



YUNUS KHIMANI courtesy SAHMAT

LIKE, I imagine, most in the audience this evening, I watched last month the TV coverage of the death and funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. Raising a question about the legacy of the Princess, the CBS commentator, Dan Rather, answered himself by saying: 'Her legacy walks behind her.' He was referring to young Prince William who alongside his brother Harry, father Prince Charles, and uncle Earl Spencer, was following, on foot, the car that moved ahead with the body of his mother. When watching the funeral of Mother Teresa — Albanian by birth, Indian by adoption, and belonging, it seemed, to the whole world — we clearly noticed, past the long lines of the distinguished and past the throngs of the humble, the assembly of the Sisters of Charity, clad in their unmistakable saris, belonging to the Order that Mother Teresa had given birth to, raised, and left behind. But the legacy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, father of four sons, remaker of the Indian National Congress, and father of independent India, is not to be found among descendants or institutions.

The Legacy of Bapu Reminiscences of a Grandson

Rajmohan Gandhi

He did raise a family — he had no daughters but four sons, all now dead, and fourteen grandchildren, of whom ten, five females and five males, are alive. Some of the grandchildren are grandparents by this time.

Though a father and grandfather, Gandhi claimed that he wanted to see all the children of India, and in fact the children of the whole world, as his children.

He started several institutions and steered them with considerable enthusiasm and skill — two *ashrams* (centres for training and community living) in South Africa, two *ashrams* in India, a college in Ahmedabad in western India, an organisation for the welfare of the former untouchables, another to promote rural industries, a third to research what he called Basic Education. He brought out journals in South Africa and in India; in 1894 in South Africa, where he had arrived two years earlier as a 23-year-old lawyer, he launched the Natal Indian Congress. And in 1920 — after returning to India in 1915 — he renovated the Indian National Congress, which had been formed in 1885.

But he always maintained that his institutions and journals had to be ready to close down at short notice. And in January 1948, within months of the independence for India that the Congress had successfully fought for, he recommended that the Congress, its goal achieved, should dissolve itself politically, become a social movement, and leave the political field to other or new parties.

Leading India to political freedom, he did leave behind a new, or renewed, nation as a legacy. Keeping the struggle for freedom largely nonviolent, he also ensured that India's new rulers, the successors to the British Raj, were civilians rather than men in military uniform. Right from 1908, when two Englishwomen were killed in eastern India in a bomb attack intended for a British official, Gandhi

argued over four decades that any power seized from the British through assassinations would go not to the Indian people but to those possessing bombs, guns and swords. It would lead to military not democratic rule. Since his thinking prevailed in the freedom movement, we may say also that Indian democracy owes much to Gandhi. It also owes much to Jawaharlal Nehru, who as India's Prime Minister for 17 years nurtured the democratic experiment with exceptional skill and commitment; yet as we know it was Gandhi who named Nehru as his successor, and saw him installed as prime minister.

Free India's constitutional commitment to pluralism and equality, unbroken to this day, can also be linked to Gandhi. The power of the past, including the distant past, to twist, tear and torment the present has perhaps been stronger in India than in most parts of the world. When Gandhi began his bid to unite the different castes, classes, races and sects of India for freedom, several of them, thanks to ancient and recent memories, seemed to trust the British more than they trusted some other Indians.

In the perspective of history, Gandhi's success in his bid for Indian unity was remarkable. This can be said despite the fact that he could not prevent the Partition or the carnage that accompanied it. The bulk of the subcontinent's Muslims seemed to subscribe to the line that independence and democracy would lead to Hindu rule, Hindus being a large majority, and to the fear that Hindus might avenge on them the wrongs of history. Under Muhammad Ali Jinnah's single-minded and astute leadership, **India's Muslim majority asked for Pakistan** (Majority of the Muslims (minority community) living in British India asked for Pakistan). Hindus and Sikhs opposed the demand. It was a deadlock that Gandhi failed to resolve; and when in the end Partition did come, it came with torrents of blood.

History will associate Gandhi with the twin failure. It will also however record that for a crucial period Gandhi united peasants and landlords, princes living in palaces and their humble subjects, high caste Hindus, middle caste Hindus and 'untouchables', Indians speaking more than a dozen languages, Hindus, a significant minority of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, and Parsis. Given Indian history, it was a notable feat.

Then Gandhi convinced India that the laws of the new country could not be influenced either by the fact of Muslim support for Pakistan, or by the privileged position of the caste Hindu elite — that the new India had to be rooted in pluralism, tolerance, equal rights, and a concern for the underdog.

We have forgotten it now, but in the twenties, thirties and forties, the world was often warned by Gandhi's British and Indian critics that the independence he and

the Indian National Congress were demanding would lead to oppression by a minority of high caste Hindus. That this did not quite happen is part of the legacy of Gandhi and the Indian freedom movement.

However, after 50 years, the independence experience provides pride but also disenchantment. If today's India, promising and pulsating but also frustrating, over-packed, discordant and prone to violence, is in some ways to be regarded as Gandhi's legacy, then we must wonder whether it is a wholly satisfying legacy.

A Universal Message

It was Gandhi's claim that his 'message and methods were in their essentials for the whole world' — that was his phrase when a group of Americans invited him to their country in 1925. Answering that the moment for visiting America had not arrived for him, he added:

I must make my position good (in India)... I must for the time being keep to my restricted Indian platform till I know the result of the experiment in India itself... I would like to see India free and strong so that she may offer herself as a willing and pure sacrifice for the betterment of the world. (*Young India*, 17.9.25)

Four years later, while visiting Burma, Gandhi said:

My mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity... But through freedom of India I hope to realize and carry on the mission of brotherhood of man... I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or exploitation of other nationalities. (*Young India*, 4.4.29)

Through India he would work for the world — that was his position while he lived. With his death, he and his truth escaped the confines of India and became global property.

His truth seemed more important to Gandhi than his institutions, indeed more important than his family, and more important also than his country.

Therefore, if there is a Gandhi legacy, it may lie more in his truth than in the India he strove to fashion, provided that truth makes sense to us.

Though he frequently employed religious language, which was often, though not always, the language of Hinduism, Gandhi's truth was not necessarily a religious truth. To Gora, a South Indian who proclaimed his atheism, Gandhi said: "Do you feel a pang at the suffering of others? Then that is enough."¹

Many may be aware of the 'answer to doubt' that he wrote out in August 1947, close to the date on which India became free :

Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self is too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and 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 it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? ...Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.²

Empowering the Weak

Let us look at Gandhi's accounts of two actual encounters with poor and weak individuals. One was with an indentured labourer called Balasanduram who in 1894 came to see the 24-year-old lawyer Gandhi in Durban, South Africa. In the autobiography, Gandhi describes him as "a Tamil man in tattered clothes, head-gear in hand, [with] two front-teeth broken and his mouth bleeding, [who] stood before me trembling and weeping.' He had been beaten by his European master. After relating how he was able to assist Balasundaram, Gandhi adds in his autobiography:

A practice had been forced upon every indentured labourer to take off his headgear when visiting a European, whether the headgear were a cap, turban or scarf wrapped around the head... Balasundaram thought that he should follow the practice even with me... I felt humiliated and asked him to tie up the scarf. He did so, not without a certain hesitation, but I could perceive the pleasure on his face.

When an Indian declares to another, 'I will get your cap off your head,' he is saying, 'You will bite the dust,' or, 'I'll wipe the floor with you.' In 1916, shortly after returning to India, Gandhi explained the matter of the cap or turban :

If a child says to his father, 'Please put on your turban the wrong side up for me,' the father understands that the child wants to have a laugh at his expense and at once obeys the command. But when someone else with uncharitable motives says the same thing, he clearly answers, 'You conquer my head first and then make me wear my turban in any fashion you please.'³

To return to Balasundaram, Gandhi adds in the autobiography:

It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings. (Autobiography)

Gandhi was with his friend Charles Andrews in the village of Bolgarh in Orissa when, at the end of 1927, as Gandhi writes, an "untouchable" with a half-bent back, wearing only a dirty loincloth, came crouching in front of us. He picked up a straw and put it in his mouth, and then lay flat on his face with arms outstretched. He then raised

himself, folded his hands, bowed, took out the straw, arranged it in his hair, and was about to leave.

I was writhing in agony (Gandhi continues)... [When the visitor was] asked why he had taken the straw in his mouth, he said this was to honour me.

Gandhi, who had ascertained that the man ate the meat of dead animals and drank liquor as customs enforced by his village, proceeds with his account:

I asked him for a gift. He searched for a copper about his waist. 'I do not want your copper,' I said in my misery. 'I want you to give me something better.' 'I will give it,' he replied. 'The gift I want is a promise never again to take that straw in your mouth for any person on earth; it reduces a man's dignity; never again to drink, because it reduces man to the condition of a beast; never again to eat carrion, for no civilized person would eat carrion.

We can see that it is the humiliation that some men inflict and others internalise that agonises Gandhi and drowns him in misery, that empowering the weak seems part of his truth.

Conscience above Life

Let us look at an incident recorded by Nirmal Kumar Bose, the professor of anthropology, when Bose was serving as Gandhi's secretary and interpreter in Bengal. The incident occurred in the winter of 1946-47 in conflict-torn Noakhali in east Bengal, now Bangladesh, where Gandhi walked, often barefoot, from village to village in an effort to instill courage in the Hindu minority and restraint in the Muslim majority, and where Gandhi spent his nights under the roofs of poor Hindus and Muslims, including washermen, fishermen, weavers and cobblers.

A Muslim community leader, whose title of Maulvi announced him to be a scholar of Islam, had come to meet Gandhi, who informed the Maulvi of his anguish that some Hindus in the vicinity had been forced at swordpoint to convert to Islam. 'At least they are alive,' the Maulvi commented. Bose writes that an indignant Gandhi told the Maulvi to his face that he was amazed that God allowed a man with his views to claim that he was a scholar of Islam.

In this exchange, the Maulvi, one might say, was pro-life, and Gandhi, though well aware that if it came to the test most people were likely to prefer disloyalty or deception to death, was in pain and anger that some human beings had been coerced against their will. He was pro-choice. He was pro-conscience.⁴

The year 1897, when Queen Victoria celebrated her golden jubilee, may be regarded as marking the pinnacle of imperialism. That year much of India thanked God for Victoria, and many in India seemed to regret their own

culture. Gandhi, who was in South Africa from 1893, had learned to sing God Save the Queen and taught it to his children, but he could not accept that the white race, or the Europeans, or the West, were divinely-ordained rulers and teachers of humankind. By 1920, less than a quarter century after Victoria's jubilee, Gandhi had entered Indian hearts, and pride in India and Indian things had returned. A celebration of the culture into which one is born may thus also be regarded as part of Gandhi's truth.

In 1927 he said in Sri Lanka: "Those from the West should not consciously or unconsciously lay violent hands upon the manners, customs and habits' of the East or "tear the lives of the people of the East [from their] roots." Significantly, however, he added that Eastern "manners, customs and habits" could be questioned if they were "repugnant to fundamental ethics." (*YoungIndia*, 8.12.27)

Non-violence as Love and Struggle

In 1936, two African-American couples, Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman and Edward and Phenola Carroll, called on Gandhi in Bardoli in western India and discussed with him his use of the word *ahimsa* or non-violence in preference to love. Gandhi told them of the impact made on him by Paul the apostle's famous advocacy of love — the epistle to the Corinthians that Prime Minister Tony Blair read at the Princess Diana funeral, ending with, 'faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.'

Once, on the Hindu New Year's day, he had sent Paul's text to a nephew, Maganlal, from whom he had high expectations, along with the following letter:

What shall I send you for a gift on this bright and happy day. I would like to give you what is wanting in you, in me, in many others. Read this (Paul's epistle on love), chew the end, digest it. Do all you can, strain your neck and eye, but get a glimpse of this love or charity... If we too can get at this dagger of love, we can shake the world to its foundations. Though I feel I have something of that love, I am painfully conscious every moment how very shallow it is... Only yesterday I saw I had no room in my heart for those who would not let me have my way.⁵

Beautiful as Paul's definition of love was, Gandhi told his American visitors, he had to take into account the "other connotations of love in the English language." Moreover, in the real world around them, which in Gandhi's phrase was a world of strife where "life lived upon life," he wanted a word that suggested struggle as well as love. Non-violence was love plus struggle, whereas by itself love might suggest an absence of struggle. (62:198-202)

The right of the weak to choose. The duty of the loving to struggle, of the struggling to love. These are parts of Gandhi's truth, and of his legacy. It was at his 1936 conversation with the Thurmans and the Carrolls that Gandhi made that well-known remark:

Well [he said], if it comes true it maybe through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered to the world.

The late Bayard Rustin, who was prominent in the American civil rights movement, has recorded that at a conference in the south of this country in November 1957, when Martin Luther King, Jr., and 59 other African-American leaders accepted the motto, 'Not one hair of one head of one white person shall be harmed,' King and he discussed, as they left the conference, the prophetic statement that Gandhi had made 21 years earlier to the Thurmans and the Carrolls.

Gandhi's arguments for nonviolence were these: Since life is sacred and also one, violence is both unholy and partly suicidal; a bit of himself is killed when a man kills another. Also, violence brutalises the user as well as the victim, and reproduces itself in the user through familiarity and on the victim's side as retaliation.

Muslims killing Hindus or Sikhs today would tomorrow kill fellow-Muslims; Hindus killing whites or Muslims would in future destroy fellow-Hindus. Again, a killer assumes the status of God rather than man, ascribing to his stand a perfection no human can claim, and to his victim an irredeemability that no human should pronounce, for no human can see everything about another.

Going Against His Own

In 1909, a man called Sir Curzon Wylie, ADC to Morley, Secretary of State for India, was shot dead at a reception in London to which he had been invited by the Indian Association. The assassin was an Indian student called Madanlal Dhingra, who was tried and hanged. Some Indians in London defended Dhingra's act as patriotic, but Gandhi, who visited London within days of the killing, expressed his dissent in these words in his journal in South Africa:

Even should the British leave in consequence of such murderous acts, who will rule in their place? Is the Englishman bad because he is an Englishman? Is it that everyone with an Indian skin is good?... India can gain nothing from the rule of murderers — no matter whether they are black or white. Under such a rule, India will be utterly ruined and laid waste. (*Indian Opinion*, 14.8.09)

After the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919, when, by British figures, about 400 Indians, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, were killed, and by Indian estimates about a thousand lost their lives, Indian opinion was decisively hardened in favour of snapping the British connection. Within eight months, the Indian National Congress held its annual plenary session in Amritsar, right next to the ground, the Jallianwala Bagh, where the massacre had taken place.

The plenary discussed a resolution condemning the massacre, demanding action against the officers involved, and criticising also violence from the Indian side that had taken six British lives before the massacre. Speaker after speaker supporting the resolution objected to the last portion. One leader said that no son of an Indian mother could have drafted that final portion. This was an insinuation that Annie Besant, the Irishwoman who had made India her home and Indian home rule her mission, who was seated prominently on the dais, had drafted the criticism of Indian violence. After all she was white, was she not?

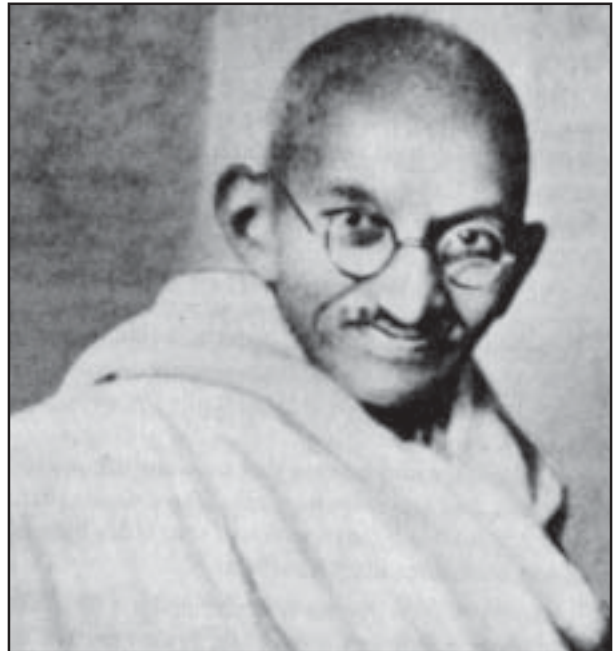
hi the voting, the resolution was passed minus the offending part. Gandhi now asked to speak on the subject. At this time he was a respected new figure on the Indian scene, one among a group of leaders, and not yet the virtually unquestioned leader that he would soon become. Though the voting had taken place, he was grudgingly allowed to take the floor.

“I was all the time thinking,” Gandhi said, “about the remark that no son of an Indian mother could have drafted those words, because it was I who had drafted them. I came to the conclusion that only the son of an Indian mother could have drafted them.” Then, according to K. M. Munshi, who was present, Gandhi ‘spoke as if his future depended on the passage of those words.’ After he finished, a vote was taken again, and the original resolution was approved in its entirety.

So fighting against your own side, or for the integrity of your side, was also part of Gandhi’s truth.

In March 1947, in the state of Bihar, where Hindus had recently killed thousands of Muslims in retaliation for what had been done to Hindus in Noakhali in east Bengal, Gandhi explained the dynamics and folly of retaliation to a huge audience that had come for one of his multi-faith prayer meetings. We may mark that in this parable Gandhi casts himself in a beggar’s role:

If I am starving and you feed me. the contentment in my eyes will brighten your face too. But suppose I am starving and demand food from you by abusing you,



you will drive me away, saying, “Go and starve yourself to death.” My abuses will not get me food. They will, however, make me feel that I am a brave man. Again, if you ask your gatekeeper to beat me up for my abuses, that will sow the seeds of hatred against you in my heart... The next day I shall gather a few friends and retaliate. If you manage to kill me, it will create among my relations and friends a feeling of revenge against you... The world has reached the stage of atomic warfare in returning violence for violence. (11.3.47, 87:70)

Against the background of today’s realities in places like the Middle East, Bosnia, India-Pakistan and Rwanda, these expressions of Gandhi’s truth appear relevant.

Though Gandhi’s stand against violence and retaliation is well-known, his belief in dialogue is less known. In the month of September 1944, in an effort to resolve the Congress-Muslim League deadlock, he talked fourteen times with Jinnah in Jinnah’s Bombay home, an exercise denounced as a sellout by some Hindus. The talks failed, but Gandhi never regretted his bid. When in May 1947 Gandhi called on Jinnah in New Delhi for what was to prove their last talk, and Vallabhbhai Patel, the strong man of the Congress, said he did not like the idea of the meeting, Gandhi said he would go to Jinnah ‘seventy times’ if necessary.

If struggle is part of Gandhi’s truth, so is dialogue between groups in conflict.

With an idea like dialogue most of us would agree readily, but what about Gandhi's belief, 'The less I have, the more I am'? He felt that renunciation would bring him closer to the Indian poor. Gandhi also thought that renunciation could be a source of spiritual power and political influence.

The Woman in Gandhi

One of the most intriguing aspects of Gandhi was his belief that he had acquired many womanly qualities even while he frequently criticised British rule for, as he put it, emasculating India.

Again and again he said that he wanted India to be more manly, and also more womanly. Three months before he died he said to a woman who had sought his blessings for a son born after three daughters:

Should even a woman like you make a distinction between a son and a daughter? Can even a wise woman like you have such an antipathy towards womankind? Of course all your children have my blessings. (89:471)

In a letter he wrote to a friend in November 1947, after violence in the newly-independent India between Hindus



and Muslims had humiliated and humbled him, Gandhi likened his state to that of the princess Draupadi in the Mahabharata whom the Kauravas' had tried to disrobe in a public chamber in the presence of her husbands. Said Gandhi:

I saw your letter only now, after listening to the sweet and sad *bhajan* (prayer song) containing Draupadi's prayer... Draupadi had mighty Bhima and Arjuna and the truthful Yudhishthira as husbands; she was the daughter-in-law of men like Dronacharya, Bhishma and Vidura, and yet amidst an assembly of people it appeared she was in a terrible plight. At that hour she did not lose faith and prayed to God from her heart. And God did protect her honour.

Today I also am seated in a palatial house surrounded by loving friends. [Gandhi was at the time a guest in Birla House in New Delhi, belonging to the industrialist Ghanshyam Das Birla] Still, I am in a sad plight. Yet there is God's help, as I find each day. (89:464-5)

Just as Draupadi had powerful relatives, Gandhi had strong allies in Nehru, Patel and others running the Indian government, many of whom had been his disciples or lieutenants. Yet when Gandhi's cherished values were assaulted in India and Pakistan, these powerful men seemed as helpless as the kings, princes and teachers had been when Draupadi was molested. Yet Gandhi also seemed to have the sense that even as Draupadi's honour was finally saved, something precious was being salvaged around him in the new India.

This we can see without much difficulty. What remains intriguing is the ease with which this challenger of the Raj and of Indian hierarchies, whose handshake at age 78, as a Czech visitor found, was 'firm, manlike,'⁶ casts himself as Draupadi, the woman under attack. This father of independent India, enthroned in the hearts of millions, so naturally sees himself either as a poor man asking for food, or as a vulnerable woman.

As Father and Husband

Here and elsewhere Gandhi's was an unusual truth. It was also, frequently, an uncomfortable truth, as his family discovered again and again. To his second son Manilal, Gandhi wrote in 1918:

Just as I became myself the victim of my spiritual experiments, so did Ba (Kasturba, Gandhi's wife) and you, the sons.⁷

When such an admission comes without an apology or indication of restitution, many of us are troubled. Not victimising a loved one is principle number one for most of us, even though many of us manage frequently to violate it. Yet before we label Gandhi as hard or unfeeling we should perhaps remind ourselves that most of our



Gandhi's wife and children in South Africa

cultures, Eastern or Western, conceive of some situations where injury or even death to loved ones is preferred to the loss of something cherished even more.

We are told that God tested Abraham to see whether he loved God more than his son. In the Hindu tradition God asks Prahlad whether he loves truth more than his father; and God asks Harishchandra to prove that he loves truth more than his family. From one war to the next, all our nations seem to honour parents willing to sacrifice their sons and daughters for an idea or a sentiment; most of us recognise that every society requires some, including perhaps our loved ones, to take up professions where life is daily risked and occasionally sacrificed. And in some difficult questions some are pro-choice rather than pro-life.

So if Gandhi's words and deeds suggested that he was prepared from time to time, for the sake of what seemed to him a higher value, to risk life, happiness, and comfort — his own, and that of his loved ones — he was following a road that was and is widely known, even if less often travelled.

My father Devadas was Gandhi's fourth and young-est son — Harilal, Manilal, and Ramdas were born before him. Gandhi assisted at my father's birth in the year 1900 in Durban in South Africa. My father was twenty and leaving for a course of study in Benares when, as he would recall after his father's death, his father "suddenly stepped forward and with great love

kissed me on the forehead." "God alone is the witness of the deep love between father and son," Devadas added."

There is deep love, Devadas says, but others do not see it. "God alone is the witness." Gandhi teased my father too, and for a while playfully called him. 'Your Majesty.' Shortly after I was born, Gandhi wrote to my father asking 'His Majesty' to hug little "His Highness" on grandfather's behalf.

Gandhi as a General

Yet at the end of 1921, when in violent disturbances in Bombay Hindus and Muslims, on that occasion taking the same side, jointly attacked Europeans and some Indians, mostly Christians, Parsis or Jews, who were welcoming the visiting Prince of Wales, and 55 were killed in the rioting and the police firing triggered by it, Gandhi had declared, possibly with my father's concurrence, that should a fresh outbreak occur, he would send out 21-year-old Devadas into the centre of the violence.

In being ready to sacrifice a deeply-beloved son, Gandhi reminds us again of Abraham, and Harishchandra, and Prahlad, who, in the traditions bequeathed to us, were asked by God if they were willing to sacrifice their nearest and dearest. In fear and trembling, and yet apparently trusting, they said they were. When contemplating a hazard involving himself or his loved ones, Gandhi only rarely said that God had sent a challenge. Oftener he said that an inner voice, his truth, was impelling him.

In some ways we can understand the logic of Gandhi's truth or inner voice. Having asked for revolt, Gandhi felt it was up to him to control it and keep it nonviolent. Thanks to his call, lives had been hurt and lost; could he and his loved ones keep out of the sacrificing fields? These were the questions that Gandhi's conscience faced. Whether the responses of this conscience are always acceptable to us is another matter.

It is ironical yet true that Gandhi the apostle of nonviolence seems most readily comprehensible from the perspective of war. Throughout his adult life he was on war duty, either struggling for Indian rights in South Africa, or commanding the Indian fight for independence, or battling for sanity between Hindus and Muslims or for justice between caste Hindus and the 'untouchables.' If he wished to remain credible with his soldiers and their supporters in what was virtually a lifelong war, 'General' Gandhi could not afford to be soft with his loved ones.

When on one occasion Kasturba, Gandhi's wife, was late for an *ashram* task, Gandhi asked for the reason. Kasturba replied that she was getting a meal ready for a journey that their third son, Ramdas, two years older than my father, was making. Admitting on further questioning that she might not have detained herself for the sake of another *ashramite*, Kasturba said: "But truth to tell, they are not to me like Ramdas." She added: "You are indeed very hard on me."

Ramdas was married in Gandhi's *ashram* in Ahmedabad in 1928. Addressing his son and his bride on the occasion, Gandhi, who as a young lawyer had earned and then given away a large income in South Africa, said: "We are pledged to poverty. You will both earn your bread in the sweat of your brow as poor people do. I have given you no gifts except a pair *oftaklis* (spindles for spinning thread by hand), and a copy of my dearly beloved Gita." In the middle of these remarks he choked and nearly broke down. The hardness so often faced by Kasturba and the sons lay around Gandhi's heart, not inside it.

Gandhi vs Gandhi

The eldest son, Harilal, bright, outgoing, and good-looking, was for some time Gandhi's great hope. In his teens he joined some of his father's *satyagrahas* in South Africa, and as a result spent two rough six-month terms in prison. In a letter to Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi mentioned Harilal's prison going. Not long afterward, however, the son rebelled and left home, accusing Gandhi of seeking a reputation for impartiality at the expense of his sons, and nursing deep grievances. Directly and through others Gandhi tried to regain his son. Some of Gandhi's letters to Harilal exhorted, or expressed pain or disappointment; other letters were breezy and chatty, one contained an amusing five-line verse, as far as I know the only verse that Gandhi ever wrote, and in another Gandhi said to his son: "I am often ashamed of the meanness of my mind."⁹

The relationship was never restored. However, after his father's death, Harilal suddenly appeared in our home in New Delhi. My uncle would never say so himself, but my father concluded from the timing of his visit that he had come "to share our sorrows."¹⁰ Not long thereafter, Harilalkaka — Uncle Harilal — died. 'Gandhi versus Gandhi' is the title of a popular, and I understand moving, stage play in Marathi about Gandhi's failed relationship with his eldest son.

Narayan Desai, son of Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary from 1917 to 1942, when he died in detention, has related that on one of their numberless train journeys, Gandhi, Kasturba and their party, which included Mahadev Desai and Narayan, heard a cry at a



Gandhi with Kasturba in a public meeting

station, 'Mata Kasturba ki jai!' — "Victory to Mother Kasturba!" This was not a cry usually heard: the man raising it was Harilal. To quote Narayan Desai:

He (Harilal) was emaciated. His front teeth were gone. His hair had turned grey. From a pocket in his ragged clothes, he took out an orange and said, "Ba. I have brought this for you." Breaking in, Bapu (Gandhi) said, "Didn't you bring anything for me?" "No, nothing for you. I only want to tell you that all the greatness you have achieved is because of Ba. Don't forget that!"...

As the train pulled away. Kasturba remembered that neither she nor anyone else had offered Harilal anything. He "must be dying of hunger," Kasturba said. From outside the compartment, amidst the cries of 'Gandhiji-ki-jai,' another faint cry could also be heard, 'Mala Kasturba

In 1947, three years after Kasturba's death, Gandhi used the words his son had used. Speaking to a visitor from South Africa, Gandhi said, "It is because of her (Kasturba) that I am today what I am."¹²

Mohandas and Kasturba were each of them thirteen when they were married in 1883. The climax of their partnership of sixty-one years was the eighteen-month period they spent together as the Empire's prisoners in the Aga Khan's house in Poona in western India, from August 1942 to February 1944, when Kasturba died.

Once during this spell, when a fellow-detainee, Dr Gilder, was allowed to receive some mangoes from his

relatives for his wedding anniversary, Kasturba asked Gandhi: “How many years have we been married?” “Why,” Gandhi replied, “do you also want to celebrate your anniversary?” Kasturba laughed along with the others, but summed up in that exchange and the laughter was all the rich sadness of a life compressed, thanks to the husband, into a mission.

Also kept with Gandhi in Poona, Mahadev Desai, too, died during that detention. Pyarelal stepped into Desai’s shoes as Gandhi’s secretary. In January 1948 in New Delhi, in the last week of his life, Gandhi said to my father Devadas, who had informed his father that he was taking Pyarelal home to dinner, “But do you ever think of inviting me?” He said this, my father would later recall, “with great laughter,”¹³ but I think this exchange between father and son sits well with Kasturba’s query to her husband regarding wedding anniversaries.

Kasturba’s Resistance

Mohandas and Kasturba were both 28 when they clashed sharply in their home in Durban. We know of the incident from Gandhi’s autobiography; we would not have known of it but for Gandhi’s candour; and we know too that “with tears in his eyes”¹⁴ he at times recalled the incident before *ashram* members. Let me quote Gandhi:

When I was practising in Durban, my office clerks often stayed with me... One of the clerks was a Christian, born of ‘untouchable’ parents... Each room [in the house] had chamber pots... My wife or I attended to them. My wife managed the pots of the others but to clean those used by one who had been an ‘untouchable’ seemed to her to be the limit. She could not bear the pots being cleaned by me, neither did she like doing it herself. Even today I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended the steps, pot in hand... I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice, “I will not stand this nonsense in my house.”

She shouted back: “Keep your house to yourself and let me go.” I forgot myself, caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, and proceeded to open it with the intention of throwing her out. The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried: “Have you no sense of shame? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives here to harbour me. For heaven’s sake behave yourself and shut the gate.”

I put on a brave face, but was really ashamed and shut the gate...

The incident... occurred... when I thought that the wife was born to do her husband’s behest...

The domineering male and husband in him had been revealed, an aspect of himself that Gandhi strove to overcome, yet he did not regret his disappointment that, as he wrote in 1921 to his friend Charlie Andrews: “Mrs Gandhi... would not treat on a footing of equality Lawrence who belonged to the pariah (‘untouchable’) class and whom I had invited to stay with me.” (Letter of 29.1.21; 19:288-90) In the chapter where he describes the incident, Gandhi claims that he saw Lawrence and the others staying in his home as “my kith and kin” and also that he knew “no distinction between relatives and strangers and countrymen, white and dark-skinned, Hindus of other faiths.” That precisely was the charge that Kasturba and her sons, and others who were kith and kin, made.



With Ba in their younger days

Uniting India's People

I find even in the young Gandhi a sense that he had to make of all Indians a united nation. In the year 1888, when 19-year-old Mohandas left Rajkot and Porbandar to study law in London, a man called John Strachey, one of the guardians of the Raj, declared:

This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India — that there is not, and never was, an Indian, or even any country of India, possessing according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious.¹⁵

There was not, and never had been, an India or an Indian, but the British were creating it—that was the implication. It was a notion that Gandhi could not stomach.

I think it is because of this sort of impulse that a 19 or 20-year-old Mohandas, a Hindu from a conservative family who had solemnly vowed that he would not touch meat in England, joins in 1889 in London the Anjuman-e-Islamia, an association of Muslim students from India.

Hence it is also, it seems to me, that in 1893, within ten days of arriving in South Africa to practise law, the 23-year-old Gandhi gathers a number of Indians living in Pretoria, many of whom are traders, asks them to be honest in business, to forget all distinctions between Indians of different religions and languages, and to form an Indian association, and decides to teach the English language to three of them in their homes, a Muslim barber, a Hindu petty shopkeeper, and a Muslim clerk. Within weeks, he would later recall, “there was in Pretoria no Indian I did not know, or whose condition I was not acquainted with.”

To create the India that men like Strachey had denied, Gandhi would involve and dissolve himself, and his blood family, to make a family of all Indians.

Gandhi's Aspirations

Let us pause for a moment to look at the dimensions of Gandhi's undertakings. He wants to unite India, he wants to liberate India, he wants to end untouchability and the sense of high-and-low in Hindu society, he wants men to share the burdens of women and women to share leadership with men, he wants Hindus and Muslims to leave the past behind and live with mutual respect, he wants sanitation and cleanliness in every corner of India, he wants an Indians to learn one Indian language, he wants Basic Education for every Indian child and every Indian cottage to hum with the activity of the spinning wheel, he desires a pang in Indians for their neighbors in need; and he wants the world as a

whole to learn to pursue and resolve conflicts through nonviolence.

For these (and other!) goals he raises teams of men and women, spots and trains leaders and reconciles them with one another, and strives for popular participation. And here is the interesting thing: if the changes he desires are not forthcoming, he looks for flaws in himself, and strives for ever-greater self-mastery. He seems to believe that if he masters himself perfectly, he will master the world around him.

He believes in God, of course, and refers again and again to occasions when God rescued him or his endeavours. He loves the devotional songs where the weak and sinful approach God with confidence. Yet on the whole this man of God seems reluctant to burden God; he directs his energies at himself. Instead of saying, ‘I can't do it, God, please do it for me,’ he seemed to say, ‘By God, I'll make an attempt to do it. I'll do or die.’ It was a formidable, almost crushing weight that he carried.

Of Human Potential

Princess Diana, if I may refer again to her, strikes a chord in us because she was just like us — had difficulties in her marriage, pain from relationships that promised so much, had problems with her health, had eating disorders — because she was vulnerable. Gandhi stirred us by appearing to be stronger than us, by his attempts at self-mastery. We see ourselves in Diana (in our fantasies we may see ourselves as Diana). Through Gandhi, we perhaps see what we can change. We see our potential. If we study him closely, we also of course see the vulnerable Gandhi underneath the armour constructed out of vows, disciplines, and his sense of what he was called to do.

The Gandhi we know, severe with his sons, had started out as a child in whom pride in the family line had been carefully instilled. In 1907 he told his first biographer, the Rev. Joseph Doke of Johannesburg:

The Gandhi clan were... of considerable importance in the political life of Porbandar... One of my earliest memories is connected with the learning and repetition, as a child, of the family pedigree, with all its ramifications and offshoots, away there in the old home within the walls of the white city.¹⁶

Gandhi's ten grandchildren and numerous great-grandchildren now living are involved in medicine, engineering, politics, the civil service, teaching, writing, conflict resolution, rural industry, physiotherapy, business, and other vocations. I think most descendants understand, and many are proud, that Gandhi sought a family larger than the flesh of his flesh; a response easier,

I suppose, for grandchildren and their children than it was for Gandhi's sons.

In his lifetime many wanted to make him their guru. He resisted them. Thus he said to Rameshwari Nehru, in 1947: "In the end, follow the promptings of your heart."¹⁷

To Amtus Salam, also in 1947: "Look into your heart, and do as it bids."¹⁸

To Verrier Elwin, 1932. "My testimony is worth nothing if when you are alone with your Maker, you do not hear his voice saying, 'Thou art on the right path.' That is the unfailing test and no other."¹⁹

"What was his secret" asked Upton Close, adding, "I think my wife discovered it. She said: 'In his presence I felt a new capability and power in myself rather than a consciousness of his power. I felt equal, confident, good for anything — as if some consciousness within me had newly awakened.'"²⁰

Yet we should ask whether this legacy that privileges the individual's truth or conscience may not disturb us more than we may like. Will not conscience clash with law, custom, a system, a constitution, an institution, a religion, a nation?

This old question was one that Gandhi had wrestled with. In 1924 he quoted a letter to him that in effect said: Do you know what harm you have done by continually harping on conscience? I find youngsters and grown-up people talking utter nonsense under cover of conscience.

In his comment, Gandhi conceded that, to quote him, "when a man makes everything a matter of conscience, he is a stranger to it." As he saw it,

A conscientious man hesitates to assert himself, he is always humble, never boisterous, always compromising, always ready to listen, ever willing, even anxious to admit mistakes.

Gandhi also thought that, to quote him again,

The world has no difficulty in distinguishing between conscience and an arrogant or ignorant assumption of it.

Gandhi's conclusion remains valid, I think. He said: The introduction of conscience into our public life is welcome...if it has taught a few of us to stand up for human dignity and rights in the face of the heaviest odds. These acts will live for ever, whereas those done under shams are like soap-bubbles... (*Young India*, 21.8.24)

Four months before he died, at the age of 78, Gandhi said:

I have just a handful of bones in my body. But my heart belongs to me. So do your hearts belong to you.

Helped by Gandhi, many found their hearts.

Gandhi surely went wrong when during the Second World War, on his views being sought, he suggested that the voluntary nonviolent sacrifice of numberless Jews, and of the British and the Czechs, might change Hitler's heart, or at any rate leave behind a powerful message for the future. He was led into responding with such views by his belief that nonviolence had universal application; and I think also by the consideration that if he agreed that Hitler was different, those in India who believed in violence would argue that their enemies were also like Hitler and required physical elimination.

In a letter from Calcutta written in August 1947 to Nehru, who was urging Gandhi to come to Delhi so that his advice could be sought from time to time, Gandhi answered:

My advice has value only when I am actually working at a particular thing. I can only disturb when I give academic advice... (90:117)

In these sentences I see an admission that his advice to the Jews, the British and the Czechs was 'academic' and did not have practical value, for he was not 'working' at their defence against Hitler. But where he might have said, "You are there, and I am here; I do not know what to advise, you must turn to your conscience and your mind and to God," he preferred, when pressed, to enunciate the general theory in which he believed. In doing so, he hurt many noble souls, including some who had looked up to him.

In Gandhi's Footsteps

Did Gandhi think he would have influence after his death, or leave a legacy? In 1936, referring to the possibility of being killed, Gandhi said:

Assassinating the body... does not matter, for out of my ashes a thousand Gandhis will arise. (*Harijan*, 16.1.37)

A view of the world in the last fifty years seems to reveal several individuals who recalled, or continue to recall, Gandhi's truth. I have already mentioned Dr Martin Luther King. If King acknowledged the influence of Gandhi on his thinking, Indians know of the impact on India of the American civil rights movement, which can be seen in the fact that possibly the most popular of all

group songs in India today, a song sung in a dozen Indian languages, is “*We Shall Overcome*”

King and several of his fellow-fighters, the Dalai Lama, who commits himself again and again to a nonviolent struggle for his people and says that he is as interested in the future of the Chinese as he is in the Tibetans’ future, Aquino of the Philippines who nonviolently defied a dictatorship and whose wife became president of the Philippines, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, the elected leader sent to a locked room when she should have been taken to the seat of power, continuing to pit her conscience against her country’s military regime, and Nelson Mandela of South Africa, now served and honoured by those who celebrated his imprisonment for 27 years, who seeks facts about South Africa’s recent past but calls also for reconciliation — these persons have recalled Gandhi’s truth by their actions, and also, often, referred to Gandhi in the course of their actions.

Thus in a statement in January this year, Aung San Suu Kyi quoted Gandhi’s words: “Real independence will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.”¹¹

In 1993 in Warsaw, a Polish Senator told me of the pro-democracy impact of Attenborough’s film on Gandhi when Poland was under dictatorship; there is documentation about the influence of the American civil rights movement and of Gandhi on the pro-democracy movement in East Germany²²; the readiness to say “No” to the regime and to remain nonviolent marked several of the transitions to democracy in many portions of the former Soviet Empire.

Then there is that persistent, even if not always famous, often eccentric, neighbourhood Gandhi, the campaigner who fights in many a small corner of our world, including several parts of India, for local or human or environmental rights without violence and without submission, or for dialogue and reconciliation. When, for example, in June this year I visited the island of Okinawa, I was told, “You should meet the Okinawa Gandhi.”

This “Okinawa Gandhi” has counterparts in numerous places. Men and women like him, and others like those mentioned earlier, who found their hearts, whose struggles, in objective and method, remind us of Gandhi, who may help kindle a flame in our hearts, and whose fires Gandhi may have helped kindle, these men and women in different parts of the

world including India have held and carried forward the Gandhi legacy. □

Notes

- ¹ Quoted in Creighton Lacy, *The Conscience of India*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Chicago, 1965, p. 139.
- ² *Collected Works*, 89:125.
- ³ Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford, New Delhi, 1996, p. 304.
- ⁴ See Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, pp. 149-50.
- ⁵ Desai, *Day-to-day*, vol. 1, pp. 2-3.
- ⁶ Jiri Nehnevasja quoted by Miloslav Krasa in Nanda (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: 125 Years*, ICCR, New Delhi, 1995, p. 104.
- ⁷ On 31.7.18. See Mahadev Desai, *Day-to-day with Gandhi*, vol.1, p.201.
- ⁸ Devadas Gandhi, *Ba, Babu aur Bhai* (Hindi). Sasta Sahitya Mandal, New Delhi, 1956, p. 16.
- ⁹ Letter of Nov. 26, 1918, in Desai, *Day-to-day with Gandhi*, vol.1, p. 264.
- ¹⁰ Devadas Gandhi, *Ba, Babu aur Bhai*, p. 28.
- ¹¹ Narayan Desai, *Bliss was it to be young — with Gandhi*, Bhavan, Bombay, 1968, p. 72.
- ¹² On June 8, 1947. Quoted in *Collected Works* 88:105.
- ¹³ Devada’s Gandhi, *Ba, Babu aur Bhai*, p. 29.
- ¹⁴ Narayan Desai, *Bliss*, p. 72.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in Ainslee Embree, *India’s Search for National Identity*, Chanakya, New Delhi, 1988, p. 1.
- ¹⁶ Doke, *An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, p. 19.
- ¹⁷ To Rameshwari Nehru, 19.9.47, 89:203.
- ¹⁸ To Ararntus Salam, 1.11.47, 89:451.
- ¹⁹ To Verrier Elwin, 25.4.32, in Iyer (ed.), *Essential Writings*, p. 157.
- ²⁰ Quoted in Gene Sharp, *Gandhi Wields the Weapon of Moral Power*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 226.
- ²¹ Aung San Suu Kyi, *For Us To Choose*, Himmat, Bombay, 1997, p.13.
- ²² See Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (ed.). *Religion: The Missing Dimension in Statecraft*, Oxford, 1994.

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