolated. We reached the villages, but we could not reach emotionally, intellectually through our organisational work to those (Mahars) people.

Sharma: But I think the problem with Dr Ambedkar was that he was never anti-British in that sense, and secondly, though he was the leader of the Mahar community and the Harijans, he never shared or was prepared to share their struggles and privations.

Chavan: Well, it is not exactly true because Dr Ambedkar had some followers outside the Mahar community in Maharashtra. Some intellectuals from C.P. and Maharashtra, who were not Mahars, respected him highly. They considered him a great man in the tradition of Mahatma Phule and others. But when it came to Gandhiji's struggle, national struggle, he was not a part of it, it is true. And, therefore, you can draw your own inferences and you can put it in whatever terms you like. He did not participate in it. He felt as if we were fighting to bring back high caste Hindu rule.

Sharma: His role at the Round Table Conference would do no credit to him. He was all the time putting impediments in Gandhiji's way.

Chavan: Quite right. That shows that he was not part of the independence movement. But what is the independence movement? Ultimately, when you are historically



taking a view of the independence movement now, you cannot merely say that the struggle against the British was the independence movement. According to me, struggles which were directed against social exploitation, economic exploitation were all part of the independence struggle.

Sharma: True, but Gandhi was second to none in attacking any form of exploitation, economic or social.

Chavan: I agree with you, therefore, we followed Gandhiji throughout our life. But my criticism of Dr Ambedkar would not be so one sided, because I understand, why he was not with us. There was some deficiency in our independence movement, that we had not made sufficient efforts to convince them to become a part of it. We have to look at it this way also.

Whenever Dr Ambedkar came to our area for lecture, I attended them, even though I was a Congressman. Mostly his lectures were not against the British but against untouchability, social exploitation-- that there was something basically wrong in society which must be changed for the sake of humanity. These ideas were revolutionary and I shared those ideas. Therefore, I won't criticise Dr Ambedkar the way some people might choose to do.

I wanted Dr Ambedkar to do something about it. On the contrary, I would say that it was one of the deficiencies of the independence movement that it



did not try to attract the depressed people, who should have been more interested in revolution and political freedom. They were away from us. There was some lacuna in that movement. This is what I feel.

Sharma: As a young man you were attracted to the Satyashodhak Samaj, then you were attracted to the C.P.I. and then attracted towards Roy. All, one by one, you rejected, but you clung to the Congress as a child would cling to his mother. How would you explain this?

Chavan: Well, I am essentially and politically a child of the Congress movement. But I have always stuck to progressive trends and followed the progressive camps and stuck on to the Congress till this day. From the beginning my political life developed with continuous rejections, changes and acceptances. But at the same time, I stuck to the Congress because it was progressive.

Sharma: Are you basically a man of emotion or reason?

Chavan: I am not devoid of emotion. But I am not essentially an emotional person. Though some decisions have been taken on the basis of emotions also. I had my doubts about Gandhiji's economic ideas but I respected him. When I heard of Gandhiji's assassination, I wept like a child. So these influences did continue. Intellectual life was one thing but basic political, national emotions and urges were always influenced by Gandhiji.

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Sharma: If I put it differently, we have seen that in every-day-life of common people there is a time when there is a conflict between the head and heart. In your case, is it the heart that prevails or is it the head that prevails?

Chavan: I think, it is the head. For example all my good friends were with the Royist group, but I was emotionally involved in the Congress movement in 1939 and as such I was emotionally disturbed. But when I went back and talked to my people, I said: Ultimately I have to work with these people and if they are not going, I would be isolated. Whenever there is a conflict between the heart and head, I feel, I normally go by the head.

Sharma: Does not merely an intellectual approach to public life or politics make a person a little less human?

Chavan: I don't think so. Why should it be so? Because his intellectual thinking also must have some human consideration, human sympathies; intellectual does not mean completely devoid of human approach and emotions. Because a man can be a socialist intellectually, basically he sympathies with the poor, karuna. It is the compelling factor. Though many times I differ with my colleagues, still I respect them and have personal feeling for them. I had seriously differed with Mrs Gandhi, but today when she was arrested, I was moved. This is human affection.

Sharma: Was your attitude towards the down-trodden of karuna or sahanubhuti?

Chavan: Karuna not sahennubhuti. They are not the same.

Sharma: That's why I asked.

Chavan: That is why I used the word karuna, not sahanubhuti. Karuna is a sort of feeling or resentment against injustice, it is a mixture of both.

Sharma: Does inustice make you angry at times?

Chavan: It does, very much.

Sharma: It is more than resentment?

Chavan: It is something more than resentment.

Sharma: You have talked of your reading in jail and last book you mentioned was Russell's What I believe .

Chavan: I just remember some of the books. I may have a list of those books which I read at that time. I had taken copious notes from some of the books. I read some Hindi and Marathi books, and lots of books on Gandhiji also. But I tried more to understand the general outline of socialism and basic ideas for which Marx stood. I can't say that I know all the scientific aspects of Marxism. I can't claim that I know even Marxism fully. I found that there was immense literature and it was very difficult to understand in two months' time. One has to read it continuously, which I discontinued.

But I did read different subjects. I read poetry and literature. Like Acharya Bhagwat, Mahajani, who was also a Sanskrit scholar, read to us Kalidas's dramas. So it was opening of a new vista of knowledge, how wide and how broadened one would [ be ]. This was the urge in those days, in an impressionable age which laid the foundation of what I could do, what I could think later on.

Sharma: What were the books on socialism which you read?

Chavan: I remember one book on Socialism by G.D.H. Cole -- I forget the name. It was related to scientific socialism. Then we read books on Marxism -- explaining Marx in details.

Sharma: How did your interest in Socialism start?

Chavan: All these books, which I read, were against repression, against social and economic inequality. It responded to my urges. The class to which I belonged was a class of poor peasants. And I thought, struggle for liberation, if it was to succeed, must mean something positive for the exploited classes. Merely change of government was not enough. That was not my Swaraj. Swaraj must have some positive social and economic content. That's what socialism had in it.

Sharma: Did your interest in socialism start in jail or before?

Chavan: I must say positively that my interest in socialism started in jail in 1932. I did not know much about it before that. I was just in a younger patriotic mood. Of course, the Satya Shodhak movement had given the call for social and economic equality, and against exploitation of the middle intellectual classes, professionals, and others. I mean those ideas were there. But socialism as such that there is a scientific way of bringing about the transformation in social life, this positive concept reached my consciousness in jail only.

Sharma: Did your re-examination of Gandhiji's philogophy also start in jail?

Chavan: In a way, yes. I can't say that I had studied Gandhiji philosophically before. Gandhiji, for instance, for us was a national leader. He for us symbolized independence movement. Gandhiji stood for us emotionally a man who stood for the poor people, a saintly person. All these ideas were there, I do not think I had studied Gandhiji's philosophy. I tried to read it and understand it from Acharya Bhagwat, who gave us series of lectures on Gandhism. There were certain positive aspects. Particularly one aspect, that appealed to me then, which I think has its influence on me even now, is purity of means. That was a positive contribution of Gandhiji towards philosophical thought. I read Gandhiji's 'Atma Charitra'

for the first time there. It had an impact. You see, Gandhiji's impact was not mere rejection of Gandhiji but acceptance of Gandhiji as the national leader. But these new ideas were no alternative to each other. Possibly they went along also in certain direction.

Sharma: But methods were also quite important; methods of Marx did not quite agree with Gandhian methods?

Chavan: Yes, but I do not think that there is any thing wrong in class struggle. I think, the interpretation of history that socialism gives is conflict of interests. People in power try to protect the interest of their class. This theory is basically sound. Even now I believe that happens. It is sound, but one has to be careful. Therefore, you cannot give all powers to the State. I do not believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat or any other dictatorship. But there is a point in this. History reveals that the ruling classes tried to protect the interests of their own class or people. So one has to be very watchful about this. Not that I wanted class struggle, but class struggle was inherent in the social life which existed all the time.

Sharma: You could not close your eyes to it.

Chavan: How you can do that, it was a reality and we had to accept it and then try to face it so far as possible. I did not agree with the Communist theory that only through class struggle everything would be solved.

I could not reach that state, though at a later stage in 1939-40, at the time of the Second World War, I was thinking of joining the Communist Party for some time. That is a different story altogether. These were the ideas that were developing in my mind.

Sharma: J.C. Kumarappa has defined Gandhism something like this: Communism minus violence is equal to Gandhism.

Chavan: This sort of definitions do not lead anywhere. Because in the ultimate analysis that may be so, but class struggle is inseparable from Marxism, and class struggle does not completely eschew violence, not that it necessarily means violence. With Gandhiji, non-violence is very important because it is linked with his ideas of ends and means. But in a struggle sometimes violence is imposed on the exploited people, not that they want it. I am not justifying violence, but sometimes it is inevitable. Therefore, Marxism and class struggle do not vouchsafe non-violence.

Sharma: Was Acharya Javadekar also there?

Chavan: No, Acharya Javadekar was not there. There were Acharya Javadekar's articles in jail. Javadekar and Acharya Bhagwat were very close friends and associates, in thinking also. So many times, Acharya Bhagwat used to tell us about Acharya Javadekar's thinking, about his book Adhunik Bharat in Marathi. I do not know how many people



know about it outside the Marathi-speaking areas.

Sharma: It has been translated into Hindi.

Chavan: It is an interesting book. The major contribution of the book is that it tries to develop a sort of synthesis between socialism and Gandhism as can be made applicable to the Indian conditions. This was the basis on which he was trying to interpret the historical developments and thought-process.

Sharma: It has been generally said that the young people, who went to jail in 1930, were quite critical of Gandhiji and did not see salvation through the Gandhian method.

Chavan: I do not think that that generalisation is correct. For example, I went to jail under the inspiration of Gandhiji and Nehru and the Congress, general patriotic influence. But we started later on critically examining things. I certainly disagreed with some of the theories of Gandhism. That did not mean that we had become anti-Gandhian as such. I can never accept that.

Sharma: For example, youngmen who came out from Nasik jail in 1933.

Chavan: In 1934, intellectual group which Jayaprakash Narayan had formed --the Congress Socialist Party --I was one of the persons who joined that. They were quite senior people. But I could not remain in that party for more than two years or so. I found that

they were too academic, bookish, urban type of people who, really speaking, did not understand the problems of the people. They just criticised and criticised, negative approach. So the Congress Socialist Party never made a deep impact on my mind. As an expression of my new awakening to the idea of socialism, I thought this could be the party with which I could work. This was not a separate party outside the Congress. This was also a point again to be noted. It was a group working within the Congress. There was no question of trying to seek an alternative but to give a new orientation to the Congress. This was the idea.

Later on, I joined the Royist group which was also a group within the Congress. I thought it had something much more positive to give than the CSP group. I had heard about Roy in jail in 1932. There were one or two people who used to get his letters from jail. They would show them to us. They used to explain his theory of socialism and constituent assembly and how the struggle of the Indian people should be made more scientific and radical. There was some sort of romantic effect of it.

Sharma: Were there any Royists there?

Chavan: A few Royists were there. H.R. Mahajani was one of them.

Sharma: In what other ways, did this jail term shape your personality? One is intellectual dimension.

Chavan: The other is the confirmation that it was not just by an accident that I went to jail and then forgot about it afterwards. It became a conviction with me that one would have to fight the struggle of independence till it was achieved, even if it was a life-long struggle. I became a confirmed freedom fighter emotionally and intellectually.

Sharma: How were the facilities in jail?

Chavan: I would say in the first three or four months jail life was rather very strict. We went to the Central Jail and from there we were transferred to the camp jail. Even there, for the first two or three months life was rather very strict. They wanted us to do chakki business, build roads, carry stones on head and do all sorts of hard work. I found after a few months, it became rather difficult for them to give us work because the number of freedom fighters was increasing very fast. So keeping discipline was the main problem for them. Then it was relaxed after three months. The latter part of the jail term in Visapur was also hard but the facilities for reading were available there.

Sharma: You could requisition books from outside?

Chavan: No, I could not do that because I had no contacts. But there were a large number of people from outside who used to send books. This was their

contribution to the movement, to supply reading material to the people in jail. So a large number of latest books used to reach there.

Sharma: What about food?

Chavan: Food was not very good in jail. It was substandard. But one gets used to it in course of time. Both in Visapur and Yeravda food was not good. But there was this relaxation in the atmosphere that we could play, read and have small group meetings.

Sharma: What kinds of games were provided to you?

Chavan: Well, they had not provided any games but we used to play our desi games like Kabbadi in that compound. In the daytime and even till 8 o'clock in the night, we could get out of the tents.

Sharma: Atapata?

Chavan: Atapata and hotutu. Then other games were there. We used to play caroms and cards. Facilities for all those games were available.

Sharma: It is said that in the 1932 movement you were responsible for issuing bulletins. Can you tell us what these bulletins contained and who assisted you in this work, financially and physically?

Chavan: Well, physical part of it, we were a group of students, we used to collect important material from news items and write it ourselves. There were some

student groups, who never came to jail, but collected material and kept these bulletins ready for us. There was a senior person named Raghunath Limaye who helped us a lot in these bulletins.

And about money part of it, we used to collect small amounts from merchants, who were very sympathetic to the national movement. We required very small amounts to purchase paper and ink. About one thousand copies were sufficient for us for distribution and pasting in the important locations of the town.

Sharma: Did you discern any change in the attitude of government officials towards the national movement in the early 1930s?

Chavan: I did not see much in 1932 though we saw a change in jail authorities somewhat for the better in the course of our jail term. But in the course of next ten years, i.e. in 1942, I saw a definite change in the attitude of the government.

Sharma: When you left the CSP, was there any immediate reason for it or you just got disillusioned?

Chavan: I got disillusioned. There was no reason and there was no complaint against anybody. The methods and the type of work that they were doing, did not appeal to me.

Sharma: Did your concept of socialism differ from their concept?

Chavan: Their concept was also evolving--not that they had a very well-defined concept of socialism. They were trying to paraphrase what Marx said about economic and social exploitation and how the struggle was to be carried on. Their main point was that Gandhiji's approach was inadequate and as such it had to be built up, though they were not personally critical of Gandhiji. But the group of people that was working for it and the manner in which their organisation functioned, gave me a feeling that I had no place in that.

Sharma: This was more intuitive than anything else?

Chavan: Yes, intuitive. There was no struggle or difference of opinion with any particular person or any complaint against any individual leader as such. But I realised that I would not be able to make much impact working with these people.

Sharma: The word 'socialism' has been used differently. And as Prof. C.M. Joad once said: "It is just like a hat which has lost its shape because everybody wears it." What was precisely your definition of socialism?

Chavan: Well, first, socialism as I understood at that time meant, equality of man. Secondly, the end of poverty and thirdly, the idea was that the motivation in the production must be changed. It must not be for

profit but for meeting the needs of the people.

Sharma: And it should be socially oriented?

Chavan: Yes, socially oriented. These were my three major conceptions of socialism as I understood at that time and in the course of time, I do not think I have changed much.

Sharma: You still abide by them?

Chavan: Still abide by them.

Sharma: Did you give some thought at that time to the methods also?

Chavan: I could not give any thinking to the methods, but I thought that we would have to fight, if necessary, by violent means. Not that I had any plan for violence, etc., but intellectually I was of opinion that there should not be any inhibition, if somebody imposed it. It was not individual terroristic violence that we were thinking about (not violence for violence sake). On the test of violence, non-violence looked to be rather doctrinaire. It was not a practical proposition, because when we read history of independence struggle at that time we thought that Gandhiji's giving up of struggle because of a violent incident at Chauri Chaura was rather an extreme step. That was my impression then. I am giving you an example of what I thought then and the reason there of.

Sharma: Did you give thought to this, that socialism of western type has to be amended to suit the Indian situation?

Chavan: I thought so. Because the Indian conditions were different and that concept came to me when I tried to understand Roy. He was trying to interpret the requirements of application of theory of socialism to India after examining the conditions in India. So that is an idea that socialism does not need to be of one single type to be imposed on each and every country.

Sharma: It could not be planted wholesale?

Chavan: No, you cannot do that. So naturally socialism that India needs has to be evolved with its own experience.

Sharma: Now, in that context, do you think that Gandhiji has given a new dimension to socialism?

Chavan: I think so. Now I feel that Gandhiji has given a new dimension to socialism. The criticism which I made in 1932 does not hold good now. I have been through much experience. Though he seemed to be very idealist, he was the most realist leader that India has ever produced. Gandhiji stands in a greater dimension before me today than even then. I am not a Gandhian, but I consider Gandhiji to be the greatest leader. He understood the psychology of the people and the strategy to be applied. The compromises that he made were not as a



strategy. He did it as a part of his intuition and whatever he thought right. But now in retrospect if one looks at it, his acceptance of the Pact with Irwin, his approach to 1942 movement, and the manner in which he treated the underground workers (with sympathy and understanding after his release) shows how realistic and practical he was. Some of his disciples, so called Gandhians, were rather very doctrinaire people, he was, a creative man.

Sharma: They were more Gandhian than Gandhiji himself.

Chavan: More Gandhian than Gandhiji himself. While we were in jail in 1942, they were highly critical of 1942 movement. But when Gandhiji came to Panchgani after his release in 1944, I along with my friends went to see him and he did not condemn them. He said that they were patriots.

Sharma: Do you mean to say that his various acts have stood the test of the time and he stands vindicated?

Chavan: Very much vindicated.

Sharma: Could you give us an idea about the strength of the CSP in Maharashtra and who were its leaders at the district and provincial level?

Chavan: Well, I would not be able to tell you about the strength at different levels in the districts. But I can tell you who were the leaders in my district and at the provincial level. The provincial level leaders

were Achyut Patwardhan, S.M. Joshi, N.G. Goray. These are the names I remember now of the leaders of the C.S.P. At the district level, this Limaye, as I have told you, was there. But he, along with others, also left that party after some time, because he was closer to the realities of the areas, so he came along with us. In different districts there were different leaders. In Poona, Shirubhau Limaye was there. I do not remember all the people at this length of time.

Sharma: What role did Atmaram Patil play in the politics of Satara and how did you organise his election campaign?

Chavan: Atmaram Patil was one of the very important peasant leaders that emerged after 1934 in my district. He was educated up to matriculation or so but he was very articulate. He had gone to jail many times and was receptive to new ideas. He became the leader of the young team of the rural workers of my district. I was one of them.

During those days, in elections the tradition was to choose candidates from among the class of rich people, leading lawyers, money-lenders, rich peasants or agriculturists who or whose families were known and well connected and who could spend a lot of money and could contribute to the party. When the time for election came in 1936, we said: No, this time we would need at least one man from our group, who represents the new movement of the Congress, the rural movement of the Congress. Our

district was one of the leading districts from where thousands of people had gone to jail. Hence, we wanted him to represent us. And this request was not acceded to easily.

So we had to start a campaign among our workers in the district, that we must have this man. We put some sort of pressure on our district leaders, but the district leaders were rather reluctant. So we had to go to the State leaders. Those were Jedhe, N.V. Gadgil and Shankarrao Deo. But they were more influenced by the district leaders than by us. We were new people. We had no social status of belonging to landed proprietor class or to highly respectable profession like that of lawyers. I was a college student at that time. I was doing my B.A. Ultimately, I had to go to Sardar Patel. You will be surprised to know that when the struggle started and we thought that the leaders were not supporting us, our team selected me to go and meet Sardar Patel because I was, amongst them, a more articulate person and a little courageous, who could go and meet anybody and talk. So I went and met Sardar Patel and explained to him the reasons behind our demand: This was a new phase in the Congress movement in our district and in the State. [So I said:] If you don't change the character and composition of candidates, you would be failing the people. He did not say yes or no, but he heard me for about ten minutes or so, and I think in spite of all pressure on

him at that time in Bombay, he must have put a word because after a week or so, when we met our district leaders and State leaders, their approach had changed. So I personally feel that Sardar Patel must have carried: Why not this man? It is very creditable for Sardar Patel.

Sharma: And he was Chairman of the Parliamentary Board.

Chavan: He was a very powerful man. It was surprising, when I wanted to meet Sardar Patel; he allowed me to meet him and heard me for ten/fifteen minutes although I was an unknown Congress worker in khadi gyjamas, coming from rural India.

Sharma: What impression did he make on you—the first impression?

Chavan: He was very impressive and willing to listen and understand a man.

Sharma: A man of few words.

Chavan: Very few words. But he listened to me, did not try to interrupt me or ask any counter questions. He asked some preliminary questions only like: What do you do? Where do you come from? Where were you in jail?

Sharma: Who constituted the district leadership?

Chavan: Bhausaheb Soman and D.K. Gosavi were important district leaders, who later became our great friends, especially mine. I respected them.

Bhausahib died later--in the 1950s, I think.

Then Atmaram Patil was also a district leader of the younger people. Some of us from his group were emerging as new leaders. This was a period of transition of district leadership after the election. They conceded the seat to us. They thought that we were bound to lose as we had no money or big name. But when the campaign started, they realised that we had the strength and Atmaram Patil received unprecedented votes at the poll. There were multi-member constituencies at that time. From each constituency four candidates used to be elected. One candidate from each constituency was not the policy then. So in my district there was one or two constituencies. In this constituency there were nearly five or six tahsils. Among the four persons elected, Atmaram Patil topped the poll. At that time, franchise was not adult franchise. It was restricted to property rights. Land revenue was the basis of the franchise at that time.

For election campaign we used to move on bicycles or in buses or by bullock-cart. There used to be yatras where we used to announce about the next meeting. We had to speak without any loudspeaker which was not easily available in those days. People used to throng in those meetings. At that time one party one symbol was not there.

Sharma:

I think they had coloured boxes.

Chavan: No, every individual member was supposed to have a symbol and Atmaram Patil had Hal as his symbol--it became a symbol of agriculturists. His success in the election established the rural leadership very firmly in Maharashtra because that was not only the experience of my district but of the whole State and of Pradesh Congress Committee also. A new type of leadership was emerging.

Sharma: This became a pace-setter.

Chavan: This became a pace-setter.

Sharma: And it affected other parts of Maharashtra also.

Chavan: It did. And simultaneously similar cases were happening in other districts also, but Atmaram Patil's case became somewhat symbolic for the State.

Sharma: How would you compare the elections at that time and in Independent India?

Chavan: There is no question of comparison. Atmaram Patil had no money, excepting the money that he paid as deposit. Even I would say in the first election which I fought in 1946, before Independence, I did not spend more than a thousand rupees. My deposit money was two hundred and fifty rupees. I spent about a hundred rupees, or two hundred rupees to meet contingencies while travelling during the election. I contributed rest

of the money to the District Congress Committee. Later on election expenses became a problem, and now it has become a huge affair.

Sharma: At that time sacrifice was the real asset.

Chavan: It was the real asset. It was independence movement versus imperialism. It was a demonstration of the will of the people for independence. That was the real type of movement, not a party contesting elections to get into power.

Sharma: Do you think there is decline in moral values...?

Chavan: Well, I do not know because that is rather a very high sounding subject. Elections, election practices, people's requirements have become different. Nowadays one has to go and meet the people and talk to them for that one needs transport. Intensive propaganda is to be done.

Sharma: I think this is a question of questions. Why the people who led the independence movement and whom the people trusted immensely have changed? This is not a question of A.B.C, but the general attitude of the people towards political workers is one of suspicion. Why has it come about?

Chavan: It has come because in 1946, when we fought the election on behalf of the party, though we

formed the Government, it was to fight the imperialist power. Later, it became a question of sharing power. So the values changed. I think that happens in every country. It is not an exception in India. I would say, in India it happened rather early.

Sharma: But it is a steep decline.

Chavan: It is, I do admit.

Sharma: One may say that tyagis have become bhogis.

Chavan: I would say that is the process.

Sharma: Did you mastermind any technique in Atmaram Patil's election?

Chavan: It is not masterminding, but there was a keen interest in my mind to work for him. I was prepared to go to the people by any means and talk to them about our symbol. Some different methods were practiced in other parts of the district also. As I could not cover the whole district, I started in my own way. I had allotted one tahsil for me and started working. I prepared the young people in the village, telling them about the new role of the Congress, new leadership that was coming up in the districts and its significance. The young people took up the election in their own hands. Normally otherwise, the 'establishment' in every village used to guide the election. But this time we started organising the younger people who had no orientation of



self-interest in the election. Because in those days, the so-called leaders, who belonged to the propertied class, supported the Government or the Government-party, used to spend money, keep the voters on previous night at some place. They were also fighting against us. But we had no means to do these things. Therefore, we had to mobilise people's support for election.

Sharma: You made up that with your work.

Chavan: With hard work. I was one of them. One very important part of the campaign was to get Congress ticket for Atmaram Patil and get him accepted as a Congress candidate. The second part was to campaign against the old established leadership in the rural areas, and it took quite some time. In that also, I had played a very important role.

Sharma: Did he play an active role in the Assembly after his election?

Chavan: Yes, he did in his own way. I would not say it was a very prominent role, but he did play a role.

Sharma: Now, do you think that 1937 is a kind of watershed in the politics of Maharashtra in the sense, as you said, that a new leadership took over? On the one hand, it put an end to Brahmin ascendancy and on the other it also put an end to the elitist control over politics. Did this trend start from 1937 or a little later?

Chavan: I should say, the process had started

in 1930. With a large number of rural people participating in the movement, it changed the character of the movement. It changed the composition of the movement, numerically, quantitatively and qualitatively. People from the rural areas used to go and address public meetings in their own language and style and it had some impact. Though the people going from cities thought that they were the only people who could go and talk to the people about the independence movement. In this way, a very articulate leadership started coming up for the purpose of the movement in rural areas. So watershed was not that year. It was a transitional period, I would say, from 1930 to 1937. The year 1937 proved it by election.

Sharma: My point was that though in the sense of participation the trend had changed, but still the masses or their leaders were not able to hold the levers of powers, or I put it differently, the corridors of power were still closed to them. They were opened only in 1937.

Chavan: Yes, in that sense, yes, one can say. It was not completely open to them even then, but the 1937 elections gave them confidence that they could do that. In that sense, if you want to call it a watershed, you can call it.

Sharma: What were your subjects in B.A.?

Chavan: I was a student of history and economics. I was not a very regular student in my college

life. I practically attended college through proxy. Most of the time I worked in my district, went to college for the last few months, prepared for the examination and got through.

Sharma: Mr . Chavan, you were present at the historic A.I.C.C. session in Bombay. Could you recapitulate the atmosphere?

Chavan: I remember very well the historic session. It is just as fresh as if it happened last month. The most important person who made impact was naturally Gandhiji because he had already given the slogan of 'Quit India'. So all eyes and ears were eager to see and hear him. Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru also played a very important role. Maulana Sahib made a very beautiful speech summing up the political situation of that time. It was one of the best speeches that I have heard. Of course, we were unable to follow some of the expressions of the Urdu language for which we had to take help of somebody else. So with Pandit Nehru, who was popular all the time, there is no doubt about it. There was a feeling that Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi had some differences. So we all were watching it with anxiety and curiosity as to what was happening.

The most important thing that I remember in detail was the speech that Mahatma Gandhi delivered after the resolution was passed. Some of the sentences he uttered were historic at any time of human

struggle of any country. He said: Every one of you should from this moment onwards consider yourself a free man or woman and act as if you are free... I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom.... We shall either have a free India or die in the attempt. I tell you, they were such dramatic, hypnotic words, though he was speaking very slowly and softly. We were sitting somewhere at the back of the pandal and practically we strained our ears to listen to him. And people got the message that though the leaders might not be there to issue instructions they should work out their own programmes and fight. This was the last struggle to be fought.

Sharma: "Do or die"?

Chavan: Yes, he said: "Do or die" . This message was of the supreme importance for the whole A.I.C. apart from its proceedings and passing of resolutions.

Sharma: In the Congress leadership, as you rightly said, there was a difference of opinion. Panditji was not for launching the struggle and so were many others. Was there any such feeling in Maharashtra also among the leaders?

Chavan: Well, at least, I have not come across such feelings. But there was a general feeling, that something historic was going to happen in the A.I.C.C. session. And I went with my group to Bombay. We were there on 7, 8 and 9 August, when the leaders were arrested and the whole city of Bombay was protesting against this repression.

Sharma: Were you a delegate?

Chavan: I was not a delegate. I was not a member of the A.I.C.C. But I had gone just to watch the proceedings, to get the first-hand impressions of the session which was going to be a historic session.

Sharma: Did the arrest of the leaders come as a surprise?

Chavan: It did. It did in the sense that they were not expecting that they would be arrested so soon, might be in a day or two. But that very night they promptly acted and arrested the leaders. People reacted spontaneously and most sharply against repression.

Sharma: The arrests did not depress the people?

Chavan: The people were angry. There was no question of depression. They were in a fighting mood. They said: A challenge has been given and it must be taken. It was the beginning of the fight. That was how it was taken.

Sharma: After the arrest of the leaders, there was an underground A.I.C.C. meeting in which Sadiq Ali, Dr. Lohia, Suchetaji and a few others participated. Were you in touch with them?

Chavan: No, I was not in touch with them. But the general feeling was there that this time we were not going to court arrest. We had no idea about the A.I.C.C.

meeting or where they met. I do not know even now. And that they gave the message which was carried on, was not a very correct thing. The people had taken their own decisions. That atmosphere was there. We, for example, about ten/fifteen people of my district met there. We went round the streets of Bombay to see the atmosphere of resistance. We did not participate but watched the crowd as outsiders. We just wanted to see what the spirit of resistance was like. In our meeting we discussed that since the leaders had been arrested promptly by the Government, they must have plans to arrest other people down to the district level. So this time we did not follow the usual technique of going to jail and surrendering ourselves. We decided that though we had come in groups, but we would not go back in groups, we would go separately, so that we did not get arrested. This decision was taken spontaneously by our group.

Sharma: Who were the others with you?

Chavan: Well, K.D. Patil, Chandru Patil and Shantaram Inamdar were with me. So according to our plan, we stayed for one day more. Normally, from Bombay to Poona, we used to go by train and from Poona to Karad by bus. But this time, I made it reverse. I went by bus from Bombay to Poona and from Poona to Karad by train. But I got down at an earlier station before Karad and walked down to the village. I stayed there with a friend of mine for a day and asked him to get workers. I started working. I told

them that this time we were not going to jail. We would have to be careful and plan some action. And this was how the whole thing started. We started meeting in different groups and an organisation developed.

Sharma: Were you incognito during this period?

Chavan: Well, I do not think in the early stages I was incognito, but I was not going openly on the roads of villages and towns. But not that I had changed my dress or anything. I was keeping my movements rather secret, but at the same time was calling meetings of the workers. There was a little freedom for the first fifteen days. The people were more enthusiastic and the police was not that alert. So we started working on an organisation and decided our next step. Kisan Veer was one of our very important leaders. I wanted to get in touch with him. So I went to his village which was about fifty miles away from my hometown. I just sent word that we should have a meeting. So our people in the village gathered, about 800 or 1,000 villagers. In that meeting, I told them about our new programme. I gave my impressions of the A.I.C.C. session and the purpose of the new movement. "Do or die" was our slogan. We were not going to court arrest. We just talked on those lines. Then with the cooperation of spirited volunteers, we started the publication of bulletins. The third important thing that we decided was to organise morchas of people and take them to tahsil catcherys. The idea was to demonstrate

and capture the citadels of power. Then with some of the taluka leaders, we organised these morchas. This was the first organised attempt of people's resistance.

Sharma: Were you able to capture some?

Chavan: The idea was not to capture in that sense, but to capture symbolically. In one instance we certainly did, but I was not there. The people went there and asked the Mamladar to put the flag on the cutcherry and he did it. It had such a powerful impact. But the district administration reacted to this incident very sharply. I still remember one morcha in my town. Our people went there, demonstrated and put a tricolour flag. We did not follow the same technique of asking the Mamladar to put the flag. On the same day other morchas were organised in Karad, Patan. And they went on peacefully. But on the second round, at Vaduj and Islampur police became very tough. At Vaduj, police opened fire on one such morcha and nine persons were killed. After this firing, they started repression in a much more comprehensive and ruthless way.

Then the second stage, of going underground, living incognito, changing one's dress, if possible, making movements in a secretive manner came. But, still then, we were moving outside practically with the people's support. I used to go and stay in a village with a friend of mine and used to go out in the fields to sleep. We kept it rather secret. That was how the whole thing



worked. And the support of the people was so spontaneous that remaining underground in a village was very simple. Everyone knew that we were in the village, but they also knew that it was their responsibility to protect us. If they saw any new face or unknown person, they immediately used to send a message. From mouth to mouth the message used to reach us. When people got interested and involved themselves in such a resistance movement, one can very well realise the atmosphere. It was rather time to live through again I feel like that.

Sharma: And police during this time was sympathetic?

Chavan: In earlier period, they were sympathetic. But after this firing, the administration became more tough though they also got little frightened. I felt at times that some of them knew where we were but they remained inactive. But after this firing, repression came into force a little more. They started attacking the properties of the people who were underground, they issued notification prizes were announced on the heads of the leading people. One thousand rupees was the prize on my head. This started after September 1942 and from October onwards the things became rather tough. A large number of people were arrested. In December and January they became terribly tough. In December, they arrested my brother Ganpatrao. as I was in touch with him, although he was not directly involved in the movement.

Sharma: To pressurise him.

Chavan: To pressurise him and pressurise me. In January, they arrested my wife, Venutai. I had married in June 1942 and the movement started in August. So she was a new member in my family and was quite unused to this sort of thing. She was from a well-to-do family and had nothing to do with these patriotic movements, etc. She was arrested a day before Sankranti. Sankranti is considered to be very important for newly-married Bahus. My mother and my eldest brother were there. So my mother took it rather very badly. She was not prepared to allow her to go with the police. But then some people came and persuaded her not to do that. Otherwise, she was in a mood to resist the police.

Sharma: When did your mother pass away?

Chavan: She passed away during Indo-Pakistan conflict in 1965. She died in Bombay. She saw me become Chief Minister and Defence Minister.

Sharma: Then your wife was kept in jail for some time?

Chavan: For about six weeks in a lockup, interrogating her in a rude way. They were trying to find out whether she knew my whereabouts and my contacts. Then I do not know why they released her some time in the end of February.

Sharma: You mean to say, they tried to exploi

family relationships?

Chavan: Very much so. One of my nephews in the meanwhile was also arrested and was treated very badly while he was in police custody. He was a schoolboy. He had participated in the sabotage movement and had joined in an attack on a railway station, where the police arms were taken away by the freedom fighters.

Sharma: Now, leaders like Nana Patil and Pandu Master....

Chavan: I had met Pandu Master and Nana Patil once, that too at an early stage; but later on I had no contacts with him. Kisan Veer was a great friend of mine. We had started participating in the movement together, but he was arrested. But within two or three months, he escaped from the jail. Then he remained out to lead the Patri Sarkar movement, which of course is associated with Nana Patil and Kisan Veer more. Veer was a very important leader of the movement. When I was outside, it was my duty to see that he was well received and acquainted him with the latest developments.

It became rather difficult sometimes to live in the district because the Police pressure was mounting. I went to Bombay, Poona and got in touch with leaders. The only leader who kept in touch with us was Anna Sahib Sahasrabudhe. He used to tour the districts and meet us and talk to us. I met him in Bombay. I met S.M. Joshi and Nana Sahib Goray once. Though I wanted to meet

Achyut Patwardhan I failed. The only national leader I met in Bombay was Dr Lohia, because it was easy to meet him. He was a very nice, friendly and fearless person. He was not very much worried about his safety.

Sharma: What did you discuss with him?

Chavan: I told him about the activities in the districts, which he encouraged.

Sharma: Your first impression of him was rather favourable?

Chavan: Very favourable because meeting a man of his stature in those difficult days was rather impressive. He was the only national leader, I had contacts in Bombay.

Sharma: I remember your last tribute to him at the electric crematorium. I was one of those who listened to you there.

Chavan: I was impressed by the man's sympathy, friendship, comradeship and simplicity--not that sort of air of being an underground leader.

Sharma: How did you manage your finances?

Chavan: Well, people gave money. We did not need much finances, as a matter of fact. We were fed by the people. They gave us transport also whenever we wanted. Sometimes we went by a bullock-cart or a motor-cycle. Mostly we travelled on foot. The question of finances came

when bulletins were to be published or some families were to be looked after. In some families earning members had been arrested. So we had to spend from twenty-five to forty rupees and that we used to collect from the people.

Sharma: But you were not getting any help from the Central Directorate?

Chavan: No, at least I did not get.

Sharma: At that time, if you remember, Kishorelal-bhai had made a distinction between violence to life and violence to property. Did you observe such a distinction?

Chavan: I tried to. I think it is in government records. Somebody who was looking into the records told me about this a few months ago. I was following this technique that sabotage yes, against government property, not against human life. This was something which emerged as a result of our discussion with our friends. There was one comrade of mine named Dr Sohani, who was working in another district. As I was leading the district movement, I wrote a letter to him, in which I said: We will have to observe these two limitations, if sabotage will have to be done first, we must not hurt any human life; secondly, we must not take any private property. We should attack public property and government property only. And Dr Sohani felt this letter to be very important. So with that letter he was travelling at night in a train when he was

arrested. So this letter is in record somewhere. I was consciously trying to convey this to friends. When I hear that this letter is there, I was rather pleasantly surprised and I said: My memory is still good.

Sharma: That means, people independently came to this conclusion?

Chavan: There were certain practical difficulties about it. They would say: Take private property. Then people would start stealing things from everybody. And I was afraid that if we did not take care of human life the people would start taking private issues, exploiting this for political purposes, and there would be division amongst them. This was the reality of that time. But this was changed when the Patri Sarkar movement came.

Sharma: Could you tell us whether the operations under you and your friends in Maharashtra had any revolutionary philosophy behind it or were these stray acts of violence only?

Chavan: No, it was not merely violence for violence sake. It was a revolutionary resistance movement to weaken the Government when it was engaged in war effort. We wanted to weaken it and see that the administration collapsed. That was the basic political approach behind it.

Sharma: The technique was also....

Chavan: Technique developed. I was arrested in May 1943, That is one chapter of the movement. After that, the Patri Sarkar movement in Satara became violent. I was not a participant in that movement. What happened later on was that, the Government started to find its own base in the villages and towns. So those who were depending on the Government, started giving information and acted under the pressure of the Government. So it was necessary to create some sort of fear in their mind. Then they thought that it was better because people who gained more, were under the influence of the pro-Government elements. So our people started enforcing prohibition and brought it about in large areas. There were many centres where liquor used to be produced.

That was the tradition in our area. If they found that anybody was doing that, they used to go and beat him. The Patri Sarkar's orders were largely obeyed. So there was an atmosphere of fear. Those who gave information to the Government were traitors to the resistance movement. So they were to be punished. The goondas or exploiters in the villages used to be prosecuted. This was their programme.

Sharma: They gave a kind of rough and ready justice.

Chavan: That is right. If they knew that somebody was doing injustice to the poor people, they used to ask for explanation from him. If explanation wa

not satisfactory, they would punish him.

Sharma: And there was the Prati Sarkar also?

Chavan: I do not know why it was called like that. The idea was to create a parallel authority or Government. It was called Prati Sarkar. It was an old fashion in my district to beat a person in such a way that no proof was found. They used to beat him on the soles. And this was known as given patri to the man. Patri is a sort of nail which is put on to hoof of horse or bullock. Marathi it is called patri. It became popularly known as the Patri Sarkar.

Sharma: How were you arrested in 1943?

Chavan: In 1943, when I was away my elder brother died. My wife was in jail. And it had shocked her and she used to get fits, which later became a psychological case. So she was in her parent's house. When I was in Poona, somebody told me that she was on the deathbed. I do not know why, but I felt that I had done injustice to her. Within one and a half months of marriage, I was separated from her. She went to jail, but I did not inquire about her. Now my elder brother was no more. The other elder brother was still in jail. She was released because she started getting fits in jail. And my parents-in-law were also not there, but my younger brother-in-law and her auntie were there who took her to her parents home. When I got this news that even in that family there was



nobody to look after her, in a weak moment I decided to go and see her. I managed a friend's car from Poona and left for Phaltan. But what happened on the way, the motor-car got punctured and instead of reaching early in the night, we reached late at night, practically early in the morning. So I had no alternative but to stay there for the whole day. It went against my entire plan of meeting her and leaving her in the very early morning. While I was sitting beside my ailing young wife, some people could guess my presence there. Later on somebody staying there betrayed. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the police came and arrested me.

Sharma: Where were you lodged in?

Chavan: I was in a lockup for some time till the prosecution started. I was convicted and sent to Yeravda. Though they tried but could not find any serious charge against me. So they prosecuted me for a speech I had delivered at some place and sentenced me only to six months. I was released after six months. After my release they realised that by mistake I was released. So they again arrested me and put me under detention. After my arrest, they didn't think necessary to keep pressure on my elder brother who was in jail and had developed T.B. So he was released. In the beginning of 1945, I also came out on parole to look after him. By that time movement had somewhat relapsed.