

THE INDIAN SITUATION

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I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE National Movement which is the dominant feature of the present situation in India is not merely an eastern echo of the post-war nationalist wave, but the result of a long process of development through the nineteenth century while we were complacently speaking of the unchanging and immemorial East. It is the latest phase of the intensified contact of East and West in India which began with the establishment of the British supremacy about 1803. Wellesley was commonly regarded as having closed an epoch; the ancient Indian monarchies were ended, and henceforth India, pacified by the British policeman, was to remain for ever unchanged. There is a curious *fin-de-siècle* feeling about many of the writers of those years. But in truth Wellesley's work was a beginning rather than an ending. Fundamentally it was the restoration of political equilibrium which made organic change and growth once again possible.

The British supremacy was finally established in 1818 by Lord Hastings, and henceforth both Europeans and Indians began to influence each other, however little they sometimes relished the prospect. Thus the English who began by borrowing the hookah and the harem, and (in India) something very like the caste-system in their social relations, have progressed to the philosophy of the Upanishads, the religion of the Buddha, and the poetry of Tagore, while Indians, who commenced by importing firearms and military discipline from Europe, have successively absorbed literary, religious and political ideas from the West. In the particular sphere of politics a number of forces contributed to the growth of the national movement. English administrators like Elphinstone and Munro, and statesmen like Bentinck themselves first looked forward to the day when Indians would administer their own government. Macaulay, in advocating the introduction of western science and the English language, in his hearty way anticipated the day when Indians would be nothing more than brown Englishmen.

The next influence was the new education policy by which English, now the official language, became the vehicle of all higher

education. By this means both access to western ideas and learning was assured, and the growth of a middle class with a common language and political ideas throughout India was promoted. Other factors of unity were improved communications like railways, and the growth of the Press. In this way all educated Indians were provided with an intellectual connection with the western world, a common language, a common stock of ideas, and facilities for exchanging them with each other. Parallel with these external stimuli came a renaissance within India itself. Rajah Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to conceive of a national and self-governing India in line with the modern world. Pioneer of so much in modern India, he was the first Brahmin to leave the country, dying in England in 1833. This movement has developed in two main directions. The first, started by Ram Mohan Roy himself, and represented to-day by Mr. Srinavasa Sastri and Rabindrinath Tagore, emphasises the value of western ideas to Indian culture and of mutual co-operation; it is Oriental internationalism. The second, begun by Swami Dayananda and represented to-day by Mahatma Gandhi, emphasises the unique value of Indian culture and the necessity for independence and self-reliance. But, except in their extreme form, they are not fundamentally at variance; they are rather two aspects of the same movement of Indian revival and of the interplay of ideas with the West. The movement of regeneration has borrowed most from the West in the realm of politics, because it is there that India is weakest, and conversely least in the spheres of religion and philosophy, because it is there that India is strongest.

This movement of revival first found political expression in the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, at first only a conference of individuals aspiring to nationhood, but now the strongest political force in the country. The Congress gradually increased in numbers and influence, and gradually drifted away from the Government; the Bengal Partition in 1905 found it in full opposition. Essentially it was the fruit of Bentinck's educational policy. Ideas of personal freedom and the rule of law, the taste for democratic methods like the committee, the conference and the vote, respect for public opinion and the art of agitation, were all fostered by English literature, English lecturers and English judges; and all took root in those quiet mid-Victorian years beneath the unruffled surface of the apparently unchanging East.

By 1900 there was a self-conscious political movement in India, neither powerful nor yet negligible, which was becoming increasingly impatient at the tardy response of a hyper-cautious bureaucracy. Since then there has been rapid development. First the Russo-

Japanese war weakened the legend of White invincibility and gave the East new hope of independence of the West. Then the Great War by the value placed upon Indian services increased the Indian sense of self-respect, and by its immensity and horror destroyed the still lingering belief in the moral superiority of the West. Indian nationalism was growing in geometrical, the Government response in arithmetical progression; a clash between the two was thus practically inevitable.

The first definite breach between Government and people was the Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905; this was healed for a time by the repeal of the Partition and the very moderate Morley-Minto reforms of 1911. During the War crisis the Government by the 1917 Declaration declared self-government to be the goal of constitutional development. But in 1919 the passing of coercive measures known as the Rowlatt Acts against the unanimous vote of the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council precipitated the second breach. Mr. Gandhi launched a passive resistance movement, and the tragedy of Amritsar which followed opened an emotional chasm between Government and people which has not yet been bridged over. As a result, Mr. Gandhi commenced a non-co-operation movement. Joined by the Muslims who had their own grievances about the treatment of Turkey, the movement was for a time remarkably successful; but when violent riots broke out, Mr. Gandhi himself suspended it. He was imprisoned for two years, Hindus and Muslims fell apart and the collapse seemed complete. But the calm was deceptive. The various parties, though they fell out among themselves, did not rally to the Government. Lord Reading, while he correctly divined the weakness of the non-co-operation coalition, and allowed it to fall to pieces with the minimum of Government interference, by his lack of any national constructive policy failed to attract any party to the Government. The Government was tolerated, but neither loved nor respected.

When Lord Irwin arrived in 1926, the time was therefore ripe for some constructive effort. It is to the credit of Lord Irwin that he attempted to do this by offering his mediation in the solution of Hindu-Muslim communal difficulties, but before he had gained the necessary moral authority his work was upset by the appointment of the Simon Commission. The Simon Commission is the starting point of recent Indian agitation. The exclusion of Indians from a body intended to advise on the future government of the country caused universal resentment which flared up in a boycott of the Commission and steadily deepened in intensity. It was, in fact,

one of those psychological blunders which periodically overtake guardians of every sort; there comes a time when the greatest devotion to another's interests avails nothing if his sense of self-respect is ignored. The neglect of *amour propre* in a young nation, as in a young man, is one of the deadly sins. That Indians should be consulted in the elaboration of their own constitution seemed to them a test of the sincerity of the Government's avowed policy of developing self-governing institutions; their exclusion touched Indian opinion at its most sensitive point—its growing sense of national unity and self-respect.

As a result of this event, an apparently somnolent India awoke to life as by magic. All sections of the Congress re-united, an All-Parties Conference drew up in the Nehru Report a scheme for Dominion Home Rule, and the Congress threatened first an Independence Resolution and then Civil Disobedience. There followed the visit of Lord Irwin to England in 1929, which coincided with the advent of the Labour Government to office. By this time London was at last convinced of the reality of the feeling in the country,—the forecasts of men like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru having proved correct—but no action had yet been taken. On Lord Irwin's return in October a new announcement defined the goal of Indian constitutional development as Dominion Status, and proposed a Round Table Conference to discuss the next stage of the journey. For a time it looked as if the Congress would cooperate, but two difficulties supervened. One was doubt as to whether the Conference would discuss ways and means of establishing self-government immediately or would be limited to the discussion of the forthcoming Simon Report; the other was the opposition of Lord Reading and the Liberals generally, which seemed to portend danger to the Labour Government. After six weeks of doubt, Mr. Gandhi sought further explanations from the Viceroy as to the scope of the Conference. As the Viceroy could not commit himself before the Simon Commission had reported, the interview failed. It seems that the opposition to the announcement raised by Liberals and Conservatives had convinced Mr. Gandhi that though the Viceroy and the London Cabinet were both sincere, they were not strong enough to carry through their policy.¹

At the Lahore Congress in Dec. 1929, therefore, the threatened Independence Resolution was passed, Civil Disobedience on non-violent principles was decided upon, and a little later Mr. Gandhi was made the sole director of the campaign. The decision was not unanimous, the extremists under S. C. Bose opposing non-violence, the right wing or Nationalists under Pandit Malaviya and Dr.

1. See article by R. Reynolds in *Political Quarterly*, No. II, April, 1930.

Ansari opposing and refusing to take part in civil disobedience. A three months lull followed, during which the Government obligingly reunited the Congress by another of its psychological blunders—the imposition of Imperial Preference for Lancashire cotton goods under threat of no protection at all against either Lancashire or Japan. At this Pt. Malaviya left the Assembly and commenced a cotton boycott movement on his own account, simultaneously with the civil disobedience movement proper.

II. CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

After the Lahore Congress in December, Mr. Gandhi retired to his ashram (religious settlement) at Sabarmati, and meditated on ways and means of civil disobedience. At length he decided to begin with the violation of the Salt Laws, but the general public remained apparently apathetic and sceptical; no one could predict the outcome of the campaign, and doubt of its success predominated. In the middle of March, Mahatma Gandhi left Sabarmati and commenced a march to the sea with his followers, and on April 6 at Dandi he manufactured the first contraband salt. At the same time Pt. Malaviya was independently starting his cotton boycott. Within six weeks public opinion had swung from critical neutrality to active sympathy, the two movements had coalesced, Malaviya making salt and Gandhi boycotting cotton, and the Government was faced with a determined and country-wide movement. What caused this sudden transformation? First it must be remembered that the Government, or that portion of it concerned with the maintenance of law and order, was mainly English in composition, and therefore suspect on account both of its irresponsibility and of its foreign character; the public which would differ from Mahatma Gandhi only with regret would oppose the Government with alacrity. Apart from this general consideration, the first factor in this sudden change was the Government's salt policy. There were two attitudes possible towards the salt lawbreakers or "satyagrahis." They might be regarded as ordinary lawbreakers and arrested as soon as they broke the law, or they might be considered a species of conscientious objectors, honest but misguided patriots who might have to be interned to prevent their infectious ideas from spreading, but who should not be regarded as criminals or conspirators or revolutionaries. The Government, after trying the second method for a short time, soon fell back on the first, and commenced arresting prominent saltmakers beginning with Pt. Jawarhlal Nehru in the middle of April. The result was to provide a cheap martyrdom (at three months a time) for anyone making

salt, and to attract the public sympathy (suspicious as always of the irresponsible executive) to the side of the lawbreakers. The feeble knees were strengthened, the onlookers were impressed. In Delhi, for example, the daily rather forlorn processions of from 30 to 50 people increased on the arrest of 18 saltmakers (12 others were also arrested by mistake at the same time and had to be released) to a crowd of 400 or 500.

The second factor in alienating the public was the publication of the Press Ordinance, giving the Government power to require from printing presses securities for good behaviour which were liable to confiscation. This was universally resented, the papers required to furnish securities usually ceasing publication, and the manner of its application made matters worse. In Delhi securities were demanded from all the presses in the City (including one then engaged only in the printing of Korans) within twelve hours of the publication of the Ordinance. This was a mistake, because the Ordinance was not retrospective, and the grounds for the demand for securities could be furnished only after its publication. As a result, all except one of the papers suspended publication, and the city depended on a blackboard in the main street for its news; fantastic rumours flew about, and there was a feeling of revolution in the air. Then came the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi on May 5th. His unique position as prophet-politician gave him a universal appeal, and the public felt that there must be something radically wrong with a Government which could arrest such a man; *Hartals* (closing of shops in token of protest) and processions led to a number of riots which further increased resentment and resulted in prolonged recriminations against the never-too-popular police.

The public were now fairly roused, and their support of the Congress was finally secured by its conduct of the struggle. After the riots of May 5th the movement as a whole remained remarkably non-violent for the rest of the year. The violent outbreaks of Peshawar and Chittagong were the work of the avowed revolutionary party, and what were often reported as "riots" in the British press were usually police charges upon processions and meetings which had been held in defiance of police prohibition. After the first outburst of salt making, the movement manifested itself in meetings and processions, in *hartals* on the arrest of prominent personalities, and in the picketing of cloth and liquor shops (another popular move, since wine is forbidden to both Hindus and Mohammedans) while the sympathy of the general public was revealed in the spontaneity with which the *hartals* were usually observed. The Government replied by means of Ordinances

(enactments of the Viceroy without the consent of the Legislature and having the force of law for six months) which declared in turn every activity of the Congress and finally that body itself illegal. Processions and meetings were broken up, picketers and whole Congress committees arrested. Now the suffering was real, imprisonment often severe and casualties numerous—on several occasions in Bombay great crowds were broken up with anything from 200 to 500 casualties, and none of them policemen—but the result was more processions, more picketers and more *hartals*. When the Congress committees were arrested, their place was taken by dummy committees, while the real direction was taken over by secret committees composed mainly of men who had already served a term of imprisonment. To break the law was the fashion, to be in prison a mark of distinction. Thus the vicious circle of police repression and public indignation was completed. The final touch came in June with the publication of the Simon Report whose almost delirious welcome in England was equalled only by the bitterness of its repudiation in India. It might have been seriously considered four months earlier, but in the circumstances the uncritical enthusiasm of the English press only added fuel to the flames of passionate resentment in India.

The turning point came with Lord Irwin's speech to the Legislative Assembly on July 9th, one of the most impressive he has ever delivered. This speech, by enlarging the scope of the Round Table Conference to give complete freedom of discussion and proposal, and by reducing the Simon Report to the level of one out of several contributions to the constitutional problem, enabled the moderate politicians to attend and so assured its coming together. There followed during August negotiations between the moderates, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar acting as intermediaries for the Government, and the Congress leaders in prison, Mr. Gandhi, Pt. Motilal Nehru and others. The negotiations failed, but the publication of Sir T. B. Sapru's report did not injure the Government's position; for if the Viceroy's final letter seemed curt and abrupt, his attitude as a whole was more conciliatory than that of the Congress leaders.

In the autumn the assembly of the Round Table Conference in London caused something of a lull in India. Though picketing, processions and arrests continued (there were from 18,000 to 20,000 people in prison at any one time during most of the movement), attention was increasingly diverted to London. The adhesion of the Princes to the idea of an all-India Federation, and the acceptance by the Labour Government of the principle of responsibility

at the centre made the Conference an unexpected success. Hope grew, and in January the premier's closing speech opened the way to negotiations with the Congress leaders. The principal leaders were released and negotiations, this time carried on by personal conversations between Lord Irwin and Mr. Gandhi, resulted in the Delhi Truce of February. The settlement was received with feelings of deep relief rather than of enthusiasm throughout the country. Everywhere the strain of the struggle was being increasingly felt, and the increasing activity of the revolutionaries in defiance of Congress was an ominous symptom of growing instability. The settlement had arrived just in time to prevent the gradual deterioration of the countryside into a condition of lawlessness and semi-anarchy.

III. THE DELHI TRUCE AND AFTER

The main terms of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on the Government side were the release of political prisoners, the restoration of confiscated property as far as possible, and the withdrawal of the Ordinances and other extraordinary measures used in combating civil disobedience. A limited freedom of salt making was given to certain coastal villages. On the Congress side, civil disobedience was suspended, all coercive forms of picketing were abandoned, and the Congress agreed to attend the resumed Round Table Conference. The general fairness of the terms is evidenced by the laments of extremists on both sides that their too sentimental leaders had been duped. The terms were submitted to a general Congress meeting in March at Karachi, and, in spite of bitterness caused by the execution of the revolutionary Bhagat Singh, were triumphantly ratified.

Mr. Gandhi had discovered in Lord Irwin that "change of heart" for which he had been looking in British officials ever since the days of Amritsar. Since the pact was concluded, he has been doing his best to see that its terms are carried out, and to prepare the way for the re-assembly of the Round Table Conference. Once more all India waits on his words, and all eyes are turned on the weekly oracle in his paper *Young India*; once more everyone in turn is alternately elated and exasperated by the stream of opinions and suggestions and pronouncements which proceed from him. His chief difficulty has been the Hindu-Muslim communal question, which has been rendered far more acute by the grave Cawnpore riots in April, in which more than 400 people were killed. The root of the trouble is the fear of the Mohammedans for their position under a mainly Hindu government, and it takes the form of

controversy about the relative merits of joint or separate communal electorates in the new constitution. The Congress favours the former, the Mohammedans demand the latter. Mr. Gandhi has offered to accept any demand of the united Muslim community, and a struggle is now going on between a minority of Nationalist Mohammedans led by Dr. Ansari, and the majority led by Moulana Shaukat Ali and Sir Mohammad Shafi. The Nawab of Bhopal is endeavouring to mediate between them. Meanwhile the Conference will re-assemble in September, when discussion will centre round the definition of "safeguards" for the transitional period before the full attainment of Dominion Status. At the moment each party and interest is happily placing its own interpretation upon that convenient word. The latest political development has been an effort of the Maharajah of Patiala to withdraw the support of the Princes from the Federal scheme he supported last autumn, but the move seems to have been prompted largely by jealousy of his able young rival, the Nawab of Bhopal, and does not seem to have had much success.

From the hurly-burly of conferences and speeches, processions and protests and arrests, some general impressions emerge. The first is the extraordinary position occupied by Mahatma Gandhi. Those who opposed his policy venerated his character, and those who denied his principles supported his policy. Throughout recent years his has been the dominating influence in India, (whatever the differences of the moment), but during the past year, happily released as he was from all responsibility, his moral prestige immensely increased. It was strikingly demonstrated at the Karachi Congress which triumphantly ratified the Truce terms, in spite of the excitement caused by the execution of Bhagat Singh and of the efforts of left wing malcontents. Mr. Gandhi has added a new chapter to the record of agitation; he has made revolution by meditation.

No less striking was the position occupied by Lord Irwin. Throughout the period, even at the height of the repressive policy, he retained the respect of Indian opinion. A constant effort was made to dissociate him from the actions of the "bureaucracy"; unpopular measures were "forced on the Viceroy," popular ones were the "assertion of his own best instincts." Indeed, the whole movement in a sense, was intended to strengthen his hands by convincing opinion in England that the national movement was real and powerful. His level-headedness, his moral force and example were largely responsible for the absence of serious racial bitterness on either side.

Next one noted the unexpected discipline of the Congress. They were able, not only to launch the movement, but to maintain its general non-violent character, preserve discipline, and carry on in spite of the arrest of every prominent leader. Another feature, of great hope for the future, was the active part played by women, as speakers, picketers and organizers. Political excitement induced many to abandon their seclusion whom social reform agitation had not persuaded, and once out, they will not easily retire again. Behind the humour of the embarrassment of the authorities in dealing with these non-violent Amazons lies the fact of the emergence of a new and incalculable force in Indian affairs. Another striking feature has been the vigour and success of the cotton boycott movement, which argues, not only a high degree of organization, but also a very wide measure of support on the part of the general public. Cotton imports from Lancashire, which in September, 1929 were valued at £4,611,000, in September, 1930 fell to £1,491,000, (figures supplied to the House of Commons). This was the more remarkable since Lancashire provides the finer cotton material which the Indian mills cannot yet produce. Little of this surplus went to Japan, its place being taken partly by the spread of "Khaddar," or hand-woven cloth, and partly by Indian mill-made cloth.

Another marked feature of the movement was the public distrust of the police. They have never won the confidence enjoyed by the police in England, and their connection with political repression has always tended to make them unpopular. The rank and file are generally believed to be very corrupt. The methods of the police, also, though in advance of the rough and tumble methods of Moghul days, have not kept pace with those of modern Europe, for there was no humanitarian movement in 19th century India to insist upon the adoption of more enlightened methods. In the present case, the police had the additional difficulty of dealing with a movement employing novel methods which they did not understand. To hit a man who does not resist you creates more opposition than it suppresses; for a non-violent movement depends for its success largely on the sympathy evoked from neutral spectators. The side which gets angry first, and uses force, loses. Police perplexity in dealing with this phenomenon was the inevitable fruit of ten years failure to pay heed to the warnings of the 1921 movement, to develop a technique and to train men who would meet the movement on its own ground.

To sum up, we may say that the Civil Disobedience Movement achieved one important result. It made the officials of Delhi

and the governing class in London realize what many of them had doubted before (and Mr. Churchill still doubts), that the national movement is a real force in the country, which can paralyse government if it is unceremoniously flouted, and which has definitely passed from the stage of speeches and vague aspirations to action and organized programmes. Lord Irwin's policy has been based on the recognition of this basic fact, and his success in carrying English opinion with him has been due to his conversion of a large part of the Conservative Party to this view in his 1929 visit. Lord Reading and the Liberals followed during the Round Table Conference. Starting from this basic principle, Lord Irwin's policy has been to rally a sufficient quantity of good-will and common-sense in both India and England in order to achieve a settlement which will satisfy the aspirations of the main body of Indian political opinion. This task, owing to the multiplicity of interests in India, and the existence of extremists on both sides (Die-hards in England, Revolutionaries and Congress Left-Wingers in India) proved immensely difficult, and requires almost infinite patience. Yet it is the only practicable policy in the present circumstances, for the only alternative proposed is one of mere repression. Force can succeed if enough is applied for a sufficient period of time, but far more force would be required in India to-day than world opinion or our own public conscience would ever tolerate. It was the wisdom of Lord Irwin that he recognized this fact, and with infinite pains commenced to unravel instead of trying to cut one of the most tangled political skeins in the world. The difficulties and dangers are great; but success, if it comes, will also be magnificent. For the establishment of India as a full Dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations will mean that the voluntary co-operation of entirely separate races and of different colours in one political union will be an established fact. It will be the first and perhaps the fundamental step in the solution of the problem of the harmonious co-operation of the white and coloured races in the world. It is worth while even to have conceived such a dream, and such a goal is well worth all the labour and skill which have already been and must yet be lavished upon it