

# Indian Opinion

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## NOTES AND NEWS

**S**PEAKING about the change of heart towards India in South Africa, Mr. Satri is reported to have said in Delhi to a pressman in complete seriousness: "Miracles do not often happen in this life, but this is one, and there is some miraculous force at work."

Sir Kurma V. Reddi, Agent of the Government of India, paid a visit last week to the Germiston Indian Location where he was garlanded on behalf of the local Indians by Mr. B. H. Singh. Sir Kurma also visited the Indian school which was originally established and financed by Mr. B. H. Singh and was later in the hands of the Education Department.

Sir Kurma also visited the Indian community at Boksburg accompanied by officials of the Transvaal and the S. A. Indian Congress. No previous notification was given as to any presentation of an address to be made, but Mr. N. A. Camay had the satisfaction of springing up like the jack in the box to read a secretly prepared address from the Transvaal British Indian Association. The Agent, who was welcomed enthusiastically and garlanded with flowers, addressed a large gathering on the importance of sanitation, and afterwards made a tour of the location. It surprised him that there was no electric lighting installation, while he also remarked on the poor condition of the roads. He advised the people, if they had any grievances, to submit them to him through the Congress.

Mahatma Gandhi was found guilty under the Police Act and fined one Rupee in connection with the cloth burning incident in Calcutta. Mahatma Gandhi accused the police of highhandedness declaring, "I should be the prosecutor and not the Government." Those who were arrested with him were also fined a Rupee each.

Mr. W. H. Andrews, the secretary of the South African Trade Union Congress, has been elected by ballot to be the Workers' delegate to the Annual International Labour Conference to be held at Geneva in a few months' time. Mr. R. Stuart, secretary of the Cape Federation of Labour Union, has been elected adviser to accompany Mr. Andrews.

The Indian Trade Mission, consisting of Mr. D. B. Meek and Mr. T. Maloney, with Mr. J. P. Dutia as Commercial Adviser, that visited South Africa and various countries in the Near East to survey their potentialities as markets for Indian cotton goods, has issued its report. Its main findings are that there are good possibilities of increasing Indian exports to these lands by full 50 per cent. but that at present Indian exporters fall short of the standards set by their competitors as regards finish; folding, packing, sampling variety of designs, etc. Some of these defects are evidently due to the fact that Indian mill-owners have so far relied most exclusively on

the home market for the sale of piece-goods and cultivated foreign markets mainly for the sale of yarn. If they make a determined effort to adapt themselves to altered conditions, they should hold their own against competitors at least in the countries in question. Among the principal recommendations of the Mission are: (1) the establishment of a combined bleaching, dyeing and printing plant, (2) the setting up of a strong central selling organisation with headquarters in Bombay and branch offices at Baghdad, Alexandria, Mombasa and Durban, and (3) the appointment of Trade Commissioners for India at Alexandria, Mombasa and Durban. The Mission makes the following important admission: "It has been represented to us by a number of merchants abroad that the shipping freights from India are higher than those on similar goods from certain other more distant countries. The figures which were shown to us would indicate that in some cases this is so."

Through the kindness of Mr. L. Jacobs, the Chemist at the corner of Grey and Pine Streets, who has placed his Consultation Room at the disposal of the Indian Social Service Committee, the members of the Committee will be in attendance between the hours of 8-30 and 9-30 a.m. and 5 to 6 p.m. every day except Saturdays and Sundays (Saturdays only from 8-30 to 9-30 a.m.) to investigate any necessitous cases among the poorer classes of the Indian community, for free medicine, as the Committee has now definitely decided to open the Free Dispensary from the beginning of next month.

Signor Mussolini has found time in the midst of the heavy responsibilities he has assumed to write an autobiography. Many educated youths in India whose highest ambition in life seems to be to secure some comfortable Government job, who have not the stamina to struggle for themselves and who are prepared to demean themselves in a variety of ways to get some coveted posts, are advised by the *Leader* to ponder over the following words of Italy's Dictator:—

"For me it would have been dreadful and fatal if on my journey forward through the years I had by chance fallen permanently into the chains of comfortable bureaucratic employment.....How could I have tolerated the halting progress of promotions comforted and yet irritated by the thoughts of an old age pension at the end of the dull road...These energies which I enjoy were trained by obstacles and even by bitterness of struggle. They were made by struggle."

"India is a land of fine speeches and empty promises and we are often tempted, I think, to look more to the outward shows of things than the realities. If only each man did his job in India, quietly, and unobtrusively, turning a deaf ear to the blandishments of those noisy persons who would like to use him for their own selfish ends, how much better it would be." The above are extracts from a speech delivered recently by Mr. F. J. Fielden, principal of Agra College, to

a gathering composed mainly of the students of the college. We reproduce them, says the *Leutler* (Allahabad), for the benefit of the old students who do not have the privilege now of sitting at the feet of Mr. Fielden and receiving their education from him (and it so happens that two of the best speakers of the province come from Agra College) and for the benefit of others too. But we wonder whether it occurred to Mr. Fielden that India is also the land where many more Englishmen than deserve find employment. And that these gentlemen when they have made their pile spend the days of their retirement in maligning the country that gave them employment.

## SOCIAL SERVICE

**A**MONGST the many good works that the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri has done in South Africa, perhaps one of the most important is the establishment of the Indian Social Service Committee in Durban. This was the result of a lecture on Social Service. In that lecture the Rt. Hon. Mr. Sastri very effectively pointed out that there were other fields besides the political field to which our attention should be turned. One of those fields was the work connected with the social uplift of our community. That was over eighteen months ago. And since then Mr. V. Lawrence and his small band of co-workers have done good work. By no means the work is easy. It is undoubtedly the most difficult. The progress is small and hardly noticeable for some time. Mr. Lawrence and his co-workers are, therefore, to be congratulated on their work.

There is, however, much to be done in the social uplift of our community. The conditions immediately outside the Borough boundaries have no doubt improved recently. But in some parts the conditions are appalling. It is no use relying upon the various Health Boards to improve these conditions. The Indian looks upon these Boards with suspicion. The suspicion appears to be well-founded. Recently we had occasion to see several summonses for the recovery of rates. In our opinion, the Health Boards in many cases could have avoided going to law. The Indian can ill-afford to pay the heavy costs on the summons. Then there is the cry that the Boards pay little attention to Indian quarters. This is by the way however. We merely quote these instances to show the grounds upon which the Indian bases his suspicion. In the circumstances any attempt on the part of these Health Boards to improve the conditions may be frustrated.

It therefore devolves upon the Indian Social Service Committee to strike out a programme of its future work so that its members can cover a wider field than they have hitherto done. Much of their work lies outside Durban. Its small band of members, we admit, is energetic and can be trusted with any work, but it cannot be denied that if the Committee is to cover a wider field, as we have indicated, its forces will have to be considerably re-inforced.

Whilst on the one hand much is being done to uplift the Indian educationally, much has to be done, side by side, to uplift the Indian socially. Recently we had occasion to refer to the "fire-treading" ceremonies in some of the Hindu Temples. These practices are being resorted to by men who ought to know better. They are being followed by the masses who are illiterate. This is an instance in which the Committee can be of considerable service. The masses can be approached before these ceremonies and informed of the wrong that they are doing to themselves.

The field is very wide indeed and we hope that the Indian Social Service Committee will fulfil the high hopes that are being entertained by the Indian community.

## S. A. Trade Union Congress

The following was among the resolutions passed by the South African Trade Union Congress which met last week-end in the Trades Hall, Johannesburg, Mr. A. Moore (president) presiding:—

"That this Congress being aware that during the past year the N.E.C. has had several conferences with non-European workers' organisations on the question of co-operation with European unions for mutual protection, resolves: That the most satisfactory method of organisation is to include all workers in a given industry or trade in one union. If this is for various reasons not practicable at the moment, then branches of unions should be opened to receive non-European workers who are otherwise eligible to join, and if neither of these proposals is adopted then parallel unions for non-European workers should be registered and have representation on the various bodies set up under the Industrial Conciliation and Apprenticeship Acts."

A brief discussion followed, in which the speakers in opposition to parallel unions were in the majority. It was pointed out that many unions had already coloured workers within their organisation. A plea was made for the acceptance of all workers, whatever colour, in the various trade unions affiliated to the Congress and its headquarters at Johannesburg.

Mr. F. Peterson (Natal) said the question was an important one for Natal where they had 4,000 Indians. About four weeks ago they formed an Indian Trade Union Congress, and the few members in Natal fought against it. They claimed that the Indians were entitled to join their various unions affiliated with headquarters in Johannesburg. Per-

sonally he did not agree to parallel unions, but thought they should encourage all workers in South Africa, whatever colour, to join up with the Trade Union movement in South Africa.

The resolution was adopted.

Mr. F. Peterson (Natal) moved that "contract labour, European, coloured or native, be abolished," and conference approved.

## Gandhi And Tagore

Reviewing a publication by Messrs. George Allen and Unwin, Limited, (London), entitled "Letters to a Friend" containing letters written to Mr. C. F. Andrews by Rabindranath Tagore during the years 1913-22, the *Leader* (Allahabad) writes:—

In Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rabindranath Tagore India has produced two towering personalities who have acquired an international position and both of whom are widely respected for their rare idealism and high character. The two, however, offer a strong contrast, in spite of the fact that they are equally inspired by humanitarian feelings, believing that in all-embracing love and not in hatred, in non violence and not in force, is to be found the solution of the world's problems, including those of India. The ways of the two for achieving the goal are different. Mahatma Gandhi is eminently a dynamic personality. His is an ascetic ideal. His faith in service, suffering and sacrifice for the evolution of the spirit is profound. In other words, he believes in heroic methods of action, and he, therefore, appeals more to the imagination of the high-souled youths of the country than does the profound philosophy of Shivam, Shantam and Advaitam of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. The one is a combination of saint and politician and the other of poet and philosopher. The former feels acutely for his country, the latter for the whole world. The dominant note of Dr. Tagore's philosophy of life is not renunciation as it is of Mahatma Gandhi. An interesting study of the character of these two great men is furnished by their writings. We have before us a publication by Messrs George Allen and Unwin, Limited, (London) priced at 7s. 6d., entitled 'Letters to a Friend,' containing letters written to Mr. C. F. Andrews by Rabindranath Tagore during the years 1913-22. No one can fail to be elevated by a perusal of these letters which are veritable literary gems and which reveal the loving soul of one of the greatest of modern internationalists, who abhors nationalism as an evil and who has denounced it in words surcharged with intense feeling. He has travelled far and wide to carry the message of peace and universal brotherhood, has established Vishva Bharti for promoting the cause of international understanding and reconciliation and thus bringing about the realisation of the Divine Truth without which there is no true freedom, and has shown the sublime heights to which the spirit of one nurtured in the doctrines of Upanishads can rise. Rabindranath's earlier works were inspired by social and national longings. But later they became almost wholly merged in the universal. Strange as it may seem, it was a series of domestic bereavements, which opened his spiritual eye. In one of his letters written in 1918 his inner self is revealed in the following words:—

'Pride of patriotism is not for me. I earnestly hope that I shall find my home anywhere in the world, before I leave it. We have to fight against wrongs, and suffer for the cause of righteousness; but we should have no petty jealousies or quarrels with our neighbours merely because we have different names. The barrier of self is *maya*. When it is dispelled, then we in our suffering have tasted the draught of sorrow that wells up from

the heart of creation, flowing out to be merged and transformed into the sea of endless joy. When we do not see ourselves in the Infinite, when we imagine our sorrow to be our very own, then life becomes untrue and its burden becomes heavy. I understand more and more the truth of Buddha's teaching, that the root of all our miseries is this self-consciousness. We have to realize the consciousness of the All before we can solve the mystery of pain and be free. Our emancipation lies through the path of suffering. We must unlock the gate of joy, by the key of pain. Our heart is like a fountain, so long as it is driven through the narrow channel of self it is full of fear and doubt and sorrow; for then it is dark and does not know its end. But when it comes out into the open, on the bosom of the All, then it glistens in the light, and sings in the joy of freedom.'

Mahatma Gandhi would very probably subscribe to every word of the enunciation of this Vedantic philosophy of life, but his method of self-realization is different from that of Dr. Tagore. His is still the attitude of one who is a seeker after truth through self-experience, whilst Tagore's perception of it is intuitive and now requires no *tapasya* for fighting *maya*. It is not for men who are still groping in the dark to say as to which of them has attained a higher level of spiritual evolution, but this much can be said that they differ though their ideals are common. Mahatma Gandhi does not think that he is yet fit to convey a message to the world and has refused invitations from other countries, while Dr. Tagore has in him the irresistible impulse of a missionary of a great purpose. The latter avoids the whirlpools of 'dirty politics' and does not believe 'in straining for a result,' but Mahatma Gandhi finds in politics an opportunity for carrying on his 'experiments in truth.' The difference between the outlook of the two cannot perhaps be better illustrated than by the following observations of Dr. Tagore in one of his letters: 'There are politicians who must make hasty decisions and act without delay. It is their function to take short cuts to immediate success and dash through blunders with their lumbering "tanks" of political organizations. But there are needs that belong to all mankind and to all time. These have to be satisfied through the rise and falls of empires.' These words were written in October, 1920, when Mahatma Gandhi had come forward with his specific for winning Swaraj. In an earlier letter Dr. Tagore had written from Paris:—

'Let him (Mahatma Gandhi) send his call for positive service, ask for homage in sacrifice, which has its ends in love and creation. I shall be willing to sit at his feet and do his bidding if he commands me to co-operate with my countrymen in service and love. I refuse to waste my manhood in lighting fires of anger and spreading it from house to house....It would be an insult to humanity if I use the sacred energy of my moral indignation for the purpose of incendiaryism.'

It would thus appear that Dr. Tagore profoundly disapproved, on moral grounds, of Mahatma Gandhi's movement. He did so because he must have felt that it ran counter to his own movement of interracial reconciliation. It seems to us that two such personalities, apparently contradictory, have been produced for a common Divine purpose, one to show the way to the proud West to the Truth, as revealed by Hindu sages, and the other to prepare the way for its acceptance by raising the inheritors of it in India in the estimation of those who look down upon them as possessing an inferior culture. And who will say that Gandhi and Tagore between them have not raised the stature of India in foreign eyes?

## Mrs. Naidu's Triumph

### Keeps America Spell-bound

Dr. Sudhindra Bose writes to the *Hindu* :—

Madam Sarojini Naidu's lecture tour in the United States continues to be highly successful from every point of view. She is speaking in most of the principal cities of the country under well-known auspices and is finding large and enthusiastic audiences everywhere.

She has spoken three times already in Chicago alone, and in New York even oftener. At her last address in Chicago under the auspices of the Emil Hirsch Centre of Sinai Temple, the hall which seats about two thousand was packed, and a large number of people were glad to get only standing room.

The success which Sarojini Naidu is meeting with in American lecture platforms is fully deserved. She is a woman of fine intelligence, of vivid personality, and a speaker of force. Her eloquence is of a glowing magnificence. She talks with a large engaging sweep and presents life-like portraits of the awakened Fatherland. Her tour is doing a great deal to create a sympathetic understanding in the hearts and minds of Americans concerning India, its problems, struggles, and ultimate destiny.

Madam Naidu goes about in America in her picturesque Indian dress. Her Hindu costume, with its draperies, contrasting colours, heavy gold chains and gold earrings instantly claim attention. She is quite interested in American women who remind her of slim, beautiful birds.

"American women are like swallows," she told a reporter. "So graceful, straight and tall. There is strength as well as beauty in their figures. And their slender ankles—how pleasing they are, not only because of their sculptural perfection but also of their activity. They typify emancipation."

Sarojini Naidu says she is not a feminist because she does not feel the necessity of a separate woman's movement. She does not believe that there is any arbitrary division of man's work and woman's but that each should do the special work for which he or she is fitted.

"I have been here for such a short time," she went on, "that I cannot begin to judge America or the American woman, or make any estimate of what Western freedom has done for women. But all that I have seen so far of American women and American homes has been most attractive to me.

"To me, the home is important. It is woman's natural sphere. The home groups here seem much smaller to me than in my own country. There we care for our whole families, our relations, our grandmother's first cousin, and our fifth cousin's husband."

There is no doubt that Madam Naidu's visit to America is demolishing many of the atrocious myths propagated by Katherine Mayo and her ilk.

"It is true that in India girls marry young," she told a representative of the Albany (New York) *Telegram*, "but Americans are likely to forget that India is a tropical country, and girls mature there at least two years earlier than in this climate. And in some parts of the American States your girls are allowed to marry at eleven."

The Albany journalist observed to the Indian poetess that she must be in error and hoped she would verify her information before using it publicly. After the interview, the scribe consulted the World "Almanac" and found that the lowest legal age at which American girls may marry in any of the States is twelve.

"Which indicates that Indians may make errors in talking about America," moralized the American newspaper man, "even as Americans err in talking

and writing about India. It is so easy to make mistakes, and such a bother to be sure of one's facts!"

Sarojini Naidu is the soul of optimism. She is a brave free spirit. She always speaks hopefully and enthusiastically of India's future. Her optimism ought to shame all chicken-hearted Indians. She feels sure that India is about to enter a period of self-realisation and expansion.

"In what direction will India expand," she was asked.

"Africa furnishes the most available territory. Indians long ago went to South Africa and their early labours made the country fit for white settlement. But there is much trouble with British bars against Indian immigration."

The Indian visitor does not care to enter into lengthy arguments or debates. She makes forthright appeals for fair consideration of India by Americans. "Our customs and religion and culture differ from yours," she gently remarks. "But as we do not feel called upon to criticise Americans for chewing gum and spitting and doing many other things that are not customary in our country, I hope Americans who visit India will observe our different customs with a similar lack of desire to find fault."

Madam Naidu avoids being tartly critical of American society. She has nevertheless an alert eye and a hospitable ear. If her message is widely received, a new understanding may get into the relations between India and America, and with that understanding there is likely to come a greater international decency. Some day, through the dense clouds of suspicion and misunderstanding, a light may break clear and bright.

It is a glorious relief to find that Sarojini Naidu, in spite of her arduous labours as a lecturer, has not lost her sense of humour. Speaking of her accomplishments, she recently said :

"I have quelled a riot, led a political party, and raised a family of four children. However, I can't add, and I don't know geography."

What a blessing it is for a country that has a political leader who does not claim to be omniscient !

## Dr. Besant On Mahatma Gandhi

Dr. Annie Besant, writing in *New India* under the caption 'Congress Muddle,' says :—

Mr. Gandhi's influence on politics, since he came to India, has always been destructive. I remember how when I expressed to Mr. Gokhale, before Mr. Gandhi's arrival in India, my pleasure about his coming, and my hope that he would be a great help in winning freedom for India, that wide and far-seeing statesman replied : "No, you are mistaken. Mr. Gandhi will cause a great set-back to our political movement." His words have proved to be sadly true.

"The wildcat movements of non-co-operation and civil disobedience devastated the political field, blighting a promising harvest that was showing its green shoots above the soil. Of course, I opposed these insane propositions, but a wave of fanatical, fetish worship, swept over India and carried all before it."

Proceeding, she asks : "When has Mr. Gandhi entered the political arena without bringing about 'Himalayan blunders?' He is not a politician. He is a vague, dreamy mystic, out of touch with ordinary human nature."

Concluding she says :—

"The collapse of the Congress as a political organisation during 1929 leaves all political parties free to go their own way. The Nehru Report remains as the rallying point for those among them who 'mean business.'"

## Miss Katherine Mayo's "Mother India"

### Weighed In The Balance

#### What Is The Verdict?

BY DR. J. T. SUNDERLAND IN THE 'MODERN REVIEW'

Miss Mayo's book has now been long enough before the public to settle in a general way the question of its worth. What are the most important testimonies and judgments that have been given to the world by the most competent scholars, critics and judges, regarding its truthfulness as a picture of India, and therefore its value?

What follows is a partial answer.

#### I. BOOKS ANSWERING MISS MAYO

At least seven or eight books in reply to "Mother India" have been written by competent persons, mostly by Indian scholars. Special attention is invited to the following four:—

1. "A Son of Mother India Answers." By Dhan Gopal Mukerji, a well-known Indian author. New York. E. P. Dutton.

2. "Father India: A Reply to Miss Mayo." By S. C. Ranga Iyer, Member of the Indian Legislative Assembly. London. Selwyn and Blount.

3. "Miss Mayo's Mother India: A Rejoinder." By K. Natarajan, Editor of *The Indian Social Reformer*. Madras, India. G. A. Natesan.

4. "Unhappy India." By the late Lajpat Rai, Editor of *The People* and former President of the India National Congress. Calcutta. The Banna Publishing Co.

All these books are interesting, carefully written and excellent. They answer Miss Mayo from different standpoints. The first three are small or of moderate size. The last is larger (500 pages), and it replies to "Mother India" with a thoroughness and completeness (and also with an authority) which leave little or nothing further to be desired.

#### II. PERIODICALS ANSWERING MISS MAYO

Nearly every monthly, weekly and daily in India has replied to "Mother India." There have also been many replies in England and America, some of them of importance. Two of much value and easily obtainable in libraries may be mentioned here:—

I. "Is India Dying? A Reply to Mother India." By Rev. Alden H. Clark. In *The Atlantic Monthly* of February, 1927. Mr. Clark is an American, a graduate of Amherst College and has been a missionary in India seventeen years.

II. "An Answer to Mother India..." "India's Degradation Laid to British Rule." By J. G. Cornelius, an Indian scholar, formerly Professor of Philosophy in Lucknow University. In *Current History*, December, 1927.

It is to be hoped that everybody who has read Miss Mayo's volume will take the trouble to look up and read one or both these articles, as well as one or more of the above-mentioned books.

#### III. THE MOST IMPORTANT MISSIONARY BODY IN INDIA ANSWERS MISS MAYO

Soon after the appearance of "Mother India" the following public statement was issued by the Executive Committee of the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, which is the highest and most authoritative Christian organization in the country,—its chairman being the Metropolitan Bishop of India:

##### THE STATEMENT

"It has never been denied either by foreign mission-

Free nations cannot govern subject provinces.

—J. A. FROUD.

aries or by Indians that grave social evils exist in India, and it is a matter of common knowledge that strenuous and organized efforts are being made by groups of Indian reformers to get rid of them. We representing a body of men and women who are in close touch with the people and are conversant with their everyday life, unhesitatingly assert that the picture of India which emerges from Miss Mayo's book is untrue to the facts and unjust to the people of India. The sweeping generalizations that are deduced from the incidents which came to the notice of the author, are entirely untrue as a description of India as a whole. We have faith in India and India's future. We have faith that India will obtain deliverance from these evils; and we earnestly desire that East and West should co-operate to this end in a spirit of love and understanding."

#### IV. EMINENT AMERICAN MISSIONARIES IN INDIA ANSWER MISS MAYO

The following statement regarding "Mother India," signed by seven prominent American missionaries, was published in *The Christian Century*, Chicago, February 2, 1928.

##### THE STATEMENT

"As Americans, we wish to express our sense of deep regret that a country-woman of ours should, after a brief stay in India, write so unfairly and offensively of this country. It is clearly apparent that Miss Mayo saw only a part of India and did not see that part in the proper perspective. In many things her accuracy as an observer will not bear scrutiny and the many highly exaggerated conclusions give a false picture of India as a whole. Generalizations that may be taken for facts by readers in America and England, are too often the statements of personal opinion based upon prejudice and partial examination. A very offensive book could be written as well of America or of any other Western nation, and then we, of the West, would rightly protest against such unfair representation. Human sin and social evil exist in every land and writers who generalize would do well to keep that in mind. As Americans who have lived in India for a number of years and have moved with all classes of people, we have no hesitation in protesting vigorously against the unfairness of Miss Mayo's book. We wish to pay our tribute of love and respect to the people of India from whom we, of the West, may learn many valuable lessons. We wish to express our sense of humiliation that an American should write with such unfairness and apparent prejudice in presenting India."

Fred B. Fisher, Bishop, Methodist Episcopal Church, Calcutta.

Alden H. Clark, Missionary, American Congregational Mission, Ahmednagar.

Alice B. Van Doren, Secretary, National Christian Council of India, Poona.

Johan J. De Boer, Principal, Voorhees College, Vellore.

Mason Olcott, President, American Aroot Mission, Vellore.

D. F. McClelland, General Secretary, Y. M. C. A., Madras.

E. Stanley Jones, Missionary, Sitapur, U. P.

( To be Continued )

FOR SALE—Ford Touring Car. Good mechanical condition, tools, five tyres, shock absorbers, upholstery in good condition. Car ready for the road.

R. L. ABRAHAM, Groutville.

What is morally wrong cannot be politically right.  
—EDMUND BURKE.

## The Story of My Experiments With Truth

[ BY M. K. GANDHI ]

Part V. Chapter VIII.

LAKSHMAN JHULA

It was a positive relief to reach the Gurukul and meet Mahatma Munshiramji with his giant frame. I at once felt the wonderful contrast between the peace of the Gurukul and the din and noise of Hardwar.

The Mahatma overwhelmed me with affection. It was here that I was first introduced to Acharya Ramedevji and I could immediately see what a force and a power he must be. We had different viewpoints in several matters, nevertheless our acquaintance soon ripened into friendship.

I had long discussions with Acharya Ramedevji and other professors about the necessity of introducing industrial training into the Gurukul. When the time came for going away it was a wrench to leave the place.

I had heard much in praise of the Lakshman Jhula (a hanging bridge over the Ganges) some distance from Hrishikesh, and many friends pressed me not to leave Hardwar without having gone as far as the bridge. I wanted to do this pilgrimage on foot and so I did it in two stages.

Many *sanyasis* called on me at Hrishikesh. One of them was particularly attracted towards me. The Phoenix party was there and their presence drew from the Swami many questions.

We had discussions about religion and he realised that I felt deeply about matters of religion. He saw me bare-headed and shirtless as I had returned from my bath in the Ganges. He was pained to miss the *shikha* (tuft of hair) on my head and the sacred thread on me and said :

'It pains me to see you, a believing Hindu, going without the sacred thread and the *shikha*. These are the two external symbols of Hinduism and every Hindu ought to wear them.'

Now there is a history as to how I came to dispense with both. When I was an urchin of ten, I envied the Brahman lads sporting bunches of keys tied to their sacred threads and wished I could do likewise. The practice of wearing the sacred thread was not then common among the *vaishya* families in Kathiawad. But a movement had just been started for making it obligatory for the first three *varnas*. As a result several members of the Gandhi adopted the sacred thread. The Brahman who was teaching two or three of us boys *Ramaraksha* invested us with the thread and although I had no occasion to possess a bunch of keys, I got one and began to sport it. Later, when the thread gave way, I do not remember whether I missed it very much. But I know that I did not go in for a fresh one.

As I grew up several well-meaning attempts were made both in India and South Africa to re-invest me with the sacred thread, but with little success. If the *shudras* may not wear it, I argued what right have the other *varnas* to do so? And I saw no adequate reason for adopting what was to me an unnecessary custom. I had no objection to the thread as such, but the reasons for wearing it were lacking.

As a *vaishnava* I naturally wore round my neck the *kanthi* and the *shikha* was considered obligatory by elders. On the eve of my going to England, however, I got rid of the *shikha* lest when I was bare-headed it should expose me to ridicule and make me look, as I then thought, a barbarian in the eyes of the Englishmen. In fact this cowardly feeling carried me so far that in South Africa I got my cousin Ohhaganlal Gandhi, who was religiously

wearing the *shikha*, to do away with it. I feared that it might come in the way of his public work, and so even at the risk of paining him I made him get rid of it.

I therefore made a clean breast of the whole matter to the Swami and said :

'I will not wear the sacred thread, for I see no necessity for it, when countless Hindus can go without it and yet remain Hindus. Moreover, the sacred thread should be a symbol of spiritual regeneration, presupposing a deliberate attempt on the part of the wearer at a higher and purer life. I doubt whether in the present state of Hinduism and of India, Hindus can substantiate the right to wear a symbol charged with such a meaning. That right can come only after Hinduism has purged itself of untouchability, has removed all distinctions of superiority and inferiority, and shed a host of other evils and shams that have become rampant in it. My mind, therefore, rebels against the idea of wearing a sacred thread. But, I am sure, your suggestion about the *shikha* is worth considering. I once used to have it, and I discarded it from a false sense of shame. And so I feel that I should start growing it again. I shall discuss the matter with my comrades.'

The Swami did not appreciate my position with regard to the sacred thread. The very reasons that seemed to me to point to not wearing it appeared to him to favour its wearing. Even to-day my position remains about the same as it was at Hrishikesh. So long as there are different religions every one of them may need some outward distinctive symbol. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over other's, then it is fit only to be discarded. The sacred thread does not appear to me to-day to be a means of uplifting Hinduism. I am therefore indifferent to it.

As for the *shikha*, cowardice having been the reason for discarding it, after consulting with friends I decided to regrow it.

But to return to Lakshman Jhula. I was charmed with the natural scenery about Hrishikesh and the Lakshman Jhula, and bowed my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in Nature, and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of nature with a religious significance.

But the way in which men were using these beauty spots was far from giving me peace. As at Hardwar so at Hrishikesh, people dirtied the roads and the fair banks of the Ganges. They did not even hesitate to desecrate the sacred water of the Ganges. It filled me with agony to see people performing natural functions on the thoroughfares and river banks when they could easily have gone a little farther away from public haunts.

Lakshman Jhula was, I saw, nothing but an iron suspension bridge over the Ganges. I was told that originally there had been a fine rope-bridge. But a philanthropic Marwadi got it into his head to destroy the rope-bridge and erect an iron one at a heavy cost and then entrusted the keys to the Government. I am at a loss to say anything about the rope-bridge as I have never seen it, but the iron bridge is entirely out of place in such surroundings and mars their beauty. The making over of the keys of this pilgrims' bridge to Government was too much even for my loyalty of those days.

The *Svargashram* which one reaches after crossing the bridge was a wretched place, being nothing but a number of shabby-looking sheds of galvanised iron sheets. These, I was told, were made for *sadhaks* (aspirants). There were hardly any living beings there at the moment. Those who were in the main building gave one an unfavourable impression.

But the Hardwar experiences proved for me to be of inestimable value. They helped me in no small way to decide where I was to live and what I was to do.