Swaraj under a Cloud?
by Hargopal Singh

India was ‘granted full self-government’ under the Independence Act 1947 passed by the British Parliament and assented to by King George VI during the Labour Party Government led by Prime Minister Clement Attlee. The hard fact, however, is that India wrested Swaraj—the goal set by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and further propounded and pursued by Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi—from British imperialism. Both of them were outstanding leaders of the Indian National Congress, although differing in their approach towards the aim. (Incidentally, Swaraj is much more comprehensive than Independence or Swadhinata. 15th August should be Swaraj Divas and 26th January should be called Sanvidhan Divas.)

The British imperialist-colonial power did not concede Swaraj as a charity to us nor did it offer it on a platter, so to say. It was the cumulative result of numerous political battles and movements spanning over several generations. No one can claim exclusive credit for this glorious achievement of the Indian people as a whole. But that is a different story and by no means of lesser importance. Immediately after taking over the interim government, headed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, faced formidable tasks. The social and economic fabric of the country was totally disrupted concomitant of the partition of the Indian subcontinent into two dominions of India and Pakistan. Having tackled the problem of Hindu-Muslim riots and resettlement of the displaced migrants from Pakistan, India moved ahead to rebuild itself from a scratch. Initially it was not treated as a one-party affair and Jawaharlal Nehru himself included in his Cabinet some men of eminence from other organisations also. There were Dr Ambedkar from the Scheduled Caste Federation, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee from the Hindu Mahasabha and Sardar Baldev Singh from the Panthik Party, among others. It had fallen upon Jawaharlal Nehru to translate into deeds the promises made during the Indian national movement. The Indian National Congress, of which he was one of the pillars, had laid down its policies and programmes through various resolutions. It had even undertaken them in the provinces where it was in power after the implementation of Government of India Act 1935.

It was duly realised quite early in the day that Swaraj was vulnerable to imperialist interference. The USA had become the dominant power after the end of World War II. For India US imperialism replaced the British. To outwit everybody, Jawaharlal Nehru visited the USA as early as October–November 1949 to establish friendly ties between the two countries. This diplomatic gesture was primarily to strike a balance between the Indian Government’s relations with the USA and the then USSR. Nehru’s bias towards the USSR was well known by then. It was necessitated by the obtaining international situation. The world then was divided into two military camps—one led by the USA and the other by the USSR.

The first priority before the ruling Indian National Congress and the Indian Government was to prepare the necessary conditions for the fortification and consolidation of Swaraj. Laying the foundations for economic independence was the first step. As a matter of fact re-construction of India and protection of Swaraj were considered intertwined right from the beginning. The Planning Commission, with Nehru as its Chairman, had started functioning in 1950 itself. Programmes of agrarian reforms and industrialisation were taken up even before the elected governments in the States and at the Centre were installed. The Constitution of India was promulgated on January 26, 1950 and the first general elections under it were held in 1952.

During the last sixtyfive years the country has completed eleven Five-year Plans and is in the midst of the twelfth one. It has the experience of various governments.
There is hardly any party which has not tasted power—both at the Centre and in the States. It has witnessed devastations through wars, floods, droughts, riots, violent agitations and other disruptions. It has wrestled with separatism also. In other words, there have been very few years when there was uninterrupted flow of life in general. Most of the period has been of tumult and upheavals. In spite of all this, the country’s face has changed beyond recognition. There is definitely the growth of the economy and the path of development has been dominated by imperialism and capitalism. That is surely the reason why the essence of the social structure remains not only intact but in certain respects it has strengthened. Not only are the old hierarchies persisting, but new ones have come up. The establishment of an egalitarian society has been relegated to the background. The word “Socialist”, included in the Preamble of the Constitution of India during Indira Gandhi’s regime, has been completely forgotten. Social and economic justice seems to have lost its meaning. Police repression has become the order of the day.

One thing, however, is certainly clear: India as a country has become a force to be reckoned with. Its racing towards becoming an economic power is not merely a dream. Its ranking among the nuclear powers is no mean achievement. At the same time a general impression has gained ground that Swaraj is being sapped from within and US interference in our policies has tremendously increased in recent times. The frequency of US Secretaries and others’ visits to India has gone up as also our Ministers’ to the US. There seems to be day-to-day consultations with regard to joint participations. The World Bank, IMF, WTO and MNCs are most common words in our vocabulary. Certainly Swaraj or Self-Rule, Independence or Swadhinata are under a cloud.

However, India does stand up and speaks its mind. The latest example is in the case of Syria where it has maintained its independent stand. Even the NDA Government had refused to send Indian forces to Iraq as desired by the US. All the successive governments have asserted at one time or the other, although walking on a tight rope.

For Mahatma Gandhi the attainment of Swaraj was the immediate goal and the establishment of Ramraj was the ultimate one. In the present context—making of India into a nation remains the primary goal which is the yet far off. Actually Swaraj and Nation make one continuum. It is through consolidating Swaraj can India march towards becoming a Nation. The nation–making can’t be left to the vagaries of imperialism. It needs an all–embracing approach in all matters, economic, political, social, cultural and human. It has to cater to the interests of all. Alienating those who are the real producers of national wealth cannot help building a Nation. It is another matter how nation–building has to lead towards establishing a society as envisioned by all those who took part in the great Indian national movement.