



LIVING NON-VIOLENCE

A. B. BHARADWAJ

GANDHI IN ACTION



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First Edition: November, 1986

Published by:
Gandhi in Action
1 Arvind Nagar, Ghonda,
Delhi 110053, India
Tel. +91-11-2280039 / 6436831



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DIRECTORY OF PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE ORGANIZATIONS

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Courtesy of the Gandhi Museum, New Delhi



PREFACE

This book is the outcome of my journey in search of non-violence. My journey is no way complete, as it is an endless path and life is a limited phenomena. For me non-violent action, as opposed to pacifism, is the only way to achieve absolute non-violence, a stage in life where each and every action is selfless. In other words, selfless action is non-violent action. In my life I have tried to see that any action in which I have involved myself in no way enhances myself or ego. I learned from Gandhi that selfless service of humanity is the way to God. This is a new dimension added to the traditional way of Bhagti (devotional way to the realization of God). Instead of seeking God through the renunciation of worldly life, identifying yourself with and feeling one with others is the way that leads to God dwelling in each one's soul. It is the path shown by Gandhi and other great men. I am a wanderer on that path. This book is a glimpse of that wandering, wandering from self to soul and to the soul in every life.

In the first chapter I have tried to analyze the attempts made by Indians, through an institutionalized approach, to realize the goals that Gandhi set forth. My own experience of about a quarter of a century shows that the process of institutionalization of an idea is itself the outcome of vested interests and, therefore, just the opposite of the idea of selfless action. I realized that this could not be my way. Since I have been actively involved in many of these institutions I do admit that my viewing of the operations and outcomes of these programmes are subjective, regardless of my efforts to be objective in this analysis.

The second chapter gives examples of different Western peace and non-violence organizations which are addressing the problems that the world is facing today and the role the Institution of the State, especially the world powers, is playing in complicating those issues. I feel that the Institution of the State is the



strongest instrument of violence which claims to have the people's sanction. But this sanction is the outcome of the fear that the State has created in the minds of the people in order to maintain its supremacy. Gandhi was the one who challenged this supremacy and tried to build the people's power as the supreme power. That is why he did not allow the Institution of the State to be his instrument to serve the people; instead he opted to go to the people, identify with them and to be one with them.

The third chapter examines some of the experiments in non-violent living that I have come across during my journeys abroad. These experiments, as I saw them, are the real hope of the revival of Gandhi's spirit, a spirit and life that showed that non-violence can only be achieved through action. I have seen people in the West who are fed up with the material progress of modern civilization turning to Gandhi for an answer to the challenges that the technological revolution has thrown to mankind.

In the fourth chapter I have given examples of the many people and organizations that have taken the first step towards non-violent action, the revival of the institution of the family of man. The family is the only institution whose constitution is based on love and sacrifice, and it is through these two values that true non-violent action is reflected. To bring about a non-violent revolution we must start from our own home and reach out to the circumference of the globe, cutting across geo-political boundaries. If someone asked me what my achievements of more than two decades have been I want to say that I have expanded the four walls of my house. My way has been to think positively, act locally and live globally:

The last chapter of the book focusses the attention of the reader on the life that Gandhi lived and the process that made him a spiritual revolutionary. The



invention of the weapon of Satyagraha in South Africa and the many experiments Gandhi made in non-violent action and truthful living are discussed. My conclusion is that his objective in life was to seek truth and realize God. The way to achieve that goal is to disassociate from untruth whenever and wherever you find it in life and to listen to the voice within, the voice of the soul, this is the way to be nearer to truth and to God.

In no way is this book a comprehensive analysis of the Gandhian movement in the West. It is not even inclusive of all the people and places I visited in my travels. The purpose of the book is to show to the reader the roots of the Gandhian movement in the West, the mistakes made when the movement relied on the institution of the State for its sanction and sustenance, and to give hope of a true revival of the Mahatma's spirit. My hope is that, having read about examples of people living out Gandhi's experiments in non-violence, others will be inspired to follow his path.

Arya Bhushan

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Good Friday, 1986



FOREWORD

The quest for a new society through which its members may be able to realize their aspirations and ideals of happy and durable social order has been in evidence from one generation to another. With the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a source of a new pattern of thought and action, this search has acquired a new character and assumed wider dimensions. The aim is to develop a way of life which should ensure freedom and happiness for the common man and security for mankind in general. The experiments which Mahatma Gandhi initiated involved many people in India in social action in the pursuit of the new goals for human society. It created hope in the hearts of large numbers of people in other countries that their dreams for a better world be realized in practice.

The pages of this book are written by an author who is not only imbued deeply with the new ideas and hopes, but is himself a participant in efforts to translate these great ideas and ideals into action in day to day life. His book, which I have gone through with great pleasure, is a wide survey of the experiments made and the experiences gained in various parts of the world to convert these dreams into a living reality in specific conditions, in a limited way.

To assess the real value of this new experiment, it is necessary to grasp the extent and force of its limitations. Inertia and rigidity is a common feature of the group life of human beings in almost all parts of the world. Various vested interests grow up around the ways in which people in general conform by force of habit and under pressure of the institutions which sustain the existing social order.

Those who perceive the need of a change to promote the health of the community and the happiness of its members have to face these limitations and



fight these forces to make any headway towards the goals which they have set before themselves.

A charismatic and powerful leader emerges on some occasions in history whose words and deeds impart a big impetus to the pace of change. Mahatma Gandhi was Destiny's gift to this country.

The pages of this book are illustrative of the direction and form of the changes which occurred in the wake of experiments which Mahatma Gandhi initiated and carried out in India. The focus of the book is specially on the impact of the Gandhian movement in areas outside of India.

Gulzari Lal Nanda

New Delhi, India

16 April 1986



EDITOR'S NOTE

My husband and I found ourselves in India for three months in early 1986. We met A.B. and his family through a mutual friend and were invited to join their household for as long as we wanted; we stayed with them for the full three months. We discovered that we were living with a family with an unlimited membership and in a house with no walls.

What had started as a simple request to correct punctuation and English grammar turned out to be a much more involved relationship with A.B. and his writing. Long afternoons in A.B.'s garden turned into long discussions about the direction and purpose of the book, which led to the big question: will you be my editor?

This has been a creative experience for me. Even though all of the content has been A.B.'s, he invited me to share in the creation of this book by giving his thoughts shape and expression. Thus the book itself is another example of A.B. living out the Gandhian principle of selflessness, that he doesn't claim possession over something as personal as his own writing. A tour guide at the Elephanta caves in Bombay told me that sculpture is not a human creation imposed on a piece of rock; the image of God is already within the stone. The sculptor merely frees the image by breaking away the rock that surrounds it. Perhaps editing for an author like A.B. can be described as an experience like such a sculptor.

To my husband and I, it was extraordinary that a stranger from another culture invited us to join his family having met us only once. How much more extraordinary that A.B. could invite me to join in the expression of his most personal and profound feelings. I have been immeasurably enriched.

Helen V. Cunningham
Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.
March 1986



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to convey my very sincere thanks to all those friends who have been a source of inspiration and help in bringing this book together. These friends have supported my travels, arranged my programmes in their countries and have been my hosts and family. Many have given me a patient hearing and direction. I am very grateful.

England: Rob Hitchings, Jim Tanburn, Dennis Robinson, Guy and Debbie Trainor, Satish Kumar (Editor of Resurgence), Rose and Arthur Hardy, John Cantor, Nick and Ana Jones, Shashi and Dr Mahima Pandey, Prof. Geoffery Ostergaard, Prof. Rex Ambler, Fred Blum, Nick and Pam Rodway, Caroline Beatty, Sister Lucille, John Linton, Dr. G.N. Singh, Ray Freeman, Tony Bullard, Geoffery Hardy, Robert Anderson, Warren Bruce, Dale Chappel, Michael and Etain Petty, Keith and Simone Panter-Brick, Rupert Maskell, Diane Schumacher.

Germany: Manfred Stormer, Antonie Fried, Rolland Lill, Biorn and Esther Rolde-Liebenan, Coosje and Neitheart Patry, Peter Ruehe, Marieluise Wittreich, Offer and Eike Ulla, Prof. Wolfram Horz.

France: Jerome Gue, Philippe and Isabelle Jacques, Denis Baupin, Edith Dubrulle, Catherine D. Oliver, Bernard Enean, Jean Baptiste, Jeanine Libouban, Oliver Raurich, Edgard Moscherosch, Vincent Butin, Marc Seve, Jane Prentis, Dr. Pierre Parodi (Mohan Das).



- Italy: Margaret and Riccardo Gramegna, Guerrino Vecchi, Gambini Giuse, Herzl Paolo, Marco Bertona, Titti Maulini, Aldo Mattiolo, Beppe Marasso, Bruno Rinaldi.
- Sweden: Asa Freij, Marita Begtsson (Ex-Member of Parliament), Lisa Melander, Sister Maites.
- Denmark: Karin and Karsten Nielsen, Ruth and Ole, Mike and Jeans Willemoes, Brigit Christensen, Viggo Bertelsen.
- U.S.A.: Clark Cunningham, Gerald Magaro, Ben Sasway, Mark Shepard, Therese Tanalski, Carol and Rick Jahnkow, Barbara Longbrook, Pamela Osgood, Tom Chen, P. Santa, C.M. Spencer, Kenneth Helfant.
- Canada: Gerry Feltham, Louise and Benoit Rancourt, Diane Buist.
- India: Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda (former Prime Minister), Shri Bhagwan Singh (former Ambassador to Fiji), Davendra Kumar Vice-Chancellor Gandhigram Rural University, Mahaveer Bhai, Narendra Vidya, Professor D.S. Bhalla, Professor Asharam, S.K. De, Rita Roy, Sunil Sharma, Shish Ram, G.B.K. Hooja I.A.S (Rtd)

My editor, Helen V. Cunningham, needs special mention as she has taken great pains and has burnt midnight oil to give aesthetic shape to the raw material I handed over to her. Helen is a social worker from Detroit, Michigan (U.S.A.) and has spent the past ten years working on the problems of inner-city housing and neighbourhood development. Helen was in India in 1986 with her husband, Clark Cunningham, a legal aid attorney and professor of legal ethics who was doing a comparative study of public interest litigation in India and the U.S.

My final thanks goes to my wife, Rani, for her patience and support.



CHAPTER I: AFTER GANDHI

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi brought an era to an end, an era which started when Gandhi returned from South Africa on January 9, 1915. From the time he became active until the assassin's bullets pierced his body on January 30, 1948, Gandhiji had been carrying on a ceaseless struggle for truth. The whole history of his life was the process of seeking for and struggling to find the truth. People around him could hardly understand his supreme objective, and this lack of understanding left him lonely and distressed in his last days. Out of despair he uttered the words "Meri Kaun Sunta Hai" — who listens to me now?

After his death, the masses who believed that political freedom from the British Raj was the supreme objective returned to routine life. Active political workers who fought under the Congress banner were engaged in finding places for themselves in the power-political arena. Political leaders started their game by acquiring key positions in top places. The remaining few who were fully committed to the ideals of the Father of the Nation had to begin afresh in the vacuum created by his death and the changed objectives of the national movement.

Gandhiji was a visionary. Throughout his life he had a vision as clear as glass: "I want to see God face to face." This was the simple and plain objective before him and he worked towards this throughout his life. Whether he succeeded is not important. The important thing is that he continued in this direction and his faith became stronger the more he strove.

What was the vision, however, of those who were sincerely interested in following the Mahatma's footsteps and in completing the tasks left unfulfilled by his death?



It took two months for the nation to come out of the shock of that assassination, for Gandhiji had been the collective conscience of the people. In March 1948 all those who were serious about the fulfillment of the tasks left behind met at the First. Constructive workers' Conference at Sewagram Ashram, the Ashram where Gandhiji had lived the last twelve years of his life guiding the nation and the Congress movement (though he himself was not a member of the party). Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and many important leaders, who by that time were very highly placed, gathered at Sewagram and were surrounded by an emerging bureaucratic complex. This was the beginning of the crisis.

The rising political leaders who had once spent days at Bapu's (a name of affection given to Gandhiji) feet were now impressed by their sense of self-importance and did not stay until the conclusion of the conference. The only visible leader that remained was Vinoba Bhave. All eyes were on him. Unfortunately, Vinobaji was never a man of the organization and what was felt needed most was a powerful, well-organized institution which could carry out the burden of fulfilling the objectives and dreams of the Mahatma.

Baba (Vinobaji) made a proposal. The formation of the Sarvodaya Samaj, a society for the upliftment of all, was Vinobhaji's suggestion. He proposed that there be a Samaj (society), a Sang (association), but no Tantra (discipline by physical force). The basic concepts of the Sarvodaya Samaj was day-to-day living without money (Kanchan Mukti) and saintly agriculture (Rishi Kheti). The slogan of the movement was that the current economic system must be broken in order to achieve the goal of revolution. The suggestion was applauded by all. Vinobaji agreed to head the movement and there was great-enthusiasm among the workers.



A new development that took place at the time was the formation of the Serva Seva Sangh (S.S.S.), a confederation of all the organizations which were floated by Gandhiji to carry out his eighteen point Constructive Work Programme. It included the All Indian Spinners Association, Harijan Sewak Sangh (Association for the Service to Untouchables), Talimi Sangh (Society for Basic Education) and others. Despite all these new developments, a basic thing was missing: dynamic leadership. The vacuum created a feeling of frustration among the workers. Vinobaji started to travel throughout the country and what he found was a communication gap among the various organizations that had joined under the umbrella of the S.S.S. The type of cohesiveness that was sorely needed was, in fact, missing.

The Second Constructive Workers Conference took place in 1950 at Anugul, Orissa. Things were moving much the same way; there was not much enthusiasm among the workers. Vinobaji did not attend the conference as he was opposed to the ever-growing bureaucracy of the organization and was confining his work to his Purnar Ashram.

Subsequently, the S.S.S. met in Wardha and decided to hold the next Constructive Workers Conference in Shivramapalli, Hyderabad. Vinobaji, again, was not very much inclined to attend the conference. Shankar Raodev, the then Secretary of the Sarvodaya Samaj, suggested, therefore, that the conference be postponed as he feared that another conference without Vinobaji's presence would again result in more frustration among the workers. After great persuasion, Vinobaji agreed to come to Shivramapalli but declared that he would reach the venue on foot. This action stirred enthusiasm among the workers.

At that time the communists were very active in Andhra Pradesh. They had launched a land-grab movement with the idea that land owned by big landlords



would be forcibly seized and distributed among the landless. The movement was catching fire and the government was worried about the violence which erupted out of this movement. Telangana was the worst affected area. There was no easy solution to the problems. There was violence by the agitators and counter-violence by the State in an effort to maintain law and order. But this was not a law and order problem. The problem was deep-rooted and needed a basic and fundamental change in the entire social and economic structure. The government was not capable of making the changes needed.

Vinobaji was also worried about the violent situation and he decided to march to Telangana. His companions tried to dissuade him from going, but it was a voice within that sent him to Telangana on foot. This was a journey with an unforeseen destination. Vinobaji, silent and serious, was not fully aware of the situation or any possible solution to the problem. He left everything to God. On April 18, 1951 he reached Pochampalli, a village in Telangana District. His mission was just to appeal for peace, for this area was riven by violent social conflict. The Communists in the area were provoking a Mao-type, violent peasant movement. When Vinobaji was confronted with the intensity of the land problem, he was moved by the plight of the landless, the poorest of the poor. He decided to think of a Positive solution to the real problem. The forcible grab of land by the landless brought home to Vinobaji that access to land was the crux of the problem and could be the basis of a social revolution. He explained that “in a just and equitable order of society land must belong to all.” Thus his appeal, made from the heart, worked and he got the first (Bhoodan) land gift through persuasion.

This was the beginning of a new dimension to the work that Gandhiji had left behind, but the requests for land grants was certainly an original idea from Vinobaji. At Pochampalli, Andhra Pradesh, Vinobaji decided to carry on this



mission of asking landlords to make donations of land for their landless brethren. The name Bhoodan Yagna (land gift oblation) was given to the movement.

While Vinobaji was moving through the villages of Telangana promoting the Bhoodan Movement, he was called to Delhi by Nehru. Vinobaji replied that he would go on foot (Padyatra) which inspired the workers. Interestingly, up to this point no organization had come forward to support Vinobaji's programme. Though only a few workers joined his Padyatra, the movement was gaining momentum. After visiting Delhi, the Padyatra entered Uttar Pradesh where the response was very encouraging. The S.S.S. came and took up the responsibility for organizing the Bhoodan work. The annual Constructive workers Conference was held in Sewapuri, Uttar Pradesh in September 1952 and the Bhoodan workers claimed that 100,000 acres of land had been obtained. At the conference, the S.S.S. declared a further target of an additional 250,000 acres of land. Many of the leaders of the S.S.S. found new hope in the movement. Shankar Raodev, Secretary of the S.S.S., took it upon himself to move around the country and form committees to promote the Bhoodan work. At the conference the S.S.S. also declared another programme: a protest against the centralized industries which were producing clothes and consumer goods. The mass were getting more and more interested in the movement.

Vinobaji continued his Padyatra and after a two month sojourn in Varanasi he moved into Bihar. While Vinobaji was travelling in Bihar a problem arose. The movement was rapidly growing and was faced with a question of finances. The simple answer was to let the movement be financed by the Gandhi Smark Nidhi (Gandhi Memorial Fund), the money which was collected after Gandhiji's death to carry on his work. Many workers were not in favour of using this money for the movement. Prominent among the opposition was Dhirendra Majumdar, one



of the three main figures in the Sarvodaya Movement. The other two Sarvodaya leaders, however, supported the use of the funds for the Bhoodan work, those leaders being Vinobaji and Acharya Dada Dharmadhikari. The decision of funding the movement by Gandhi Smark Nidhi consumed the entire initiative of the independent workers at the grass roots level. Since Vinobaji, the initiator of both the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan Movement approved of the proposed financial arrangements, everyone kept silent. The result of the change in financial policy and its impact on the movement slowly started to become visible. The movement which took root at the people's level started rallying around the institutions that financed the workers.

One of Vinobaji's major achievements at this point was the winning over of Jayaprakash Narayan, a well-known freedom fighter and a leader of the Socialist Party. Popularly known as JP, he joined the movement out of sheer frustration from the political parties which, according to him, had lost all relevance to the current situation in India. Basically, JP was a Marxist. During the freedom struggle he had basic differences with Gandhiji on the issue of non-violence, but he also had differences with Communist Party and its role on India's freedom struggle. He, therefore, opted to join the Indian National Congress Party and tried to create an independent forum within Congress, the Congress Socialist Party.

JP was among the most important new recruits to the Bhoodan Movement. He became the first Jeevan Dani (one who offers his whole life for a cause or movement). With JP came many politicians into the fold of the Bhoodan Movement, sacrificing their long political careers to work for the movement. However, a new situation was created with the emergence of JP as a leader, a leader second to none, other than Vinobaji. Some of the senior workers had an



aversion to political parties and did not approve of JP's leadership, but they saw no immediate crisis because the wave of the movement was steadily increasing.

The formal process of declaring the Jeevan Dan started at Bodhgaya, Bihar where the Sixth Annual Sarvodaya Sammellan (conference) was held from April 18 Through 20, 1954 under the Chairmanship of Asha Devi Aryanaikam. It was a big event with all the top leaders in attendance, including Dr. Rajendra Prasad, India's President, Dr Radhakrishnan, India's Vice-President, and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister. At this Conference the target set earlier for the acquisition of 250,000 acres of land was declared achieved by the Bhoodan workers. Approximately five hundred young men followed JP in declaring their Jeevan Dan. This was perhaps the peak of the Bhoodan Movement. It, apparently, looked like 1930 when Gandhiji led the historic Dandi March (Salt Satyagraha) in which millions of common people took part.

The unexpected wave of the Jeevan Danies created another problem. Vinobaji's close associates were not clear as to how these people could best be used and engaged in the Bhoodan work. Most of the workers were active in politics. Many had been part of the freedom struggle. At JP's call, some of the active members of the Socialist Party also joined the movement. The fundamentalists among the old Gandhians did not fully agree to this idea of taking into the movement those who were not fully committed to Gandhian philosophy and who were not trained in the Ashram life.

In July 1954 a training camp of the Jeevan Danies was organized under Vinobaji's guidance at Mujaffarpur, Bihar. Vinobaji, in his inaugural speech, replied to the criticism of those who did not approve of accepting everyone who wished to become Jeevan Danies:



We are getting into an unnecessary controversy. When the wood is put in the fire it becomes ashes, it does not remain to be identified as the mango wood ash or the teak wood ash. Ash is ash and is identical. Therefore, there is no need in differentiation among those who have come forward to offer their whole life for the movement. Each one will guide the other.

God's devotee will never suffer from economic problems. God is there to help him. Our path is "Bhagti Marg" (devotional way of achieving God or self-realisation) and Bhagta is always protected by God. We need not worry about this. A Jeevan Dani may lack in capacity and tactics but his Bhagti (devotion) to the cause of the movement will be par excellence.

JP also addressed the campers:

The purpose of this life order is, as has been said by Vinobaji, to dedicate ourselves for the achievement of "Bhoodan Moolak Gramodyog Pradhan Ahimsak Kranti" work for a non-violent revolution based on the Bhoodan Movement, village industries and non-violent way of life). The Bhoodan Movement is for a fundamental change in human behaviour as well as in the structure of the society.

Besides the Bhoodan Movement, Vinobaji introduced the other Dan (gift) programmes: Shramdan (gift of Labour), Sadhandan (gift of subsidiary means of production such as bullocks to the Bhoodani recipients to help till their new land), Budhidan (gift of mental abilities in promoting the Sarvodaya ideals), Sampattidan (gift of money, income or wealth) and Kanchan Mukti (elimination of the use of money in everyday life, an experiment in the Ashram life). Vinobaji called for the Shanti Sena (a peace corps for promoting communal harmony and bringing peace in violent incidents). Vinobaji also introduced the Sarvodaya Patra, a pot in each home into which the children were asked to drop a handful of grain



or a coin daily. The Sarvodaya Patra Programme was intended to symbolize that the activities of the workers enjoyed the support and sanctions of the people at large. But all these Programmes were short-lived and did not catch the eye of the people, as the programmes were centering around the institutions and not the people.

The initial objective of the Bhoodan Movement was to find a positive alternative to the bitterness and violence between the landlords and the landless. Vinobaji realized that it was not practical to ask for land for all because land is limited, therefore, he gave a new call for Gramdan (gift of village), Vinobaji started asking for the dedication of individual ownership of land to the village community. The first village to come under Gramdan was Mangroth in the Hamirpur District of Uttar Pradesh. The second and third Gramdans were obtained after three years in the State of Orissa.

The process of Gramdan started with the awakening of Gram Bhavana (consciousness and collective will among the village people). This was followed by Gram Smakalpa (the creation of community determination to accept the Gramdan way of life). It was thought that Gram Samkalpa would result in the generation of Lok Shakti (people's power) and, thus, in turn will give birth to Lok Niti (people's polity). There were three basic steps for a village to be entitled for declaration as Gram Dani village. First, the villagers should transfer all individual titles of land into the name of the Gram Sabha (village assembly). Second, a village assembly should be constituted. The creation of Gram Kosh (village fund) for the welfare of the weaker section of the village people was the third condition.

The three phases of the Gramdan Process were: 1) Prapti (receiving), individual ownership is dedicated and received in the name of the Gram Sabha; 2) Pushti (completion), the complete handing over of legal documents of



individual ownership; and 3) Nirmana (reconstruction), the complete reconstruction of the village with the active involvement of the whole village community. In September 1957, the S.S.S. adopted the following resolution defining Gramdan and Gram Parivar (village family):

If 80% of the landowners of a village are prepared to dedicate the right of ownership of their land and not less than 51% of the total land has come under its purview than the village will be considered as Gramdan. If, due to the scarcity of land, the landless people and the families who have got very small size of land are prepared, similarly, to give away their own incomes then it should be considered as Gram Parivar.

Factually speaking, the concept of Gramdan never went home to the landlords. The basic concept of Gramdan was that, after the village was declared a Gramdani village, the land in the village must be distributed equally among the families, taking into account the number of families involved. Redistribution of the land hardly took place. The original concept of the Gramdan was amended and the new idea of Sulabh Gramdan (simplified method of Gramdan) was introduced. This was a turning point from which the whole movement started to decline.

Sulabh Gramdan was merely easily obtainable Gramdan. It required four basic conditions. First, a minimum of 1/20th of cultivable land should be donated by the landowners for distribution to the landless. Second, the ownership of the land should be vested with the village assembly, the Gram Sabha. The ownership of the remaining 19/20th of the land was allowed to be maintained by the landowner. The right to mortgage the land was also allowed with permission from the Gram Sabha. One could sell land to the Gram Sabha or to any family which had joined the Gramdan. Third, the landowners had to contribute 1/40th of their



total produce and the landless 1/30th of their income to the Gram Kosh, a village fund to be used for the common good. Finally, the Gram Sabha would be constituted by enrolling one member from each family and the decisions of the Gram Sabha would be accepted unanimously by the villagers.

In 1965 Vinobaji gave a call for Gramdan Toofan, a whirlwind programme of the Gramdan. Two integral parts of the Toofan were Prakhand Dan, the dedication of a group of villages designated as a Community Development Block by the government for development purposes, and Zila Dan would be automatically declared when all the Blocks in a district were declared Prakhand Dan. Finally, the State of Bihar, where the maximum amount of land (39,085 Gramdans) was given in the Bhoodan Movement was declared Bihar Dan. As on January 20, 1969, 86,709 villages were declared as Gramdani. There were 554 Prakhand Dans and 11 Zila Dans.

From the surface, the material achievements of the Bhoodan and Gramdan Movements gave the impression that the movements had created an impact on the minds of the people and that one of the fundamental problems of the Indian masses may have found a permanent solution. At the same time, the political intelligentsia became interested in the day-to-day working of the movement and tried to associate themselves with it. The ruling party, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Pandit Nehru, extended its full support to the movement and many Congress leaders and workers, who were feeling uncomfortable as well as frustrated in power politics joined Vinobaji. However, inside the rank and file of the movement there was not only reservations among the fundamentalists, but also open discussion and criticisms. The movement was drifting away from the masses and towards the institutions that were either funding the movement or giving it political support.



More importantly, there were fundamental differences among the leadership over the basic issue of confrontation with the government when the law came in the way of implementing the land distribution programmes. An incident in the State of Bihar, where the movement was at its high pitch, is an example of those differences. In Munger District, the landlords of the village of Pehngi started forced ejectments of the tillers from the land. The news reached the leaders of the movement who were stationed at Khadigram in Munger District and workers were sent to Pehngi to conduct an on-the-spot inquiry of the situation. Acharya Rammutti, a Sarvodaya leader, sent a detailed report to the S.S.S. which was at the time meeting at Puri, Orissa. The report informed the S.S.S. that the police were called in when the Sarvodaya workers protested the forced ejectments. The tillers, along with a prominent Sarvodaya worker, were arrested.

Opinions among the S.S.S. about the appropriate response to the government action varied. One opinion was that the workers should defend themselves and fight the cases, as had been the tradition of the freedom struggle. Other opposed any direct confrontation with the government. Vinobaji was in favour of fighting the cases and JP was opposed. After a great amount of discussion, the S.S.S. could only agree on a vague resolution. Most of the workers were in favour of a mass struggle against the landless tillers and tenants, but since the leadership was divided over the issue and was not able to give clear direction, the momentum that was created by the Pehngi ejectments was vitiated. Although at some places a few Sarvodaya workers resisted the Bedakhli (dismissal from the right to cultivate land), the action did not have much impact. The tussle over the use of Satyagraha ultimately reached its climax and culminated in a vertical division of the whole movement in 1973-74.



Although the Bhoodan work continued, the real life of the movement started receding after the 1965 Toofan Gramdan. Vinobaji was invited and he agreed to go to Bihar on the condition that the workers were prepared to work towards a target of 10,000 Gramdans in the next six months. The workers accepted the challenge, but on his way to Bihar the war with Pakistan was started and all attention was diverted from the movement. The enthusiasm of the workers was diluted by the idea of defence of the country. Vinoba declared that Gramdan is, itself, a defence measure but the Toofan Gramdan programme ended without much success. Whenever there is military action by the government, the people who claim to believe in non-violence become sceptical and they forget the fact that non-violence is defeated by the dependence of the government on its Army for its defence.

The 1967 Sarvodaya Sammelan was held in Balia, Uttar Pradesh at the same time the Darbhanga District was declared Gramdan, and the coincidence of the events renewed the enthusiasm of the workers. Vinoba was interested in sending his best comrades to Darbhanga so that the work there could proceed smoothly. Not much could be achieved, however, because the Organizations which were involved with this task were engaged in their own organizational development and the work of the movement was only secondary. Sarvodaya Mandals (groups) and Bhoodan Committees were not very active in Darbhanga and there was the ever-present struggle over the question of leadership.

One other ugly factor crept into the movement: corruption among the workers and organizations responsible for the distribution of the Bhoodan land. There were complaints about bogus Gramdans and Dharendra Majumdar was able to substantiate many of the claims of corruption.



While the Bhoodan Gramdan movement was losing ground, the year 1969 was the centenary year of Gandhiji's birth. A very ambitious programme was launched by the government, at a cost of millions of rupees, to spread the philosophy of the Mahatma. Most of the leaders and workers who were active in the movement were put on various Committees and Sub-committees of the Centenary celebrations. Vinobaji was not in agreement with the government's programme, "I think that the importance is not being attached to Gandhiji's work but to the number 100."

In the summer of 1970, JP was holidaying with his wife Prabha Vati, in the Himalayas when the news reached him that the workers, mostly youth active in West Bengal and Bihar, had been threatened by the Naxalites (pro-Mao extremists). JP immediately went to Mushari, Muzaffarpur in Bihar and, distressed by the situation, decided to remain in Mushari under the banner of "Do or Die." Many workers responded and joined him there. This was, perhaps, the first time since JP joined the Sarvodaya Movement that he had gone into depth of a particular problem and the programme that was being carried out to address that problem on a grass roots level. He saw for himself that much of the Gramdan work was merely talk and only existed on paper. None of the forty-three villages JP had visited had actually fulfilled the required pledges by the village people.

In March 1971, while JP was busy in the Mushari work, Bangladesh (East Pakistan) declared its independence from Pakistan and a war was on. JP went on a world tour to promote support for the recognition of Bangladesh by the big powers. Millions of refugees flooded across the border from East Pakistan into India and most of the Sarvodaya workers become involved in organizing relief work. World opinion was in favour of the recognition of Bangladesh and Prime



Minister Indira Gandhi supported their independence by ordering Army action in East Pakistan. Ultimately, Bangladesh was identified on the world map as an independent country and, in India, it was seen as a big achievement for JP and Mrs. Gandhi.

The period from 1972-74 was very crucial in the post-Gandhian and Vinoba-led Bhoodan and Gramdan Movement. On one hand there was frustration among the workers as well as the leaders, and on the other was a political crisis in the country. The ideology of Congress, so far, had been the establishment of a Gandhian-type social order, but the party had fallen short of the mark. Though Nehru had great respect for the Mahatma, he never followed Gandhiji's philosophy of a decentralized socio-economic/political system based on the principles of truth and non-violence. Nehru followed, instead, a western development model in the field of economics. Still, Nehru spoke of the Sarvodaya Movement with great admiration and, at the end of his life, he began to realize the mistake he had committed in moving the nation towards western ways of progress.

Mrs. Gandhi, Prime Minister and Nehru's daughter, drifted further from her father's line of action. A new culture was introduced into the body politic. Whatever was left of the Gandhian era in public life was washed away within no time. The politics of opportunism were visibly becoming the order of the day. Promises of removing poverty and bringing social justice to the weaker sections of society were left unfulfilled; to the contrary, the problems of the poor and down trodden were becoming more and more complex. Corruption was rampant, prices of essential commodities were touching the sky and unemployment of educated youth was on the increase; it was a time of uncertainty for the nation.



There was unrest among all sections of the people and the Sarvodaya Movement had no answers for the day-to-day problems which faced them. Only a few at the top enjoyed the lion's share of the fruit of the sweat and blood of the millions of underdogs. The opposition parties had lost their credibility, as they were busy in the process of grabbing power without doing any service for the people. No one knew the way to break this impasse. Vinobaji retired to his Ashram in Pavnar and vowed not to move outside.

Though JP was fully devoted to the Sarvodaya Movement, he would speak with despair of the current political situation. To quote an example, I was asked by a professor and Gandhian activist Dr J K Sharma of Delhi University to arrange a talk by JP at the University. When I approached JP in the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, where I have been working at that time, he replied with deep sorrow, "Mere bhashan se kaya hone wala hai?" (What would my lecture accomplish?) Even so, he was the only leader known for his integrity and selfless service to the country. After Vinobaji's retirement from public life he would refer movement workers to JP for advice. In 1972 outlaws of the famous Chambel Valley approached Vinobaji because they wanted to surrender to the law and return to normal way of life. Baba advised them to see JP for this purpose. JP intervened on their behalf and over 200 outlaws surrendered to the police. This historic event showed how hearts could be changed through non-violence. JP's image was boosted and he was considered the only hope for the regeneration of the values that were cherished by the Father of the Nation.

In the beginning of 1974 there was trouble among the students of the L.D. Engineering College at Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The students were agitating against the sudden increase in mess charges. The agitation caught the eye of the youth all over the country. The press highlighted it. I was in Gujarat at that time in



connection with the training camp of the Rajghat School of Non-violence at the Anand Niketan Ashram near Baroda. Harivallabh Parikh, the Director of the Ashram and an influential Gandhian leader in the ruling Congress Party, was contacted by (then) Chief Minister Chiman Bhai Patel requesting his intervention in this matter. Patel needed help to save his government from falling as a result of the agitation. Parikh rushed to Ahmedabad, but the pressure of the agitation was so strong and public opinion was so much against the state government that the Central government had no choice but to dismiss Patel's government.

JP had also been invited by the Gujarat Sarvodaya leader, Ravishankarji Maharaj, to assess the situation of the Gujarati youth agitation. JP addressed the students and, while appreciating the movement against the corrupt government, he advised the youth leaders to remain peaceful and not to align themselves with any political party.

Mrs. Gandhi grew very much concerned with the youth movement that was steadily gaining momentum throughout India. She wanted JP's help, but she was not prepared to accept JP's suggestions. JP wanted to bring about a consensus between the ruling party and the opposition parties on issues that cut across party lines and affected the whole nation. Mrs. Gandhi wanted a solution convenient only to her own party, so the dialogue broke down. Mrs. Gandhi went to Purnar Ashram seeking Vinobaji's help, but he gave only indirect support to her government by saying, "Although Mrs. Gandhi is a party politician, her mental attitudes and values are near my own." But even Vinobaji's support could not help Mrs. Gandhi and the confrontation between the youth and the government continued.

The ultimate dismissal of the Gujarat state government was a boost to the student community in the State of Bihar and they, too, demanded the removal of



the Bihar State Government which was under the leadership of (then) Chief Minister Abdul Gaffoor. JP was approached by the youth leaders in Bihar to lead their agitation. JP wrote a letter to Mrs. Gandhi stating his position and the line of action he proposed to take in the situation. This letter, instead of creating a beginning of a dialogue between the government and the agitating Bihari youth, turned out to be an end. Mrs Gandhi openly attacked JP, making the accusation that though JP talked of very high moral values in public life, he himself actually received funds from highly dubious sources. In response, JP attacked the Central Government, blaming it as the mainspring of corruption.

This direct confrontation with the government changed the character of the Sarvodaya Movement. While JP jumped into the fray by leading agitating students in Gujarat and Bihar, Vinobaji was not at all in favour of direct confrontation with the government. (The difference between JP's and Vinobaji's approach to the Bihar and Gujarat agitations was a curious reversal of positions. In the 1955 Pehngi Bedakhli, 22 years earlier, Vinobaji was in favour of direct action and JP was against any confrontation with the Government). Thus, a movement which was started with an objective of building a new social order ended in a direct conflict with the existing political system, the parliamentary system of democracy. (Gandhi had, as early as 1909 when he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, opposed the parliamentary system of democracy).

Although JP and Vinobaji were in full understanding of their areas of disagreement and agreement, the workers were divided over the issue of confrontation with the government. There was a clear-cut division between the supporters and opponents of JP's movement, so much so that there were open accusations and counter-accusations. There was bitterness among the workers, though a majority supported the movement. Middle level leaders publicly



criticized one another. The ruling party, with the help of the opponents of the Bihar movement, created an impression through the media that Vinobaji was against the movement because it was anti-nation and supported by outside forces in order to defraud the integrity of the country.

The agitation reached its climax in 1975 when the Allahabad High Court disqualified Mrs. Gandhi as a member of the Lok Sabha (Parliament) because she was found guilty of election fraud. The court's decision gave a boost to the movement. All the opposition parties joined together in asking for Mrs. Gandhi's resignation failing which a nationwide agitation would be called.

As JP was becoming popular among the masses, particularly among the youth, the opposition parties formed a coalition under his patronage. However, the opposition parties which joined together under JP's banner had never fully accepted the Gandhian programme and many political leaders disagreed with JP's slogan of "Total Revolution". This gave Mrs. Gandhi a handle. Alleging that the movement was violent and anti-people, she accused leaders of the movement of instigating the Army and police to revolt against the constitutionally and democratically elected government. Exactly on this pretext, Mrs. Gandhi proclaimed a state of "Emergency" in the country on June 25, 1975, suspending the Constitution and the fundamental rights of the people, imposed censorship of the press. Opposition leaders and thousands of workers, including JP and former Deputy Prime Minister in her own Government Morarji Desai, were jailed.

There is no need to detail the atrocities of the nineteen dark months under Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency rule. The injustices of totalitarian governments are not new to the world. The purpose of this book is not to talk of the misdeeds of the politicians. This brief mention of the Emergency is necessary as it marked the climax of the Sarvodaya Movement.



Emergency Rule was over in 1977. Mrs. Gandhi was defeated in the election and JP emerged as the undisputed hero of the nation. He was seen as the instrument which brought down the Nehru family regime, a regime which had dominated Indian politics for three decades. (The Nehru family has held the seat of Prime Minister continuously since Independence, barring approximately 18 months when the seat was held by Lal Bahadur Shastri from July 1964 to January 1966 and temporarily by Gulzari Lal Nanda from May through June 1964, January through February 1966). But a movement that had been called for a “Total Revolution” turned out to be nothing more than a change in power politics. In exchange for Mrs. Gandhi her opponents, the Janata Party, were placed on the throne of power. The exchange of power was solely the result of the atrocities which were committed during the Emergency, mainly the forced sterilization programme and other extraordinary powers given to a few top political leaders and bureaucrats.

After the Janata Government took over, the media promoted the party as the heroes of the Emergency and an optimistic picture was painted, as if, with the take-over of the Janata Party, the Gandhian Era was at India’s doorstep. All Janata Party Members of Parliament took an oath administered by JP at the Gandhi Smadhi Rajghat (the site of Gandhi’s cremation). It was an event that further cemented this image.

However, the Janata Regime could not bring about any qualitative changes in the existing parliamentary system of democracy, despite their tall talk of a Gandhian-type of social transformation. JP, while he was heading the movement did talk about some new dimensions, such as the Janata Sarkars (a people’s government at the village level) and people’s candidates for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. But his health was failing and there was a lack of



dedicated workers as JP's close associates and senior sarvodaya workers themselves were seeking Janata Party tickets for elections including Mr V. M. Tarkunde. Not only that, some of JP's close associates who were pressing upon JP during Emergency for an unholy compromise with Mrs. Gandhi and thereby tried to remain in the good books of Mrs. Gandhi caucused around JP after the Janata Government came to power and became his conscience keepers. JP's only recourse was to advise the workers of the Total Revolution Movement to support the Janata Government. Perhaps he had come to realize that the movement, along with the Sarvodaya, Bhoodan and Gramdan Movements under Vinobaji's leadership, had no base at a grass roots level and that the lack of such a base was the reason of their failure.

This brief history of the Gandhian Movement after 1948 must include a brief reference to the over 2000 organizations which have been doing voluntary work in rural areas. Supported by government funds or donations from national and international welfare foundations, these organizations claim to have been doing constructive work programmes but are actually directed towards welfare work of a mere mundane nature. Barring a few, all the programmes came into existence in the wake of the Bhoodan and Gramdan Movements. Most of the organizations were either involved in Khadi Gramodyog (handmade and handspun cloth or other village industries) under the auspices of the Government's Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

These rural organizations could not, however, make any dent in changing the unjust socio-economic structure in which the weak had been subjected to exploitation by the powerful. Despite their efforts, the gap between the haves and have notes continued to widen. Although there was an appearance of progress in rural development, these organizations, instead of creating a



decentralized socio-economic system based on complementary economics (as envisaged by Gandhiji) became a part of the rhetoric of development and progress and copied the model of competitive economics of the Western, developed world. These organisations totally failed to help generate power among the weak. The powerful were able to win over the leaders of the organizations with money, power and political influence. These organizations were operating solely under the auspices of the government, not of the people. They were all registered under the Charitable Societies Registration Act of 1860 and were answerable only to the Government through the Registrar of the Societies. Organizations which claimed to be instruments of non-violent revolution actually derived their power from the law.

The death of Vinobaji brought also the end of the Sarvodaya Movement. Only the Institutions and two warring factions survived. The factions, popularly known as Vinoba Wale (Vinoba group) and JP Wale (JP group), were struggling for control of these institutions. The Vinoba Wale, led by Nirmala Deshpande, captured the Bhoodan Boards and Khadi Boards. Organizations like the Gandhi Peace Foundation (which receives money from the Gandhi Memorial Fund) and its subsidiaries came into the hands of the JP Wale. The objectives, however, of these factions were reduced to efforts to prove that the other faction was carrying out anti-Gandhian activities. This fruitless controversy merely resulted in the apathy of the people and a feeling of frustration among the genuinely dedicated workers.

Since Gandhiji's death there was, and is, in India a crisis of moral leadership. There is no personality that could be named as the undisputed leader of the post-Gandhian movement. The movement which was started to achieve



the goal of building a Stateless, classless society based on truth and non-violence has ended in petty quarrelling.

I am not pessimistic. I have full faith and believe that the truth will ultimately prevail and the journey started by he “half naked fakir” will continue. According to Hindu belief, the soul never dies; the old body is merely cast away, as we throw away old and torn clothes. Therefore, the spirit of great men have no geo-political and religious boundaries. They are free from all bondages and, hence, can take on a new body anywhere on the globe. Examples of the new Gandhian Movements springing to life on Western soil are the living proofs that the Mahatma, the Great Soul, never died.



Ben Sasway and Friends at Demonstration in Front of Courthouse during Trial July-Aug 1982



CHAPTER II: WORLD POWERS AND NON-VIOLENCE

Living in this age of science and technology nobody can ignore what is going on in other parts of the world. Having toured Europe and the United States, I find that the challenges the human race is facing are common and, therefore, a solution has to be found by putting heads together. It is not possible to produce any stereotyped formula for the solution to these issues. It is a challenge, but man is able to face that challenge. If not, our life would be a worthless affair. We cannot, and should not, run away from these knotty problems.

The biggest challenge in the world today, especially in the West, is the mad race for armaments and the imminent danger of nuclear holocaust. Regardless of the positions taken by their governments — decisions made only by the power politicians — the people are very keen to build up a non-violent society. This is, I believe, the present global challenge that we have to face. How do we face this situation and what techniques can be evolved for the purpose will be discussed here.

U.S.A.: War Resisters

In September 1981 Benjamin H. Sasway, a young Serva traveller wrote me: I am 20 years old and a student at Humboldt State University in California, where I am majoring in Political Science and Philosophy. I am intensely interested in social and environmental concerns and have recently been involved in the peace movement in an organization on my college campus. This is my first visit abroad and my first experience as a traveller. Feeling somewhat limited in my perspective I decided to “see the world.” Hearing about India’s rich, colourful history, ancient culture and impressive philosophy, I am convinced that this is a land one ought not to miss. I was



told that the people are warm, friendly and have the kind of contentment that leads to happiness. These are the characteristics so often missing in my own country. My goal is to see and feel this warmth and happiness for myself. It occurs to me that going as a Servas traveller would be a near perfect way to meet this goal. I look forward to meeting you in your home as one human being to another in the spirit of peace and harmony for all mankind.

This letter really inspired me and I wrote Ben, welcoming his visit. He stayed with me and my family for two weeks. We had long discussions on Gandhi and his philosophy. Ben told me about his intentions to resist the U.S. Draft Law, under which every American male citizen between the ages of 18 and 26 must register with the Selective Service System. Although registration is not the same as being drafted, the Army has the prerogative to call a registered person for service at any time or place it deems fit. Therefore, Ben stated that he felt that the authorities are making a false division between the mechanism and the only possible use of that mechanism. The only conceivable purpose for a draft registration is for a possible draft. The only use for a draft is intervention in some Third World country, like El Salvador.

I found Ben very soft spoken, but very firm in his conviction for non-violence and peace. He was prepared to undergo any amount of hardship to uphold his commitment to his ideals. During the course of our discussion I explained to him the Gandhian concept of Satyagraha. I was not sure as to what extent the U.S. Government would go in prosecuting Sasway, but I assured him that if the Reagan government decided to put him in jail that we, in India, would write to President Reagan. Ben returned home with enthusiasm and got involved in the draft resistance programme. In the winter of 1982 my good friend, Therese



Tanalski of San Diego, wrote informing me that Ben had been convicted for 30 months.

During my trip to the U.S.A. in 1984 I made a detailed study of the media coverage on Ben's case. **The New York Times** reported his story on July 1, 1982.

A college student, who said he wanted to be neither an anti-draft martyr nor a leader, was arraigned before a federal magistrate today for failure to register for the draft, the first American to be so charged since the Vietnam War.

There was a very strong protest against Ben's conviction by peace activities throughout the country. In the August 22, 1982 edition of **The New York Times Magazine**, David Harris wrote:

It has been almost 10 years since this kind of crime was last arraigned in an American Court. Just its mention summons up the almost forgotten language of an age when it seemed that such crime would have no end: registration, classification, reclassification, deferment and induction; 1-A, 2-S, 3-A, and 4-F; Hawks, Doves, pigs, gooks, straights, freaks, fags and dodgers; General Harshey and general strike; "Not with my life, you don't," "Hell No, We Won't Go," "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." They are not easy things to forget and it isn't surprising that to many Americans, Ben Sasway's current legal situation seems like a reprise of the 1960's. It resounds with the echoes of the past.

Ben's journey into legal jeopardy began when he wrote a letter to President Jimmy Carter on July 24, 1980, six months after Carter had proposed the resumption of draft registration as a sign of disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Sasway wrote his letter as "a symbolic statement of my opposition on the day I am supposed to register for the draft:"



I feel compelled by my conscience to state honestly and openly that I am not registering for the draft. I am obligated to protest even simple registration since I feel that the spirit of this mandate, like actual conscription, is immoral and incompatible with a truly free society. To deprive people of their basic rights, freedom of choice, freedom of speech and freedom to be who they want to be is a callous erosion of the American constitutional heritage.

The long wait following Ben's four page letter to President Carter was not broken until Reagan took office and the deadline for registration was finally fixed. In a letter to Ben, dated June 17, 1981, Henry N. Williams of the Selective Service System wrote:

"We have received information that you may be required to register with Selective Services, but a check of your records indicates that you have not. Unless we hear from you within 15 days of the date of this letter, we will send your name to the Department of Justice for investigation and possible prosecution.

This was the beginning of the drama that ended in a final order of conviction by U.S. District Judge Gordon Thompson, Jr. On August 27, 1982 Ben was sentenced to 30 months in prison. Ben was immediately sent to jail. The citizens of San Diego organized a round-the-clock vigil at the prison and the media boosted the campaign against the action taken by the U.S. government. **The Washington Post** reported the event on August 27, 1982:

A federal court jury deliberated for fifty minutes before finding Sasway guilty of refusing to sign a registration card. As Sasway's mother cried "Benjamin" and broke down in tears, U.S. Marshals led Sasway quickly to



the nearby federal jail after U.S. District Court Judge Thompson refused to allow his release on bond.

The New York Times, in its August 27, 1982 issue reported that “the Reagan Administration began a crackdown on non-registrants this year. The Selective System estimates that 8.5 million men are eligible for registration and that 700,000 have not signed up.” Another leading daily, *The Los Angeles Herald*, wrote:

Opponents of draft registration in Congress and among civil liberties groups counted that prosecuting every young man who fails to register would impose a crushing burden on the U.S. Attorneys and courts while selective prosecution would be illegal. President Reagan said during his election campaign that he was opposed to both the peace time registration and peace time draft. Once in office, he changed his mind about registration.

Ben’s counsel applied for his bail on October 4, 1982. There was a nationwide movement and the people became very much interested in this case. The San Diego County Draft Resister’s Defence fund organized a performance by Joan Baez, an internationally known folk singer, to collect to meet the expenses of the campaign. There were massive rallies and demonstrations in support for Ben all over the country. Ben was finally released on bail on October 18, 1982. The Appeals Court struck down the previous gag order which was imposed as a condition of release.

On hearing about the conviction I wrote to President Reagan, as promised. I sent copies of my letter to the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London. The leading Indian English daily, *The Statesman*, wrote a story on Sasway’s Inspiring action. As expected, I did not hear anything from the U.S.



government. I wrote a letter to Ben while he was in jail and Ben wrote me a response from jail, but it could not be mailed from the jail and it was, therefore, sent to me after his release on bail. I quote a portion of that letter here to show how clear and firm he was in prison:

Although I am rather pessimistic about my own case (I do expect eventually to have to return to the jail), I am confident that the public support generated by my situation and the other people in the U.S. who are currently being prosecuted for refusing draft registration will help bring about a higher peace consciousness and a stronger commitment to the struggle for peace. The American draft registration programme, as a manifestation of American militarism, can be stopped even though a few people may have to go to jail. If this be my lot, I'm willing to go.

For me personally, the last few years have been emotionally trying times. Yet in it all I feel I have grown. I have had the opportunity to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate myself and the world situation. As you may remember when I was with you in Delhi, I was somewhat equivocal about certain fundamental philosophical questions — especially the use of violence. I had refused to consider myself a pacifist and did not know for sure how I felt about violence. The more I have considered it, however, I have come to realize that violence in any form is morally wrong and completely inappropriate in solving human conflict. Though I have strongly appreciate the work of such “great souls” as Gandhi and Martin Luther King. It is only just recently that I have come to more fully embrace the depth and strength of their vision. If human society is going to march forward toward justice, we must now cast off the dead weight of armaments and weaponry.



After his release from jail, Ben resumed his studies and went back to Arcata. His appeal in the Supreme Court was due to be heard in the winter of 1984. I planned to visit the U.S. in the summer of 1984, but I was not sure if I would be able to see Ben in jail, in the event that he might lose his appeal and be returned to jail.

On reaching London, I came to know that Ben was still out and had been organizing my programme in the U.S. His appeal had yet to come up for a hearing. During my one month stay in the U.S. I was told that it might be delayed even further, possibly as late as spring 1985. I was constantly watching and waiting for news about Ben's case after my return to India in September 1984.

Finally Mark Shepard, another good friend from the U.S., wrote in early May telling me that on April 1, 1985 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear Ben's appeal and he was taken to jail on April 29, 1985. It was a shocking news for me. I decided to see him in jail, if I could get a chance. I had the opportunity to return to the U.S. in the summer of 1985, so wrote to Ben's parents asking for their assistance in my efforts to see Ben. My request, unfortunately, was rejected by the U.S. government. The good news I did receive from the family, however, was that Ben might be released in October 1985. He was actually released on September 20, 1985 and he returned to school. On his release, Ben commented:

I guess the most important thing coming out of this moment is that I have done what I had to do and I feel good about it. I have responded to what I consider a great moral responsibility. I am more committed to my stand now than when I first decided not to register in 1980. I plan to continue doing work for peace and social justice in the future.



Italy: Tax Resisters

In Italy, while conducting some intensive training programmes on non-violent direct action, I was able to visit some of the groups actively involved in peace and non-violent action programmes. Through our discussions I came to understand that they are inspired mainly by traditional Christian thinking and their basic objective is to resist the huge expenditure on war and weapons by the government. A radical form of their programme is organizing a no-war-tax campaign which discourages the taxpayer from paying that percentage of the tax on his income which is to be spent on war, the Army and its armaments. I found that more and more assesses are taking part in the non-cooperation movement. They are also approaching the President of Italy and pleading with him not to prosecute the conscientious objectors. The government, however, is penalizing them and imposing fines. So far, 1650 persons have refused to pay the “war-tax” and consequently, as a reaction, more people are getting interested in this campaign.

It may be pointed out that Lanza Del Vasto was the first Italian to object to the “war-tax” and, after leaving the country, started an experiment in community living based on non-violence in France. He became very popular and is considered a prominent leader of the peace movement in the West. Lanza had been to India and stayed with Gandhiji in his Ashram. He was Called Shanti Das (man of peace) by Gandhi. Shanti Das and his community are described in detail in the following chapter.

Geoff Hardy arranged for me to speak at a meeting of the Universal Peace Party in southeast London. The Universal Peace Party, which is a part of the Green Movement discussed later in this chapter, has included a quote of Gandhi’s in its manifesto:



To see the universal and pervading spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest creature as oneself. Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

Carrying through with this quote, I spoke on the need for present day politicians to see religion in politics, as did Gandhi. Gandhi started his public life in South Africa in the last decade of the 19th Century. To him, religion was a matter of putting it into one's own life and he started with himself. In his legal practice he would not take a case where he had to fight for a falsehood. This was part of his religious practice. He called this "Religion of Truth". To him religion was not a thing to be worshipped, but actually lived in daily life. He said that "truth and non-violence are as old as the hills". For Gandhi, religion was the voice of the soul. In present day politics, the practice is that the inner voice is not heeded. Politicians act according to the pushes and pulls of the party and the wishes of the power politicians. That is why Gandhi did not become involved in power politics. After the struggle for India's freedom was won in 1947, Gandhi opted to serve the people as a humble servant. For him, politics was the lot of the teeming millions and not the seat of the Presidency. Adherence to the truth in all aspects of life was his religion.

* * *

John Cantor was my host in Penrith, a town in the Cumbria region of England. John, an engineer, had visited me in India to study appropriate technology and rural development projects. While in India, John worked in the small town of Chingalput in Tamil Nadu and now the citizens of Penrith have adopted Chingalput as its sister city and is helping in its development activities. It was through John that I was invited to a discussion on "Star Wars" at the Penrith Peace Group.



The group was of the opinion that “Star Wars” will not free the world from nuclear weapons. Five main reasons for rejecting U.S. President Reagan’s strategic defence initiative evolved from the discussion. First, it would provide the opportunity for a first strike. By destroying early warning satellites, a nuclear attack could be carried out undetected. The plan to have such capability is evident in the statement made by the Director of the U.S. Space System of the U.S. Air Force before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1982: “We are working towards making sure that we have a war fighting capability with the space systems”. If the Space Defence Initiatives weapons worked they could shoot down a retaliatory strike. Together, anti-satellite and anti-missile weapons could make a first strike possible. Second, the resulting mutual hostility and tension would make war more likely, whether by accident or design. Third, it will release a new round of arms escalation of ever greater sophistication and danger. Fourth, it will threaten arms treaties and the Geneva Arms Talks, which are vital because there are so few restraints on arms build-ups. Finally, and most importantly, the arms race is expensive. 800 million people on this planet still live in abject poverty. We cannot afford arms when people starve.

France: Non-Violent Alternatives

La Maison Vigilance Taverny is about 40 kilometres from Paris. It was started by various peace and non-violent groups working in Europe. The idea behind this centre is to keep vigilance on the French government’s Atomic Power Control Centre (APCC) which is the place where the “red button” is kept under heavy armed guard and is directly controlled by the President of France. An area of five hundred acres was acquired for this purpose where the APCC was built underground. The Vigilance Centre organizes regular silent fasts and demonstrations in front of the Atomic Centre. The peace volunteers assemble in



the morning, hold a prayer meeting and then walk near to the main gate of the atomic centre carrying banners and placards with slogans against arms and demonstrations, camps are also organised by the centre. I stayed at this place for two days and joined in the fast and vigilance action programme. One of the major achievements of this mission was that a top French Army officer, so impressed by the programme, resigned his post and joined the peace movement. The officer was tried in the courts and punished for this act of leaving the Army to advocate for peace. The government's actions were severely condemned by the press and the public. The morale of the peace workers in France and all over Europe was greatly raised by this man's action.

Mouvement Pour Une Alternative Nonviolente (MAN) is an organization well known in France and throughout Europe for its non-violent direct actions on the nuclear arms race. I was invited to speak to their members in Paris and share my experiences on non-violent action programmes in India. It was a very enriching experience to talk to the members as I found them to be very committed and all well experienced. I was asked about the current struggle among the Gandhian institutions and the government and about the Indian government's policy of selling arms to other countries. They were curious about the outcome of the Bhoodan Movement led by Vinoba Bhave. The members showed their concern over the controversy among the leadership in the Sarvodaya Movement and wanted to know the reason for this unfortunate situation.

Through Denis Baupin, a member of MAN and coordinator of the non-violent group Ecole Centrale, I came to know of a thrilling peace action. In the first week of June, 1985 an exhibition on air and space crafts had been organized by the French government and various aeronautic industries. It was held at Le



Bourget, a former airport north of Paris near the Roissy Charles de Gaulle Airport. There had been a huge advertisement campaign in France and abroad to promote the sale of French technology in weaponry. At this exhibition the latest aircraft made by French industrialists, like Dassault and Aerospatiale, were shown.

A group of peace organizations (wrongly called pacifists because peace workers, in fact, would be a better name) joined in a spectacular non-violent action against this scandal of a weapon sale now being openly exhibited to the public as if it was a simple fruit market. Those joining the action were Mouvement Pour Une Alternative Non-violente, Artisans de Paix Union Pacifiste de France and Les Verts (an ecology movement related to “Die Gruenen” of Germany).

Approximately thirty people from these groups decided to chain themselves to an aircraft at the exhibition on June 4th. They entered the exhibition as regular visitors, but they carried with them a chain hidden in a plastic bag. Fifteen of the peace workers jumped the light fence surrounding the aircraft and, before the security guards had time to interfere, they chained themselves to the front wheels of the air craft. The others remained outside the fence wearing T-shirts that cried “No To The Weapons Sale”. The police were reluctant to take any violent action in response, but were finally forced to break the chain and bodily carry the protestors outside of the fence. This action was widely publicized and highly supported by peace activists throughout Europe.

MAN is also working in concert with the Community of the Ark (described in detail in the following chapter) in building a movement for the freedom of a French colony, New Caledonia. New Caledonia is currently used for nuclear testing by the French government. I had the opportunity to talk to Dr. Pierre



Parodi, Director of the Community of the Ark about his experience in New Caledonia:

I recently spent five weeks in New Caledonia where the natives are called “Canaques”. The primitive population has a clear understanding of the lack of coherence between one’s inner voice and one’s action in daily living. In the Canaque language there is just one word for thought, word and deed, and this is true of all 28 dialects. They have a single word for that purpose. When the first explorers and missions arrived, the Canaques marvelled at them because it seemed that their actions were in conformance with their wonderful words. They were soon scandalized when they realized that this was not the case. It is true to say that the whole history of colonization is the story of broken promises, of pacts violated. They were so scandalized by this gap between words and deeds that they said “these people are dangerous”. It led to a revolt when they killed many people. In the same way these reflections are valid about North America where Indians were horrified by the difference between words and deeds. Therefore, we try to live what we say in our daily life in the community.

Pierre continued, explaining his views of the human psychology of self-righteousness:

We can distinguish three main types of self-conditioning of the mind. The first sees the “enemy” as the perpetrator of evil. The second sees oneself as the virtuous one. In every conflict everyone likes to consider himself as being right and as being engaged in the support of the common good. The third error is to believe that in the defence of the common good weapons are efficient. These three lies are the real cause of violence in society.



As advocates of non-violence, we must, as a first step, honestly consider if we are caught in the web of these three conditions of the mind. Then, instead of turning to arms, we would resort, with Gandhi, to non-violence. Unfortunately, in every society force is confused with the force of arms. Even the official church documents that the recourse to force means the recourse to arms weapons. That, too, is a lie, arms are a destructive force, but force can be constructive. Life itself is a constructive force and so are men who unite and share and help each other. Truth also, is a force. They are the forces in life itself. Gandhian non-violence means rejection of destructive forces. Among destructive forces we count not only weaponry, but also the thrust for power and greed. These three rule the world of men.

Politics divides: The Berlin wall.

My good friend, T.N. Jutshi, had been among the few who protested at the Berlin Wall in the early days of its construction in 1960. He told me about the Wall and its impact on the minds of the people. It was a horrifying story that narrates how politics divided two brothers. Since then, I have been thinking of visiting this Wall.

We reached the Wall at the infamous “Checkpoint Charlie.” The scene was terrorizing and dreadful. It looked as if there was going to be war very soon. Army personnel, on both sides, were in position with stenguns and machine guns ready. The faces of the visitors looked pale and fear-stricken. Everybody looked as if each had lost his way but dared not ask the other for help.

We entered an old wooden building where a small photographic exhibition and museum on the havoc of war is housed. A brief history of the Wall and the awful story of the cruelties of war is painted on the walls of the museum. It shows how a man can behave in a manner worse than a beast.



In his book, **The Wall Speaks**, rainer Hildebrandt has written:

The technical miracle of the Modern Age is supported by both foreign and domestic politics, for the Wall is only the strongest link in the division between East and West, and what within the framework of “Deutschlandpolitic” the one obtained by gleaning the votes, the other reaps criticisms for non-achievement, and illusions. A “Cemented Division.”

It is not self-delusion in the face of such divisive power to speak of the “Transient nature of the Wall.” Division is as much a part of life as cohesiveness. Where there is life, there is division, beginning from the cell to the highest forms of the society. Now since there is the need of mankind, which knows it needs unity but is more divided than ever, in diametrically opposed form of supremacy, in armament potentials, in rich and poor, hungry and the all-too-sate. Thus in the birthplace of the Second Technical Revolution and in what once was the most travelled point in Europe there now stands a Wall.

The sad lines above touched my heart and a question rose in my mind: is the spirit in man extinguished? How long would the human being continue to be subjected to such cruelty in the name of the State and Nation? The time has come for all the common people of the globe to come out of the web woven by various vested interests that keep the common people divided and rule over them in the name of their welfare. Hildebrandt’s words continued to touch me:

Is this book perhaps a documentation of the Human Rights Movement whose champions—and how many of them are in prison!—do not put their faith in improvements brought about via “politics from above”, but only in their own strength and, therefore, in the power of truth, freedom



from constraint and solidarity. Then this would be a book about Gandhi or Martin Luther King or Lech Walesa or Charter 77 or Helsinki Groups or may be an as yet still unprinted writing for the benefit of the thousands of nameless ones, “who must fill the trenches so that those following them can step on their bodies in their forward surge,” whereby their only crime is that they, in the words of Sakharov, “stand upright and go hand in hand and pretend they live in freedom!”

I was moved by the sight of the Wall and its tragic history. I was feeling pity over the helplessness of the common people who cannot do much against such inhuman acts unless they are united and educated to raise their voice against such cruel acts of the vested interests. I decided to do a humble, symbolic action at the Wall. I told Manfred Stomer, my host in Berlin, that I wanted to sit on a silent fast for a few hours at the Wall. It would just be a prayer for invoking good sense among those who could do some positive thinking in this regard. Manfred was a little hesitant, as he had no experiences with such actions. I told him that he need not join me in this action, I would come alone the next morning. I walked two kilometres from the place where I was staying and sat by the side of the Wall. I recited the Isha-Vasyopnishida, one of the principle Upanishads. It had an electrifying effect and I was soon surrounded by tourists who, having seen the Wall, had hopeless looks on their faces. At first, no one was able to understand the purpose of my sitting and chanting at the Wall. The Army personnel guarding the Checkpoint were also looking towards me, eagerly watching my silent action. In the distance, the Russian Army personnel watched me through their telescopes. Language had been a barrier, but the people were soon beginning to understand the purpose of my vigil. I started writing the thoughts that came to my mind. Some people came close and tried to look into my notebook, but I had



been writing in Hindi. I wrote a poem about the Wall, giving a call to the people to break the walls that stand in the way of the common people and divide them. Let us unite the hearts of the people and bring them closer to one another, “*Todo Ye Divarain. Jodo Dil Ki Tarain.*”

One evening the Quakers in Berlin invited me to a dinner meeting. Biorn and Esther Rolde-Liebanan, two Quaker activists, have been organizing peace action programmes in Berlin East and West. Here I spoke less and listened more. Esther told the dreadful stories of the reality of the common man’s life in East Germany. She had known Biorn for many years through Quaker activities. Biorn had been visiting Esther and her family in East Berlin very often and five years ago they decided to marry. It was not an easy thing; a sea of problems lay before them. They were barred from seeing each other by the GDR government. Esther’s parents were shadowed by intelligence agents and even their jobs were threatened. Many restrictions were put on their movements. Their mail subjected to censorship, and telephone calls were tapped. It is to the credit of the whole family that they withstood all the intimidation by the authorities and honoured the decision of the couple. They were all committed to peace, social justice and fundamental rights. After a long and sustaining, but peaceful, battle with authoritarian rule, the couple was successful in their mission. For the sake of her love for Biorn, Esther has had to sacrifice her whole family. She told me, with tears in her eyes, that she can never see her parents again as the GDR government has thrown her out of the country and cancelled her citizenship. Biorn, a West German citizen, can go to East Berlin and see her parents and he remains her only hope of contact with her family.

* * *



One of the important events during my 1984 stay in Germany was the European Parliamentary elections. I went to a polling booth near Munich and watched the polling system. What was more interesting was the parallel poll conducted by the local peace group. Its members, standing outside the polling booth, were giving a sheet to every voter who had come to cast his vote. This sheet was like a ballot paper, and the voter, if he so wished, was to mark his support for banning the nuclear arms race. I watched this activity with great interest and the peace workers introduced me to a new, emerging political party: the Green Party. Its members are committed to peace, social justice and the protection of the environment from pollution. The Green Party manifesto states:

Green politics, as it is today, is hard to define. It is a bit like the first days of spring. Winter may still cover the land, but there is a surge of new life reaching up; green shoots through the wasteland. Half of the trouble is that, apart from the uniquely inspiring example of Mahatma Gandhi, there are so few models for what is going on today.

It is quite interesting to know how the Green Movement started in the West. In the early 1970's many books, like **The Blueprint for Survival** and **The Limits to Growth**, influenced young minds. A message began to spread throughout Europe. Green Parties are now set up in almost all Western European countries. There are representatives of the Green Party in the European Parliament and there are many members in the Dutch, Italian, Finnish, Belgium and West German national parliaments. The German Greens have done the most to promote the cause of Green Politics in the 1980's. They were able to mount a most effective and inspiring campaign in the 1983 elections when they won 27 seats to the West German Parliament.



The inspiration for the Green Movement was drawn from E.F. Schumacher who has been very active in the alternative life-style movement in the West. The manifesto of the Party carries Schumacher words:

We must do what we conceive to be the right thing and not bother our heads or burden our souls with whether we are going to be successful. Because if we do not do the right thing, we will be doing the wrong thing and we will just be part of the disease and not a part of the cure.

George Prall, a member of the Ecology Party in the United Kingdom, ran in a local election for County Council. Though he did not win a seat, he got a chance to go out to the people and explain the aims and objectives of the Green Movement. He also had a first-hand view of the phenomena of power-politics, how the elections are won and various tactics that are adopted by the professional politicians in order to win elections. Of this experience, George says, "Money plays a big role in order to grab votes. There is no place for values in present day politics." George and I discussed the arms race and the stand taken by the Green Movement. He was able to explain his views of the objectives of the movement:

Nuclear weapons are not just some nasty mistake in an otherwise healthy world. They are the logical outcome of an often aggressive way of life. Our dependence upon nuclear weapons has exposed a deep-rooted social sickness, bringing many of us to challenge the basic assumption that lies at the heart of our civilization.

By choosing to live the way we do, we have ensured that the wholeness of each person is lost, the oneness of all humanity is denied, and the interdependence of all living creatures is destroyed. We challenge the



unthinking materialism which compels us to go on producing and consuming more and more.

Schumacher has warned us, in his book **Small is Beautiful**, that the foundations of peace cannot be laid by universal prosperity in the modern sense. Such prosperity is attainable only by cultivating such drives of human nature, such as greed and envy, which destroys intelligence, happiness, serenity and, thereby, the peacefulness of man. That is why the Green Movement lays stress on the politics of participation and personal responsibility. Effective politics begins at home, in the way we ourselves live. To be effective in our campaigns we must actually be living a life in which there is no place for the worst monstrosities of our industrial culture. Non-violent action is a vital instrument of politics for the New Society. It is a wisdom of ecology that can make us whole again, restoring the balance between the logical and the natural, between ourselves and others, between humanity and the planet earth.

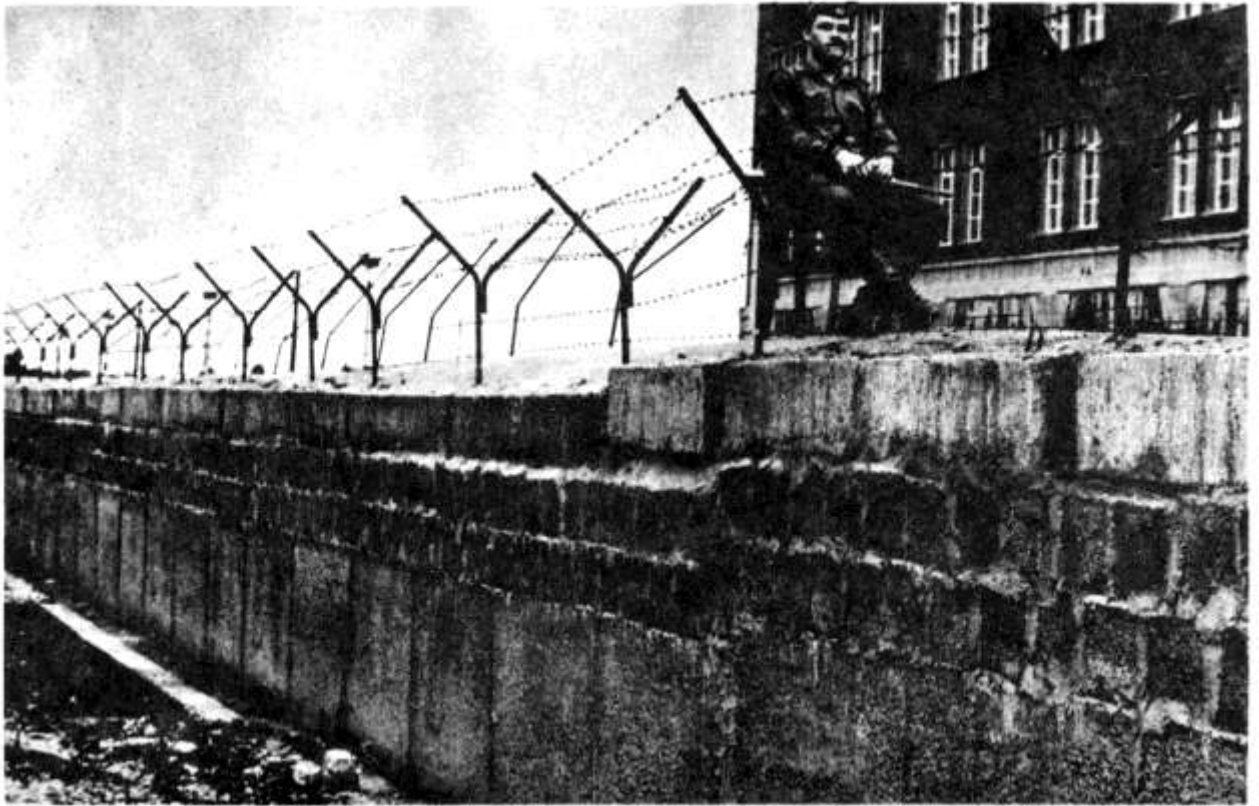
I told George that the Green Movement directly relates to the Gandhian concept of “People’s Politics” and the experiments going on at the present in the implementation of the Sarvodaya concept, specifically the Bhoodan and Gramdan Movements. It is interesting to see that political movements are drawing inspiration from Gandhi and it gives hope, and proof, that the people of the world are moving together towards solutions for global challenges.





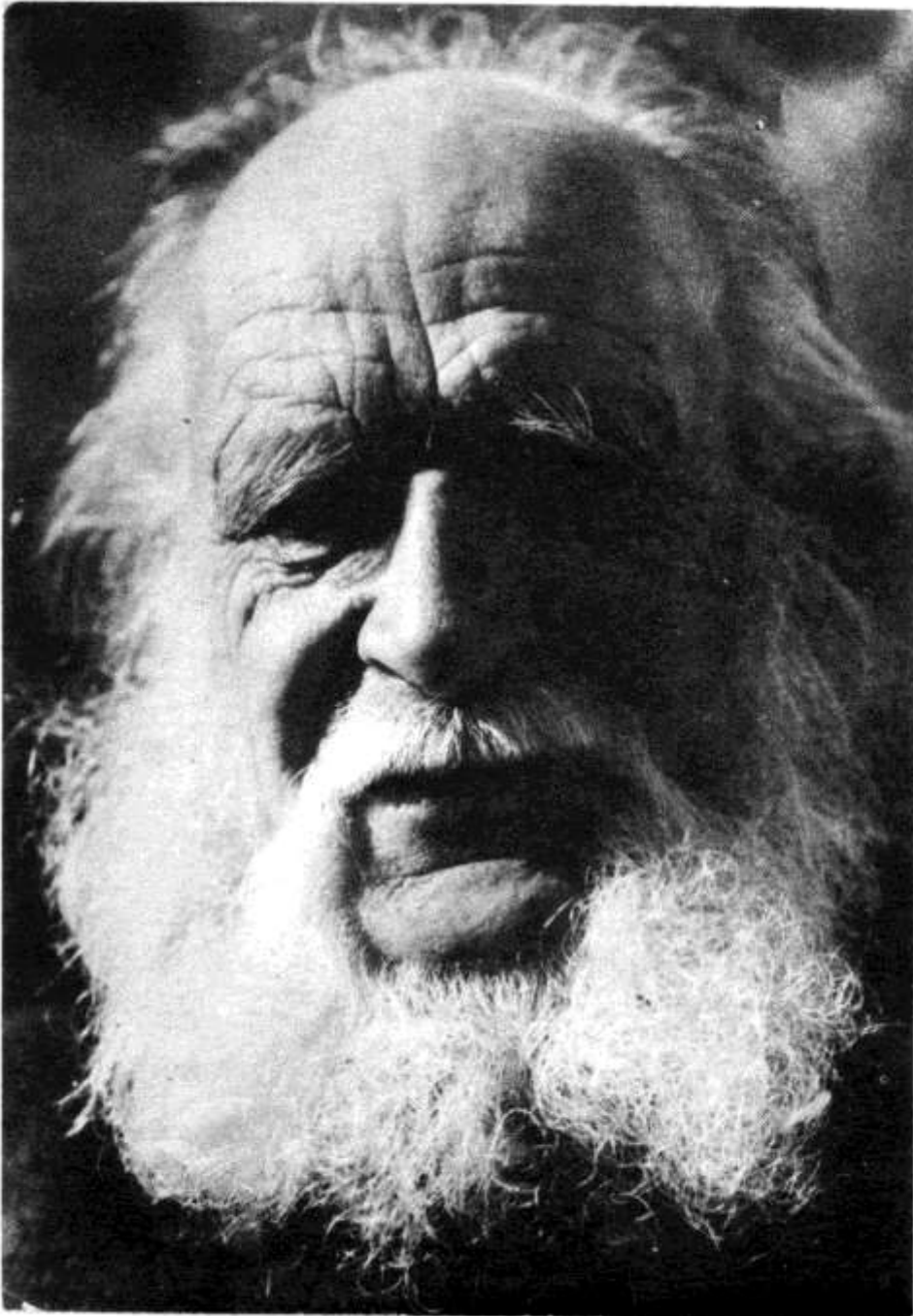
'Peace Trees' were planted in various towns and villages of Italy during the 'People's March for a Non-Violent society' organised by Gandbi-In-Action in the International Year of Peace, 1986.





Politics Divides: The Berlin Wall





Lanza Del Vasto: Founder of the Communities of the Ark in France



CHAPTER III: ALTERNATIVE LIFE-STYLES

I feel that the biggest challenge which the world is facing today, and for which Gandhi provided an answer, is the building of a non-violent society. The possibility of a nuclear holocaust is the concern of everyone on the globe, especially of those in the West. In India, maybe because of illiteracy, ignorance, poverty or other numerous problems, we are not as concerned about it at the moment. There are no centres or bases nearby where nuclear arms are stored, so perhaps we are not faced with the immediacy of the problem. But in the West people are not only concerned, but also afraid. A fear psychosis is prevalent. As a student of non-violence, I think that this issue is very relevant to us all. There is a fear and sense of hopelessness in the voice of those talking about the future of this world.

But let us think in terms of an alternative society based on non-violence. This does not yet exist, but there is a groping in the darkness to find a way to build that society. I think the non-violence in Gandhi's vision can provide a satisfactory answer. When I talk of non-violence or of Gandhian philosophy, it is not a specific formula which can be applied to solve any problem or the problem of nuclear holocaust. It is a complete system and different life-style which he advocated; not only advocated, but lived out during his lifetime. It is up to us to decide if we really need a society free from fear and conflict and then proceed on to think about what actually must be done.

Gandhi, also, did not attain this stature of non-violence in action within a day. He was an ordinary man who started his search while travelling in a train in South Africa. He was thrown out of a first class compartment of the train because he was a black Indian. It did not matter that he had a valid ticket for the compartment; he had no right to travel in a compartment reserved for whites.



The train official expected him to move quietly to a second class compartment. But no, that strange man sat on the platform the whole night in the chilling cold, shivering and thinking about how this gulf between man and man was created. The Creator of this world never created these barriers between white and black or rich and poor. This was the point from which the great quest began.

The important thing about this man was that, throughout his life, he tried to identify himself with the most ordinary men, the commonest of the common, the poorest of the poor and the weakest of the weak. That was his approach towards life and that is what I call the non-violent approach to life.

Similarly, if we want a society based on non-violence, a society free from wars, a society free from all types of exploitation, we have to make radical changes in our life-styles. We cannot stand on two stools at the same time. We cannot have the comfort of this technological world and at the same time a peaceful life without any mental worry or tensions. The choice is ours. Briefly, this is what Gandhi wanted to tell the world.

India is basically a society of rural masses. Seventy-four per cent of the people live in villages. When I talk of a village it is not just a cluster of a few hundred people living together as the concept is in the West. A village used to be an independent socio-economic entity based on a decentralized socio-economic system, built not on a competitive but on a complementary structure. If you study India's history of the past two hundred years, especially when the British first came, you will find this was so. The new rulers destroyed the very fabric of rural society because they knew that India could not be overcome unless the village structure was completely smashed. Hence, the East India Company introduced centralized production into village life and, thereby, broke their system of cooperation and coordination.



A village used to be an independent and nearly self-supporting unit. Every villager was complementing the life of the others. There was no competition because there was the farmer, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the cobbler, the weaver and all other arts and crafts which were necessary for living. The blacksmith mended the plough of the farmer; he need not think of competition with any other person, because each one was there to work for all the people of the entire village. This spirit, to work for others in a sort of family relationship, existed among the entire village community. The basis of rural culture was the spirit of voluntarism, the spirit to work for one another leading to a sense of mutual cooperation. In the village, the relationship between the people was so informal and cordial that it appeared to be just one family. As the village was very small, everyone knew others and there was no question of keeping the police for vigil; everyone was vigilant for the sake of the other. If someone committed a crime, he could not walk with his head held up in the village. This is not possible in a big city, where a person in a suit and tie may be a robber. In the village there was a society based on a spirit of voluntarism, mutual understanding and family relationship. It was decentralized socio-economic system.

The basic thing is the elimination of competition and the centralized system of production. If we want real freedom, which includes complimentary interdependence, it means that for one's needs one will be able to do the maximum with the help of local resources at his disposal. Thus, we would be able to manage things much better.

From this we should try to understand the phenomenon of war. A society based on a completely centralized and highly technical system is bound to be competitive and violent, whereas the society that is based on a complementary system cannot be anything but non-violent. Hence, the never ending emphasis



of Gandhi on village industries in preference to centralized, capital and machine-intensive production mechanized and centralised industries.

Learning about alternative lifestyle

The Gandhi Summer School, sponsored by the Gandhi Foundation, was held in an abbey near Oxford, England in July 1985. Prof. Geoffrey Ostergaard, an executive member of the Foundation and a close friend, wrote me about the Summer School, suggesting that I should attend. A formal invitation was sent to me by Guy Trainor, on behalf of Surur Hoda, the General Secretary of the Foundation:

How happy we will be to have you among us. Your experience at practicing Gandhian programmes at the grass roots level will make an invaluable contribution to our discussion and, perhaps, serve as a useful antidote whenever our mouths — as opposed to our hands — threaten to run away with our minds.

The abbey, built in the 14th century, now houses the “New Era Centre”. I had met Fred J. Blum, the Director of the Centre, in India a few years earlier. He has been an admirer of Gandhi and has been living non-violently in his day-to-day life. The New Era Centre was started in 1967 with the aim to make it a place of reflection, prayer and renewal for those who are searching and struggling to live a life that is personally fulfilling while being dedicated to the service to the human community and to the world in which we live. The hope is that the abbey will be a place for an experiment in spiritual living. Many conferences and workshops are regularly conducted at the abbey and there is a daily programme of prayers and meditation. The abbey has a very calm and peaceful environment.



The Summer School was the first of its kind at the abbey and had drawn approximately 35 participants including myself, reached the abbey a day earlier. Many colourful tents were pitched and people were meeting each other and talking about mutual interests and fields of work. The routine of the week long school started at 7:00 in the morning. Participants were free to go either for Yoga or meditation classes. As I am habituated to get up at 5:30 and finish my Yoga exercise early, I opted for the meditation classes. Fred Blum conducted the class. The first fifteen minutes were devoted to silent meditation and then there was recitations from holy books. The interesting thing was that the participants were free to speak out if they wanted to share something. Individual prayers were allowed, I was invited to share an Indian prayer.

After breakfast, the next programme was Bread Labour. I was asked to take responsibility for the work to be done in the kitchen garden of the abbey, which was still at a developmental stage. The land in the courtyard was being reclaimed and Sister Lucille wanted me to transfer some vegetable plants from the nursery to the garden. I was also asked to help in digging a trench for the toilet.

There were two academic sessions each day. The subjects covered in those sessions included "Gandhi's Religious Philosophy", "Religion in the World After Gandhi," "Gandhi's Philosophy and Practice of Non-Violence," "Imagining a World without Violence," "The Silent Revolution," "A Critique of an Indian Ashram.," "The Ark: a Gandhian Community," "Self Reliance and Work," "Personal Self Reliance," and "Training in Non-Violence."

As the theme of the school was "Gandhian Philosophy in the West Today," the practical problems the people in the West are facing were discussed at length. The basic issue is the fear of nuclear war and the crises created by industrial civilization. Most of the participants came to the school with the hope



of finding some solution to these two problems. It appeared to me that Gandhian philosophy is being looked at as a solution to the problems Western society is facing today. The dilemma, however, is that it is very difficult for common people of the West to practice Gandhian philosophy because the system in which they live is quite opposite to the philosophy. People have become so entrenched in “Western Civilization” that they find it difficult to abandon their ways and change over to a new system. It takes a firm commitment to the ideals which Gandhi and, for that matter, all great men like Buddha and Jesus Christ practised in their lives.

I had the opportunity to talk with the organizers of the school and discuss at length their views of Gandhian philosophy and the practical problems which Western Society needs to overcome. Satish Kumar, the editor of *Resurgence* and a very active Gandhian from India staying in England for the last many years, explained how his magazine was able to reach many people in the United Kingdom and Europe who are interested in a new way of living. He has made several experiments in the Gandhian way of community living; the latest one is the Small School. He explained the school’s origins and philosophy:

Gandhi had a policy which he called “walking on two legs,” that is to say, not only opposing the British government, but at the same time constructively creating the alternative. The idea of starting a secondary school in Hartland came when my son, Mukti, was to finish his primary. A Methodist chapel, which was not in use, was for sale. We bought it for 20,000 pounds. I did not have the money, so I made an appeal to the readers of *Resurgence*, not for gifts, but for investments. The readers were invited to buy shares of 2,000 pounds in the property. This meant that, if the venture failed, the building could be sold and everyone would get their money back. The response of the readers was encouraging and the shares



were oversubscribed. In the past two years the school has been able to raise 80,000 pounds for repairs, new buildings, equipment and teachers' salaries.

We have tried to break down the boundaries of traditional subjects and have tried to give a new direction to the whole approach of teaching. Thus a project on the history of the motor car takes in social history, transport design and engineering. Prehistory takes in archaeology, geology and evolution. In this way the curriculum covers a wide range. The emphasis is educating the whole child. Learning to live together, respect and tolerate one another are as important as history and geography. There is a strong emphasis on practical activities, such as pottery, spinning, carpentry and compost making.

Nick and Pam Rodway were other speakers at the school. They live a Gandhian life-style in a village near Devon and work with Satish at the Small School. Both of them have proved with practical demonstrations that if one wishes one could live Gandhi's way. They held classes on sandal making, spinning and bread baking. I found in Pam a spiritual depth and motherly affection. She would say prayers before touching the dough, and I could see that baking for her was really a spiritual experience. She has a thesis on baking bread which she shared with the participants:

In the Lord's Prayer we ask for all bodily nourishment in the name of bread because bread may justly be called meat (food) of all meats. Bread is never out of season, disagreeing with no sickness, age or complexion, and therefore, it can truly be called the companion of life.

The positive achievement of the Summer School was that people sat together, lived together and worked together to understand and live Gandhi's



philosophy. This seven day experiment in the Gandhian way of living was successful and has been claimed so in the Gandhi Foundation's report: "The Gandhi Foundation is making steady progress with the achievement of a very successful Summer School. Talking and discussing philosophy is not difficult. The problem is living it, living it from within or accepting it as a part of life."

Guy Trainor has since written and told me that he had organized a follow-up get-together for the participants of the Summer School. Seventeen people attended, which showed their keen interest in carrying on the experiment. This is a very hopeful outcome in nursing the saplings of Gandhi on Western soil.

A political leader resigns

Riccardo Gramegna was very active in Italian public life for ten years. He represented his area in the State Assembly and was Minister for Planning and Development. But his work among the young people was his avocation. Fired with the spirit of Gandhi and other great souls, he found it difficult to reconcile himself with power politics. He quited politics to start organizing young people for a new way of life which is based on spiritual values, a decentralized socio-economic system, mutual cooperation, love and non-violence.

I have come across many young people from the West, but I have seen very few who are as dedicated and spiritually motivated as Riccardo and his wife, Margaret. Though they are younger than I am in age, I learned a great deal from them during my stay in Italy. I could see that at very short notice, the students and the youth of the town rallied around him and listened to him with great patience and love. He is loved by his people and Riccardo reciprocates.

Riccardo has developed a couple of youth cooperatives where young people experiment in community living through hard work, such as agriculture



based on bio-dynamics, bee keeping, dairy farming and handicrafts. I visited these cooperatives and saw wonderful work being done silently.

Riccardo and Margaret have also developed the idea of an International Study Centre of the New Culture for the Expansion of Human Consciousness. The Hindi name of this Centre is 'Jai Jagat Chetna Kendra' as has been envisaged by Vinobaji. They explained the goals of the centre:

The goal of this centre is to supply an open, impersonal forum for self-guided actions, networking connections in a team spirit, and to share life experiences and the work of service through the exchange of strength and mutual support with a positive and unbiased approach. The members are expected to continue working in their areas in the service of human consciousness.

This fascinating approach is a positive step towards a new way of living. Through the Centre they have planned a network of sub-centres in order to reach more people by organizing study circles and arranging for alternative medicine, non-violence training camps, handicraft workshops and the publication of relevant literature. This devoted couple is a living example of true missionary zeal and selfless service to the people.

Many people have realized that within a materialistic life there is also a spiritual reality; that man is not only a physical and mental character, but also an immortal soul. That within a life of egoism, fear and ignorance there is only suffering and that life must be lived simply and naturally, in service to humanity and nature. People who have made this realization live here and there throughout the world, almost unnoticed, working for the expansion of human consciousness. They are aware that many other, in many different ways and in



many different parts of the world are living active examples of this “new culture” and “new age.”

Villaggio Verde (the Green Village) is a community project for people such as these to live together, work together, and to be a living, active example of a community life of harmony and service. It is a village for people who are living for “being” and not for “having”.

A residence for fifty families is being built in the natural environment of the foothills of Monte Rosa, the most magical and mystical mountain of the Italian Alps. Twenty-five hectares of land is set aside for a self-sufficient farming project and there are plans for building a dining hall, library, cultural centre, office and creativity workshops.

No guru, leader, particular practice, discipline or teaching will be followed. The foundation of the Green Village is self-rule, self-discipline, self-practice and self-teaching. Everyone is free to follow the inner voice of the consciousness within the heart.

A.T.D. Fourth World: Reaching Out

A.T.D. Fourth World was started in France in 1957 by Father Joseph Wresinski (Father Joseph is the son of one of those poor families who constitute the “Fourth World.”) In Father Joseph’s words:

Our movement was born in 1957 amidst misery, anguish, solitude and the incomprehension of those around us. In a word, it was born in the very same importance and almost total disregard from which the poorest suffer. It was born in a shanty town on the outskirts of Paris, the capital of one of the richest countries in the world, a shanty town worse than many we have subsequently discovered in other continents, a shanty town



inhabited by French born families. These 300 families were living in shelters which would normally be built for pigs, surrounded by mud, lacking electricity and sanitation, without water except for a fountain serving everyone and without facilities for refuse collection and postal deliveries.

These families were considered not as poor people, but as rubbish; at best, objects of charity and communal soup. Their children had been placed in care and their new born were, themselves, soon becoming subject to public assistance. Do not forget that the West was, at that time, a victim of its own success, convinced as it was that its economic progress and social legislation were such that poverty could no longer exist. It was believed that “to live in misery one must be the wreckage of humanity, feeble or weak-willed.”

Those poor families were the first members of A.T.D. They founded A.T.D. themselves for voicing their situation and the injustice they have been subjected to. I had the opportunity to visit the headquarters of A.T.D. in a suburb of Paris. A.T.D. places volunteers in the slums near the big cities in which they stay in the homes of poor families. They do not give anything in the material sense; they give patient hearing. The volunteers make the people realized that there is somebody who will listen to them and understand their feelings, sorrows and miseries. Although the movement started on a very small scale by Father Joseph in Paris, it has now spread throughout Europe, Asia and Africa.

The coordinator of A.T.D. explained that the experience with this programme has been that the person who is interviewed by the volunteer begins to feel much more relaxed and relieved of a great burden; they start gaining self-



confidence. Many start an altogether new life with inner strength to face the challenges of life. An A.T.D. volunteer said:

We have heard the same words in every country from the poorest people, “We are capable of taking our own care, our own responsibility. If you would only encourage us instead of criticizing us for our difficulties, we would succeed in what we want to do.

In September 1982 one of the permanent volunteers went, as a nurse, to be with the poorest of the poor in a prison camp. Many people believe that those who have wronged society can make no contribution to it; that wrong doers cannot change and that they must be banished from society.

We cannot resolve this question here. All we can do is extol the ingenuity of the men in the prison camp, their efforts to remain men of dignity in the small details of everyday life and their thirst to learn with the hope that remains in the heart of each one, despite of their difficult and painful conditions. The volunteer at this camp founded a Learning Club, which celebrated its second year of work on May 31, 1984. One of the camp residents talked about the Learning Club:

I am the youngest son of my family and I am in prison. On 19th November, 1982 I accepted the challenge to join the Learning Club. It has transformed me. With my colleagues, who know what it is to live in misery, we decided to teach reading and writing to those who have not had the privilege of learning these skills at school.

Then I was given responsibility for the library. For more than five months, for long hours, my friends and I have been learning proverbs and tales for our old people. We decided to make them into a book called **Proverbs in Freedom**. Why “freedom?” Because they came from nineteen ethnic



groups and seven countries of Africa and they have passed from one person to another.

Here are some selections concerning the family from **Proverbs in Freedom**:

A man's strength is his family. (Yacouba)

If a person laughs at the torn cloth that you wear on your back, it is you who he mocks. (Attie)

One does not cut off the head of a chimpanzee in order to show it to a baboon. (Abidji)

A piece of wood that falls into water never becomes a crocodile. (Bete)

A cow never tires of her own udders. (Tagounana)

There is no rubbish dump on which to throw disobedient and thieving children. (Wobe)

Charismatic Khadi

Throughout my travels in Europe and the United States I heard repeatedly that unemployment is a growing problem for common people everywhere. As technology advances, more and more people lose their jobs to machines. In the West, as it is in Third World countries, people are searching for a way to achieve full employment so that all can earn a decent wage and feel as if they have a productive role in society.

Part of the problem is that Western society is based on competitive economics rather than complementary economics. In competitive economics, the person is expendable if the profit is at stake. There is no sense of mutual cooperation.



So far in this book I have described Western organizations and movements as illustrations of Gandhian philosophy in action. I will, however, make an exception to my practice and discuss a Gandhian solution, practiced in India, to a Western problem.

The word 'Khadi' is derived from a dialect of Hindi. Khadi is the traditional handloom used to weave cloth for the people living in the villages. As stated earlier, a village is not just a cluster of a few hundred persons living in one place; it signifies a socio-economic and cultural unit based on the concept of cooperation and not competition. In a village, everyone compliments the life of others as has been explained in the earlier pages. Therefore, Khadi is the outcome of complimentary economics and not competitive economics. The socio-cultural concept of Khadi signifies equality and cultural harmony. In the modern world, a man or woman is usually judged at first sight from his or her dress and we have the habit of forming opinion about his or her socio-economic and cultural status from the types of dress he or she wears. Khadi, the cloth woven on the handloom, has uniform shape and colour and leaves no specific mark on the man or woman who puts it on. It is, therefore, not possible to judge him or her and form an opinion about his or her status. One can say that Khadi is the concept of simple living and high thinking in actual practice and a symbol of socio-economic equality. Khadi emphasizes the idea of decentralization in production and self-sufficiency at the local level. In a country like India, with its teeming millions, this helps to solve the problem of unemployment in villages where hundreds of people are either totally or partially unemployed. This is also the cheapest and simplest method of providing employment to the local people with the least amount of investment. For example, a textile mill which needs an investment of Rs. 2,000,000/- provides employment to only 1000 workers. In contrast, an equal



investment in Khadi can give employment to ten times the number and it helps bring about self-sufficiency in one of the basic needs of society, i.e. clothing. This is the basic idea behind introducing Khadi in preference to mill-made cloth.

The next question is what is the place of Khadi in a highly advanced society in which the cost of production is less in the centralized production system using high technology? I think this is a fundamental issue and raises a point where we have to decide our basic approach towards life and its style. There is no doubt that the centralized production system through high technology is cheaper than the decentralized one based on labour intensive simple machines, such as the spinning wheel and handloom. But here we fail to recognize a very hard fact: a worker employed in a big factory, under subhuman conditions, and at low wages is a victim of capitalism which causes disparities in society which are the root cause of violence. We have to decide what sort of life we want to live and the life-style we would like to adopt. Do we need self-sufficiency in meeting the basic needs of people or do we just build a society based on human-exploitation?

Another related question is about the quality and variety of cloth produced. I am all for variety, design, colours and prints, but the best way of getting things made to your choice is to do it with your own hands. One does draw the maximum joy and satisfaction only through one's own creative work. How can a machine think of the designs that one likes? Also, if we adopt the principle of simple living and high thinking, than we have to understand that clothes are no more than the basic necessity for protecting the body and not for its decoration.

From that angle, production of Khadi cloth for meeting one's own basic need is much cheaper, let me put before you my own experience. I spin my own yarn (cotton thread) on my spinning wheel of two spindles, which cost me only



Rs. 300/-. I spin for just an hour a day while I am reading, watching T.V. or talking to some visitors. I produce 50 metres of cloth in a year which is sufficient for me to have five shirts (15 metres), five trousers (12.5 metres), four pairs of underwear (8 metres), one pair of bed sheets (10 metres), and one pair of towels and napkins (5 metres). How much does it cost me? Here is the breakdown at 1984 prices:

5 kg. Cotton Silvers @ Rs. 25/-	Rs. 125/-
Depreciation of Spinning Wheel	Rs. 10/-
Weaving Charges @ Rs. 1/- a metre	Rs. 50/-
Stitching Charges @ Rs. 2/- a metre	Rs. 100/-
Miscellaneous Expenses	Rs. 15/-
Total	Rs. 300/-

The total amount spent represents Rs. 6/- (48 cents) per metre, so how can one say that Khadi is very costly and, therefore a luxury? Even medium quality mill-made cloth will cost twice as much. Isn't it simple arithmetic? In the U.S.A., I'm told that an ordinary Khadi shirt costs as much as \$ 25.

From my short experience in the West, where technology is the order of the day, I believe that Khadi could provide an alternative part time, if not full time, occupation plus self-sufficiency in one of the five basic human needs. Therefore, I can say with complete confidence that those who wish to change their life-style and adopt a new way of life (e.g. simple living and high thinking) the adoption of Khadi is a good way of breaking the ice. This simple, but novel method is worth a trial and, if done with a will, success is bound to follow, as the day follows the night. The Upanishads say "Tamaso ma jyotirgamay", lead me from darkness into light.



A family moves back to basics

The Penrith, U.K. peace activists had asked me to speak at a public meeting on “An Indian Perspective on Peace” at an 18th century watermill in the Aden valley, seven miles from Penrith. I spent the night at the mill and was deeply inspired by Nick and Ana Jones, the owners of the mill. They are truly living Gandhi in Action.

Nick and Ana, along with their two daughters, have been living at the mill since they bought it from the Atkinson family in 1974. The Atkinsons had run the mill for generations, but their earnings were on the decline. The post-war growth of the big mills, together with the declining demand for brown or wholemeal bread and oatmeal made it hard for these traditional mills to make both the ends meet. This is one of the few watermills and windmills still operating in Britain.

Nick told me the story as to how they came to the mill and started this venture:

About the time I was born, thirty six years ago in Melbourne, Australia, my father was working for the British Council. I spent most of my childhood travelling in Africa, Australia, the Middle East and Europe. This had broadened my view of the world; but at a cost. I grew up rootless, an outsider. On the one hand I craved the security tradition, on the other hand the excitement of social change and movement. This tension crystallized while I was in Cambridge from 1968 to 1972. A degree in history and fine arts seemed almost irrelevant. Ana and I were married in Yorkshire in January 1974 and, at the time, I was working as a manager of Rosehill, near Whitehaven on the Cumbrian coast. Ana had her own business in London as a weaver and designer. We both felt a deep need to return to a more basic earthly way of life. I came to know of the watermill being sold. Ana



and I felt that the mill needed us to love it, restore it and use it. We had nothing to lose and everything to gain. We moved in the watermill as its owners on Ana's birthday in October 1874. The first five years were exhilarating, but very exhaustive. It was one thing to dream of a practical, down to earth life-style, quite another to live it.

Ana told me about the present position of the watermill:

We are milling about three to four tonnes of organic whole wheat flour each week. This is delivered to local bakers, wholefood shops and grocers. Most of it is sold in the cities — Newcastle, Durham and Manchester. In addition we sell direct from the mill. We have seven acres of land which support goats, sheep, fell ponies, hens, ducks, cats and bees. We have a small printing press for printing paper bags and posters. Of course, one goes through a number of changes and upheavals over ten years. There have been good times and bad, too.

The night I spent at the watermill, in a room adjoining the water channel beside the mill, was a rare phenomenon that reminded me of my own native place, Himachal Pradesh, where we have such watermills, called "Gharats", still in operation. The sound of the ever-flowing water was so soothing that it served as a natural sleeping pill, and its voice was like the music of classical song.

In a country like England, where the Industrial Revolution took its birth and led the whole world to adopt a new type of civilization based on competition and exploitation of the natural resources, it is like swimming against the current to run such activities like the watermill. Nick and Ana are a living experiment in the building of an alternative life style for a better society.

Nick in his small book, *The Watermill Baking Book*, has warned people of the hazards of industrial food. He states that:



We are confronted with a tremendous variety of products from all over the world. There have been major changes in the way the food is produced, processed, packed and distributed. The chances are that what you buy may have been highly processed, refined, pasteurized, homogenized, coloured, flavoured, textured, dried, frozen, sprayed to prevent its sprouting or to make it look more attractive, or to improve its keeping qualities. It may have been precooked, reconstituted, grown with oil based fertilizers and treated with toxic herbicides and pesticides. This is the standardized convenience food that most of us have to put up with and that we have been led to believe is good for us.

There is a growing awareness that most of us have been sacrificing the quality of our food and, in consequence, our health for the sake of a wider choice, economy and convenience. The so called degenerative diseases have taken quite a hold in the countries of the developed world. They include heart diseases, cancer, arteriosclerosis, obesity, kidney disease and dental decay. Major contributing factors in these diseases have been shown to include 1) faulty diet which includes excessive sugar, excessive stimulants like alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee and cocoa, and a lack of dietary fibre or roughage; 2) pollution in food from the atmosphere (lead from petrol fumes) and increased radiation from nuclear sources; and 3) a sedentary way of life with a lack of exercise and too much stress.

Modern methods of food production have not helped. The growth in population has led to pressure for as much food as possible to be produced per acre; quantity for quality. There has been a strong demand for cheap food. Some farmers, to keep the cost down, have found it easier to mechanize, to farm intensively, to use artificial fertilizers and chemical



weed killers. They have been highly successful in meeting the challenge to produce more food more cheaply, but at a cost in terms of the health of the soil, animals and the consumers of the products.

These methods have not husbanded the land, but exploited it. But nature is beginning to protest, and so have many consumers. We are beginning to understand some of the long terms effects of our mistreatment of the land and the animals on whom we depend for our food. Land that has been farmed intensively is becoming less resistant to insect and fungal attack and its fertility is steadily decreasing; animals are becoming less disease resistant. It is in our long term interest to remedy these problems.

Community of The Ark

In 1971-72 a young French student, Jacky Parmentier, visited India and stayed in various Ashrams, including the Brahma Viday Mandir in Pawnsar which was founded by Vinobaji. Jacky learned Hindi in order to understand the rural life of the Indian masses. While he was staying in Vinobaji's Ashram he learned Sanskrit. His pronunciation of the language was so perfect that his recitation of the *Shlokas* from *Srimad Bhagved Gita* sounded like a scholar's. Vinobaji gave him the Indian name Yogamitra.

Jacky stayed with me in Delhi and attended the training programmes of the Rajghat School of Non-Violence, which I had been organizing at the time. I was immensely impressed by this young man. His commitment to the ideal of non-violence was superb.

It was through Jacky that I came to know about the Community of the Ark, founded by Lanza del Vasto. After returning to France Jacky wrote to me, telling me of his decision to join the Ark and work with Lanza. His letter showed his



utmost faith in non-violence as a way of life and, also as a way of solving social issues concerning the future of mankind:

You know that I am a Conscientious Objector and, in France, we have few liberties. Now we must work in one association recognized by the government to do some social work. But this is not an answer to our denial. We refuse military service, we refuse to resolve conflict with violence. We do not answer to this problem by doing social work. I feel that we need to learn non-violence. It is easy to want non-violence, but it is not so easy to live. We need to search how we can be more true and non-violent. What can help us? Surely, self-control by spiritual training and, also, to think over the non-violent methods to resolve conflict.

Lanza del Vasto

Lanza del Vasto got the inspiration to start the Ark from Gandhiji. Lanza had stayed at Gandhiji's Ashram at Sewagram, near Wardha, in 1938 and was renamed Shanti Das. On his return, Shanti Das was determined to start an ashram based on the lines of Sewagram.

His full name was Joseph John Lanza del Vasto. He was born at the turn of the century, in 1901, in a village in southern Italy, coming from a prominent family. His father, a Sicilian noble-man, had kings and even a sister of St. Thomas Aquinas among his ancestors. From his early childhood he had questioned life. He studied philosophy and took his doctorate at the University of Pisa on the Spiritual Trinity. His dissertation sought to reconcile aspects of Christian dogma, art, science, Carmelite contemplation Hindu Yoga, Zen and free speculation. He always asked, "What is life? Philosophy and the sciences put together cannot account for the existence of a fly."



When the family fortune was lost, Lanza worked as an artist, making beautiful wood carvings and other works of art; a seemingly care free existence. At forty five he went to India to see Mahatma Gandhi, whom he considered a saint who “had rediscovered truth that was capable of putting the soul back into life and renewing the world.” He found Satyagraha, non-violent love, “the force of justice, not a force applied to the defence of justice, a force inherited in justice itself.”

In India he put on Indian garb and walked as the local holy men did, wearing only a loin cloth, carrying a begging bowl, fasting and singing. When he arrived at Gandhi’s Ashram, Gandhi embraced him. Lanza, at that time, said he had come to learn “how to be a better Christian.” Life at Sewagram impressed Lanza. He had gone to Gandhi in quest of truth and was learning that truth is not an abstraction. It is a life, it is a work, it is learning a skill, and it is discipline and responsibility.

The Gandhian ideals of work and prayer were meant to change external power structures also and the government kept Gandhi and all who followed him under constant surveillance. Gandhi’s teaching, in response, was honesty. “Give the police all information, show the police your letters and tell the police your secret thoughts. It is a good way for us of making sure that we have only good thoughts.”

Gandhi had been inspired by the Beatitudes of Christ and Tolstoy’s writing on poverty and Christian brotherhood (“Kindness and peace shall kiss”), so Gandhi gave back to Christians a sharing in Hindu spirituality. It was a building up of good, not an exchange, but a putting together, a marriage of ideals “made flesh.” Lanza reciprocated this spirit and got new inspirations to give a fresh life



to Christian values. He decided to work for a new social order. He explained his idea of the Ark in this way:

The Ark is neither a religious order nor a chivalrous order. It draws, however, from both. It is a working order. It is not a brotherhood of monks, but a new people made up of laymen who have children and bring them up. A people apart, but indifferent to barriers of nationality, class, race or creed. A people that does not, without good reason, oppose established national law and authority, but considers itself, small though it be in numbers and strength, as free and sovereign, like the nomads of the desert and itinerant Gypsies.

The aim of the order is to create, within the nations, little islands of perfect life, not that we think ourselves perfect or set ourselves up as an example, but if imperfect as we are, and in many ways “the last,” we find the garden and kingdom of heaven here and now the demonstration is all the more convincing. Our aim is to multiply these little islands by emigrating from the mother community and turning as many people as possible away from the mad philosophies of our times and, instead of exciting them one against the other, nation against nation, class against class, party against party, religion against religion without knowing what may result from the shock, to unify and pacify them here and now and oppose their peace to the agitation of the world.

La Borie Noble

Shanti Das’ Ark became a centre of great attraction for me. I had been looking for an opportunity to visit the community. My dream became a reality when I boarded a train for Millau in the south of France. It is a beautiful area surrounded by hills and green grassy meadows. On the hills there is not much



vegetation, as the rains are few and far between. The main occupation of the people living in this region is sheep breeding and a little farming, where ever water is available. The life for the people is very hard. There are a few valleys where water is available in abundance and many types of fruits and other crops are cultivated. Tourism is also a big industry and people from all over Europe come here during the summer. Rodez is a neighbouring city and, in contrast, is exceptionally rich in its scenic beauty. There are many monuments of the 16th century which reflect the old French culture and social life.

La Borie Noble, the place where Lanza started his Ashram and had stayed until his death in 1981, is about 60 kilometers from Millau, in a hilly area close to Montplair near the Italian border. There are three community living experiments going on in this area. The biggest one is the Ark, where about 100 people live like a family. The community owns about 2000 acres of land, mostly hilly with thick forests, so agriculture is not possible. Slowly, however, the land is being reclaimed and brought under the plough. Horses are used to plough the fields. No power driven or highly technical machinery is used in the community. Only organic manuring is done, mostly homemade compost. The toilets are built on septic tanks and human waste is also recycled for farm use. All the members have to do hard farm labour for four hours a day, including women and children.

The community has its own watermill which is used for grinding the wheat grown in the community's farm. There is a bakery where the bread for the whole community is baked. I talked with the baker who explained their baking methods, from making the dough to the oven fire, the amount of wood they use, the time it takes to bake bread for the whole community and the varieties of breads that are made. I was amazed to see a 10 kilogram loaf of bread in the shape of a round basket.



I met many people in the community and talked with them about the life they have adopted. I was eager to know what had made these people, mostly young people, leave modern life-styles and come to live a very hard life of comparative poverty. One of the senior members of the Ark said:

We are living a life that is whole, in which everything has the same sense, from prayer and meditation to ploughing our daily bread, from teaching doctrine to handling manure, from cooking to singing and dancing around the fire. Showing that life free from violence and abuse (hidden violence as well as brutal violence, legal and authorized abuse as well as illegal abuse) is possible. That such a life is not more difficult than a life of mere physical pleasure nor less natural than ordinary life.

In a short time I came to realize how happy these people were. In the West, especially in the urban areas like Paris, London, and Frankfurt, I found the faces of the people to be tense, fear stricken and pale, with very strained and artificial smiles. In contrast, at the Ark I found everybody humming with life. When I looked into the face of someone I would be drawn towards him or her, as if I had known them for a long time. Life runs so smoothly that there hardly is a chance for any tension or the loosing of tempers by the members.

There is no hierarchy of workers, which is a very healthy practice. Each member is treated equally and is engaged in his own activities without the least feeling of fear of the “boss” or interference from a superior. Each one has a feeling of love and affection for the other, irrespective of age and experience. This is a thing that our Gandhian and other social institutions in India have to learn and adopt in their functioning. The prevailing practices today are very autocratic, and workers are afraid because they know that if the bosses are not happy with them they may lose their jobs. Workers often resort to flattery or do



unreasonable favours for their bosses in order to secure their positions. This type of habit not only demoralizes the workers, but often damages the reputation of the institution. These unfortunate practices are on the increase in India.

After Lanza's death, his close associate and a very dedicated member of the community, Dr Pierre Parodi took over responsibility of the Ark. Pierre, renamed Mohan Das, has served the poor people of Morocco for many years as a medical practitioner before joining the Ark. Pierre is very soft spoken kind-hearted man with an ever smiling, innocent face. There is humility and meekness in each and every word he utters.

I first saw him at the community lunch. All members of the community wore blue robes and trousers. Lunch, in the summer, is served in the open air on a very simple platform on the edge of a hill facing a stream. Plain wooden benches are fitted in a semicircle so that people sit and eat facing each other. A lean, bald headed man came towards me, handing me a plate of food and saying, "I feel pleasure in welcoming you from the land of Gandhiji to this Ark of Shanti Das". I was taken aback when I realized that Pierre stood before me.

I had a long discussion with Pierre about the day-to-day functioning of the Ark. He was a little shy expressing himself in English, though he fully understood my English questions. He answered through an interpreter. The discussion centred mainly around the Gandhian approach to solving the problems that mankind is facing today. Pierre told me that they are trying to help solve the problems of the people in New Caledonia, a French colony where the government is currently conducting nuclear tests. The members of the Ark regularly participate in the Satyagraha against the government and the non-violent protests have built public opinion in favour of freeing New Caledonia from colonial rule. (This action was described more fully in the previous chapter.)



I was told that every member of the community has to take a pledge before he enters into the order of the Ark as a “companion”. The vows taken by the members are called “Vows of the companions”. A new entrant has the opportunity to stay for a trial period and experience the life-style. Only after the entrant is so convinced that the life-style of the Ark is appropriate for him or her may he or she sign the vows. Members of the community help the newcomer understand the life-style that is followed in the Ark. After an entrant completes his one year of “companionship,” he has the option to stay with the community or the freedom to go.

The companion of the Ark is also called the “Gandhian of the West” and he or she takes the following seven vows:

1. To work for the support and growth of the order, to work on ourselves and exercise ourselves for the knowledge, the possession and the gift of ourselves, to preach the return to simplicity and work to encourage the craftsmen as often as possible by purchasing from them, to learn a manual skill and, as far as we can, to work with our hands.
2. We promise to obey the Head of the order in everything he may ask us for the purpose of spreading the doctrine and, as far as duties allow, we promise to put the doctrine into practice and see that it is practiced by others. We will not enter any sect or party or group without his consent.
3. We promise to simplify our lives, to rid ourselves of our artificial needs, the obligations vanity imposes on us and all forms of excess and luxury. We promise to train ourselves every month for helping those in need.



4. We promise to say with courage what we believe to be true, unless prudence, decency, respect or charity oblige us to keep silence. We promise to shun fraud, intrigue or gossip.
5. We promise not to afflict any human being, nor, if possible, any living creature for pleasure, profit or convenience.
6. We promise to try non-violence in our quarrels with those around us and all conflicts in which we are involved, to renounce revenge, to ask rather than command, to reconcile those who hate each other rather than take part, to avoid arguments, to avoid going to the law, to prefer the harmony to the satisfaction of triumph. We promise not to do or say anything that might encourage revolt or war, repression or prosecution.
7. Companion and witnesses, remind us of our promise with severity should ever we forget.

All powerful God, do not abandon us to our mere courage but let our promise uphold our ardour and our ardour hold us to our promise. Let this commitment free us from our chains and prepare us for more complete and more profound engagement. Grant us, as the time goes on, to love and serve with deeper understanding, truth, justice and peace.

This pledge is taken in front of the bonfire at the dawn of the Feast of St. John. It is offered to Shanti Das, the Servant of Peace, the Companion of the Ark, who teaches the members to serve. This solemn promise is made every year. It is an interesting thing that every member of the Ark has to reaffirm his or her faith by taking the vows every year and is free to leave the Ark if it no longer suits their way of thinking.



In Gandhiji's Ashram there were eleven vows followed by the members. Shanti Das did not impose the vow of celibacy. Pierre told me that Shanti Das was of the opinion that the family is the only place where non-violence can be practiced. Therefore, family life was allowed in the community. Celibacy in life is a very high ideal, however, and members are free to choose that way of life. The basic emphasis is on a natural life-style, without any physical taboos imposed from outside authorities.

Pierre told me that they actually try to follow the great souls, like Gandhi and Lanza, in their lives and in their deeds:

Gandhi found truth listening to the small voice within. He tried to mould his thoughts according to the inner voice. In the same way he matched his acts with his words. Consequently, there was coherence between his way of life, his words and his thoughts. Gandhi was, therefore, a man true to himself.

Pierre related some of the problems Shanti Das faced when he began the community. There were many problems of adjustment to and understanding the goals of the Ark. Many companions left Shanti Das. The location had to be changed. Finally, he succeeded at La Borie Noble and, after Shanti Das' death, the community continued to grow and expand. There are now five independent branches of the Ark carrying on this wonderful experiment in non-violent living.

L'Arche De Bonnecombe

L'Arche De Bonnecombe is another community about 80 kilometres from Millau, about 15 kms. from Rodez. It is a huge complex covering an area of more than 300 acres. I was told that this was once the residence of a Bishop and a huge seminary was located here. After World War II it was lying vacant. The members



of the community approached the Bishop and he allowed it to be used by the Community of the Ark.

This large complex of old buildings looks like a palace. Rooms the size of 800-1000 square feet are now being used to house the families of community, including fifty children. In this community there are about fifty families living and sharing life in the real sense. They are almost self-sufficient in the day-to-day needs. They have their own farm dairy, cheesery, flour mill and bakery. A small school is attached to the community where the children of the members of the Ark study. Apart from textbook knowledge, the children are involved in the life of the community and join the elders in working in the kitchen garden, bakery and carpentry shop. The adults participate fully in the entire routine of the Ark and are trained to take responsibility for the work in which they have special interest.

Life runs so smoothly that there is no need for forced discipline. There is no high and low rank in the day-to-day administration of the community. Each one helps the other in their work and positive growth. Freedom of thinking and work is the basis of the life they have chosen.

Le Cun Du Larzac

The plateau of Larzac is at a distance about twenty kilometres from Millau. It is the location for La Cun Du Larzac, a civil defence study centre.

Larzac is an arid limestone tableland, south of Massif Central, covering an area of 1000 square kilometres. It lies mostly in the Department of Aveyron. Pinewood plantations are prevalent and, in depressions where more fertile soil lies, there are unfenced fields of crops. The plateau, rising 800 to 900 metres above sea level, is surrounded by canyon-like valleys. It is exposed to strong winds. The summers are hot and dry and the winters cold and snowy.



In 1970, the Secretary of State for Defence visited this area and in a public meeting, told the people that in order to enlarge the military camp the plateau would be acquired by the government. Thereby, the peasants of the area were threatened by displacement and thousands of acres of land would be put to military use instead of farming. This news was very disturbing and the local people decided to oppose the government's proposed action. For ten long years the peasant — farmers of the area ceaselessly fought to save their land. A people's movement was built and peaceful means were adopted to handle the situation. More and more people from neighbouring areas join in this peaceful struggle.

On March 1, 1972 Lanza visited Millau where he addressed a meeting of the struggling people. He spoke to them about active non-violence. The audience was captivated by his ideals and the sincerity with which he offered his support to their peaceful struggle. By agreement with the peasants, he started a two week fast at La Cavalerie, the military camp that was established in 1901. Lanza's fast was a historic marker for the people. Thousands of peasant's pledged their support to the non-violent struggle to save the plateau. The extension plan was finally abandoned when Francois Mitterand, the leader of the Socialist party, was elected to the Presidency in May 1981.

This historic, non-violent victory made Larzac a place of special interest for people. Young people interested in alternative life-styles found it a place where they could practice their idealism. Le Cun Du Larzac was, in fact, an outgrowth of the peasant movement.

In August 1977, Le Cun began to build its centre without a building permit in the middle of the territory intended for the military camp. Following a court order to stop work on its construction, the building was ordered to be demolished



in May 1978. The orders were never implemented due to the pressure of the people's resistance movement.

Le Cun seeks to promote research on every aspect of defense matters. "Our aim is to find out how defense can be civilized rather than to militarize society". In this effort, La Cun subscribes to over 70 periodicals and newspapers and has progressively built up a library with 2000 works and 500 documentation files. It is a unique collection of this kind.

I stayed at Le Cun for several days and studied its activists. One of the main programmes during the summer is to organize youth training camps. Such a camp was being held while I was there. Approximately thirty young people were undergoing training in non-violent direct action. This particular group consisted of members of a West German peace group. Another interesting programme organized by the members of Le Cun consisted of peaceful demonstrations at a military recruitment camp where they try to encourage young people not to enlist in military services.

I was highly impressed by the life-style of the people staying at Le Cun. Each member has to do manual work, working in the kitchen, cleaning the toilets, or looking after the animals. The community has none of the luxuries of Western society, such as modern toilets, hot water taps and electricity. Even the guest have to share in the manual work, like in Gandhiji's Ashram. Most of the members are well educated and have left well-paying jobs to adopt this life of voluntary poverty. Although Le Cun is not run on the lines of the Ark, as it is considered to be a political activist's centre, the source of inspiration has been Lanza del Vasto.

Les Truels

I was able to visit one other community that found its inspiration from Lanza and the Community of the Ark. The community in Les Truels, a village once



held in possession by the military, also grew out of the peasants' struggle in Larzac. Michel and Nicole are the guiding spirits of the small settlement. Both had been working with Lanza for more than two decades. Michel was a farmer when he was attracted by Lanza and joined his movement. Since then, he and his wife had been living in the Community of the Ark. After the victory of the Larzac peasants, this couple decided to stay on at Les Truels and build an independent unit of the Ark under Lanza's guidance. A small beginning has now developed into a well-knit family of twenty five members. It reminded me of the early days of Sewagram Ashram.



Dignity of Labour: A companion of the Ark



CHAPTER IV: BECOMING ONE

Why is there violence in society? Because we do not feel one with the other. We always try to separate ourselves from others. When we separate ourselves from others we add to the violence in the society. When we feel one with others, there is no question of being afraid of anybody as violence is a creation of fear from others.

But let us start with ourselves, or rather I with myself. I, alone have no meaning because from where do I come? What is my origin? I mean that in the social context. The family is the origin of a social being. Within the four walls of our house we are all non-violent and all very informal. Among ourselves, we do not do anything in the family which goes against the interests of one another. The moment we go outside the four walls of our home, violence starts. We no longer see people as members of the one family related as mother, father, brother, or sister. Our attitude is different. We pose and act in a very formal way. I believe that violence starts at this point.

Jesus said, “love thy neighbour as thyself”. Do we? No, it is very difficult. If I could love my neighbour, a non-violent society would be just at the doorstep. But we do not think that way. We have to go beyond the threshold of our house, not physically but mentally, and widen the horizon of our hearts and minds. The effect may reach the global level. That is the only way to achieve a society based on love and non-violence.

In an effort to build a society based on love and non-violence, not only must the threshold of the house at the family level be crossed, but the threshold of geo-political boundaries at a national level must be removed. Billions and billions of dollars are being spent to maintain these geo-political boundaries, but the common people of any country, even in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., are not



interested in war. It is only the “Institution of the State” and the vested interests fighting for power who advocate the need for armies, arms and geo-political boundaries. Therefore, I consider the State as the strongest institution of violence. We have to fight this institution and reduce its powers. Contrary to State power, people’s inner power must be invoked at the individual level so that geo-political boundaries can be eliminated at the global level.

Getting Acquainted

The first steps in developing a relationship with someone, in becoming one with others, is getting acquainted. In most inter-personal relationships those first steps are cautious and tentative. Through my travels, however, I was able to meet individuals and organizations who are taking bold and courageous steps towards becoming one with others.

SERVAS (an Esperanto word meaning “to serve”) was conceived in 1948 at a high school in Denmark by a number of people who had gathered together in their deep concern about the violence of World War II. They wished to prevent such a holocaust from ever happening again. They established an organization which would make it possible for people of various nations to arrange visits to one another’s homes. For this purpose, a network of people who shared these thoughts and would provide free hospitality to like-minded visitors was necessary. Under the leadership of an American, Bob Luitweiler, the movement was started and spread throughout Europe, the US, Canada, Japan, India and Latin America. There are now more than ninety countries that are members of SERVAS. The United Nations listed SERVAS International as a Non-Government Organization in 1973.

As a student of non-violence, I feel that the family is the only institution which can be an instrument in building a society based on non-violence. The



foundation of the family is love and sacrifice, and that it is through this spirit that we can achieve such a society.

Pursuing SERVAS activities and trying to expand the horizon of my family has given me immense joy. My wife and I usually say that God is happy with us for he appears quite often before us in the form of a guest. There has hardly been a day during the last fifteen years when we have not been blessed with such a gift. The new arrival is not a stranger, but a member of our family and it is in this spirit that we have been carrying on with this work. We have learned a lot from these people from different cultures, religions and faiths. It has been a unique programme of non-violence in action.

Through this organization I have had the opportunity to meet people and develop family relationships with friends all over the world. This is how the world stood at my doorstep and the journey towards becoming one began for me.

I was invited by the Berlin coordinator of SERVAS International, Offer Ulla, (also now elected as the European Co-ordinator) to stay with them in the countryside of Berlin. He and his wife, Eike, had been in India and had studied Indian philosophy. Both of them are great admirers of Gandhi. I was asked to speak to their SERVAS chapter about non-violence and the Indian way of life. People asked questions about Gandhi's personal life, the decentralized system of economic production, rural problems and poverty. People in the West have a difficult time in a situation of continuous economic insecurity. It seems a mystery to Westerners that millions of people of the Third world can live happily in the unthinkable situation where they have practically nothing to fall back upon economically. In the West the approach towards life, it seems, is to work from security to more security.



Children are very bold in their approach to getting acquainted. They ask straightforward questions which, innocently, go directly to the root of many misconceptions between people. I was invited to speak about the Indian way of life at the Queen Elizabeth High School in Penrith, U.K. It was a new experience for me to talk to students and teachers, and the unique thing I observed among the students was their free and frank way of discussing various issues. A young girl asked me about the system of arranged marriages and the reasons behind this tradition. I was asked about education for women in India. Another question was about the language problem. Students were interested in Gandhi and asked whether the ideals of Gandhi are still popularly known and followed in India by political leaders.

I was also invited by the Temple School in a village near Penrith. This primary school is run by the Church of England. I had a very tough time here as the small children asked very odd questions, though I was amazed to see their simple common sense and intelligence. One child asked me if I had any children. When I told him that I have two children. He responded that he had been told that Indians have many-many children, why did I have only two? Another asked what the children in India eat for breakfast.

It was my first visit to a school for beginners in a foreign country. The most striking thing about the school was its environment. The behaviour of the children was very natural. The presence of the teachers was not taken as a cause for fear by the children. The students enjoyed their classes. The headmistress of the school told me that she and her staff try to help the children to develop to the best of their ability so that they make the most of themselves. "We make them feel confident and secure in school to experience success and to preserve and develop skills."



The role that university students have played in bridging the gap between the West and Third World countries cannot be left unacknowledged. ASA is a scholarship scheme, established in 1960 on the initiative of Berlin students, which provides study tours in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The students work on projects which address the economic and social needs of the people in developing countries. Priority is given to self-help schemes with a special emphasis on rural development. In its 25 years, three thousand students have actively participated in ASA programmes.

The Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft, a non-governmental organization, works as a link between ASA and the Free University in Berlin assisting foreign students exchange at the University. Approximately thirty thousand students at the University are under the cultural exchange program and are helped by their respective governments. Most are from developing countries; many are from India. The Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft organizes training and educational programmes for Germans abroad and foreigners in Germany.

The children and students have taken the first steps to becoming acquainted with the people of the world. Others have taken the next step of reaching out and striving towards a new society. George and Lillian Willoughby have initiated the Movement for the New Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (U.S.A.). Both of them had been to India a number of times and I had the opportunity to meet them. They are trying to build centres in all parts of the world which strive for a transnational culture based on human values. In his introduction to the Transnational Center, George' has said:



The dream of a Transnational Center for social change grows out of years of involvement in the non-violent struggle in the United States; of experimentation in the Philadelphia Life Center (itself a center for social change); of studying and observing non-violent struggles; in many other countries, especially in India; and last but not the least, out of a deep concern to keep building a decentralized but closely linked transnational community of people committed to economic and social justice, to peace and to human freedom for all peoples in the world.

Autres Regards (Alternative Perceptions) is a newly organized group of French youth in close relationship with informal education groups in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. All members have visited these Indian provinces. Their main concern is to try to change the general perceptions of the French people about the Third World in general, and India in particular. They organize meetings, films and conferences about India and its development and they publish a bulletin which highlights the relationship between the problems of the poor people in developing nations and the Western way of life. They send small groups of French citizens into India and receive, in France, guests from the Indian projects which they sponsor.

I was interviewed for their bulletin about my views on the festival for the “Year of India,” which was being held in France at that time. Autres Regards also invited me to a meeting on the future of Indian villagers. The purpose of this meeting was to expose another image of India, an image more acute than the “folkloric” one that was being portrayed by the festival. Two other organizations participated in the meeting: The Catholic Committee for Development and Freres des Homes (BAM International) which was, at the time, organizing a tour of



France for four Indian volunteers from Madhya Pradesh. These associations are among the most important action groups in France that are working for Third World development and provide information for the French public. Each organization provided a speaker for the meeting — Cyrille D'Souza, an Indian economist working in France; Ann Britto of the Indian Social Institute, Bangalore; and Denis Mazeau, a former BAM volunteer in Madhya Pradesh. They all presented a particular aspect of Indian rural development with a special emphasis on the people's self-confidence and self-reliance.

I would like to relate one final example of how people are trying to educate themselves about and understand the world's struggles for peace and social justice. Neitheart Patry, an engineer working for the World Bank, was coming to India as a guest of the government. He came to know me through the Rajghat School of Non-Violence and had written to me asking if he could visit. He moved out of his five-star hotel in New Delhi and came to my village Ghonda, in the trans-Yamuna area. Patry showed a deep interest in understanding Gandhi, so I presented him with a copy of *Hind Swaraj*. After returning home and studying the book, Patry wrote me with the startling news that he had left his lucrative job with the World Bank and had decided to work for an organization which provides technical experts for development programmes in the African Subcontinent:

To me the most important thoughts (of *Hind Swaraj*) are on civilization. It is so often in our world that we go to a country and we find only the copied societies from the British, French, Spanish or other nations. It is the most distressing and depressing thing about many developed and developing countries that very little independent thinking and experimentation goes on. It is particularly sad that in almost all the countries this situation



prevails. It was exactly ten years later that I was able to meet Potry at his home in a village near Dusseldorf, West Germany. He and his wife, Coosje, took me to Kirchentags (Church Day) in Dusseldorf. Approximately 150,000 people from all over Europe took part in this five day gathering. Kirchentags is held every two years and all sects of Christian faiths participate. Many voluntary organizations and peace groups also participate. Several Eastern European church organizations were represented.

The objective of this gathering is to focus the attention of the people and the super powers on the global issues of peace and social justice. Exhibitions and audio visual programmes focus on growing economic inequalities and the increasing expenditures on armaments. Useful information about voluntary work being done in developing countries is shared. I was able to meet with the representatives of the various groups that have been working in India. Service Civil International proved to be one of the most interesting exhibits at the event, displaying an old military gun carriage which they had converted into a mobile medical aid van to help poor people in South Africa. The cost was 60,000 Deutsch Marks (Rs. 2.4 lakh). The funds for the project were collected by volunteers through the sale of bandages.

The concluding ceremony was a very solemn function. Despite heavy rains, thousands of people gathered in the stadium to participate in this historic event. Young men and women in colourful dresses entered the stadium carrying a huge globe, singing songs which conveyed their commitment to make every sacrifice necessary to make the earth a peaceful place to live. A huge banner was hung in the stadium. "Die Militarisierung des Himmels macht die Erde zur Nélle." The militarization of the sky turns earth into hell.



Exchanging services

Marc Levi, the director of the Group de Recherche et d'Echanges Technologiques (G.R.E.T.) in Paris, had visited me in India in 1984. In 1985, I was able to meet Marc in Paris and witness the activities of G.R.E.T. Although this organization has many projects in developing countries, one of the main activities is to collect information from various research centres and transfer it to the agencies which are directly engaged in development work in Third World countries. The organization was created in 1976 by a group of volunteers and rural development specialists. At present, G.R.E.T. has seven research teams or "cells" — agriculture, process of agricultural production, non-conventional sources of energy, hand tools, health, rural housing, and small scale industry. Each cell has two basic functions: 1) authentic documentation and further research on the subject, and 2) sending volunteer workers into the field for practical work and experience.

I spent some time studying the documentation on alternative medicine. I found that a lot of study has been conducted on the Indian system of medicine (Ayurved). Useful information is gathered on day-to-day diseases such as fever, colds, and diarrhoea, along with the remedies made from locally available herbs and plants. Considerable information on Ayurved was also available. I was pleased to know that there is a growing interest in Ayurved in the Western world. Nature cures and Yoga are becoming popular day by day.

G.R.E.T. has sponsored Jerome Gue's work on a rural housing project in India. I met Jerome, a French engineer, and a conscientious objector in a tribal village of Bihar where some of my dedicated young friends, most of them engineers and technologists, have started Vikas Bharati, a project on appropriate technology for the upliftment of the poor people in that area. Vikas Bharati is



functioning under the leadership of Mahesh Sharma, a very dynamic youth leader. Jerome, whom I now call Jai Ram, became a very intimate friend in a short time. He had been working on a research project under the guidance of the Centre of Science for Villages at Wardha, Maharashtra. It is a unique experiment which takes science to the villages for the betterment of the have-nots. The direction of this centre is provided by a devoted friend and senior colleague, Devendra Kumar, now vice-chancellor Gandhi Gram Rural University near Madurai.

Appropriate Technology, Design and Development Workshop (APT Workshop) is the creation of two young engineers from England, Rob Hitchings and Jim Tanburn, who stayed with me when they were in New Delhi in 1984. They had started the workshop in 1983, after quitting their lucrative jobs with big multinational companies. The workshop is situated about 150 miles from London in a small village near Mickleton where there are three engineers and one apprentice. APT Workshop's objectives were explained:

There is a tremendous need for the development of relatively simple equipment which can help to alleviate hunger and other effects of poverty in the less developed areas of the world. The basic human requirements, such as clean drinking water, food, shelter and fuel for cooking are not adequately met in these areas. Help given from industrialized nations has often been above the heads of the local poor who receive it, and has not, therefore, been effective. There is a great need for further development of workable solutions, with a suitable method of introducing them and the chief factor is the training of field workers. APT is an association of engineers and craftsmen working to develop and provide solutions.



They have, so far, developed a small loom to knit fishing nets and a hand-operated moulding machine for bending iron sheets and metal pipes. I worked with this group for a few days and was very much impressed by their deep and sincere concern for rural artisans of the Third World. They have taken up some work for the help of artisans in South Africa, Bangladesh and India.

Sharing resources

When I was in the United Kingdom, I was invited to speak to the Penrith Third World Group about ways in which the members could help the poor people of the world. I spoke about the reasons why problems of poverty arise in the Third World and many difficult questions were raised in the following discussion. Can outside financial help solve the problems of the Third World poor? Is the much acclaimed goal of “development” only an instrument of the vested interests of world powers and multinational corporations? Are the developed countries of the Western world responsible for the problems of the poor in developing nations? The basic question is why the gap between the rich and the poor is widening despite the efforts of so many governmental and non-governmental organizations. There must be something wrong in the basic approach to solve these problems. If the developed world continues with this approach, as it is at the present, the problem will become more and more complicated instead of moving towards a solution.

I participated in a similar discussion at a meeting of APT members and supporters. The three engineers spoke about their experiences in South Africa and they raised the fundamental question as to why people in Western countries should help the poor and starving millions of the Third World and, if not, why not. Most of the people gathered were of the opinion that it is good to help the poor financially, but it is equally important to understand the causes of socio-economic



disparities in the world. The real task is to root out the causes which increase the disparities. This fundamental change in our approach has to come, and we have to begin to treat the poorest of the poor as our own brother.

Financial support from the West, however, has not much helped the journey of non-violence. Regardless of the money which is given freely, the sincere concern of the people who share their resources cannot be ignored. People have shown their commitment to understanding the life of poor people in the world and have taken responsibility for their brother. The work of those groups, which I met in my travels, deserves a brief introduction.

Eine Welt Werkstatt is an active group which organizes peace action programmes in the Dusseldorf area. I was invited to speak with them about mental poverty. They operate a store in which they sell items produced in Third World countries, such as Nicaragua, Guatemala, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India.

Sarvodaya Movement, another Dusseldorf group, has been organizing financial help for the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka under the leadership of Aryarattene. Members of this group, although not fully familiar with the Indian Sarvodaya Movement, had been to Sri Lanka and participated in the foot marches (padyatras) organized by Aryarattene.

In Copenhagen, Swallows is an organization which has been mobilizing help for Third World countries. Its members go door-to-door on peace walks; collecting funds for projects in South India and Bangladesh. They, too, have a quarterly magazine which highlights the problems of the Third World.



Help a Village Effort (HAVE) is a Toronto based group of common citizens. They have been active in providing funds for digging drinking water wells in villages of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Gerry Feltham, HAVE chairman, visited India in 1980. He travelled throughout the country, visiting many institutions engaged in the service of rural masses. He also visited Sewagram, Wardha and met Vinobaji. Inspired by Gandhiji and his philosophy, Gerry was moved to organize these Canadian citizens.



CHAPTER V: THE SPIRITUAL REVOLUTIONARY

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to trace the legacy of Gandhi and his principles in India and the few Western countries that I had the chance to visit. In India, my association with the organizations that have been carrying on Gandhi's task is almost of a quarter of a century. The impressions I have shared about the work of these organizations have not been very positive and, for that matter, I have been quite critical of these organizations. My intention in making these criticisms is not to underestimate or undervalue the amount of effort that the people in these organizations have exerted in their attempt to follow Gandhi, but to focus the reader's attention to the fact that the primary objective Gandhi had set forth for himself and the people of India had been forsaken, if not forgotten.

The tragedy in India after Gandhi's death was that the organizations which were striving for the establishment of an order based on Gandhian principles got lost in the slogans of material welfare of the people; Gandhi's basic concepts of overall development of the human personality in seeking truth in life were overlooked. In working for the material good of the people, traditional ways of exploitation of the weak could not be stopped and, instead, the oppressor became the instrument for administering the so-called economic development programmes under the shelter of the elite and ruling class. Thus the status quo continued to exist under the garb of welfare for the poor. The result is that though there is much national development the poor have become poorer and the rich richer. No doubt Gandhi emphasized the need for the economic emancipation of the poor, but at the same time he warned people not to get lost in the fulfillment of needs which reduce the human being to a mere economic phenomena.



The basic mistake we have made in India is to forget the unity of Gandhi as a political and social activist and a spiritual revolutionary. In contrast, the movements in the West that I have described in this book have preserved the spiritual dimensions of Gandhi's teachings like the communities of the Ark in France and the Green village in Italy. One reason has been that, unlike India, Gandhian movements in the West lack economic power and the support of the State. Therefore, of necessity they have had to rely solely on moral force, which was Gandhi's only power. Another reason is that the Indians have made the mistake of worshipping Gandhi as if he had reached a divine state impossible for the common man to achieve. Therefore, we in India no longer aspire to follow Gandhi's spiritual life; instead we just venerate his memory.

In fact, Gandhi was not incarnated; he did not spring from his mother's womb as a saint different from others. Instead, Gandhi was, above all, a common man but he took what was basic to life of the most ordinary person and made it the road to God.

As understand it, Gandhi's mission in life was "to see God face to face". What method he adopted to achieve that goal and how far he was successful in bringing home his own experiences to the common people is a vital question.

In all societies people do strive to realize God in their own lives through their own traditional methods and rituals, whether it be Hindu, Muslim, Jewish or Christian ways of living. The unusual thing about Gandhi was that he not only deviated from traditional ways but strongly attacked the dogmas and values he believed were wrong or untrue in traditional religious rituals. Not only did he live, but also died for the sake of establishing true values in religious life. Ultimately, he reached the conclusion that truth is the real universal religion.



Gandhi's first efforts to seek God by being faithful to the truth came through very simple acts. When Gandhi was 18 years old he decided to go to London to study the law. Gandhi's family was orthodox Hindu and, therefore, resisted the idea because according to Hindu custom crossing the sea was a sin. Gandhi ultimately won over his family by making three simple vows to his mother: that he would not eat meat, not drink wine, and would abstain from sexual relations. His faithfulness to these vows, despite many temptations in England, was the beginning of Gandhi's great self-discipline.

Gandhi made his faithfulness to these vows not only as an act of obedience to his mother, but also a way of seeking truth. Thus he found rationality in these vows and not only tried to follow them in his own life, but also influenced his friends to adopt these values in their lives. Interestingly, Gandhi started his public life with a speech not about violence or the liberation of Indians, but on vegetarianism.

Gandhi first began the serious practice of law following his studies in England when he was sent to South Africa to represent an Indian merchant, Dada Abdulla. His first years in South Africa, from 1887-1896, were the time when the foundation was laid for his future direction. Up to this period Gandhi, though doing good things with good intentions, was still not fully committed to an alternate life style. He had been carrying on his practice as an attorney and a mundane family life. But at the same time he had been seriously thinking of bringing a fundamental change to his personal life with more emphasis on truth and non-violence as a guiding spirit to every aspect of his life. This fact he realized while he was pleading the case of his clients. He realized that litigation is not good and disputes should be decided by mediation and arbitration. In the famous Dada



Abdulla case he persuaded both his client and his opponent to admit the truth and avoid litigation.

Gandhi's growing assertion of the truth of his Indian character was also expressed in his early practice of law. He once left the courtroom when asked to remove his turban as the judge considered it an insult for a lawyer to be wearing a "hat".

Gandhi explained his stand in a letter to the editor of *The Natal Advertiser* on May 24, 1893, stating if in British tradition it is necessary to take off your hat as a mark of respect, according to Indian tradition it is insulting if you go before someone with an uncovered head. Therefore, Gandhi affirmed that he had not insulted the court. Such was the conviction of Gandhi; he could never keep silent even as to the smallest grain of untruth regardless of the consequences.

Although Gandhi went to South Africa in connection with his legal cases, his strong sense of public service and his conviction to fight untruth wherever it existed led him to involvement with the struggle for the rights of the Indian immigrants in South Africa. Out of this struggle came his utmost faith in truth, non-violence and self-suffering. One turning point was when he returned to South Africa after going back to India for his family. Although he was met by an angry mob on the dock, he refused to accept the offer of the Police Superintendent to shelter him in the police station. Instead, he was badly attacked but stood calm and firm amongst the angry and violent mob. He said, "They are sure to quiet down when they realize their mistake. I have trust in their sense of fairness". Gandhi had realized that a man who has fully committed himself to truth must also have utmost faith in his opponent in order to bring home to that opponent that he has no ill feelings for him.



The decade that followed, 1896-1905, was really the period in which Gandhi's basic social philosophy evolved. He gave to the world the unique weapon of Satyagraha. All that he accomplished in his ceaseless struggle for the establishment of right social values that had roots in the spiritual life, such as "all men are brothers", a famous teaching of Christianity. When all legal and legitimate avenues to redress the grievances of the Indians in South Africa were exhausted and the discriminatory "Black Law" was passed by the Transvaal Parliament in 1907, Gandhi gave a call to disobey the discriminatory act, according to which every Indian was required to carry his permit to be shown to the authorities whenever demanded. He said:

We must congratulate the Transvaal government for the courage of their convictions. If we are conscious of the mask of slavery, the act will put on us the onus; we will meet it and refuse to submit to it. The brave rulers who know the value of action rather than speech can only respond to bravery and action.

We are going on with the struggle no matter what happens to me or to any one else. If God's message came to me that I erred I would be the first to acknowledge my fault and beg your forgiveness. But I do not think that I would ever receive that message. This is a religious struggle and we shall fight to the bitter end.

These lines show the clarity of his vision that the cause of the oppressed was to be met with deep faith in God, which Gandhi experienced through the voice within.

It is important to remember that Gandhi carried on his spiritual research side by side with his struggle for the rights of the Indians in South Africa. During this period he made serious study of many religions. He studied Tolstoy's famous



book *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Vivekananda's *Raj Yoga*, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, Arnold's *Light of Asia*, *The Song Celestial* (Bhagavad Gita) and the *New Testament*.

Reading *Unto This Last* moved Gandhi to start an experiment in the simple day today life advocated by Ruskin. In 1903 he purchased 100 acres of land at a distance of fourteen miles from Durban and two and a half miles from Phoenix Railway station. At the same time he had started a weekly publication, *Indian Opinion*, and had bought a printing press for that purpose. He shifted the press to the land he had bought and gave it the name "Phoenix Settlement." Life was very hard for all who lived at the settlement; everybody had to share in the manual labour of the fields to grow food for the community. The teaching of *Unto This Last*, as grasped by Gandhi, was that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. A lawyer has the same value as a barber in as much as both have the same right to earn their livelihood from their work, and that a life of labour, that is the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living. Gandhi used to rise with the dawn, ready to translate these newly imbibed ideas into practice. This was the beginning of shifting to an alternative life-style.

Even though the inspiration for Gandhi's quest for a simple alternative life-style was a book of an Englishman, the roots of that quest went deep into the Indian soil. Gandhi's insights to the true strengths of Indian culture were shown in an early letter to the editor of *The Natal Advertiser* in response to an article which referred to Indian immigrants as "parasites who live a semi-barbaric life." Gandhi, who could not tolerate such a remark, wrote:

You say these Asiatic live a semi-barbaric life. It would be highly interesting to learn your views of a semi-barbaric life. I have some notion of the life



they live. If a room without a nice carpet and ornamental hangings, a dinner table (perhaps universalized) without an expensive table cloth with no flowers to decorate it, with no wine spread, no pork or beef, be a semi-barbaric life; if a white comfortable dress specially adapted to a warm climate which, I am told, many European envy in the trying heat of summer be a semi-barbaric life; if no beer, no tobacco. No ornamental walking stick, no golden watch chain, no luxuriously-fitted sitting room be a semi-barbaric life; if, in short, what one commonly understands by a simple, frugal life be a semi-barbaric life then, indeed, Indian traders must be guilty of the charge, and the sooner the semi-barbarity is wiped out from the highest colonial civilization, the better it is.

Gandhi linked his spiritual quest, simplified life style and struggle for the cause of the oppressed in the famous and very hotly debated book, *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule), published in 1909. He sent a copy of this book to Tolstoy, who in return wrote, "I have read book with great interest, for I consider the question there dealt with — passive resistance— to be of very great importance, not only for India but for the whole of humanity." Gokhale, whom Gandhi considered as his political Guru, reacted very sharply about the book, "So hasty and crude that Gandhi himself would destroy the book after spending a year in India." Gandhi was only forty years old when he wrote this book, but as late as 1945 he said, "I withdraw nothing except one word in it."

I consider this small book as an encyclopedia of Gandhi's life philosophy. The beauty of the man was that he never prevailed upon anybody to follow it. He himself was striving to live up to the ideas he advocated in the book throughout his life. One may disagree with what Gandhi has written about doctors, lawyers,



and railways and the blind following of machines, but none could differ with him on the choice between soul force and brute force.

Gandhi said, in summarizing the book years later, that there is no such thing as Western or European civilization; there is modern civilization which is purely material. It is not the British who are ruling India, but modern civilization. If British rule was replaced tomorrow by Indian rule based on modern methods India would not be better; she would only become another nation of Europe or America. Increase of material comforts does not in any way cause moral growth. India's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learned during the past fifty years of British rule. The material things of modern civilization have to go and the so-called upper class must learn to live consciously, religiously and deliberately the simple life of the peasant knowing it to be a life giving true happiness. East and West can only really meet when the West has thrown overboard modern civilization almost in its entirety. They might seem to meet if the East adopts modern civilization, but that meeting would only be an armed truce such as exists between Germany and England, both nations living in the hall of Death in order to avoid being devoured the one by the other.

All we have to do today is replace "Germany and England" with the two super powers and we will see how everything in Gandhi's prophecy has come true.

In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi synthesized the Hindu way of living with the best he learned from other religions and writers. The word "Hind"; represents the Hindu way of life and "Swaraj" means one's own rule or self-rule. He had said, defining the ideal of Swaraj, "It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. Such Swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself. What others get from me is not Swaraj but foreign rule."



In order to achieve Swaraj one has, at first, to follow four fundamental rules to be a “Satyagrahi.” These guiding principles are life of truthfulness, life of voluntary poverty, life of fearlessness and life of Brahmacharya (dwelling in God). All four are so closely linked that it is not possible to follow a single rule in isolation. A man who does not lead a life of truthfulness can never be a fearless man, and one who does not have a life of voluntary poverty would always be prevailed upon by his desire. Hence, a weak man cannot be fearless, much less truthful. Therefore, all four of these guiding principles must be followed by the true Satyagrahi. In other words, we can say that these principles are the essence of spiritual life. When one starts following this path as a part of inner or self-discipline, one gets the power to listen to the voice within. It is the voice within which helps one to adhere to the truth; thus Gandhi explained the term Satyagraha as “the force which is born out of truth, love and non-violence.”

A Satyagrahi can only attain true Swaraj at a stage when he no longer needs any forced discipline. In the Institution of the State, power is the outcome of man’s tendency to allow himself to be ruled by forced discipline. This tendency is partially due to man’s inner weaknesses and partially due to the circumstances in which he lives and the structure of society based on the existing socio-economic political system.

In his battle against existing socio-economic disparities Gandhi neither blamed the rich nor advocated a Marx-like class struggle, but tried to bring home to the rich that whenever one possess more than his basic needs he is stealing. Such an approach gave a new and revolutionary meaning to the traditional religious belief that stealing is a sin. Gandhi’s approach, unlike Marx who advocated force and violence against the institution of private property, was to



teach the people that all men are brothers, all have responsibility for the other and all have the right to have access to the gifts of God and nature.

Marx advocated a stateless society in which the ultimate goal would be achieved by a class struggle through violent means. But the past history of more than one hundred years shows that Marxism has totally failed to achieve that ideal. Whenever so-called revolutions took place on Marx's theory, they all resulted in societies completely in the iron grip of the Institution of the State. Hence people have lost faith in Marxism. Why has Marxism failed? Because the wrong means were used to achieve a good end.

Here is the relevance of Gandhi for all times to come. He also advocated for a stateless society, not by violent means but through the application of non-violence and love which he called "Sarvodaya." The process of bringing about social change through non-violence has to start with the individual himself first and then it would help others to change. Gandhi lived the life of a true Satyagrahi and, therefore, he could influence the whole world by his personal example.

The two methods Gandhi evolved for building a society based on non-violence and love were to disassociate from untruth wherever you see it in your life and to identify yourself with the weakest of the weak, the poorest of the poor. This was, in a nutshell, Gandhi's whole life philosophy. Though apparently so simple, these methods are hard to put into life, yet it was the practice of these principles in life that gave Gandhi to the world. It is up to each individual to choose the path they want to follow.



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If humanity has to survive, non-violence is the only way. For building a society based on non-violence, two things are a must — geo-political boundaries have to be eliminated and the Institution of Private Property has to go. Ever increasing piles of nuclear and other armaments on one side and the ever widening gulf between the rich and the poor on the other, is the outcome of these two phenomena that are ruling this world today. A fundamental change in our lifestyles is needed. To begin with, let us pledge ourselves to think positively, act locally and live globally.

— A.B.



Community of the Ark in France



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Participants of a 'Non-violent Action' training camp that the author conducted in Italy in 1984.



Demonstration of spinning in St. Benedictine Abbey near Chicago, U.S.A.





'People's March for a Non-violent Society' organised by Gandhi-In-Action in 1986, was concluded on the Holy Mounte Rosa in Italy. Participants performed a 'Vedic Yagna'.



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