

Gandhi and Indian Nationalism:

Two Rejoinders

*Are India's present troubles the fault of Gandhi,
or are they due to the failure of men to live up to
his principles?*

PYARELAL and RAMASHRAY ROY

IT IS NOT POSSIBLE in this short article to deal with all the controversial points and inaccuracies in Minoo Adenwalla's dissertation "Gandhi and Indian Nationalism—a Reappraisal" [MODERN AGE, WINTER, 1959-1960]. His main thesis is that the liberal spirit underlying the British rule in India would have in the natural course resulted in India's independence; and but for the civil-disobedience movement the communal blood-bath preceding and following independence, as also most if not all of the present ills that are afflicting India, would have been avoided.

His contention that the three instalments of reforms before the Government of India Act of 1935 were a free, spontaneous gift of British liberalism, ignores a whole chapter of the rise and growth of Indian nationalism, Swadeshi, the fight for the annulment of the partition of Bengal, and the countless sacrifices of a generation of Indian patriots. Lord Morley said in the House of Lords referring to Minto-Morley reforms: "If this chapter of reforms led . . . necessarily up to the establishment of a Parliamentary system in India, I . . . would have nothing . . . to do with it." In 1942 Mr. Churchill declared that he had

not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.

The "equality" under the "unique system of law evolved by the British" over which Mr. Adenwalla waxes eloquent was largely fictitious. He seems to have forgotten the entire Ilbert Bill episode. Nor does he seem to be aware that far from undermining the "legal basis" of untouchability, the British law and British courts were actually used under the British rule to enforce the practice of untouchability in the name of customary law.

As for the universities, whatever the motives of the protagonists of the British system of education, its effect, in the words of Will Durant, was "to denationalize," "de-Indianize," and turn into "imitation Englishmen" those who came under its influence. That it failed to fulfil its progenitors' other expectation—namely, that if their plans of education were followed up there would not be "a single idolator among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence"¹—was no fault of the system.

The railways the British built subserved not the interests of India, but those of the

British army and the British trade. "The losses are [were] borne by the people, the gains are [were] gathered by the traders."² Indian indigenous industries were strangled by the "the arm of political injustice." Indian was bled white.

In desperation the people revolted. The revolt was put down with "midieval ferocity."³ Constitutionalism without the backing of an effective sanction cut no ice. Words of promise uttered to the ear were broken to the heart.⁴ Verbal protests availed nothing.

The terrorist interlude followed. The result was utter demoralization of the people. Secrecy and subterfuge became the stock-in-trade of the patriot-politician.

The spectacle of a nation of four hundred millions who dared not speak what they felt, act as they thought right—whose cowardly existence had become a living lie and a denial of God under the incubus of foreign rule—drove the iron into the Mahatma's soul. He proclaimed that to be free a nation of 40 crores had only to speak out its mind civilly but firmly, and refuse openly to be a party to its own subjection. He not only elaborated the theory but also devised techniques by which the power of non-violence could be employed by the common man for the redress of wrongs whether individual or social.

For training in Satyagraha, especially of the leaders, he elaborated his eighteen-fold program of constructive non-violence. Whenever violence erupted he suspended civil disobedience and concentrated on constructive work as preparation for Satyagraha. This did not mean withdrawal from politics but pursuit of politics by another way. Civil disobedience and constructive work were the obverse and the reverse of the same coin.

The lapses from non-violence were due not to the training which the people received during non-cooperation, but to in-

sufficient training; sometimes wrong training with which the Mahatma or the non-cooperation movement had nothing to do. The occasional aberrations notwithstanding, the vast bulk of the people remained by far and large non-violent throughout the Indian freedom struggle.

Satyagraha meant a life of sacrifice and self-suffering. Many who were not prepared for such life left the Congress. Among them were Jinnah and the liberals. It was not the religious differences, essentially it was the struggle for power that led to partition. To what extent it was Jinnah's personality that rallied the Muslims around him, and to what extent it was the British policy of boosting the Muslim League in pursuance of its tactics of "divide and rule," must be left for history to judge.

But for Civil disobedience there would not have been the phenomenal mass awakening. Civil disobedience, however, was not responsible directly or indirectly for the blood-bath preceding and following independence. Not a small portion of the blame for it must rest with the British government, who in the final phase, neither itself governed nor let India govern, but allowed the passions to build up under the shadow of its power. When the pent-up fury burst all bounds the British themselves were appalled. But the awakening came too late.

Our present-day troubles are by no means peculiar to us. Unadulterated Satyagraha is the sovereign cure for them also.

True, we had not developed the non-violence of the brave in the course of our freedom struggle. If we had, it would not have failed us in our internal troubles. The point, however, is that if the non-violence of the weak or passive resistance could achieve such marvellous results, how much more may one expect from non-violence of the brave. The truth is that in the face of the threat of nuclear warfare, the only remedy against injustice that is left us is

non-violent resistance, be it at the level of the individual, the group, or the nation. Gandhi has shown the way. It is for us to build and improve upon the techniques he gave us.

PYARELAL

¹Macaulay in 1836.

²Will Durant, *The Case for India*, p. 37.

³Kohn quoted by Will Durant, p. 15.

⁴Lord Lytton's Confidential Minute of 1878.

MINOO ADENWALLA's article, "Gandhi and Indian Nationalism Reappraised," raises many issues, about both facts and their interpretation. But since space does not permit me to deal with all the issues, I will limit myself to three basic issues.

In the first place, his thesis that the present dangers to democracy in India are exclusively the result of Gandhi's political leadership and of the weapon that he forged to fight the British rule is not only not supported by facts but also presents an example of misinterpretation of those facts. He assumes that the Indian people under the British rule were enjoying every imaginable bliss, and the happy state of matrimony between the Indian people and the British rule would have gradually but inexorably brought political, social, and intellectual emancipation to the people of India but for Gandhi who enticed them away from wisdom and their benevolent masters to rebellion and its natural consequences.

But Adenwalla conveniently forgets, or rather ignores, many of the currents and cross-currents of Indian history. Long before the advent of Gandhi on the political scene of India, the course of political struggle had degenerated into an unhappy bipolarity. At the one end this bipolarity was marked by the liberals who, out of their moral timidity and political sanctimoniousness, feared and loathed the insurgence of the "ignorant," "tradition-bound" Indian mass and consequently fol-

lowed the secure and safe path of prayers, implorings, and mild protests. At the other end it was characterized by the extremists and the terrorists who were preaching intolerance and practicing extreme measures such as boycotts and breaking of rules, and particularly by the terrorists who were robbing banks and committing political murders. Sooner or later the masses, irrespective of the quality of political leadership, were bound to be brought into the vortex of struggle, and this would have led not to constitutional agitation but to the only alternative of armed revolt. Thus, dangers to "orderly society" and "constitutional agitation" were present in India before the advent of Gandhi on Indian political scene. It was the genius of Gandhi to steer clear of both the courses and to weld the Indian people into the bonds of national pride which was so conspicuous by its absence a short while ago. But acceptance of this fact on the part of Adenwalla will totally destroy his basis of indicting Gandhi's political leadership.

The next strand in Adenwalla's thesis is his explicit belief in the goodness of the British masters and their readiness to abdicate their empire in India when full democracy and responsible government had been established there, and, as a corollary, that Gandhi's leadership was a definite interference in the evolutionary process of India's political growth. This view utterly fails to grasp the injustice of the British rule and its repressive nature in India. Gandhi himself was a most loyal and co-operative citizen, as is evident by his remark, "I discovered that the British Empire had certain ideals with which I have fallen in love, and one of those ideals is that every subject of the British Empire has the freest scope possible for his energies, and honour, and whatever he thinks is due to his conscience. . . . That government is the best

which governs least, and I have found that it is possible for me to be governed least under the British Empire." (Quoted in Bishan Saroop Sharma, *Gandhi as a Political Thinker*, pp. 11-12.) But he was soon to be disillusioned by the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre, the Rowlatt Act, and the turning back of the British rulers on their promise to give dominion status to India as a result of her participation in the First World War. How far and how much one can depend upon the fair play and the sense of justice of the British rulers is well evidenced by the American War of Independence.

It was the futility of constitutional methods, on the one hand, and the fear that the country might be plunged into violence on the other, that convinced Gandhi to "find out a method of direct action suited to a disarmed people to meet a revolutionary situation." The British rulers, for him, turned out to be "the Satan with whom no co-operation was possible." In other words, Gandhi faced a situation which, if left alone and left to evolutionary process of history, might have thrown the country into the lap of terrorists, and it had to be the terrorists because moderates and liberals were fast losing their grip on the situation. The leadership of Gandhi averted a tragic course of Indian history which the evolutionary process—very dear to Adenwalla—was bound to lead to. Thus, Adenwalla's assumption deliberately ignores the dynamism and complexity of Indian history and hence lacks in depth and perspective.

In the third place, Adenwalla's attachment to constitutional agitation as an instrument of change precludes him from viewing "other means" with an objectivity. History records innumerable instances where constitutional agitation has proved worthless and consequently led to the convulsions of history (but such convulsions

stop the heart-beat of people like Adenwalla). Between these two extremes, mankind has been wavering in search of an instrument which would be effective, direct, and persuasive but at the same time peaceful, ennobling, and pure. It is the greatest contribution of Gandhi, not only to the political struggle of India but also to the political thought of the world, that he forged such a weapon. But this weapon is fearful to Adenwalla because it signalled the awakening of Indian masses, its rising voice against the tyranny of the government, and, above all, its constant watchfulness against usurpation of its rights. Gandhi's weapon not only emancipated India (which Adenwalla so insistently denies) but provides even now a weapon in the hands of Indian people to safeguard their interests. As Wendell Phillips has said, Republics exist only on the tenure of being constantly agitated. . . . Every government is always growing corrupt. . . . A republic is nothing but a constant overflow of lava. . . . The republic which sinks to sleep, trusting to constitutions and machinery, to politicians and statesmen, for the safety of its liberties, never will have any." (Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, pp. 138-139.) To decry the right of the people to resist and wield an effective but non-violent weapon is to decry conflict which is no less vital and essential for the preservation of democracy than "order" and "evolutionary process." Conflict is co-existent with society, what remains for us to do is to channelize this conflict in a way which will be conducive to democratic values, and for this no weapon is better than Gandhi's.

To sum up, Adenwalla not only misrepresents Indian history but also misinterprets it, and his reasoning and conclusions are tarnished by his personal beliefs.

RAMASHRAY ROY

REVIEWS

Conservatism and the Social Bond

STANLEY PARRY

The problem of freedom in community.

Up from Liberalism, by William F. Buckley, Jr. *New York: McDowell, Oblensky, 1959.*

IN HIS MOST RECENT book, William Buckley addresses himself to the heart of the conservative need to achieve a conscious, ordered, and positive formulation of itself. He offers his readers both a policy for action and a theoretical justification of that policy. Yet it may be doubted whether the true value of his thought can be gotten from either of these factors. Rather it is with regard to the broader problem of the very nature of the struggle for theoretical clarity that the book has real significance.

For the tensions evident in Buckley's thought on this point are precisely those present in the floating mass of conservative thought itself in this crucial period of its existence.

The timeliness of the book, therefore, must be judged in relation to the struggle for theoretical coherence; and its true worth rests in the contribution it makes to the clarification of that struggle. This is a good therefore that should be neither praised indiscriminately nor condemned out of hand; it should be discussed thoroughly—and that on the basis perhaps of problems other than the ones the author directly addresses.

The program of action offered in *Up from Liberalism* is summarized as follows: "It is to maintain and wherever possible enhance the freedom of the individual to