

# Gandhi's HUMAN TOUCH

Lecture by

**Prof. Madhu Dandwate**

My colleague, Inder Gujralji, Dr. Vivekanandan, Ladies and gentlemen,

To me it is indeed a privilege to have the opportunity to deliver JP Memorial Lecture on "Gandhi's Human Touch", a subject which is very close to my heart. I think, in the present world, full of hatred, bitterness, cruelty, racial discrimination, communal tensions, inequities, human degradation and erosion of values, Gandhi is more relevant today than at any other time. In the context of the present situation, I strongly feel that there is an imperative need to recapture the spirit and human touch of Gandhi. While I speak on the subject, I am reminded of my recent address at the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, in which I spoke on planning in India. I said that in our country, if we have any respect for Gandhi, we must have planning, whose base is social and human and the apex is economic. I deliberately avoided the term 'human face', because in these days of modern cosmetics, face can be human, and yet the soul and heart can be cruel.

## **Begin from the End**

I just ask a question to myself: From where should I begin the subject of my speech? I have made up my mind. I will begin from the end.

Gandhi died on 30th January 1948. When I take cognizance of the great contribution that he has made to human history for the establishment of peace, for which he had to pay the price of his life, I am reminded of a speech delivered by Simon Peres, the Israeli Labour Leader, who addressed the Socialist International's 20th Congress at which I was present. While charting out his path for peace and freedom, he gave a very interesting analogy. He said that ensuring peace is not like securing a commodity in a market. And in his characteristic style, he said at the Congress that when you go to the market with a credit card to purchase a commodity, you secure the commodity first, and then you pay the price afterwards. But as far as struggle for peace and freedom is concerned, you pay the price first, and then you get peace afterwards. And revealing his own history, he said: "I have paid a very heavy price for my struggle for peace. I lost the elections, I lost my power." And he emotionally said: "I may lose my life as well." He concluded his speech by saying: "Even if I have to lose my life, I will not be worried. My march towards peace will be from life to death, and it may end at my graveyard." And when he said this, sitting in the audience at the Socialist International Congress, in these words of the Israeli leader, I really felt the warmth of Gandhi's human touch.

## **Dark Calcutta & Glittering Delhi**

Many of you must have seen the famous Attenborough's film Gandhi. When I saw the film my immediate reaction was that if I were to produce that film, I would have begun it in a different way. Those of you who have seen the film must have noted that it began with the scene of assassination of Gandhi. I am sure, from the point of historicity as well as excellence and aesthetics of art, there could have been a better beginning. I would have projected a flash back of two extreme events of 1947. One scene would have been the darkness of Calcutta, where Gandhi was giving the healing touch to the society that was torn by Hindu-Muslim riots. And the second flash back would have been the glittering lights of Delhi on the midnight of 14th August 1947, awaiting the dawn of freedom on 15th August 1947. Glittering lights, loud slogans and a poetic assertion of Late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who said: "At the stroke of the midnight hour when the world sleeps India will awake to life and freedom and a soul of a nation long suppressed will find utterance." I remember the darkness of Calcutta. I remember the agony of Gandhi. A few weeks prior to Independence Day of 1947, an emissary of Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel was sent to Gandhi at Calcutta, who was working for peace and harmony among the Hindus and Muslims. The emissary reached at midnight. He said: "I have brought an important letter for you from Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel." "Have you taken your food?", asked Gandhi. When the emissary said " No", Gandhi

served him food. And after food, Gandhi opened the letter from Nehru and Patel. They had written: "Bapu you are the father of the nation. 15th August 1947, will be the first Independence Day and we want you to come to Delhi to give us the blessings." Gandhi said: "How stupid!. When Bengal is burning, Hindus and Muslims are killing each other and I hear the cries of their agony in the darkness of Calcutta, how can I go to Delhi with the glittering lights?" These were the heart-rending words of Gandhi. He said "I have to live here for the establishment of peace in Bengal and if need be, I have to give up my life for ensuring that there is harmony and peace." The emissary started for his return journey in the morning. It was a moving sight, full of human touch. Gandhi gave the emissary a sendoff. He was standing below a tree. A dry leaf fell from the tree. Gandhi picked it up and put it on his palm and said: " My friend, you are going back to Delhi. What gift can Gandhi give to Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel? I am a man without power and wealth. Give this dry leaf to Nehru and Patel, as my first Independence day gift." And when he was saying this, tears came from the eyes of the emissary. And with a sense of humour Gandhi said: " How great is God? He did not want Gandhi to send that dry leaf. He made it wet. It is glistening with laughter. Carry this leaf as a gift full of your tears." That was Gandhi's human touch.

People have no idea about the literary talent of Gandhi and his love for poetry. In the context of this agonizing situation, Pyarelal quotes Gandhi:

"His place in the circumstances, was not in the capital but with the men of the tattered battalion which fights till it dies.

Theirs be the music, the colour, the glory, the gold; Mine be a handful of ashes, a mouthful of mauled-the maimed-the halt and the blind in the rain and the cold..."

## **Women in Champaran**

Sensitivity for the problems of women as the weakest among the weak was another trait of Gandhi. Gandhi had sent a team of workers to study and report on the problems of the Champaran district. But the report they gave him did not refer to any problems of the women there. "How can any report be complete without an account of the women's problems?", he asked. The workers told Gandhi that the women of Champaran were very shy and would not meet them. Gandhi then deputed Kasturba Gandhi and Avantikabai Gokhale to visit Champaran to report on women's agony. The women of Champaran would not first meet them and even open their doors.

At sunset, Kasturba Gandhi knocked one door and told the women inside: " We are moving round your town from sunrise to sunset. We are now thirsty. Will you not offer us a glass of water ?" A door was then slightly opened. A woman's hand peeped out with a glass of water on her palm. Kasturba drank water and then said: " Sister we have seen your hand. We have seen the glass of water on your palm. But we want to see the woman behind this hand." The woman inside broke down. She said: "Three women of our household share only one untorn saree and as one woman has gone out with that saree how could others open the door for you and expose our semi-naked bodies?" Kasturba told the weeping woman: "Close the door. The doors of your heart are opened." Kasturba and Avantikabai, touched by the reply, returned to Gandhi with this heart-rending report about

women in Champaran. It steeled Gandhi's determination not to rest till the honour of these women were restored.



## **Noakhali Peace Mission**

I said I will begin from the end and move backwards. I will, therefore, take you now to Noakhali. There were 'brave men' in India who from house tops were saying: "Hindus are being butchered, they are subjected to atrocities in Noakhali and we must save them." But, there was only one Gandhi and his peace mission went to Noakhali. The Noakhali episode and Gandhi's peace March brings out his courage as well as compassion. I will give some of the instances which I gathered from no less a person than Sucheta Kripalani, who had accompanied Gandhi on his peace mission to Noakhali. Gandhi went from village to village. He carried holy books with him. He went to every village. He appealed to all the men and women, Hindus as well as Muslims, to ensure peace. They offered prayers and Gandhi made them take a pledge that they will not kill each other. But he waited for a few days in every village to see that whatever pledges that were given were implemented. There was a moving incident at one village. Gandhi visited that village. He asked the Hindus and Muslims to come out of their hutments for a common prayer and a common pledge for peace. No elderly person turned up. He waited for half an hour, not even one Hindu or Muslim turned up. Gandhi was very ingenious. He had carried a ball with him and then addressing children from the village he said: "Small kids from this village, your parents are frightened of each other but what fright you can have? Elderly Hindus and Muslims might be frightened of one another. But

children are innocent. You are children of God. I am inviting you to play the game of ball." The Hindu and Muslim children started moving towards the dais where Gandhi was sitting. Gandhi threw the ball at them. Boys and girls threw it back. He played for half an hour and then he told the villagers: "You have no courage but if you want that courage, induct it from your children. A child belonging to the Muslim community is not afraid of the child belonging to the Hindu community and so also, a Hindu child is not frightened of a Muslim child. They have come together, they were playing with me for half an hour. Please learn something from them. If you have no inner courage, try to emulate it from your children." And one after another elders - both Hindus and Muslims - started coming. A big gathering assembled. He made them take a pledge that they will not kill each other. He stayed there for sometime. Then he went from village to village and brought peace to Noakhali. What type of human experience he had? Horace Alexander, an eminent journalist of those days, gave a story to one of the leaders. He said that when Gandhi's prayer was going on in one village, all of a sudden a Muslim person pounced on him. He caught his throat. Gandhi almost collapsed. While falling down Gandhi recited a beautiful quotation from the Quran. Hearing the words of Quran, the Muslim, instead of throttling Gandhi, touched his feet and with a feeling of guilt he said: "I am sorry. I was committing a sin. I am prepared to remain with you to protect you. Give me any work, entrust to me any task, tell me what work I should do?" Gandhi had a sense of humour and compassion. He said: "Do only one thing. When you go back home, do not tell

anyone what you tried to do with me. Otherwise there will be Hindu-Muslim riots. Forget me and forget yourself." That man went away with a feeling of repentance.

## Compassion & Cruelty

There is another agonizing incident. In case, your tears are not yet frozen, be prepared to shed them. This is the story told to me by Acharya Kriplani's wife, Sucheta Kripalani who was a member of Gandhi's peace brigade in Noakhali. She said, one night at 12 o'clock they got the news that some Muslims were going to kidnap three young girls who were a part of the Peace Mission. Sucheta Kripalani went to the next door neighbour, an old Muslim landlord. Sucheta went to him and said: "Please protect these three young girls as your daughters." He put his hand on the Quran and said: "Didiji, I give you a solemn pledge that as long as you want, these three girls will stay in my house as my daughters and I will protect them." They stayed there for three months. By that time peace returned to Noakhali. They celebrated the victory of peace. Army men celebrate the victory of war with Bugles, but Gandhi celebrated the victory of peace with solemn silence. When members of Gandhi's peace troupe dispersed, the three girls who stayed with the Muslim family, returned home. What was in store for them at the hands of their parents? Their parents told them: "You have no place in our house." They asked: "Why?" "You are Hindus and you stayed in a Muslim family for three months. You have no place in our house", was the reply. Girls asked: "What should we do?" Parents said: "Go to the streets." They said: "If need be, become prostitutes, but you have no place in our house." The only shelter for these uprooted girls was Gandhi's Ashram, which

was a refuge for all those who were disowned and disinherited. These girls never got married because orthodox families could not tolerate girls who stayed with Muslim family. Some of them died unmarried, unsung and unwept. That was Gandhi's agonizing experience.

When peace returned to Noakhali and later on India became free, Gandhi received an acknowledgement of his mission for peace through a letter from Lord Mountbatten on 26 August 1947. In his letter Mountbatten wrote:

"My dear Gandhiji,

In the Punjab we have 55  
thousand soldiers and large scale rioting  
on our hands. In Bengal  
our forces consist of one man, and  
there is no rioting.

As a serving officer, as  
well as an administrator, may  
I be allowed to pay my tribute to  
the One Boundary Force,  
not forgetting his Second in  
Command, Mr. Suhrawardy?

You should have heard  
the enthusiastic applause which  
greeted the mention of your name  
in the Constituent Assembly on  
15th of August when all  
of us were thinking so much of you....

Yours very sincerely,

Mountbatten of Burma"

Mountbatten, who was clothed in military uniform all his service life, holding arms in his hands, realized the strength, courage and the spirit of compassion of a sensitive human being called Gandhi.

## **Pangs of Partition**

Now let me go back to the days of partition. Gandhi and Gaffar Khan opposed the partition of India upto the last moment. You know what Gandhi told the leaders including Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel? They had said, everywhere violence was taking place. Gandhi observed. "I don't take pride in my faith. I do not think that there is a greater devotee of non-violence than myself. But mine is the non-violence of the brave and not of the cowards." He said: " I am committed to non-violence. I am against civil war, I am against fratricidal war, I am against Hindu-Muslim riots, but I am not frightened by the blood while taking crucial decisions... I have a feeling of compassion." When the final decision of the partition of India was to be taken by the Congress Working Committee, Gandhi said: " I think I should leave", and the President said: " I think there is no sense in asking Gandhi not to leave. At least his views are well known. He does not share our perception." Gandhi had said: "There is still one more opportunity for a struggle. Be prepared to fight. In 1942 you gave me the authority to lead the struggle. I gave the call to the British to quit India and then I called upon the people to do or die. This old man has still the capacity to do or die. Please stand erect and be prepared for one more struggle. We shall retain free India as a united nation. But probably you have lost the will to fight. You may go your own way." And during the musings, before his prayer, once he said : " This old man is of no use to them. Oh! God pick me up as

early as possible", and God too obliged him and He did not allow him to live for long. Gandhi died at the hands of his assassin. Gandhi is dead but his courage and compassion, the values for which he lived, will never be erased.



## **Gandhi's Might**

I would like to refer to the debates on the Indian Independence Bill in the House of Commons in England. I have gone through the debates and I will request you all to read the records of the debate on the Indian Independence Bill. When that debate was going on, Winston Churchill made a concerted attack on the Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee. He said: "We built the glory of the British Empire for 150 years and you surrendered to Gandhi, who has no arms, no bullets, no guns and no ammunition." Attlee gave him a fitting reply. Sometimes we do not understand our own history. Someone else has to teach it to us. Attlee narrating the history said: "Mr. Churchill, it is true that we quit India but we quit with grace. Are you under the impression that our Empire survived in India for 150 years on the strength of Indian people? We were there on the strength of the Navy and the army." And he referred to what happened outside India when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose founded the Indian National Army and the Royal Indian Navy's revolt in 1946 in Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi. I was among the youngsters who participated in the demonstrations in Bombay to express solidarity with the RIN revolt in the midst of bullets showered on the demonstrators by the British soldiers. We are not only students of history but some of us are its participants. Participation in history is a more intense and rewarding experience than merely reading the pages of history.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on the day of the formation of the Azad Hind Government, addressing Gandhi on the Azad Hind Radio, said: "Bapuji, you might not be believing in violence and we have taken to arms. But basically we are on the same wave-length. You are motivated by the urge for freedom, we too are motivated by the same urge. The struggle that was started after your arrest on 9th August 1942 did not remain locked up only in India. That started the freedom struggle far and wide. It touched the hearts and minds of my army men and though they think, I am their leader, in fact you are our leader." While replying to Winston Churchill Attlee said: "The Royal Indian Navy's revolt in 1946 and the formation of the INA under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, though not blessed by Gandhi, were the consequences of the patriotic mass awakening that Gandhi had created. It was thus clear that we could no more rely on the army and the navy to sustain our empire in India. When that became a reality, it was better to quit with grace."

## **Human Touch in Struggle**

Before Gandhi came on the political scene, the world knew only two instruments of change, the bullet and the ballot. Once late Dr B. R. Ambedkar, one of the founding fathers of our Constitution, said: "It is neither by mere counting of heads nor by chopping off heads that you can bring about a political change. It is by taking cognizance of what is happening inside the head and heart that you will be able to strengthen the motivation for change." That is what Gandhi had believed.

Gandhi brought a new methodology of struggle in which there was a human touch . Gandhi had love for all the patriots. He said: "Even an individual terrorist who throws a bomb with a patriotic motive, is a courageous person." But he believed that a person who is a terrorist, though guided by patriotic motives, hides himself from the people. He remains away from the people. "But mine is a weapon", said Gandhi, "in which you have not to kill others by remaining in hiding, but, if need be, be prepared to be killed in an open non-violent revolt." Once he said: "In a violent war, the General of the army is at the back in a closed tank well guarded. But in my non-violent battle one who leads the struggle is at the head of the people to face the first bullet if need be. And even if the leader is killed, probably his death could rouse and awaken the people, through his martyrdom." In this connection, let me narrate an interesting story. When Gandhi was in Agha Khan palace jail in 1942, he expressed his dissatisfaction over Sind

remaining unmoved in the 1942 movement. When Jayramdas Daulatram, a nationalist leader from Sind, was hit on his thigh by a police bullet, the whole city where he stayed rose in revolt. Some friend clandestinely sent this news to Gandhi in jail. Gandhi's immediate reaction was that "by receiving a bullet on his thigh, so many people could rise, if he were to receive the bullet on his chest how wonderful it would have been?" To many people Gandhi's remark would appear very cruel. But behind these apparently cruel remarks, was Gandhi's human touch of his patriotic urge. From your library, read the history of all the revolutions. Very often in a violent revolution, minority leads the revolution, microscopic minority participates in it and a minuscule of minority attains power. This is the micro development of a revolution, to use the language of the economists. That is what Gandhi felt. Gandhi told people to defy the oppressive authority that usurped their freedom and in the process, if necessary, face bullets and bayonets. There is nothing more effective than suffering, that can rouse the people. Suffering of man in search of freedom is more explosive than the bullets that seek to suppress freedom, was Gandhi's faith. I had gone to the spot of Dharasana Salt Depot in Gujarat where batches after batches of Satyagrahis faced brutal repression by the police during the Salt Satyagraha in the freedom struggle. Sacrifice was a badge of honour for these Satyagrahis. This sacrifice galvanized the people for a determined struggle. You have heard about Gandhi's Dandi March for the Salt Satyagraha, which was one of the most important epics of our struggle for freedom. A few Kilometers from Dandi, there is a small

village called Karadi. In that Karadi village there was one disciple of Gandhi, called Pancha Kaka Patel. He participated in no-tax campaign of Gandhi. He participated in Dandi Salt Satyagraha. The British Government confiscated his house. His agricultural land and other property was also confiscated. While he was being taken to jail handcuffed, the police said: "See, not a single inch of land remains in your possession. Your house too has been confiscated." Pancha Kaka Patel told the police : "You can rest assured, I will never ask for the the return of my property, till India becomes free." In 1937, Congress Government was formed in the then Bombay Presidency. In Bombay Presidency, Shri B. G. Kher became the Chief Minister and he sent a message to Gandhi's disciple Pancha Kaka Patel that: "We are prepared to give back your house and land confiscated during the British rule." He said: "No this is not the freedom of Gandhi's dream and I have taken a pledge that till India becomes completely independent, I will not take back my property. Keep it with you." In 1947, on 15th August, India became free. This disciple of Gandhi, Pancha Kaka, was told: "Now the country has become free and so take back your property." He contacted Gandhi. He said: "Gandhiji, do you feel that freedom of your dream has come?" Gandhi said: "Unfortunately, I must say no." And then Pancha Kaka told the government: "I cannot accept back my property." Then some cynics, commented : "Oh! Pancha Kaka Patel refuses to accept the confiscated property. But when he dies his wife and his children will claim that property." And after this comment, Pancha Kaka Patel came with a statement: "I anticipated this possibility and therefore to

avoid any embarrassment to me, I did not get married at all and I have no children." That was what he said. Such was the human material that Gandhi's human touch had created.

## **Gandhi to Mandela**

Gandhi's struggle did not begin in India. 21 years of his life were spent in South Africa. Many, who have not suffered from social injustice, do not understand our language of social justice. They must try to trace as to how did Gandhi's struggle begin? Did it begin as an economic struggle? Did it begin as a political struggle? It began years back, during 21 years of his stay in South Africa, as a struggle for social justice, for the dignity of man and against racialism. And, there he succeeded to a great extent. Whenever I saw Mandela, I saw in his eyes the image of Gandhi. I told him during his visit to India: "You fought and ultimately got freedom and democracy. But to men like us, march from Gandhi to Mandela is a march from social justice to freedom and democracy." Gandhi once wrote: "I was born in India but I was made in South Africa". There is an interesting experience of Gandhi in South Africa, which has a great human touch. Gandhi's struggle in South Africa was over. General Smuts, the great dictator, who exploited the people, indulged in racialism in South Africa, again and again put Gandhi to jail and made him suffer rigorous imprisonment. But Gandhi developed skills during his rigorous imprisonment. He learned from a cobbler, how to make leather sandals. When General Smuts called Gandhi and told him that there was general amnesty and he was released, Gandhi presented to General Smuts a small packet. He asked: "what is it, any bomb?" When he opened the packet, Smuts found a pair of sandals. Gandhi

told Smuts: "This is my parting gift." On the occasion of Gandhi's birth-anniversary, General Smuts sent a letter on which he wrote: "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." The man who oppressed Gandhi and subjected him to rigorous imprisonment, responded with such warmth. Gandhi always used to say, "Hate the sin not the sinner."



## **Non-violence of Brave**

Again I will give another illustration in which there was an intense human touch. It was the Satyagraha movement on the North-West frontier when Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, called as the Frontier Gandhi, was leading it. On the previous night of Satyagraha, he was arrested. Next day, one thousand Pathans stood to offer Satyagraha. Since Pathans belonging to the 'militant race' were to offer Satyagraha, the British did not send the Police to control the situation arising out of Satyagraha. They sent the Garhwal regiment of the Army. And when that regiment reached the spot of Satyagraha, the Captain of the regiment, an Englishman, gave orders to the Pathans to disperse within 10 minutes. No Pathan dispersed. Again he said: "I give you 15 minutes more." They did not disperse. And then he said: "Within 5 minutes I will open fire." The Pathans bared their chests and said: "Captain, we are prepared to be fired upon. Open fire. Fire as many bullets as you want. Let us see whether our chest with the urge for freedom is powerful or your bullets." After 10 minutes, the Captain ordered: "Fire" However, men from the Garhwal regiment did not fire bullets on Satyagrahis. They threw down their rifles. Captain said: "You will be court-martialled. You may be hanged. You might be sentenced to life imprisonment." They told the Captain: "Whether you kill us or imprison us, we have seen the sublime courage of these Pathans. Those who gave us military training, taught us how to fire at

those who had guns and rifles in their hands. They have not taught us to fire at unarmed patriots."

Ten volumes of 'Transfers of Power in India', documents have now been published by the British Government. They reveal all confidential records including the one about the Garhwal regiment defiance.

## **Human Touch of Humour**

Gandhi went to London during the Round Table Conference in 1931. He was in his usual 'dhoti', and was described by Churchill as 'Half-naked Fakir' of India. He went to meet King George V at the Buckingham Palace. One journalist asked him: "Don't you feel embarrassed to see the King George V in this scanty dress?" Of course he was not participating in a beauty contest remember. Gandhi said: "Why should I feel ashamed?", and added: "The King has enough on for both of us." Referring to the boycott of the Prince of Wales during his visit to India, the King George V asked him the first question: "Why did you boycott my son?" And Gandhi replied: "Not your son, your Majesty, but official representative of the Crown and we are against the Crown." Gandhi's reply was not arrogant, but it had the human touch of humour.

### **Concern for public funds**

Gandhi had great concern for public funds and their utilisation. Once, accompanied by Acharya Kripalani and Acharya Bhansali, Gandhi went to visit the well known temple at Pune on the Parvati hill. When they returned from their visit to the temple, Gandhi requested Kripalani to hire a horse-driven cart and fix up the fare. In the meantime a young college girl came to Gandhi and asked for his autograph. Gandhi insisted that she must make a modest contribution towards his public work. The college girl paid Rs.10/-, and Gandhi returned her gesture by giving her his autograph. Gandhi handed over the ten rupee note to Acharya Kripalani with instructions to pay the cart-fare from this amount.

When the cart reached the residence of Gandhi's host, all three got down from the cart. Immediately after getting down, Gandhi asked Acharya Kripalani as to how much was paid for the cart-fare. Kripalani's reply was "Rs. 5/-" Gandhi then asked him to return Rs. 5/-, since he had given him Rs. 10/-. Kripalani helplessly looked at Acharya Bhansali, who told him that the cartman had run away with Rs. 10/-, without returning Rs. 5/-. On entering the house of their host, where the three leaders were expected to dine, Gandhi told the lady of the house that food should be prepared only for two persons. He told her: "Since Acharya Kripalani had lost Rs. 5/- from the contribution of Rs. 10/- made by a young girl towards our public work, Acharya Kripalani will not be given food to-night." Gandhi was

worried over the loss of a paltry amount of Rs.5/-. It strikes a sharp contrast with the present times, when we witness several multi-crore scams involving serious corruption.

Gandhi's concern for a clean life and probity in financial matters had influenced his senior colleagues in the freedom movement as well.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was in the Ahmednagar fort prison during the 1942 Quit India Movement. While he was in jail, Azad's wife, Begum Azad, died at her residence. As a gesture of courtesy Azad's friends started collecting funds to be used for Begum Azad's memorial.

When Maulana Azad was released from the prison in 1945, he came to know about the collections being made for Begum Azad's memorial. On 17th September 1945, Azad issued a statement saying that memorial should be raised only for a towering person in public life. He humbly pointed out to his colleagues that Begum Azad was just a housewife and had made no significant contribution to public life to qualify for her memorial. Maulana Azad, through a public statement, appealed to his friends to stop any further collections for his wife's memorial and asked them to donate the money collected so far to the 'Kamla Nehru Memorial Hospital.' Such were the men of integrity who grew in the company of Gandhi and experienced his human touch.

## **Imparted Dignity**

Gandhi's touch lent dignity to the instruments and innovations he introduced, evidence of which could be found in a moving episode during the individual Satyagraha of 1940.

For individual Satyagraha against the Second World War, Gandhi used to prepare a list of Satyagrahis, who were persons with integrity and spirit of dedication.

On one occasion a woman from Bombay staying at Sikka Nagar was to stage individual Satyagraha by making a pronouncement against war and courting arrest. She resorted to individual Satyagraha by making antiwar speech in front of the Lamington Road Police Station in Bombay. She was then arrested by the police. Normally, the arrested Satyagrahi was allowed to visit his or her residence to pick up the luggage before being produced before the Court and then sent to jail after the Court's verdict. However, in this case, the lady Satyagrahi, after her arrest, was informed that she would be directly taken to the Court and then to the jail. After this information was given to her, she took out her diamond earrings, pearl necklace and gold bangles. She wrapped those ornaments in handkerchief and handed them over to a Khadi clad person among the spectators, assembled to witness the Satyagraha. She gave him her residential address and requested him to hand over her precious ornaments at her residence. The bewildered Khadi wearer asked her, whether she would not suspect that he would run away with the costly

ornaments. The Lady replied: "Brother, you have on your body Gandhiji's Khadi; you won't commit the sin of running away with the ornaments which I have handed over to you in great faith." This shows how Gandhi had imparted to the Khadi wearers a new dignity and credibility. It is doubtful whether, in the prevailing atmosphere at present, people like me, who are habitual wearers of Khadi, will be relied upon by women to handover their precious ornaments!

## **Gandhi's Humility**

You must have seen Charlie Chaplin, the great humorist, on the screen. On the screen, he makes you laugh but when he returns home he cries in anguish. Once Byron wrote: "If I laugh at any mortal things, it is that I may not weep." Gandhi went to see Charlie Chaplin in a small house in a slum district of London. After their meeting was over, Gandhi asked Charlie Chaplin: "Would you like to see the demonstration of our prayers?" He said: "There is no room for you." Gandhi said: "You sit on the sofa, we will sit down on the floor", and he offered the prayers. Charlie Chaplin wrote. "Gandhi and his men did not feel embarrassed to sit on the floor in front of me but I literally felt embarrassed to sit on the sofa and look down upon Gandhi and his colleagues."



## Human influences on Gandhi

Gandhi never lived in isolation. He did not insulate his mind from the views and influences from others. Ruskin, Tolstoy, Romain Rolland and several others had deeply influenced his life. Ruskin wrote his famous work '**Unto this last**' and Gandhi admitted: "I derived great inspiration from '**Unto this last**' by Ruskin and his concept that good individual is contained in the good of all". The concept of **Sarvodaya** and **Antyodaya** were the products of this influence. Following Ruskin's views, Gandhi stated: "Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: 'Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?' then you will find your doubts and your self melting away." Tolstoy wrote his famous book '**The Kingdom Of God Is Within You**', which also influenced Gandhi. When Gandhi spoke of 'inner voice', people made fun of him. You may not believe in the inner voice. But in essence it connotes conscience or conviction. There is an illuminating work, '**Correspondence between Romain Rolland and Mahatma Gandhi.**' The original book is in French. The beautiful correspondence is translated into English. Gandhi wrote his autobiography in 1931 and to that autobiography, Romain Rolland wrote a preface in French, which was translated into English. In his

preface to Gandhi's autobiography, Romain Rolland wrote: "This great book you are reading is not autobiography in the usual sense, inspired by narcissism or moral exhibitionism. It is a story of experiments with truth."

Those who accuse that Gandhi was unscientific ignore the reality that science, in essence is experimentation. Thus Gandhi, who experimented with truth, himself became in a way a scientist.

I now turn back to 9th August 1942 and a touching moment in the life of Gandhi. The youngsters might not be knowing that Gandhi had a competent secretary, whose name was Mahadev Desai. On 8th August 1942, Quit India resolution was passed and on 9th August early in the morning, all the national leaders including Gandhi were arrested. Gandhi was taken to Aga Khan Palace prison and others to Ahmednagar Fort prison. Before that, quietly Gandhi revealed his mind confidentially to his secretary, Mahadev Desai. He said: "Mahadev, if the Britishers arrest me this time, I will use the last weapon in my armoury. I will undertake a fast unto death. Only condition to give up my fast will be that India should be free. Either India will be free or Gandhi's dead body will come out of the prison." Mahadev Desai knew it well that this time Gandhi was determined to die behind the bars. So he went to Jawaharlal. Jawaharlal was against the fast. He went to Maulana Azad He said: "That can be the last choice" He went to Satyamurthi. He said: "It will create anarchy and violence if he dies in jail." Govind Ballabh Pant feared violence. And Shankarrao Deo said: "If I do not get an opportunity to die by a

bullet I shall die by a fast." He said: "If Gandhi dies in the battle of freedom, I shall not tolerate his death. I shall revolt against this government and ask them to fire at me and if they do not fire a bullet, I will undertake a fast unto death and die as a compensation for father of nation's life."

Such sterling men were created by Gandhi out of the dust - men more glittering than gold, men of character, men of suffering. That was the human touch of Gandhi. Mahadev Desai had a son, Narayan. He has written a very fine book in Gujarati. Chitra Desai has translated it under the caption "Rose and Fire". In that she has narrated a poignant story. Before his entering the jail, Narayan told his father, Mahadev Desai: "Father I will pack up your luggage." Mahadev Desai observed: "This time no luggage will be required, because Gandhi is going to die in the prison." Mahadev Desai was arrested along with Gandhi and he knew well that this time Gandhi was determined to die. "I have lived with Gandhi but I do not want to see his death. I feel so much agonised, my sensitive heart is so much disturbed that I don't think that I will live for more than 7 days in prison." Mahadev Desai entered the Aga Khan Palace jail on 9th August 1942 along with Gandhi and he died exactly on the 7th day, on 15th August 1942. Probably, he had the premonition that he would die. After his death Gandhi said: "All my colleagues tried to persuade me with words not to undertake fast unto death in the jail, but my disciple, Mahadev Desai, knowing fully well that Mahadev alive cannot persuade Gandhi to give up the fast, died and through

his death he has persuaded me to give up the fast." And so Gandhi gave up his determination to die through the fast.

An incorrigible optimist like me today feels that irrepressible spirit of Gandhi will one day assert itself and it will be India's finest hours. If a man like me still feels that I should live, it is only to see that glorious moment.

Friends, let me now conclude. In England, when King dies, they say: "The King is dead, long live the King." After the martyrdom of Gandhi, I would like to say in the same vein:

Gandhi is dead

Long live Gandhi,

His values,

His human touch".

