

# GREAT INDIANS

By

S. RADHAKRISHNAN



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*With an Introductory  
Essay on the Author by*  
PROF. D. S. SARMA

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## INTRODUCTION

### PROFESSOR S. RADHAKRISHNAN

SRI S. RADHAKRISHNAN was born of Telugu Brahmin parents in Tiruttani, Chittoor District, Madras Presidency, on September 5, 1888. He had his education in the Voorhees College, Vellore, and the Madras Christian College, Madras. He took his M.A. degree in Philosophy in 1909 and was, from 1909 to 1917, on the Staff of Presidency College, Madras, where he soon distinguished himself as a very clear expositor of even the most abstruse problems of philosophy. He was then transferred to the Arts College, Rajahmundry, as Lecturer in Philosophy. After serving there for a year, he was selected for the post of Professor of Philosophy in the University of Mysore. From 1918 to 1921 he remained in Mysore, where he wrote his first two important books—*The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* in 1918 and *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* in 1920. The latter, which contains a very able criticism of the chief contemporary systems of Western Philosophy from the point of view of Absolute Idealism, made Radhakrishnan's name well known in the philosophical world.

The young philosopher now attracted the eye of the great educationist, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, who offered him the King George V Professorship of Philosophy in his University. Professor Radhakrishnan accepted the offer, went to Calcutta in 1921 and held the place for



the next twenty years, with brief intervals, during which he was on other duty. Within three years of his going to the University of Calcutta he published the first volume of his monumental *Indian Philosophy* in which he gives a lucid survey of the philosophy of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, the theism of the Bhagavad-gītā, the pluralistic realism of the Jains, the ethical idealism of the Buddha and the later schools of Buddhist philosophy. The second volume of *Indian Philosophy* which was published in 1927 gives an account of the six Brahmanical systems of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta, and also of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śakta systems of theism.

Meanwhile Professor Radhakrishnan was invited to deliver the Upton Lectures for the year 1926 at Manchester College, Oxford. He accepted the invitation and went to England for the first time in 1926. The theme he chose for his lectures was the 'Hindu View of Life.' These lectures have since been published in book form. The first impression appeared in 1927 and there have been so far five other impressions. *The Hindu View of Life*, which gives a clear and rational account of Hindu Dharma, is the most popular of Radhakrishnan's books and has been translated into many languages, both Indian and European. After delivering the Upton Lectures at Oxford, Professor Radhakrishnan went to the United States on a lecturing tour and delivered the Haskel Lectures at Chicago in August 1926.

The Western scholars who met the Indian Professor in 1926 were very much impressed by his scholarship and his clear exposition, in fluent and faultless English, of many knotty points in Hindu philosophy. They saw that he was not only a great writer but also a great



speaker and that he could rouse the heart as well as enlighten the mind. So Radhakrishnan was invited to occupy the Chair of Comparative Religion in Manchester College, Oxford, in 1929. Accordingly he went to Oxford again in 1929 and gave the first of a series of lectures on the 22nd October. This lecture, along with some others, was later published in book form in 1933 with the title—*East and West in Religion*. While he was in England, he was also asked to give the Hibbert Lectures for 1929. The subject which he chose for these lectures was 'An Idealist View of Life.' These lectures were published in book form in 1932. *An Idealist View of Life* is the most important of Radhakrishnan's books, for it is here that we have his original contribution to the religious thought of his time.

After he returned to India, he was elected Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University in 1931. So he left Calcutta temporarily for Waltair and remained there from 1931 to 1936 as the head of the Andhra University. In 1931 he was nominated to the League of Nations' Committee for Intellectual Co-operation along with other persons of renown from various countries. He served on this Committee from 1931 to 1939 and had to go to Geneva annually for its meetings.

In 1936, when he was offered the newly created Spalding Professorship of Eastern Religions and Ethics, he gave up the Vice-Chancellorship of the Andhra University and went to Oxford. At the same time he reverted to his Professorship of Philosophy in Calcutta University. The arrangement was that he should divide his time between Oxford and Calcutta, lecturing for a term here and two terms there. This arrangement continued till the war broke out and prevented his annual voyage



to England. During the war he was granted dispensation from his duties in Oxford till normal conditions were restored.

Meanwhile he was induced by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1939 to accept the Vice-Chancellorship of the Benares Hindu University. A high salary was offered to him, but he refused it and consented to work only in an honorary capacity, retaining at the same time his Calcutta Professorship. It was but appropriate that a Hindu philosopher of Professor Radhakrishnan's eminence who had done so much by his books and lectures to spread a correct knowledge of Hinduism in Europe and America should have become the head of the Hindu University in the sacred city of Benares. There was, therefore, universal satisfaction when he accepted the place.

In 1939 Professor Radhakrishnan was able to bring out two important books. One is a collection of his lectures as Spalding Professor at Oxford with the title—*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. In this book he shows, with an astonishing wealth of learning, how the Upaniṣadic mysticism has been a continuous influence in Western thought from the times of Pythagoras and Plato down to the present day.

It may be mentioned here that, while Professor Radhakrishnan was at Oxford delivering these lectures, he was invited by the British Academy to give the annual lecture in the 'Master Mind' series. He chose as his subject 'Gautama the Buddha,' and his treatment of it was so masterly that it was described as a lecture 'on a master mind by a master mind.' And next year Professor Radhakrishnan was elected Fellow of the British



Academy. He was the first Indian to achieve this distinction.

The other book published by him in 1939 was a collection of essays and reflection by eminent persons in various walks of life all over the world on the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. This collection was edited and provided with a long introduction by Radhakrishnan and presented to Gandhiji on his seventieth birthday. And it is a happy coincidence that in the very year in which he published this symposium on Gandhiji's life and work Professor Radhakrishnan was invited to South Africa, the scene of Gandhiji's early life and activities, to give lectures on Indian philosophy and culture.

In 1941 Professor Radhakrishnan, while being the honorary Vice-Chancellor of the Benares Hindu University, was requested to occupy the Sir Sayaji Rao Chair of Indian Culture and Civilization founded by the Gaekwar of Baroda in memory of his illustrious predecessor. He had accordingly to relinquish the King George V Chair of Philosophy in Calcutta University which he had held for twenty years. But the bonds of love which connected Professor Radhakrishnan with the University of Calcutta could not be snapped. In 1942 he was invited to deliver the Kamala Lectures at that University. The delivery of these lectures, first in Calcutta and then in Benares, was one of the most outstanding successes of Professor Radhakrishnan's career. The Lectures were published in book form later in 1947.

In May 1944 Professor Radhakrishnan was invited by the Chinese Government to deliver a course of lectures in China and meet the leading academic people



there. He went by plane from Calcutta to Chungking on the 6th and, after spending two weeks in China returned to India on the 21st. During his stay he delivered twelve lectures on various subjects, besides giving informal talks at the dinner and tea parties held in his honour. These lectures were later published in book form with the title *India and China*.

In 1946 Professor Radhakrishnan went on a lecturing tour to the United States and delivered lectures at the Harvard, Yale, Los Angeles, Michigan and Cornell Universities. And during the same year he led the Indian delegation to the UNESCO's first conference held in Paris. He has been on the Executive Board of this international organization since its inception and attended its second conference at Mexico City in 1947 and its third conference at Beirut in 1948 and became the Chairman of the Board for 1948-49. In January 1948 he resigned from the Vice-Chancellorship of the Benares Hindu University and was, in the course of the year, appointed Chairman of the Indian Universities Commission. The most important books published by him during the last two years are his translations of the Bhagavadgītā (1948) and the Dhammapada (1949). A volume on Professor Radhakrishnan is in preparation in the 'Library of Living Philosophers.'

The services rendered by Professor Radhakrishnan to Hinduism, Buddhism and Indian philosophy and, above all, to the cause of religion in general have been immense. As far as the exposition of Hinduism is concerned, no teacher since the appearance of Swami Vivekananda on the platform of the World Congress of Religions at Chicago in 1893 has attracted so much attention as Professor Radhakrishnan. And his influ-



ence is likely to be permanent, because it depends not on mere popular lectures, but on scholarly works written in a charming style. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures of the modern Hindu Renaissance. Along with Gandhi and Tagore, he has raised the prestige of our nation among the nations of the world.

We may say that Professor Radhakrishnan has done yeoman's service to both Hinduism and Buddhism by the reorientation he has given to the teaching of the Buddha in the light of the Upaniṣadic thought. He has shown that the Buddha, far from being an innovator, was a teacher who took his stand on the philosophy of the Upaniṣads and tried to emphasize its ethical aspects and popularize its teachings. What the Upaniṣadic Rishis called Brahman, the Buddha called Dharma. It is because the Buddha had attained to the Real that he perceived the fleeting as fleeting and discarded it. The Buddha had thus an experience of the Absolute and taught that his eight-fold path would lead men from the unreal to the Real. He was only a reformer of Hinduism and not its opponent.

Professor Radhakrishnan is not only the greatest modern exponent of Hinduism but also a great world champion of religion in general. It is not the Hindus alone who are grateful to him for his clear and convincing explanation of all the aspects of their faith. Religious men all over the world whose faith is stronger than their reason will be thankful to the eminent Hindu philosopher for having painted in such warm colours 'to their intellect what already lay painted to their heart and imagination.' For, possessing the true hospitality of the Hindu mind, he undertakes to defend not this religion or that religion, but the spirit which lies



behind all religions. And he defends this most cherished possession of humanity against every kind of attack made against it in modern times. He courageously takes up the gauntlet thrown down by the physicist, the biologist, the behaviourist, the psychoanalyst, the anthropologist, the socialist, the communist and the humanist and reaffirms in eloquent terms the indefeasible and inalienable claims of religious experience. He boldly proclaims wherever he goes, that nothing but a spiritual revival could cure the distempers of the present world. The new world order which we all hope to see after the devastating global war of 1939-46 must have, according to him, a deep spiritual impulse behind it to give it unity, drive and lasting peace. There seems to be no doubt that his name will go down into history as that of the greatest religious philosopher of modern times. He is in the true line of descent from the ancient Hindu philosophers who have from time to time rescued the spirit of religion from the aberrations of secular thought and practice. The only difference is that, while the ancient philosophers took their stand on what they termed scriptural revelation, the modern philosopher takes his stand on the religious experience of the saints, sages and mystics belonging to various traditions all over the world.

D. S. SARMA.



## MAHATMA GANDHI—I\*

THE greatest fact in the story of man on earth is not his material achievements, the empires he has built and broken, but the growth of his soul from age to age in its search for truth and goodness. Those who take part in this adventure of the soul secure an enduring place in the history of human culture. Time has discredited heroes as easily as it has forgotten everyone else ; but the saints remain. The greatness of Gandhi is more in his holy living than in his heroic struggles, in his insistence on the creative power of the soul and its lifegiving quality at a time when the destructive forces seem to be in the ascendant.

### I

#### Religious Basis of Politics

Gandhi is known to the world as the one man more than any other who is mainly responsible for the mighty upheaval of the Indian nation which has shaken and loosened its chains. Politicians are not generally reputed to take religion seriously, for the values to which they are committed, such as the political control of one people by another, the economic exploitation of the poorer and weaker human beings, are so clearly inconsistent with the values of religion that the latter

\*Introduction to *Mahatma Gandhi—Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work* edited by the author.



could not be taken too seriously or interpreted too accurately. But for Gandhi, all life is of one piece. 'To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics ; and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means !' Again, 'I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth, I am striving for the kingdom of heaven, which is spiritual deliverance. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the Gīta, I want to live at peace with both friend and foe. So my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul.'<sup>1</sup> If man as a political being has not been much of a success, it is because he has kept religion and politics apart, thus misunderstanding both. For Gandhi there is no religion apart from human activity. Though in the present circumstances of India Gandhi happens to be a political revolutionary who refuses to accept tyranny or acquiesce in slavery, he is far from the uncompromising type of revolutionary whose abstractions force

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi — His Own Story*, pp. 353-4, 357.



men into unnatural and inhuman shapes. In the acid test of experience he remains, not a politician or a reformer, not a philosopher or a moralist, but someone composed of them all, an essentially religious person endowed with the highest and most human qualities and made more lovable by the consciousness of his own limitations and by an unfailing sense of humour.

## II

### Religion as Life in God

Whatever opinion we may hold of God, it is impossible to deny that He means something of supreme importance and absolute reality to Gandhi. It is his faith in God that has created in him a new man whose power and passion and love we feel. He has the feeling of something close to him, a spiritual presence which disturbs, embarrasses and overwhelms, an assurance of reality. Times without number, when doubts disturb his mind, he leaves it to God. Was there a response from God? No and Yes. No, for Gandhi does not hear anything said even by the most secret or the most distant of voices; yes, because he has a sense of reply, the appeased, satisfied feeling of one who has received an answer. It is indeed from the nature of the reply which is so eminently rational that he recognizes that he is not the victim of his own dreams or hallucinations. 'There is an undefinable, mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it though I do not see it. It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It is proved not by extraneous evi-



dence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within. Such testimony is to be found in the experience of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself.<sup>1</sup> 'It can never be a matter for argument. If you would have me convince others by argument, I am floored. But I can tell you this—that I am surer of His existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in this room. I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but that will not kill me. You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. But blast my beliefs in God and I am dead.'<sup>2</sup>

In consistency with the great spiritual tradition of Hinduism, Gandhi affirms that when once we rise from the grossness to which the flesh is prone into the liberty of spirit, the view from the summit is identical for all. We have to climb the mountain by different paths, from the points where we happen to be, but that which we seek is the same. 'The Allah of Islam is the same as the God of the Christians and the Īsvara of the Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are many names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes, and little man has tried in his humble way to describe mighty God by giving Him attributes, though He is above all attributes, Indescribable, Immeasurable. Living faith in this God means equal respect for all religions. It would be the height of intolerance—and intolerance is

<sup>1</sup> *Young India*, October 11, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *Harijan*, May 14, 1938.



a species of violence—to believe that your religion is superior to other religions and that you would be justified in wanting others to change over to your faith.' His attitude to other religion is not one of negative toleration but of positive appreciation. He accepts Jesus' life and work as a supreme illustration of the principle of non-violence. 'Jesus occupies in my heart the place of one of the great teachers who have made a considerable influence on my life.' He appreciates the character of the prophet Mohammad, his fervent faith and practical efficiency, the tender compassion and suffering of Ali. The great truths emphasized by Islam, intense belief in God's overruling majesty, puritanic simplicity of life, ardent sense of brotherhood and chivalrous devotion to the poor are accepted by him as fundamental to all religions. But the dominating force in his life has been Hinduism with its conception of truth, its vision of the soul and its charity.

All religions, however, are means to religion. 'Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within, and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker, and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.'

There is no other God than Truth, and the only means for the realization of truth is love or *ahimsā*. Know-

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, May 14, 1938.



ledge of truth and the practice of love are impossible without self-purification. Only the pure in heart can see God. To attain to purity of heart, to rise above attachment and repulsion, to be free from passion in thought, word and deed, to be redeemed from fear and vanity, the inconsistencies of our flesh and the discursiveness of our minds must be overcome. Disciplined effort, austere living, *tapas* is the way to it. Suffering rinses our spirit clean. According to Hindu mythology, the God Siva undertakes Himself to swallow the poison which comes up when the ocean is churned. The God of the Christians gave His Son in order to save mankind. Even if they are myths, why should they have arisen if they did not express some deep-seated intuitions in men? The more you love, the more you suffer. Infinite love is infinite suffering. 'Whosoever would save his life shall lose it.' We are here working for God, called upon to use our life for carrying out His intentions. If we refuse to do so and insist on saving our lives instead of spending them, we negate our true nature and so lose our lives. If we are to be able to follow to the farthest limit we can see, if we are to respond to the most distant call, earthly values, fame, possessions and pleasures of the senses have to be abandoned. To be one with the poor and the outcast is to be his equal in poverty and to cast oneself out. To be free to say or do the right, regardless of praise or blame, to be free to love all and forgive all, non-attachment is essential. Freedom is only for the unconfined who enjoy the whole world without owning a blade of grass in it. In this matter, Gandhi is adhering to the great ideal of the *sañnyāsin* who has no fixed abode and is bound to no stable form of living.



There is, however, some exaggeration when the ascetic code in all its fullness is prescribed, not merely for the sañnyāsins but for the whole of humanity. Sexual restraint, for example, is essential for all, but celibacy is only for the few. The sexual act is not a mere pleasure of the body, a purely carnal act, but is a means by which love is expressed and life perpetuated. It becomes evil, if it harms others or if it interferes with a person's spiritual development, but neither of these conditions is inherent in the act itself. The act by which we live, by which love is expressed and the race continued is not an act of shame or sin. But when the masters of spiritual life insist on celibacy, they demand that we should preserve singleness of mind from destruction by bodily desire.

Gandhi has spared no pains in disciplining himself to the utmost possible extent, and those who know him will admit his claim that he has 'known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Muslims, Parsees, Christians or Jews.' He adds : 'I cannot claim this as a special virtue, as it has been in my very nature rather than a result of any effort on my part, whereas in the case of non-violence, celibacy and other cardinal virtues, I am fully conscious of a continuous striving for the cultivation of them.'

Only the pure in heart can love God and love man. Suffering love is the miracle of the spirit by which, though the wrongs of others are borne on our shoulders, we feel a sense of comfort deeper and more real

<sup>1</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi—His Own Story*, p. 209.



than any given by purely selfish pleasures. At such moments we understand that nothing in the world is sweeter than the knowledge that we have been able to give a moment's happiness to another, nothing more precious than the sense that we have shared another's sorrow. Perfect compassion untouched by condescension, washed clean of pride, even of the pride of doing good, is the highest religious quality.

### III

#### The Spirit of Humanity

It follows that the mark of spirituality is not exile from the natural world but work in it with love for all. *Yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmaivābhūt vijānatah.* Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ātmaiva. The condition is absolute. There must be freedom and equality of status. Such a demand makes for the establishment of a universal community of free persons and requires those who accept it to overcome the artificial barriers of race and creed, wealth and power, class and nation. If one group or nation attempts to make itself secure at the expense of another, Germans at the expense of the Czechs, landlords at the expense of tenants, capitalists at the expense of workers, it is adopting an undemocratic method and can defend its injustice only by the force of arms. The dominant group has the fear of dispossession and the oppressed stores up just resentment. Only justice can terminate this unnatural condition, the justice which means the recognition of the equal claims of all human beings. The movement of humanity all these centuries has been



towards human brotherhood. The various forward trusts that have become manifest in different parts of the world, the ideals of justice, equality and freedom from exploitation of which men have become increasingly conscious, the demands they have come to feel are all risings of the common man against the perversions and compulsions that were perpetually developing to restrain him and hold him back. The progress of the consciousness of freedom is the essence of human history.

We are inclined to give too much importance to exceptional incidents by seeing them in distorted perspective. What we do not sufficiently realize is that these setbacks, blind alleys and disasters are only a part to be viewed in relation to the background of the general tendency at work over the centuries. If we could only get a detached view of the continued effort of mankind, we would be amazed and profoundly moved. Serfs are becoming free men, heretics are no longer burned, nobles are surrendering their privileges, slaves are being freed from a life of shame, rich men are apologizing for their wealth, militant empires are proclaiming the necessity of peace, and even dreams of the union of mankind are cherished. Yes, we have even today the lust of the powerful, the malice of knaves, the lies of the hypocrites and the rise of arrogant racialism and nationalism ; yet one would be blind if one did not see the great tradition of democracy which is universal in its sweep. Unceasing is the toil of those who are labouring to build a world where the poorest have a right to sufficient food, to light, air and sunshine in their homes, to hope, dignity and beauty in their lives. Gandhi is among the foremost of the servants of huma-



nity. He is not comforted by the prospect of the distant future when faced by the threat of immediate disasters. He joins forces with men of fixed convictions to work by the most direct means possible for the cure of evils and the prevention of dangers. Democracy for him is not a matter of phrases but of social realities. All his public activities in South Africa and India can be understood only if we know his love of the common man.

The civilized world has been stirred deeply by the Nazi treatment of the Jews, and liberal statesmen have solemnly expressed their disapproval and sorrow at the recrudescence of racial prejudice. But the strange though startling fact is that in democratically governed countries of the British Empire and the United States of America many communities suffer political and social disabilities on racial grounds. When Gandhi was in South Africa he saw that Indians, though nominally free citizens of the British Empire, were subjected to grave disabilities. Both Church and State denied equality of rights to non-European races, and Gandhi started his passive resistance movement on a mass scale to protest against the oppressive restrictions. He stood out for the essential principle that men *qua* men are equal and artificial distinctions based on race and colour were both unreasonable and immoral. He revealed to the Indian community its actual degradation and inspired it with a sense of its own dignity and honour. His effort was not confined to the welfare of Indians. He would not justify the exploitation of the African natives or the better treatment of Indians on account of their historic culture. While the more obnoxious of the discriminatory legisla-



tion against the Indians was abolished, even today Indians are subjected to humiliating restrictions which do not reflect credit on those who submit to them or add to the prestige of the Government which imposes them.

In India it was his ambition to rid the country of its divisions and discords, to discipline the masses to self-dependence, raise women to a plane of political, economic and social equality with men, end the religious hatreds which divide the nation, and cleanse Hinduism of its social abomination of untouchability. The success he had achieved in removing this blot on Hinduism will stand out as one of his greatest contributions to the progress of humanity. So long as there is a class of untouchables he belongs to it. 'If I have to be re-born, I should wish to be born an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition.' To say that we love God as unseen and at the same time deal cruelly with people who move by His life or life derived from Him is a contradiction in terms. Though Gandhi prides himself on being a conservative Hindu, there has been no more vigorous critic of rigours and disabilities of caste, of the curse of untouchability, of the vice in temples, of cruelty to cattle and the animal world. 'I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never leads me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism.'

Today his opposition to the autocracy of the Indian princes is based on his love for the millions of their subjects. Not even the most generous observer can say that all is well with the States. I may perhaps quote a few sentences from the *Statesman* of Calcutta, a paper



which represents British interest. 'It is no reflection upon individuals but only upon human nature to say that in many of the States appalling conditions prevail. The bad landlords as well as the good ones are subject to no laws, they have the power of life and death, there are no obstacles to their greed or lust or cruelty, if they are greedy, vicious or cruel. If the treaties which protect petty tyrants are never to be revised, if the Paramount Power is for ever to have an obligation of honour to defend the indefensible, then some day an irresistible force will encounter an immovable object, and according to the classic answer to this problem something will go to smithereens.' The slowness of evolution is the cause of all revolutions. Gandhi, with the utmost friendship for the princes, is asking them to wake up and set their houses in order. I hope that they will realize, before it is too late, that their safety and survival are bound up with the rapid introduction of responsible government, which even the Paramount Power with all its strength was obliged to concede in the provinces.

Gandhi's main charge against the British Government in India is that it has led to the oppression of the poor. From the beginning of her history India has been known for her wealth and possessions. We have vast areas of the most fertile soil, material resources inexhaustible abundance, and with proper care and attention we have enough to go round and feed every man, woman and child. And yet we have millions of people who are the victims of poverty, who are under-nourished and under-housed, whose lives are an unceasing struggle from youth to old age, until at last death comes to their rescue and stills their aching



hearts. These conditions are not due to pitiless nature, but to the inhuman system which cries out to be abolished, not only in the interests of India but of the whole of humanity.

In the broadcast address which he gave from London to America in 1931, Gandhi referred to the 'semi-starved millions scattered throughout the seven hundred thousand villages dotted over a surface nineteen hundred miles long and fifteen hundred miles broad.' He said : 'It is a painful phenomenon that those simple villagers, through no fault of their own, have nearly six months in the year idle upon their hands. Time was, not long ago, when every village was self-sufficient in regard to the two primary human wants—food and clothing. Unfortunately for us, when the East India Company, by means which I would prefer not to describe, destroyed that supplementary village industry, then the millions of spinners—who had become famed through the cunning of their deft fingers for drawing the finest thread, such as has never been yet drawn by any modern machinery—these village spinners found themselves one fine morning with their noble occupation gone, and from that day forward India has become progressively poor, no matter what may be said to the contrary.'

India lives in the villages, and her civilization has been an agricultural one which is becoming increasingly mechanical. Gandhi is the representative of the peasant, the producer of the world's food who is fundamental in society, and is anxious to maintain and fortify this basic bias of Indian civilization. He finds that under British rule the people are giving up their old standards and in spite of many admirable qualities



they have acquired, such as mechanical intelligence, inventive skill, courage and adventure, they are worshipping material success, are greedy for tangible gains and are governed by worldly standards. Our industrial cities have lost all proportion to the landscape out of which they have grown, have swollen to meaningless dimensions, and their people caught in the entangling apparatus of money and machinery have become violent, restless, thoughtless, undisciplined and unscrupulous. For Gandhi, industrialized humanity has come to mean women who for a paltry wage are compelled to work out their barren lives, babies who are doped with opium so that they shall not cry and disturb their working mothers, little children who are robbed of their childhood and in their tender years are forced into industrial works, and millions of unemployed who are dwarfed and diseased. We are being snared and enslaved, he thinks, and our souls are conquered for a mess of pottage. A spirit and a culture which had soared up in the rishis of the Upaniṣads, the Buddhist monks, Hindu saññyāsins and Muslim fakirs, cannot be content with cars and radios and plutocracy. Our vision is dimmed and our way lost. We have taken a wrong twist which has dispossessed, impoverished and embittered our agricultural population, corrupted, coarsened and blinded our workers, and given us millions of children with blank faces, dead eyes and drooping mouths. Beneath our present bafflement and exasperation the bulk of the people retain a hunger for the realization of the old dream of genuine liberty, real self-respect ; of a life where none is rich and none is poor, where the ex-



tremes of luxury and leisure are abolished and where industry and commerce exist in a simple form.

Gandhi does not aim at a peasant society which will forgo altogether the benefits of the machine. He is not against large-sale production. When he was asked whether cottage industries and large-scale production can be harmonized, he said, 'Yes, if they are planned so as to help the villages. Key-industries, industries which the nation needs, may be centralized. Under my scheme nothing will be allowed to be produced by cities which can be equally well produced by the villages. The proper function of cities is to serve as clearing-houses for village products.'<sup>1</sup> His insistence on khadi or homespun and his scheme of popular education centring round the handicrafts are devised to resuscitate the villages. He repeatedly warns that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its innumerable villages. The bulk of India's population must get back to the land, stay in the land, and live primarily off the produce of the land so that their families may be self-supporting, owning the implements they use, the soil they cultivate and the roof that shelters them. Not an uprooted, shiftless class of factory workers, not an unsound, rapacious, money-lending business community, but a responsible agrarian population and the stable, level-headed people of small agricultural market-towns must dominate the cultural, social, economic and political life of the country, give it morality, tone and noble objectives. This is not to become primitive. It is only to take up a mode of existence that is instinctive to India, that

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, January 28, 1939.



supplied her once with a purpose, a faith and a meaning. It is the only way to keep our species civilized. India of the peasant and rustic life, of village communities, of forest hermitages and spiritual retreats has taught the world many great lessons but has wronged no man, has injured no land and sought no dominion over others. Today the true purpose of life has been perverted. How is India to get out of this slough of despond? After centuries of subjection, the people seem to have lost the will or the wish to lift themselves out of it. The forces against them seem to be too strong. To give them confidence, a prouder self-respect, a more erect carriage, is no easy task. Yet Gandhi has tried to re-kindle a torpid generation with the fire that burns in his soul, with his passion for freedom. In freedom men and women reveal their best ; in slavery they are debased. To liberate the ordinary human being from the restrictions, internal and external, which warp his nature has been the aim of freedom. As a great defender of human liberty, he is struggling to release the country from foreign control. Patriotism, when it is so pure, is neither a crime nor bad manners. To fight against the present unnatural conditions is one's sacred duty. He employs spiritual weapons and refuses to draw the sword, and in the process is training the people for independence, making them capable of winning and holding it. Sir George Lloyd (now Lord Lloyd), the then Governor of Bombay, said of Gandhi's campaign : 'Gandhi's was the most colossal experiment in world history and it came within an inch of succeeding.'

Though he has failed in his attempt to move the British Government, he has liberated forces in the



country which will not cease to act. He has stirred the people from their lethargy, given them a new self-confidence and responsibility and united them in their resolve to win freedom. To the extent to which there is today an awakening of a new spirit, a preparedness for a new kind of national corporate life, a new social attitude in dealing with the depressed classes, it is largely due to the spiritual energy and dynamic of Gandhi's movement.

Gandhi's outlook has nothing sectional or provincial about it. He believes that the heritage of India can help the culture of the world. A prostrated India can give no hope to humanity ; only an awakened, free India can give help to a groaning world. Gandhi affirms that if the British are earnest about their vision of justice, peace and order, it is not enough to put down the aggressive powers and preserve the *status quo*. Our love of liberty and justice must exclude the passive violence of refusing to reform a situation which is contrary to the professed ideals. If greed, cruelty and contempt of man have gone to the making of empires, we must change them before we call upon the world to rally to the forces of freedom and justice. Violence is either active or passive. The aggressive powers are now actively violent ; the imperial powers who persist in the enjoyment of unjust advantages acquired from past violence are as much guilty of violence and are inimical to freedom and democracy. Until we act honestly in this matter, we cannot secure a better world-order and the world will be in a chronic state of uncertainty, full of wars and threats of wars. Self-government for India is the acid test of British honesty. Gandhi is still observing his twenty-four hours' fast



every Monday to indicate to all concerned that self-rule is unattained. And yet his is the restraining influence on an impatient India, torn between the legitimate aspirations of the people and the obstinacy of the British ruling classes. He has been the greatest force for peace in India.

When he landed in England after the South African struggle was over, he found that war against Germany had been declared. He offered to enlist unconditionally for the whole duration of the war in order to undertake ambulance work at the Front. His offer was accepted and he was placed in a responsible post with an Indian unit. But owing to over-exposure while on duty, he was taken ill with pleurisy and his life was suspected to be in danger. On recovery he was ordered by the doctors to leave for the warm climate of India. He actively encouraged recruiting in the war—a thing which has puzzled even many of his friends. At the end of the war the Rowlatt Act was passed against the unanimous opposition of Indians. Things were done in the Punjab under martial law which shocked the country. Gandhi was one of the authors of the Congress Inquiry Report on the Punjab disturbances. In spite of it all, he recommended to the Congress at Amritsar in December 1919 that the Reforms should be accepted and worked in a constitutional manner. When in 1920 the Hunter Commission Report wavered in its criticism of official action, when the House of Lords declined to condemn General Dyer, he made the great decision of his life to refuse to co-operate with the British Government, and in September 1920 the Congress adopted the resolution of non-violent non-cooperation.



It will be well to quote his own words in a letter to the Viceroy, written on August 1, 1920 : 'Your Excellency's light-hearted treatment of official crime, your exoneration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Mr. Montagu's despatch and, above all, the shameful ignorance of the Punjab events and the callous disregard of the feelings of Indians betrayed by the House of Lords, have filled me with the gravest misgivings regarding the future of the Empire, have estranged me completely from the present Government, and have disabled me from rendering, as I have hitherto whole-heartedly rendered, my loyal co-operation.'

'In my humble opinion the ordinary method of agitating by way of petitions, deputations, and the like is no remedy for moving to repentance a Government so hopelessly indifferent to the welfare of its charge as the Government of India has proved to be. In European countries condemnation of such grievous wrongs as the Khilāfat and the Punjab would have resulted in a bloody revolution by the people. They would have resisted, at all costs, national emasculation. Half of India is too weak to offer violent resistance, and the other half is unwilling to do so. I have therefore ventured to suggest the remedy of non-co-operation, which enables those who wish to dissociate themselves from Government, and which, if unattended by violence and undertaken in an ordered manner, must compel it to retrace its steps and undo the wrongs committed ; but, whilst I pursue the policy of non-co-operation, in so far as I can carry the people with me, I shall not lose hope that you will yet see your way to do justice.'

While he maintains that British rule in its present



form has made India 'poorer in wealth, in manliness, in godliness and in her sons' power to defend themselves,' he hopes that it can be altered. Even while he continues his campaign against British control, he is not opposed to the British connexion. In the heyday of the non-cooperation movement he fought stoutly against the movement for complete severance from Britain.

While he was willing to work with the British as friends and equals, he was firm that no improvement in the Indian situation was possible so long as the British adopted an unnatural attitude of patronage and superiority. Let us remember that even in moments of the greatest excitement he did not harbour ill-will to the British. 'I will not hurt England or Germany to serve India.'

When by some stupid or ill-conceived measure, such as the Amritsar massacre or the appointment of the Simon Commission, India lost patience and self-control and became aflame with wrath, Gandhi was there leading the discontent and indignation into safe channels of love and reconciliation. In the Round Table Conference he showed his indelible affection for the British and his faith in a commonwealth based not on force but on reason, and the will to promote the general good of mankind. A halting measure of self-government in the provinces was the result of the Round Table Conferences, and when the majority of the people were against the acceptance and working of the Constitution, it was Gandhi again, more than any other, who persuaded the Congress to work the reforms for what they were worth. His sole concern is peace with Britain, but peace rooted in freedom and friendship. India today is represented by a leader who has no trace



of racial bitterness or personal rancour ; he has no faith in the use of force and restrains his people from restoring to violence. He does not desire to separate India from the British Commonwealth if only it means a fellowship of free nations. His Majesty the King in his speech to the Canadian Parliament on the 19th of May said that the unity of the British Empire 'finds expression today in the free association of nations enjoying common principles of government and a common attachment to the ideals of peace and freedom, bound together by a common allegiance to the Crown.' Gandhi demands the application of these 'common principles of government' to India. He claims that the Indians should be masters in their own house, and that is neither unreasonable nor immoral. He is keen on bringing about better relations between the two camps through the co-operation of men of good will.

It is tragic that his appeal avails no more than the whistling of the wind. After years of unwearied labour and heroic struggle his great mission remains unfulfilled, though his vision and faith are still alive. For myself I shall hope that British public opinion will assert itself and compel its Government to set up a free, self-governing India, without bartering or niggling, without hesitation or delay, with a fine, open gesture of faith, though it may involve a little risk : for I am persuaded that, if it is not done in response to Gandhi's appeal for justice and fair play, the relations of our two countries will get worse, the breach will widen and bitterness grow to the detriment and danger of both.



Whether it is the South African Government or the British Government, whether it is the Indian mill-owners or the Hindu priests or the Indian princes who are the objects of Gandhi's criticism and attack, the underlying spirit is exactly the same in all these different activities. 'I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence ; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth, or Truth which is God, through the service of these millions.'<sup>1</sup>

#### IV

#### Satyāgraha

'Ahimsā or non-violence is the highest duty' is a well-known saying of the *Mahābhārata*. Its practical application in life is satyāgraha or soul-force. It is based on the assumption that 'the world rests on the bedrock of satya or truth. Asatya, meaning untruth, also means non-existent, and satya, or truth, means "that which is." If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being "that which is" can never be destroyed.'<sup>2</sup> God is the reality. The will to freedom and love is in accordance with reality. When man rejects this will for his own interests, he is rejecting himself. By this act of frustration he is setting himself in opposition to reality, is isolating himself from it. This negation represents man's estrangement from himself, his denial of the truth

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, March 11, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi—His Own Story*, p. 225.



about himself. It cannot be final or ultimate. It cannot destroy the real will. Reality cannot frustrate itself. 'The gates of hell shall not prevail.' God cannot be beaten. The meek shall inherit the earth and not the mighty who will lose themselves in the effort to save themselves, for they put their trust in unspiritual or unreal things like wealth and death-dealing weapons. Ultimately men are ruled not by those who believe in negation, hatred, violence, but by those who believe in wisdom and love, in inward and outward peace.

Satyāgraha is rooted in the power of reality, in the inward strength of the soul.—It is not merely the negative virtue of abstaining from violence, but the positive one of doing good. 'If I hit my adversary, that is of course violence ; but to be truly non-violent, I must love him and pray for him even when he hits me.' Love is unity and it comes into clash with evil which is separateness, getting, despising, hating, hurting and killing. Love does not acquiesce in evil, in wrong-doing, injustice or exploitation. It does not evade the issue but fearlessly faces the wrong-doer and resists his wrong with the overpowering force of love and suffering, for it is contrary to human nature to fight with force. Our conflicts are to be settled by the human means of intelligence and good will, of love and service. In this confused world the one saving feature is the great adventure of being human. Creative life asserts itself in the midst of death. In spite of all this fear and gloom, humanity is practised by all, by the farmer and the weaver, by the artist and the philosopher, by the monk in the cloister and the scientist in the laboratory, and by all, young and old, when they love and suffer. Life is immense. *Prāṇo virāṭ.*



The advocates of the use of force adopt a crude version of the Darwinian struggle for existence. They overlook the fundamental distinction between the animal and the human worlds and exalt a biological generalization into a doctrine of human destiny. If violent resistance is adopted in a world where it does not belong, human life is in danger of being degraded to the level of animal existence. In the *Mahābhārata* the warring world of men is compared to a dog kennel 'First there comes the wagging of tails, then the bark, then the replying bark, then the turning of one round the other, then the show of teeth, then the roaring, and then comes the commencement of the fight. It is the same with men ; there is no difference whatever.'<sup>1</sup> Gandhi asks us to leave fighting to apes and dogs and behave like men and serve the right by quiet suffering. Love or self-suffering can overcome the enemy, not by destroying him but by changing him, for he is, after all, a person of like passions with ourselves. Gandhi's acts of repentance and self-humiliation are full of moral courage and atoning sacrifice.

While a few individuals here and there tried to use the method of love in their personal lives, it is Gandhi's supreme achievement to have adopted it as a plan for social and political liberation. Under his leadership organized groups in South Africa and India have used it on a large scale for the redress of grievances. Entirely adjuring the use of any physical violence for attaining political ends, he has developed this new technique in the history of political revolution, a technique which does not injure the spiritual tradition of India but arises out of it.

<sup>1</sup> *Evam eva manusyesu viseso nasti kascana*, V, 72, 72-3.



It has taken different forms of passive resistance, non-violent non-co-operation, and civil disobedience. Every one of them is based on hatred of the wrong and love for the wrong-doer. A *satyāgrahi* is chivalrous to his opponents. The disobedience to law has always to be civil, and 'civility does not mean the mere outward gentleness of speech cultivated for the occasion, but an inborn gentleness and desire to do the opponent good.' In all his campaigns, whenever the enemy was in trouble Gandhi went to his rescue. He condemns all attempts to use the enemy's need as one's opportunity. We should not strike a bargain with Britain when she is in trouble in Europe. During the war he wrote to the Viceroy of India : 'If I could make my countrymen retrace their steps, I would make them withdraw all the Congress resolutions and not whisper "Home rule" or "Responsible government" during the pendency of the war.' Even General Smuts felt the irresistible attraction of Gandhi's methods, and one of his secretaries said to Gandhi : 'I do not like your people and I do not care to assist them at all. But what am I to do ? You help us in our days of need. How can we lay hands upon you ? I often wish that you took to violence like the English strikers and then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness.'<sup>1</sup>

Twenty years after the war to end war millions of men are again under arms and in peace time armies are mobilizing, fleets are covering the seas and aero-

<sup>1</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi—His Own Story*, p. 247.



planes are assembling in the sky. We know that war solves no problems but only makes their solution more difficult. Many Christians men and women are tormented by the arguments for and against war. The pacifist declares that war is a crime that disgraces humanity and there is no justification for defending civilization by the instruments of barbarism. We have no right to impose suffering on men and women with whom we have no quarrel. A nation engaged in war is inspired by a grim determination to defeat and destroy the enemy. It is swept by fear and the passion of hatred. We cannot rain death and destruction on a crowded city in a spirit of love and forgiveness. The whole method of war is one of engaging Satan to reprove Satan. It is contrary to the mind of Jesus, his moral teaching and example. We cannot reconcile killing and Christianity.

The advocates of war argue that, though war is a dreadful evil, on occasions it becomes the lesser of two evils. Practical wisdom consists in a proper appreciation of relative values. We owe obligations to the social community and the State which is its organ. As members of a society, we derive protection of person and property, education and other advantages which give our lives value and interest. Naturally our duty is to defend the State when it is attacked, to preserve the inheritance when it is threatened.

It is this line of argument that is presented to us when we are called upon to maim and kill, to wound and destroy people against whom we have no ill will. Nazi Germany contends that man's principal duty is membership of his State, and his reality, goodness and true freedom the furtherance of its ends. The State has



the right to subordinate the happiness of individuals to its own greatness. The great virtue of war is that it kills man's longing, in the weakness of his flesh, for personal liberty. In his speech at the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Fascist party, Mussolini said : 'The order of the day is more ships, more guns and more aeroplanes at whatever cost and by whatever means, even if we have to wipe out completely what is called civilian life.' 'From pre-historic days one cry has been borne over the centuries, "Woe to the unarmed."' 'We desire that nothing more shall be heard of brotherhood, sisterhood, cousinhood or their bastard parenthoods because the relations between states are relations of force and these relations of force are the determining elements of our policy.' Mussolini adds, 'If the problem is considered on the claim of morality, nobody has the right to throw the first stone.' Empire building is like a game of cards. Some powers get a good hand and play it so well that others are nowhere. When all the profits are in the pocket they turn round and say that gambling is bad and assume an attitude of amazement that others wish to play the old game. It is not right to assume that the idols of race, power and armed force are worshipped only in Central Europe.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, in his speech in the House of Lords during the debate on the 20th of March, pleaded for 'the massing of might on the side of the right.' 'We are driven to this,' he argues, 'because we are convinced that there are some things that are more sacred even than peace and that these things must be defended.' 'I cannot believe that it is against the will of Providence that nations should defend things which



are so precious to civilization and human welfare.' In Gandhi we have that rarest kind of religious man who could face a fanatical, patriotic assembly and say that he would, if he had to, sacrifice even India to the Truth. Gandhi says : 'Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise ; I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man.'

The aim of the religious individual is not to degrade the visions to the demands of the actual but to raise the actual to the pattern of the ideal. Our patriotic allegiances disrupt the spiritual unity of the human family and we maintain our loyalty to the larger community by refusing to engage in war and our loyalty to our State by defending it in religious and human ways. The religious at least, like the Apostles, 'ought to obey God rather than men.' Our trouble is that society in all countries is in the hands of people who believe in war as an instrument of policy and think of progress in terms of conquest.

Man, unless he is sadistic, is happy when he is gentle and merciful. There is joy in creation and misery in destruction. The common soldiers have no hatred for their enemies, but the ruling classes by appealing to their fear, self-interest and pride seduce them from their humanity. People in whom rage and hatred are factitiously produced fight one another because they are simple men trained to obedience. Even then they cannot put rancour in their killing. It is discipline that compels them to do what they hate. The ultimate responsibility lies with the Governments that are implacable and pitiless. They have imprisoned simple people and diminished their humanity. Men who delight in creation are drilled to form armies, navies and



air fleets that are meant for destruction. We applaud murder and make mercy a thing of shame. We forbid the teaching of truth and command the spreading of lies. We rob both our own people and strangers of decency, of happiness and of life, and make ourselves responsible for mass murders and spiritual death.

We cannot have peace until all the nations treat with each other in a mood of freedom and friendliness, until we develop a new conception of the integrated social life. The fate of civilization and humanity on this planet is bound up with deep instinct for the universal values of spirit, freedom, justice and love of man which form the breath of Gandhi's being. In this violent and distracted world Gandhi's non-violence seems to be a dream too beautiful to be true. For him God is truth and love, and God wishes us to be truthful and loving regardless of consequences. A truly religious man takes as much trouble to discover what is right as the prudent man does to discover what will pay, and he does it even if it means the surrender of his dearest interests, individual, racial and national. Only those who have emptied themselves of all selfishness, individual, and corporate, have the strength and the courage to say, 'May my interests perish, so Thy will be done.' Gandhi does not admit the possibility that love of God and of truth and fair dealing can hurt anyone. He is certain that against the rock of moral law world's conquerors and exploiters hurl themselves eventually to their own destruction. It is not even safe to be immoral, for the will to power is self-defeating. When we talk of 'national welfare,' we assume that we have an inviolate and perpetual right to hold certain territories ; and as for 'civilization' the world has seen a



number of civilizations on which the dust of ages has settled. The jungle has conquered their cities and jackals howl there in the moonlight.

Considerations of 'civilization' and 'national welfare' are irrelevant to the man of faith. Love is not a matter of policy or calculation. To those who are persuaded by despair that there is no remedy against the violence of the modern world but to escape or destroy, Gandhi says that there is another within the reach of us all, the principle of love which has upheld the spirit of man through many tyrannies and will uphold it still. His satyāgraha may seem to be an ineffectual answer to the gigantic displays of brute force ; but there is something more formidable than force ; the immortal spirit of man which will not be subdued by noise or numbers. It will break all fetters which tyrants seek to rivet on it. In an interview with a *New York Times* correspondent who asked him in the March crisis for a message to the world, Gandhi recommended simultaneous disarmament on the part of the democratic powers as the solution. 'I am certain,' he said, 'as I am sitting here, that this would open Hitler's eyes and disarm him.' The interviewer asked, 'Would not that be a miracle ?' Gandhi replied : 'Perhaps. But it would save the world from the butchery which seems impending.' 'The hardest metal yields to sufficient heat ; even so must the hardest heart melt before the sufficiency of the heat of non-violence. And there is no limit to the capacity of non-violence to generate heat.....During my half-century of experience I have not yet come across a situation when I had to say that I was helpless, that I had no remedy in terms of non-violence.' Love is the law of human life, its natural necessity. We



are approaching a state when this necessity would be manifest, for human life would be impossible if men were to evade and disobey this principle. We have wars simply because we are not sufficiently selfless for a life which does not need wars. The battle for peace must be fought in the heart of the individual. The spirit in him must break the power of pride and selfishness, lust and fear. A new way of life must become the foundation of national life as well as of world order, a way of life which will conserve and foster the true interest of all classes, races and nations. It is the freed men, who have liberated themselves from submission to the blind, selfish will of avidyā, that can work for and establish peace. Peace is a positive demonstration in life and behaviour of certain universal principles and standards. We must fight for them by weapons which do not involve the debasement of moral values or the destruction of human life. In this effort we must be ready to endure whatever suffering comes our way.

In my travels in different parts of the world I have noted that Gandhi's reputation is more universal than that of the greatest statesmen and leaders of nations, and his personality more beloved and esteemed than any or all of them. His name is familiar to such a degree that there is scarcely a peasant or a factory worker who does not consider him to be a friend of humankind. They seem to think that he is likely to restore the golden age. But we cannot summon it, as we would summon, let us say, a passing cab. For we are subject to a thing more powerful than any nation, more humiliating than any conquest, and that is ignorance. Though all our faculties are designed for



life, we have allowed them to be perverted in the cause of death. Though the right to happiness is clearly implicit in the creation of humankind, we have allowed that right to be neglected and suffered our energy to be used in the pursuit of power and wealth by which the happiness of the many is sacrificed to the doubtful satisfaction of a few. The world is in slavery to the same error to which you and I are subject. We must strive, not for wealth and power but for the establishment of love and humanity. Freedom from error is the only true liberty.

Gandhi is the prophet of a liberated life wielding power over millions of human beings by virtue of his exceptional holiness and heroism. There will always be some who will find in such rare examples of sanctity the note of strength and stark reality which is missing in a life of general good will, conventional morality or vague aesthetic affectation which is all that many modern teachers have to offer. To be true, to be simple, to be pure and gentle of heart, to remain cheerful and contented in sorrow and danger, to love life and not to fear death, to serve the Spirit and not to be haunted by the spirits of the dead, nothing better has ever been taught or lived since the world first began.



## MAHATMA GANDHI—II\*

WE are too near the event—the great blow fell only the day before yesterday and our hearts are so full of grief that it will not be possible for us to undertake any detailed or detached appraisal of his life and work. The whole world has been shocked with horror that a great soul, rare in any age but unique in ours, has thus fallen. President Truman said that a giant among men had fallen. This puny figure of seven stone was a giant among men, measured by the greatness of his soul. By his side, other men, very important and famous men, big in their own way, big in their space and time, look small and insignificant. His profound sincerity of spirit, his freedom from hatred and malice, his mastery over himself, his human, friendly-all-embracing charity, his strong conviction, which he shared with the great ones of history, that the martyrdom of the body is nothing compared with the defilement of the soul, a conviction which he successfully put to the test in many dramatic situations and now in this final act of surrender, show the impact of religion on life, the impact of the eternal values on the shifting problems of the world of time.

The inspiration of his life has been what is commonly called religion, religion not in the sense of subscriptions to dogmas or conformity to ritual, but religion in the sense of an abiding faith in the absolute

\* An address delivered in All Souls College, Oxford, on Sunday, February 1, 1948.



values of truth, love and justice and a persistent endeavour to realize them on earth. Nearly fifteen years ago, I asked him to state his view of religion. He expressed it in the words :

‘I often describe my religion as the Religion of Truth. Of late, instead of saying God is Truth, I have been saying Truth is God, in order more fully to define my Religion....Nothing so completely describes my God as Truth. Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known. The most ignorant among mankind have some truth in them. We are all sparks of Truth. The sum-total of these sparks is indescribable, as yet—unknown—Truth which is God. I am being daily led nearer to It by constant prayer.’<sup>1</sup>

Even though Gandhi practised this religion with courage and consistency, he had an unusual sense of humour, a certain light-heartedness, even gaiety, which we do not associate with ardent religious souls. This playfulness was the outcome of an innocence of heart, a spontaneity of spirit. While he redeemed even the most fugitive and trivial moment from commonness, he had all the time a remote, a far-way look. The abuses and perversities of life did not shake his confidence in the essential goodness of things. He assumed, without much discussion, that his way of life was clean, right and natural, while our way in this mechanized industrial civilization was unnatural.

Gandhi's religion was an intensely practical one. There are religious men who, when they find the

<sup>1</sup> Radhakrishnan & Muirhead : *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (1936), p. 21.



troubles and perplexities of the world too much for them, wrap their cloaks around them, withdraw into monasteries or mountain-tops and guard the sacred fires burning in their own hearts. If truth, love and justice are not to be found in the world, we can possess these graces in the inviolable sanctuary of our souls. For Gandhi, sanctity and service of man were inseparable.

‘My motive (he says) has been purely religious. I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind ; and this I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man’s activities today constitutes an indivisible whole ; you cannot divide social, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity.’

If Gandhi took to politics, it is because he looked upon politics as a branch of ethics and religion. It is not a struggle for power and wealth, but a persistent and continuous effort to enable the submerged millions to attain the good life, to raise the quality of human beings, to train them for freedom and fellowship, for spiritual depth and social harmony. A politician who works for these ends cannot help being religious. He cannot ignore the formative share of morality in civilization or take the side of evil against good. Owing no allegiance to the material things of life, Gandhi was able to make changes in them. The prophets of spirit make history just by standing outside history.

It is impertinent for any man to set about reforming the universe. He must start his work from where he is. He must take up the work that lies nearest to hand.



When, on his return from South Africa, he found the people of India suffering from mortified pride, want, pain, and degradation, he took up the task of their emancipation as a challenge and an opportunity. No improvement, he felt, was possible without political freedom. Freedom from subjection should be won not by the usual methods of secret societies, armed rebellion, arson and assassination. The way to freedom is neither by abject entreaty nor by revolutionary violence. Freedom does not descend upon a people as a gift from above, but they have to raise themselves to it by their own effort. The Buddha said : 'Ye who suffer, know ye suffer from yourselves ; none else compels.' In self-purification lies the path to freedom. Force is no remedy. The use of force in such circumstances is foul play. The force of spirit is invincible. Gandhi said :

'The British want us to put the struggle on the plane of machine-guns. They have weapons and we have not. Our only assurance of beating them is to keep it on the plane where we have the weapons and they have not.' He took hold of ordinary men and women, men and women who were an incredible mixture of heroism and conceit, magnificence and meanness, made heroes out of them and organized an unarmed revolt against British rule. He weaned the country from anarchy and terrorism and saved the political struggle from losing its soul. The transfer of power on August 15, 1947, marked the end of that struggle. The fight was a lean one, it was completely free from any trace of racial bitterness or feeling. It has ended in a settlement reached in a spirit of good



temper and friendliness. The credit for it is due to Gandhi.

Freedom for Gandhi is not a mere political fact. It is a social reality. He struggled not only to free India from foreign rule but to free her from social corruption and communal strife. He strove for a free and United India. The hour of his triumph proved to be the hour of his humiliation. The division of the country is a grievous wrong we have suffered. Our leaders, caught in a mood of frustration, tired of the communal 'killings' which had disgraced the country for some months past, anxious to give relief to the harassed, distraught multitudes, acquiesced in the partition of India against their better judgment and the advice of Gandhi. The New Delhi celebrations on August 15 Gandhi would not attend. He excused himself and was engaged in his lonely trek in the villages of Bengal, walking on foot, comforting the poor and the homeless, entreating them to remove from their hearts every trace of suspicion, bitterness and resentment. The division of the country has not resulted in communal peace but has actually increased communal bitterness. The large migrations, the thousands of people wandering to and fro, weary, uprooted, heavy laden, the mad career of communal violence, worst of all, the spiritual degradation all around, suspicion, anger, doubt, pity, grief, absence of hope, filled Gandhi with deep sorrow and led him to devote the rest of his life to the psychological solution of this problem. His fasts at Calcutta and Delhi had a sobering effect but the evil was too deep to be cured so easily. On his seventy-eighth birthday, October 2, 1947, Gandhi said :

'With every breath I pray God to give me strength



to quench the flames or remove me from this earth. I who staked my life to gain India's independence, do not wish to be a living witness to its destruction.'

When last I met him, early in December, 1947, I found him in deep agony and determined to do his utmost to improve the relations among the communities or die in the process. He met his death while engaged in this great work. It is the cross laid on the great-hearted that they exhaust themselves in sorrow and suffering so that those who come after them may live in peace and security.

We are too deeply entangled in our own past misdeeds ; we are caught in the web we have ourselves spun according to the laws of our own twisted ethics. Communal differences are yet a wound, not a sepsis. But wounds have a tendency to produce sepsis. If this tendency is to be checked we must adhere to the ideals for which Gandhi lived and died. We must develop self-restraint ; we must refrain from anger and malice, intemperance of thought and speech, from violence of every kind. It will be the crown of his life-work if we settle down as good neighbours and adjust our problems in a spirit of peace and goodwill. The way to honour his memory is to accept and adopt his way of approach, the way of reconciliation and sympathetic adjustment of all differences.

When the strife of these days is forgotten, Gandhi will stand out as the great prophet of a moral and spiritual revolution without which this distracted world will not find peace. It is said that non-violence is the dream of the wise while violence is the history of man. It is true that wars are obvious and dramatic and their results in changing the course of history are



evident and striking. But there is a struggle which goes on in the minds of men. Its results are not recorded in the statistics of the killed and the injured. It is the struggle for human decency, for the avoidance of physical strife which restricts human life, for a world without wars. Among the fighters in the great struggle, Gandhi was in the front rank. His message is not a matter for academic debate in intellectual circles. It is the answer to the cry of exasperated mankind which is at the cross-roads—which shall prevail, the law of the jungle or the law of love? All our world organizations will prove ineffective if the truth that love is stronger than hate does not inspire them. The world does not become one simply because we can go round it in less than three days. However far or fast we may travel, our minds do not get nearer to our neighbours. The oneness of the world can only be the oneness of our purposes and aspirations. A united world can only be the material counterpart of a spiritual affinity. Mechanical makeshifts and external structures by themselves cannot achieve spiritual results. Changes in the social architecture do not alter the minds of peoples. Wars have their origins in false values, in ignorance, in intolerance. Wrong leadership has brought the world to its present misery. Throughout the world there seems to be a black-out of civilized values. Great nations bomb one another's cities in order to obtain victory. The moral consequences of the use of the atom bomb may prove to be far more disastrous than the bomb itself. The fault is not in our stars but in ourselves. Institutions are of little avail unless we are trained to obey our conscience and develop brotherly love. Unless the leaders of the



world discover their highest human dignity in themselves, not in the offices they hold, in the depth of their own souls, in the freedom of their conscience, there is no hope for the ordered peace of a world community. Gandhi had the faith that the world is one in its deepest roots and highest aspirations. He knew that the purpose of historical humanity is to develop a world civilization, a world culture, a world community. We can get out of the misery of this world only by exposing the darkness which is strongly entrenched in men's hearts and replacing it by understanding and tolerance. Gandhi's tender and tormented heart heralds the world which the United Nations wish to create. This lonely symbol of a vanishing past is also the prophet of the new world which is struggling to be born. He represents the conscience of the future man.

Gandhi has paid the penalty of all who are ahead of their time—misunderstanding, hatred, reaction, violent death. 'The light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' The struggle between light and darkness, between love and hate, between reason and unreason which is at the heart of the cosmic is shown up by this most moving tragedy of our age. We made Socrates drink death ; we nailed Jesus to the Cross ; we lighted the faggots that burnt the mediaeval martyrs. We have stoned and killed our prophets. Gandhi has not escaped the fate of being misunderstood and hated. He has met his death facing the forces of darkness, of ultimate unreason, and through it has increased the powers of light, love and reason. Who knows if Christianity would have developed had Jesus not been crucified? Gandhi's death was a classical ending to his life. He died with the



name of God on his lips and love in his heart. Even as he received the bullet wounds he greeted his murderer and wished him well. He lived up to what he preached. Possessed and inspired by the highest ideals of which human nature is capable, preaching and practising fearlessly the truth revealed to him, leading almost alone what seemed to be a forlorn hope against the impregnable strongholds of greed and folly, yet facing tremendous odds with a calm resolution which yielded nothing to ridicule or danger, Gandhi presented to this unbelieving world all that is noblest in the spirit of man. He illumined human dignity by faith in the eternal significance of man's effort. He belongs to the type that redeems the human race.

We have killed his body but the spirit in him which is a light from above will penetrate far into space and time and inspire countless generations to nobler living.

yad-yad vibhūtimat satvam  
 śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā  
 tad-tad evāvagaccha tvam  
 mama tejo amśsasambhavam.

Whatever being there is endowed with glory and grace and vigour, know that to have sprung from a fragment of My splendour.—*Bhagavadgītā*, x. 41.



## BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA :

### Sustainer of Spiritual Reality\*

#### I

#### The Living Reality

**I**T is somewhat surprising that many students of religion assume that the religious seers, the true representatives of religious genius, belong wholly to the past and we today have to live on the memory of the past. If religion is a living truth, if it has any vitality, it must be capable of producing men who from time to time bear witness to the truth and confirm and correct from their own experience the religious tradition. When the springs of experience dry up, our love for religion is a mere affectation, our faith a belief and our behaviour a habit with no reality behind it. In the Indian religious tradition, religion has meant not an imaginative or intellectual apprehension of Reality but its embodiment in regenerated living. Religion should energize our consciousness, transform our character and make us new men. The truly religious are those who have solid hold of the unseen Reality in which we ordinary men merely believe. They are not freaks proclaiming the reality of spirit, which is esoteric and intense. They tell us that they have a direct knowledge of the Real of which we have indirect or inferential

\* Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi—Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1946.



knowledge. For them God is an Abiding Fact, a Living Presence, and in the consciousness of this fact their whole existence is transformed. These artists of the inner life are of different types. Some are full of poetry and music ; others are vigorous men of action ; still others are solitary souls. Despite these differences they walk the same road, speak the same language of the soul and belong to the same family.

The Indian tradition has been kept alive by seers who were born in every age and incarnated the great ideal. We have such God-engrossed souls even today. It is our good fortune that we have with us today a living embodiment of God-centred life, a perfect image of the life divine in the mirror of human existence. Sri Ramana Maharshi is not a scholar ; he has no erudition, but he has wisdom that comes from direct experience of Reality, the wisdom we acquire through the discipline, not of intellect but of one's nature, through chastity, poverty and obedience. The possession of this wisdom yields the fruits of spirit, love and purity, courage and humility, courtesy and holiness.

## II

### His Spontaneous Realization

Sri Ramana was born on the 30th December, 1879, with a latent disposition to religion. He was no good at studies because his heart was elsewhere. His reading of *Periapurāṇam* with its account of the selfless devotion of *bhaktās* made a deep impression on his devout nature. The change which took him away from worldly pursuits is thus described in his own words :



'It was six weeks before I left Madura for good that the great change in my life took place. It was so sudden. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual good health. But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die, and at once set about thinking what I should do. I did not care to consult anyone, be he a doctor, elder or friend. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there. The shock of the fear of death made me at once introspective or "introverted." I said to myself mentally, i.e., without uttering the words, "Now death is come, what does it mean? Who is it that is dying? This body dies." I at once dramatized the situation. I extended my limbs and held them rigid, as though rigor-mortis (death-stiffening) had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together, so that no sound could escape. "Well then," said I to myself, "This body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the crematory and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of my body am 'I' dead? Is the body 'I'? This body is silent and inert. But I am still aware of the full force of my personality and even of the sound of 'I' within myself, as apart from the body. So 'I' am a Spirit transcending the body. The material body dies, but the Spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am, therefore, the deathless Spirit." All this was not a feat of intellectual gymnastics, but came as a flash before me vividly as living TRUTH, something which I perceived immediately, without argument almost. "I" was something very real, the only real thing in that state, and



all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The "I" or myself was holding the focus of attention with a powerful fascination. *Fear of death vanished at once and for ever. The absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to now.*<sup>1</sup> Growing absorption in spiritual matters made Sri Ramana indifferent to his studies. When rebuked, he left his home on Saturday, the 29th of August, 1896, leaving a note behind him : "I have in search of my Father, according to his command, started from this place. On a virtuous enterprise indeed has this embarked. Therefore, for this act none need grieve nor to trace this out need money be spent." Thus under a sense of Divine Command he left Madura and after some trouble, reached Tiruvannamalai on the 1st of September. When he visited the temple he fell into a trance. In such conditions a sense of oneness with the Ultimate Reality is produced. Sri Ramana renounced the world and became an *Avadhūta* which is a compound word made of four letters *A-va-dhū-ta*. The first stands for *Akṣaratva* or imperishability ; the second for *Vareṇyatva* or the summit of perfection ; the third for the destruction of the bonds which implicate us in the temporal process and the last for the realization of the truths conveyed by the great passage 'That art thou.'<sup>2</sup> To attain such a condition of harmonizing consciousness, has been the aim of religious men. If we lose ourselves in the hopes and desires, in the fears and cravings, which wax and wane

<sup>1</sup> *The Sage of Arunagiri* (1945), pp. 8 & 9.

<sup>2</sup> Aksaratvad vareṇyatvad dhutasamsarabandhanat  
Tattvamasyadilaksyatvad avadhuta itiryate.



with the accidents of the outer world, if we yield to the chance allurements of time and space, we will lose our soul. Doubt which comes to us from outside is insignificant as compared with the doubt that corrodes from within. The true evil is not death of the body, but the failure of one's nature, the death of faith in the Ultimate Reality.

### III

#### The Spiritual Value of the Sage's Presence

In this thought, Sri Ramana adopts the metaphysical position of Advaita Vedānta. He speaks to us of the Divine which is the pure subject from which all objectivity is excluded. The 'I' is different from the 'me.' The Self is not the body which perishes, not the senses which suffer the same fate as the body, not life, mind or intellect. It is the pure Spectator, the *Sākṣin*, which is the same in all. We get to realize it not by metaphysical theorizing but by spiritual discipline. Reality impinges on the unreality of life and to discover reality, absolute concentration and consecration are essential. We have to still our desires, steady our impulses, tread the ethical path. We cannot see so long as our vision is engrossed in outer forms but those who turn their gaze inwards behold it. No one can see properly so long as he remains divided and disintegrated in his consciousness. We must become inwardly whole and free. We cannot acquire this wholeness or integrity if we do not root out our selfish impulses. We cannot know truly or act rightly so long as we are too afraid, too indolent or too self-centred.



To see the Real and not merely the things of the world, the eye must be inverted.<sup>1</sup> God is within us.<sup>2</sup> Not comfort but control is happiness. 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself' says Jesus. Dedication to God means denial of the ego. We must empty the self in the abyss of God. This process is helped by the practice of unselfish service (*niṣkāma karma*), devotion (*bhakti*), mind-control (*yoga*), and inquiry (*vicāra*). Inquiry into self, religious worship, ethical service are means to this realization. The end of all worship, *pūjā*, *japa*, *dhyāna*, is communion with God. With increasing intensity in our devotion the distance between the human and the Divine diminishes. Indian thought believes in four stages of God-realization—*sālokya*, where God and the worshipper dwell in the same world, *sāmpya*, where the devotee is near the Divine, *sārūpya*, where the devotee assimilates more and more the forms and attributes of the Divine, and *sāyujya*, where the devotee is united to the Divine.

When one discovers the Divine within oneself, one must discover it also in the outer world of men and things. While the heights within are revealed to those who strenuously exclude all that lies without, the process of seeing all in the fullness of the Divine is more arduous. God is both eternal silence and perpetual activity, the unmoved witness and the ground of all that is, the metaphysical Absolute and the personal Lord. The Divine reveals itself anew in all life and existence. Nothing on earth is excluded from the

<sup>1</sup> Avrttacaksuh—*Katha Up.* ii, 1. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Atmaiva devataḥ sarvaḥ  
Sarvaṁ atmanyavasthitam.



divine Consciousness. The Divine is the life which gives birth to us all and is further than our farthest thought. Sri Ramana dwells not only in a world of pure subjectivity but has also a sense of the Infinite that is in all. As he has eliminated his selfish ego he becomes the Voice of the whole, the conscience of all that is. As he has no selfish desires and no sense of agency, he enters into the world-movement and carries out the functions expected of him by that Universal Spirit. Honour and dishonour, praise and blame, do not move him. Actions are not Subject to the necessity of nature but are centred in the freedom of the Divine.

It is a false assumption to hold that the spiritually strong have no patience with human weakness. They are not insensitive to human sorrow. The *r̥ṣis* are revealers of Reality, which is all-bliss. They do not keep their discoveries to themselves. They have a social significance. By getting into their company, we, ordinary people, realize the actuality of the world of spirit and catch something of their fire. The great of spirit are ministering angels who assist, protect and help those who are in need. Association with the holy people produces detachment from fruits of action. Such detachment leads to desirelessness; from desirelessness arises stability of mind; Liberation in life is then achieved.<sup>1</sup> The Upaniṣad asks the aspirant for spiritual life to approach, fuel in hand, a teacher versed in scriptures, steady in his realization of the Supreme.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Satsamgatve nissamgatvam nissamgatve nirmohatvam  
nirmohatve niscalatattvam niscalatattve jivanmuktiḥ.

<sup>2</sup> *Mundaka Up.* i. 2. 12.



The teacher shows the path. His very presence radiates peace and joy. He refashions the souls of those who look to him for help. With keen psychological insight he understands the needs of those who approach him and satisfies them. Like all saints, he has the foundation in God ; his surface is intertwined with everything that exists. He loves all beings as he loves himself and cannot rest until everyone mirrors the Divine in his life.

The saints are the sustainers of society. Philo remarks : 'Households, cities, countries and nations have enjoyed great happiness, when a single individual has taken heed of the good and beautiful. Such men not only liberate themselves they fill those they meet with a free mind.' The true sages possess the inner joy and peace which are independent of outer circumstances. Their happiness is not dependent on outer things. They have passed beyond the forms of social life. Their renunciation is spontaneous and does not involve any idea of sacrifice. They work for the fulfilment of the Divine in the world, for the good of all beings, for the fulfilment of the Purpose. They are one in consciousness and action with the Divine.

To suggest that the spiritual souls are expected to abstain from action in the world is incorrect. The opportunities which the world offers are to be used for self-development. Life is a game where we should act our parts. We are all cast for different roles and our business is to play them in the right spirit. We may lose the game but we should not mind it. It is the play that matters and not the score we make.



## IV

**Reality to be Sought**

If the world is to be saved, it can only be by the intrusion of another world into it, a world of higher truth and greater reality than that which is now submerged by the overwhelming discords and sufferings of the present time. Our failure to develop contact with this world of Reality is the cause of our malady. Men like Sri Ramana recall us to that larger dimension of Reality to which we really belong, though we are generally unaware of it.



## SRI RAMAKRISHNA\*

### I

THIS Centenary Volume brings together the different systems of thought, belief and practice which have developed in India from the dawn of reflection. Though this amorphous mass appears at first sight to be more an encyclopaedia of varying philosophies and sects than a continuous and uninterrupted development of one system, closer second thought reveals a pervading unity which binds together the bizarre multiplicity of beliefs and practices. The different systems described in this volume possess a unity of character and attitude which makes the manifold a single whole, which we might describe as the Hindu spirit. The civilization which is inspired by the spiritual insight of our sages is marked by a certain moral integrity, a fundamental loyalty, a fine balance of individual desires and social demands, and it is these that are responsible for its vitality and continuity. To a departure from the ideals can be traced the present weakness and disorder of the Hindu civilization.

Spiritual life is the true genius of India. Those who make the greatest appeal to the Indian mind are not the military conquerors, not the rich merchants or the great diplomats, but the holy sages, the *r̥ṣis* who embody spirituality at its finest and purest. India's pride

\* Introduction to *The Cultural Heritage of India* :  
(Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Memorial Volume I).



is that almost in every generation and in every part of the country, from the beginnings of her recorded history, she has produced these holy men who embody for her all that the country holds most dear and sacred. Though they generally remain away from the main stream of life, kings and commoners pay reverent homage to them and take their advice in the problems of their personal lives as well as in public affairs. By their lives they teach us that pride and power, wealth and glory are nothing in comparison with the power of spirit. It is those who scorn their own lives that raise life above our scorn.

Sri Ramakrishna is one such *ṛṣi*, though not the only one of his kind. He is one of those rare beings in whom the flame of spiritual life burns so brightly that all who come near are able to share the illumination and see the world new-born as on the first day. He is an illustrious example of the mystical tradition which runs right through the religious history of this country from the days of the Vedic *ṛṣis*. This tradition may sometimes have been overcome by a ceremonial piety or by a rationalist dogma. Yet it always reappears faithful to its original pattern. Its characteristic tendencies are those set forth in the Upaniṣads.

## II

Religion is a matter of experience. It is not an awakening from a swoon, but a transformation of one's being. It is not an addition to one's intellectual furniture, but an exaltation of one's personality into the plane of the universal spirit. It is *Brahmadarśana*—insight into reality, a direct awareness of the world of values.



Religious experience is not to be confused with the pursuit of truth, beauty or goodness. It is a life of adoring love transcending these. The Divine is not a mere sum of knowledge, love and beauty. The ultimate Reality which responds to our demands is more than rational. Religion means awe more than service, holiness more than virtue. We worship not what we can understand, but what we cannot. There is the unknown, the reserve of truth, which the intellect cannot reach and yet feels lies behind everything. There is an element of mystery in all religion, an incomprehensible certainty which is not to be explained by grammar or logic. Life is open only to life. Religious experience, when genuine, is characterized by vividness, directness, freshness and joy. In it we feel the impact of Reality. It is spiritual discovery, not creation. The men of experience feel the presence of God and do not argue about it. The shoals and shallows of existence are submerged in a flood-tide of joy.

We do not infer God from our feeling of dependence or from an analysis of the self. The reality of God is revealed in an immediate intuition of the essential dependence of all finite things, of the priority of absolute to relative being.

Though the experience is beyond reason, it is not opposed to reason. While the Upaniṣads emphasize the direct awareness of the world of spirit, they also adduce reasons in support of the reality of spirit. Their approach is both objective and subjective.

Each order of reality known to us is only truly apprehended from a standpoint higher than itself. The significance of the physical world (*anna*) is disclosed in the biological (*prāṇa*) ; that of the biological in the



psychological (*manas*) ; that of the psychological in the logical and ethical (*vijñāna*). The logical finds its meaning in the spiritual (*ānanda*). The drift of the world has an underlying tendency, a verifiable direction towards some implied fulfilment. If the vast process of the world leads up to the spiritual, we are justified in finding in the spiritual the best clue to the understanding of the world.

It is now admitted that the forms and properties of matter, animals and plants in their varied classes and orders, human beings with their power of choice between good and evil, did not come into existence in their present form by a direct act of Almighty God, but assumed their present forms in slow obedience to a general law of change. The higher exerts a curious pressure on the happenings of the lower and moulds it. This fact requires explanation and modern philosophers confirm the suggestions of the Upaniṣads on this question. Professor Lloyd Morgan, who studies the problem from the biological side, affirms that while resultants can be explained as the results of already existing conditions, emergents like the advent of life, mind and reflective personality cannot be explained without the assumption of divine activity. The progressive emergence, in the course of evolution, of life, mind and personality, requires us to assume a creative principle operative in nature, a timeless reality in the temporal.

Professor A. N. Whitehead argues, after Plato, that there are eternal objects, answering to the eternal forms or patterns of Plato, and makes God transcend both the eternal objects and the concrete occasions. He is the active source of limitation or determination. For



Plato also, the ideal world ruled by the supreme Idea of the Good is different from the creative God. The Supreme Being is the Ideal World and the Demiurge contemplates the Ideas and their unity in relation to the Idea of the Good and reproduces this heavenly pattern as far as is possible in time and space. Plato does not tell us what exactly the relation of form to sensible fact is ; nor does Whitehead tell us what exactly the relation of eternal object to concrete occasion is. Is a sensible thing a mere assemblage of forms or eternal objects or universal, or is it more ? Aristotle felt that Plato's mistake lay in separating the universal characters from sensible things and setting up these supersensible abstractions as the source of the things we see. Aristotle believes that he gets over the difficulty by affirming that the form exists only in the individual thing and is just its essential character. The solution is not quite so simple. We still ask : What is the status of scientific objects and how are they related to the things we perceive ? What is the position of moral ideas and how are they related to moral facts ? Whatever these difficulties may be, it is agreed that the universe is not self-explanatory.

When we consider the nature of cosmic process with its ascent from matter to spirit, we are led to the conception of a Supreme Being who is the substantiation of all values. These values are not only the revealed attributes of God but the active causes of the world. Till these values are realized, God is transcendent to the process, though He inspires it. God is the creator, destroyer and sustainer of this universe. He transcends all creatures as the active power in which they take their rise.



An analysis of the self yields the same result. The Upaniṣads undertake an analysis of the self and make out that the reality of the self is the divine universal consciousness. It is needless to repeat here the careful accounts which the *Chāndogya* and the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣads* relate.<sup>1</sup> Some modern thinkers arrive at similar results. The *j vātman* is not a *substance*, but an activity, what Aristotle calls *energeia* or self-maintaining activity. We have to distinguish the logical subject from the substratum of qualities. The former is a logical problem while the latter is an ontological one. So long as we adopt the 'substance' theory of the self, difficulties arise. Locke was obliged to reduce substance to an unknowable substratum, a something he knows not what, which supports its attributes, he knows not how. It becomes a superfluous entity and rightly did Berkeley abolish material substance altogether. Its attributes, which he called ideas, could just as well be said to inhere in one divine mind as in a multitude of unknowable substrata. But Berkeley retained spiritual substance, for, according to him, the essence of any existent thing is to be perceived by a mind. Hume applied a more rigorous analysis. He broke up the self into a succession of impressions and ideas. He would recognize nothing in the mind except these : 'When I enter most intimately into what I call myself,' he said, 'I always stumble on some particular perception or other of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can ob-

<sup>1</sup> See the writer's *Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*—Allen and Unwin. Revised second edition, 1935.



serve anything but the perception.' He inferred that 'were all my perceptions removed by death, I should be entirely annihilated.' For him there was nothing 'simple and continued.' 'The successive perceptions only constitute the mind.'<sup>1</sup> But Hume's analysis does not account for the continuity of self and the feeling of identity. How can a series of feelings be aware of itself as a series? Hume has no answer to this question but takes shelter under 'the privilege of a sceptic.' Kant, however, was greatly disturbed by the precarious position in which Hume left the problem of knowledge. He started with Hume's analysis and tried to cure its defects by the use of *a priori* principles. But he conceived the self on the analogy of material substance, as the permanent in change, which is necessary for the perception of change. He did not raise the question of the relation of changing attributes to the unchanging substance. Does the substance itself change when the attributes do?

We must seek for the source of substance not in the external persistence in space, but in the internal continuity of memory. The question, why do the contents of the mind hang together, how are they unified, Kant answers by referring us to the transcendental subject, to which all experiences are finally to be referred. It is the subject which is the correlate of all objects. But it is only the logical subject, and is not to be confused with the metaphysical soul or a spiritual substance which is simple and indissoluble and therefore immortal. Even McTaggart in the second chapter of his *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* attempts to establish

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise of Human Nature*—Ed. Selby Bigge, pp. 252-3.



the immortality of the self on the ground of its immutability. But that which is immutable, and therefore immortal, is not the empirical self. This transcendental self is the *Paramātmān*, functioning in all minds. It is not capable of existing in the plural. There is only one transcendental self and our empirical selves are psychical facts, streams of change. The *jīvātmān* is not a substance, but an activity, whose nature is to change continuously. Whether we look at the real from the objective or the subjective point of view, the real can be defined only as spirit.

Though the being of man is spirit, his nature is complex and unstable. There are other grades and kinds of life in the human individual. That is why he has the creaturely sense over against the transcendent majesty of God, the spaceless spirit of all individual spirits.

### III

Those who live in God do not care to define. They have a peculiar confidence in the universe, a profound and peaceful acceptance of life in all its sides. Their response to ultimate Reality is not capable of a clear-cut, easily intelligible formulation. The mystery of God's being cannot be rationally determined. It remains outside the scope of logical concepts. Its form does not lie in the field of vision, none can see it with the eye. There is no equal to it. An austere silence is more adequate to the experience of God than elaborate descriptions.

The Upaniṣads often give negative accounts of the supreme Reality. God is nothing that is. He is non-being. Pagans like Plotinus, Christians like Nicholas of Cusa support the negative theology of the Upaniṣads.



This negative theology also gives us a knowledge of Divinity. It affirms that Divinity is not perceived by the categories of reason. It is grasped by the revelations of spiritual life.

When positive accounts are given, we abandon concepts in favour of symbols and myths. They are better suited to life which is inexhaustible and unfathomable. God is regarded as father, friend, lover. Infinite power and infinite love are both revelations of God. God is infinite love that pours forth at every time and every place its illimitable grace on all that ardently seek for it. The divine solicitude for man is easy of comprehension when we look upon the Divine as Mother. She wishes to possess us and so will pursue and track us down in our hiding places. God is in search of us. This conception has been made familiar to us by Francis Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven*.<sup>1</sup> Among the worshippers of the Divine as Mother, Ramakrishna holds a high place.<sup>2</sup> In polytheistic religions, the nature of the Divine becomes as it were divided into fragments.

1 Cf. Pascal's *Mystere de Jesus*. 'I have loved thee,' said Christ to Pascal, 'more ardently than thou hast loved thy defilements.'

2 Compare the lines of *Any Mother* by Katharine Tynan :

'There is no height, no depth, my own, could set us apart  
Body of mine and soul of mine ; heart of my heart !

\* \* \* \* \*

If some day you came to me heavy with sin,  
I, your mother, would run to the door and let you in.  
I would wash you white again with my tears and grief,  
Body of mine and soul of mine, till you found relief.  
Though you had sinned all sins there are 'twixt east and west,



The positive descriptions are variations of the central theme that God is a person. The negative theology makes out that even personality is a symbol. In later Vedānta, a distinction is drawn between the Absolute Brahman and the Personal Īṣvara. Śaṁkara says, 'Brahman is realized in its two-fold aspect : In one aspect it is endowed with the *upādhis* (adjuncts) of name and form that are subject to modification and cause differentiation ; and in the other it is just the opposite (bereft of all *upādhis*), i.e. the transcendental Reality.' The Absolute answers to the essential diety of which Eckhart speaks as deeper than God himself and the groundlessness of Boehme. Brahman and Īṣvara, Absolute and God, are not contradictory, but complementary to each other. Each is the perspective offered to the mental standpoint of the seeker. Religious experience also lends support to this dual conception. It has normally two sides, an experience of personal intercourse with a personal God as well as a sense of rest and completeness in an absolute spirit which is more than personal. If the latter alone were experienced, we should not lapse from the condition of

You should find my arms wide for you, your head on my breast.  
 Child, if I were in Heaven one day and you were in Hell—  
 Angels white as my spotless one stumbled and fell—  
 I would leave for you the fields of God and Queen Mary's feet,  
 Straight to the heart of Hell would go seeking my sweet,  
 God mayhap would turn him round at sound of the door,  
 Who is it goes out from me to come back no more ?  
 Then the blessed Mother of God would say from her throne :  
 Son, 'tis a mother goes to Hell seeking her own.'



absolute freedom. It is because our natures are rooted in the world of space-time as well that we look up to the Absolute as something different from us, with whom it is possible for us to have personal relations. There are experiences of men who are convinced that they are working with God, thinking and striving under pressure from Him. For them God is not an unchanging Absolute, a Being perfect in nature and realization. God is aiming at something through the medium of the human. There is a sense in which God has real need of us and calls us to share in His increasing victories and another in which God is timeless, and completes our being. When we emphasize the former aspect, we call it the Supreme God : when we lay stress on the latter, we call it the Absolute.

There are three terms in constant use in the Indian religious vocabulary which bring out different aspects of the Supreme : Brahman, Atmān and Īśvara. These words are used with little appreciation of the distinctions implied by them. Brahman is the immense, the vast, the ultimate, permeating all the universe and yet eluding any conceptual definition. We experience its living reality, its otherness, its unconditionedness by all that is of this world. To the logical mind its character is not clear and yet its reality is apprehended as something which contrasts with the time-series. We have direct relationship with it. Brahman is the name we give to that substantial and eternal Being. It is the object of our metaphysical quest. It is the transcendent and abiding reality which is far beyond the world of succession though it gives meaning to the process and supports it all through.

Since it is apprehended by us it is clear that we have



in us a quality which apprehends it. It is we that possess the ineffable consciousness of the eternal. The soul it is that becomes aware of Brahman. The Absolute is spirit. Though unspeakable in its transcendence, the Supreme is yet the most inward part of our being. Though Brahman in one sense entirely transcends us, in another sense it is intimately present in us. The Eternal Being, Brahman, is spirit, Ātman. That which we indicate with awe as the Absolute is also our own transcendental essence. It is the ground of our being, that in which our reality consists.

Off and on, in some rare moments of our spiritual life, the soul becomes aware of the presence of the Divine. A strange awe and delight invade the life of the soul and it becomes convinced of the absoluteness of the Divine, which inspires and moulds every detail of our life. To bring out that God is both transcendent and immanent, that he is a presence as well as a purpose, the conception of Īśvara is used. It affirms the ever-present pressure of God on the here and now. He is the lord and giver of life, in this world and yet distinct from it, penetrating all, yet other than all. Īśvara is the Absolute entering into the world of events and persons, operating at various levels but most freely in the world of souls. Īśvara as the divine presence is maintaining, helping and preserving the whole world to move up, at every plane, in every person and at every point, to reach towards greater perfection, to get into conformity with its own thought for the world. It is the pure Absolute, Brahman, acting. The religious sense that spiritual energy breaks through from another plane of being, modifying or transforming the chain of cause and effect, finds its fulfilment



in the concept of Īṣvara. As the Upaniṣad has it : 'The divine Intelligence is the lord of all, the all-knower, the indwelling spirit, the source of all, the origin and end of all creation.'

#### IV

In Hinduism the descriptions of the Supreme are manysided and comprehensive. A Catholic religion expresses itself in a variety of forms and comprehends all the relations which exist between man and God. Some of the great religions of the world select one or the other of the great relations, exalt it to the highest rank, make it the centre and relate all else to it. They become so intolerant as to ignore the possibility of other relations and insist on one's acceptance of its own point of view as giving the sole right of citizenship in the spiritual world. But Hinduism provides enough freedom for a man to go forward and develop along his own characteristic lines. It recognizes that the divine light penetrates only by degrees and is distorted by the obscurity of the medium which receives it. Our conception of God answers to the level of our mind and interests. Hinduism admits that religion cannot be compressed within any juridical system or reduced to any one single doctrine. The different creeds mark out the way of the spirit. Religious life has to be built through their aid. Ramakrishna practised forms of worship not only of the different Hindu sects but also those of Islam and Christianity. From actual experience he established that the goal of all religions is the same. 'As the same sugar is made into various figures,' Ramakrishna used to say, 'so one sweet Mother Divine is worshipped in various climes and ages



under various names and forms. Different creeds are but different paths to reach the Almighty. As with one gold various ornaments are made having different forms and names, so one God is worshipped in different countries and ages, has different forms and names.’<sup>1</sup> Real contradictions are found more often in mediocre minds, but the vastness of soul of the spiritually profound gathers within itself opinions and tendencies profoundly contradictory.

Idolatry is a much-abused term. Even those who oppose it are unable to escape from it. The very word brings up to our mind thoughts of graven images, strange figures of frightful countenance, horrid animals, and shapes, and so long as the worshippers confuse these outer symbols with the deeper divine reality, they are victims of idolatry.

But as a matter of fact, religion cannot escape from symbolism, from icons and crucifixes, from rites and dogmas. These forms are employed by religion to focus its faith, but when they become more important than the faith itself, we have idolatry. A symbol does not subject the infinite to the finite, but renders the finite transparent. It aids us to see the infinite through it. When, however, we confuse the symbol with the reality, exalt the relative into the Absolute, difficulties arise and an unjustified idolatry develops.

It is this idolatry that stands in the way of religious fellowship and understanding today. Every dogmatic religion overlooks the spiritual facts and worships theological opinions. It is more anxious for the spread of its dogmas than for the spiritual education of the

<sup>1</sup> Max Muller : *The Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna*, p. 100.



human race. If we realize the true place of symbolism, then we shall not bother about how men reach the knowledge of spiritual reality.

The different religious groups bound within themselves by means of rites and ceremonies militate against the formation of a human society. Intuitive religion rebels against these communal and national gods, confident in the strength of the one spirit whose presence informs and illumines the whole of mankind.

## V

The Absolute which is timeless is reflected in some fashion in our world of space and time. The world is the appearance of the Absolute. It is the *vivarta* of the Absolute. The unity of the Absolute is not affected by the plurality of existent worlds, though the world is an expression of the Absolute. Of course, the nature of the Absolute is by no means exhausted by this world or for that matter by any number of such worlds, and the changes, of the varied worlds do not in any way affect the unity of the Absolute. We cannot, however, say that the empirical universe is the result of the apprehending consciousness, for that would mean the Absolute is a thing in itself and the world a mere appearance, and there is nothing to tell us whether it is an appearance or whether there is a thing in itself at the back of it. Much the best solution is to admit that the world expresses the Absolute without in anyway interfering with its unity and integrity. Such a kind of relationship is what is called *vivarta* by Indian thinkers.

Without being content with such a view we sometimes make out that real is not pure being which ex-



cludes all negation, but a self-conscious principle which involves a certain negation of absolute reality. God is a form of Absolute being. Even as the world is distinct and is in a sense a negation of the Absolute being, God is a limited expression of the Absolute. So far as God is concerned, the world is as necessary to God as God is to the world. God would not be God but for the world which expresses him. The world is an expression or *pariṇāma* of God, though a *vivarta* of the Absolute.

## VI

The idea of *karma* has been with us from the beginning of philosophic reflection. The self is a composite of mind, body and activities.<sup>1</sup> Surely 'one becomes good by good action, and bad by bad action.'<sup>2</sup> When a man dies, the two things that accompany him are *vidyā* and *karma*.<sup>3</sup> 'According as one acts, according as one conducts, so does one become.'<sup>4</sup> Desire becomes action and actions determine the course of life. Evolution of life goes on until salvation is attained.

Salvation or *mukti* is life eternal and has nothing to do with continuance in endless time. No adequate account of *mukti* can be given since it transcends the limitations with which human life is bound up. So the question of the nature of salvation, whether it is individual or universal, has no relevance or meaning when applied to life eternal, which is altogether a different life.

The question becomes important when we attempt to describe the state of salvation from the standpoint

<sup>1</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, i. 6-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 2-13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 4-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 4-5.



of the empirical world. Whether salvation is individual or universal has significance only on the basis of the plurality of individual souls on the empirical plane. If in this universe we have only one soul, then salvation of that soul means the redemption of the whole universe. In the *ekajīvavāda*, universal salvation and individual salvation are identical.

Though some later Advaitins adopt this position, Śaṁkara is opposed to it. If all the different souls are only one *jīva*, then, when, for the first time, any soul attains liberation, bondage should have terminated for all, which is not the case. He says: 'No man can actually annihilate this whole existing world.... And if it actually could be done, the first released person would have done it once and for all, so that at present the whole world would be empty, earth and all other substances having been finally annihilated.'<sup>1</sup>

From the empirical standpoint a plurality of individuals is assumed by Śaṁkara and many of his followers. On this view salvation does not involve the destruction of the world. It implies the disappearance of a false view of the world. The idea is further elucidated by Śaṁkara in the *Sūtra-Bhāṣya*: 'Of what nature is that so-called annihilation of the apparent world? Is it analogous to the annihilation of hardness in congealed clarified butter (*ghee*) which is effected by bringing it into contact with fire? Or is the apparent world of names and forms which is super-imposed upon Brahman by nescience to be dissolved by knowledge, just as the phenomenon of a

<sup>1</sup> *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, iii. 2-21.



double moon which is due to a disease of the eyes is removed by the application of medicine ?'<sup>1</sup>

Śaṃkara admits that the world appearance persists for the *j vanmukta* or the *sthitaprajña* of the *Bhagavadgītā*. The *j vanmukta*, though he realizes *mokṣa* or *Brahmabhāva*, still lives in the world. The appearance of multiplicity is not superseded. It is with him as with a patient suffering from *timira* that, though he knows there is only one moon, he sees two. Only it does not deceive the freed soul even as the mirage does not tempt one who has detected its unreal character. Freedom consists in the attainment of a universality of spirit or *sarvātmabhāva*. Embodiment continues after the rise of the saving knowledge. Though the spirit is released, the body persists. While the individual has attained inner harmony and freedom, the world appearance, still persists and engages his energies. Full freedom demands the destruction of the world appearance as well. Śaṃkara's view of the *j vanmukta* condition makes out that inner perfection and work in the finite universe can go together.

It is usually thought that at death the soul attains final liberation or *videhamukti*. It is not easy to reconcile this view with Śaṃkara's other statement that Apāntaratamas, Bhṛgu and Nārada even after death work for the saving of the world.<sup>2</sup> These are said to be the 'possessors of the complete knowledge of the Vedas.' Śaṃkara writes : 'The continuance of the bodily existence of Apāntaratamas and others depends on the offices which they discharge for the sake of the

<sup>1</sup> *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, iii. 2-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 3-32.



world. As the sun, who after having for thousands of ages performed the office of watching over these worlds, at the end of that period enjoys the condition of release in which he neither rises nor sets, so Apāntaratamas and others continue as individuals, although they possess complete knowledge, which is the cause of release, and obtain release only when their office comes to an end.' So long as their offices last their *karmas* cannot be said to be exhausted. Śaṁkara here admits that *samyagdarśana*, though it is the cause of release, does not bring about final release and the liberated individuals are expected to contribute to *lokasthiti* or world maintenance. Their *karma* can never be fully exhausted, so long as the world demands their services.

This view is not to be confused with *kramamukti* or gradual release, which is the aim of those who are devoted to *Kārya-Brahma* or Hiraṇyagarbha.<sup>1</sup> Śaṁkara is discussing not gradual release, but release consequent on *Brahmajñāna* which is attainable here and now : and for even such released souls, persistence of individuality is held not only as possible by Śaṁkara but necessary in the interests of what is called *lokasthiti*. In other words, the world will persist as long as there are souls subject to bondage. It terminates only when all are released, i.e. absolute salvation is possible with world redemption.

Such a view of Śaṁkara's philosophy is by no means new. Appaya Dīkṣita, for example, takes his stand on those passages in Śaṁkara where the *jīva* is said to be

These attain liberation when the office of Hiraṇyagarbha terminates.



of the nature of Īśvara and not Brahman, and holds that the liberated individuals attain communion with Īśvara and not union with Brahman. 'The Self of the Highest Lord is the real nature of the embodied self' (iii. 4-8) and he contends that Śaṅkara supports the view of *mokṣa* as attaining the nature of Īśvara. He also suggests that when *jīvas* attain liberation, the world with the liberated souls and Īśvara lapse into the Absolute where there is neither subject nor object, neither world nor God. But so long as some souls are unredeemed, even the liberated are in the world, which is governed by Īśvara, though filled by the spirit of oneness of all, and fulfil their redemptive functions.

That the individual does not become identical with Brahman but only with Īśvara comes out from what is called the theory of reflection or *bimba-pratibimba-vāda*. When a face is reflected in a number of mirrors, the destruction of a particular mirror means only its lapse into the reflecting face and not the face in itself. It is only when all reflection ceases, i.e. when all mirrors are destroyed, that the reflecting face disappears and the face in itself appears. The full release or the attainment of Brahman is possible only when all *avidyās* are destroyed. Until then, release means only identity with Īśvara.

If such a view is adopted, two conditions are essential for final salvation : (1) inward perfection attained by intuition of self, (2) outer perfection possible only with the liberation of all. The liberated souls which obtain the first condition continue to work for the second and will attain final release when the world as such is redeemed. To be saved in the former sense is to see the self in all, to see all things in the self and



to live in the self with all things. To be perfect is to be oneself and all else ; it is to be the universe. It is to give oneself so that all might be saved. Commenting on the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* text (iii. 2-15), Śaṅkara says : 'He who has reached the all-penetrating Ātman enters into the all.' Kumārila in his *Tantravārttika* quotes the Buddha as saying : 'Let all the sins of the world fall on me and let the world be saved.'<sup>1</sup>

The liberated individual has the consciousness of the timeless infinite, and with that as his background, take his place in the temporal world. He has what the seers called *trikāladṛṣṭi*, an intuition of time in which past, present and future exist together for ever in the self-knowledge and self-power of the Eternal. He is no more swept helplessly on the stress of the moments. He lives in the consciousness of the universal mind and works for the welfare of the world in an unselfish spirit. True renunciation is not abandonment of action, but unselfish conduct.

### Conclusion

While the sayings of Ramakrishna did not penetrate so much into academic circles, they found their way into lonely hearts who have been stranded in their pursuit of pleasure and selfish desires. Under the inspiration of this great teacher there has been a powerful revival of social compassion. Educational and medical work is done throughout the country. He has helped to raise from the dust the fallen standard of Hinduism, not in words merely, but in works also.

<sup>1</sup> See the writer's *An Idealist View of Life*, Ch. VII.



# RABINDRANATH TAGORE

## I

### The Greatness of Literature

**I**T is the peculiar glory of great literature that it lasts much longer than kings and dynasties. History bears witness to the power of the human spirit, which endures longer than dynasties or creeds. The political world of Homer is dead while his song is living today. The splendour of Rome has vanished but the poetry of Virgil is yet vital. The dreams of Kālidāsa still move us like the cry of a living voice, with their poignant sense of tears in human relations, while the Ujjain of which he was the ornament has left her memory to his keeping. The great medieval potentates are forgotten, but the song of Dante is still cherished ; and the Elizabethan age will be remembered as long as the English language lives on account of its Shakespeare. When our lords and leaders pass into oblivion, Tagore will continue to enchant us by his music and poetry ; for though he is an Indian, the value of his work lies not in any tribal or national characteristics, but in those elements of universality which appeal to the whole world. He has added to the sweetness of life, to the stature of civilization.

\* Presidential Address at the General Conference in connexion with the Seventieth Birthday Celebrations of Rabindranath Tagore, held in Calcutta, December 1931.



## II

## Emphasis on the Spiritual

To many a young Indian in these changing times Rabindranath's voice has been a comfort and a stimulus. When we are weighed down by the burden of defeated hopes and stand dazed at the conquests of science and organization, when our minds lose their moorings and sense of direction, he comes to us instilling hope into our hearts and courage into our minds. He points out that though our heads are bleeding they are not bowed down, and that the value of success need not be judged by standards of wealth and power. The true tests of civilization are spiritual dignity and power of suffering. Wealth, power and efficiency are the appurtenances of life and not life itself. The significant things are the personal ones which are beyond the reach of science and organization.

In his insistence on the supremacy of spiritual values as central to the good life and social order, Rabindranath is at one with the long tradition of Indian thinkers. In him we find the eternal voice of India, old and yet new. In spite of the vicissitudes of fortune and the driftings of history, India has kept her essential spirit alive. The self of man is not to be confused with the physical body or the intellect. There is something deeper than intellect, mind and body—the real self, which is one with the self of all goodness, truth and beauty. To aim at that and make it a living presence is the purpose of religion; to train oneself through purity, love and strength into conformity with that conception is the aim of ethics; to mould oneself to the pattern of that eternal being is the con-



summation of our aesthetic nature. One has to achieve not merely technical efficiency but greatness of spirit.

When we walk into the night and see the stars keeping their eternal watch, we experience a sense of awe before their remoteness, of annihilation before their immutability, of utter insignificance before their immensity. The heart stops beating, breathing is suspended and our whole being receives a shock. Our petty interests and anxieties look pitifully small and sordid. There is a similar perturbation, a similar break in the breath, when we listen to great poetry or gaze into a human soul. Philosophy and religion, art and literature, serve to heighten this spiritual consciousness. It is because we have ignored this aspect of life that we find today so much instability, conflict and chaos in spite of intellectual advance and scientific progress. For over three centuries scientific inventions and discoveries have produced increased prosperity. Famines have practically disappeared, population has increased and the grimmer incidents of life like plagues and pestilences have been brought under control. As the sense of confidence and security about the social order spreads over the world, the spirit of curiosity and exploration, which was mainly responsible for the triumphs in the scientific and the technical regions, became extended to the deeper things of life. The world was soon robbed of its mystery and romance. A strange new world of hardness and brutality, of science and big business, arose, which prejudiced the order of love, beauty and happiness so very essential for the growth of the soul. Scepticism and agnosticism have become attractive to the modern mind. In the struggle between the sceptics and agnostics who doubt



whether there is anything behind the universal and the spiritual positivists who affirm that the most vital reality is behind the universe, Rabindranath is with the latter.

There is a story about the visit of an Indian philosopher to Socrates. It comes not from Plato or Xenophon but from Aristoxenes of the third century B.C. He relates how Socrates told the Indian stranger that his work consisted in enquiring about the life of men, and how the Indian smiled and said that none could understand things human who did not understand things divine. For the whole Western tradition, man is essentially a rational being, one who can think logically and act upon utilitarian principles. In the East, spiritual understanding and sympathy are of greater importance than intellectual ability. For thousands who talk, one can think; for thousands who think, perhaps one sees and understands. What distinguishes man is this capacity for understanding.

Physical growth and intellectual efficiency cannot satisfy us. Even if we have extensive agriculture and efficient transportation and every one possesses his own aeroplane and radio set, if all disease is eradicated, if workmen receive doles and pensions and every one lives to a green old, there will still be unsatisfied aspirations, wistful yearnings. Man does not live by bread alone nor by learning alone. We may recognize the world on the most-up-to-date and efficient scientific lines, and make of it a vast commercial house where all the multiple activities of the human atoms are arranged for, so that we have in it every group, from the scullery-maids and the errand boys doing their work in the basement cellars, up to the women



of fashion making up their faces in the beauty parlours on the top floor, and may even succeed in transforming a society of human beings into a swarm of ants ; yet there will be unsatisfied longings, a thirst for ultimates. Even in that new world-order, children will continue to laugh and cry, women to love and suffer, men to fight and struggle. The real greatness of man is due to his failure, to his moving about in worlds unrealized, with vague misgivings. Man is a creature with a dual status. He partakes of the characters of both the seen and the unseen worlds. While he is a part of the natural order, he has in him the seed of spirit which makes him dissatisfied with his merely natural being. He is truly 'a creature of the borderland,' with animal desires of spiritual yearnings ; and a life which is entirely given over to the former cannot give him rest.

In his daily life of work and toil, when he tills the soil or governs the State, when he seeks wealth or pursues power, man is not himself. In such activities things are in the saddle. The making of money and the tending of families absorb all one's time and strength. Things eternal and unseen get no chance. And yet events occur which disturb the complacency of superficial minds, events with which the sense of mystery and the feeling of uncertainty return. When in the sorrow of death or the suffering of despair, when trust is betrayed or love desecrated, when life becomes tasteless and unmeaning, man stretches forth his hands to heaven to know if perchance there is an answering presence behind the dark clouds ; *mahāntam puruṣam ādityavarṇam tamasah parastāt*—it is then that he comes into touch with the supreme in the solitude of his



consciousness, in the realm of the profound and the intense. It is the world of light and love in which there is no language but that of silence. It is the world of joy that reveals itself in innumerable forms—*ānanda-rūpam amṛtām yad vibhāti*.

The poetry of human experience, the realities of life as distinct from its mere frills, are achieved in solitude. When we move away from the self, we move away from the only reality which is accessible to us. Man is himself in his religion and in his love. Both these are strictly personal and intimate, peculiar and sacred. If our society attempts to invade even this inner sanctuary, life will lose all its worth and genuineness. A man can share his possessions with others, but not his soul.

We have become so poor today that we cannot even recognize the treasures of spirit. In the rush and clamour of our conscious life we do not pay attention to the less audible elements of our being. The sudden thrills, the disturbing emotions, the flashes of insight, it is these that reveal to us the mystery we are, and by these we apprehend the truth of things.

Only the man of serene mind can realize the spiritual meaning of life. Honesty with oneself is the condition of spiritual integrity. We must let in the light to illumine the secret places of the soul. Our pretensions and professions are the barriers that shut us away from truth. We are more familiar with the things we have than with what we are. We are afraid to be alone with ourselves, face to face with our naked loneliness. We try to hide from ourselves the truth by drugs or drunkenness, excitement or service. It is with an effort that we have to pull ourselves together,



cultivate the inner life, and abstract from the outer sheaths of body, mind and intellect. We then see the soul within and attain to a stillness of spirit. The discovery of inwardness is the essential basis of spiritual life.

So long as we lead outward lives, without being touched to our inward depths, we do not understand the meaning of life or the secrets of the soul. Those who live on the surface naturally have no faith in the life of spirit. They believe that they do their duty by religion if they accept the letter of faith. Such spiritual dependence is inconsistent with true religious life, of which foundation is utter sincerity. A life, without independent thought cannot comfort a spiritual being. It is lack of spiritual confidence that impels us to accept what others say about religious truth. But when once the individual in his freedom of spirit pursues truth and builds up a centre in himself, he has enough strength and stability to deal with all that happens to him. He is able to retain his peace and power even when he is faced by adverse conditions. Absolute serenity of spirit is the ultimate goal of human effort, and this is possible only for one who has deep faith in the creative spirit and is thus free from all petty desires. Naturally orthodox religion, whether as dogma or ritual, means almost nothing to him.

### III

#### Insistence of Life

But to dwell in the realm of spirit does not mean that we should be indifferent to the realities of the world. It is a common temptation, to which Indian



thinkers have fallen more than once victims, that spirit is all that counts while life is an indifferent illusion, and that all efforts directed to the improvement of man's outer life and society are sheer folly. Frequently the ideal of the cold wise man who refuses all activity in the world is exalted, with the result that India has become the scene of a culture of dead men walking the earth peopled with ghosts. No one who holds himself aloof from the activities of the world and who is insensitive to its woes can be really wise. To practise virtue in a vacuum is impossible. Spiritual vision normally issues in a new power for good in the world of existence. The spiritual man does not turn his back on the realities of the world, but works in it with the sole object of creating better material and spiritual conditions. For spiritual life rises in the natural. Being a poet, Rabindranath uses the visible world as a means of shadowing forth the invisible. He touches the temporal with the light of the eternal. The material world becomes transparent as his spirit moves in it.

The world is not a snare nor its good a delusion. They are opportunities for self-development, pathways for realization. This is the great tradition which has come down from the seers of the Upaniṣads and the author of Gītā. They delight in life. For since God has taken upon Himself the bonds of creation, why should we not take upon ourselves the bonds of this world? We need not complain, if we are clothed in this warm garment of flesh. Human relationships are the mainspring of spiritual life. God is not a Sultan in the sky but is in all, through all and over all. We worship Him in all the true objects of our worship,



love Him whenever our love is true. In the woman who is good, we feel Him; in the man who is true we know Him. Tagore's Hibbert Lectures on *The Religion of Man* (1931) ask us to realize the supreme in the hearts of us all.

The great of the world work in it sensitive to its woes. When the Buddha preaches *maitrī* and the Gītā teaches *sneha* for all, they mean that we can understand others only through love. To look upon life as an evil and treat the world as a delusion is sheer ingratitude. In his play *Saṅṅyāsi or the Ascetic*, Rabin-dranath points out how outraged nature had her revenge on the ascetic who tried to gain a victory over her by cutting away the bonds of human desires and affections. He attempted to arrive at a true knowledge of the world by cutting himself off from it. A little girl brought him back from this region of abstraction into the play of life. No asceticism is ever equal to the task of suppressing living beauty. The ascetic's in-most defences went down before the rapture of beauty, and clamant life compelled him to fling open the doors. The Saṅṅyāsi discovered that "the great is to be found in the small, the infinite within the bounds of form and the eternal freedom of the soul in love." We must bring heaven down to earth, put eternity into an hour and realize God in this world. Ascetics are like cut flowers in metal vases. They are beautiful to contemplate for a while but they soon wither, being without nourishment from the soil. To be firm and rooted, man must consent to be nourished on life. Asceticism, however necessary it may be for the growth of the person, cannot be confused with a mere refusal of the nourishment by which the growth is helped. The



saints do not refuse to sit at the rich man's table ; nor do they object to the scent of precious ointment.

It is foolish to fancy that God enjoys our sorrows and sufferings, our pains and fasts, and loves those who tax themselves to the uttermost. Life is a great gift, and those who do not love it are unworthy of it. Those who lay waste their souls and call it peace cannot obtain the support of Tagore for their action.

One need not enter a convent or become an ascetic to reject life. Many of us reject life by surrounding ourselves with taboos and prohibitions. Interpreting the main intention of Hindu thought, Tagore insists on a loyal acceptance to life. We must face life as an adventure and give full play to its possibilities.

Religion speaks to us in many dialects. It has diverse complexions. And yet it has one true voice, the voice of human pity and compassion, of mercy, of patient love, and to that voice we must do all we can to listen. Naturally, a sensitive soul is bound to be outraged by the social order which is at the end of one age and the beginning of another. We say that there is a revolution in Russia or Spain ; but there is one in our country too. We also have our guillotines and our victims, though many of those who suffer still go about their heads on their shoulders. We have become mere walking and talking phantoms. With our languid paleness and lack of depth, which we try to cover by paint and pose, our lives remind us of the mannequins in the shop windows of Chowringhee.

Our deepest passions are debased by the conditions imposed by society. Add to this the appalling poverty and ignorance in which many people live. If they are somewhat sensitive in temper, they are compelled to



spend perturbed nights of anguish and long monotonous days of struggle, measuring time by the throbs of pain and the memories of bitterness. When dim thoughts of suicide rush through their overcrowded heads, they stare at the ceiling and smoke a cigarette. Rabindranath has not much sympathy with the prevalent view that social service consists simply in joining leagues to stop cigarette-smoking or to advance the practice of birth control. It consists in enabling people to live with intensity of being.

As a poet he despises organization and believes in each man living his own life in his own way. He is the champion of the individual in his age-long struggle against the mass tyranny which crushes him. The fate of one who sets himself against the established order is abuse and criticism, persecution and fierce solitariness. Tagore is the poet of sorrow and suffering. The pathos of men's striving, the bitterness of life submerged in the shadows, the waste and loneliness of women's lives have found few more profoundly moved spectators. To this audience it is scarcely necessary to refer to the innumerable instances where the poet reveals the anguish that is implicit in common situations.

The most sacred of all human relationships is love; and whatever our scriptures may say, our practice is immoral because it demands the beauties of self-control and self-abnegation from only one sex. So long as our women are treated as mere servants and toys of the undisciplined male, the social order will continue to be corrupt. The convention that a woman's virtues are chastity and submissiveness to man is altogether too flimsy an excuse for masculine tyranny. What is virtue in a man is virtue in a woman. It is unfortunate that



there are many among us who are cold-blooded libertines who unscrupulously use women as instruments of their lust. They are the human animals, the slaves of sense.

The body is the temple of the spirit, the apparatus for spiritual growth. To regard the body or any part of it as indecent or vile is the sin of impiety. To treat it as cheap and vulgar is equally impious. Physical union without love is the essence of prostitution. This is true within as without marriage. A woman who gives herself to a man for whom she has no love, as a mere act of duty just because she is his wife, is as cruelly abusing herself as the husband who insists on his rights. Love is spiritual and aesthetic, a matter of conscience and good taste and not one of law or codes. Married life without love is like slave labour. Obedience to ecclesiastical pundits or social rules is a form of self-indulgence, even as action in obedience to one's deepest being is the imperative command of life. As beauty is higher than harmony, as truth is higher than consistency, so is love higher than law. Like fire it purifies everything.

In his play *Sati*, Uma refuses to accept the man who never won her love even though he was her chosen husband, whatever pledges others may have given for her. When she cuts herself away from Jivaji, to whom she was sacredly affianced, and accepts another, she defends herself by saying, 'My body was yielded only after love had given me.' When her mother says, 'Touch me not with impure hands,' she replies, 'I am as pure as yourself.' Her eloquent and dignified bearing cuts her father to the quick and he says: 'Come to me, my darling child! mere vanity are these man-made



laws, splashing like spray against the rock of heaven's ordinance.' Our legal providers and protectors do not realize that our women possess souls, yearning for understanding, for some one to share their dreams and their longings ; and when a man and a woman offer to each other, not their strength or rank or fortune but their weakness, their desolation, their heart's need, they enter into a region which is not built by the labour of human hands but by the love of their hearts. Their union is consecrated though it may not be approved.

#### IV

#### Conclusion

In all Rabindranath's work three features are striking. (1) The ultimateness of spiritual values to be obtained by inward honesty and cultivation of inner life ; (2) the futility of mere negation or renunciation and the need for a holy or a whole development of life ; and (3) the positive attitude of sympathy for all, even the lowly and the lost. It is a matter for satisfaction to find an Indian leader insisting on these real values of life at a time when so many old things are crumbling away and a thousand new ones are springing up.