

## DIVERSITIES OF MR. GANDHI

*A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.*

H. F. SUTHERLAND

IT is one of the essential attributes of a great personality that it should combine or reconcile within itself certain qualities which are normally incompatible. And of these perhaps the most important are uniqueness and universality. Consider any example of acknowledged greatness, and the meaning of this statement will become clear. We say that Shakespeare and Michaelangelo and Beethoven are universal in their appeal to the thoughts and emotions of mankind. For that very reason we declare that they are unique. Their uniqueness consists in their universality. It becomes a relationship not only of identity but also of reciprocity. The more unique, the more universal—and *vice-versa*. In terms of mere psychology one cannot account for such a phenomenon; the explanation is to be sought in the more ultimate realm of metaphysics.

Judged by this criterion alone, Mr. Gandhi would appear to be one of the immortal souls of all time; a man destined to be worshipped as a god when the names of Washington and Lenin are long since forgotten. I submit that such a conclusion would be mistaken. I believe that it is possible to show that Mr. Gandhi, despite the scope of his appeal to the most varied sentiments and convictions, is lacking in the one element which further analysis will prove to be inherent in the criterion we are seeking to apply. His universality lacks the unifying bond of *consistency*; his appeal (whether by accident or by design) is so comprehensive that he becomes a bewildering diversity; what seemed at first sight to be the ordered pattern of true greatness becomes the confused aggregate of a patchwork quilt or a crazy pavement. A doctrine which is "all things to all men" will never evoke a response that is based upon the enduring values of human nature. What, then, is the nature of this doctrine? And in what sense can it be described as a diversity without cohesion or unity?

Let us begin by giving Mr. Gandhi the benefit of the doubt, by assuming for the sake of argument that his teaching can be rendered in an intelligible form. What is the philosophy which

underlies his programme of "ahimsa" and "satyagraha," of "swaraj" and "swadeshi"? What do these concepts mean, and how are they related to each other?

"Ahimsa" means "non-violence". It is the keynote of the Congress Party's campaign; but in itself, as Mr. Gandhi himself assures us, it is a negative notion. It must be combined with the more positive doctrine of "satyagraha" (literally "truth-force") in order that it may provide a principle of conduct. To define this fusion in terms of passive resistance and civil disobedience is hardly adequate, since these slogans are more relevant to the practical application than to the theory itself. Refrain from violence and follow the truth, says Mr. Gandhi. And to the famous taunt of jesting Pilate he would retort: This does not mean a spineless submission to evil. It means that the entire force of your soul must go forth against the will of the tyrant. So far, the theory appears to move in the realms of ethics and theology, and the political reference is conspicuously absent. But do not be deceived. In Mr. Gandhi's lexicon the tyrant is Lord Willingdon, and evil is the Simon Report. It is by means of such identifications that the ethical theory becomes a political programme; the abstract power of evil becomes a concrete "Satanic Government"; the mystic becomes the nationalist, and the saint the revolutionary.

Thus do we reach "swaraj" and "swadeshi". The two notions are intimately connected, but they may be separated for the purposes of analysis. "Swaraj" is commonly believed to mean self-rule, self-government, or self-determination,—when we accept these ideas in a purely political sense. Remember, however, that "swaraj" has an alternative meaning. It may signify self-control or self-mastery as a moral attribute of the individual. Whatever may be the true relationship between ethics and politics, these two interpretations of "swaraj" are by no means identical. Even Mr. Gandhi does not maintain that they are. Instead, he seeks to show that the one is a presupposition of the other. "A nation," he says, "whose citizens have not learned self-control cannot rule itself as a national entity." So it appears that the ethical ideal has some sort of logical priority, and self-control is a primary condition of self-government. From this to "swadeshi" the transition is obvious. "Swadeshi", the economic counterpart of "swaraj", means national self-sufficiency in the widest sense. It involves the development of home industries for India, the wearing of homespun and the use of the spinning-wheel, the boycott of foreign goods.

The essence of the entire doctrine may be summed up in one brief admonition: Practise self-control by refraining from violence,

and by opposing the soul-force to evil and tyranny. By so doing you will attain self-government. That is to say, "swaraj", as a moral ideal, is to be attained by non-violence and the power of truth. These in turn resolve themselves into civil disobedience and non-co-operation and economic boycott. The practical objective is "swaraj" as self-government.

We are here confronted by a complex social philosophy which includes and relates ethical, economic, and political concepts. Certain far-reaching problems immediately emerge, but their discussion is beyond the limits of the present article. I shall not stop to suggest that the nature of truth is a controversial question, and that "satyagraha" as a way of life must consequently present some elements of difficulty. I shall refrain from asking whether complete self-control is possible, and, if not, whether the attainment of self-government by degrees (as contemplated by the British policy) is not the obvious solution. I shall not enquire if civil disobedience is an inherently subversive movement which Mr. Gandhi may fail to control, or if "swadeshi" is merely a visionary effort to neutralize forces which must prevail in an inter-dependent world. My aim is rather to prove that Mr. Gandhi's doctrine, together with some of its accompaniments, appeals to bodies of opinion so diverse in their characters, so contradictory in their interests, that its superficial coherence disappears in a cloud of ambiguity. What was thought to be the authentic voice of greatness is drowned in the yammering chorus of Babel.

The notion of "ahimsa" makes a potent appeal to pacifists and internationalists throughout the world,—particularly to those whose advocacy of non-violence and disarmament rests upon a religious basis. Mr. Gandhi likewise evokes a ready response in the active minds of those who are obsessed by a pseudo-philosophy of monism, who have been nurtured on a diet of diluted Hegel, and who are accordingly convinced that racial differences are but the illusory appearances of some essential oneness behind the veil of sense. The ascetic habits of the "Mahatma" command the respect and admiration of the imaginative and the romantic. To the Indian peasant, the significance of the loin-cloth is understandable; its dramatic effectiveness in other countries is a matter for Freud and Jung to discuss.

But Mr. Gandhi's teaching has many other aspects which must not be ignored. It is possible to argue (as Lord Meston, for example, has done) that the civil disobedience campaign is in essence neither political nor economic. In the last analysis, it may well be the manifestation of a social and religious antagonism—the desperate

effort of Hindu orthodoxy to defend itself against the encroachments of western civilization. A dominant caste which believes its position to be threatened by an alien culture will not hesitate to exploit the discontent of those whom it would seek to keep in subjection. No doubt Mr. Gandhi's championship of the "Untouchables" will tend to alienate the sympathies of many high-caste Hindus; but in this field the battle is not yet won, and there remains the possibility that the "status quo" may be restored when "perfidious Albion" has departed from the scene. Readers of the American Constitution will hesitate to deny that an emancipation may become a dead letter.

So much for the ethical and religious (and histrionic) aspects of Mr. Gandhi's campaign. Let us consider for a moment his work in social reform. With an almost Hellenic versatility he reappears, this time as the oriental personification of Mrs. Ella Boole and her white-ribboned cohorts. The picketing of government liquor stores by Congress Party volunteers is constantly emphasized by Indian propagandists in the United States. It is a direct appeal to defenders of national prohibition, a clarion call set to the tune of the noble experiment. True, it does not impell the W. C. T. U. to obstruct the traffic in the humid West fifties; but the identity of aim is there, and the active sympathy is forthcoming. I make this point with profuse apologies, if Mrs. Boole (or Mr. Gandhi) should resent the parallel.

But it is not only as a prohibitionist that Mr. Gandhi commands the support of ardent reformers in India and elsewhere. As the enemy of Untouchability, the uncompromising foe of inequality and class distinctions, he makes an irresistible appeal to radicals of all countries. I am not here discussing the merits of his programme. If the emancipation of the depressed classes can be achieved by their admission to a common Hindu electorate, I agree with his view of the MacDonald "communal award". What I am attempting to do is to demonstrate yet another facet of his many-sided doctrine. By those who embrace the philosophy of human equality, from the liberal-minded Conservative to the dogmatic Marxist, Mr. Gandhi is hailed as a saviour of mankind. It is an uncritical acceptance, but its reality is not to be denied. Even the anarchist may persuade himself to enter Mr. Gandhi's group. He sees the Congress Party as the opponent of a constitutional settlement; he translates "civil disobedience" as "lawlessness". Repudiating the principle of non-violence as a weak-kneed concession, he decides that here is a conflict that he may wage with his own

weapons. The result is terrorism in Bengal, repressive measures by Government, and further terrorism—a vicious circle which may yet issue in violent rebellion.

We have seen that Mr. Gandhi is a pacifist and an internationalist. Paradoxical as it may appear, he is also a nationalist. In its most obvious political aspect, the civil disobedience campaign is represented as the struggle of the oppressed against alien domination. One may pause to ask whether India is in any sense a nation, and, even if so, by what process it has conferred a mandate on one party. Does the Congress Party speak for the Moslems? Does it speak for the Native Princes? To the emotional nationalist, however, such questions are irrelevant. Again, as in the case of prohibition, the Indian agitator is ready to exploit the prejudice of his audience. He invokes the name of Washington and the spirit of 1776. He indulges in the most ludicrous historical analogies, emphasizing the superficial resemblances and obscuring the substantial distinctions. And even if he is not addressing the followers of "Big Bill" Thompson, he will sit down amid hysterical applause.

There remain two further aspects of Mr. Gandhi's diversity. I refer to the economic boycott and the "no rent" campaign. The first of these commands the support of those Indian cotton manufacturers who do not overlook the fact that they will benefit from the proposed elimination of British competition. Sincere and idealistic those magnates may be. The coincidence of their patriotism and their financial wellbeing must nevertheless give rise to suspicion. The "no rent" campaign strikes a different note, and appeals to the agricultural labourer, groaning under the triple burden of usury, excessive population, and the disastrous fall in commodity prices. Thus, as we have learned to expect, Mr. Gandhi succeeds in having it both ways. His economic programme evokes a response from the prosperous capitalist and also from the exploited masses. He makes an issue of the depression that is, and of the prosperity that is to be.

Truly a remarkable gospel, this message in its infinite variety! Mr. Gandhi might be excused if he should apply to himself the claim of Emerson's "Brahma":

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly, I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and the doubt,  
And I the hymn the Brahman sings.

We have reached the end of our long analysis. Let us now examine some of the discrepancies which are the penalty of undue

comprehensiveness. How are we to reconcile Mr. Gandhi's religious "motif" with the sympathy which he obtains from extreme socialists and communists? The leaders of these factions are, with few exceptions, the cynical arch-enemies of religion, the high priests of agnosticism. If religion is "the opium of the people", Mr. Gandhi should be anathema to those preceptors of humanity. His indebtedness to the "Gita" should be sufficient to brand him as in the highest degree "utopian and unscientific". Yet it is among radicals of all countries that Mr. Gandhi inspires the most intense enthusiasm. It seems that even the warnings of Karl Marx may be ignored by the extremist who sees John Bull as an imperialistic Satan. The issue is plain and straightforward. If Mr. Gandhi's use of "satyagraha" constitutes a sound programme, then the Marxian condemnation of religion is false. On the other hand, if all religion is (as the Marxist will have it) the instrument of exploitation, it follows that Mr. Gandhi is the dupe of his own mystical fancies. If our socialist and communist friends possess that monopoly of cerebral power which they frequently claim, doubtless they will find a way out of this impasse. "The world would listen then, as I am listening now".

Similarly, there is a *prima facie* contradiction between internationalism and pacifism on the one side, and aggressive nationalism on the other. If the cause of world peace is endangered at this moment, it is largely because of the vogue of nationalism, political and economic. Radical thinkers tend to be pacifists; but they appear to have no conscientious objection to supporting a movement which claims to be nationalistic. In fairness I admit that there is a possible answer to this criticism. It may be argued that "ahimsa" and "satyagraha", though now directed to the achievement of Indian national independence, are precisely those weapons which must ultimately be adopted by pacifists and internationalists in all countries. Even conceding this point, however, I would maintain that it disposes of the difficulty only in its political aspect. Can the same reasoning be applied to the device of the economic boycott, which we have seen to be an essential element in "swaraj" as self-determination? Is it not obvious that this device may frequently provoke sound intervention? Is not this truth writ large upon the recent history of the Far East? The economic boycott is a weapon which can be effective only in the absence of war-mindedness and armaments. It is therefore a question-begging scheme, since it assumes the existence of that very state of affairs which it is designed to create. As practical realities stand to-day, it is but a blatant form of isolationism that tends always

to defeat the cause of international peace. Hence, if we recognize the distinction between the political and economic aspects of nationalism, we shall be led to conclude that Mr. Gandhi's methods cannot be wholly acceptable to the pacifist. I shall not enlarge upon the self-evident contradiction between the claim to equality and the caste-system of the Hindu religion. Nor shall I reiterate the point regarding the naive inconsistency of socialists who endorse a boycott likely to establish the prosperity of capitalists. Enough has been said to illustrate my main thesis—that Mr. Gandhi's diversity of appeal is a thing rendered possible by the utter sacrifice of all coherence and unity.

The welter of conflicting interpretations and clashing interests becomes a maze of ambiguities. Even the identity of Mr. Gandhi himself disappears in the nebulous confusion. Is he a herald of reconstruction, or an economic catspaw? Is he, in the last analysis, an internationalist, a pacifist, or an aggressive nationalist? Is he (as many believe) a prophet, a saint, "Mahatma"? Or is he (as others suspect) an astute exploiter of religion? Is he a sincere social reformer, or the unwitting tool of the Brahmans? Is he the personified voice of the awakening Orient, or the uneasy muttering of a slumbering dogmatism? Is he a statesman, a practical politician? Or is he merely a visionary, an unpractical mystic?

As a loyal British subject, I wish to emphasize the complexity of the movement which has been inspired by an appeal so richly diversified. The Indian problem is the greatest of our Imperial responsibilities. We have offered a plan of ordered progress to the goal of self-government, but it is a plan which rests its whole meaning and validity upon a foundation of mutual understanding and co-operation. That foundation we shall seek in vain, if we fail to appreciate the subtlety of the various issues involved. I believe that our policy has suffered from over-simplification. Meanwhile, our task is to find that point of departure which may be hidden within the doctrine of Mr. Gandhi.

It is, I repeat, a bewildering diversity, a sprawling manifold, an amorphous mass of contradictions, a veritable labyrinth of ambiguities. As for its interpretation, no assumption is too fantastic to be entertained. It may be the manifestation of some esoteric harmony which the finite understanding cannot grasp:

Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.

Is the reconciliation of these contradictions to be found in some such mystical exaltation to a higher level of Reality? If so,

it is no political conundrum for the mere statesman to ponder. It becomes a metaphysical problem which will be solved only "when philosophers are kings".....

Mr. Gandhi's sincerity may be beyond question. And yet I cannot help thinking that there is one dilemma from which he has no escape. If he is a saint, let him turn his back on politics, contenting himself with the reflexion that he seeks a kingdom not of this world. If he is a politician, let him cease to grease the wheels of his band-wagon with a holy unction. Let him cease to masquerade as a saint.