JAWAHARLAL NEHRU ON MAHATMA GANDHI

(Gandhi and non-cooperation: Non-cooperation was essentially, as Seely had said long ago “the notion that it was shameful to assist the foreigner in maintaining his domination”. Therefore, Andrews had written that “it was with the intense joy of mental and spiritual deliverance from an intolerable burden that I watched the actual outbreak of such an inner explosive force, as that which actually occurred when Mahatma Gandhi spoke to the heart of India the mantram -- “Be free! Be slaves no more!” and the heart of India responded. In a sudden movement her fetters began to be loosened and the pathway of freedom was opened.”

Gandhi, indeed, was continually laying stress on the religious and spiritual side of the movement. His religion was not dogmatic but it did mean a definitely religious outlook on life, and the whole movement was strongly influenced by this and took on a revivalist character so far as the masses were concerned. The great majority of Congress workers naturally tried to model themselves after their leader and even repeated his language.

As for Gandhi himself, he was a very difficult person to understand, sometimes his language was almost incomprehensible to an average modern. But we felt we knew him quite well enough to realize that he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader and having put our faith in him we gave him an almost blank cheque for the time being at least.

It was Hindu-Muslim ki jai everywhere. It was remarkable how Gandhi seemed to cast a spell on all classes and groups of people and draw them into one motley crowd struggling in one direction. He became indeed “a symbolic expression of the confused desires of the people.”

Gandhi’s persuasive power: Gandhi had pleaded for the adoption of the way of non-violence of peaceful non-cooperation with all the eloquence and persuasive power which he so abundantly possessed. His language had been simple and unadorned; his voice and appearance cool and calm and devoid of all emotion, but behind that outer covering of ice there was the heat of a blazing fire and concentrated passion and the words he uttered winged their way to the innermost recesses of our minds and hearts and created a strange ferment there. The way he pointed out was hard and difficult but it was a brave path and it seemed to lead to the promised land of freedom. Because of that promise, we pledged our faith and marched ahead.

Making heroes out of clay: The year 1930 was full of dramatic situations and inspiring happenings; what surprised most was the amazing power of Gandhiji to inspire and enthuse a whole people. There was almost something hypnotic about it and we remembered the words used by Gokhale about him: how he had the power of making heroes out of clay. Peaceful civil disobedience as a technique of action for achieving great national ends seemed to have justified itself and a quiet confidence grew in the country shared by friend and opponent alike that we were marching towards victory.

Dialogue with opponents: On principle, he was always willing to go out of his way to meet and discuss anything with his opponents. Being absolutely convinced of the rightness of his own position, he hoped to convince the other party, but it was perhaps something more than intellectual conviction that he aimed at. He was always after a psychological change, a breaking of the barriers of anger and distrust, an approach to the other's goodwill and fine feelings.

Gandhi’s concept of democracy: Gandhi’s concept of democracy is definitely a metaphysical one. It has nothing to do with numbers or majority or representation in the ordinary sense. It is based on service and sacrifice and it uses moral pressure. In a statement, he defines a democrat. He claims to be 'a born democrat.' 'I make that claim, it is said, is that I can completely identify with the poor and the poor, longing to live no better than they and a corresponding conscientious effort to approach that level to the best of our ability can entitle one to make it.'

Whether Gandhi is a democrat or not, he does represent the peasant masses of India; he is the quintessence of the conscious and subconscious will of those millions. It is perhaps something more than representation; for he is the idealized personification of those vast millions. Of course, he is not the average peasant. A man of the keenest intellect, of fine feeling and good taste, wide vision, very human, and yet essentially the ascetic who has suppressed his passions and emotions, sublimated them and directed them in spiritual channels; a tremendous personality drawing people to himself like a magnet and calling out fierce loyalties and attachments -- all this so utterly unlike and beyond a peasant. And yet, he is the great peasant, with a peasant's outlook on affairs and with a peasant's blindness to some aspects of life. But India is peasant India, and so he knows his India well and reacts to her slightest tremors and gauges a situation accurately and almost instinctively.

Source: Jawaharlal Nehru, An Autobiography

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