

**M. N. ROY
AND
THE MAHATMA**

**A Radical Critique and Assessment
of Gandhi and Gandhism**

**By
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FOREWARD

Indian Radical Humanist Association (Mumbai) has great pleasure in publishing this erudite and thought provoking essay on Gandhi and Gandhism. This is being published on 21st March 1998 which is M. N. Roy's birth anniversary. The year 1998 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Mahatma.

Prof. Sibnarayan Ray, a great thinker and writer and a close associate of M. N. Roy, has presented this analysis of Roy's thinking and Gandhian thought and programme in his characteristic lucid manner. We are grateful to him, though he is a member of the Radical Humanist family, for making this available to us for publication.

I wish to take this opportunity of announcing that on the third Saturday of every month a meeting is held at 5 p.m. at Mani Bhavan, Laburnum Road, Mumbai 400 007. In these meetings, talks on different subjects are given by persons well-qualified to speak on these subjects. All are requested to attend these talks. A list of talks delivered so far can be found at the end of this booklet. Readers are also requested to send their names and addresses so that we can mail to them our programmes. If you need any information, please contact me.

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M. N. Roy and The Mahatma :

a radical critique and assessment of Gandhi and Gandhism

When Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi returned to India in January 1915 after nearly twenty-one years in South Africa he was a relatively obscure figure known to very few people in his own mother land. His acknowledged political mentor, Gokhale, advised him to devote a year to acquainting himself with the Indian reality.¹ Gandhi himself had remarked before leaving South Africa that India was a strange country to him. India was in the midst of war, and Gandhi pleaded for unconditional and wholehearted support by Indians in the war effort.² In the New Year's Honours list of 1915 he was awarded a Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal for his proven loyalty to the British empire. He was then forty-six, and no-one could have foreseen that in a few years time he would establish himself as the most popular and powerful political leader of nationalist India.

But although his valiant efforts in South Africa had not achieved any just or enduring solution of the Indian problem in that country, his personal gain from that bitter experience was considerable. South Africa transformed him from a diffident and inconspicuous youngman to a charismatic personality whose integrity and inner strength inspired not a few and commanded from them unquestioning devotion and discipline. After the cold and lonely night at Pietermaritzburg station which he later claimed to be the 'Most creative experience' of his life,³ it took him about ten years (1894-1904) to prepare himself for the leadership role which was to be his for the rest of his life. Not only did he remould himself, but he also got his self-image persuasively portrayed by his first biographer, Rev. Joseph J. Doke, who focused on the religious-ethical dimension of his politics and presented him as a patriot-saint. **M. K. Gandhi : An Indian Patriot in South Africa** was published in London in October 1909 with an introduction by Lord Ampthill. He had

already discovered his very special method of organized non-violent resistance to unjust laws and institutions - **Satyagraha** - and formed his **welt-anschauung** which he then boldly formulated as some kind of a manifesto, at first in Gujarati - **Hind Swaraj** - and subsequently in English, **Indian Home Rule** (March 1910). He sent copies of both his authorised biography and his manifesto to Tolstoy who gave his authoritative imprimatur by declaring Gandhi's experiments in South Africa to be of global significance. South Africa also made Gandhi an adept in both conducting a militant political movement involving many people and terms of imprisonment and in negotiating settlement with powers that be.⁴

With all these acquisitions Gandhi arrived in India, and although at that time his name was hardly known even to the politically minded public, within five years he was in overall command of the nationalist movement and Congress organisation. He had advanced step by step - establishing his **asram**, making limited experiments in **satyagraha**, winning from the poet Rabindranath the epithet the **Mahatma**, assuming editorship of two weeklies **Navajivan** and **Young India** which enabled him regularly to propagate his views, getting published the first Indian editions of both **Hind Swaraj** and the Doke Biography, calling a nation-wide **hartal** which led to several outbreaks of mob violence, proposing non-cooperation at the All-India Khilafat Conference, then assuring the Khilafatists that the majority of the Hindus supported them, and finally by defeating his rivals and opponents at the Calcutta and the Nagpur sessions of the Congress and persuading that organization to commit itself to his programme of non-cooperation, boycott, charkha and swadeshi, on the assurance that it would bring India swaraj within a year. He revised the Congress constitution and reorganized it in such a way that what until then was a political platform of mainly moderate-minded elite groups was transformed into a populist mass movement of which he was the supreme leader. To the masses he was not only the Mahatma but also an **avtar**

or incarnation of God who would not only get rid of the British but also establish **Ramarajya** on earth. From this point onwards for nearly a quarter of a century Gandhi occupied the centre stage of Indian policy.

However, even during this period he was not without critics nor was his authority altogether unchallenged. I have elsewhere examined at some length the vital points of disagreement between Tagore and Gandhi, but although Tagore publicly differed from Gandhi on many major issues, their personal regard for each other did not suffer any decline.⁵ On other hand, three of the most persistent critics of Gandhi, Jinnah, Ambedkar and Roy - not only rejected his method of **satyagraha** and the utopian vision of **Hind Swaraj**, but took a highly skeptical view of his widely publicized 'saintly' personality. Of the three, M. A. Jinnah, originally a liberal-secularist proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity, reacted so violently to Gandhi's mixture of religion and politics, that he eventually employed that explosive mixture himself to mobilize his own community, re-emerged from self-chosen exile to become the supreme leader of the Muslim community in the Indian subcontinent, and became the founder of Pakistan. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar fought Gandhi tooth and nail over the issue of caste and untouchability. In the end, shortly after Gandhi's death, he saw the legitimacy of his demands fully recognised in the Constitution of free India, which was drafted in the main, ironically enough, by Ambedkar himself. The most radical and thorough-going critic of both Gandhi and Gandhism was, however, M. N. Roy who had neither Jinnah's nor Ambedkar's political success, and it is to him and his critique that I intend to devote the rest of this paper.

II

Born eighteen years after Gandhi, Roy was the son of a Brahmin headteacher of Sanskrit at a school in the neighbourhood of Calcutta.⁶ At birth he was named Nerendra Nath Bhattacharya, but later he had to assume a string of aliases to escape detection and arrest by the police. M. N. Roy was the name he adopted

at Stanford in 1916 and that is the one by which he is known. Between the two, Gandhi and Roy would seem to exemplify many of the contrasts which comprise India - the former a modh bania Vaishnava from the back waters of a princely state of Kathiawar Gujrat, married at the age of thirteen, sent to England to qualify at the bar after passing the matriculation examination; the latter, a brahmin Sakta exposed from his early boyhood to the strong intellectual-cultural crosscurrent and political turmoil in Bengal, especially in the metropolis of Calcutta, expelled from school at the age of eighteen for organising an anti-partition meeting, inducted shortly thereafter into a secret revolutionary nationalist organisation which had been formed in 1902 and of which the ideological leadership would be assumed by the Cambridge-educated Aurobindo Ghosh. Though Gandhi wrote and published a good deal in Gujarati, English and Hindi, he was not by temperament an intellectual, or a systematic thinker, or a theorist. Roy, with the Brahmin tradition behind him and the rich inheritance of the Bengali cultural renaissance of the 19th century, developed into an outstanding intellectual and theorist and wrote and published his ideas in several modern European languages. (Spanish, German, French, Russian and, of course, English, but not in Bengali or Hindi).⁷

Between 1908 and 1915 Roy was one of the principal organisers of the revolutionary nationalist movement in Bengal. With his associates he planned an armed insurrection in India during war.⁸ To negotiate military assistance from Germany he went to Batavia in 1915, and from there to the Philippines, Japan, Korea, China and the United States till he finally landed in Mexico in 1917. The insurrectionary plan proved to be abortive, but Roy imbibed Marxism in Mexico, learnt Spanish, wrote and published four books in that language, became one of the leaders of the Socialist Party, founded El Partid Comunista de Mexico (1919), and was invited by Lenin to Moscow to take part in the Second Congress of the newly founded Communist International (1920).⁹ Although at the Second Congress Roy differed with

Lenin on the National and Colonial Question (more about this later), he rose very rapidly in the International's hierarchy on account of his exceptional intellectual eminence and organisational ability. His work **India in Transition** (1920, translated in several European languages) came to be acknowledged as a Marxist classic and was followed by a succession of books, pamphlets, manifestoes. In 1920 he founded the emigre' Communist Party of India at Tashkent, and from 1922 to 1928 edited a political Journal, published at first as **The Vanguard of Indian Independence**, then as **The Advance-Guard** and finally as **The Masses of India**. Although his books and journal were banned in India by the government, they reached clandestinely not a few people, and by 1922 he succeeded in forming five small communist groups in Bengal, Bombay, Madras, U.P. and Punjab. In December, 1925 the Communist Party of India was formally founded at a conference in Kanpur.¹⁰

By 1926 Roy had been elected as a full member of the Executive Committee and Presidium of the Comintern, its Secretariat and Orgbureau, Chairman of the Eastern Commission and member-secretary of the Chinese Commission, and he had offices and staff at Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Zurich and Amsterdam. At the end of the Seventh Plenum of ECCI, he was sent to China as head of the Comintern delegation there. Due to ambiguities in the Comintern's directives and confusions and conflicts within the Communist leadership in China, counter-revolutionary forces succeeded temporarily in crushing the communists.¹¹ Roy returned to Moscow after seven months in China to be caught in the midst of the deadly power struggle among Lenin's bolshevik successors in the Soviet Union. In 1928 when at its Sixth Congress the Comintern adopted an extreme left policy, Roy disagreed with it, and after the publication of his critical view of the official line in the Opposition press, the unavoidable break came in 1929.¹² Roy devoted the next year to completing his monumental work **Revolution and Konterrevolution in China** (Berlin 1930), returned to India

clandestinely, and after seven months of incessant underground work for building a Revolutionary Party of the Indian Working Class, was caught and sentenced to twelve years' transportation which was reduced on appeal to six years rigorous imprisonment. He was released in 1936, joined the Congress, tried to build an alternative leadership to Gandhi, then broke with the Congress in 1940 over the issue of support to the 'anti-fascist war', formed the Radical Democratic Party which was eventually dissolved in December 1948 after much careful consideration. During the last eight years of his life Roy formulated and developed, in collaboration with several younger colleagues including the author of this paper, the philosophy of Radical or Scientific Humanism, the most detailed formulation of which may be found in his magnum opus, **Reason, Romanticism and Revolution** published in two volumes (Calcutta 1952, 1955). In June 1952 he met with a serious accident in Mussoorie, which resulted in cerebral thrombosis and partial paralysis. He recovered briefly, and his **Memoirs** began to be serialised in his weekly journal, but after a third and final attack of cerebral thrombosis, death came ten minutes before midnight on 25 January 1954.

From 1920 till the Mahatma's assassination at the hand of a Hindu fanatic Roy had been a consistent critic of Gandhi and Gandhism. Even after his break with the Comintern he continued to remain a Marxist till the end of the war, when, totally disillusioned with the Soviet Union, he had to re-examine his theoretical postulates. The philosophy of Radical Humanism which developed out of this re-examination is still basically very different from Gandhi's worldview, but with the advantage of hindsight it is possible to discern several pregnant features which Radical Humanism shares with Gandhism. I shall come to this in the last section of this paper, but at no stage do I find any evidence that Roy was remotely influenced by Gandhi or was even aware of any possibility of a confluence of ideas in future. However, Gandhi's martyrdom did make him reconsider his view of Gandhi's personality, ideas and method. He now recognized

that Gandhi's was 'essentially a moral, humanist, cosmopolitan appeal', that 'the implication of the doctrine of non-violence is the moral dictum that the end does not justify the means', that Gandhi 'sincerely wanted politics to be guided by moral considerations' and his 'endeavour to introduce morality into political practice was the positive core of Gandhism'. He thought that the only way to immortalize Gandhi's memory would be for his followers to practice 'the precept of purifying politics with truth and non-violence'. Nevertheless, even when paying his homage, Roy did not forget to mention that the Mahatma himself allowed his humanist appeal 'to be heavily coloured by the narrow cult of nationalism', that he 'fell a victim to the very cult he preached', that 'he vaguely visualized a humanist idea, while still groping in the twilight of medievalism'.¹³ Roy was no longer a marxist, but to the end his humanism continued to be uncompromisingly materialist, rationalist, atheist and libertarian. Despite significant points of similarity towards the end, any scenario of reconciliation between the Mahatma and the heretic would be altogether far-fetched. Professor Dennis Dalton put much more meaning into Roy's homage to the martyred Mahatma than is warranted by available evidence.¹⁴

III

The year 1920 was a turning point in the life of both Gandhi and Roy. Gandhi formally launched non-cooperation on 1 August of that year. Roy reached Moscow in May having been invited personally by Lenin to take part in the Second Congress of the Communist International which opened on 19 July and continued till 7 August. In Mexico Roy had studied Marx and been initiated into the intricacies of dialectics by Michael Borodin, but his interpretation of Marxism was much more deeply influenced by the writings of Lenin's erstwhile mentor, George Plekhanov, than by Lenin. Moreover, during the months he spent in Berlin on his way from Mexico to Moscow he acquainted himself with the works of the recently assassinated great Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg, founder of the German Communist Party, and for

many years a very severe and influential critic of Lenin¹⁵, and he developed strong ties of personal friendship with some of her prominent colleagues and followers.

On arrival at Moscow Roy was given a draft copy of Lenin's theses on the National and Colonial Question for his comments and observations. The theses were to be presented and adopted at the Second Congress. Roy, however, differed with the Lenin's formulation on several major issues, and at Lenin's request, formulated his own Supplementary Theses. With some modifications both sets of theses were adopted by the Congress¹⁶, but the differences were not really resolved, and they would continue to haunt the communist movement long after the death of both Lenin and Roy. On a later occasion Stalin explained Lenin's acceptance of Roy's supplementary theses with modifications on the ground that when Lenin formulated his own draft, he was very inadequately acquainted with the Asian situation. Stalin subsequently supported Roy's position at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern (1924) against Roy's principal opponent at the Congress, D.2.Manuilski.¹⁷

It was during his discussions with Lenin before the Second Congress that Roy gave what was probably his earliest critical assessment of Gandhi. The **Hartal** of the previous year and subsequent developments had already brought Gandhi into prominence in Indian politics. Lenin saw in Gandhi a potential revolutionary who might lead the upsurge of post-war mass discontent in India against the British. Roy opposed this view by holding that while Gandhi might appear 'politically revolutionary' he was in fact a 'social reactionary whose popularity rested on his 'religious and cultural revivalist appeal'. He drew upon the authority of Plekhanov who saw the Narodniks and the Social Revolutionaries in Russia in the same light as he saw Gandhi.¹⁸

Roy's assessment of Gandhi at this time and the following years has to be placed in the context of his Marxist interpretation of Indian history, and in particular, his analysis of contemporary

politico-economic and socio-cultural developments in India. The bourgeoisie in Europe had at one time played a progressive role by overthrowing the ancient regime of feudalism and the Church and by bringing about a social revolution. In India the middle classes grew under the patronage of the foreign rulers. On the other hand, they were still very much rooted in a tradition-bound feudal society and, on the other, they were largely a creation of colonial rule. They were frightened of the prospect of a far-reaching social revolution, and despite their growing politico-economic aspirations, were prone to reaching a compromise with the British if the terms proved favourable to their interests and ambition. The exigencies of the war had forced the British to promote a measure of industrial development in India, but what they planned was some kind of a partnership with the rising Indian bourgeoisie in which control would remain essentially in British hand. Within India popular unrest against both foreign and native exploitation was growing fast since the end of the war, and the situation had become potentially revolutionary. Sections of the Indian bourgeoisie might cooperate in the movement for political independence, but faced with the threat of a social revolution they would prefer to come to terms with the British.

To Roy Gandhi, on the one hand, was 'the embodiment of the primitive, blind, spontaneous spirit of revolt of the masses', and on the other, he was a cunning bania-politician who, with his reactionary ideology and stress on non-violence, was bent on restraining the revolutionary forces and promoting a compromise between the indigenous vested interests and the British. Gandhi in his view 'endeavours to utilise mass energy for the perpetuation or revival of the heritage of national culture which has been made untenable by the awakening of mass energy'. It is the paradox of Gandhi that while he rejects western civilization, under his leadership the nationalist movement would at best succeed in establishing a capitalist society with a pre-capitalist culture.¹⁹

Gandhi, however, did not figure in the deliberations of the

Second Comintern Congress. Roy's principal differences here with Lenin were on three points. According to him, (a) a revolution in Europe depended on the course of the revolution in Asia bringing about the break-up of the colonial empires; (b) in the colonies, especially India, there were two distinct movements, one bourgeois democratic limited to the middle classes, which sought compromise with the existing order and tried to bring under its control the second movement which was that of the exploited and ignorant masses for whom political independence to be achieved and made meaningful required at the same time a social and economic revolution; and (c) the Comintern should support revolutionary mass movements and not the colonial middle class movements. He pleaded for the Comintern's commitment to the principle of 'revolution from below'. Lenin rejected the first point, and after considerable discussion acknowledged in a qualified manner the validity of the second and third points, and as a concession to Roy substituted the term 'nationalist revolutionary' for the term 'bourgeois-democratic'. Roy on his part admitted that 'the cooperation of the bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements is useful' in the early stage, but the emphasis should be on the organisation of peasants and workers and on a programme which would telescope political independence with a socio-economic revolution

The position outlined by Roy at the Second Congress was elaborated and developed by him in his first major work as a Marxist theoretician, **India in Transition** (1922). This included a systematic critique of Gandhi and Gandhism. The work was followed by a succession of books written and published both while he occupied a peak position in the Comintern and after his break with it, - among them, **One Year of Non-cooperation** (1923), **Political Letters** (1924), **The Aftermath of Non-cooperation** (1926), **The Future of Indian Politics** (1926), **Our Task in India** (1932), **Whither Congress** (1934), **Manifesto of the Revolutionary Party of the Indian Working Class** (1935),

Fascism, its Philosophy, Professions and Practice (1938), Our Problems (1938), Letters to Mahatma (1940), Gandhism, Nationalism and Socialism (1940), Ideal of Indian Womanhood (1941), Freedom or Fascism (1942), Nationalism, An Antiquated Cult (1943), Nationalism, Democracy and Freedom (1943), Problems of Freedom (1945), India's Message (1950) - in every one of which Gandhi is a major target of his attack. Instead of going through these writings individually, I shall, for the purpose of this paper, highlight some of the main points of his criticism which became sharper and went deeper with the passage of years.

IV

We have already mentioned that Roy underlined some of the glaring self-contradictions of Gandhi. Gandhi, in his view, was a product and historic expression of the seething discontent of the Indian masses at the end of the first world war, and total non-cooperation, if whole-heartedly pursued, could have been the prelude to the much-needed revolution in India. But by imposing on it his dogma of non-violence Gandhi deliberately emasculated the revolutionary forces and reduced its leadership to impotence. All established orders, whether foreign or indigenous, rely on force and use it without hesitation when threatened with dislodgment. Whether violence is desirable or not, it is unavoidable in a revolutionary confrontation between the oppressor and the oppressed, Gandhi provided the aspiring masses with the potent weapon of all-out non-cooperation, and then called off the movement the moment it went out of the bounds set by him. He did this repeatedly, which to Roy could not but be interpreted, at the best, as Gandhi's self-deception, arising out of his self-contradiction, and at the worst, as cunning deception of the people who had accepted him as their messianic leader.

Again Gandhi professed to reject totally all elements of modern civilization - science and technology, factories and railways, medicines and hospitals, schools and colleges,

parliaments and political parties - but at the same time he negotiated with the British imperialists to reach some compromise, and the net effect of his **swadeshi** movement was to strengthen the position of the Indian capitalists through boycott of foreign goods, and to prepare the Congress as a suitable instrument to which political power could be eventually transferred by negotiation. All this amounted to rejecting and accepting modern civilization at the same time. He preached the cult of poverty but relied heavily on his industrialist patrons to finance his various activities. He condemned untouchability but clung to **Varna** divisions or the caste system. A man of **Bhakti**, he proclaimed the agnostic Jawaharlal Nehru as his successor. In this Roy saw a certain deviousness on the part of Gandhi who thereby seriously reduced the chances of an alternative modern leadership emerging in Indian politics, and a lack of integrity and inner strength in Nehru's character, who with all his modernism, clung to the Little Father or Bapu. Gandhi proclaimed the ideal of **sarvodaya** of the people, but in concrete terms he relied on the so-called trusteeship of the elite (which would include benevolent landlords and millowners), and himself came to occupy for a quarter of a century the position virtually of the dictator of the Congress, who knew how effectively to suppress and eliminate any challenge to his absolute authority. It is not necessary to mention all the self-contradictions of Gandhi listed by Roy, but it should be clear that he gave little credence to the much publicized sainthood of the Father of the nation.

Roy strongly objected to Gandhi's mixing of politics with religion. The secular political temper which the moderate leaders before Gandhi had tried with some measure of success to develop in the Congress and which extremist leaders like Tilak and Aurobindo had threatened to subvert, was virtually overthrown by Gandhi when first he championed Khilafat, and then introduced into the Congress his whole range of traditional Hindu religious beliefs, rituals and practices, including **Ramdhun** and **Ramarajya**, prayer-meetings and fastings, cow-protection,

brahmacharya, Bhajans and recitals from the Gita. In Roy's view, Gandhi stimulated the growth of Hindu nationalism and, may be somewhat unwittingly, helped in the growth of Muslim revivalism by, on the other hand, alienating secularist Muslims like Jinnah and, on the other, encouraging Khilafatists and Muslim militants. By mixing religion and politics Gandhi became the Mahatma and **avatar** to the Hindu masses, steeped in ignorance and superstitions, and did incalculable harm to Indian polity.

While Roy saw in Gandhi's non-violent non-cooperation a strategy to immobilize revolutionary forces and help Indian vested interests in improving their position and bargaining power with the British, what he found most perverse in Gandhi was his persistent advocacy of a return to the past, his rejection of the achievements of modern civilization, his refusal to visualise a future where no one will be deprived of his or her right to the fullest enjoyment of the achievements of civilization. In his books and the critical essays published in his journal **Independent India** Roy exposed time and again the implications and practical consequences of Gandhi's rejection of science and technology, his distrust of reason, his asceticism and fear of sex and the senses, his cult of poverty, his panacea of the **charkha**, his refusal to see the basic conflict of interests between landlords and peasants, capitalists and workers, his total failure to grasp the far-reaching significance of the concept of fundamental human rights. During Roy's six years of rigorous imprisonment in jail in the thirties while he was writing his Prison Notebooks (about 3000 closely handwritten foolscap sheets of paper), it became increasingly clear to him that Gandhism was, paradoxically, very close in its ideology to Fascism which was threatening the very basis of modern civilization. In a segment from the Prison Notebooks published after his release under the title **Fascism : its Philosophy, Professions and Practice** (1938), he not only analysed the fearful phenomenon in Europe, but showed how many features of the Hindu tradition in general and of Gandhism

in particular bore strong similarities with the ideas of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Giovanni Gentile, and the adoption of those ideas by their followers in contemporary Italy and Germany. The rejection of reason and reliance on 'inner voice', the glorification of the mysticism morality of suffering, the doctrine of superman or the **avatar** of the **Gita**, the merging of the individual in a deified collectivity called the Nation, the metaphysical justification of inequality and the systematic effort to make the workers accept their exploiters as benevolent trustees, - all these indicated an affinity which was skilfully covered by the advocacy of non-violence which, in actual practice, was repeatedly shown to be ineffective. To Roy it came as no surprise that Gandhi would show almost total callousness to what happened to the Jews in Germany under Hitler. In 1938 while Hitler was planning total extermination of the Jewry in Germany, Gandhi publicly advised the Jews to choose self-immolation as satyagrahis. 'The calculated violence of Hitler', he wrote in his organ 'may even result in a general massacre of the Jews. But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imaged could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hand of the tyrant'²⁰. The same year Gandhi praised the Munich Pact as sound statesmanship, and advised the Czechs against an armed resistance to invasion by the Germans²¹. In 1940 he praised the French surrender to the Nazi invaders as 'brave statesmanship'. French statesmen have shown rare courage in bowing to the inevitable and refusing to be party to senseless mutual slaughter'²². A few days later, he appealed to the British (who were then fighting for survival) to :

lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity... Let them (Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini) take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings ... If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourself man,

woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.²³

Roy who knew what had happened to Germany and Italy under Fascist and Nazi dictatorships and who had no doubt that a Fascist victory in the war would mean a terrible setback to human freedom and progress throughout the world including India, publicly came out in support of Britain even though he had fought against the British for thirtyfive years since 1905.

Roy traced the source of the affinity of Gandhism with Fascism to the fundamentally authoritarian nature of Gandhi's personality. In South Africa a diffident and inarticulate young barrister had transformed himself into a leader of people by developing an iron will which could not be deflected from its target. Like the **yogis** of India he had given away sex and the pleasure of the senses and material possession to achieve the kind of power which would risk death rather than acknowledge defeat, and all is grist that comes to its mills. But the authoritarian personality is afraid of freedom and reason which it must avoid to maintain its self-image and hold over others. Even Nehru sensed this when in his **Autobiography** he spoke of a 'Kingliness' in Gandhi 'which compelled a willing obeisance from others. Consciously and deliberately meek and humble. Yet he was full of power and authority, and he knew it, and at times he was imperious enough, issuing commands which had to be obeyed²⁴. Following Erich Fromm's study of Luther and Calvin, Roy diagnosed that the fascist traits in Gandhi's personality and ideas were rooted in his 'fear of freedom'²⁵.

Gandhi rarely engaged in public controversy with his critics (the only sustained debate over basic issues that he ever had was with Tagore). Once he had ensconed himself at the Mahatmic pinnacle of popular reverence and virtually absolute control of the Congress organisation, he presumably felt no need to refute criticism, although from time to time he would make strategic moves to outmanoeuvre potential political rivals. While Roy was

his most persistent and radical critic for a quarter of a century, he was never a serious threat to Gandhi's political dominance like C. R. Das or B. R. Ambedkar or M. A. Jinnah or Subhash Chandra Bose. He could afford not to recognize the seriousness of his criticism. In 1924 Gandhi wrote in his organ **Young India** a brief article on "Bolshevism and Discipline", acknowledging that he "did not know the meaning of Bolshevism", and followed this in the same issue with another article defending **charkha** against Roy's attack on it in **Welfare** of May 1924. Subsequently he published in the same organ Roy's fairly long reply to Gandhi's piece on Bolshevism, along with a dismissive comment that Bolshevism, if correctly represented by Roy, 'is a poor thing'¹²⁶. At the Karachi Session of the Congress (March 1931), the draft of the Resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Programme which, according to Intelligence Reports, was prepared and given to Nehru by Roy (who attended the Congress session clandestinely under the assumed name Dr. Mahmood), was considerably modified and watered down at the instance of Gandhi and eventually adopted. The Congress also endorsed the Gandhi-Irwin Pact which Roy strongly opposed. After his release from jail Roy met Gandhi for the first time at Faizpur Congress (December 1936) where Roy's proposal for transforming the Congress into a fighting organisation against the British was unequivocally rejected by Gandhi. At that Congress Roy refused to join Gandhi's prayer meeting and was advised by him to eschew active politics. When Roy started his weekly **Independent India**, Gandhi replied to his request for a goodwill message with a postcard advising him "to render only mute service to the cause of freedom". Later in November 1939 there was an exchange of correspondence between Gandhi and Roy over their differences on various issues. Gandhi emphasized that the Congress had now become 'a non-violent army in war time. Its will is expressed by its general whoever he may be. Every unit has to render him willing obedience in thought, word and deed'. Of course, Gandhi did not have to spell out that he was himself the general whose

will would brook no questioning. And so here could be no compromise. The rupture became complete when, after a great deal of hesitancy and tight-rope walking, Gandhi eventually launched the Quit India movement in August 1942.

The war brought about drastic changes all around. Not only were the Axis Powers crushed, but the British Empire was left too exhausted to maintain itself. Roy had anticipated this quite early and prepared and published a Draft Constitution and People's Plan for independent India.²⁷ Meantime Jinnah had fully established himself as the Quaid-e-Azam of the Muslims of the subcontinent, and creation of Pakistan had been proclaimed as the goal of the Muslim League. The congress leaders were in a hurry to reach a settlement with the British that will ensure peaceful transfer of power, even at the cost of partition of the subcontinent. And Gandhi, now in his late seventies, found himself bereft of his command over his long-time followers and the Congress organization, and left with his personal God and ethic of satyagraha. He told Louis Fischer that he was 'a spent bullet'.²⁸ He was opposed to Partition, he even proposed to the new viceroy Jinnah's name as the Prime Minister of an undivided India; he advised the Congress leaders to disband the organization, give up the struggle for power, and transform the Congress into an association of social servants. But neither Nehru, nor Patel, nor Rajendraprasad, nor Kripalani found any of his proposals realistic or acceptable. The record of their conduct does not indicate that any of these trusted lieutenants of the Mahatma were ever really committed to the goal of **Hind Swaraj** or to the absolute principle of **ahimsa**. With Mountbatten as Governor-General they decided to be rulers of a truncated India. Gandhi's last years were his loneliest, but they were also his noblest. Alone he worked steadfastly for non-violence and truth in private life and public affairs, against powerful currents of aggressive chauvinism and cynical power-lust. He fasted and prayed and tried in vain to bring reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims, between the two newly formed rival states, India and

Pakistan, to bring solace and courage and faith into the lives of the millions who had become victims of partition. And then he himself fell a victim to the fanaticism of a Hindu nationalist.

It was Gandhi's martyrdom and his moral **praxis** of the last lonely years, rescued from the ambiguities and manoeuvring of power-politics of the previous quarter century, which made Roy re-examine his long-held poor estimate of Gandhi, and pay him public homage in unambiguous terms. But before that his own outlook (and, to an extent, personality as well) had been changing under the impact of the war and his self-examination during the post-war years. I had the privilege to know and work with him closely during the last eight years of his life. Although there was a difference of thirty-three years between us, he accepted me not only as a colleague but also as a friend and had enough generosity and openness of spirit to welcome what contribution I was able to make to the development of the new philosophy of radical humanism.²⁸ During the early forties he had gradually become altogether disillusioned with the profession and practice of bolshevism and the record of the party dictatorship in the Soviet Union. I do not think he ever totally rejected all the major premises of Marxism, but he increasingly emphasised the worth of many ideas and ideals which in no way could be reconciled with orthodox Marxism. He still recognized the importance of the economic foundations of social organisation, but culture, which included knowledge, art, morality and various finer and distinctive pursuits and achievements of homo sapiens, was seen as having its intrinsic and abiding value and creative significance, and he rejected its Marxist characterisation as superstructure. The worth of any institution or organisation was to be measured in terms of how it helped and advanced the free development of the creative potentialities of everyone of its members. Most significant, he now fully recognized the integral relation of ends to means, the urgent need for imbuing politics with morality, the utter unsuitability of political parties to the pursuit of human welfare and enlightenment, the pressing need for decentralization

and devolution of power, the beauty and value and effectiveness of small units related to one another in voluntary cooperation.²⁹ These realizations brought him closer to an appreciation of Gandhi, although I do not think he was ever really conscious of any kinship with the Mahatma.

During Roy's last years, on a number of major issues the differences between the two antagonists had significantly reduced. However, I do not think that between their total philosophical approaches there was any possibility of reconciliation. To the end Roy remained an unmitigated materialist (or 'physical realist', as he sometimes preferred to write), an uncompromising rationalist, a radical humanist who saw man not as a "sinful creature" who may through abstinence, devotion and prayer win his god's blessing, but as the peak of the evolutionary process, maker of history, rich in potentialities, gifted at birth with the urge for freedom and the spirit of inquiry which through proper development and application produce civilization and bring about material and cultural progress. He saw no virtue in privation, poverty, fasting or the fullest development of his or her personality. In a just and open society the basic physical and psychological requirements of every individual must be met, and at the same time people shall equip themselves to create evernew cultural resources which, unlike material resources, do not diminish by sharing. Roy thus belonged in spirit to the tradition of the humanism of the renaissance and saw in puritanism, devotionism, distrust of reason and the senses, or obsession with **moksha** or the other world nothing but serious impediments to the proper development of the individual and society.

Nevertheless the issues on which they came closer to each other towards the last lonely years of their lives are not only significant for an understanding of the change in their respective situations, but are even more pointedly relevant to the national and global situation today. By obliterating almost totally from their consciousness and behaviour the integral relation of means

and ends and the principle of basing politics on morality, our power-elites in India have enmeshed themselves and the country during the last few decades in all-pervasive corruption and cynicism. The terrible concentration of power in the hands of the multi-nationals and superstates, the systematic efforts to cretinise the common people through the mass media, the misuse of resources on rocketry, weaponry and big projects, on proliferation of bureaucracy and middlemen, on production and consumption of luxury goods, to the neglect of meeting the basic needs of the majority of mankind (food, shelter, education, medical service, clothing etc.) - can only lead to global disaster. The process which has brought mankind to the brink of a universal catastrophe requires urgently to be reversed. It strikes me that both in Gandhi and Roy there are insights and pointers which are likely to be helpful in confronting our fearful contemporary situation. Both Gandhi and Roy put their accent on a radical reconstruction of society in which some of the main guiding principles were decentralization and devolution of power, promotion of small and viable units and institutions of grassroots democracy, politics guided by morality, economy based on voluntary cooperation and directed to meeting the basic needs of the people, technology fully oriented to human welfare, and culture which would be creative, open and various while at the same time drawing upon the positive common past achievements and heritage of mankind.³⁰ Caught in the crisis of our age, we may yet find much succour and useful guidance from the voices of both who have currently been sidelined by our power-hungry politicians, unscrupulous finance-magnates and obtrusive mass-media.

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THE MESSAGE OF THE MARTYR

M. N. Roy

(This article was written by M. N. Roy immediately after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and it was published in Independent India dated 22nd February 1948.)

Leaders of aggrieved India have professed unswerving loyalty to the sacred memory of the martyred Mahatma and pledged themselves solemnly to be guided by his message. If the pledge will be implemented, then death at the assassin's hand may still accomplish what a dedicated life could not. There is no doubt about the sincerity of sentiments felt in an atmosphere of poignant anguish and expressed spontaneously from the bottom of hearts moved by a dreadful experience. At the same time, it cannot be denied that, had nationalist India grasped the Mahatma's message and been guided by it without reservation, today she would not be mourning his death at the hand of an assassin. Therefore, having recovered from the initial impact of the stunning blow, the country should even now try to understand the meaning of the Mahatma's message, if his martyrdom were not be in vain.

Even during his lifetime, the Mahatma was hailed as the Father of the Nation. Nationalist India's homage to his sacred memory will be to canonise him as such. He was the patron-saint of nationalism which triumphed during his lifetime. Yet he fell a victim to the very cult he preached. That is the implication of the terrible tragedy which stupefied the entire civilised world. But few seem to have learned the lesson. The patron saint of nationalism has been sacrificed at the altar of the geographical goddess of Akhand Hindustan, and all Indian nationalists, who today reaffirm undying loyalty to the Mahatma, also worship at

the shrine of that goddess. Since that financial cult logically goes to the incredible extent of demanding the blood of its own patron-saint, The Mahatma's message must have been greater than a mere call for suffering and sacrifice for the country. Essentially, it is a moral, humanist, cosmopolitan appeal, although the Mahatma himself allowed it to be heavily coloured by the narrow cult of nationalism. The lesson of the martyrdom of the mahatma is that the nobler core of his message could not be reconciled with the intolerant cult of nationalism, which he also preached. Unfortunately this contradiction in his ideas and ideals was not realised by the Mahatma himself until the last days of his life. During that period, he was a disillusioned soul, full of sorrow, struggling bravely against the growing feeling of frustration with an apparently stout optimism based on the sand of an archaic faith.

The doctrine of non-violence represented an effort to introduce morality in political practice. But in the Mahatma, the politician often got the better of the moralist. Personally he may have never deviated from his principles, or faith, as he preferred to call it. Yet, he allowed or condoned of his followers. Even that he did not do willingly. His codes of morality appeared so very dogmatic to others that they often could not observe them without surrendering judgement. Except in some quaint details, the moral codes preached by the Mahatma are unobjectionable. As a moralist, he followed his footprints of the religious preachers of the past; and therefore his codes were found to appear dogmatic in the rationalist atmosphere of our time. Instead of rejecting them on the spacious plea of practical politics or political pragmatism, one should provide them with a secular and rationalist sanction. Utilitarianism is not the only alternative to intuitional or transcendental morality.

The implication of the doctrine of non violence is the moral dictum that at the end does not justify the means. That is the core of the Mahatma's message - which is not compatible with

power-politics. The Mahatma wanted to purify politics; that can be done only by raising political practice above the vulgar level of a scramble for power. But for this, nationalist India today would not be intoxicated with the ideas of having a strong army-an idea which logically spells the danger of war. In the atmosphere of this intoxication, it is blasphemous to pledge unswerving loyalty to the message of non-violence and peace preached by the Mahatma.

Nationalism, heavily tainted by Hindu orthodoxy, bred Muslims communalism. Therefore, the ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity, placed before the country by the Mahatma, could not be attained. The failure in this respect must have been the greatest blow for the Mahatma.

During his last days, he staked his life for restoring communal harmony. He failed. Where he failed, smaller men with less lofty motive will not succeed. Nationalism is heading towards its Nemesis. The cosmopolitan (non-communal) and humanist message of the Mahatma was needed by India never so very urgently as today. Caught in the vicious circle of the contradiction of his ideas and ideals, the Mahatma could not see the limitation of nationalism before it was too late. Will his martyrdom open the eyes of his followers ? Will they know how to honour his sacred memory ? That can be done by acting according to his message, more boldly than he dared himself.

The Mahatma's place of honour in history will not be that of a patron-saint of nationalism which, in power, is bound to go against the moral and humanist essence of his message. He will be remembered for having vaguely visualised a humanist ideal, while still groping in the twilight of mediavalism. Primarily a religious man, he set before his followers high ideals which could not possibly be attained unless the human spirit broke out of the charmed circle of the religious mode of thought. Therefore, like all other religious prophets of morality, peace and human

brotherhood, the Mahatma was destined to fail in his mission. Communal harmony is not possible in the mediaeval atmosphere of religious orthodoxy and fanaticism. The ideal of individual liberty is precluded by nationalism, which is a totalitarian cult. In the absence of individual freedom, Humanism is an unattainable ideal. The inspiring vision of a peaceful human brotherhood is bound to be eclipsed by the ambition of making the nation great, prosperous and powerful. It would be idle to pledge loyalty to the message of the Mahatma unless it meant realisation of its contradictions and an intelligent resolve to place the moral and humanist core of his teachings above the carnal cult of nationalism and power-politics. Otherwise, the mahatma will have worn the crown of martyrdom in vain.

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