

# Gandhi for the new generation

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TO  
NARAYAN DESAI

## FOREWORD

I have gone through with interest the two lectures that Dr. Gunvant Shah delivered under the Gandhi Lecture Series organized by Baroda Municipal Corporation. One gets an impression that he has taken enough pains in preparing the lectures. I am glad that what he spoke after a thorough preparation is now being published.

I do not find myself in agreement with Dr. Shah on one or two points. As I understand it, what Dr. Shah tries to point out is that over-emphasis on celibacy and a rather rigid code of conduct cannot be driven home to the present generation and that certain ideas of Gandhiji are debatable from the viewpoint of psychology. I believe that what Gandhiji has said regarding celibacy is essential to realize the Divine after reaching the climax of spirituality. Very few individuals can do so. The *Bhagawad Gita* clearly states:

Manushyanam sahasresu

Kaschid yatati siddhaye

Yatatam api siddhanam

Kaschin mam vetti tattvatah

"Among thousands of men scarcely one strives for perfection and of those who strive and succeed, scarcely one knows Me in truth."

There is a vast difference between an *Oordhvaretus* (one whose semen is sublimated) and a *Ritugami* (one who follows the season). And a *Ritugami* too has to observe perfect celibacy if he wants to realize Truth. Gandhiji did not impose celibacy on others but those who vowed for it were not properly tested by him and such people could not observe complete celibacy. I humbly believe that this is the result of a sort of covetousness. Gandhiji was a human being and that was his real distinction. Since he did not attain perfection it is possible that he had in him such benevolent covetousness. Had it not been the case and had he attained perfection, it would not have been possible for him to achieve

independence for the country. He granted exemption to Nirmalabehn and others in regard to celibacy. This proves that he did not impose celibacy on others. His severe code of conduct was for himself. That too he never tried to impose on others. We may feel that it was severe but a person who wants to strive for emancipation should observe it and then he would find it natural. This is my belief. Gandhiji's specific mission for the earthly life was to win independence and to lead the country again towards her unique civilization. This work of his has been unique in the history so far.

I agree with other points covered by Gunvantbhai in the two lectures and I believe that by giving such meaningful lectures he has done some real good service to the people. I wish this book would get wide publicity and people in general and the youth in particular would read it. Such literature is necessary to guide the new generation to follow the proper path.

In response to Gunvantbhai's letter I wrote that writing a foreword might be difficult owing to my disagreement on one or two points. He insisted that those points can be discussed in the foreword keeping intact the disagreement. I am indeed very happy to note that by doing so he has given a proof of his open-mindedness. In the second lecture he has nicely shown how open was the mind of Gandhiji. His presentation based on facts and incidents is really admirable. His style would attract the present generation since one finds in his presentation a happy blend of logic and reflective thinking.

I welcome such an earnest attempt and congratulate Gunvantbhai while expressing the hope that thoughts of Gandhiji would reach the youth of Gujarat and the country at large.

Bombay,

Morarji Desai

14, November 1981

## PREFACE

We generally forget the difference between 'criticism' and 'condemnation'. It is my humble belief that Gandhian thought has not been critically examined to the extent it has either been admired or condemned. The new generation has suffered a lot on this account.

It is rather difficult to keep away from eulogy while thinking about a towering personality such as Gandhiji. Moreover those who claim to be his uncritical followers would take everything from him to be correct and good. This may be pardonable but certainly not desirable. It is quite possible that blind admiration for somebody might result in escapism. Similarly condemnation without sufficient support of facts is also another way of one's tendency to escape. The new generation is, to a great extent, free from both these tendencies to escape in the sense that they are free from the eulogy of the uncritical followers as well as the prejudices of those who condemn. It seems to me that such a detachment can prove quite rewarding for a critical inquiry.

If I can keep myself away from adoration for a moment, I feel like saying that Gandhiji was a conscientious man. It was the faith in his conscience that ultimately resulted in the faith in truth. It was because of such profound faith that even after calling himself a 'traditional Hindu', he could be a crusader against untouchability and die for the cause of secularism. It was because of his faith in truth that he could withdraw the call for the battle when violence erupted in Chauri Chaura. This would not have been possible, had his loyalty to the institution been more powerful than his faith in truth. Changing over to a simple dress, a mere loin-cloth, is not possible without such a faith in conscience. One could quote many instances to prove that he followed his inner voice regardless of what the friends or the rivals would say. Such a peculiarity gives Gandhiji a distinct position vis-a-vis other great persons. The secret of having many followers, who were' comparatively superior to him in cleverness, scholarship and ability, and who remained with him till the end, lies in his way

of life which was action-based, clean and transparent like a stream babbling along - the life steeped in the desire to realize God.

One may get an impression that the new generation is not interested in Gandhiji. Such stages do come after the life of great men. It has dawned upon many thinkers that the relevance of certain fundamentals of Gandhian thought would go on increasing with the passage of time. Gandhian thought too would change its form in the years to come and attain new dimensions. Watsonian behaviourism of 1912 underwent a change as a result of experimentation of neo-behaviourists like Thorndike, Guthrie, Skinner and Hull. Psycho-analysis of Freud resulted in a neo-Freudian thought after the contributions of Eric Burn, Thomas Harris, Erich Fromm, Anna Freud (Freud's daughter) and Ronald Layng. Classical gestalt theory of Koffka, Kohler and Werthemir got a new form, thanks to the contributions of neo-gestaltists like Kurt Lewin and Tolman. Dalton Atomic Theory got modified and gave way to modern atomic theory owing to Avogadro's hypothesis. It seems that Gandhian thought too is undergoing such a metamorphosis and the classical Gandhian thought is developing into a neo-Gandhian thought at the global level. Such a thought- process is not only welcome but also inevitable. Those who uncritically followed Gandhiji years ago feel unhappy perhaps because they might be unable to understand the new context. Gandhiji wrote *Hind Swaraj* in the year 1909. The book is extremely valuable to understand Gandhiji but how could we ever bring back the year 1909 now?

One feels surprised on noticing the great change that has overwhelmed the new generation. A 'Disco-mad' culture is evolving. Intoxicating and life-corroding materials like hashish, cocaine, L.S.D., 'needle', etc. are dissipating the vitality of our youngster. While dealing with the younger generation, one has to face problems of communication gap. Many issues come to the fore in the absence of a dialogue between the old generation and the hedonist youth of today. The strategy to communicate Gandhian thought to the new generation should be modern. One would surely be frustrated if *Hind Swaraj* is placed in their hands straightaway. While preparing the lectures, I had this point in mind. I shall be

satisfied even if some thoughts of Gandhi reach the youth. My intention was to operate on the 'wavelength' of the modern youth.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Jatindra Mody, Mayor, Baroda Municipal Corporation, for extending an invitation to me to deliver these lectures. I would not have ventured to accept the invitation for such a prestigious lecture series but for the insistence from my friends Mr. Rajnikant Jani and Mr. Navneet Dave. I express my grateful thanks to the listeners also. My grateful thanks due to Mrs. Suhas C. Almoula for preparing the English version of the lectures with meticulous care. Dr. (Miss) Kalindi Randeri and Dr. Mahendra Joshi were kind enough to help me in giving final touches to the English rendering of the lectures. Shri Dhirubhai Desai and Shri Kanubhai Desai were kind enough to go through the manuscript before it went to the press. I thank them for their invaluable help. I wish to put on record my deep debt of gratitude to Shri Morarji Desai who accepted my request to write a foreword for the book in spite of honest differences of opinion. The foreword bears a testimony to the fact that in spite of many differences in views, a dialogue is possible. Elders do allege that I am partial to the younger generation. I accept this allegation which to me is quite agreeable.

A joke is now getting popular at the international level: "In capitalism, man exploits man; in communism it is the other way round." Gandhiji was for the creation of a society free from exploitation - a society where one man's swarajya does not become a burden on the shoulders of somebody else. I would suggest to my young friends that they read Tolstoy's famous book entitled *What Then Must We Do* in order to appreciate this point.

Till today, the condition of the world was such that man had many problems before him. Today it seems that man himself is a problem. In such circumstances the world would need Gandhiji for centuries to come. The centre of gravity of my lectures was precisely this.

I have full faith in the capacity of the younger people to understand where their own interest lies. The basis of such a deep faith is that I too am not yet too old to belong to the old generation.

24, Kadambapalli.

Gunvant Shah

Nanpura,

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17<sup>th</sup> April 1982



### **Important reading for the New Generation**

*Lead Kindly Light* - Vincent Sheen

*Gandhi's Truth* - Eric Erikson

*The Gita According to Gandhi* - Mahadev Desai

*To Be or To Havel*

*Small Is Beautiful* - E. F. Shumakher

*Tools for Conviviality* - Ivan Illich

*Gandhi's Emissary* - Sudhir Ghosh

*Mahatma Gandhi - The Last Phase* - Pyarelal

*Celebration of Awareness* - Ivan Illich

*Energy and Equity* - Ivan Illich

*The Third Wave* - Elwin Toffler

*An Autobiography* - Gandhiji

*Stray Glimpses of Bapu* - Kakasaheb Kalelkar

*India Wins Freedom* - Abul Kalam Azad

*Freedom at Midnight* - Collins and Ka'pier

*Gandhi - A Memoir* - William Sheirer

Note: After having read the books mentioned above, the reader must read Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj*. It is necessary in order to understand 'classical Gandhian thought'.

## I. GANDHIJI AND THE NEW GENERATION

At the outset I would like to have a few frank words with you. When I received the invitation from the Mayor, Dr. Jatinbhai Modi, to deliver these two lectures, I was more surprised than delighted; but when I subsequently saw the list of speakers, I became conscious of my poor credentials. I have an immense attraction for Gandhiji's philosophy and I have studied it also to some extent but I am certainly not a Gandhi-ite. Although I represent a generation which has not seen Gandhiji in person, my ability to evaluate Gandhiji's greatness in public is extremely limited. I shall say a few things during these two days as a student of Gandhiji's philosophy and whilst doing so I shall try to preserve what may be termed as ruthless objectivity. It is my humble belief that lack of direct contact and the time-lag may, to some extent, prove beneficial in getting a true assessment of the unique phenomenon called 'Gandhi'.

My affinity with Baroda has been preserved for many reasons. I am in many ways fond of this Baroda of Premanand, Ustad Faiyazkhan, Maharaja Sayajirao, Vinoba Bhave, Ramanlal Desai and Kishansinh Chavda. My friends from Surat often tease me by calling me a 'Barodian' and my friends in Baroda harass me by calling me a 'Surati'. I have preserved like a treasure my acquaintance of twelve long years with green tender leaves of the thousands of *asopalave* trees here. I am grateful to the Baroda Municipal Corporation for this 'home coming' and for giving me an opportunity to meet my friends and say a few words about Gandhiji. I would now like to come to my subject.

After Gandhiji's demise, Kishorlal Mashruwala stated in his first editorial of *Harijan* that whatever is published in *Harijan* after 1948 should not be considered an authentic interpretation of Gandhi. One can see, in this statement by Mashruwala, an alertness, worthy of a radical thinker, to ensure that no injustice is done to a great man like Gandhiji.

I want to say with full humility that Gandhiji was not a man with a closed mind whom the new generation would dislike. The image of Gandhiji which today's generation has acquired has been passed on through his so-called followers.

There have been so many followers between Gandhiji's true image and today's young men, that the original image has suffered refraction, if I may say so. The new generation fully respects Gandhiji, it even admires him but it is not much attracted towards him; the underlying reason for this lies in such a refraction. Thus there has been quite a bit of misunderstanding because the new generation has received 'Gandhiji's philosophy through the older generation. This misunderstanding is entirely forgivable, because when Gandhiji himself was not free from human imperfections, what can one say about his followers?

When Vinobaji inaugurated 'Sardar Bhavan' hardly two hundred metres from here, Kishansinh Chavda had asked him why Bapu had chosen him as the first Satyagrahi. Vinoba had answered : "Bapu saw the whole of me, hence my faults were not noticed by him." Although some of his followers were as great as Plato or Aristotle, after all they were human beings! Even if we set aside the followers, still it must be said that there are so many things in Gandhiji's life which the young people of today would like to appreciate. However, there are certain things in his life which would not be acceptable to the young today. I would like to examine both these aspects in the context of the aspirations of today's younger generation.

Deliberately, I shall first discuss things which today's generation may not like, and then go on to the likeable aspects. Once I had asked a college-going girl as to what was her perception of Gandhiji. She had replied with an honesty that Gandhiji would have liked: "It is true that Gandhiji was a great man but he was extremely dry, a man of principles and the one who was opposed to pleasure. This is my impression." It is true that there is no depth in this reply, but we must realize that such a widespread misconception plays a great role in keeping the new generation away from Gandhiji. There are two main factors which would not be acceptable to today's generation. They are:

- (i) Too much emphasis on celibacy
- (ii) Rigid code of behaviour

It seems Gandhiji's insistence on celibacy can be described as extreme. Instead of limiting this insistence to himself he extended its imposition on other

married couples. When I was young, my 'Gandhian' elders had compelled me to read Mashruwala's book dealing with 'Man-Woman Decorum', the book for which Gandhiji cannot be held responsible. When I grew up and studied as well as taught about psychologists like Freud, Karl Jung, Adler, Ronald Laying, Erich Fromm and Eric Erickson, I realized fully the limitations of this book. I have felt that although Gandhiji's attitude to sex was not merely religious, it is a matter of deep research whether it was completely scientific or psychological.

Whilst discussing this topic I would like to narrate (in my words) an incident which Manubhai Pancholi had told me.

A Harijan girl named Laxmi who had been adopted by Gandhiji, once went to her village and returned to the Ashram with her hair bobbed cut. Gandhiji was a little disturbed to see the new fashionable Laxmi. He spoke to Maganlal Gandhi about this and Gandhiji and Maganlal got together and using some force, cut off Laxmi's hair. Laxmi cried but what could she do before elders? The matter was over but the Mahatma who was in the habit of severely scrutinising his own actions kept feeling that 'something wrong' had occurred. Meanwhile Nanabhai Bhatt arrived. Gandhiji narrated to him the whole incident and asked for his opinion. Nanabhai replied, "Because you and Maganbhai are older in age than Laxmi, is it right to believe that your soul is greater than hers?" Gandhiji had accepted the point implied in this reply.

Many years ago a book entitled *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) based on the *Vedas* was published by Pandit Satavalekar. In it is stated that a *brahmachari* (celibate) has two main qualities: (1) *Oordhvaretas* and (2) *Ritugami*. He, whose semen has not been shed, but is drawn higher is called *Oordhvaretas*. He who is *Ritugami* that is one who follows seasons, is also a *brahmachari*. Pandit Satavalekar said that according to the *Vedas* even a mango tree or a dog is a *brahmachari* because it is *Ritugami*. Such a liberal interpretation of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) is seen in the *Vedas*. If we just have a glimpse of what Gandhiji wrote on the subject we shall have some idea of how far today's generation has strayed from him.

As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, tied a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love. Hence one who would obey the law of *ahimsa* cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

Then what about people who are already married? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer up their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married.... If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. The very thought that all the women in the world are one's sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains.<sup>1</sup>

In his play *Brahmacharyashram*, K. M. Munshi had bitterly ridiculed Gandhiji's views on celibacy but it must be noted that Gandhiji himself had enjoyed this ridicule.

I am not going to discuss here Gandhiji's views on *brahmacharya*. I only wish to maintain that today's generation is not able to stand some of Gandhiji's honest views based on long experience. The same may be said about the severe code of conduct espoused by *Ekadash Vratas* (Eleven Vows).

You will be surprised to know that Gandhiji had also written a primer for children. The very first chapter in that primer begins with an insistence on getting up at four o'clock in the morning. The second chapter contains the 'bitter' lesson that teeth must be cleaned with a twig of *Nimb* (margose) tree. His primer is a specimen of the sort of book which can be written without even an elementary knowledge of child psychology. The child educationist Shri Gijubhai Badheka, well known as 'the whiskered mother' of children in Gujarat, went so far as to say : "Had I not been told that this primer is by Gandhiji, I would have, after reading, put it in the waste paper basket." Here I am easily reminded of Vinobaji dipping children, in the early morning of winter, in the cold waters of Sabarmati. However, in all fairness to Vinobaji, we should also note that after several years, Vinobaji did acknowledge his mistake in doing so.

I not only accept new generation's right to dislike, but if necessary, even to discard some of Gandhiji's insinuations, opinions and biases. I would add that it is even essential to do so but at the same time I would hasten to emphasize that it will be a great loss to the new generation to ignore many other attractive facets of Gandhiji's versatile personality. It is necessary to evaluate the Mahatma in a holistic manner, the way he himself saw Vinoba.

Gandhiji's life contains many facets which would attract the new generation. I think the following could be included among them:

- (i) Unity of thought and action
- (ii) Complete transparency
- (iii) A revolutionary way of life steeped in *Satyagraha*.

Let us examine these in detail. A well-known characteristic of today's generation is that it is willing to accept faults but not in the least prepared to accept hypocrisy. In Gandhiji, who could say, 'my life is my message', we see an honest effort to put into practice what he believed in.

Today one comes across Marxists, who own big properties and are millionaires. We have also no dearth of similar 'Gandhians'. In this country there are saints and priests who are engulfed in legal battles regarding property. A determined effort to keep endeavouring to put into practice what he considered to be true, is the most radiant feature of Gandhiji's life. To catch hold of a random point of his life and to term it 'Gandhian Philosophy' is dangerous. This is where the so-called Gandhians have gone wrong.

Acharya Kripalani had narrated an incident in this very hall and in this very lecture series, which could be helpful in understanding Gandhiji.

An American lady went into a huge departmental store for shopping. After buying many items she purchased an expensive necklace. She took the advice of a salesman in the same store as to which other shop was good for shopping and she went into another shop not quite far. There she saw a necklace which was quite similar to the necklace which she had purchased. Just out of curiosity, she asked the price, and discovered that the previous shopkeeper had

charged her 15 dollars more. When she went to the counter to make the payment after finishing her shopping, she found that her purse was missing. Whilst she was worrying about her purse, the salesman from the previous shop approached her and handed over the purse. This was the same person who had charged her fifteen dollars more for the necklace. The lady could not resist asking him : "What kind of morality you people have? On the one hand to return the purse and on the other to charge fifteen dollars more? What sort of behaviour is this?" That man understood the lady's argument. Coolly he replied: "Madam, that was my commercial morality and this is my social morality."

In this way, men have made divisions of morality as well as of life. If we understand that Gandhiji had never made such divisions of life, we will be saved from many a 'Gandhian problem'. If a person kills someone with the spindle of the spinning wheel it does not become a 'Gandhian' murder. If someone gives you pure poison which is a village industry product, it does not cease to be poison. If a doctor finishes off someone with the tip of an injection needle, it is not considered a 'medical' murder. If tomorrow the Khadi emporium starts selling revolvers, they do not become 'non-violent' revolvers.

I would request my young friends to read twice Gandhiji's introduction to *Anasaktiyoga* (The Gospel of Selfless Action). Look at this sentence which is an example of prose which is simple, effective, born out of practice and expressive of truth. "He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises."<sup>2</sup> Many commentaries have been written on the *Gita*, but with the exception of Gandhiji, no commentator has claimed to have made his comments after endeavouring for forty years to live according to the precepts of the *Gita*. It is no small matter that Gandhiji could make such a claim and yet displays a humility befitting one who is in search of truth. The same humility can be discerned in the introduction to his autobiography which bears the Unusual title, *Experiments With Truth*. Here is a nice extract:

As I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet... I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions... I hope and pray that no one

will regard the advice interspersed in the following chapters as authoritative. The experiments narrated should be regarded as illustrations, in the light of which every one may carry on his own experiments according to his own inclination and capacity.... I am not going either to conceal or understate any ugly things that must be told. I hope to acquaint the reader fully with all my faults and errors. My purpose is to describe experiments in the science of *Satyagraha*, not to say how good I am.... Let hundreds like me perish, but let truth prevail. Let us not reduce the standard of truth even by a hair's breadth for judging erring mortals like myself.<sup>3</sup>

On each and every page of his autobiography, we see without any exception, a transparency par excellence. Let all of us, who have gathered together over here, think for a moment how many of us would be able to reveal to others, without hiding anything, all that has happened during the past twenty-four hours! It is not just black money which people hide, but also things which need not be hidden. If we unravel the layers of our being and examine them carefully, we shall find that there are more things worth hiding than those worth revealing. Even those who are prominent, are busy devoting their energies to appearing as they ought to be, rather than appearing as they are. But Gandhiji was different. He was extremely anxious to present himself to society just as he really was. That is why in his last days he had told Manu Gandhi that if he died in his bed disease-ridden, she should declare to the world that he was a fake Mahatma. Perhaps because of such an acute anxiety he undertook what could be called a highly controversial experiment of sharing the bed naked at night with Manu who was like his daughter. Many prominent persons have expressed their distaste for this experiment. Many others have ridiculed it. Vinobaji had given his reaction to Gandhiji in a few words: "Where is the need to prove that soil is soil!" My view is that the reason why he undertook such a tough experiment was that if, at the end of this experiment, he fell short of his own expectations; he would immediately declare that he was not the great man people believed him to be. This is what I call an acute anxiety to reveal oneself as one really is. Such an anxiety can be discerned in two autobiographies after Gandhiji. One is Bertrand Russell's autobiography



wherein one finds unmixed frankness and the other is Burma's former Prime Minister U Nu's autobiography entitled *U NU : The Saturday's Son*. It is difficult to find someone who will equal Gandhiji in this respect. Gandhiji's distinguishing trait was that he could portray his error as Himalayan and his achievement as a minute particle. It is not difficult to explain to the new generation this second major dimension of Gandhiji's life, that is his ability to reveal himself as he was before millions of his friends and countrymen. For a full half century, Gandhiji's life was like an open book to the common man of undivided India - an open book which, with the passage of time, proved to be a history of India.

The third aspect of Gandhiji could attract the new generation like a magnet. This was his revolutionary way of life which was steeped in Satyagraha. The first issue of *Harijan* was published on the 11th February, 1933 from Puna. In it, someone had asked Gandhiji, "Is fasting a form of pressurising?" Gandhiji had stated in his reply: "I believe that there is no prayer without fasting and there is no real fast without prayer. My fast was the prayer of a soul in agony."<sup>4</sup> This reply of Gandhiji is worth noting in the context of the present state of 'fasting' which he had propounded. The words Gandhiji had uttered on a full-moon night in Samvat 1976 (1920 A. D.) before forty thousand pilgrims in Dakor would penetrate the heart of any young man:

If need be, I can resort to non-co-operation against my own son. Likewise, I may do so against the Empire... It does not say this in so many words, but it acts as it did in the Punjab. As a devotee of Lord Krishna, I ask you to boycott the schools and law- courts of such an Empire.... Let your hearts be guided by God alone. The moment you do so, your chains will break.

\* \* \*

Non-co-operation is a golden weapon, a weapon of the gods. When you see injustice, see someone as evil incarnate, you should forsake him: Shri Krishna taught this to the Hindus, the Prophet Mahomed to the *Muslims and the Zend-Avesta teaches it to the Parsis. Tulsidas has said, in his gentle way, that one should keep away from the wicked.... Non-co-operation does not proceed from*

*ill will or hatred. It is a religious duty for the man of religion. Even between father and son, non-co-operation is proper; between man and wife and between relatives, it is a duty.*<sup>5</sup>

Whilst *speaking in Surat* on January 31, 1922 he had said:

Let some General Dyer stand before us with his troops. Let him start firing without warning us. It is my prayer to God that, if that happens, I should continue to talk to you cheerfully even at that time just as I am doing now and that you should all remain sitting calmly then, under a shower of bullets, as you are doing now. It would be a great thing for Gujarat if, at that time, your ears and backs were turned towards me but your chests and your eyes faced the direction from which the bullets came and you welcomed them....Though our prejudice against the untouchables is waning, we are not yet ready to regard them as our blood-brothers. How many among us would be ready to suck out the poison if one of them was bitten by a snake?<sup>6</sup>

By quoting these abstracts, I only want to prove that his civil disobedience or non-co-operation was not directed against the foreign rule only. He must have received his inspiration for non-co-operation from Prahlad.<sup>7</sup> Here was a person who, if need be, would revolt against his own self. When he had fasted in protest against the move for separate constituency for Harijans in Poona in the year 1932, he had written to Dr. Ambedkar, "Whereas, you are an untouchable, I have of my own accord become an untouchable." When *Harijan* was started from Poona shortly thereafter, he had requested Dr. Ambedkar for a message for the first number. Instead of giving a message, Dr. Ambedkar had made a short statement which was full of bitterness. This statement was published in *Harijan* and at the end of it, Gandhiji had written a note in defence of the bitter tone.

Gandhiji's *Satyagraha* was aimed not at any particular individual but at the undesirable element either in a person or a group of persons. He had given many tough fights to General Smuts in South Africa but when Gandhiji was seventy years old, the General had with complete frankness expressed his reverence for him. I shall talk about this in detail in my next lecture. The

secret of the friendship which the Britishers developed for him was his impersonal attitude in offering *Satyagraha*.

Gandhiji's consciousness would work with full might wherever he saw injustice, exploitation and terrorising. At such a moment, he would not think what he alone would be able to achieve. I call this *Jatayu Vritti* (Jatayu tendency). Jatayu of the *Ramayana* was aware that he would not be able to defeat Ravana. But did that mean that Ravana could be allowed to kidnap Sita without any opposition? "Ravana could do such a thing only after my death." This *Jatayu Vritti* has almost vanished after Gandhiji's demise and that is why corruption has increased. Everyone is a witness to corruption and they all say helplessly, "What can we do?" Gandhiji had never accepted such helplessness.

Was this the same Gandhi, who had felt that the entire court was whirling around him when he was pleading Mamibai's case in Bombay's Small Cause Court? Was this the same Gandhi, who hit the headlines as the 'unwelcome visitor' in Durban's newspapers on his first day when he refused to remove his turban? Was this the same Gandhi, whom a policeman had dragged out of a train in bitter cold at Maritzburgh station when he was travelling from Durban to Pretoria? Was this the same Gandhi who had started true legal practice by settling Dada Abdulla's case out of the court? Was this the same Gandhi, who had dragged Kasturba to the door and asked her to get out, when he had quarreled with her as she was coming down the stairs unwillingly holding a vessel full of urine in her hands? Was this the same Gandhi, who had organized Satyagrahas in Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli and Dharasana and awakened the spirit of the people of India? Was this the same Gandhi, who in his early years, was even afraid of going in the dark? Yes, this was the same Gandhi who kept increasing his moral strength through a way of living steeped in truth and who succeeded in shaking the most powerful government in the world by asking them to 'Quit India'.

Shaken by the poverty in the country, he altered his dress and his way of living in a manner worthy of an uncompromising revolutionary. His uniqueness lay in the easy manner in which he absorbed the finest element of Indian culture in

all his activities. He glorified an ordinary act like spinning by calling it *Katan Yagna* (Sacrificial Spinning). By calling Yeravda prison Yeravda Mandir (Yeravda Temple), he gave a new meaning to prison life. In the same way going to prison became 'Jail Yatra' (pilgrimage) and a public meeting became *Prarthana Sabha* (prayer meeting). Like an adept strategist, he used these concepts to kindle the potential cultural elements which lay deep down in the being of an ordinary man of India. The extensive mass education which he imparted for nearly half a century, culminated in the clarion call, 'Quit India'. And then it so happened that Gandhiji's voice became the voice of India and the new generation in those days heard that voice. A great representative of the youth of that age, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "Wherever he sat, that place became a temple and wherever he went, that place became sacred."

In Gandhiji's life, a revolutionary style of living keeps 'propping' up along with devotion to non-violence. The conflict in life arising from a search for the highest elements in humanity can also be perceived in his life. The sound of footsteps of revolution can be heard in the smallest events of his life. These footsteps sound differently from the thumping of the boots of soldiers on parade. At times, it so happens that only a woodcutter's action is considered 'revolutionary' and a gardener's peaceful, long lasting work is not considered revolutionary. Gandhiji was interested in going to the root of every problem. Owing to lack of time I am foregoing the temptation to talk about many things which would undoubtedly impress the new generation. All the same I cannot but mention one aspect which we have not devoted adequate attention to.

According to the news received from Geneva, 53 Nobel Prize winners of the world have issued a joint statement after observing the rapidly changing conditions in the world. In this statement they say:

The underlying factor in the widespread restlessness in man today is the condition of the world today. If any change has to be effected in it, then there is only one way open to human beings - and that is civil disobedience with the sole stipulation that basic human rights are kept in view. The political and economic policies of today are responsible for thrusting crores of people into

hunger and death. The rich and powerful people of the world are the most responsible for this state of affairs. But they are not the only ones. If the helpless people decide to guide their own destiny and more and more persons do not obey other rule except the fundamental right of living and use the weapon of non-violent conflict wielded by Gandhi for his own demands, then it is certain that we shall be free from this calamity before our own eyes.<sup>8</sup>

One can realize how relevant Gandhiji's *Satyagraha* is in today's global conditions.

Gandhiji was a Vaishnava and he also possessed the cleverness of a Vaishnava. He never used this cleverness to humiliate anyone or to project himself better than what he was. That is why even his enemies were attracted by his cleverness. His humour had a dash of seriousness and his seriousness was adorned by a touch of humour. Let us see an incident noted by Kakasaheb Kalelkar.

One day, I went to the Press. There was Swami, plunged in work as usual, a glass of milk beside him, some ripe and luscious bananas lying before him, and proof after proof coming into his hands from the Press. He would break off a bit of banana with his left hand and correct proofs with his right. The proof dealt with, he would take a hasty sip of the milk. The sip taken, back to his proof again! This kind of thing used to go on for three or four days at a stretch. No time to bathe. No time for anything at all – sleeping where he worked. This was the way he was working when he received a card from Bapu, despatched from some place in North Bharat. It ran like this: "You are looking after Navajivan so well, that I have no cause to worry. I hope your work progresses satisfactorily." Swami was greatly puzzled. Why had Bapu sent him such a card? "I have complained of no difficulties, nor is it likely that any one has complained about me." He wondered and pondered, and then he suddenly remembered. "Oh!" he said, "of course, that is what it is! I promised to work the Navajivan Press for six months, and the six months are up, today. Oh! the clever old *bania*! This is his way of getting that promise renewed! I had completely forgotten that originally I came here for six months only! Look at

the way he is binding me over for a further period; Jivatram (Kripalani) is quite right when he says that that old man is the wildest bird you could come across in a day's journey!"<sup>9</sup>

The sad thing is that Gandhiji, as he was, has not reached today's generation, as I have said earlier; only a distorted Gandhiji has reached them. Some ideas of Gandhiji have reached the new generation through his followers and that too those followers who are too much engaged in politics. At times the new generation has experienced Gandhiji through those persons who supported him with complete honesty until independence was attained and subsequently with equal dishonesty deserted him in private. There would have been no objection if they had deserted him in public since atonement would have been possible when the error was realized. But that was not to be. They kept encasing Gandhiji and garlanding his statues. Gandhiji suffered from all sides. His critics abused him as old fashioned and his admirers abandoned him whilst calling him *Bapu* (loving father). Furthermore, his genuine followers did him injustice by being rigid and not allowing the slightest modification of the classical Gandhian Thought.

Before concluding my lecture on 'Gandhi for the New Generation', I would like to say a few words about today's new generation. When we were young we were always being told, "respect your elders". Now that we have grown up, we are repeatedly being told "respect the young". I am a representative of the generation which has lost on both counts. The rising generation considers me old and the old generation considers me young. In a way this is a position of vantage because there is a possibility of becoming a bridge between the two generations.

There was a time when the angry young man's motto was: "Give me liberty or give me death." Today's generation is being dragged towards intoxicating drugs and substances under the influence of 'radical hedonism'. The new motto of such a hedonist youth in Aldous Huxley's words is: "Give me hamburger and a T.V. set and don't bother me with the responsibilities of liberty."

It is possible that in the eyes of the new generation, Gandhiji may have some limitations which keep them away from him but we should also consider in all seriousness, what the limitations of the new generation are which keep them away from Gandhiji.

If this matter is considered with complete honesty, I am sure that the new generation will be drawn towards Gandhiji (whom Lord Mountbatten had called 'one- man army') as a river gets drawn towards the sea. I request all those assembled here to read Alvin Toffler's epoch-making book, *The Third Wave*. In it there is a chapter entitled, 'Gandhi with Satellites'.

Some people honestly believe that Gandhi committed some great mistakes. There are people who think that Gandhiji had really erred in supporting the Khilafat movement, in his attitude towards Subhashbabu and, finally, in making Jawaharlal the Prime Minister of India instead of Sardar Patel. It is out of place to discuss these so-called errors here. The only point to be stressed is that Gandhiji's errors too were extremely 'honest'. It should not be forgotten that great persons never make small mistakes, and that even their small mistakes bring about far-reaching consequences. From this point of view Gandhiji should not be regarded as a 'great soul' (Mahatma) who would never err. One should rather regard him as a great man who, though he remained always consciously vigilant about whatever he did, was always ready to admit his mistake whenever he realized that he had committed it and who would also do his best to rectify it subsequently. To expect that he would never err would amount to being unjust to him.

He, as it were, placed his conscience on a table in front of him and endeavoured hard to seek out objectively with a magnifying glass each and every shortcoming within him. The world could get from him the invaluable gift of his autobiography!

In the world's new context which is being shaped, it seems Gandhiji's philosophy of life will have increasing relevance in the centuries to come.

As long as the search for the new and constantly evolving human being continues, there will be a need for the highly pervasive and sublime

phenomenon called 'Gandhi'. If the new generation has any doubt about this, I can only say that it is not Gandhiji's fault. With these words, I should like to end my talk today.

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1. *Yeravda Mandir*, Ch. III, p. 8
2. *The Gita According to Gandhi*, Mahadev Desai (1977), p. 131
3. *An Autobiography*, M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1981 pp. x, xii
4. *Harijan*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 11, 1933, Poona)
5. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 18, pp. 387-88
6. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 22, pp. 299- 300.
7. The God-loving son of the demon Hiranyakashyap who disallowed worship of God in his Kingdom.
8. Translated from *Lok Swarajya*, Vol. 1, No. 7, July 21, 1981, Bombay, p. 8
9. *Stray Glimpses of Bapu*, Kaka Kalelkar, pp. 85-86



## II. GANDHI: AN OPEN-MINDED TRUTH-SEEKER

Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to numerous spheres of life is so great that it is not possible for an ordinary person like me to talk about him without reverence. In spite of this, I am trying to say a few things about him with as much objectivity as possible. We have the right to criticize Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of life in the bitterest terms but on one condition - that whilst doing so, our mind should be as open as his. I believe that if the new generation manages to come in direct contact with him even with a view to making a critical inquiry, it is bound to be impressed by his original contribution. Before putting across the point that Gandhiji was an extremely open-minded seeker of truth, I would like to emphasize one thing. At times it is difficult for even great men to appear as they are before the society. Mahatma Gandhi is a clear exception to this. This quality gives Gandhiji a unique dimension which can attract the new generation. With this background, I would like to proceed to my subject of today.

It was absolutely appropriate for Gandhiji to call his autobiography *Experiments With Truth*. He had the open mind and heart fit for a seeker of truth, proof of which is available in the extremely measured language of the preface of his autobiography:

I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analyzed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final. For if they were not, I should base no action on them. But at every step I have carried out the process of acceptance or rejection and acted accordingly. And so long as my acts satisfy my reason and my heart, I must firmly adhere to my original conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

Would a person, whose mind is not as open as the sky, be able to use such words?

Gandhiji's humility was put to the most stringent test because of Mohammed Ali Jinnah's stiff attitude. Gandhiji would respectfully address Mr. Jinnah as *Quayade Azam*. In *India Wins Freedom*, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad expressed his displeasure at Gandhiji's tendency to give excessive importance to Jinnah.

Mr. Jinnah who played with fire in the name of the Muslims of the undivided India could speak only two words in Urdu - *Achchha Hai*. Gandhiji had made a deeper study of the *Holy Koran* than Jinnah Saheb. It is a well-known fact that he had even given it a place in his daily prayers. I cannot forego the temptation to narrate one incident even if it means digressing a little.

Once, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah were contesting a case in the Hyderabad Court. At one place in the case, an extract from the *Koran* had been quoted. The Court asked Mr. Jinnah to translate it. Jinnah Saheb could not do so. Tej Bahadur Sapru did the translation and the work went on. Next day this incident was published in the local press under the caption: "Maulana Tej Bahadur Sapru translates the *Koran* for Pandit Mohammed Ali Jinnah."

At the time of the Round Table Conference, a meeting between Gandhiji and Jinnah was arranged after much persuasion. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was with Gandhiji and she was very keen on arranging this meeting. At the appointed time Jinnah came to Gandhiji's (East End) residence. As a gesture of courtesy towards his guest, Gandhiji asked Jinnah Saheb "What will you have?" Jinnah Saheb replied jokingly with a sarcasm, "Scotch and Soda, if you have."

To Jinnah Saheb's utter surprise Gandhiji took out the bottle of Scotch and Soda and was prepared to pour them out! Yes, of course, Gandhiji did not know what to pour first - whisky or soda! It is difficult to imagine the mental agony involved in the act of offering his guest a bottle of whisky for the Mahatma who wished to introduce prohibition as his first act even if he got an opportunity to rule for a moment. It is doubtful whether it is possible for any follower who calls himself a Gandhian to show such rare generosity. He showed the same

generosity in his willingness to arrange non-vegetarian food for Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in Sevagram, in sending packets of cigarettes to Jawaharlal Nehru and in preparing tea for Mahadev Desai. Gandhiji has never hesitated in showing generosity towards others whilst keeping his own codes intact. The key to this, as I see it, lies in his open-minded reverence for truth, steeped in humility.

Very often one wonders: How could Gandhiji include in his vast circle so many great men so different from one another and, at times, possessing contradictory dispositions? How was he successful in getting work in accordance to their abilities, from so many persons who were great in their own way? He could keep with him till the end, sensitive and idealistic Nehru, who was influenced by western science and technology; as well as the efficient and down-to-earth realist Sardar Patel who was firm as a rock. Many gems had gathered together in his coterie of intimates.

Kishorlal Mashruwala, a visionary of 'Total Revolution' and a subtle philosophical analyst; Vinobaji, a synthesiser of knowledge, devotion and action; the learned professor Jivatram (J. B.) Kripalani known for his piercing sarcasm and logic; Kakasaheb Kalelkar, an exponent of 'The Culture of Life' who had turned into a super Gujarati in the company of Gandhiji whilst devoting himself to the worship of beauty and literature; Mahadevbhai who merged his identity completely in the phenomenon called Bapu; Narharibhai, Rajendrababu, Swami Anand, Sarojini Naidu - how many names shall I enumerate? Merely to list the names of men and women, whose lives had taken a new direction at the mere touch of Gandhiji's philosopher's stone (*parasmani*), would mean compiling a book!

Sudhir Ghosh has raised a question in his book: What is the mystery behind the effectiveness of Gandhiji's magic on so many persons? Let us see Sudhir's reply in his own words:

During my travels in various parts of the world - North and South America, Europe and Asia - I have often been asked: "What is the clue to the great power that Gandhi had over other men and women?" My answer is that it originated in

his incredible capacity to care for others. You were taken up by him because nobody cared for you the way he did. He did not love mankind only. He loved you as an individual and quickened to your singular sorrows, your particular hapinesses. He always had time for you; he was never too busy to see you or to think about you if you were away. How one man could find room for so many in his mind and heart was a miracle.<sup>2</sup>

Now that I have mentioned Sudhir, let us see a dialogue in 1947 after independence was obtained, which he had noted:

On this occasion I remember I groused against Mr. Nehru at some length and remarked: "You know, Bapu, one day this Krishna Menon will probably destroy Panditji." He said, "I think I know what you mean. If you mean that, with all his greatness, Jawaharlal is a poor judge of men, I think I agree with you. But tell me, have you anything better than him in India?" "Of course we haven't," I said promptly. "Then be loyal to the good that is in this man. If you do that you will be all right. But if you are resentful, you are defeated. And I do not want to see you defeated. I know he is prejudiced against you. But it cannot be helped. I tried to put it right but I failed. You have to accept it as a fact of life and live with it."<sup>3</sup>

Here it is worth noting what Ramanarayan Vishwanath Pathak has said about our people. "Just as we are worshippers of individuals so also we are haters of individuals. If a man is considered good, everything about him is taken to be good, and if bad everything about him is deemed bad."<sup>4</sup>

A seeker of truth has to avoid such prejudices. How can a person involve the whole nation in the task of getting independence, if he does not possess an open mind and an ability to utilise the goodness in every human being? For that he should have the boldness to love his opponents and the courage to acknowledge his own or his followers' errors.

Gandhiji had the strength to magnify his errors as Himalayan. His unique autobiography is proof of this.

One of the characteristics of a seeker of truth is that he is developing continually, that means, he is 'ever growing'. Vinoba lays more stress on grasping the truth rather than insisting on truth. In order to acquire truth, one has to be prepared to lay open one's mind and one's being. It is my humble opinion that some wrong notions about Gandhiji have got established in the minds of the new generation because of the rigid views of many of Gandhiji's followers. The present-day generation is prepared to look upon Gandhiji as Mahatma (great soul) but it has not yet dawned on them that Gandhiji's mind was like an open book. Those young men who think in this manner would realize their error if they read the following extract:

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the latter of the two on the same subject.<sup>5</sup>

Even I had certain prejudices in my mind regarding Gandhiji's views on celibacy. To this day it is my humble opinion that Gandhiji's attitude towards celibacy is unacceptable from the point of view of psychology and excessively extremist. But I want to talk about something else.

Four to five years ago, I had an occasion to stay at Sevagram for three days. I had gone to participate in a seminar on education arranged by Shriman Narayan Agarwalji. There I specially went to see the late Ramdas's wife Nirmalabehn. I wanted to know from Nirmalabehn what Gandhiji was like as a father-in-law and whether he had forced celibacy upon his son and the daughter-in-law. As I have said earlier, I had certain prejudices in my mind in this matter. I asked Nirmalabehn many questions and I am giving here a summary of our conversation (based on memory):

Nirmalabehn said: "When we two went to Gandhiji with our proposal for marriage he put forth the idea of practising celibacy for five years. We agreed to it and the marriage took place. After two and a half years I went to Bapu. I said to him, 'Bapu, now I cannot practise it any longer.' Bapu allowed us to have our way and gave up his insistence.

"The morning prayers used to be at four in the early morning in Sevagram. I would attend regularly but then the whole day my body ached. For a few days, I was rather reluctant to tell Bapu. But one day, I went to him and told him about my difficulty. Immediately, Bapu granted my absence in the morning prayers. He was so great a man. And yet I don't remember he ever imposed any idea on me."

When a person rigidly clings to the truth he has realized, believing it to be the ultimate, his friends and near ones begin to dislike him. Young people would prefer to stay miles away from such a rigid person. Gandhiji's family was so vast that it comprised Bhansali, who had his lips stitched up by a tailor, as well as a dynamic young person no less than Sudhir Ghosh. In the history of India one has not come across any leader who has attracted young people in such vast numbers and got them to do as he wished. At his call, thousands of young persons went to jail and were ready to sacrifice anything for the country. Today a race is on to fill one's pockets both in the fields of politics as well as social life. Gandhiji had created such an atmosphere in the country that young people vied with one another to make a sacrifice. Three and a half decades after independence, conditions are such that young people today will not be prepared to believe this! The extent to which young people, who had accepted the banner of Gandhiji, were swept away by enthusiasm in the days of the struggle for independence can be glimpsed in the following lines:

What do we care if we die of torture in jail!

The brave have not heard the word

'defeat' in the battle for truth.

From our ashes will arise, brigades of

battalions of the brave,  
From each drop of blood, will be born  
children of truth,  
With the intense heat of our penance,  
black stones will melt.  
With the stream of love from our hearts,  
we shall cool the fires of the world.

- Kalyanji Mehta

Oh friends! Forgive these crazy brethren.  
Have you ever seen patience in the hearts of lovers?  
What all is burning inside, to whom we shall  
show the cry of our hearts?  
Won't you remember even our stupidity some day?  
Better you forget our mortal memories!  
Do not spoil your happy lives with  
unpleasant memories,  
If even independence comes, a secret  
request oh brother!  
Remember us for a moment, just tiny!

- Jhaverchand Meghani

We shall save the honour of Bharat  
on our deathbed,  
We shall have our names inscribed amongst  
obstinates on our deathbed,  
Oh dying man, die for your word,

We shall teach this lesson on our deathbed.

- Unknown

Independence! Independence! keep on singing  
this tune,  
For ever I shall relish the pleasure and joy  
of death.

- Chandravadan Mehta

We know not what difficulties lie our way,  
We only know that the call has come to die,  
May motherland live, for that time has  
come to die,  
Who cares so long we remain under  
your gaze.<sup>6</sup>

- Jhaverchand Meghani

I must say, in this competition for making a sacrifice, the new generation was in the forefront in those days. In those days not only the old women, but also the young men had adopted the spinning wheel and the production of Khadi had gone up to such an extent that there was retrenchment of workers in the textile industry of Manchester. It is true that the employment of labourers in Manchester had been affected by the spinning wheels in India but, when Gandhiji went to England, the same workers got themselves photographed with him. Unless one has an open mind, is it possible to lovingly embrace someone against whom you are putting up a straight fight and to accept if necessary his viewpoint which is right? And see the magic of this open, clean mind! General Smuts, South Africa's big autocrat, diplomat and a staunch fighter had often clashed with Gandhiji. There were many conflicts between the two. Let us see in General Smuts's own words how Gandhiji behaved with his opponents:



For me - the defender of law and order - there was the usual trying situation, the odium of carrying out a law which had not strong public support and finally the discomfiture when the law had to be repealed. For him it was a successful coup. Nor was the personal touch wanting, for nothing in Gandhi's procedure is without a peculiar personal touch. In goal he had prepared for me a very useful pair of sandals which he presented to me when he was set free! I have worn these sandals for many a summer since then, even though I may feel that I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man!<sup>7</sup>

It is necessary for a seeker of truth to be firm, but rigidity will only harm the truth. If the seeker of truth is not open-minded, his insistence on truth (*Satyagraha*) will become obstinacy. There are numerous instances in Gandhiji's life which reveal his open-mindedness. Defeat is acceptable to a seeker of truth but victory achieved through untruth is not. I wish to prove my statement by citing a couple of incidents.

#### **Incident-1 :**

The fight for independence was gaining momentum. In Bengal Chittaranjan Das (Deshbandhu Das) had given up his lucrative practice to join the battle and had given his palatial home in the service of the nation. Subhash Bose had become Deshbandhu Das's colleague. In Bihar Rajendra Babu had given up his legal practice. Pandit Motilalji had given up his aristocratic living and adopted the common mode of life. Anand Bhawan became 'Swaraj Bhawan'. His son Jawahar took to Gandhiji and became a hero of the new generation. Lala Lajpatrai in Punjab, Rajaji in Madras, Jayaramdas in Sind, Gangadharrao in Karnataka, Gopbandhu in Orissa, Jarnalal Bajaj in Madhya Pradesh, Shankarrao Deo in Maharashtra, Vithalbhai Patel and Sarojini Naidu in Bombay, Vallabhbai and Indulal Yagnik in Gujarat, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the Frontier Province, Dr. Ansari and Maulana Mohammadali in Delhi - thus freedom fighters were stationed in every province.

People took out a procession in Chauri Chaura near Gorakhpur. The police made a lathi-charge and the police stations were burnt, murders took place on both sides and there was a havoc. The mood of battle was so all-pervasive in the

country that except for Gandhiji no captain would even think of withdrawing the fight. A captain follows a strategy, he has his eyes fixed on victory. Many persons were unhappy because the fight was withdrawn. Having given the call for battle, should one withdraw from it just because of a single incident? What about the consequent loss of spirit of the people? Gandhiji never thought on these lines because there were two important facets in his strategy: truth and non-violence. Independence obtained at the cost of truth and non-violence was not acceptable to him. "Let hundreds like me perish, but let truth prevail. Let us not reduce the standard of truth even by a hair's breadth for judging erring mortals like myself." Would one who uttered these words care for truth or for victory in the battle? This incident reveals Gandhiji's faith in truth and his determination.

#### **Incident-2:**

Kakasaheb has noted an incident: When the Ashram school was started, Kakasaheb, Mashruwala and Narhari Parikh worked there as teachers. Gandhiji would visit them once a fortnight and would discuss numerous matters - big and small. One day he told his colleagues: "The school which you are running is yours, not mine. Whatever advice I give here, consider it as advice only. If you are not convinced, throw it away. Of course, if I had been living with you and working like you as a teacher in the school, I would have tried my best to convince you to my point of view. But I am not doing a teacher's job, hence I have no right to impose my ideas on you. I trust you."

#### **Incident-3 :**

Gurudev Tagore had gone to Europe. There someone asked him, "Is Gandhiji highly respected in your country?" Gurudev said, "Yes." When asked what was the reason, Gurudev said, "If I went to the jungle and if a tiger was sighted I might say 'Oh' with horror, but this will not happen with Gandhiji."

Now let us see what Gandhiji says about Tagore: One day a public worker told Gandhiji, "Bapuji, this Ravindranath writes well but he does not take part in the struggle. If he loves the country, why does he not do anything?"

Gandhiji replied in one sentence: "A cow does a cow's work and a horse does a horse's work."

One can go on talking about his open-minded penance for Truth by citing many such instances. Here it must be remembered that it was his habit to trust the other man. That man might be General Smuts or the Viceroy. A closed-minded person would never be able to trust his opponent. The other great quality which greatly helped his search for truth was fearlessness. When he decided to give the 'gift of death' to the calf who suffered in agony in the Ashram, Sardar Patel had warned him: "This calf will die of his own accord within a couple of days. But if you kill him, you will unnecessarily invite controversy. There will be agitation in the Hindu society in the entire country: We have to go to Bombay to collect funds. No one will give us even a *pie* (the smallest coin) there. Our work will be greatly affected."

Later when the calf was put to sleep with an injection, the whole country was agitated. Gandhi would not be himself if he gave in on being afraid of agitation.

What I mean to say is this that it is clear from many incidents that he was not afraid of death. Lin Yutang had somewhere talked about three types of fear. One was fear of death, second fear of God and third fear of neighbours. Here, 'fear of neighbours' means fear of 'what will people say?' If the seeker of truth suffers from such a fear, then he cannot achieve anything. Many orthodox Hindus were prepared to support Gandhiji if he abandoned his ideas on untouchability. Shrinivasa Iyengar prepared the resolution on Hindu-Muslim unity at the Congress meeting in Madras in the year 1926. Gandhiji looked at the draft and said: "If a Hindu-Muslim settlement can be achieved by anyone's effort on any condition, then I am agreeable to it. What is there to show me in this?" After giving a cursory glance to the draft of the resolution, he said it was OK. He went to sleep early, after the evening prayers. The next morning he got up very early and after waking up Mahadev Desai he said: "I committed a blunder. I did not read carefully the draft of yesterday's resolution. At night I remembered that in it, Muslims are allowed to slaughter cows and the issue of cow-protection has been left out. If Muslims slaughter cows, we cannot stop

them forcibly but surely we can make them understand by serving them! Even for the sake of independence, I will not give up the ideal of cow-protection." This sort of expression was likely to displease the Muslims. But Gandhiji did not relax his sincere expression of his views because of that fear. And when he allowed the calf to be relieved of pain by means of an injection, he did not heed the warning that such action would be disagreeable to the Hindus and the Jains. This was his peculiarity.

Normally we are more afraid of misunderstanding than of untruth. Instead of pondering over what we are, we worry more about 'how we appear to others'. A seeker of truth like Gandhiji would really be concerned with doing what he thinks is right, not what others will think. Besides, faith in truth is bound to be effective in the long run. The real state of affairs is understood after the misunderstanding is removed. Gandhiji could look far ahead in such matters and he could test his decision on the anvil of truth. That is why short-term gains could not attract him and major losses could not worry him. The secret of his ability to keep the people with him to continue the struggle for decades and achieve independence was his underlying integrity which is essential to a seeker of truth. In spite of an intense desire to see the country become independent, he was not in a hurry to obtain independence quickly by any means whatsoever or by making wrong compromises. Independence obtained at the cost of basic principles was not acceptable to him. This factor distinguishes Gandhiji from all other revolutionaries or freedom fighters. His insistence on the right means is an expansion of his mental attitude of 'not accepting anything at the cost of truth'.

One other thing should be noted here. Gandhiji's concept of *swarajya* (independence) did not culminate in the 'end of the British rule'. At the time of Dandi March when he started to go from Erthan, a village in Olpad taluka, to Bhatgam, two coolies were walking ahead of him with Kitson lamps on their heads as it was dark in the early morning. He revealed his feelings about this in the meeting at Bhatgam. He said, "True *swarajya* will come when we look upon those whom we consider low-born today as our real brothers and sisters. Why

should heavy lamp be placed on the head of a coolie? One day he might become the Viceroy of India. You cannot criticize the Viceroy's salary after incurring unnecessary expenses on me. If we cannot tolerate this loot by a hundred thousand whitemen, then be sure, when our 300 million people start looting one another, our bones will not be found. I am warning you so that our purity may not be tarnished."

Sometimes a man's style of 'thinking big' is ego-satisfying or for appearances. Gandhiji's thinking, having had permeated the roots of his fundamental life ideal of devotion to truth, manifested itself in humility and openness. Those who look on the surface may find a contradiction but because he was not a prisoner of rigidity, Gandhiji could relax his codes in certain circumstances.

I would only mention a few examples. Gandhiji who sometimes travelled by a special train when necessary had been called on 30th March, 1947 to meet Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy, who had asked him to come by plane, but Gandhiji insisted on travelling by third class in a train. Starting from Patna, Manu Gandhi selected a carriage with two compartments but Gandhiji called the Station Master, had it emptied and arranged for those travelling by hanging on the footboard outside to sit inside. Gandhiji used to reply to many important dignitaries on the blank portions of their own letters. But he could also spend 12-15 rupees in those days on a lengthy telegram to Kakasaheb's daughter-in-law Chandan, during her illness explaining in detail how she should be nursed. He was extremely insistent on celibacy. Yet he could get himself massaged by young ladies, Dr. Sushila Nayyar or Manu Gandhi, and could go to his prayer meeting keeping his hands on two young girls. He observed silence every Monday but when Maganlal Gandhi died he made an exception to his vow of silence for consoling the weeping relatives.

It would not be inappropriate here to mention his very controversial experiment of sleeping naked at night with Manu Gandhi to test his celibacy during the last days. This experiment had raised a storm of controversy and even today many thinkers criticize it.

Whilst travelling from Lusaka to Nairobi, I was accompanied by our learned writer and well-known thinker Mr. Rohit Mehta. We talked a lot about Gandhiji and discussed this controversial experiment also. He said, "Biographers ought to have ignored this incident and kept it aside." I was of a different opinion. I said, "By doing that, injustice could be committed to Gandhiji. His greatest attraction according to my mind was the fact that his life was an open book. Had he failed in this controversial experiment, the very next day he would have told his countrymen, 'I am a fake Mahatma.' He was extremely alert about not keeping the people under a misconception regarding his weaknesses. I am of the opinion that he would be keen to let the people know if his greatness was shallow."

Eric Erikson has written a book called *Gandhi's Truth* which gives psycho-analysis of Gandhiji. Erikson compares Gandhiji's personality with the personality of Jesus Christ and yet he believes that Gandhiji's achievement, though wonderful, was incomplete. He expresses the opinion that Gandhiji could not attain the ideal of truth and non-violence in thought and action and says that in his relations with Kasturba and his sons, particularly Harilal, there was a subtle violence. Erikson also believes that his sternness had resulted from his physical self-restraint. Erikson put forth a crucial question: "Is calibacy on which Gandhians lay so much stress really necessary for *satyagraha*?"

As a humble student of psychology, I have felt there is much truth in Erikson's analysis. Having said that, I would like to add quickly that Gandhiji himself had admitted that his non-violence was incomplete. Even if we look upon him as an incarnation we must remember one thing. In his introduction to *Anasakti Yoga* he has given incarnation's definition as 'an exceptional human being with flesh and blood'. Thus even whilst looking upon him as an incarnation we should not forget that he was a human being. Only if we accept that, we can make a proper evaluation of his errors and human limitations. The seven-year old Mohan who was afraid to go out in the dark started saying '*Ram-narri* (God's name) to ward off his fear and could attain fearlessness through that very *Ramnam*. This journey through life which started from very ordinary beginnings

and culminated in exceptional attainments holds a promise of becoming a greater source of inspiration for the ordinary man. Whilst thinking about Gandhiji, the open-minded seeker of truth, we too should keep our minds open. This great man who always said that 'Truth should not be abandoned even if it meant death', lived upto this dictum till his death. Even in his so-called errors what a large amount of honesty becomes apparent! Would such honesty be found in our so-called virtues? Supposing we were asked to reveal, without hiding anything whatsoever, all that we had thought or done during the past twenty-four hours, shall we be able to show ourselves as we really are? 'Just for a month, I shall not lie' - a tiny resolution such as this breaks down within four-five days - such is my experience. In spite of all human limitations, Gandhiji nurtured the truth he had attained, devoted himself to it and moulded his life accordingly. Herein lie his uniqueness and greatness.

Gandhiji had the ability to continue his fight with readiness to accept the iota of truth from his opponent without relaxing his own insistence on the truth as he saw it.

Years ago Romain Rolland the great French writer had called Gandhiji 'St. Paul of our age'. St. Paul who was originally a Jew and had voluntarily become a Christian became a martyr in 64 or 67 A.D. He was killed by the Government. Charlie Andrews had said, "If humble persons have the faith in their humility and throw away all fear of Hitler or Stalin and if they look with hope to the greatest *Guru* of our age, they can still inherit this world." Albert Einstein had described Gandhiji as 'a human being who can be a light-house to future generations'.

Gandhiji who believed that 'Truth is God' was prepared to die for Truth. Many a time did he risk his life for the propagation and espousal of Truth. On his last birthday 2nd October, 1947 he told the doctor who had come to treat him for his cough, "Today I am sitting in a kiln. All around me, there is fire. Now I wish that either I may not live to see this fire on my next birthday or India be changed - either India becomes pure or I will not be living."

The same day he told the doctors, "Just as you doctors are searching for science, the same way I am searching *Ram-nam*. If I find it well and good, otherwise I shall die looking for it."

The search for Truth even in his day-to-day life was for him a journey for the attainment of the ultimate Truth, i.e. God (Ram); whatever had to be done was to be done for the love of God and his attainment. What he had written years ago in the preface to his autobiography is proof of this:

For it is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from Him Who, as I fully know, governs every breath of my life, and Whose offspring I am. I know that it is the evil passions within that keep me so far from Him, and yet I cannot get away from them.<sup>8</sup>

In the final days a bomb exploded in Gandhiji's prayer meeting and he was barely saved. When Lady Mountbatten congratulated him, he replied: "I can only be considered fit for your congratulations when *Ram-nam* is on my lips when a bullet hits me in the chest and I have love for one who has killed me."

When he was hit by the bullet from Godse's revolver, before falling on the ground he uttered the words - '*Hey Ram*' and he became one with ultimate Truth whom he considered the Lord and Master of his every breath.

As I mentioned earlier whilst defining incarnation Gandhiji had said, "Incarnation is an exceptional human being with flesh and blood." Applying this very same definition to Mahatma Gandhi and saluting the human incarnation of this age, I would like to say one thing before I conclude my talk. Vincent Sheen has written an extremely beautiful book on Gandhiji entitled, *Lead Kindly Light*. On the first page of this book he has given a picture of the spinning wheel and placed alongside with it Einstein's formula of relativity. According to Einstein, when a particle achieves the speed of light, it ceases to be matter and gets converted into energy. On the same basis, Sheen tries to show that the sacrifice of a totally non-violent person can be instrumental in releasing infinite power.



The coming generations will definitely prove that the sacrifice made by Gandhiji, the true seeker of Truth and life-long worshipper of non-violence, has not been wasted.

Years ago, Mohan, Lord Krishna, born and brought up near the river Yamuna, went to Kathiawar and breathed his last. After centuries, another Mohan, Mahatma Gandhi, went from Kathiawar to the bank of river Yamuna and went asleep eternally. One Mohan is known for looting butter, whilst the other, for looting salt. One Mohan was clad in yellow garment, whilst the other in white Khaddar. One Mohan used weapon called *Sudarshana Chakra* whilst the other used *Yeravda Chakra* (spinning wheel). One Mohan gave the *Bhagvad Gita* to us, whilst the other showed us how to live the *Gita* way. Both died as a result of infighting.

I do not have sufficient words to thank you for affectionately listening, during the two days, to a small man like me talking about a great man like Gandhiji. Thanks.

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1. *An Autobiography*, M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 1981, p. x.
  2. *Gandhi's Emissary*, Sudhir Ghosh, p. 196
  3. *Gandhi's Emissary*, Sudhir Ghosh, p. 221
  4. *Swairvihar*, R. V. Pathak, Pt. I, p. 3
  5. *Harijan*, M. K. Gandhi, 29-4-'33, p.2
  6. *Ladat-nan-Geeto*, Ishwarlal Ichharam Desai, Jilla Panchayat, Surat (Translated from Gujarati)
  7. From *Mahatma Gandhi*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, presented to Mahatma Gandhi on October 2nd, 1939
  8. *An Autobiography*, M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, p. xii

## About the Author

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Born in Rander (Surat) on March 12, 1937; was educated in Surat and Baroda.

Worked as: Lecturer and Reader in the M. S. University of Baroda', Baroda (1961-72); Visiting Professor to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (U.S.A.) in the year 1967- 68; Professor and Head, Department of Education, Technical Teachers' Training Institute, Madras (1972-73); Professor of Education, S.N.D.T. Women's University, Bombay (1973-74).

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