

Karel Hujer: *The Bomb in Gandhi's India*

It sounds utterly incongruous but in this world of violence, nuclear detonation has occurred of all places not too far from Porbandar in India. That is the birthplace of that frail spiritual giant of our age, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, whose life was dedicated to the uncompromising practice of Ahimsa, non-violence. It is a most alarming betrayal of Gandhian heritage perpetrated by sovereign India, for whose freedom Gandhi sacrificed his life.

My days in Gandhi's ashram in Wardha are an ever-living inspiration as the darkness of human bestiality rages about us from the far regions of Asia to the core of our Western civilization, where Christianity in this ailing world appears but a faint glimmering light. Since the end of World War II one sociologist has already counted eighty small wars presaging World War III. Yet we call this peace-time and pursue our pleasures as long as tragedies do not personally overtake us. My thoughts do return to Babu-ji, Little Father, as we called Gandhi, who loved the Christian song, "Lead kindly light amidst th' encircling gloom."

It is more or less a sinister farce when the Madame Prime Minister who carries the name Gandhi (no relation whatsoever to Mahatma Gandhi) announces that the nuclear bomb India exploded during the

weekend of May 18 is to be used for peaceful purposes. India is on the verge of chronic famine and what Gandhi once stated remains valid: "If I can secure five cents a day for every Indian, I will save India from starvation." With today's inflation we could perhaps raise that amount to fifteen cents a day. Nuclear weapons in Gandhi's India is only a vain extravaganza of political maneuvering and trickery, in diametrical opposition to Gandhian honesty. In our time of moral decadence, Gandhi's statesmanship that stood for a higher human relationship would inevitably bring him to resist the conduct of today's sovereign Indian government, which would impose on such a rebel a much more restrained prison than the British raj ever did when Gandhi called himself "happy jail bird."

Liberated India has not liquidated its appalling poverty and, as in British days, some fifty to sixty millions of its people do not know from where they will receive tomorrow's handful of rice to appease their hunger. Yet the cost to equip a single Indian soldier would provide adequate food for five thousand starving people. Gandhi was their bold and unvarnished spokesman, who walked with them only in his loin cloth.

Meanwhile, that minority of upper crust who today sit in a position of power enjoy the vanity of the dubious prestige of being a nuclear

power and of adding to the portentously growing chain of proliferation. How soon will it spread to Pakistan, that creation of the Muhammadan atheist, Jinnah? Were Israel to be submerged in the Mediterranean sea, who would prevent the unpredictable emergence of this Gehennic weapon for the purpose of peace in the Mideast? Is this a form of bubonic plague of the 20th century produced by our glorified technology?

More than anyone, Gandhi was aware that science without wisdom is a social menace. As a servant of the poorest of the poor and a divine attorney, Gandhi knew that the Industrial Revolution in his land was much more a menace than a blessing and he extolled the virtues of handicraft and simple village industry.

In his atavistic passions, man in this advanced technology is ever more obsolete. In his subconscious state he continues to be primitive, and the cosmic source of energy he has tapped is a more potential portent of death than life. Gandhi saw the danger in dehumanizing mechanization as he saw it ever more in the atom when he said: "If I knew that an atomic bomb were to fall at a certain spot, I would walk to that location to console the people in their last moment of life."

Those evening Gandhi prayer meetings now appear to me as having taken place in some strange, different

world. Gandhi's faith in ultimate goodness shone bright when he insisted "God rules even where Satan holds sway because the latter exists only on His sufferance." Although in 1920, after the first world war holocaust, he already admitted that "Mine is the voice in the wilderness," yet he assured Romain Rolland, an exile from nationalistic France and a faithful European servant of peace, that "the ancient seers of India were greater scientists than Newton; greater warriors than Wellington, because knowing the use of weapons, they did not resort to the use of force, but taught the war-weary world that its salvation rests in non-violence." This was indeed a prophecy for the oncoming atomic age. The eminent American missionary in India, the late E. Stanely Jones, states appropriately in this instance: "God uses many instruments, and he may have used Mahatma Gandhi to help Christianize unchristian Christianity." The most disastrous wars of our age have their roots in the world nominally called Christian, and this world, for better or worse, has invented the nuclear weapon. After all, India, where Britishers ruled 150 years, only follows Western footsteps.

(Dr. Hujer, retired, Guerry Professor of Astronomy and Physics at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, is a frequent contributor to this page.)