*C*

*entenary celebrations of the birth of any prominent man attract assessments of his character, career and influence. Nothing could be more understandable, particularly in the case of* ***M. K. Gandhi,*** *who was by common consent one of the greatest leaders Asia has produced in an era of colonial nationalisms and decolonization, who in his own life time was called a saint and a machiavellian politician, and who has become in independent India both a national myth and an embarrassment.* ***Accounts*** *of the importance of Gandhi in modern India tend to fall into two main categories. There are those who dismiss him, often regretfully, as an idealist whose Utopian plans for a democracy of village commonwealths and a* ***non-violent society*** *have collapsed in the face of economic and political necessity and the machinations of unscrupulous politicians. In the words of* ***Jayaprakash******Narayan****, ‘If you consider the political ideologies attaining in India today, you would find that somehow one who is called the Father of the Nation is completely missing from all of them’. Such pessimism assesses Gandhi as if he had been solely a dispenser of blue-prints for a brave new world, and fails to see him as a* ***dynamic leader*** *whose greatest influence flowed from the type of movement he led and the techniques he used, rather than from the peculiarly personal ideals he held. On the other hand, there are those who hail him as the Father of India and try to draw direct causal connexions between his ideals and many of the major changes which have occurred in India since 1947, particularly the official abolition of Untouchability and the institution of panchayat raj. But this is the perspective of the biographer. It underrates the complexities of politics and society and their interaction, and turns a blind eye to the innumerable cross currents which make up the main stream of*

***Indian social and political activity***