

Mahatma Gandhi

By PERCIVAL SPEAR

SINCE this year marks the centenary of Gandhi's birth, there will be many appraisements of him. It therefore seems fitting to look at his work as a whole, and not consider him simply as a politician.

At first sight, it might seem a misnomer to connect the name of Gandhi with contemporary politics in India. For if Jawaharlal Nehru can be described as the forgotten man of modern India, Gandhi can be described as the discarded man. In political circles in India today, much criticism may be heard of Nehru, but there is scarcely a mention of Gandhi. Not even Congress magnates in their immaculate khaddar *dhotis* and Gandhi caps can spare him a thought. His following is a sect whose members sit quietly in *ashrams* or wander the countryside; their leaders like Jai Prakash Narayan and Vinoba Bhave, voices crying in the wilderness, being the less regarded the more they are respected.

In this atmosphere of deflation, it is inevitable that the question should be asked: did Gandhi's existence make any real difference to the national movement? Would not developments have been much the same, at least in the long run, without him? Could not Gandhi's significance be compared with Tolstoy's view of Napoleon, as a plaything of world forces to be tossed aside as soon as he pitted his military genius and personal will against the *zeitgeist*? Similar, it could be said, was the fate of Gandhi's non-violence and soul-force as soon as Indian conditions changed. From reverence India passed to lip-service, then neglect and finally contempt. His *samadhi* stone is strewn with flowers, his library nearby unvisited. In becoming divine he ceased to be a mortal leader.

If there had been no Gandhi it would be a reasonable assumption that Tilak would have retained his hold over Congress until his death in August 1920. There would have been no non-cooperation movement and 'responsive cooperation' would have been Congress policy. The Montagu-Chelmsford constitution would certainly have had an easier passage in its early years. But what then? There would certainly have been a struggle for the leadership, for Tilak left no obvious successor. There would certainly have been a revived communalism, for Gandhi was a reconciling rather than provocative force. The tendency for a division between constitutionalists and direct actionists would have existed just the same, with the same economic, ideological and psychological forces operating to accentuate it. Therefore the crisis at the end

of the nineteen-twenties would have occurred in any case. In the absence of Gandhi it would probably have occurred in a much more acute form, and would almost certainly have led to an open breach between the two Congress wings. The direct actionists would have broken away under Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose; the right wingers like Motilal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and the Patels, would have repudiated them. The right wing would have moved nearer the Mahasabha and the left wing to the Socialists and Communists. The left wing would almost certainly have had an open and violent clash with the Government and would certainly have been severely repressed. Progress towards self-government would have been indefinitely held up. What is more, violence would have been introduced into public life, and the passions which smoulder beneath the smooth surface of Indian life would have been directed against the British. The picture of India during the Second World War would have been very different; the end of the British rule would have been violent, confused and bloody. And after that, dictatorship and division would have been India's lot.

It is often not realized that Gandhi's role as a reconciler was not mainly between the Indians and the British. Indeed, in this respect, he often acted as a *provocateur*. What struggle could have been more openly, one might almost say brazenly, provoked than the 1930 Civil Disobedience movement with its march to Dandi or the 1942 clash with the declaration, 'of course this is open rebellion'? Or what tactics could be more provoking than those adopted for salt-making? Gandhi's real mission as a peacemaker was as between the two wings of Congress. He provided, with his mystique and his appeal to the peoples of India, an arched bridge between the two factions which at its apex entered a new dimension. Through this 'cloud of unknowing', as it were, he drew leaders of both groups, to and fro, so that the young Nehru was mesmerized into accepting conservative leadership and the Congress stalwarts induced to tolerate Nehru as Congress President. When Bose refused to be mesmerized in his turn, he was firmly pushed off the bridge into the waters of political oblivion below.

It was not only Gandhi's part as a peacemaker which influenced the course of events. There was also the matter of his *mystique*. Such things are notoriously difficult to describe and to assess. They are still more difficult to prove by documentation. For in such a case you have to consider not only the sayings of the man himself and their validity in themselves, but their effect on the minds and feelings of others. And these effects are often irrational, because they consist in part at least of responses from deep-rooted instincts rather than in rational analyses or

cool calculations of self interest, individual or collective. Here, I think, is the place for a type of evidence which can, when all allowances are made, be a useful auxiliary to the more formal official and private documentary sources. We need to know, in a given situation, not only what A said and B did, what was the population, the caste relationships and the level of imports and exports, but what feelings were stirred up by C and how D, E and F reacted to them. On this treacherous ground you cannot rely on personal statements, for people can rarely describe or explain their own feelings satisfactorily. But you can report how other people felt and what action it induced in them. You can become aware of the feeling in others and report it objectively. I will give an example of what I mean. As an observer at the time, I know that the middle class in northern India in general welcomed warmly the Irwin declaration about Dominion Status of October 1929. It seemed to them to open a way for peaceful progress. They hoped for an accommodation between Congress and Government. They were alarmed and despondent at the prospect of a conflict as determined by Congress early in 1930. But within two months of the march to Dandi the situation was so tense and feelings were so high that a newcomer might well have described it as a revolutionary situation. Yet neither of these features is fully brought out in the ample documentation of these events which exists.

The explanation for such changes of feeling lies with this question of Gandhi's appeal, to which we must now return. However difficult the task of describing it, the attempt must be made. Gandhi raised his Hinduism to another dimension where it transcended all caste and in which he was able to apply Hindu concepts to all the situations of life. He did not apply a veneer of Hindu sentiment to twentieth-century life like silver to a baser metal. He connected the deep springs of Hindu feeling to the field of Hindu society and so brought fresh life to a society pronounced by generations of observers to be moribund. He did not so much oppose caste as by-pass it. For the individual he provided a *marga* or a way with his ethics of *ahimsa* or non-violence, later developed into the full doctrine of *satya* or truth. For the rest, he drew on the deeper Hindu feelings and channelled them into the modern Indian situation. The Hindu instinct for worship or veneration he provided for in his own person. And this he did not do by donning the saffron robe of the *sannyasi*, in other words by being professionally holy. He drew this feeling by the secular and quite modern method of identification with the poor. The Gandhi cap was a prison badge and the loin cloth a peasant's garb. He took the concept of renunciation, which

confers power, and through the example of fasts and abstinences, diverted it to the training of his political and social *corps d'élite*, the *satyagrahis*. Then he extended it to the country at large as a justification for imprisonment and hardship. The nation, which he personalized as the Mother, must suffer to be free. Suffering confers spiritual strength; suffering is holy; therefore the national struggle was holy, and in partaking of it, everyone was performing acceptable *dharma*.

He used the same method with non-violence. Non-violence or *ahimsa* has never been an essential ingredient in Hinduism from the days of the Vedic Aryans downwards. But at least from the time of Mahavira and the Buddha, it has been an important strand in the texture of Hindu thought. To use a western theological expression, it was a work of supererogation, something meritorious without being obligatory (except for kshatriyas, for whom it would be a breach of their *dharma*). It was something whose practice conferred merit, while its neglect did not involve guilt. In bringing non-violence into public life, Gandhi was therefore drawing on deep wells of Hindu moral and religious feeling and of self-approbation. In practising non-violence, the demonstrator was not merely making, as in the west, a rational calculation that a strike or a demonstration may be a more effective and economical method of achieving one's ends than a riot. He felt that the action put him on a higher moral plane than his opponents, that it linked him with the gods as it were. It gave the Congress supporters the feeling of rightness, of acting within the magic circle of *dharma*, a feeling which is as important for the Hindu as for the Englishman. Gandhi thus made anti-government action a religious act, not with the violence of the Islamic *jihad*, but in a more subtle way, which could not be brought within the range of governmental ordinances or law courts. Opponents, as it were, were placed without the camp, in moral outer darkness or at least twilight; they were political *mlechchas* or outcasts.

Gandhi further used the Hindu sense of rejection as a moral basis for non-cooperation. There are things in the traditional Hindu world that wound the spirit so deeply that the only thing to do is to withdraw from them. This is the basis of one type of fasting or inability to take food, of the *hartal* which has moral overtones quite lacking in the strike, and of sitting *dharma*, the awkward procedure of appealing to your opponent's conscience by fasting on his doorstep. This was a reason why any police action at the time of a *hartal* was considered odious, and why they could so easily be branded as moral barbarians.

In sum, Gandhi revived for, or drew out from the people at large the concept that has always been cherished in high-caste circles, that

the Hindus were a peculiar people and that between them and the outer world was a great gulf fixed. When we remember that in the heyday of the Victorian Age it was to the Europeans that both thoughtful Hindus and Muslims looked for moral leadership, this was a transformation indeed. With this concept went a sense of mission or fulfilment, a dynamic which is a necessary ingredient of all successful movements. Any creative minority must have something of this if it is to persuade the majority that its cause is imperative as well as just. This was something which all previous leaders lacked to the same degree. Surendranath Banerjea grew nervous whenever definite action was urged; Gokhale had a sense of mission indeed, but it was confined to the small westernized group and expressed in their terms; it was thus insulated against the masses. Tilak had more mass appeal but it was local both as to space and class. His sardonic negatives and appeals to prejudice and passion were in their turn, from an all-India point of view, insulated by his Brahminical background. Non-Marathas could not appreciate Tilak's praises of Śivaji. Muslims disliked his description of General Afzal Khan's murder by Śivaji as a patriotic act. Sapru, with all his dedication and controlled patriotic passion, was withdrawn from the people and even from his own kind. As for Motilal Nehru, with his spotless *khaddar*, he deceived no one into thinking him a son of the people.

With whatever precise terms Gandhi's influence on the masses be described it seems clear that this sort of contact at this time could not have been achieved without him.

Let us now turn to Gandhi's record as a politician or statesman. As to his ability and craft as a politician there has never been any question. Indeed there were those, especially harassed officials or exasperated business men, who considered that he was all shuffles and shuffles and that the rest of his activities and professions were self deception or worse. I can see no ground for this opinion, looking at his record as a whole. It amounts to saying that he was a cleverer politician than his rivals, and leaves out of account the controlled circle of ideas in which he moved. Without those ideas, he would not have moved at all in the direction he took but would merely have been a very clever manipulator in the power game. The fact that he often seemed to move in zigzags does not alter the further fact that he moved overall in a definite direction, towards an impersonal goal.

In this sphere Gandhi had to deal with three major groups, the Indian National Congress itself, the Muslims, and the British government. Let us look at his dealings with each in turn. In the case of the Congress he

had first to gain control of it. He only returned to India in early 1915 as a disciple of Gokhale. Until the end of the First World War he was simply one of several leaders, one who actually made recruiting speeches for the British government and only otherwise distinguished himself by a short campaign on behalf of indigo peasants in Bihar. Tilak held the field in national politics after the death of Gokhale, dominating the congress and attracting the Muslims with the Lucknow Pact of 1916. His first task was therefore to oust the apparently unchallengeable Tilak. His chance came with the passing of the Rowlatt bills and the Amritsar shooting of early 1919. Here were issues on which he could appeal to the universal Hindu conscience in a way in which the cynical realism of Tilak could never do. His second chance came with the Muslim Khilafat movement. Tilak regarded it, with some reason, as unrealistic and no concern of India.¹ But Gandhi could enter into popular Muslim feelings as he could those of the Hindus. On this basis he was able to forge a Hindu–Muslim alliance which enabled him to launch, within a few months, the Non-cooperation Movement against the government in 1920–22. I am sure Gandhi had no thought of the possibility of such a movement less than a year before it was launched. Here was the characteristic Gandhi mark—skilful opportunism set in a deep appreciation of major political issues and objectives. Tilak escaped political oblivion by death. It is difficult to say that at any one point he was deliberately undermined by Gandhi; Gandhi just drew the limelight and attracted popular sentiment to himself.

By the time of his arrest and the collapse of the movement in early 1922, he had become such a powerful figure buoyed up with the veneration and the vague aspirations of millions, that he was bound to remain a major force for the rest of his life. It is here that we come across the next of his characteristics, the periodical retirement. Released from prison in 1924, he staged a come-back by means of a communal fast—something beyond Tilak's understanding—and then retired to his *ashram* to work for the untouchables whom he christened Harijans, Children of God,—not even, as he was fond of saying later, a four-anna member of Congress. Others, besides people of Tilak's outlook, misunderstood this move. It was from this time that one heard, from optimists like British newspaper correspondents, that Gandhi had 'shot his bolt'. In fact, these periodical retirements were on a pattern of withdrawal for return, rather akin to Gladstone's retirement in the eighteen-seventies. Gandhi had no intention of permanent withdrawal

¹ Gopal Krishna, 'The Khilafat Movement in India: The first phase', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Parts 1 and 2, 1968, pp. 42, 53.

at any time. He waited on events, for public opinion to flow in his direction when his opponents or rivals had demonstrated the unsoundness of their policies. This device kept him out of controversy and avoided the bitterness which goes with it; it enabled him to return when called upon with the minimum of personal rancour; it gave him an olympian position of holy detachment. If Lloyd George had been capable of such self-control after the fall of the Coalition in 1922, the course of events in Britain between the wars might well have been different. Gandhi was never idle during these interludes, but strengthened his general position by his social activities. He carefully dissociated these from politics, but he knew very well that they had a wide and favourable influence—except among the high Brahmins, who hated them. But Gandhi needed these for his final martyrdom, so he gained in every way.

The particular mouse which the Gandhi cat was watching from 1924–29 was the Congress Swaraj party led by Pundit Motilal Nehru. Gandhi could easily see (like many others) that the policy of entering the legislative bodies in order to wreck them was bound to fail, as wrecking legislators found the continued sight of the forbidden fruits of office more than frail human nature could bear. With ‘Responsivist’ defectors and general frustration the policy was already under strain when the British came to his aid with the appointment of the all-white Simon Commission (1927). As tempers sharpened with the Simon boycott so did extremist ardour grow. Gandhi found himself welcomed back, in the hope of stemming an extremist flood, by the very people who had thrown his policies overboard at the Gaya Congress in 1923.

From this time Gandhi remained the acknowledged national leader though he still had periods of withdrawal. His problem now was to hold the party together in face of fresh fissiparous tendencies. In 1922–23 it was the council-entry or Congress right which defeated the No-changers or non-violent Left. Now it was a new Left, a direct action left, and not at all non-violent, who threatened the old guard with an open breach with government. It made its *début* at the Madras Congress in December 1927 whose proceedings Gandhi likened to those of schoolboys. This new left dominated Indian politics in the thirties. Its leaders were Jawarharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. It derived its strength partly from impatience with the Swarajists’ futilities, partly from the economic slump which increased industrial and educated unemployment. It was encouraged by European examples of violence and dictatorship as short cuts to recovery and stability. If Nehru was a socialist, Bose was attracted by fascism. To save the right wing from the threat of leftist secession, Gandhi’s price was willingness on their

part to resort to civil disobedience; to lead the left against the government his price was non-violence; and to save the government from open insurrection, his price was the civil disobedience movement. So we can note the paradox that in 1930–31, nearly everyone in the Congress movement was doing what they didn't really wish to do, and yet found a sense of fulfilment in so doing. No one in India but Gandhi could have achieved this result and he could not have done it himself without his access to deep springs of feeling within the Hindu mind and soul, and the aura of sanctity, the Mahatma's mantle which he had woven for himself. The loin cloth had been a first important step, if a scanty one; there followed such things as fasts long and short, the daily spinning, the weekly day of silence, the devotional songs and the prayer meetings. And there were the weekly articles in *Young India* and the *Harijan* by which he made himself the general oracle of India.

It is this attitude and this finesse which explains Gandhi's conduct in 1930–31. In January 1929 the Congress left wing had obtained a resolution at Calcutta demanding Dominion status within a year. In October came Lord Irwin's Dominion status and Round Table conference statement. Gandhi with many right wing leaders publicly welcomed the statement. Yet in December he frostily rebuffed the Viceroy and adhered to the previous Congress resolution. Since Dominion status was impossible on the nail as it were, Gandhi proceeded step by step to the launching of the Civil Disobedience movement in April 1930, beginning with his march to Dandi to make salt. The gap between Government and Congress was between a conference to consider the next step towards Dominion status and a conference to inaugurate it. Many thought at the time that this was an inadequate ground for a revolutionary movement and that Gandhi had been disingenuous in his conduct. My own view is that after welcoming the statement, he became convinced that the left wing was so strong that if balked by Congress they would break away and provoke a violent clash with government. In Gandhi's belief this would have been disastrous. Therefore he took the lead himself in organizing a non-violent movement in which all groups took part. Thus, as he thought, he prevented revolution and left the way open for later cooperation. He covered up his *volte-face* with characteristic weekly moralizings, hair-splittings, exhortations and inspirations.

For the next few years Gandhi's task and achievement was to keep the two wings of Congress together. One device was to promote the left wingers and then surround them with right wingers on the Congress committee. When, frustrated, they wanted to resign, he used his

personal spell. This worked with Jawarharlal Nehru, who had two successive terms as President, but not with Subhas Bose. He wanted two terms also, but Gandhi sternly demoted him in a classical piece of Congress in-fighting. The clash, which might have been fatal ten years earlier, was not so now because Bose's following had in the meantime been largely confined to Bengal.

We next turn to Gandhi's dealings with the Muslims. He never repeated his success over the Khilafat movement and in the 1930 movement they were conspicuous by their absence. And this was in spite of the loyal support of distinguished men like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the late President of India, Dr Zakir Husain. It was in spite of his emphasis on brotherhood, his entertainment of Muslims in his *ashram*, his inclusion of passages from the Koran for recitation at his prayer meetings. This development was part of the logic of events as Gandhi shaped them. In his view a middle class Congress was not going to wrest power from the British within a measurable period. Neither would a westernized materialistic *Swaraj*, even if attained, be particularly desirable. To make the movement strong enough it must be nationwide, and this meant a mass appeal. The masses must also balance and purify the western materialism of the classes. But a mass appeal in his hands could not be other than a Hindu one. He could transcend caste but not community. The devices he used went sour in the mouths of Muslims. They inevitably became suspicious that they would be outside the pale, in imagination as well in matters of hard bargaining and material interests. How could they be expected to enjoy envisaging India as a mother goddess? Further, if the Congress was seeking mass support, the Muslim League was bound in the end to do so also. What held Muslims together and gave them their own sense of significance and importance, was ultimately Islam. Such appeals led away from Hinduism and all too easily led to the cry of Islam in danger. Therefore Gandhi's mass movement inevitably led to a supplementary Muslim mass movement which as inevitably became a counter mass movement. In this sense Gandhi must be counted as one of the founding fathers of Pakistan, an architect of the partition which he so hated and deplored.

Was there an alternative to this? I think there was, and it should be given a moment's consideration. If the national movement had been kept on a middle class basis, it could also have been kept on a secular-westernized basis in the hands of men like Gokhale and Banerjea. The Muslims had progressed from their original aristocratic *nawabi* outlook to a middle class one. The two sides could thus have worked

together on a secular nationalist and British parliamentary platform. Sir Tej Bahadur Saprú would have fitted this role on the one side and Jinnah in his 1920–32 phase on the other. But Jinnah at this time constantly found himself a general without an army, while Saprú was a general who would not lead the armies who wanted to follow him. Herein lay the fallacy of this constitutional pipe dream. There were not enough such secular minded leaders to impose themselves on the middle class and the middle class wasn't strong enough to extract much from the British on their own. A Churchill's reply to a Saprú's arguments would have been the same as Stalin's to the arguments of the Pope's influence. How many divisions has he got?

It has been natural for the British observers to pay much attention to Gandhi's dealings with them. But in fact they were the easiest of his three problems. They knew that they could not remain in face of mass resistance, and that they could not suppress even sectional movements beyond the willingness of the British people to countenance it and Indian agents to enforce it. Gandhi's task was to convince them that Congress had got mass support, and also to assure them that Congress would continue to do business with them after independence. He achieved the former with his two great movements and the latter by his own contacts with Lord Irwin and through lieutenants like Vallabhbhai Patel. That was why, when after World War II the British realized that the two bases of their authority had gone, it was possible to make an amicable withdrawal. It was not the British but the people of the Punjab who were the scapegoats and victims of this deal. Gandhi added some characteristic traits to the broad sweep of this policy. He understood the working of the British mind almost as well as the Indian. He knew that they must feel right as well as strong in order to fight confidently. He undermined their self-righteousness with moral reproaches, beginning with the phrase, 'satanic government'. He meticulously warned them of every illegal act, so that all would know it was done in the name of justice and conscience and that arrest would be an outrage. Many called him a cunning hypocrite, but all were increasingly uncomfortable and uneasy. Both Gandhi and the British knew that the *raj* rested ultimately on opinion, and the positive opinion in their support he steadily eroded in ways not indictable under ordinances or laws. The supreme embarrassment was of course the fast. His whole tactic was in another dimension from that in which the pragmatic Englishman moved. It left him fuddled and flustered, resentful and bewildered. Never before has an occupying power been ejected by abstinence from food.

There remains the question of Gandhi's personal creed of non-violence, the Mahatma side as it were. On the one hand it was widely regarded as a crafty tactic, on the other as a new revelation. In fact it was both. Gandhi knew very well that the mass of his followers had no belief in non-violence as a moral principle. To them he recommended it as a political tactic on the ground that it would work. He added the rider that such practitioners would be acting in accord with the ultimate verities and so acquiring merit. Practise it, he said, from conviction if you can, but if not, for the very results' sake. In the first World War he had recommended people who believed in force to join the army because this was more manly than using the non-violent principle as an excuse for avoiding risk.

But for himself it was quite different and here we approach the heart of Gandhi's significance. Non-violence (*ahimsa*) was always for him an ethic, a moral way. At first it was a particular principle within the general circle of Hindu ideas. But from the early nineteen-twenties there was a steady development. What began as a personal insight and *marga* or personal way of life to salvation, became a universal principle applicable to all. It was, in a sense, a new revelation, offered to all, but in the Hindu manner, obligatory to none. It was in the light of this universality that he could write to Hitler without any sense of incongruity recommending *ahimsa* for his consideration and action. He merged the rather bald concept of *ahimsa* into the more positive one of *satya* or truth. His disciples or convinced followers were *satyagrahis* or truth fighters. He found the English word 'soul-force' to express this more positive side, and into it and the word *satya* he poured the concept of universal divine love. The object of the *satyagrahi* in practising non-violent resistance was to convert his opponent, not by argument as a Chinese would, but by an appeal to the heart or conscience. Self-discipline rather than self-criticism was the method of arriving at truth. Renunciation was a part of this; it purified and gave spiritual power. So was suffering; accepted in the right spirit it both strengthened the soul and converted the opposer. All this was very Hindu, playing on deep-seated beliefs and attitudes. Hindu lore contains instances of ascetics acquiring such power by their austerities that they have somehow to be restrained. The great god of power Shiva is the patron of ascetics or renunciates and in one aspect an ascetic himself.

But Gandhi did not stop there. He held strongly that all men are brothers, and that brotherhood transcended all caste lines, though it did not obliterate them. He dramatized this concept in the Harijan movement. A man, he said, is his brother's keeper, whatever a

Brahmin may say, and this involves the golden rule of doing to others, etc. Therefore social service within the world, not withdrawal from it into contemplation or division into separate social compartments, was the true way of life.

His creed, with its acceptance of the inner voice and its overall sense of spirit, had its mystical side. But in its practical aspect it was down to earth, rigid and austere. It was a far cry from the permissive society which he would have said was a natural development from the western materialism he had already denounced. In it there was little sense of beauty in life, no place for the intellectual and little *joie-de-vivre*. The only outlet for the emotions was in religious devotion. All else, sex, food, good living and all other pleasures had to be rigidly controlled. This outlook may seem as dead in modern India today as J. M. Barrie's plays are in England. But in fact it is linked with a great Indian tradition and it still continues on its own momentum in great rural Indian areas. The late R. C. Dutt, when writing on the Hindu epics, thus expressed it. 'The ideal of life', he said, 'was joy and beauty and gladness in ancient Greece; the ideal of life was piety and endurance and devotion in ancient India.' Permissiveness and self-discipline. Setting aside personal idiosyncrasies, Gandhi's thought was in fact in line with ancient Indian tradition, springing from the village society of the early Aryans. In this respect he shared some of the outlook of the Arya Samaj without their militancy. And this brings us to the final point: Gandhi as a social philosopher.

If the true life of the individual was renunciation, endurance and devotion, it must be fostered by a suitable social environment. There could be no place for unbridled individualism. There could be no place for a profit-making society devoted to the acquisition of goods and the indulgence of pleasure. Such a society he found in the west—as Iqbal also did though he drew a different conclusion. No doubt materialism had always existed everywhere in some degree. But in the west Gandhi considered that it had received a gigantic and unnatural boost from the industrial revolution and the capitalist, technocratic and consumptionist developments which went with it. Not consumptionism but abstentionism was Gandhi's recipe for society. These ideas are to be found scattered throughout his voluminous writings, and have been the subject of much ridicule and some merriment. If machines are satanic, why travel in trains, submit to western surgeons and so on? His elaborate simplicity once led Sarojini Naidu to sigh: 'if only Bapu knew how much it cost to keep him simple'. But in fact they expressed his fundamental outlook. They are to be found concentrated

in the passionate pamphlet entitled *Hind Swaraj* which he wrote in Gujerati at white heat while sailing from South Africa to India in 1909. Western society is evil because it encourages the vices of materialism, sensualism and acquisitiveness, and minimizes the virtues of simplicity, restraint, and devotion. Western innovations should be resisted in India not because machines were wrong in themselves—is not a spinning wheel, or a handloom or a Persian water wheel a machine?—but because they brought with them the bane of acquisitiveness and consumptionism and all the other evils of western materialism. The only society Gandhi considered fit for this way of life was the village, and the only machines permissible were those conducive to village welfare. He wanted to get rid of the British factories as well as the officials; indeed, he would have tolerated the officials if they had removed the factories. How such a society would have been organized he never described. But we can get an idea from the works of his most distinguished contemporary disciple, Jai Prakash Narayan. This was one reason why he looked on independence, when it came, with no joy. Not only had Mother India been dissected, but the fight for Hindu purity of life had still to be fought and won.

What then, in sum, did Gandhi's whole life and labour amount to? From this angle the ejection of the British was only one part of the plan, and the control and management of Congress only a means to that end. The whole design embraced the revival of Indian idealism through his own doctrine of *ahimsa* and *satya* and the adjustment of Indian society as a whole to the pressure of the west. This adjustment was in large measure a resistance, for Gandhi returned to the ancient Indian springs of life and conduct. Western innovations could only be admitted in small homoeopathic doses if they were not to produce materialist viruses which would poison the whole body. The Hindu soul's well-being was paramount; the soul's vesture was poverty and its adornment simplicity. This implied a rustic village society; and if this also involved the contempt of the world with its whirring wheels, its pomps and vanities, the Mahatma was quite content, firm in the faith that a disillusioned war-torn sensual world would eventually crowd Indian *ashrams* seeking spiritual illumination. In fact Gandhi's whole effort, political, spiritual and social, was one of those attempts to reconcile India with the west or to integrate the west with India which have been made since the time of Ram Mohan Roy a century and a half ago. Ram Mohan's appeal was of the mind to the sophisticated classes; Gandhi's to the conscience and to the masses. His attempt was the most impressive yet made, on the largest scale and with the greatest

devotion. It was India's good fortune to have such a dedicated soul and its misfortune that, while Ram Mohan Roy looked forward, Gandhi looked backward. It was for this reason that, though his political campaign was a brilliant success, his aim of social regeneration was a no less resounding failure. He spun the thread of simplicity and sought to weave it into a garment of national well-being. He failed because, for lack of a machine, he could not weave fast enough. Gandhi won his political battle and lost his cultural campaign. Or was he right and all the western world wrong, rushing ever faster to destruction?