

The Fundamental Problems of India

I do not propose to speak to such a distinguished gathering on the commonplace things that you hear or read about India. I think it would be far better if I speak to you on the more fundamental problems of India. Having been a student of philosophy myself, I am naturally more interested in fundamental problems. I hope you will also agree with me that I should rather speak to you today on some of the fundamental problems that face my country, both in the present as well as in the future.

In my travels abroad, I have often found that people generally have a wrong and sometimes a rather funny idea about my country. For instance, among the people in Europe, the general idea about India is that it is a land in which three things can be found : snakes, fakirs and maharajas. Among those who have been influenced by British propaganda, the general idea about India is that it is a country where people are always fighting among themselves, and where the strong hand of Britain is required in order to maintain peace and order among the people.

If you approach the Orientalists in Europe, that is, the experts in Indology, you will find that they look upon India as a land of mystics and philosophers, a land which at one time produced a very rich philosophy,

but which is today as dead as the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Babylon are dead today.

Now the question is, "What is India in reality?" No doubt we have a very ancient civilization, but unlike other ancient civilizations, such as Egypt or Babylon, Phoenicia or even Greece, the ancient culture and civilization of India is not dead. It still lives in the present. And we Indians of today think the same thoughts fundamentally the same thoughts, and have the same feelings, the same ideals of life, as our forefathers who lived 2,000 or 3,000 years ago. In other words, there is a continuity, historical and cultural continuity, extending from the ancient times till the present day—which is in some ways a very remarkable thing in history. Now, in order to understand India, this fundamental fact should first be understood, namely, that the India of the past is not dead. India of the past lives in the present, and will live on in the future.

Against this background, this ancient background, we see changes in our national life from age to age. During the last 3,000 years, people have come into India from outside with new ideas, sometimes with new cultures. All these new influences, ideas and cultures have been gradually absorbed into the national life of India, so that in spite of the fact that, fundamentally we have the same culture and civilization as we had several thousand years ago, we have nevertheless changed and moved with the times. Today, in spite of our ancient background, we are able to live in a modern world and adapt ourselves to that world.

Those who have been influenced, whether

consciously or unconsciously by British propaganda, have the impression that India was very easily conquered by the British and also that after the British conquest of India our country was for the first time politically unified. Both these notions are entirely wrong and without foundation.

In the first place, it is not true that India was easily conquered by the British. It took the British 100 years, from 1757 to 1857, to finally subjugate India. Secondly, it is also an entirely wrong notion to think that India was politically unified by the British. The fact is that India was for the first time politically unified nearly 2,500 years ago under the Buddhist Emperor, Asoka. In reality, the India of the time of Asoka the Great was even larger than the India of today. Asoka's India included not only modern India, but also Afghanistan and a part of Persia.

After the time of Asoka, India has gone through many ups and downs in her national life. There have been periods of decay, followed by periods of progress and national upheaval. But throughout these ups and downs in our national life, we have been able, in the long run, to keep up our progress. About one thousand years after Asoka, India again reached the zenith of progress under the Gupta Emperors. This was followed by another glorious epoch in Indian history about nine hundred years later under the Mogul Emperors. Therefore, it is worth remembering that the British notion that we have been unified politically under British rule is entirely wrong. All that the British have tried to do during their regime in

India is to divide the Indian people and to weaken, disarm and emasculate them.

I shall now present before you a problem which will interest scientists, and in particular, students of sociology. The question is whether the Indian people have any right to live as a free nation. In other words, have they the strength and the vitality left in them to live and to develop themselves as a free nation? I personally hold the opinion that if a nation once loses its vitality, its inner vitality, then it has no right to exist. And even if it does continue to exist after losing its vitality, that existence will have hardly any worth or value for mankind. The only reason why I stand for India's freedom and believe that as a free nation we shall have a glorious future is that I believe that we have sufficient vitality left in us to live as free men and to develop as a nation.

Now, if I have to answer this question as to whether sufficient vitality is left in us, I shall have to answer two questions: firstly, has our nation any creative faculty and secondly, is it prepared to fight and to die in order to preserve its existence? These two tests have to be applied to India.

With regard to the first question, we have seen that in spite of the British in India, in spite of the innumerable restrictions and disadvantages which follow from foreign rule, we have been able during the century to give numerous proofs that in different departments of our national life we still have creative power.

The number of philosophers and thinkers produced in India under British rule, the number of writers and

poets that enslaved India has produced, the artistic revival in India in spite of British rule, the scientific progress made by the Indian people in spite of so many difficulties in the way of their education, the standard already attained by our leading scientists as compared with scientists in different parts of the world, the industrial progress made by India as the result of her own effort and initiative and, last but not least, the distinction which we have attained in the field of sport, all these go to show that in spite of being politically subjugated the vitality of the nation has remained intact.

If under foreign rule and in spite of the obstacles and restrictions that follow from foreign rule, we could give so much proof of our creative faculty, then it stands to reason that when India is free and when the masses of the Indian people are afforded educational facilities, they will be able to give much better proof of their intellectual calibre and creative faculty in different walks of life.

I have just referred to the first test of a nation's vitality, namely, creative faculty. I shall now consider the second test, namely, as to whether the Indian people are able to fight and to die for the sake of freedom. On this point I should like to say, first of all, that, since the last great fight that they had with the British in 1857, the Indian people have not given up the struggle against the enemy, even for one day.

Unfortunately, owing to what I would call the folly of our forefathers, after our final defeat in 1857, the leaders in those days had allowed themselves to

be disarmed. Whatever difficulty we have subsequently experienced in winning back our freedom has been due largely to our having been disarmed. But though owing to the mistake of the leaders the people were disarmed, nevertheless they continued to fight for their freedom in other ways.

I shall not take up your time unnecessarily by giving a description of all the methods that have been used in India against the British. I will only say this, that all the methods that have been tried by revolutionaries in different parts of the world for the achievement of their own independence have been tried in India.

At the beginning of this century, particularly after the victory of Japan over Russia in 1904 and 1905, the Freedom movement in India got a new impetus and since then, during the last 40 years, our revolutionaries have been studying very closely the methods of revolutionaries in other countries and they have tried to adopt as many of their methods as possible.

They have tried also to manufacture secretly arms and explosives inside the country and to use those arms and explosives for the achievement of independence. As a development of this struggle for freedom, India tried a new experiment—Civil Disobedience or Passive Resistance—of which the best exponent was Mahatma Gandhi. Though personally I believe that this method will not succeed in bringing us complete independence, there is no doubt that it has greatly helped to rouse and unify the Indian people and also to keep up a movement of resistance against the foreign government. I should, therefore, say that the fact that

in spite of all the difficulties that result from foreign rule, a nation can produce a new method and practise that method with a large measure of success is also a proof of that nation's vitality. It shows that, that nation does not accept enslavement as a settled fact and is determined to struggle against it and to work out new methods for achieving independence.

I have, as a revolutionary, made a very close study of the revolutionary movements in other countries, and I can say without any exaggeration that since 1857 we have used every possible method of revolutionary struggle. In the course of this struggle, tremendous sacrifices have been made and many have given their lives. There was, however, one method that still remained for us to take up and that was the organization of a real modern national army.

That work we had not done up till recently because it was impossible to do that inside India under the eyes of the British army and the British police. But the moment this war gave the Indian people an opportunity of organizing a modern Indian national army outside India they at once seized it. As a result of that effort, and with the help of the Japanese Government and the armed forces of Japan, they have been able to build up this army.

So my point is that throughout our revolutionary struggle against the British Government and their armed forces we have shown sufficient initiative, creative power and vitality and have made tremendous sacrifices. We now hope that under the conditions, and with the advantages that this war has given us, we

shall be able, after all, to fulfil our national aspirations and win freedom for India.

Having replied to the question regarding the vitality of the Indian people and their right to live as a free nation, I shall now attempt a sociological analysis of modern India. If you are to understand modern India, you have to take note of three important factors. The first factor is the ancient background, that is, the ancient culture and civilization of India, of which the Indian people of today are conscious, and of which they feel proud. The second factor is the struggle which has gone on without any break or interruption since we were finally overpowered by the British. And the third factor consists of certain influences which have come into India from outside.

Modern India is composed of this ancient background, the unbroken national struggle against Britain, and the impact of influences from abroad.

I shall now deal, in some detail, with the influences which have reacted on India from outside and which have been responsible, to some extent, in making modern India what it is today. Among these outside influences, the first factor is the influence of Western thought which was crystallized in Liberalism, Constitutionalism and Democracy.

In other words, since 1857, modern liberal and democratic thought has been influencing the intellectuals of India to a large extent.

From the beginning of the present century, a new factor came into operation. After the victory of Japan over Russia in 1904-1905, the eyes of the Indian people

were opened to a new movement in Asia, the movement for the revival, not merely of Japan—but along with Japan—of other Asiatic countries. Since then, Indian thought has been greatly interested in Asiatic revival. During the last 40 years we have been thinking not merely of what was happening inside India, but also of what was happening in other parts of Asia.

Another important factor which had influence on our mind consisted of the revolutionary struggles that have gone on in different parts of the world. Indian revolutionaries studied the Risorgimento Movement in Italy under the leadership of Mazzini and Garibaldi and the struggle of the Irish people against their British oppressors. In Russia, before the last World War, there was, as you know, a movement against the Czar called the Nihilist movement. That also was studied. And nearer India the new awakening in China under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat-sen was also studied very closely and with great interest by Indian revolutionaries.

Thus, Indian revolutionaries have been exceedingly receptive to the influences exerted by revolutionary struggles abroad. Then during the last World War, when the revolution broke out in Russia and, as a result of it, a new government—the Soviet Government—came into existence, the work of that Government was studied with great interest in our country.

People in India have not been interested so much in the Communist movement as in the work of reconstruction in Soviet Russia—in the rapid industrialization of that country and also in the way in which the Soviet Government solved the problem of

minorities. It is this constructive achievement of the Soviet Government which was studied with great interest by people in our country. As a matter of fact, intellectuals like our poet Tagore, who had no interest in Communism as such, were profoundly impressed when they visited Russia in the work of educational reconstruction in that country. Then there is another influence which came to India from outside in more recent times—I mean, the new movement in Europe headed by Italy and Germany called Fascism or National Socialism. This movement was also studied by our revolutionaries.

I have just dealt with some of the influences that have reached India from different parts of the world, from England, France, Japan, China, Russia, Germany and so on. I will now take up another question viz., as to how we have reacted to these influences—how much we have accepted and how much we have rejected out of these outside influences.

In dealing with this question of our reaction to these outside influences, I must first point out that there is a big gulf between our generation and the last generation. As typical exponents of the last generation, I would like to mention Tagore and Gandhi. They represent for us the last generation, and between their thoughts and ideas and the thoughts and ideas of our generation there is a big gulf.

If you study the works of Tagore and Gandhi, you will find that all along there is a conflict in their minds as to what their reaction to Western influence should be. So far as Mahatma Gandhi is concerned, he has

never given us any clear solution of this problem. He has left people in doubt as to what his attitude is toward the acceptance of Western ideas. Generally speaking, his attitude is one of antagonism. But in actual practice he has not always acted in accordance with his own ideas, the reason being that the rest of his countrymen do not share that inner hostility or antagonism which Mahatma Gandhi personally has toward Western ideas and conceptions.

You all know about Mahatma Gandhi's attitude on the question of violence of physical force. He does not advocate the use of arms, or the shedding of the blood of the enemy for gaining one's freedom. This attitude toward violence or physical force is closely related to his general attitude toward foreign influence, particularly Western influence.

Our generation has followed Mahatma Gandhi as the leader of a political struggle, but has not accepted his ideas on all these questions. Therefore, it would be a mistake to take Mahatma Gandhi as the exponent of the thoughts and ideas of the present generation in India.

Gandhi is in some ways a complex personality, and I would like to analyze his personality, so that you may understand him better. In Gandhi, there are two aspects—Gandhi as a political leader and Gandhi as a philosopher. We have been following him in his capacity as a political leader, but we have not accepted his philosophy.

Now the question arises as to how we can separate the two aspects. Why, if we do not accept his

philosophy, are we following him? Though Gandhi has his own philosophy of life, he is a practical politician and therefore, he does not force his own philosophy on the people. Consequently though we are following him in our political struggle, we are free to follow our own philosophy. If Gandhi had tried to thrust his philosophy on us, we would not have accepted him as a leader. But he has kept his philosophy separate from his political struggle.

I have mentioned as representatives and exponents of the last generation Tagore and Gandhi. Now let us compare their philosophies. There are some points in which they agree, but in some other points they do not. The points on which they agree are firstly, that they would like to see the national struggle being conducted without the use of arms. In other words, on the question of physical force, they have the same views. On the question of the industrialization of the country, they also have the same views. Both Tagore and Gandhi are against modern industrial civilization. But in the realm of culture, their views are not the same. So far as thought, art and culture are concerned, Tagore is prepared to accept foreign influence. He believes that in the realm of culture there should be full co-operation between India and the rest of the world and there should be reciprocity. We should not be hostile or antagonistic to the culture or art or ideas of any other nation. In the realm of culture, while Tagore advocates full co-operation between India and the rest of the world, Gandhi's general attitude is antagonistic to foreign influence. We must, however,

remember that Mahatma Gandhi has nowhere given a very clear exposition of his views. I am only referring to his general attitude on this question.

I have previously remarked that there is a big gulf between the fundamental thoughts and ideas of the last generation and of our generation. I will now explain what I meant thereby. As I have just said, this problem as to what our reaction should be toward foreign influence and toward industrial civilization troubled the leaders of the old generation all their lives and we see proofs of it in their actions. But this problem does not exist for us. It does not exist for us, because our starting-point is that we want a modern India based of course on the past. We do not believe that India can achieve freedom without the use of arms. Now once you take up this attitude, that for winning freedom we have to fight and to use arms, it follows that we must have modern industries to manufacture the arms. So we take our stand on modernism. We have to fight the enemy with modern methods and with modern arms—so we must have modern industries. What constituted the biggest problem for the old leaders constitutes our starting-point. The problem for modern India is not our attitude toward modernism or foreign influence or industrialization, but how we are to solve our present-day problems.

I believe that modern Japan will understand our generation much better than modern Japan understood the last generation in India. Our stand is virtually the same. We want to build up a new and modern nation on the basis of our old culture and civilization. For