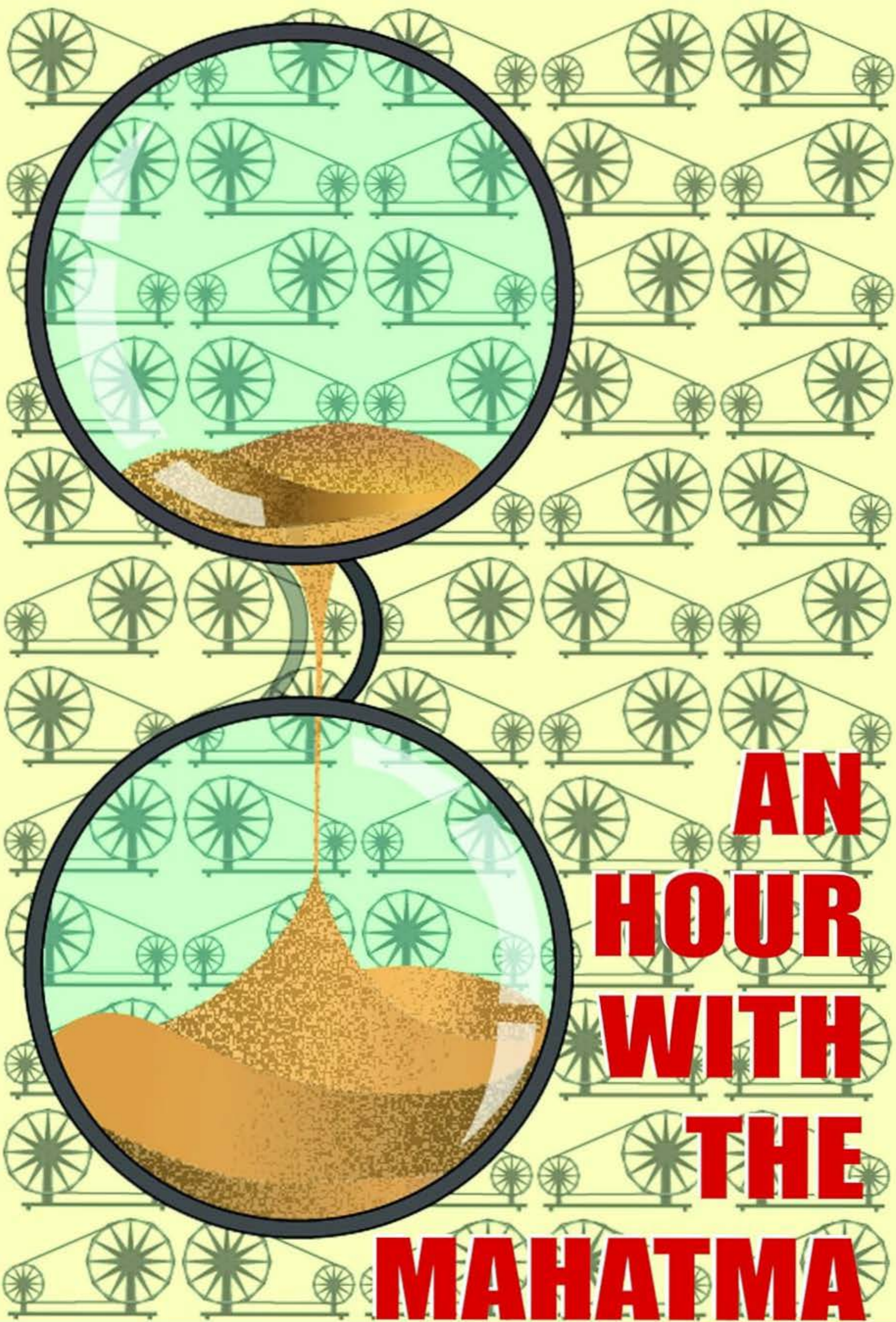


AN HOUR WITH THE MAHATMA

DR. ALOK BAJPAI



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## PREFACE

*What people understand is the true meaning of my word*

Some write to liberate themselves, and some to share and unburden their suffering. For some, it is a passion, for others, a compulsion.

But none of these were my reasons. I experienced an urge to write and my inner voice led me to put pen to paper. The end, if it happens, is still unknown.

The beginning as with the end comes from some energy source. In my case that source is Mohandas Gandhi. The preeminence of his ideas is demonstrated ever so often in the individual and public sphere.

Though Gandhi wished what he withstood in his life time be cremated with him, over 100 volumes of his writings have been preserved and innumerable books document his life, experiences and his philosophy. I revisited these texts after completion of my writing. A few ideas and words will give a sense of déjà vu for Gandhi is a part of our collective consciousness expressed through the personal hence the bibliography is a loose one, focused only on what he did.

This book is an expression of my deepest sentiments, language being the only means to voice the surge of emotions in my heart.

The initial sections reiterate his famed life, his vows and questions that people want to ask about Gandhi but have no authentic source.

The latter chapters review his life at a deeper level in an attempt to draw attention to the psychosocial factors that dictated his actions.

The last few chapters are a critical examination of his philosophy, process and personality.

At no juncture, do I claim this to be a complete biography; it is but an effort to create an interactive biography in which facts answer fiction.

'It is not work that kills; it is chaos, the friction of ideas in the mind that causes wear and tear.'

Very few people can equal the harmonization of thoughts as Gandhi did.

## WHY MAHATMA GANDHI?

**H**uman history is punctuated by events which have been a watershed in evolution. From the discovery of fire to the invention of the wheel to the present moment, human life keeps evolving. At the level of human thought, the evolutionary history is marked by the lives of those after whom the world never remained the same. The impact was seen in several aspects be it religion or socio-economic sphere. Violence and turmoil often accompanied this dynamic progress, some of it too sudden for the man in that era. Recorded history often appears cyclical as these significant minds and their times interact to create a new order.

Though science and art after the medieval age had liberated man from the shackles of ignorance, monarchies and religion continued to rule the world. Three centuries later industrialization surfaced. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century saw industrialization and subsequently a capitalist world emerged in Britain due to its unique economic and social structure. Over the next century, it spread across the empire. The reality of wealth was here to stay.

The Newtonian world was an absolute truth and the Church ruled most of the societies except the Oriental, capitalist life restructured the ownership of money and new kings emerged. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a new world order. Wealth generation and control of world wealth was the major preoccupation of free nations. The peaceful existence of isolated empires was fast disappearing and business intrusions overtook all other considerations.

Money became the new GOD. Wiser after two devastating world wars, countries expanded their financial interests and interlocked with

each other shrinking the world into a global village as seen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Technological advances and a greater availability of food are factors which have helped improve the quality of life worldwide. In its aftermath, the psychological approach to life has also changed.

The value system which sustained man for 4000 years has never been rocked as in the last 150 years. As democracy emerged following the WW1, the self-determination of nations brought in new ways of free-willed behavior. Old morality was discarded and replaced with doubt, uncertainty and disillusionment.

Reactionary fanaticism increased and the continuous gradient of existence between rich and poor was replaced by huge chasms. Exploitation changed its face and justifications of might is right became the order of the day. The last three decades have seen unprecedented growth in communication and as the world shrinks and becomes accessible on our fingertips; its impact on the human mind still remains to be seen.

But history itself is incomplete without the mention of three eminent figures who through their lives transformed the world permanently—

Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein

When capitalism arose so did its opponents. Marx along with Fredrick Engels affected socio-economics through his Communist Manifesto and *Das Kapital*, an impact that capitalism has not been able to smudge till date. The class conflict and its often-violent solutions caught the imagination of the working class. The Lenin-style revolution that followed may have failed but Marxism still is not out.

Freud demolished the Victorian era morality. Relegating the neurosis of the human mind to childhood trauma and omnipotent sexual energies, he immediately allowed conscience to offload the guilt.

Freud's man was irrational and determined and all his wildest fantasies, acts and dreams were not of his doing but an act of repressed desires. Society was quick to catch on and morality changed forever.

Marx and Freud were contradictory. Marx propagated scientific, rational materialism and Freud, instinctive irrationality. Marx believed in Conscious decision (and blamed the corrupt guiltless bourgeoisie), whereas Freud vindicated the behavior asserting the unconscious determines our actions.



Together they obliterated the 19<sup>th</sup> century thought process; though both were theoreticians and dissenters to their ideas were blocked from their own minds.

As their theories were tested in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in respective fields, both proved to be correct but partially.

Albert Einstein like a true scientist insisted that his theory of relativity should not be taken at face value unless experimentally tested. It was tested and it shook the castle of the absolute Newtonian world. Two hundred years of belief and absolutism was shattered beyond belief and the new system is still to emerge.

Though Marx and Freud demolished the old system and challenged the values that had held people together, albeit in a poverty stricken social system with a guilt prone psyche, Einstein's contribution was misinterpreted and embroiled in this destruction. His relativity was confused for relativism and extended to personal and public life.

Suddenly no absolute moral or social values existed and all things became relative. He himself never believed that 'God plays Dice' but believed in a certain order in the Universe. His own humanism was brutally challenged when his discovery of mass energy conversion was converted to an atom bomb.

Einstein was a pacifist, Marx condoned violence and for Freud repression itself converts to violence. By the time World War II ended, humanity was mired in hopelessness, irrational behavior and lack of faith in human values was at its lowest, fueled by the likes of Hitler. Further as the world emerged from a bipolar world, it witnessed the emergence of corporates. Unscrupulous corporations waged wars to control markets and resources and the cyclical story of exploitation continues in a new garb.

As time flew, 'Freudian' became an interesting idea, 'Marxism' was experimented with and awaits resurrection, Einstein's science won while his pacifism lay defeated and the world waited for another balancing force, this time probably a healing touch.

## *India till now*

While the world was transforming its order, India was reeling under the yoke of the British Empire. The fire of 1857 had cooled down and

the repressive machinery of the Empire was on a roll. The severest damage was to the self-respect of Indian citizens. Four and a half centuries of foreign rule, 150 years of colonial subjugation had shattered the esteem of Indians to such an extent that even six decades after Independence, it has not been redeemed.

Post-Independence industrial growth and globalization with liberalization after 1990 has created a unique situation. India in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is experiencing an 'Adaptational crisis', as Toefler wrote in *Future shock*, where good and successful is becoming exclusive. Need and greed have blurred and merged into each other. Gluttony is the buzzword of modern India and materialism is blurring all that is valuable.

Modern India has acquired wealth and prosperity without labour; it has received the privilege of choice before critical thinking. Post-independence, education focused on rote-learning and not on rational thought. The Indian citizenry failed to discriminate between need and greed. The gap between the rich and poor widened, preparing the grounds for future violence with various 'isms', corruption, lust, power and endless factions warring each other. India emerged a nation no different in which culture and civilization clashed.

In such times, Mahatma Gandhi is the idea not only for India but the world. Einstein had already recognized *The Mahatma* when he said on his 70th birthday, 'Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one walked the earth.' Gandhi's impact on human life will be a slowly unfolding drama and far beyond the conflict-ridden revolutions.

For when the human mind is tired of wars, exploitations and destruction, when the mind realizes living harmoniously is to live in love and peace, Gandhi will remain an classic icon, a man of and for our times.

It is not imperative to justify his relevance but Gandhi himself would have reprimanded us for not supplementing it with rationale, so answering this question is foremost—

## *Why Gandhi?*

We can attempt to understand this.

No denying that biographical (and not hagiographical) study of

many luminaries is educative, but Gandhi's life is most illustrative because he is in the 'not too distant' past and belongs in contemporary history. Six decades of Indian independence have not been able to erase the question 'Is Gandhi relevant today?' The very existence of this remark is testimony of his significance.

The lurking doubts in the mind of India keeps him alive.

History is often telescoped and mystified as time flows; patchy memories and interpretations give multiple skin layers to characters to a point where after centuries the real person is a myth himself. The ambiguous recall from collective as well as personal memory is unavoidable in historical reconstruction. For realistic assessment, the correct time lens is required, anything closer or farther will distort the picture. A historical template and text is the fluid material out of which a great mind is moulded. Deity or devil, the future of these lives rests in the subjectivity of a historian's lens.

Gandhi can escape such a fate because ordinary people have a chance to examine him in the correct perspective. Time has still not dressed him in its mythical cloak. And he made sure that when the will of the age and his mind work on each other to reframe a historical turn, it should be an open book, personal or public.

Even if he is open to scientific critical enquiry, the most important reason to know him is that he was the unifying point of myriad streams of India's history in a certain period and the issues which we face today were enunciated by him long ago. So, before the world recognizes him his own family should know him well.

Though he has been widely researched and commented upon from various viewpoints, a certain consistency prevails, not only socio-politically but even at a deeper psychological level.

The transformative process of his life does not appear to be an unconscious flow. After a certain point in his life his conscious actions defined him. Whether he succeeded or failed is not so important as his commitment to his philosophy. So, I regard it my responsibility as narrator in the present era to pass this on as true history and not a myth.

Even if we discard the above statements as eulogy, there is more to it.

## *Why Gandhi?*

*Why not?* can end the debate but Gandhi would not approve of this approach so a more pertinent query will be—

If not Gandhi, then who?

He is everywhere, albeit in a clichéd manner - from management to peace meetings to cleanliness drives; yet do we know him.

Have we emulated him as we should have? Surely he has more than utilitarian value.

He is important for our minds, not only because he is the forgotten part of our collective psyche or because his was the road we did not trudge along post-independence, but also because he endured the ordeal of human dilemma, as had Buddha, Krishna and many others.

Even if we dismiss Krishna as a myth and Buddha as an experiment in isolation, Gandhi still remains different as his was the struggle in the dust and sweat of life's battleground.

He is more contextual and verifiable because of time projection.

Ramayana and Mahabharata are mythological and allegorical because it was not a simultaneous record of the narrative but a backward projection. Even in real time, the question remains...whose version? (The natural aberration of history). Buddha's core principles and life are history clouded by myth. Gandhi practiced what he preached. He believed in action before instruction and in this he comes closer to Krishna.

Pragmatically too, his life story is known to us through 2500 books and contemporary narration from those who saw him in flesh and blood.

Though variously interpreted, used, contradicted and killed, Gandhi's facts remain irrefutable and the clouds of mystification which surround many a great soul (though the less courageous minds around them do it!) are still far from him.

The politics can be debated but the transformative process can neither be rejected nor his Universal human concern be questioned.

Once we decide to examine him we can try to understand him and ask.

## AN HOUR WITH THE MAHATMA

Gandhi grew on me.

For four decades, I have heard about him, read his works as well as those written about him. When I decided to walk with him in mind, it never remained a dull journey. With Gandhi one can only move ahead as I and many others continue to do so.

His own experiments with life were complex but shrouded in simplicity. Those who could not penetrate turned him into what he never wanted - an idol. Idol worship always has a hidden idol-bashing agenda which expresses itself in moments of helplessness. Most were satisfied with adulation or criticism. Dry academic descriptions and unimaginative analysis added to this process of isolating him from life and enclosing him in an ivory tower, the last place he would have wanted to be in. He strived to be like others a simple human being but his humanism, his own contradictions and conflicts often confounded the observer or follower to provoke an escapist reaction - a reaction not to understand but to idolize.

Gandhi is strong enough to sustain this onslaught and emerge as per his wish as a MAN - a man with human follies and fallacies but always looking beyond himself, his vision set on the poorest of poor, on the last man. A man who would not theorize but act, ready to give up his life for what he believed in but not without testing it on himself. To know Gandhi this MAN should be heard.

Thus began an experiment with students from 10-25 years of age, from school till University level, an attempt to discover and discuss him through the young mind.

An hour with the Mahatma is my journey with Bapu where every hour was a new learning. As we talked, a few would question while the

rest listened in awe. Many myths were broken as we attempted to perceive him like a Man.

Gradually this hour did not remain only about the Mahatma. It became entangled with issues of life, of one's own life and the social matrix surrounding it, of the past and of the future, of the active and the passive, of the eternal dilemma of—

'To be or not to be' and about the 'skills of life'.

The hours rolled by and our conviction became stronger that he is the role model of our times; one who ought to be emulated, partially or fully.

The question of my soul...

*Are we all one or is each one of us alone?* sought an answer from him and he obliged.

As we talked, what emerged from his biography was a process - the process of becoming extraordinary from the ordinary, of being a king yet humane, of being a soul over matter, of being in the Rajas yet living in Sattva.

The process of feeling the 'ONE'.

The superhuman effort of liberating the mind from the chains of thought and emotions is what every individual aspires for but few try and even fewer achieve. The process as we discovered it in MAHATMA Gandhi's life transformed mine.

Institutions obliged us and we conducted the sessions in the school auditorium. Small groups of youngsters from schools and colleges discussed and narrated Gandhi's life in various sessions. Students were grouped class-wise; students of 6th-8<sup>th</sup> were in one group, 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> in another and lastly graduates and postgraduates. Each session lasted an hour and with each hour, we grew closer to the Mahatma.

As we rolled Gandhi's pictures and the audiovisuals, his life experiments were narrated and his process discovered. It also gave us an opportunity to clarify his criticisms. The focus changed according to the age group; adolescent and young adults were more political but the younger were keen on learning about his value system.

Most adolescents echoed what they had learned from popular media. No one could remain indifferent.

The younger students listened in awe while the older ones were initially skeptical but the sacrifices he made, his journey and experiments

in Truth, Ahimsa and simplicity appealed to them.

His life story was woven along with pictures from his life and our interactions encouraged the audience to tell his stories. As the story reached towards the 1930s and 40s, the impact of the rote, the incomplete teaching of history in the last 6 decades, in India, revealed itself.

The older students were harsher on him.

Some blamed him for not saving Bhagat Singh, some for being cruel to Bose and others held him responsible for the partition and 'the menace called Pakistan'. A group of MBA students called him an actor who used gimmicks like simplicity to gain power. Another group, failing to understand Gandhi's insistence on sharing of wealth went to an extreme: 'Even if we give to the poor, they will ask for more' little realizing that 'they' and 'us' breeds violence.

The younger children had simpler queries like how he managed to sustain himself and his family without work and how his children grew. When asked whether we speak the truth to our parents, they were honest. Never did any child claim complete honesty to himself or his parents.

It was heart-wrenching at times to listen to the scathing tone of misinformed young adults but equally satisfying to listen to a brutally honest confession of a 12-year old.

At the completion of our sessions, most of the participants had become converts – supporters of Mahatma Gandhi. When they left this hour with Gandhi, they had experienced a paradigm shift, evident by the numerous emails we received and they began to apply his experiments to resolve issues in their lives.

Hopefully an attempt to bring truth and honesty in their personal life becomes their life skill.

My own purpose is simple. Let the future generations of this country at least know Gandhi; whether they revive his ideology or not is for them to decide. The act and the idea was energized by MAHATMA himself.

I am neither a Mahatma nor 'Gandhian' (if there is anything like it), not even in the frame of what he would have felt or thought, even in his weakest moments. I am separated from Bapu by decades and centuries as far as the modern value system goes. I am at the opposite

end—compromising, fluctuating, indulgent. Surviving rather than sacrificing.

But that connects me to him—the pull of the opposite, devotion for what is deficient in me...the striving towards ONE.

What has kept this lifelong fascination for him in my mind is His mind. The common thread is his binding love for all. But probably we who are far from him can understand him more than those who followed him (at least on the apparent!)

Did Gandhi oppose Gandhism because he knew his followers would blindly emulate him in action, not in thought, leading to a hidden resentment for him. It was his supporters who distorted *Gandhi, the idea*.

All his life, Gandhi impressed upon his followers to change from within; he left no method of instruction for people to follow, so at the first opportunity people abandoned him and his ideals which could have shaped a different world. It is indeed difficult to follow Gandhi. The daily grind and swirl of greed, lust, ambition and vanity disrupts inner harmony and gives rise to anger and impatience.

People found it difficult to emulate Gandhi even in his times, but in the fervor of nationalism and opportunity, personal ambition was postponed, the selfish adopted selflessness, but soon after his death he was remembered only to cloak hypocrisy and deceive the people. Over the next two decades following his death, his image made its way on currency, in celebrations and for gimmicks. His philosophy and his experiments with truth were relegated to ‘Gandhian Studies’ in universities. A few pursued on his path but their numbers dwindled rapidly.

With the emergence of a New India, Gandhi-bashing became a pursuit. Newer players exploited his name to make a mark in politics and suddenly everybody had an opinion on him.

A small experiment was carried out asking people’s opinion about Gandhi being on Facebook.

People in large numbers sent a eulogy, rote-learned from books while others rejected him outright terming him as obsolete, useless or the man responsible for the partition and our country’s dismal state. Most had not read about Gandhi beyond a textbook and had formed an opinion based solely on political propaganda.



The younger generation, in the age group of 16-21, were more willing to understand him and defer judgment, but deeper questioning revealed the existence of a bias which prevented progress on the path to knowing his true nature or his philosophy.

Is India in a delirium missing the path?

But I want to believe Gandhi that each one of us can become *that* idea. Not necessarily Gandhi but one's own. Be yourself and carry others along even if partially because that is the only way to survive together. If young minds carry an iota of his truth into the future, there is Hope.

Any conscious attempt to be a compassionate *humane* human is an uphill task.

Such has been the human lot always, so our questions must be the same as faced by MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI.

How did he answer them?

Seeking an answer to this question is the purpose of this book and who better than Gandhi to provide these answers. Gandhi never avoided any query and he would not do it to us too.

As We ask—

'He was the Father of 'The Nation' is the simplest answer to the basic question 'Who was Gandhi?'

Probed further the simpler minds credit him with liberating India from the clutches of the British.

For the majority, Gandhi is just a few dates, words and images restricted to a textbook. Fortunately, we still remember him on some dates as on his birthday - 2<sup>nd</sup> October and on 30<sup>th</sup> January; we remember him for his philosophy of Ahimsa, the phenomenal response he generated in the Dandi march, for the Quit India Movement and not the least - his spectacles, meager dress and lathi are symbols of the humble personality that he was.

But few precocious minds delved deeper and there lies the hope. Even a critical attitude is better than indifference. Questioning and blaming at least provides an opportunity for discussion and rectification in knowledge rather than blind rigid opinions.

During the course of interactions with youth, Gandhi has been smeared for various personal and political actions - the cause of partition, a tyrant husband and father, ambitious and exploitative politician,

sabotaging those who disagreed – these are but a few barbs directed at him. Not only uninformed youth but few ‘committed’ right and left wing ‘followers’, the so-called intelligentsia has been even more ruthless in describing him.

Gandhi himself expressed that history often records *discord and not harmony* and the critic chooses the historical points of discord. But a chance for an objective analysis should be provided to the future by presentation of a man unmarred by political differences.

Positing a few questions and attempting to find the answers might help in modifying the perspective.

Queries like—

Was Gandhi different?

Or

Was he like us who decided to be different?

If you say yes to the first, this book can be kept away. Gandhi can be brushed aside and you can continue to live your life the way you do, but if you seek an answer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question, I endeavor to provide these through the following pages.

Why did he become different?

or

How did he?

Was it a natural temperamental genetic that unfolded?

Or

Did he at a juncture in his life consciously choose a certain path?

Did he want to achieve greatness by sacrifice?

Or

Was his need to be like the masses?

Was he a politician or a saint, a theorist or an experimenter?

But the most important questions still vex me.

His epic struggle with sexual energy raises deeper queries. Was he giving undue attention to a natural biological energy

Or

Was he a man sexually charged and severely agitated as a result?

Was he a bad father and husband?

Was his inner struggle between the masculine and feminine similar to that which engages us all? And finally,

Did he invite or summon his death in the process?

He was called ‘a colossus who came within an inch of success’ when he retreated during freedom struggle of India, giving rise to a plethora of political questions.

Most of us know the narrative of his life but it is still worthwhile to reiterate his life in his own words before we set off on an explorative journey.

Call it Gandhi’s life or his story or BAPU KATHA.

## BAPU KATHA (THE STORY...)

*Hai bahaar-e-baagh duniyaa chand roz  
Dekh lo is kaa tamaashaa chand roz*  
—Nazir Akbarabadi

**M**ohandas Karamchand Gandhi surprised people around him when he quoted this couplet from the great poet Nazeer Akbarabadi on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1948; after all, the naughty Moniya was alive in him. But amidst his daily routine and multiple meetings, he had mentioned thrice on that day ‘If I am alive tomorrow’ as if he had a premonition and had seen the show of glory.

Late by 10 minutes, he took a shortcut to the prayer platform and when Nathuram Godse fatally shot him, he was in his final act of Ahimsa, his palms held together in a pranaam, to acknowledge and respect death itself as if he was waiting for those bullets, as if this was the only way he could prove that he was God’s son.

Another couplet from Nazeer says:

*Kya milegaa dil kisee ka tod ke  
le dua toote dilon ko jod ke  
jaa magar kuchh yaad apnee chhod ke  
ho tera duniyaa mein charchaa chand roz*

Gandhi is gone with a promise that he will remain with us. So why ask about his life from anyone else.

Let us listen to his story through his own words, then he can answer later...

“My experiments in the political field are now known, not only to India, but to a certain extent throughout the ‘civilized’ world. For me, they have not much value and the title of ‘Mahatma’ that these

have won for me has therefore, even less. Often the title has deeply pained me and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me. But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself and from which, I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field. If the experiments are truly spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise. They can only add to my humility. The more I reflect and look back on the past, the more vividly do I feel my limitations.” AMG, 4

“What I want to achieve - what I have been striving and pining to achieve for the last thirty years is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this one end. I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, so my experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open, and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value. There are some things that are known only to oneself and one’s maker. These are clearly incommunicable. The experiments I am about to relate are not such, but they are spiritual, or rather moral-for the essence of religion is morality.” AMG, 4-

“Far be it from me to claim any degree of perfection for these experiments. I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and accuracy, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through 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.” AMG, 5

“My life is one indivisible whole and all my activities run into one another, and they all have their rise in my insatiable love for mankind.” SB, 45—MK GANDHI

And now the katha.....

Sudamapuri, in modern Porbander is the city of the mythological friend of Lord Krishna, who was poor but proud. The white limestone city faces the salty breeze and the trading movement across its docks for ages. Into this contradictory influence of the material and the spiritual, of power and renunciation, Mohandas entered the world on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1869.

Modh Baniyas from Gujarat have been originally grocers in the tradition of Vaishya, the 3<sup>rd</sup> in the class hierarchy of India, but the Vaishnava and Jain influence had made them eclectic like most Indians across the country. That was the time of religious tolerance. Moreover, the Gandhis were a semi-ruler class and were Prime ministers in several Kathiawar States (the states existed till mid 20<sup>th</sup> century before Gandhi and his political sons had sown the country together).

Mohandas's family had a tradition of sticking to principles, a quality which was often seen in Kathiawari minds. (Even Jinnah was from this region)

Ota Gandhi, Mohandas's grandfather had to seek a job in Junagadh due to political differences. He saluted the Nawab with his left hand. When pointed out the discourtesy, he replied, "The right hand is already pledged to Porbander." The genetics of politics and principle was his template of life. His father, just and generous, took care of his clan but was not without fallacies. His was a great influence on Mohan 'Moniya' as Gandhi was called. Often, he would see his father dispensing justice as a prime minister sitting in a temple or amidst household chores. One can easily imagine this scene as India was used to it between 1920 and 1948. Karamchand Gandhi's son toppled an empire as easily as he peeled a pea.

Though Karamchand Gandhi married four times, he was incorruptible. Putlibai, his mother, has been described by Mohandas as 'saintly' - devoutly religious, steadfastly ritualistic, she never ate meals without prayers, and even illness would not sway her from her fast.

Moniya was the youngest of three brothers and a sister. He describes his early schooling experience as average classifying himself as 'sluggish intelligence and of raw memory'. Being shy and reticent,

books, lessons, school and then back home was his world but all at the stroke of the hour. His social anxiety did not allow him to talk to anyone lest he would embarrass himself. Moniya to Mahatma must have been quite a journey temperamentally. Few incidents marked his childhood serving as building blocks in the formation of his character.

“I never could learn the art of ‘copying’” he said. Indeed never, from the day he refused to copy the spelling of ‘kettle’, even when his teacher prodded him in front of Mr. Giles, the educational inspector. Even at the risk of being reprimanded, he held that a teacher should supervise, not encourage cheating. He earned the first of his labels from his teacher—‘stupid’.

“I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.” AMG, 18

Mohandas’s lifelong crusades had their seeds sown in his early life. We all have a few but he did not forget his - child marriage was one. He got married to Kastur when he was just 13. Initially the prospect of fun and ‘a strange girl to play with’, and then carnal desire kept him engrossed. From being ‘two innocent children unwittingly hurled into the ocean of life’, passions flew and he ‘took no time in assuming the authority of a husband.’

He confessed years later, “Separation was unbearable. I used to keep her awake till late into the night with my idle talk. If with this devouring passion there had not been in me a burning attachment to duty, I should either have fallen prey to disease and premature death, or sunken into a burdensome existence.” AMG, 23-24

His sensitive nature and zeal to be ‘right’ in behavior and character saved him from many blemishes.

When his brother and he stole a bit of gold from his armllet to pay off debts, the guilt was too much for him. The confessional letter he wrote to his father is a document wrapped in guilt. He learned hi first lesson in Ahimsa - no scolding, no hateful eyes; just a few drops of tears rolled down the cheeks of Karamchand Gandhi.

Only briefly, his friend Mehtab, an athletic, powerful Muslim, had cast a spell upon him. He appealed to the shy Mohandas as an antithesis and he plunged into the world of youthful adventure

but none of the temptations stuck to him.

He smoked, ate meat, visited a brothel too, but failed miserably. The pleasures of the forbidden were not for this boy. Each act pushed him into deeper contemplation, till he came out of the stupor and then he got into his favorite role - that of a reformer. He questioned his friendship with Mehtab, but still could not tear himself away for very long. Mehtab was the first name in the list of people whom he could not convince in life.

What saved him?

“As we know that man often succumbs to temptation, however much he may resist it, we also know that Providence often intercedes and saves him in spite of himself. How all this happens - how far a man is free and how far a creature of circumstances - how far free will comes into play and where fate enters the scene - all this is a mystery and will remain a mystery.” AMG, 37

But the same providence intercedes for all of us and the same tool is provided. It remains for us to choose... He chose it early.

“The conviction that morality is the basis of things and that truth is the substance of all morality; Truth became my sole objective.” AMG, 50-51

Even then his truth had pragmatism to it. He knew his parents would despair if they knew of his meat-eating, so that was his inner penance. He was never naïve not even in his simplicity.

Mehtab's shadow reflected in his marital relationship as well. Mohandas had phases of suspicion, arrogance and tyrannical behaviour with Kastur, out to prove the husband within, in his largely passionate love for her. The aftershock of his tyranny took years to extinguish.

Two people from his early days, without whom Gandhi's rebellion would not have surfaced need special mention.

RAM, his mantra for life, was his rebel against his own fearful self. His maid Rambha passed on 'Ram naam' as a shield against all doubts, external or internal and he made it into 'Ram' for all, irrespective of religion. Once Putliba asked Moniya to take a bath after touching Uka, the scavenger and untouchable. Little did she realize that when she was explaining about Uka being an untouchable, she was triggering a revolution. 12-year old Moniya carried the



storm within, which was quelled partially only when the temple gates were opened for the first time to the untouchables 50 years later.

A brief trial to study in Bhavnagar and Gandhi was lost till a family friend suggested that he go to London to study Law. He jumped at the opportunity.

“Before the intention of coming to London for the sake of study was actually formed, I had a secret design in my mind of coming here to satisfy my curiosity of knowing what London was.” CWMG, 1,3

The rider was his vows to Putliba - no wine, meat or women in England - fears which made foreign-returned outcastes. It was only his passion for women which he struggled with all his life. He recoiled from wine and meat.

Once in England, he found himself “between Scylla and Charybdis. England I could not bear, but to return to India was not to be thought of. Now that I had come, I must finish the three years said the inner voice.” AMG, 63

Salt's Plea for Vegetarianism removed the dilemma, if any, regarding vegetarian eating habits. He had nursed the desire to eat meat and had given it up to please his parents but as he converted consciously, he had *a neophyte's zeal*.

His experimentation had begun - The long walks to save a penny and the typical Gandhi shyness that taught him the brevity of words.

11<sup>th</sup> June 1891, he enrolled as a barrister to the High court and on 12<sup>th</sup> June he was homebound.

His future had taken shape...On a visit to Paris, he was more attracted to Notre Dame as a symbol of love for God rather than the Eiffel tower, which even Tolstoy regarded as ‘man's folly’ - a creation as if under intoxication of tobacco and alcohol. Gandhi added to the disparagement.

“So long as we are children we are attracted by toys and the tower was a good demonstration of the fact that we are all children attracted by trinkets. That may be claimed to be the purpose served by the Eiffel Tower.” AMG, 102

Home was no easy turf. Expectations of the family and his own

sense of responsibility found him fiddling in Bombay courts and then Rajkot which was a bit better. His disinterest in his profession surfaced soon “I found the barrister’s profession a bad job - much show and little knowledge.” AMG, 118

Providence had something else planned. Destiny was not interested in Mohandas the lawyer and his monthly income.

In the meantime, a Meman firm from Porbandar invited him to “instruct our counsel better than ourselves. And he would have the advantage of seeing a new part of the world, and of making new acquaintances” wrote Dada Abdullah to his brother. AMG, 128

He knew it was not a barrister’s job but that of an employee to draft and counsel.

“But I wanted somehow to leave India. There was also the tempting opportunity to see a new country and gain new experiences. Also I could send £105 to my brother and help in the expenses of the household. I accepted the offer without any haggling and got ready to go to South Africa.” AMG, 129

The ‘wrench of separation’ this time was from Kasturba and my two sons.

The food struggle had another dimension now...that with sexuality...

“Our love could not yet be called free from lust, but it was getting gradually purer.”

He was a walker so “the attraction of South Africa rendered the separation bearable.” AMG, 130

The struggle started from his arrival itself. Stung by the ‘snobbishness’ and disrespect for Indians, within a week, he found his self-respect churning. Almost in a quiet revolt, he left the Durban court when asked to remove his turban.

As if he had prodded the cosmic forces in a severely apartheid-struck, exploitative South Africa, he was pushed to a decisive moment.

He wrote many years later of that night - the night which as a peg on the timeline will be remembered as a witness to transformation.

“On the seventh or eighth day after my arrival, I left Durban (for Pretoria).

A first class seat was booked for me. The train reached

Maritzburg, the capital of Natal at about 9 pm. Beddings were provided at this station. A railway servant came and asked me if I wanted one. "No" said I, "I have one with me." He went away. But a passenger came next and he looked me up and down. He saw that I was a 'coloured' man. This disturbed him. Out he went and came in again with one or two officials. They all kept quiet, when another official came to me and said, "Come along, you must go to the van compartment."

"But I have a first class ticket" said I.

"That doesn't matter" rejoined the other. "I tell you, you must go to the van compartment."

"I tell you, I was permitted to travel in this compartment at Durban and I insist on going in it."

"No, you won't" said the official. "You must leave this compartment or else I shall have to call a police constable to push you out."

"Yes, you may. I refuse to get out voluntarily."

"The constable came. He took me by the hand and pushed me out. My luggage was also taken out. I refused to go to the other compartment and the train steamed away. I went and sat in the waiting room, keeping my handbag with me and leaving the other luggage where it was. The railway authorities had taken charge of it. It was winter, and winter in the higher regions of South Africa is severely cold. Maritzburg being at a high altitude, the cold was extremely bitter. My overcoat was in my luggage but I did not dare ask for it lest I should be insulted again, so I sat and shivered. There was no light in the room. A passenger came in at about midnight and possibly wanted to talk to me but I was in no mood to talk.

I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults and return to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial - a symptom of the deep disease of color

prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the

color prejudice. So, I decided to take the next available train to Pretoria.” AMG, 140-41 Life was determined to test his resolve. The very next day brought physical violence. In spite of being beaten up on a carriage, he rightfully held on to the seat and tolerated the kicks and the bleeding till a few fellow passengers intervened in his favor.

Mohandas passed the first test of Ahimsa and gained a lifelong strategy.

South Africa gave him ample opportunity to test his Ahimsa, both physical and verbal.

Strength took away his shyness too. He spoke in his first public meeting on *Truthfulness in Business*. Merchants opined that truth is inconsistent with business. Business, they said, was ‘a very practical affair and Truth a matter of religion.’

Gandhi felt the first taste of his convincing power and ‘the responsibility to be truthful in a foreign land’ because “the conduct of a few Indians was the measure of that of the millions of their fellow-countrymen.” AMG, 157-58

Gandhi’s walking habit invited another bout of violence. He was kicked and pushed by an official on the footpath in front of President Kruger’s house without a warning. He was dismayed but in a symbolic act of nonviolent defiance, he got up and walked off.

Mr. Coates, a bystander who witnessed the rude assault, offered to be an eyewitness and apologized.

“You need not be sorry” Gandhi said. “What does the poor man know? All colored people are the same to him. He no doubt treats Negroes just as he has treated me. I have made it a rule not to go to court in respect of any personal grievance. So, I do not intend to proceed against him.” AMG, 162-63

Another year in Pretoria convinced him that a dignified equal life with citizen’s right was what Indians needed. Natal (*in South Africa*) Indian Congress brought together the elite Indians to fight for their rights. But Balasundaram, a Tamil indentured laborer’s plight moved Gandhi and he took cudgels for him.

He became the leader of all those who had no voice and remained so, on whichever ground he trudged.

As Natal Congress protested against disfranchisement of Indians,

one of the first Satyagrahas shaped up. Gandhi himself was evolving as a human in an attempt at self-realization. His deep discontent at exploitation of man by fellow human beings turned his attention to a Christian concept of service.

“Service of the poor has been my heart’s desire, and it has always thrown me amongst the poor and enabled me to identify myself with them.” AMG, 190

He plunged himself into serving the community - a lifelong tool for him to be near God. He had escaped to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawar intrigues. He found himself searching for God and striving for self-realization.

Uniting people was another way to achieve oneness with the Supreme but his profession was a barrier. Gandhi changed the basic premise he worked on and proved its success, but alas, it was not what most others could implement, so criticism poured in.

“I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties given as under. The lesson was so indelibly burnt into me that for a large part of my time, during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer, I was occupied in bringing about private compromises in hundreds of cases. I lost nothing thereby - not even money, certainly not my soul.” AMG, 168

He was protesting for a life with equal rights, but besides that, he had total allegiance and loyalty to the British Constitution. Their sense of justice and fair play was Gandhi’s argument in reiterating the duties of the citizens of the British Empire. Though he doubted their color prejudice and exploitative rules, he remained loyal to the throne. This was the strange protest which people took decades to understand. Lest someone cast aspersions on his intentions, Gandhi clarified, “Never in my life did I exploit this loyalty, never did I seek to gain a selfish end by its means. It was for me more in the nature of an obligation and I rendered it without expecting a reward.” AMG, 212

This sense of duty pushed him to serve with the Ambulance Corps in the Boer War and then in the Zulu revolt and also serving the soldiers in World War I. “Trust the enemy and don’t hit when he is weak...it requires great courage and a heart.”

Gandhi returned to India in 1896 after 3 years, to fetch his wife

and children. He had gone for a year and it seemed a never-ending stay there. By then, the state of Indians in SA had already made news in India through Gandhi's 'green pamphlet' and angry white men awaited his return.

Aboard, Gandhi was busy preparing Kasturba and his children for a western way of life. Still enamored by European etiquette and dress, he was trying to make 'knives and forks' a part of their lives. The yoke of civilization was there to stay for another few years. The ship was quarantined at Durban for reasons other than health.

The agitation against Gandhi's repatriation was to intimidate them to return to India. He did not give up. Death threats ensued. Orders to permit entry were issued after passengers led by Gandhi asserted their right to land. Kasturba was escorted but Gandhi was advised to alight at night, which he refused.

As he got down and started walking, all hell broke loose. He was pushed, kicked, hurt, and objects were thrown at him; the crowd swelled as he moved on. His life was in obvious danger when the generous wife of a police Superintendent saw this and intercepted. The crowd dispersed and he was taken to a safe home. The crowd continued to demand for him but he was disguised so that he could get away.

Gandhi was a trouble maker for them yet he was winning friends because of his truth and decency even amongst white men.

He was asked to identify the assailants and prosecute them but by then Ahimsa had truly taken deep roots in him. This was his reply, "I do not want to prosecute anyone. It is possible that I may be able to identify one or two of them, but what is the use of getting them punished? Besides, I do not hold the assailants responsible. They were given to understand that I had made exaggerated statements in India about the whites in Natal and calumniated them. If they believed these reports, it is no wonder they were enraged. The leaders and, if you will permit me to say so, *you* are to blame. You could have guided the people properly, but you also believed Reuter and assumed that I must have indulged in exaggeration. I do not want to bring anyone to book. I am sure that, when the truth becomes known, they will be sorry for their conduct." AMG, 239-40

Gandhi progressed to be a successful lawyer in the next decade and had a comfortable life at par with any upper middle class European family, but his restlessness for a simpler life and the ascetic in him kept experimenting with simpler food, service and acceptance of people from different classes. His house was already a commune with a spiritual aura.

Mohandas Gandhi was multi-faceted and had myriad talents - publishing a paper 'Indian Opinion' (which he handed over to Albert West later) on one hand and experimenting with cooking on the other.

His latent desire to be a doctor saw him nursing using indigenous methods; his youngest son Devdas Gandhi was delivered by him.

He read voraciously, researching on everything that was of interest to him.

"I am convinced that for the proper upbringing of children, the parents ought to have a general knowledge of the care and nursing of babies. At every step, I have seen the advantages of my careful study on the subject.

My children would not have enjoyed the general health that they do today had I not studied the subject and turned my knowledge to account. We labor under a sort of superstition that the child has nothing to learn during the first five years of its life. The fact is that the child never learns as much in the later years as he does in the first five years. The education of the child begins with conception." AMG, 250-51

Gandhi's war against lust resurfaced. He was burdened with guilt for it was his carnal desires that kept him from attending to his ailing father prior to his death. Also 'lustful love' in his relationship with Kasturba kept him uncomfortable.

He resumed Brahmacharya and anything which aroused his passion was discarded. These fixations continued all his life. In 1906, he took the vow of Brahmacharya after consulting Kasturba at the last moment.

"I had not shared my thoughts with my wife until then, but only consulted her at the time of taking the vow. She had no objection."

The vow was kept on one sense against any physical, carnal pleasure but his Brahmacharya never excluded women from his life.

This aspect is discussed later as it had a huge impact on him and India. He did his chores himself whether it was a haircut or washing his collar.

Sometimes he was ridiculed for the mess he created but Gandhi was well beyond ridicule.

He narrates—

“I shall never forget the first collar that I washed myself. I had used more starch than necessary, the iron had not been made hot enough, and for fear of burning the collar I had not pressed it sufficiently. The result was that though the collar was fairly stiff, the superfluous starch continually dropped off it. I went to court with the collar on, inviting the ridicule of my brother barristers, but even in those days I was impervious to ridicule.” AMG, 261

His search on Truth and Ahimsa continued and he tried to create an ideal world with likeminded inhabitants in Phoenix farm. His thoughts and mindset become known by this:

“Man and his deeds are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call for approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. *Hate the sin and not the sinner* is a precept which, though easy enough to understand is rarely practiced and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.

This Ahimsa is the basis of the search for Truth. I am realizing every day that the search is futile unless it is founded on Ahimsa as the basis. It is simple to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all varnished with the same brush and are children of one and the same Creator and as such, the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.” AMG, 337

All this was the result of nature and nurture. Deep down Gandhi was a Hindu with roots of Vedic ethics - Truth in speech, action, thought, Shraddha (faith), Tolerance (friendly eye)

Ahimsa (empathy)

Covetousness (rightful possession)

Attached detachment



Work

Brahmacharya

Christianity and Islam had a profound impact on him. Light of Asia and the Sermon on The Mount started a change which culminated with Ruskin Bond's *Unto This Last*. Tolstoy and Thoreau had already given him ideas for a political struggle with humanism and ethics.

All of it may appear a fantasy to us for we are far removed from and tend to flow with life rather than assert our will. But for MK Gandhi, life was one indivisible whole. He had already seen the artificiality of division and separation in the name of religion, caste, creed.

It was a flaw of the human mind, trained to see everything as separate -time, space, relations, countries, color - and it spills to politics and social life. This gives rise to -isms and exploitation. He was already soaring above it. He continued Satyagraha to get the Black law repealed and organized the longest march; he was arrested and assaulted, his bones hurt but the spirit had conquered and risen above the physical. His undying spirit drove him to cover 40 miles one day so that he could lift a wounded man from a field. Never once did his gaze shift from his purpose to improve life and bestow dignity to all. That is why his God was HERE and his history was NOW.

But the eyes were set on a distant future for mankind.

“On Tolstoy Farm<sup>1</sup> we made it a rule that youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do, and therefore, when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher cooperating and working with them. Hence whatever the youngsters learnt, they learnt cheerfully.” AMG, 409

‘Lead by example, punish oneself for the wrongdoings of others’...he went on except for a few lapses. His ideas sometimes went against nature - like when he punished a girl besotted by one of his sons. He threatened to fast as a penance for the natural sexual attraction between them and made the girl cut her hair as he attributed the attraction to her long tresses...and the only episode of physical violence was punishing his son with a ruler.

In 1914, the clouds of WW1 were hovering over Europe and

the world as Gandhi was preparing to return to India. Gokhale had supported his cause in SA and had become his political guru. He exhorted him to return back through England. Gokhale had seen the man he was...he knew that Mohandas Gandhi was needed to revive the spirit and self respect of India and then freedom would follow.

Gandhi was facing another dilemma - to support the British or not as he had done in the Boer war. He was not expected to do so though. His Ahimsa was at the forefront and war at the best of times is inherently violent. Gandhi has been blamed often and detractors point out this paradox. He was aware of it, evident by his words:

“As a matter of fact, the very same line of argument that persuaded me to take part in the Boer War had weighed me down on this occasion. It was quite clear to me that participation in war could never be consistent with Ahimsa. But it is not always given to one to be equally clear about one’s duty. A votary of truth is often obliged to grope in the dark.” AMG, 427

“By enlisting men for ambulance work in South Africa and in England, and recruits for field service in India, I helped not the cause of war, but the institution called the British Empire in whose ultimate benevolent character I then believed. My repugnance to war was as strong then as it is today; and I could not then have and would not have shouldered a rifle. But one’s life is not a single straight line; it is a bundle of duties, very often conflicting. One is called upon continually to make one’s choice between one duty and another. As a citizen, not then, and not even now, a reformer leading an agitation against the institution of war, I had to advise and lead men who believed in war but who from cowardice or from base motive or from anger against the British Government, refrained from enlisting. I did not hesitate to advise them that so long as they believed in war and professed loyalty to the British Constitution, they were in duty, bound to support it by enlistment. I do not believe in retaliation, but I did not hesitate to tell the villagers near Bettia four years ago, that they, who knew nothing of Ahimsa, were guilty of cowardice in failing to defend the honour of their womenfolk and their property by force of arms. And I have not hesitated to

tell the Hindus that if they do not believe in out-and-out Ahimsa and cannot practice it, they will be guilty of a crime against their religion and humanity if they fail to defend, by force of arms, the honour of their women against a kidnapper who chooses to take away their women. All this advice and my previous practice I hold to be not only consistent with my profession of the religion of Ahimsa out-and-out, but a direct result of it. To state that noble doctrine is simple enough; to know it and to practice it in the midst of a world full of strife, turmoil and passion is a task whose difficulty I realize more and more day by day. And yet the conviction that without it life is not worth living is growing deeper.” SB, 167-68

This rather circular statement is the most difficult to execute in life as Gandhi himself says. The lines often get blurred in real time and require practice of a lifetime and needle-sharp wisdom. Ahimsa and truth were his ‘rule and breath’. Both required tremendous courage, faith and persistence. Gandhi had to explain his non-violence; what was a matter of heart had to be brought to language by him to convince people. He had to cite examples of issues of National interest to mundane acts like killing a snake or stray animal. He was right. For humanity to coexist, non-violence is the way.

“I am conscious of my own limitations. That consciousness is my only strength. Whatever I might have been able to do in my life has proceeded more than anything else out of the realization of my own limitations.” SB, 214

He had seen his share of misinterpretation and opposition but his patience grew as he became stronger in his convictions.

He often confessed his limitations and imperfections and knew ideals are difficult to achieve, but as long as one tries...

Mohandas Gandhi did not trust his Mahatma—

“The mahatma I leave to his fate. Though a non-cooperator, I shall gladly subscribe to a Bill to make it criminal for anybody to call me Mahatma or to touch my feet. Where I can impose the law myself - at the ashram - the practice is criminal.” MT, II, 340

He ended his autobiography with this statement—

“The time has now come to bring these chapters to a close...My

life from this point onward has been so public that there is hardly anything about it that people do not know...My life has been an open book. I have no secrets and I encourage no secrets.” AMG, 614, see also MM, 4

This was 1925. Gandhi was 56 years old. On Gokhale’s advice, he had spent a year traveling India on foot, in trains and buses and had grasped the pulse of the country. India was crumbling under its self-derogatory habits and mindset.

Horizontally divided, the masses were just surviving and foreign-educated urban elite were confused about their relationship with their colonial bosses. 1857 had become history. Gandhi had already induced an agitation against the soft politics of Congress and blasted Indian attitudes in his speech in BHU, winning him youth followers.

He had long given up his western suits; even the overclothed Gujarati dress was gone. His will to live minimally pushed him to abandon all extra clothing. He identified with the poor of the country and refused any comfort which a common man could not afford.

The country supported him during the noncooperation movement but he withdrew the movement as he strongly opposed the violent actions of the people. Violence in any form was unacceptable to him.

The Khilafat movement came to an end and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre had removed Gandhi’s delusions about the fair play of the British race. Ahmedabad and Bardoli had proven the power of Satyagraha and Gandhi was jailed.

But all was not over...he had new lessons to learn, new battles to fight.

His wish remained to ‘reduce myself to zero’. “So long as a man does Not, of his own free will, put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. Ahimsa is the farthest limit of humility.” AMG, 616

He had no time to relax.

But no one listened to him.

The minds used to deify, put him on an altar and excused themselves from following.

“There is no such thing as ‘Gandhism’ and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems.”

His love for humanity had to be reflected through his own India.

“I have no desire to deliver public speeches. I detest being lionized. I wonder if I shall ever again have the health to stand the awful strain of public speaking and public demonstrations. If God ever sent me to the West, I should go there to penetrate the hearts of the masses, to have quiet talks with the youth of the West and have the privilege of meeting kindred spirits - lovers of peace at any price - save that of Truth. But, I feel that I have as yet no message to deliver personally to the West. I believe my message to be universal but as yet I feel that I can best deliver it through my work in my own country. If I can show visible success in India, the delivery of the message becomes complete. If I came to the conclusion that India had no use for my message, I should not care to go elsewhere in search of listeners though I still retain faith in it. If I ventured out of India, I should do so because I have faith, though I cannot demonstrate it to the satisfaction of all, that the message is being received by India, be it ever so slowly.”

As these words are being typed Gandhi has indeed reached not only the West but around the world.

“I have not a shadow of doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith.” SB, 216

As he said, his open life is well known and will be followed...

But a deep reverential bow to him for his perfect act of exit.

“I fancy I know the art of living and dying non-violently but I have yet to demonstrate it by one perfect act.” MGP, II, 475

Gandhi distilled his life to fulfil his vows and precepts and his life was a truthful experiment.

## THE PRECEPTS AND THE TOOLS

Gandhi aimed at seeing *One in all and all in One*, discarding self-interest and greed of mankind. His life was an example of how spirituality replaces vain ego and pride. All his thoughts and deeds were aimed towards achieving

Satya	(Truth)
Ahimsa	(Non Violence)
Brahamcharya	(Celibacy)
Aswad	(Control over tongue)
Asteya	(No stealing)
Aparigraha	(No hoarding)
Abhaya	(Fearlessness)
Asparshiyata nivaran	(Removal of Untouchability)
Shareer shram	(Physical labour)
Sarvadharm sambhava	(Religious Tolerance)
Swadeshi	(Self reliance)

His was not a selfish attempt for personal salvation. The personal merged to social when he redefined social sins—

*Politics without Principles*

*Wealth without Work*

*Pleasure without Conscience*

*Knowledge without Character*

*Commerce without Morality*

*Science without Humanity*

*Worship without Sacrifice*

During the industrial revolution when profit and wealth was fast becoming the motive of countries and individuals, Gandhi's ideas must have seemed archaic but in no way, were they useless.

The world has not changed much in a century. Where gain becomes the purpose of interaction, most people interact to please the other, switching from one idea to another to avoid confrontations. Gandhi stood firm in his beliefs.

He may have changed the manifestation and expression in advice and act but the premise never changed.

As a national leader and due to his status, huge number of people sought advice from him, each with their own agenda and thought process. Not to get swayed, to pursue and not to push people away, to carry all along and yet maintain his own being, is never an easy task. The dialectical tension it creates in thought and emotion can be felt only by those who stand up with conviction. Gandhi attempted this and succeeded for major part, for his tools were different.

## *His Tools*

As in any experiment of consequence even before the process begins, the elements have to be decided; but as Gandhi's was a dynamic, contextual, humanistic experiment enmeshed within a historical frame, the tools kept evolving and as time rolled, these got consolidated. His own precepts evolved in the process. He may have sounded utopian but his process was radical. Gandhi aimed for perfect harmony in what was moral, spiritual and worldly, not only within himself, but in his worldview too. For him, politics and the public sphere were an extension of his acts, the eventual order emerging from the collective transformation.

Gandhi insisted on the purity of purpose. Any act for him which was lust-driven or exploitative was bound to be defeated.

Being religious without being ritualistic made Gandhi into a traditionalist and radical transformer at the same time. Even while he was removing bricks from the rigid orthodox structure of Hinduism, he left the structure intact.

'Sat' the preoccupation of the Indian psyche with Truth was Gandhi's essence of existence. He applied this litmus to all that happened around him, most rigorously to his own acts. But the pragmatic Mohandas Gandhi was always aware of human instincts,

so he knew Absolute and Relative Truth existed.

The Mahatma knew that no idea can exist in isolation and the rules of the world must be bent to change the order. He consciously evolved a few strategies to preserve what he believed in and change what he believed should be. A few of these are amply evident from his life like -

*Converting weakness to strength*

*Converting loss to opportunity*

*Connecting to people - to the last man*

*Compartmentalizing his personal conflicts*

*Channelizing libidinous energy*

*Caring to nurse*

*Physical labour*

*Dignity of labour*

Politics, khadi, charkha, dress, fast were not mere gimmicks to draw attention but were powerful instruments to raise his consciousness.

Political status provided him a unique chance to take others along. India followed him like mice following the pied piper.

Gandhi was often accused of inconsistencies but an unbiased look can provide a deep insight. He always adhered to Truth and Ahimsa which no one could deny. As a man of karma, his concerns were almost immediate and local, though his vision was distant. This approach of applying his soul tools to problem-solving may have created contradictory statements but in no case, were they betrayed. What was a scary unpredictability on the surface was a deeply bound unity in 'mansa, vachana, karma' (mind, word and deed.)

Gandhi deserves an informed and not an opinionated critique by the modern youth. Within this premise let us attempt to discover the real GANDHI and revisit his life to answer the rational critical tendencies of our times - the tendency of asking

Why? and How?

What? When? and where?

These can be understood by analyzing his evolution and the influences on him in childhood, his process of political growth, of seeing his spiritual, moral and personal self as an integrated whole.

Evolution and Influences



## THE ROYALTY

**M**ohandas was no ordinary child by birth. Being a loved child in a Prime Minister's household was a prerogative few have but Moniya showed no signs of the glory he was going to earn himself. The class he was born into was in him, even in his renunciation. He not only transformed himself but also the meaning of royalty just as Buddha did 2500 years back.

Gandhi was brought up in a religious traditional environment and by his own admission he was temperamentally shy, an introvert and fearful, and as often happens with anxious kids, he was highly suggestible.

A playful, average student, he went about in early life as most would have done in his time, indulging in the same mischief which is the hidden history of us all. His friendship with Mehtab was possibly a reaction to his own frailty and inability to resist. The first seeds of religious tolerance were sown in the family and friendship.

He confessed to eating meat, smoking and stealing but these trivial acts had an unusual impact on him. His father's truthful attitude and mother's obsessive piety were influences already changing him from within.

His own discomfort when lying and cheating his parents was enough for him to choose truth and honesty. In his formative years, he became obsessed with the character of Raja Harishchandra, the mythological king who sacrificed his all for truth. The story impacted Gandhi throughout his life. Truth was taking root in his being, else how could a child disobey the teacher even at the risk of isolating himself.

The humiliation of being called stupid for not cheating and that

too by a teacher would have surely traumatized him. The impact of childhood and adolescent incidents and emotions never leave us and most often formulate our personalities. Most go about life driven by unconscious motives and emotions. Rarely do they pervade to an extent of being the conscious choice of a person and in whom they do, the persons are likely to be great.

His resolve to eliminate untouchability and his existential query may have taken roots when he was asked to wash himself after touching an untouchable, Uka. Gandhi's rebellion, that kept him going all his life, was already taking shape, as it does with most of us, but he had something more even then, rebellion against his fearful self and then the rebellion against his own acts to get back to what he held most dear all his life.

His letter to his father pleading for forgiveness after stealing and the tearful response of his father changed his life forever and he obtained his shield for all battles in life—TRUTH.

Truth saved him from being a nervous cynic; he almost chose atheism against orthodox religion in his formative years.

We often latch on to lies and falsity because of the mind's insecurity to face uncertainties but to become aware of it and go against it requires higher thought.

Gandhi remained anxious till his early youth. Possibly this fearful anxiety was the reason for his power struggle with the stronger Kasturba in marriage.

But in other spheres, he also had a mantra given to him by his doting maid Rambha, a name which Gandhi gave a new meaning to - the name of RAM.

*Ram* remained with him till his last breath.

In his autobiography, Gandhi lays a lot of emphasis on providing a detailed and brutally honest account of his childhood as he was the only source of information. All his life, Gandhi remained honest to his inner being and chose to recollect memories of his youth, only in the fifth decade of his life, to reconsolidate his roots. Providence was his guide as he moved forward, leaping over the hurdles he encountered in life. Even in his youth, he was a reformer within. He recalled later that he had an intention of changing Mehtab but cautioned that a reformer 'should not be a close friend'.

In the early years, his struggle was not only between skeptical atheism and religion, but also between personal and impersonal affection. He realized close friendships were dangerous, because 'friends react to one another' and through loyalty to a friend, one can be led into wrongdoing. He had a handful of friends like Kallenbach and Andrews but he willfully practiced impersonal, detached love.

## WEST-BOUND

Though Gandhi was growing during the time of British oppression, he did not give any indication of being aware politically or historically except in the surge of youth, wanting to grow strong to defeat the Englishman who stood ‘five cubits tall’ and took recourse to eating meat.

His life was at crossroads when he paid heed to a suggestion to pursue law in England. A doctor’s profession was out of question because of its training process though he could have been a good doctor for he was a health fanatic throughout his life. With no other goal in sight, his youthful spirit leapt and urged him to take up law. It was a light in the aimless life he was facing. Despite financial difficulty and the possibility of being ostracized by the rigid Modh Baniyas, he was resolute. This habit of his remained; once convinced he would pursue the idea to its logical consequence. Though denied any financial assistance by the British agent, he was determined to pursue his dream. His training in Western and Christian ideology began, which influenced his thoughts, actions and beliefs.

When Gandhi arrived in London he was an impressionable youth, but as described by a fellow passenger he was sure about his truth and also that his was the right truth. Gandhi was in that phase of life when we all experiment and emulate our role models. In his case, it was the British GENTLEMAN. Gandhi tried dressing up like him, attempting to refine his taste in music, dance and adopt etiquette of the *Angrez* (a common term for all that was Western). He soon realized that it was a façade and not his real self, and that his purpose of life was different. He jolted himself out from these distractions to focus on simple living and studies.

What made him do so?

Accountability and responsibility towards self, so rare in young adults, were finding expression in him. Gandhi's awareness was his evolution. He had promised his mother that while in the West, he would not eat meat (one of the reasons why people were not allowed to go to the West), drink alcohol or befriend English women (he was already married).

He had only his conscience to answer to but he did not slip and remained committed. It was not lack of opportunity but a decision to abstain and remain true to his word that kept him safe. The seeds of truth and religiosity had already been sown and tested and England provided him with an opportunity to realize and experiment with few other tools of his character. Often chided and ridiculed for being a beast, he developed self-belief and his TRUTH - a character trait which never betrayed him, an ability to 'forget what did not appeal to him and continue doing what his heart said'. Whatever his experiments, they took deep roots. Not only responsibility, he experimented with other aspects of himself.

Anyone who attempts to know Gandhi cannot miss out on his ability to turn loss into opportunity, a habit that was reflected in his political process too. Each act raised his consciousness, provided him with better control over himself and the world around him.

Isn't it what we all desire but avoid the grind that is vital to develop it?

Financial restraints compelled Gandhi to shift to a lesser-privileged area in London which meant he had to walk a lot more. He took this as an opportunity which later became his *trademark walk*. His walk was an instrument of passive resistance in South Africa which much later culminated with the famous Dandi March.

Bound by his vow not to touch meat, he chose vegetarianism and channelized it into a positive force within. This was his first semi-political movement. Joining a vegetarian club, he became its torchbearer and persisted to a point that a restaurant hosted a vegetarian meal in his honour for his farewell.

England proved to be a training laboratory for him. Persistence - the habit of the highly successful, surfaced in Gandhi during his vegetarian movement and kept exhibiting its strength throughout

his life. His articles in *The Vegetarian* written in 1891 were an introductory commentary on India and a prelude to his future thought. He was living in a liberal England and as he imbibed the Western influence whilst pitting the Oriental thought against it, Indian pride rose its head.

We all have the same elements provided generously to us by nature, but a varying extent of conditioning and awareness often keep them under wraps.

By the time, he returned from England he was not only a barrister, but a man with a solid foundation for a great life ahead.

*The building bricks comprised Truth*

*Responsibility and accountability*

*Persistence*

*Physical labour*

*Channelizing loss to an opportunity*

God within was his guide and dictated his actions. We can see in Gandhi's evolution how these unique time-tested elements that shape behavior were being harmonized and many more were added later to transform him into the man he was.

## RETURN TO ESCAPE

Gandhi landed in Bombay to grieve the loss of his mother. The mother who was incorporated in him, whose vows kept him steadfast, did not receive an outburst of tears from her favorite child. Gandhi restrained himself from an emotional outburst. Whether it was a control of expression he had cultivated or a deeper psychological reason is debatable, but he never displayed his emotions in public.

With a divided mind, he started law practice in Rajkot but soon had to bear the arrogance of the Raj.

Reluctantly, he made a plea but was snubbed by a British magistrate. His shame and failure urged him to file a suit but he was advised against taking legal recourse. Still he retained his faith in the British sense of justice and respected them in the worst of times. A sense of slavery restrained him from revolting, but he reacted in the best way he knew till then...escape. Bombay was no better. Though he was getting small cases, his social anxiety overpowered him to a point of incapacitating him. He could not present his case in court and on one occasion was found stammering in front of the judge. He must have been dejected once again facing a dim and hopeless future with a wife and a kid, when the offer from South Africa came.

Dada Abdullah wanted him to represent his firm in a lawsuit with another Indian...

Gandhi escaped again but once in South Africa he was back in his element, the first instinct to resurface was turning loss to opportunity.

His frustration with the way law was practiced must have been

acute. He recommended an amicable settlement between the parties rather than fighting a case which would result in both parties incurring heavy losses.

Gandhi's view on lawyers and law remained the same that they should bring people together rather than engage them in fighting. It also brought forth his immense quality of joining people and taking all along, something which brought many factions together in India and South Africa. The title 'Father of the Nation' was in inception without him being aware. He was probably unaware of what was unfolding.

A rebellion was simmering again. In a minor incident, he refused to remove his turban in front of a judge and rather be turned out of the court (though he wore it after few years once he was permitted to practice law). A point of transformation came which changed Mohandas to the Gandhi we have known forever. The reactionary rebel in him changed to a provocative rebel.

Provoked he sure was, not only by the White man who had wanted him out of first class rail compartment that night in Maritzberg, but from then on, again and again...

That night did something to him. He felt a surge of self-respect like never before and when thrown out, he decided to shiver on an isolated platform rather than go and ask for a blanket. Something changed in him that cold night. It was the night of his epiphany. He had an option of escaping again, catching the next steamer out, but Gandhi decided to stay. He stopped running away from situations and humiliations; stopped running away from himself and never again did he shy away from issues. *The Mahatma Gandhi* was born.

The next day brought him face to face with the first in a series of his greatest experiments and what emerged was his weapon against all difficulties, one, which coupled with truth changed the future - AHIMSA.

Badly beaten up in the carriage for refusing to sit near the foothold of the carriage driver, he was saved by a white man. This and the dismal state of Indians' self-respect in South Africa convinced Gandhi to stay back and fight. He stayed for the next 20 years. He fought for Indians, for the coolies, the Sami in his own style, that which the world later called *Gandhian*.



## AMBITIOUS POLITICIAN OR MAHATMA

### *Political Laboratory*

Gandhi now was no more the shy, anxious person of his London days.

Being more aware of his shortcomings, he had initiated a struggle within and without. As if the humiliation had uncoiled some hidden energy, his sensitivity heightened and he plunged into the world around him. The miserable indentured laborers and their plight, the rich but restricted scared businessmen moved him. He decided to mobilize them and initiate a struggle not to push the white ruler out but to claim an environment for the Indians to live respectfully. His was a genuine aim to earn a life of equal rights, respect, a life free of exploitation emanating from the color of one's skin. No doubt his crusade focused on Indians alone and the Black population in South Africa was largely excluded. But this was not a 'racist' intention as few accused Gandhi of later. It was a focused political strategy; any larger issue would have diluted the intensity. He was proven right as long after he left Africa, apartheid continued and another 'Gandhian' style struggle spearheaded by Nelson Mandela abolished it.

This time the self respect issue spread from apartheid to civil rights movements in USA where another black leader Martin Luther King Jr. took the lead from Gandhi.

Focus was an important constituent of his armamentarium.

The next decade brought out another aspect of Gandhi. He organized mass movements to protest for abolition of tax and permits, yet he never exploited others even when in a winning position. General Smuts who claimed to be his arch rival is a

testimony. Gandhi after being released from prison not only borrowed a shilling for the taxi, from the same man who had imprisoned him but could also make sandals for him (Gandhi gifted Smuts with a pair of sandals that he had made with his own hands while in jail which Smuts gifted back to him on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday apparently). In 1931, Gen Smuts advised the British that he knew Gandhi as an enemy and nothing would be possible if they could not deal with him. His worst enemies could not hate him though they remained confused. He excelled in confusing the opponent with his smile, small gestures and patience. For few decades, people did not believe in his candid challenges. He was suggested a name to his strategy Sad-agraha (good intention and persistence) which he reinvented to Satya-Agraha (persisting truth) with specific focus on rules which were simple in statement yet tough to follow:

- Never hate the enemy
- Give him a chance to improve
- Nonviolently stick to your demand
- Be ready to sacrifice your life for it but never exploit the enemy.

As always, it was not mere rhetoric. Gandhi negotiated from SA to England for his demands and often informed his rivals in advance, to the extent that he told Gen Smuts that he was going to get the law changed. When asked by Smuts how did he intended to do so, Gandhi told Smut's that he would do so with his help! His habit of engaging the rival and deriving energy from their agitation was unique as in a trained martial arts warrior.

While he was fighting them, he also formed a medical corps and helped the wounded in the Boer War. During his trips to India, he reported about the plight of the Indians in South Africa. With ample opportunity to prove his Ahimsa, Gandhi faced violence multiple times, even at the hands of a fellow Indian, but not once did he prosecute the offenders. His followers and he refrained from violence. Ahimsa had taken deep roots. Meanwhile his personal battle to hone his internal strength continued.

His walking habit helped him to take the wounded on foot, sometimes 20 miles in a day. Each passing moment was preparing

him for the greater battle that was awaiting him. All this was not happening in isolation.

Gandhi became a rich, successful lawyer with an office and staff in SA and also made time to write and print a paper, *Indian Opinion*.

Within him the spiritual influences were growing and his own personal battle to live simply like an ascetic was raging. His friends Kallenbach and Charlie Andrews were loyal assistants who helped him establish the community he wanted to live in. One was secular-religious and the other was indulgent. Gandhi's talent of making diamonds out of clay was already in action. Phoenix farm and later Tolstoy farm were hermitages; all those who lived on the farm practiced equality, dignity of labour, nursing the sick and poor and respect for all living beings.

Gandhi had respect for human beings and that is how he could practice Satyagraha - fight a battle but still love the enemy. This was the influence of Christian thought of service unto GOD. Thoreau's *Walden* and Leo Tolstoy's *Unto This Last* had a lasting impression on him. In 1909, while on board from England to South Africa, he created a document '*Hindi Swaraj*' which was his vision of the India of the future - a nation where there would be dignity of labour, trusteeship, equality... a vision which has still to see the light of day. His fame as a Satyagrahi and leader had already reached India. The Congress and the country were waiting for him. He lived in India for a year but had to go back on demand as he had promised to return when needed.

While India waited, Gandhi ascended further up the steep, rewarding path of spirituality. Along with Truth, Ahimsa, Vegetarianism and Satyagraha came Brahmacharya (a life long struggle for him) and with it, *aswad* (abandon the taste in food), control of tongue and dispossession (*aparigraha*).

He knew instinctually that possession is the source of conflict and the antithesis of being ONE with God. He dispossessed and left all he had in South Africa, even forcing Kasturba to leave her jewelry behind. His struggles were manifold - with authority, with himself, with friends and within family, but he survived the agony only because of his clarity of mind regarding his principles.

When he sailed for India with his family and a handful of followers, he had faith in his heart and his eyes set on a distant free India but his feet firmly planted to the ground. Moniya had become fearless without apprehension of where he would get his next meal from or about the roof over his head; some strange force was moving him.

## THE INDIAN IS BACK

Gandhi was no ordinary foe, nor was he a blind friend. He would sacrifice himself for Truth and Ahimsa but never sacrifice the Truth. To be with him, one had to be with him in his world of Aparigraha, Truth, Ahimsa and Service. Outsiders may have had some relief but Ba and his sons were not spared. They learned the hard way. Whether it was Gandhi's expectations or ruthlessness with himself which extended to his family, is difficult to say. Though he deprived himself of luxuries, he never forced others except his immediate family whom he cajoled and pressed for sacrifices towards simple living.

He had shed the western attire long back and whatever remained would go soon. When he arrived in India in 1915, little did the country know that they were welcoming an ascetic Emperor. The prime minister's son had become a king albeit in Buddha's footsteps.

The India of 1915 was stripped of the passion of 1857. Their self-respect crushed, few social changes were all that could be managed and rest was subversive. Congress was the buffer between the British and the masses, and it was a group of Western-educated liberals who could partially connect to the downtrodden Indian. The trend was survivalist.

Gandhi was the odd man out amongst these finely dressed English speaking elite leaders because of his dress and simplicity. The urban Indian leader was skeptical but they missed out on first impression - the sophisticated mind, the command over language, the etiquette, the decency and compassion balanced with a sharp political mind. By all standards, it was a strange combination for

politics as England, India and the world witnessed the fine balance over the next three decades.

He paid heed to the advice of Gokhale: 'See India before you speak.'

Gokhale had seen the fire and power of this man and his potential to reinstate India to its past glory with freedom from the Imperial rule being just a part of it.

For the next one year Gandhi traveled across the vast country on foot and by rail. Gokhale attempted to induct him to his 'Servants of India' group, but Gandhi was too independent to be a follower.

He was moving with a spirit as if he wanted to imbibe whatever he had lost in 20 years. His life force would have mingled with the pulse of this vast land. Politically he was considered an 'interesting' man but still not a leader.

A year was too much for the restless Gandhi. He was spiritual but his meditation was karma and change...

India got the first taste of Gandhi's simmering agitation and frustration after he witnessed the disparity, pitiable self-esteem, filth and squalor throughout the country. He wrote about the habitual behavior of Indians after attending a Congress session in Calcutta for which he had come from South Africa. This time it was directly addressed to all. His speech in 1916 at the foundation ceremony of Banaras Hindu University, presided by Annie Besant, immediately split the audience into the moderate conservatives and the rebel youth who were looking for radical change. This speech still holds Universal value.

Gandhi softly but firmly made scathing remarks on the filth and poverty around India's temples, the tendency to use English while ignoring the vernacular, the bejeweled Maharajas, the secure officials and the insecure multitudes.

He was interrupted by the Chair to halt the speech. Few were about to leave, but the youth who were looking for a fresh leadership had had a glimpse. Gandhi got a life-long follower in Vinoba Bhave. Meanwhile his political guide Gokhale died and Gandhi moved on to establish Sabarmati Ashram, after a brief sojourn at Gurudev Tagore's Shanti Niketan, to build his own community and repeat the experiment of community living from South Africa.

He also met another person in 1916 during the Lucknow session of Congress - an association that would shape the future India - the young charming liberal, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru did not immediately get drawn to him though Gandhi was well known. The year 1916 saw the establishment of associations, ashrams and andolans. When Rajkumar Shukla pursued Gandhi from Lucknow to Kanpur to take him to Champaran, Gandhi, reluctant at first, finally relented.

## CHAMPARAN AND BEYOND

Academics still debate whether Gandhi led the masses to agitation and a life of self-respect or Gandhi seized the vacant leadership of peasants as they were already in a revolting mood. Whatever the internal truth, it cannot be denied that after Champaran, Indian politics never remained the same. Prior to Champaran, Gandhi had suggested a mini Satyagraha at Viramgam against customs and atrocities that gave him cause to reactivate himself. The exploitation of farmers as they were forced to grow Indigo and other cash crops instead of crops, and that too for a meagre sum, and the subsequent misery arising out of poverty, the rampant hopelessness and alcoholism, stirred his being.

Even today traveling in India can move a sensitive soul to tears in spite of improved living standards.

India in 1916 was in tatters...Gandhi renounced whatever excess he had on his physical being. He continued to simplify his dress till he came to wearing the basic minimum. His explanation was simple; he could not provide clothes to all but by giving up, he could be like them. Some dismiss this as a gimmick to beguile the poor but his response to situations was not always dictated by rational thought but more often controlled by his heart; his life account is proof enough that his actions were never self-centered. No selfish motive will ever propel a person to torture his own self in body and soul. It has to be in Swadharma and Swabhava (instinct and nature). In Richard Attenborough's movie, Gandhi gives the cloth covering his torso to a woman in tattered clothes; this incident was one of the many to follow where the Mahatma was moved often to live like most Indians did in poverty and deprivation.



Gandhi asked Kasturba to instruct the women of poor peasant households to wear a clean dhoti (a single cloth draped around the body). One of them took Ba to her hut and asked whether she could find any trunk or shelf; there was none. That woman's answer must have shaken Gandhi to the core for she said, "Ask Mahatmaji to get another dhoti for us, only then can we take this off to wash."

Mahatmaji (Tagore bestowed upon him this title) could not give a dhoti to millions like her but he sure did the next best act. He gave up the extra clothing on his body to be like them (*Gandhi caps* were made from his turban for the striking workers in Ahmedabad later). He mobilized local leaders, met Dr. Rajendra Prasad and few other young nationalists and was supported by Nehru. He established an ashram-cum-office there and exhorted the farmers as well as intelligentsia to revolt against the tyranny. The SATYAGRAHA was non-violent with similar rules as in South Africa.

The mass civil disobedience movement shook the local administration. Gandhi was arrested when he refused to leave the district but was not jailed, probably due to the public support he had generated.

He insisted that it should not be repeated in other districts nor should Congress get involved except in providing external moral support and that it was not a fight for Swaraj. He knew in his heart that India was not ready for Independence. He must have seen the chasms and wanted even the last man to be free as and when freedom happened. The vision of Hind Swaraj was not only a free India but also a different India.

If Champaran brought him to the masses, Kheda in Gujarat and Ahmedabad made him a leader of the poor and oppressed. If Champaran gave him his left hand—Jawaharlal Nehru, Kheda provided the right hand—Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Both were an integral part of him till his death.

As he rose in popularity, Mahadev Desai joined him as an able lieutenant and remained his secretary for the next two decades.

Gandhi was an instinctual leader, a quality which guided him in selection, acquisition and delegating responsibilities. He did not want to rush into battle for Swaraj without empowering the common man and bridging the gap between the rich and poor, the elite and

common man, Hindu and Muslim, illiterate and educated, ruler and the ruled. He had seen the point of nemesis for this vast, varied country. He refused to earn freedom for the urban only. He once again acted on what he believed - that true India lives in the villages. He implemented social reforms even before political changes. *Change the heart before the system...* was his motto always.

Commitment to his principles and the readiness to suffer and sacrifice all on that altar must have troubled a lot. His willingness to accept an untouchable into his household not only elicited a protest from Ba but also resulted in a cessation of funds in Sabarmati on this issue, but Gandhi had immense faith in God and immeasurable patience. He was supplied with money to sustain the ashram by a generous businessman. Moniya remembered his dues to the untouchable Uka from childhood. Sabarmati evolved into a school of self-reliance. Revival of charkha, cleaning of toilets, cooking, growing vegetables, educating, prayer and nursing—it was a world in itself where each inhabitant participated in maintaining it within their capacity.

He would not sacrifice truth for anyone. No one experienced it better than Ambalal Sarabhai, his friend and mill owner. During a strike, Gandhi supported the mill workers and Anusuya Sarabhai, Ambalal's sister was convinced enough to support him. But as always, he took all of them along to work out a solution for both.

Gandhi expanded his influence outside the ashram to unite Hindu and Muslims with the help of the Ali brothers during the Khilafat movement.

He succeeded in uniting them initially and during the Swaraj movement. The Khilafat movement brought Maulana Azad and others under Gandhi's fold, but as it withered, the rifts reappeared, enhanced by the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha. Communal harmony and removal of untouchability were his life-long crusades and both haunted Gandhi in his life and thereafter. Gentleman that he was, he still believed in the justice of the British. He exhorted Indians to help them in WW1. Nursing and medical assistance were his forte. He remained true to himself and counselled against exploiting the enemy especially in its hour of crisis - a principle he held in South Africa too. He believed in changing the enemy's heart,

not hating the enemy; such a belief system requires a heart of compassion and nerves of steel.

He may have been politically wrong but he believed in the inherent goodness of human beings and hoped the British Government would allow Indians some freedom and self-respect. The more aggressive politicians were not in agreement with him. Till 1919, he only wanted the Indians to lead a life of dignity and never demanded freedom from the British.

But it all shattered...

## **1919**

While Gandhi was busy awakening people, removing differences and bringing in tolerant religion to unite and raise the downtrodden, April 6, 1919 was a day of prayer and abstinence for India. The purpose was to present a consolidated India to protest the exploitation of the British rule, but the future had other plans.

On April 13, when General Dyer led his armed troops into the lone alley to Jallianwala Bagh, the place where people had converged for a non-violent protest, he opened the coffin box of the British Empire in India. Ruthlessly, without warning, he massacred the innocent...the old, the young, women and children. As bodies slumped to the ground and blood seeped into the earth, India wept. The tears turned into fire. Sardar Udham Singh wandered for the next 21 years till he killed General Michael O' Dwyer and the Jallianwala Bagh incident ignited a young teenager, Sardar Bhagat Singh, to sacrifice himself in the fire of the freedom struggle. Tagore renounced the knighthood conferred on him by the British crown and Gandhi never remained the same. His trust in the gentleman British was murdered.

He was numb with shock and the void was filled with agitation.

Jallianwala Bagh did to him politically what Maritzberg had done to him, on a cold night, personally.

It was not only the trauma of the atrocities but the realization of the complex ground he was treading on. India was brewing in response to the Rowlatt Act and Gandhi had mobilized a small group to start Satyagraha hoping that the Government would relent.

Though he was unwell, he pressed on, but once the act was published in the gazette he called for a mass civil disobedience movement. In spite of the lack of faster communication modes, the country united and awakened to an agitation. 30<sup>th</sup> March was designated as a prayer-fast day, which was later postponed to 6<sup>th</sup> April. The whole country was charged as if it had got a meaning and a tool to protest. But all was not well for Gandhi. From various parts of the country, he received news of violence and the administration's brutal response to the agitation. In Delhi, Ahmedabad, Kheda and Punjab, people broke the law, went on a rampage and ignored his plea of non-violence. Gandhi had misinterpreted the sentiments of the people. The rising of the common man had given him the confidence that they understood the essence of Satyagraha. April 1919 made him review his stance. He realized people did not respect the law and followed it only as a compulsion. Also, the country was ready to revolt but had still not imbibed the basic premise of Ahimsa or Satyagraha, though the response to his call for Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods told a different story. He withdrew the civil disobedience movement but not without paying a heavy price. He was blamed for the very thing he was against – violence - not only by the British Government but also by the youth in Punjab who believed that his withdrawal led to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

His radical means of protest was premature for the Indians but he persisted till he perfected it a decade later.

As his stature grew, the Congress recognized his power to mobilize masses and began to follow Gandhi's constitution. When he was elected their President, he directed efforts to increase the base of Congress to the rural areas, keeping in mind the lessons he learnt of Ahimsa and Satyagraha.

His ideas spread and when the non-cooperation movement picked up in 1920, it continued peacefully till 1922 except for violence during the Prince of Wales' visit.

Gandhi fasted for penance but even his fast was not enough to prevent the Chauri Chaura incident where policemen were burnt alive by a furious mob.

Gandhi's accountable and responsible self not only fasted but

abruptly ended the movement, again bringing him to confront the impatient leadership of the Congress. Gandhi's Christian mind was always ready to take the sins of others on his soul. He not only fasted but was arrested and jailed for sedition.

### *Yervada Temple*

Whether dejected, sad or tired, the 6-year prison sentence would have come to the 53-year old Mahatma as a relief. He used these years to write his autobiography 'My Experiments with Truth'. He called the prison a temple and used this period to formulate his vision for the country and its people.

Although he was released after two years, he did not participate actively in politics even as the President of Congress. He divested his energy in framing constructive programs, spreading the ideas of Satyagraha, Ahimsa, truth and self-reliance, Khadi, charkha, cleanliness, emphasizing to Indians the need for Swaraj (self-rule).

He insisted that self-respect and discipline are important to attain before ruling the country. The idea was catching on fast as observed in the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928.

Ahimsa was being accepted but at the same time aggressive youth groups with a socialist ideology were taking up arms.

Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Ramprasad Bismil were not violent but they did not follow Ahimsa either. They answered to the British atrocities with violence.

Jallianwala Bagh was a thorn in their hearts and the death of Lala Lajpat Rai, a father figure, flared them up. Saunders's murder and the bomb at the Assembly Hall were more of a violent protest rather than a murderous militancy.

The idealists wanted to shake up and awaken the British but Mahatma knew what they did not - Violence begets Violence. A reactionary government would have unleashed a spate of terror and violence triggering an uncontrollable spiral in which the poor unarmed masses would suffer the most as they were in no position to resist state violence. Though he praised Bhagat Singh and tried to save him from capital punishment, he never endorsed his violence, insisting that violence was not Bhagat Singh's creed.

This part of history needs to be revised at least in the Indian subcontinent. He did not agree with aggressive followers either. His differences with non-violent yet aggressive Turks in Congress were at the forefront in 1928-29. Subhash Chandra Bose and Nehru wanted total Independence and rejected Gandhi's appeal for Dominion status. A compromise resolved the issue till the demand for total independence was approved in Lahore in 1929 and 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930 saw the charter for Independence.

The history of political differences has often been distorted and used by various factions in later decades to blemish Gandhi, but propagators have always forgotten the fact that none of these leaders had a mass following.

Gandhi was a point where the country would converge. All the politicians knew that Gandhi was the only man who could speak in the language of the masses. His simple words held greater truth for people than any political rhetoric. He thought and acted for the benefit of every man. His was the concern for transformation of the psyche for a better future rather than just freedom.

Present day India is enough proof of the fallacy of not following in his footsteps.

## WALKING REVOLT

Mahatma Gandhi aptly named his autobiography as 'MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH' and not - I KNOW THE TRUTH.

Once someone knows the truth often the doors of accepting a different viewpoint close. Gandhi being a relentless crusader of Truth had to continue experimenting and discover it, however bitter it was. He continued his personal experiments with food, celibacy, simplicity and many others. He had already given up clothes to become one with the masses. Once the declaration for total independence was charted in 1929, the provocative rebel took over and he was back with a force, but this time, he made it into a collective rebellion. It was high time for him to return to active politics, test his own strength and test the impact of his lifelong teachings on the people who followed him like a herd.

Gandhi challenged the empire directly. He declared that he was going to walk to the coast of Dandi from Sabarmati Ashram and break the salt law which compelled the masses to pay heavy taxes on salt to fill the British coffers.

True satyagrahi as he was, he warned the British administration before acting.

Gandhi's organizational skills were at their best and he meticulously planned the march. Even the villages he was supposed to stay in were carefully chosen and he stayed, not with the rich, but with the untouchables, garnering phenomenal support for the cause. The act of defying the salt laws was simple on the surface but the energy it generated was enough to whip up a storm. The master politician and saint were at work together.

He chose his team carefully which comprised middle-aged men and mostly youngsters.

No women were chosen initially, not because he thought they were weak but he knew it could be dangerous. Later, Sarojini Naidu and others joined in.

348 kms in 24 days and almost 12 hours on foot daily...Gandhi was out to test his limits at the age of 61. He walked out of Sabarmati Ashram with a pledge not to return till India became free. A spectacle was unfolding, a nation was uniting behind him. He walked and he conquered. Initially the Government did not respond and brushed it off thinking of it as an attention-seeking gimmick of a man who had been out for a decade. But the movement and idea spread country-wide. Lord Irwin miscalculated the power of his simple act. Gandhi was arrested a month later but the revolt continued. The Viceroy was informed of his intention to raid the Dharasana salt factory and had him arrested. The march went ahead as planned with Abbas Tyabji, a seventy-six year old retired judge leading the march with Kasturba by his side. Both were arrested before reaching Dharasana and sentenced to imprisonment for three months.

After their arrests, the peaceful agitation continued under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Some Congress leaders disagreed with Gandhi's promotion of a woman to lead the march. Hundreds of Indian National Congress volunteers started marching towards the site of the Dharasana Salt Works. Several times Naidu and the Satyagrahis approached the salt works, before being turned back by the police. At one point, they sat down and waited for twenty-eight hours. Hundreds more were arrested. Naidu was aware that violence against the Satyagrahis was a threat and warned them, "You must not use violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten, but you must not resist: you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows." On May 21<sup>st</sup>, the Satyagrahis tried to pull down the barbed wire protecting the salt pans. The police charged and began clubbing them. American journalist Webb Miller, an eye-witness to the beating of Satyagrahis with steel-tipped lathis, drew international attention with his report—



*Not even one of the marchers raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins. From where I stood, I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow. Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. Within minutes the ground was quilted with bodies, their white clothes soaked in blood. The survivors, without breaking ranks, silently and doggedly marched on until struck down. When every one of the first row was knocked down, stretcher-bearers rushed forward and carried off the injured to a thatched hut that served as a makeshift hospital.*

*There were not enough stretcher-bearers to carry the wounded; I saw eighteen injured being carried off simultaneously, while forty-two still lay bleeding on the ground awaiting stretcher-bearers. The blankets used as stretchers were sodden with blood. At times the spectacle of unresisting men being methodically basped into a bloody pulp sickened me so much I had to turn away...I felt an indefinable sense of helpless rage and loathing, almost as much against the men who were submitting unresistingly to being beaten as against the police wielding the clubs...Bodies toppled over in threes and fours, bleeding from great gashes on their scalps. Group after group walked forward, sat down, and submitted to being beaten into insensibility without raising an arm to fend off the blows. Finally, the police became enraged by the non-resistance. They commenced savagely kicking the seated men in the abdomen and testicles. The injured men writhed and squealed in agony, which seemed to inflame the fury of the police...The police then began dragging the sitting men by the arms or feet, sometimes for a hundred yards, and throwing them into ditches.*

Miller's first attempts at telegraphing the story to his publisher in England were censored by the British telegraph operators in India. Only after threatening to expose British censorship was his story allowed to pass. The story appeared in 1,350 newspapers around the world and was read into the official record of the United States Senate by Senator John J. Blaine.

Vithalbai Patel, former Speaker of the Assembly, watched the massacre and remarked:

“All hope of India reconciling with the British Empire is lost

forever. I can understand any government's taking people into custody and punishing them for breach of the law, but I cannot understand how any government that calls itself civilized could deal as savagely and brutally with non-violent, unresisting men as the British have this morning."

In response to the beatings and the press coverage, Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, wrote to King George:

*Your Majesty can hardly fail to have read with amusement the accounts of the severe battles for the Salt Depot in Dharasana. The police for a long time tried to refrain from action. After a time, this became impossible and they had to resort to sterner methods. A good many people suffered minor injuries as a consequence.*

Miller later wrote that he went to the hospital where the wounded were being treated, and 'counted 320 injured, many still insensible with fractured skulls, others writhing in agony from kicks in the testicles and stomach; scores of the injured had received no treatment for hours and two had died.'

The sun was setting over the British empire. They were being watched by the world. It must have been a solace for Mahatma as the Dharsana salt raid proved his message of AHIMSA had been imbibed and the possibility existed that India would be freed. India after 200 years was feeling the fresh, free air in its nostrils. Many years later, after India's freedom, Gandhi was asked by E. Stanley Jones to do a reverse march to Sabarmati as a pageant of victory of his ways. He gave the expected reply, "The biggest pageant will be the British troops walking back."

Gandhi was released and called to attend the subsequent round table conference after he negotiated on behalf of the Congress and could restore some degree of respect. The Gandhi-Irwin pact disappointed a few but it obtained a certain respect for the Indian movement and people. Gandhi remained an ascetic even in success; he used to walk unaided in his minimal dress to the Viceroy's house.

His dress remained the same even in England...the same London where he wanted to dress like a British gentleman in his youth. Churchill could not contain his disgust and called him 'the seditious half-naked fakir.' It was more out of apprehension of the losing grip of an Empire and anxiety at being forced to negotiate but

Gandhi joked that His majesty was dressed for both of them. 'Minus four of Gandhi, matches plus four of Royalty'.

He came back empty-handed and was arrested on arrival. The conference set in motion another process, one that would change the face of India forever. He had a fellow Indian Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, with his huge concerns for the Untouchables, as an independent delegate in the conference. Sensitive, educated and a man you experienced the anguish of being an untouchable, he was as concerned about the untouchables, as Gandhi was. The irony of history sometimes is that two great minds can look at the same future but from different political viewpoints. The British had realized that India had to be free in the coming years but were also quick to catch the undercurrent of discontentment and the seed of separation. Instead of a peaceful transfer, notoriously, they threw the communal award on the face of Indian leadership. The British mind was still shrewd and the ace 'divide and rule' worked for them. A separate electorate for different communities - Muslims, Sikhs and the untouchables - was proposed. The depressed classes were to be assigned a number of seats to be filled by election from special constituencies in which only voters belonging to the depressed classes could vote. Gandhi realized the trick that the award was a clearly divisive plot. It would have retrogressed India to a ghetto mentality.

Dr. Ambedkar was concerned about the empowerment of untouchables and Gandhi had the whole country to think of. The truth is that both wanted respect for Harijans, as Gandhi called them. Dr. Ambedkar demanded a separate electoral power but Gandhi opposed him because he knew that they would never be integrated into the mainstream; he never opposed reservation though.

As a result, 1932 saw him fasting unto death in Yervada Jail.

Gandhi grew weak during his fast but finally Dr. Ambedkar relented. Tagore, Nehru, Sardar Patel and many others had to intervene as the country grew anxious.

But MONIYA had repaid the debt again...the temples were opened for the untouchables...the walls of 5000 years crumbled. A series of Satyagraha movements at Vaikom, Guruvayur, by those who believed in human dignity added to the force.

## THE LAST PHASE

**M**ahatma Gandhi fasted over multiple issues in a decade not only to protest against the British and their policies but also as penance for what he considered as transgression of his nonviolent struggle.

Even in his less active political period when other leaders struggled over issues, Gandhi was busy. His vision for India was far beyond freedom. He largely kept to rural India involving himself in constructive programmes and upliftment of villages.

His focus on basic education, Khadi and attempts to make villages self-reliant, autonomous units kept him busy. Sevagram Wardha was the new epicenter of Indian politics after Gandhi shifted there. Meanwhile the demand for Independence gathered momentum and the British government passed the Government of India Act granting India Dominion status.

Few leaders were ready to experiment the sharing of power but Gandhi himself kept out. He was arrested in 1942 to prevent him from announcing the Quit India Movement but Kasturba made the announcement instead and the whole country seethed. In historical speeches on Aug 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 1942, Gandhi talked of Hindu-Muslim unity and subtly challenged Jinnah to have him killed if he was wrong, but with the punch line that the real Gandhi will survive beyond the body. He told the princes in an AICC meeting that their only alternative to have a dignified living was to join him and share his ideas about helping the poor lest Nehru would prove to be a difficult man to deal with after Independence. His concern as late as 1942 was unity and that no class should be left behind, even if they were careless, frivolous rulers or the separatist Muslim League.

He suffered a few losses...companions of his youth left him forever...Kasturba and Mahadev Desai.

Subhash Chandra Bose left Congress due to ideological differences and fled India to form the INA. 1942-46 was a tumultuous period. World War II was raging but this time Gandhi opposed providing any help to them. Bose with Japanese support wanted to hammer the British from the Eastern border and succeeded partially. The demand for Independence was becoming agitational. The INA heroes were arrested after Japan's defeat and as the trials continued, the defense establishments raged. Navy and Air force revolts and the common man's non-cooperation forced the British to take a decision about India's freedom. The elite leaders were preparing for the transfer of power but Gandhi had no intention to possess material wealth and power and was increasingly sidelined by those who were waiting for their compensation of sacrifice. He advocated the dissolution of Congress as it had outlived its utility (did he sense the power lust), being acutely aware of corruption pervading in the ranks of the party. Moreover, he never wished for the Indian sahib to replace the White sahib.

Providence had another role for Gandhi when India faced her toughest challenge and needed Gandhi as never before. At the ripe age of 75, he once again put his beliefs to test.

The severest trauma came to him in the form of the proposed partition; it directly threatened his Oneness, his message of peace and communal harmony.

He, who would never run away from a situation, was there to face it whatever the price.

## *India Divided*

The centuries-old brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims that had survived the medieval period was developing cracks a few decades before India's Independence. The analysis of exact reasons for the violent outburst, arson, murder and widespread hatred which brought out the beast in both in 1947, will only be overshadowed by the emotional turmoil and pain it revives. An objective view of the situation and the circumstances that led to

the violence may be possible a few generations later. Till then, the normal excuses for human behavior and the blame game will continue. Catharsis is essential. The partition of India has not been treated similarly resulting in a simmering anger and mistrust keeping the two separate, and creating a negative impression about Mahatma Gandhi, one which will take many years to dispel.

The British may have played the final 'divide and rule' card but why did the countrymen fight is a question that still remains unanswered.

One who is made to leave home bare-handed is angry, but extreme violence cannot be explained by this alone.

It may have been a political compulsion for Congress to accept partition or the personal ambition of Jinnah and Nehru, yet why did they play into Mountbatten's hand?

All this will be answered in future and we can exonerate or examine Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi was and still is blamed for the partition. Any discussions with the youth and immediately fingers are pointed at him. A deeper query reveals misinformed or distorted historical facts. Such has been our tribute to him.

Gandhi was accused of consenting to partition, of not using his weapon of *fast unto death* to prevent it, of not persuading Mountbatten, of being blindly affectionate to Nehru and wanting him to be the leader of India and finally for forcing the Indian government to pay 55 crores to Pakistan. Whether he would have defended himself against the tirade is a moot question but important for our own clarity of mind and to forgive and forget.

Gandhi was the only leader opposing partition and he tried hard to persuade Jinnah, even offering him the Prime Minister's position to which Nehru and Patel objected. He even attempted to play on the emotions. He requested Mountbatten to leave India intact and postpone the partition following a mutual decision of the Congress and Muslim league. He knew that Jinnah would not be able to run a minority government and seeking Congress's support will not be far behind but his lieutenants were not so daring.

He hoped brothers when forced together, without any external force to disrupt, may stay united. He was mistaken. The ambition

and helplessness was deeper and events moved fast enough to blur the distinction between right and wrong.

Once the partition was decided he moved on to the next job at hand. Sad at heart but faithful and optimistic, Gandhi plunged to reestablish communal harmony.

He went to Noakhali and Bihar and wherever he could, urging, fasting often in penance, to establish peace, even suffering injuries on the broken glass spread out to welcome him. This continued after independence as well, till his death. We ought to respect him for his honesty and not assume that while on one hand he suffered, on the other he instigated communal hatred. His was the only voice that could silence the murderers. His was the only shelter which could save the minority and he even forgave instigators like Shaheed Suhrawardy.

He was aware that hatred was being fuelled by some to gain power by beguiling Muslims into some illusory land of respect. He resisted partition tooth and nail and while he was in the interior villages of Bengal pacifying people, partition was accepted by Nehru, Patel and Jinnah. The will of few to separate prevailed over most.

As mentioned by Ram Manohar Lohia, Gandhi was very agitated at not being informed and suggested that the process be left to them rather than the British.

He answered to few communist visitors who blamed him for not doing enough against partition. Gandhi explained that his earlier fasts had been successful because people supported him but in a suspicious atmosphere, he was rendered redundant and what had been promised and signed could not be reverted by him. So, he focused his energy in saving people, the same people who betrayed his Ahimsa. Publicly harassed and questioned he always shared his trauma and ensured safety for Muslims and Hindus alike. Even at refugee camps people knew in their hearts that he was right but often provoked him. His desperate utterances, when provoked, were quoted out of context. Gandhi would say that if there were no other solutions 'go back and kill' or 'have a war with Pakistan'.

He offered and planned to visit Pakistan but what made his opponents angry was his decision to force the Indian Government to pay the promised 55 crores to the newly-created Pakistan.

It was Gandhi who always kept his promises, and the promise to pay was not his; it was a vow made by the parties involved in the partition. Gandhi stayed committed to the truth all his life. As a child for the sake of truth, he had risked his stature in the eyes of his father and this time he would risk HIS LIFE.



## SWARAJ-MAHATMA'S OR POLITICIAN'S

“What is your idea about western civilization?” asked a reporter.  
“It’s a good idea” retorted Gandhi.

Gandhi’s political core is palpable in this answer.

The immediacy of his response illuminates the undercurrent of thought. Even by Freudian explanation, humor has a hidden logic.

He was not only struggling for freedom but also attempting revival of what was Indian. In almost a critique of civilizations, he pitted the Western against the Indian. Trained in the West, he returned to India in that phase of life when most look to the West for material success. Gandhi was an amalgamation of the West and East—a Western renunciate and an Indian ascetic. He did not bring a new idea in politics but a new tool of nonviolent agitation. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the fierce nationalist and the brilliant Karmayogi had already burned the fire of mass agitation and it set Indians thinking, but it never reached a crescendo. As Gandhi was trying to feel the pulse of India after spending 20 years in South Africa, both Gokhale, his political guru and Tilak who spearheaded Indian resistance, passed away.

The right wing was in its infancy and largely within Congress. Muslim League and reactionary Hindu parties were still not well formed ideologically and the Left was more socialist than communist. The Congress itself was swinging between the moderates and the extremists. The world war had created an economic crisis and the country was dejected.

Gandhi, the astute politician, was guided by his intuitive strength of immediate truth that never failed him. He could sail an ocean without a compass. His *here and now* was destabilizing to a few

initially, but they could reorient once *the Gandhian idea* cast a spell upon them.

Why did Gandhi succeed where others failed?

Mass movements were new to Indian leaders and 'mass' for them meant urban educated people. Gandhi had experienced the fallacy in SA and he was successful in making the cause universal (Traders and indentured labourers, miners and professionals all became Indians in SA when asking for their rights). Mahatma Gandhi mingled without discriminating between the utmost poor and the rich capitalists, the Brahmins and the Untouchables, the agitated and the calm. He did so by appealing to the good within all and exposed them to the idea of an alternative non-exploitative life of dignity. The Mahatma was guiding the politician. This was the tradition of the country. Ascetics were advisors to emperors and connected to masses at the same time. Gandhi was adept in bridging the gap. He practiced what he preached.

An honest leader, he appealed to the youth of all classes and they saw a spiritual revolutionary in their midst.

Even educated people with a socialist bent of mind were drawn to him. Jawaharlal Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan and many others rallied behind him as did Vinoba and JB Kripalani.

Some stuck to him always, some left him only to return back later, some even - after his death.

The Left leaders of those days were critical of Gandhi but deep down they shared a bond. With the passage of time, some realized, much after his death, that Gandhi's brand of socialism was more effective than theirs. They had an intellectualized theory but were unable to convince the masses to revolt against the British empire. Their influence extended only to the industrial sphere but lack of a spiritual element blunted the movement. Only Gandhi received unparalleled support from the citizens.

India with its states and factions was never one, barring the period during which Akbar and Ashoka reigned, but this was a resurgence of the Self, the spirit of Ahimsa and love.

Gandhi's skill on capitalizing issues to buttress his principles was most evident in his choice of his support. He chose the Khilafat over the Muslim League as he knew that any disruption in communal

harmony would weaken the struggle. He may have failed and mistook people's intentions but he harbored a deep insecurity when Hindu-Muslim issues surfaced. The prospect of violence became a reality towards his end.

Like a poet said

'Majhab nahin sikhata aapas mein bair rakhna'  
and the counter point...

Majhab hi sikhata hai aapas mein bair rakhna  
(religion does not teach animosity

vs

it is religion which teaches animosity)

Gandhi observed that though the first was ideal theoretically, it was the latter which was the harsh reality.

The experimenter and man of action in him realized this in no time and all his life he tried to bring the ideal into practice even if the price was high - his own life!

Gandhi had to face defeats during his political struggles mainly on ideological issues within the Congress and his mode of resistance against the British. The most highlighted of these were his differences with Subhash Chandra Bose. Bose was made to resign as President of the Congress after he defeated Pattabhi who was Gandhi's candidate. It was a political alienation rather than personal as is projected. Gandhi had faced both Nehru and Subhash on the issue of Poorna Swaraj few years earlier. Both had the same aggression and impatience to bring down the Raj.

Bose was more in favor of direct action and Nehru was moderate and camouflaged; Bose was the alienated son and Nehru remained in the family. Not that Nehru followed Gandhi blindly - he was fiercely critical of Mahatma, but stood by him till after Independence. Even later, Gandhi's influence was reflected in his decisions.

Bose was courageous to follow his heart and he chose a violent war against the British. His spirit and army was brave, committed and even in their defeat they ignited India to oppose the Raj. Gandhi was criticized for not being supportive of Bose which was justified from a political standpoint but ideologically it was inevitable. One would be naïve to believe that Bose had chosen the way of war overnight and also that Gandhi would have approved it. However

deep his affection for Bose had been, Mahatma Gandhi could not endorse it. He was already struggling to prevent Nehru from drifting to the Left.

Gandhi was intuitively correct in recognizing that any extreme in this vast diverse country would never hold it together and the result would be violent chaos.

63 years after freedom, India does not have any other word to describe it.

A revisit to HIND SWARAJ is worth the time. Inspired by Ruskin's *Into the Last*, in a prophetic outburst of writing while on his voyage from England to SA in 1909, Gandhi delineated India, its problems and future.

The basic issues still haunt us.

Did the answer lie in following Gandhi's vision for a decade or two? It is a foregone idea but can we still address our lives with his ideas about economics and polity?

Peaceful existence and providing opportunity to all will require Mahatma Gandhi, not the man, but Gandhi the thought.

Gandhi's impact, his ways, responses and counter reactions have often been studied in a linear political analysis.

What was he doing and why?

Some clues to Gandhi the enigma can be found in HIND SWARAJ.

Gandhi was just following his 'truth', a worldview which he had expressed 6 years before entering Indian politics. The British banned it due to fear of sedition and were not wrong.

The gist of Hind Swaraj has been often summed up as a tirade against—

Colonialism

Capitalism

Materialism

The British read 'agitation' in it.

Gandhi wrote in the opening remark that his ideas took shape by the impression several books had on him. He humbly acknowledged Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau but indeed the ideas of this book are sharp, aggressive and betray a certain agitation. Gandhi nowhere sounds like a placid saint but rather a revolutionary reformer

with Ahimsa and Truth as his weapons. The apparent paradox hits a keen mind.

Politics in Hind Swaraj was a tool to transform and revive a 'civilization' against what he called 'modern civilization' where Western was implicit.

His tone remained the same 12 years later in a *Word of Explanation* written in 1921 where he laments 'the only part of the program being used is Non-violence' and 'that too is not being carried out in the spirit of the book.'

Clearly his BOOK was—HIND SWARAJ.

The backdrop to Hind Swaraj was his visit to England where he met 'every known Indian anarchist in London in 1908'. On his return to South Africa, he attempted an answer to the Indian school of Violence.

Ahimsak Gandhi was out to defend his beliefs but it was not only the opposing Indians who provoked the rebel.

(Savarkar had locked destiny with Gandhi in England on the issue of violence during the freedom struggle!). The comments of Western thinkers including Tolstoy must have hurt his awakened self-respect.

India was largely perceived through its students and English speaking leaders. Their obsession with the Western lifestyle and thought irked the liberal supporters. Wanting to be British but without the British in their country was incomprehensible - wanting to adopt western philosophy and civilization without the West.

The Indian leaders almost fulfilled the prophecy when Britain was debating whether to share power with Indians. It was suggested that Indians were not civilized enough. Macaulay brought in the system to educate the uncivilized Indian and create babus. The Congress had leaders with conflicting civilizations existing within them, of which only a few had channelized the conflict to reforms.

Gandhi, though educated in Britain, had no baggage, was fiercely independent and was an 'outsider'. He had the chance to objectively assess the Indian mind and form an opinion about them. His ocean of ideas was being tested in SA at that time and Satyagraha as a tool of protest was being experimented with. It undoubtedly brought

about positive changes with the resurgence of dignity and respect amongst the South African Indians.

Gandhi had judged in no time the existing inferiority in the Indian psyche induced by 200 years of colonial rule. He had seen the attempts of Indians to be ‘the oppressor’ to retain some semblance of dignity.

Hind Swaraj loses no words in pointing the fallacies of the Western system.

He used strong words to mention parliamentary instability in British democracy - the oscillatory behaviour and ‘all talk, no show’, the behaviour of parliamentarians and the ‘babu’ status, not leaving the honesty unquestioned (all this was written in 1909 and still holds true several decades later).

Comparing the two civilizations, he used the words as Kingdom of Satan and God for modern and ancient respectively. He criticized the British for being money-minded traders and using force to gain power.

In almost the same tone, he is critical of the ‘dehumanizing’ power of machines and the secondary status of women in England of those days especially the suffragette.

His criticism of machines and the railways appeared retrogressive at that time but later he changed his views partially. The fear of marginalization of humans and the spread of evil were his two major concerns throughout. He warned Indians that the lust for power and money and haste to skip tradition would lead to the downfall and extinction of whatever is good. He blamed not only the British but the Indians too for their lack of self-respect and subjugation—“The English have not taken India, we have given it to them.”

The factionalism, the greed for material comforts, the Hindu-Muslim differences - all gave the trader Englishmen a chance to spread their roots and wings in India. And in face of power, India succumbed due to lack of will and moral strength.

He stressed that by will or power, if they stay, they have to stay like servants of India and give equal rights.

Even while he was blasting away the West, he said that freedom was the only thing that India required.

His Swaraj may have been interpreted to be home rule but it was not restricted. Much before Swaraj or home-rule, it was self-rule...not the self-rule of Indians over the country but the self-rule of an individual over himself - the rule against corruption, against immorality, against exploitation and for discipline and duty before rights.

Once this Swaraj comes, the rest will 'fall from heaven'.

Mahatma Gandhi is still waiting for this Swaraj in India.

Add to it women's rights, communal harmony, the fight against untouchability and constructive program, Gandhi never derailed from his political track. The book as it moves has the reader questioning his religious thoughts and whether they are detrimental to progress. Maybe he over-stressed but the finger was pointing to morality and tolerance and not the organized religion that he himself never practiced.

He emphasized on 'dignity of labor' and criticized education that made people literate but destroyed character, self and civilization.

Machine, railways and the professions of lawyers and doctors were the dangers against a healthy, spiritually humanistic society, not in their existence but in ways they operated.

He asserted that Ahimsa and non-violence had the power to counter brute force. Like a therapist for the soul, he pointed at gaps which generate violence.

The new order of the world may have to revise Hind Swaraj as all he said is unfolding.

In the name of globalization, economic imperialism, material rush, destruction of human values, blurring of need and greed and disrespect for human life as well as nature, in war or otherwise emerging religious standoff is the life facing a major part of the population. He still may have the answer for India at least.

We should listen to the basic address to save humans within a contemporary constructive program.

Decentralization, small autonomous self-reliant units and other reforms may have to be contemporized but foremost is the **DIGNITY OF LABOR**.

Give a graduate degree to a person but don't kill the artisan or his skill to earn respectfully.

Lack of dignity of labor is the nemesis of this country.

Trusteeship, guardianship of wealth is the only way to bridge the gap between rich and poor and not violence. Raising the standard of living has limited reach, instead distribution of resources from top-down may work better. Religious tolerance, women empowerment, mainstream the outcaste with honesty, love, Truth and Ahimsa.

It is only when we feel that we all are one and that is the only way to survive, these societal ills will diminish; else a BHARAT will keep struggling with India. Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. We devalued our past and the West teaches it to us now.

Let us not forget MOHANDAS GANDHI lest the West reintroduce us to him.



## DIALECTICS

Life poses questions which each generation answers to the best of its ability. These answers in themselves do not benefit all and often lead to further dilemmas. But no man is an island. Most people are confounded by the plurality of their universe and the simplest response is to drift with the stronger current. Translated into action they are stuck in the basics of life - food, shelter, money and some concern outside themselves extending to family and friends. The Maslowian actualization is a mirage for most. At any given point, societies seem to live in various mental worlds and time phases.

The deeper insecurity of extinction leads to a pseudo-secure zone of material possession and power which extends from personal to politics.

But providence has periodically intervened in human life by gifting illuminating examples of men.

From Buddha to Christ to Prophet Mohammed, each in their geo - political circle had to undergo a dual struggle - one within themselves to unite with the supreme, cosmos or GOD, and a simultaneous struggle outside in their historical context to better the lives of contemporary fellows.

They found their religion through a heroic struggle and at the cost of their lives. But none of them was a power-hungry politician. The sole purpose of their suffering was to bring in a just, non-exploitative, tolerant, loving society. They succeeded temporarily but humanity at large went back to its old pathetic state. The incarnations were always deified and human business continued as usual with its inherent anxiety and violence. Whether it was a linear

historical sense of West or the circular evolutionary idea of East, the immediate always exhibited disunity, intolerance and war, mostly directed outward. Passing through phases of imperialism, feudalism, capitalism, the world became less poor, the food supply increased as did material comforts but new ways of exploitation emerged and suspicion became the creed under the garb of nationalism.

Where Buddha escaped and took the tortured under his wings, Christ taught extreme tolerance, love and forgiveness. Prophet Mohammed not only tried to instill tolerance and humility in a warring Arab world but also love for GOD and a code of conduct for a true Musalman which in action gives respect to all members of society, to all religions and an equal chance to the unfortunate to survive. These were not merely founders of religions but landmarks in the evolution of the human mind and soul.

Not surprisingly all this was happening in Asia and the conflict of East and West took its roots over the last 1000 years and no wonder the next saviour of humanity again surfaced here.

Mohandas Gandhi may have been an ordinary man but by the time he quit he had become an idea - an idea which may take another 100 years to mature but will surely be the answer to our woes. This human experiment has sown the seeds for a just, peaceful world and we who are neither too far nor too close to him may probably know better than those who were close to him. The future will see him in a more mystified light so the process of this man needs to be looked into for an objective history. At least this prophet should not be kept in an ivory tower.

We can partially understand the circumstances and judgments faced by the previous redeemers of humanity by closely examining Gandhi. His followers worship him and fail to see his mind. His word was a dictum to be followed blindly and his detractors criticize him but are unable to pin down his qualities. The man becomes more important than his idea. Both face the same difficulty. Each one of us who thinks about him has to use both the faculties, the intellect and the emotion, and to even get nearer to how he thought requires a leap within, a bold step to break the rigid, fearful mindset which maintains the status quo. Even in his lifetime, Gandhi's lifestyle and responses were scary for many and unable to adjust

their mental homeostasis, they chose one of the two camps. We are fortunately saved from these extremes but the essentials to even get a grasp of his complex idea remain the same.

A cursory look at Gandhi's own writing reveals inconsistencies and he himself directed people in 1939 to believe his later statements on an issue. He did not leave an organized body of literature or academic treatise to be termed as 'Gandhian' philosophy. The analysis often separates Gandhi from the Gandhians and the vast millions followed and still look up to him rather than the Gandhians.

How then to go about knowing this man?

A deeper look at his life and acts immediately reflect a life in movement- an ever-evolving dynamic mind ready to experiment, moving on the tight rope of contradictions. The contradictions which move the human life in a spiral, now progressive, now retrogressive, were encompassed in the vast canvas of Gandhi. Perhaps at no time before, barring the mythical Krishna, such dialectics was visible. Individual struggle often ends in giving up in face of contradictions and dialectics suffers. For most, it never comes to the conscious surface but for a man like Mohandas Gandhi it was always in the orbit of awareness and as he grew it became a play for him, the great artistry of balance.

If we attempt to examine him by a dialectical process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, we may find ourselves closer to him.

The human mind, in its primal anxiety of separation from nature as a wave in an ocean moving towards dissolution, has evolved a survival strategy, that of division and categorization which pervades relationships, community, social and political spheres. Countries, caste, race - all are but a straw to latch on to. The existence in nature of duality in the form of day and night, dry and wet, mountain and sea has extended to labeling acts as good and bad, right and wrong, Devil and God. The perplexing awareness of such contrasts pushes people to choose one and remain in a pendulum-like state because not choosing leaves them isolated and alone which itself is anxiety-provoking, yet few attempt to rise above this to recognize the ONE behind it. By instinct or by reason, people like Gandhi worked towards developing an eye for seeing One in all and all in One, not by rejecting the contradictions but

by accepting the process and connection between them. When Gandhi points, we should look at the moon and not at the finger.

His own life was a living example of this dialectics...

There is no reason to believe that Gandhi was different from us and did not have the defeating impulses we all suffer from. He had a vast stream of lust and agitation, pride and fear, ambition and service, selfishness and denouncement, as his own description testifies.

But at some stage of life he decided to make the ascent and tame the passion of flesh and mind and make the soul and spirit the master. He found the right tension of the rope on which he had to balance without falling, an exercise we all are capable of, provided we find the key to eliminate what Gandhi removed from within - fear and insecurity.

Nothing to lose, he could live without a job, a source of income, a pension, a house and move in this ocean of life without a map. He had the balancing bamboo of the expert NAT (an Indian trapeze artist) with Ahimsa and Truth at each end.

And then the world saw the most amazing act unfold...that of a saint and a politician. He was not politicizing the saint but the saint was cleansing politics. The shrewd politician and the saint coexisted within, joined by the invisible thread of truth. Shock and awe was what pulled people to him irrespective of economic strata, caste, creed and religion. He was there all-encompassing, patient, warm, humane, never rejecting people, always attempting to make Gods out of clay, pointing to human goodness, reserving more love for enemies and critics.

The dialectics reflected in his politics but he never sacrificed people for principle. The truth could be manifold and adjusted, so could personal weaknesses. But for his NONVIOLENCE, all other opposition could be arbitrated and Gandhi had no hesitation in submitting as long as the outcome benefited all. He was out to convert the divided India to a whole and if possible a harmonized amalgamation of West and East.

Non-violence vs Violence, Lust vs Asceticism, Socialism vs Capitalism, Modern vs Archaic, Communal vs Secular, Autocratic vs Democratic, analysts have put many lenses to Gandhi's life and

politics but he has recoiled to answer from his own deeper self. For all said and done no one can blame Gandhi of being corrupt and dishonest. Possibly in his effort to appeal to the inner voice of opponents, he may have been momentarily biased but the ultimate focus was never betrayed of making the world a better place where the poor could coexist with the rich and love would prevail. Is it not what the GITA said, the Sermon on the Mount insisted upon and Quran repeatedly points out?

Gandhi sure needs a chance to prove that he was not only the epitome of self-actualization but the mirror to our hidden potential to navigate to the summit.

## CRITIQUE

Neither Gandhi claimed his own greatness nor did he relish being called Mahatma. He did not deny being a politician either but his detractors lost no opportunity to criticize him. He was blamed for his politics and sexuality.

We shall not attempt to examine his politics here but rather put it in the correct perspective. Though Gandhi himself would have liked the critical writing to fill the book and eliminate the praise, he received the terms 'not being naïve' to 'cunning' mostly in a process of posthumous intellectualization. Anarchist, inconsistent, western activist were slightly kinder ones.

He has been pitted against all leaders who did not follow his ways and the difference of opinion has been used as an evidence. Even if committed minds as Bhagat Singh and Subhash Bose are set apart, Gandhi was always accused of dictatorial attitude and intrigue especially as none of the others could reach any stature and their ineffectiveness was blamed on Gandhi as if he stifled their growth.

What is being ignored is that it was a political difference and if Gandhi had his tools to win and propagate his ideology, others were also free to use their own and they did. Gandhi was blamed for beguiling people and through his faulty politics delaying Independence and the problems that plagued the country post-1947.

No debate has been able to provide any description of an alternative society being discussed in Gandhi's time. The fight for freedom was the same, the routes varied and people chose their way. Gandhi expected no followers and he would have preferred to give

his life than condone violence. He was trying to build a nation and he could not have carried so many factions without being tolerant and clear. He had to depend on his mind and philosophy. If people had better options, the ground was clear for them. A country or a society created by violence often introverts it once the struggle is over, but keeps returning to it for the solution of a crisis.

Did anyone ever write or think that a freedom created by killing the British violently and the society thereafter would direct the same violence inwards. The multitude of India, fractionalized and factionalized, carries a huge potential of violence even today. The nations that leave the way of peace, burn.

His presence was not considered during partition but we have to realize that an event like partition happened with relatively lesser violence because of Mohandas Gandhi. His face and voice cooled many. His love served as an ointment to the masses. He could cry with them and they could fall at his feet without shame and guilt. No other leader had this charisma. Part of his politics may have gone wrong, but doubting his intentions is misconstrued. Gandhi, Nehru Patel and others could still save the huge population of Muslims who stayed back.

Even his most modern followers disagreed with his anti-technology and anti-industry view. It was not a retrogressive ideology but was discarded by Gandhi for its anti-human process.

He differed here from Marxists. He was as socialist as anyone but without material possessions. Marxist analysis in India will someday realize that his socialism was more apt for this country. His class struggle was non-violent and inclusive, it was class cooperation and not class conflict.

Trusteeship, sharing of wealth and capitalist as guardian were no easy ideals. His insistence on villages as autonomous communes, self-reliant units, was to enable the multitudes of this country to live respectfully and avoid exploitation. He stressed on manual labor as use of machines caused unemployment and subsequently disruption.

For Gandhi, anything that devalues and alienates the person was unacceptable.

He had felt the pulse of India and he knew correctly the self -

deprecating psyche haunting India. Lack of self-respect and unity (30 crores Indians could not revolt against the Raj together at any point before him...)

He toiled to raise their consciousness and self-respect; he used Khadi, Charkha, Swaraj as tools to make the common Indian live with dignity and to bridge the gap between the elite and masses.

He had seen the enormous lava of violence bubbling beneath the ideological, financial chasms in this vast land of diverse religious and cultural beliefs.

History is the best judge of political decisions and all right and wrong is retrospective. Ironically Gandhi himself was not much of a history reader.

He was the creator of history. For he told Acharya Kripalani once, "History has not written the final word yet."



## GANDHI - THE MAN

The shy, reticent yet rebellious boy Moniya from Porbandar had come a long way. He was a national leader, revered as Bapu or Mahatma, with India waiting to follow his command. He had the country and its people waiting for him to beckon. The factions that were opposed to him were smaller in stature.

A position which is the perfect ground for power, lust, tyranny and greed but Mohandas was an ascetic in action, an epitome of what India had stood for through the ages. India's sadhus and renunciates have been respected by the lesser mortals but often they lead parallel lives and are bothered about their own salvation in this world and the next. Following Kabir, a true sanyasi had appeared after many centuries and all this had not happened by some quirk of fate. All that was Gandhi (some may say Gandhian...) was a conscious endeavor with daily hard work, effort and the result of a life long battle within. The jewels were not only for his own salvation but if applied to life, would make everyone's life peaceful. Such was his faith and commitment which for a few decades seemed to be the creed of India. His life was an example that one cannot control life events but one can define his principles, and if it is done with honesty, external events change according to one's wish.

But all that he held dear was to be challenged in the final 15 years of his life. The 63-year old Mahatma had barely realized that the fiercest battles of his life lay ahead. He was pitched against ambitious, young men, the age of his sons.

But before we latch on to this aspect we should examine another. None of these changes happened in isolation and Gandhi

persevered like any ordinary human being. No ruckus, no noise, just the daily grind of life.

He succeeded because of a simple trick he knew - that our world is in our vicinity. One has to change himself and the bit around himself and the world will change. He was a pioneer who showed us - 'Think globally, act locally'.

Those who knew him were aware that he never ignored his immediate time and space, however mundane or trivial it appeared to be. Gandhi became a banyan tree; he rose high to touch the sky but his branches returned to mother earth never losing its grip on the core. The immediate always affected him even if the change was distant, but neither Gandhi nor the ones around him realized that the ruins of many a tradition was taking shape.

Putlibai, his mother would have never dreamt that her admonishments to wash after touching Uka or mlechha Muslims would trigger such questions in Mohandas's mind which he would answer by demolishing the walls.

Being a victim of child marriage himself, he remained a lifelong crusader against it and even tried to liberate Ba by tutoring her. He shared a special bond with Kasturba and his views on women in general were liberal-progressive.

Lot of people would have looked back as Gandhi marched forward - Mr. Lele who turned his back on Gandhi, refusing to give him a scholarship to England and the Magistrate, Charles Ollivant who rebuked him in Porbander, were ignorant that they were snubbing the man who would topple the British citadel.

The rebel in Gandhi remembered his emotional turmoil and never ignored his calling. A political crusader against untouchability and communal hatred he remained true to whatever appeared 'right' to him.

His obsessive cleanliness kept him busy and he spend a great deal of energy in motivating people to practice hygiene. Sanitation experiments in Sabarmati and Phoenix, his preference for a clean environment even if poor are a lesson in individual contribution to hygiene.

The poor, unhygienic living conditions and habits of contemporary India are a betrayal of Bapu. Cleanliness that should be natural is an effort.

The environment was his perpetual concern and his was not a gimmick even by today's environmental concerns.

It seemed strange and irritating to political leaders often visiting him in his Ashrams when amidst serious decision making and discussions he would run after a goat or start cleaning a toilet or sit in the front of the kitchen and keep watch to ensure no food was wasted. The sound of a Charkha was the background music to the Indian ear while its future was being decided on the floors of the ashram. But this was not a fad of an old man. Gandhi consciously chose these acts to demonstrate the need for practical action. The only way to improve the immediate environment and when personal coalesces to collective, the world improves. This process has been the most demonstrable experiment for change.

His political followers had shed their western attire but their minds still dwelled in an ivory tower. Physical labor which they considered mundane, grounded many.

Dignity of physical labor and respect was a basic rule he followed and many were transformed. He closed his mind to differences which are the source of all violence and exploitation and which separated humans from each other as if the world presented itself to him in a gestalt. All his life he tried to bridge these gaps between people as he realized the destructive power of violence arising from these differences.

A cursory glance at him may give a false idea that he was a dry, wry academic or a grim, serious Mahatma out to change the world. He had his share of mood swings, aggressive outbursts and irritability and even a low tolerance level where he found his principles compromised. Ba was often the brunt-bearer.

But Gandhi knew his follies and constantly worked towards transforming himself; his sense of humor never left him and the famous disarming smile was his quizzical weapon which would confuse, friends, followers and statesmen alike in the personal and public sphere.

Meticulous to the core, an untiring writer- by a rough estimate he must have written 500-700 words a day amidst all his travel, politics and personal struggles often ambidextrously as while penning down Hind Swaraj. One has to glance through his articles in The

Vegetarian around 1891 which provides a glimpse of the future lifestyle of Gandhi and also a detailed description of Indian life; he wrote as if he was organizing his own thoughts, a style which made him perhaps the best political draftsman. His talent to mobilize people was evident every now and then. Gandhi was also an excellent account keeper. He may have chosen poverty but he was a magnet when it came to collecting funds. A crore for Tilak fund was gathered in no time. Women surrendered their jewelry at his feet and others brought savings. Gandhi not only collected money but also accounted for every penny. He used various gimmicks like inviting Sardar Patel's good humored jokes about him being a tricky, greedy baniya. He also auctioned garlands that were put around him and was often found haggling over money in exchange for his autographs. He carried on him a small collection box almost always and once he even auctioned a goat! He did not bank on the rich alone but many ordinary folks contributed to become a part of the struggle for they recognized that he was the true uniting thread who turned the earth to, as Nehru said, *a temple and hallowed ground*.

When the going got tough his immense reserve of patience kept him calm and smiling. His inherent loving demeanor drew people to him and those who had to leave his company bore severe pangs of separation though they knew Mahatma was a man on the move.

His relationship with people who expressed a difference of opinion also remained affectionate. Such was his equation with Tagore. Though they held diametrically opposite worldviews, they respected one another and shared their views without malice. What pained Gandhi was his failure to convince and reassure his son Harilal of his unconditional love. Another person he could not convince was a fellow barrister from London, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. One was a part of his heart which drifted away, the other split his heart to a point of a death wish. Despite the odds, he had the perseverance and strength not to sway from his chosen path. His resolve originated from a mind that had assimilated contradictions within. The thesis and antithesis opposed each other but held him steadily, just as the arches meeting to hold a structure. He became vast enough to assimilate the opposites. He was faithful yet scientific,

an ascetic yet worldly, spiritual yet political; Mahatma was a father to the millions.

In the process of carrying everyone and caring for all, he attained the ultimate insight - the difference between people is all behavioral and deep down it is the ONE who prevails, call it nature or GOD. Any mind which realizes this undergoes an intense moment; the mind transgresses the limits of human life.

In the moment when Death is realized to be inimical to life, everything changes.

Life once free from the fear of death actualizes. Gandhi surely must have felt the epiphany.

Erik Erikson mentioned actuality and mutuality while psychoanalyzing Gandhi. He fulfilled both.

Even his prescriptions for Ahimsa, Truth and Satyagraha exuded fearlessness.

This is the exact premise on which people find Gandhi enigmatic and it is more an artifact of intellect rather than an emotion. For Gandhi 'religion and politics' were spiritual and spirituality was the way to ethical politics and transformation. Service, care, equality, justice are never issues of immediate concern to a politician. Above all, he insisted on Truth and Ahimsa. Not only ordinary political leadership but also intellectuals who were with Gandhi kept questioning themselves to rationalize their path. Probably they could not sustain the tension of spiritual politics, however right, and bounced back to self as soon as the goal was achieved.

What was his source of energy?

Had he learnt the message of Buddha,

The message of 'here and now'?

'ONE STEP IS ENOUGH FOR ME'

Mohandas Gandhi's life was not a dull and boring, colorless canvas. His journey from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1869, Porbandar to 30<sup>th</sup>

January, 1948, Delhi was an epic story of struggles. The biographers, historian or otherwise, still find it difficult to balance the person with the politician. His spiritual, religious self often overshadows his political economy and the reverse saps the *rasa* of the tale.

His inconsistencies have often been lamented upon as Gandhi

kept reminding people that he does not look very far into future nor does he dwell in the past. He could sail smoothly with his focus on the immediate but even his most ardent followers often groped in the dark eventually following his word. Some used it to blemish him. It is pertinent even at the cost of repetition to move beyond his declarative history and examine his thought process, which he always revealed aloud in speech and the written word.

Each life is an interaction of the historical context and individual template of temperament and will. Few achieve greatness by recognizing the need of the hour and work their will; few by imposing it as did Hitler; rarely by modulating the need itself by slowly unifying the personal transformation with the social. The latter are recognized by history as The Prophets and they grow in stature with time. Whether their acts prove beneficial or destructive is only in hindsight.

Since the inception of thought even the most unaware of human beings are directed by a philosophy. Marx looked at an individual as a product of his/her socio-economic situation but people like Gandhi influence these political conditions.

Although a strictly Marxist interpretation of Gandhi restricts the understanding of his full impact, yet a brief look at the historical conditions is important as they provided the milieu in which Gandhi could actualize.

Nehru put it aptly when he said that colonial rule had converted an open-minded, commercially successful Indian society to a famished, repressed mindset with its agrarian base eroded. Gandhi had felt the pinch, but his opposition to the discrimination waited till South Africa. Gandhi galvanized the humiliated Indian community in South Africa to a semi-revolt for a respectful living. He latched it to Indian nationalism and returned to an India which was simmering but the only resistance they showed against the British was through mild protests organized by the Congress. The masses were alienated and a divided India was no challenge. Mired in caste, religion and economic disparity, Indian society provided hope to the British for eternal rule.

During his attendance in Congress sessions on his visits to India, Gandhi was quick to grasp the malaise of Indians. The state

of affairs played on his mind such that he formulated a plan for India first reflected in Hind Swaraj. For the next 33 years, Gandhi and India remained interlaced.

His moral, economic and political philosophy emanated from his deep-rooted religiosity. His was a Hindu frame of mind but in no way orthodox.

Instead of cowing under the chains of ritual, he de-contextualized and revolutionized traditional understanding. His was a modern interpretation but not without the chiseled jewels. He trod on fearlessly to discard whatever was a burden in the scriptures. He rejected all that was against individual freedom - Sacrifice, dispossession, truth, nonviolence and all the precepts that indicated the path for individual salvation in the Hindu system were qualities fully cultivated by him, but the stroke of genius was the synthesis with the Christian influence of tolerance and service and an inner revolution reflective in Mohammed's life. The gradual individual revolution was turned to a social coup. He remained rooted and draped in tradition but stepped out of it to converse with liberal Western thought.

Gandhi's ideational response to his time was simple - humanism and individual liberty. Even when the connotations changed the fundamental remained unaltered, to appeal to the goodness of spirit, to create a just society based on charity and love. He went a step further not only exhorting the rich but stirring the poor to a life of self-respect.

Gandhi did not choose the ascetic in the jungle role to transform the society but chose politics to appeal to the inner self. Correctly recognizing the potential of the Indian mind to either subjugate slovenly or react violently, he created a third way. His insistence on Ahimsa was to ensure a slow conversion where all could survive. He never decried the rich nor blamed them for the poor's plight but kept hammering home that the poor should work hard and have dignity of labor whereas the rich should act as trustees of wealth. This was misconstrued as having a capitalist favor. He could compromise on his ideas to accrue benefits for all but never sacrifice the basic concern. Though labeled as an anarchist himself, he still approved of a state to control few key industries. Often blamed for

being against technology and industrialization, Gandhi evolved and changed his ideas about machines but never betrayed his basic reservation about the dehumanization aspect.

He led by example and no one could put a finger on his weaknesses.

His justification about the means deciding the end in its fullness, is the panacea for all social evils.

That his brand of socialism preceded the advent of socialism in India was a claim he made, as also, that he was a communist before has a ring of truth. His experiments in South Africa, in Phoenix and Tolstoy farms and later Sabarmati in India were an example of an equal community. Labor, abolition of untouchability, equality and participation in living were well proven before he insisted on them in public life. It is a well-etched truth that he was above corruption and never professed what he did not practice.

The shrewd politician in him knew the potential for factional struggle in India and the various ideologies floating around and their implication on the freedom struggle. As long as all did not unite, the British could neither be opposed nor pushed out. To beat the divide and rule policy of the Empire, he often accepted a rival thought process. He had to become the General of the War and allow the contradictory forces to work within his multitude even if it meant a relative truth. He condoned the acceptance of some violence by army or police theoretically but violence to arbitrate a bloody revolution was unacceptable. Those who blame him for being too soft forget that the larger populace of India can be violent in a reaction but a systematized violent war was not for them. India as a country had not fought for ages. Also, the society created by violence post-independence would breed more violence, as the energies would turn inwards. The proof around us is enough. The means are important.

That he was out to create a new form of society was amply clear though his lieutenants were happy to continue the old order with some modifications (as it eventually happened).

He was modern and Western in spirit but he pitched a battle of civilizations to start with. This was in no way only spiritual but a smart political move. The suppressed Indian psyche needed a



singular point of existence beyond economy and education, even as an urban leadership was becoming the 'Brown sahib', for the uneducated masses their way of existence, their civilization was the thread.

Gandhi criticized the western not in some academic debate but in the heat and dust of Indian villages, exalting the Eastern life at the same time.

Nothing could be a bigger ego-booster than knowing that their culture is better than the enemies and that to from a man who was a part of the West partially and had shed its symbols to join the poor masses.

Once he was heard across the country he undermined the social institutions which enslaved but never brazenly destroyed. The inner self of Indian masses was shaken as never before and they rallied behind him over a decade forcing the urban elite to join them. Gandhi's insistence on power to people had to be conceded by leaders. Out of the harmony, India emerged united long after Asoka and Akbar. But this was a people's unity. The princely rulers and the feudal lords who had supported the British to maintain their vain, hollow and exploitative lives either supported this superficially or joined the divisive, conceited, self-interest of leaders like Jinnah. The idea of Pakistan was itself was endangered by the awakening of the masses. Though the new evolving capitalist society of India was becoming powerful, they could not avoid the intrigue of royalty and stood behind Gandhi in spite of his anti-industrialization approach.

Gandhi was left alone once the freedom was ensured. A staunch believer in humanity and the goodness of man, he along with Nehru and Patel went on suturing the wounds and wiping the tears.

Prophets often face the antithesis to the meaning of their existence in or after their life. Their teachings are turned upside down and human greed and insecurity apparently win till the next one comes. Gandhi is no exception.

## THE TWO

*Purush and Prakriti*  
*Yin and yang*  
*Active and passive*  
*Dynamic and static*  
*The Push and the pull*

Nature is balanced between the opposites and the human mind as a reflection of nature is an apt example.

The masculine and the feminine exists in each one of us. Nurture determines the predominant expression. Gender bias and conditioning suppress the feminine qualities in a male and vice versa. Males are still taught to suppress emotions, not to be soft and not to shed tears 'like girls'. All that wells up leaves a huge potential for violence. Unable to contain the anxiety of conflict females were suppressed for they reminded males of their softer side. Females whenever they get a chance turn the male within outwards- in aggression.

They discover and complement each other only in the moment of sexuality, the dissolving of self in union. But a few defied...

Once they got in touch with the feminine they changed.

The immense strength, patience and ability to sustain pain made them gentler and full of love.

Ramakrishna Paramhans tried and it is said he had hormonal changes.

No critique of Gandhi and his sexuality, even his politics can ignore this abstract process and should keep this factor in mind.

He as a child had seen his devoutly religious mother fasting;

she was considered to be a woman with native wisdom, with a sense of justice and caring at the same time.

Fasting in a traditional Indian household is still a valid way for housewives, at times the frequency and variety is overwhelming, as if these females are out to contact 33 crore Gods yet they go around life happily.

Fasting is not only to raise one's spiritual and religious awareness but fasting is also a tool of protest used by women in a patriarchal society; what could not be voiced was expressed in a refusal to eat, akin to a death wish. In older times, people who willed death would stop eating.

Whether Gandhi had witnessed this is debatable but he used fast for both purposes.

He brought a personal tool of protest to the public sphere and made it a powerful instrument for Satyagraha.

He fasted and had his way; the intentions were never in doubt though. He had incorporated both the masculine and feminine in him. Like Ardhnarishwara, the Shiva, the union of masculine and feminine—Gandhi personified the symbol once he had a battle facing him.

Gandhi had the Ram Naam deep in his psyche. He talked of Gita and Krishna all his life and his life force remembered Ram in crisis and even in death.

Many a meditation fails, most transformations remain transitory because repression never finishes the urge; it just leads to perversion. Most Mahatmas and ascetics have a hidden devil which surfaces on first chance.

Gandhi was more Mahatma than most. He, not only channelized his huge sensuality and agitation to Ahimsa, Satya and generous love but also made the process so transparent, that any possibility of perversion was crushed. Mahatma struggled intensely within him. The energy of this inner resistance was the force behind his fire. Even as he grew he devised new ways to channelize his sexuality. Each failure within or outside, he crucified himself, blaming his impurity and lust for it and penalized himself with fasting or withdrawing from comforts. Almost like Christ, he carried the burden of others' sins. In an attempt to control his tongue and taste,

he experimented with food all his life. There was some truth in it. If one gives up the yearning for taste that is momentary and gives fleeting sensory pleasure, then other urges settle down.

His behavior can be explained if we accept his mental conditioning as an obsessive streak in his personality.

Cleanliness, food, guilt, sin - all this remained with him throughout. Any of these in a lesser-willed person can turn into a disorder warranting treatment. Herein lay his greatness. Where most people succumb to weaknesses, Gandhi turned them into his strengths. His loss was his opportunity.

Whether these were fads or fallacy, it cannot be judged by us but it gave him power to stand by his principles.

Whether we follow him or not is secondary, but whether we follow our own truth or not is of primary importance.

## *The Saint and the Sexual*

Life and its meaning has vexed HOMO SAPIENS since thought evolved. Points of view evolved and multiplied, the debates of theism and atheism, this world and that world continued, but the truth of birth and death remained unaltered.

The ultimate taboo is death; all human effort ends at the exit. This thought of mortality immediately brings in the futility of life and whether the whole effort to live and achieve is an illusion - Maya. To transcend this taboo and become immortal remains the strongest unconscious desire of the human mind. People want to leave their footprints in work and creativity in the hope of immortality. At another level the urge of life is to be born, separate, transcend and merge with the ONE.

Nature's energy in each individual, which can be called differently - libido, life force and many others in various cultures has evolved another mechanism - Procreation - the continuity of life through offspring.

'I will be alive in you' is the ultimate desire of each parent. But the process itself provides a moment of transcending, the moment of dissolving into ONE at the peak of sexual excitement, the thought of death while being alive.

The recreational aspect of sexuality is a prelude to achieving this peak...or what else is an orgasm.

But as possessiveness and material living engulfed human life, rigid societal rules emerged and sexuality carried guilt and sin along with it. Human race is still not rid of it (the contradiction of healthy blissful vs guilt ridden sexuality is evident in comparing ancient Indian, Greek texts with the Christian concept of sin, well spread by Colonial rule).

As the battle rages for the last 3000 years between the invincible libido and the wall of socio-religious protocol, a whole spectrum of human behavior has emerged. Repression and suppression of libido created perversion as Freud has elucidated. A few accepted it but largely humanity has been condemned to receive the punishment for eating the forbidden apple.

Do a bit, repress the rest and consciously fantasize or unconsciously dream and on the whole, be anxious about Death and Sexuality. But a few daring minds experimented and evolved another way to transcend. They meditated on the energy, channelized it, felt GOD or the Unity of the cosmos consciously. Most of these people receded from the humdrum of life and became ascetics. Few others remained in the world and directed their libido to channelize the energy through service.

Indian mythology is replete with sexual escapades of Rishis as is Christianity. Even today, holy men once in a while exhibit the perverted result of this conflict. Gandhi was a great step in this experiment of nature and that too an open one for us to study.

Gandhi's historians either did not mention his sexuality or those which did became excessively critical. Very few authors have been objective in analyzing him on this important process of his. His close associates wrote a bit, but for the rest it has been an account from a definite biography.

But even his worst critics will agree that the man who was 'a politician trying to be a saint' cannot be understood without an understanding of his sexuality.

Sexuality assumes a controversial flavor even otherwise but examining someone like Gandhi, the prerequisite required is objectivity.

Moral stances should be eliminated lest avoidance or criticism warps the truth. It may be prudent to apply this caution in Gandhi's case because he walked on a tightrope himself without ever trying to escape the heat of sexuality.

Psychodynamics can easily explain the unconscious defense mechanisms that convert sexual energy (libido) to higher goals or to neurotic seeds of violence.

Very few minds in human history have brought this process in the field of consciousness and modulated it in their awareness. Rest have been doomed to an almost unconscious involuntary channelization, at times to benefit but mostly to senseless violence and misery. So, for a while, we can resist the urge of idol worship or idol bashing and treat Mohandas Gandhi, not as a God but a Man who attempted to rise above what he thought was a weakness. We may agree or disagree with his views but he deserves our undivided attention to his experiments with truth.

Gandhi walked the razor edge of truth, balancing Ahimsa with sexuality - the rope connecting it was his lifelong obsession. Though he strove for his version of Brahmacharya (it was higher than just being celibate, it was unity in mind, body, soul and action...to be free of all lust) yet his world was inhabited by women. He was accused of being a pervert, a monstrous experimenter obsessed with women but a crucial fact is missed or ignored deliberately. None of Gandhi's acts were hidden or carried out in secrecy; his sexuality too unfolded in the open as his other dimensions. He was in a position to create a private world for himself that would have been discovered much later like many other eminent public figures, but that was not Gandhi. He would have betrayed the truth. He ended his biography and said that after 1920 his life was an open book. Whatever was not known before, he wrote it in the description of his life.

Let us try to redeem what others have labeled possibly due to fear of sexuality or the shock of truth!

Gandhi had deep-rooted ideas of truth and honesty wrapped in religious belief. He was a rebel anarchist at times but a creative one. He created new traditions without necessarily demolishing the old. Humanity has struggled with a biological, instinctual sexuality

since eons. The chemistry has always been judged on societal standards and as Christianity spread its influence, the concept of SIN clouded the bliss and Ananda of Indian thought.

As India reeled under the colonial rule and Victorian morality that had labeled the Indian liberal psyche as sinful, the religious minds coiled and became rigid to protect their identity.

Into such an era was born Mohandas to an upright Karamchand Gandhi and ritualistic, religious and pious Putlibai. His mother's sense of right and wrong never left him and his first assertion of his 'vegetarianism' was within her frame of ideas. The other pledge was keeping off women in England. Putlibai, his mother and Rambha his maid had already left a strong feminine influence on his mind, which was enhanced in the love of his childhood bride Kastur. Gandhi did rebel, albeit briefly, to experience the masculine symbols - smoking, meat eating, even visiting a prostitute and stealing.

The battle for domination ensued with a strong-willed, fearless Kastur who would follow but not give in without being convinced. He belonged to the era when to protect the chastity of girls, child marriage was the norm.

Though he tried to be a friend, Mehtab's influence, his hormonal surge and an adolescent myth of masculinity and possessiveness took control of him. His impulsive outbursts of rage and an attempt to control, set a pattern of responses from Kasturba. Unless persuaded, she would neither retaliate nor submit.

Gandhi was fond of her but lustful. He admitted that he could not teach Ba due to his lustful love as he was not faithful in teaching her but distracted by physical attraction.

Gandhi opposed child marriage and confronted society for violating the purity of a woman without her consent.

On one occasion, the lustful Gandhi visited a brothel but was overcome by anxiety. *His Ram* saved him from being unfaithful. His viewpoint on sexuality was to change forever the day his father died. He postponed serving his father while he lay on his death bed and instead chose to get physically intimate with Kasturba; as he was getting into the act he was informed that his father was no more.

The ensuing guilt did not leave him ever. He blamed the death of his first-born to his sacrilegious lust. He went on to have 4

children but remained uncomfortable with sexuality throughout his life. He criticized sexuality as a downfall and insisted on celibacy which he adopted as a way of life in 1906.

That he was not attracted to women was untrue. He always had a charming personality and almost fell in love in England but truthfully confessed that he was married.

It took him three decades to realize that a confrontation between the masculine and feminine only saps energy. His tyrannical attitude, verbal aggression towards Kastur continued till he reconciled to becoming a companion but only after he had addressed the feminine in himself and attempted to free his relationship of LUST...His struggle with Kasturba turned into real companionship after his vow.

Probably all these decades he could not resist the physical attraction for Ba and succumbing to it revived the guilt pangs. His own shame made him aggressive, strict and often demanding of her. Once he had decided to sever this connection with her, he became more respectful and accepting of her.

He must have tried to analyze this part of him but could not accept it consciously. It is possible that his sin theory and avoiding sex to be a true son of God was a fallacious belief, but then he was a man and people do a few acts for entirely personal reasons.

Probably he gave undue importance to it but whatever may be the reason, it had a lasting impact on his life and his death.

Even after returning to India, he had few close relationships with charming women, but devoid of physical contact. The separations were agitated enough to cause a furore but Gandhi never hid anything so could not be blamed of deceit. He reverted in time, to focus on the larger goal. In Sabarmati, Miraben and many others were devotees whose exact relationship and intensity were difficult to define.

Gandhi was celibate in marriage but psychologically he was more complex in his entanglements with women. He never shunned contact with women because he respected them as equals. Rejection was not his way.

Gandhi held liberal views about women and their empowerment was his prime concern. Education, dignity, financial liberation to the



extent of exhorting them not to follow their husbands blindly, Gandhi took sometime to give the same to his own wife. His viewpoint on women being a party in their own exploitation, as they cling to material possessions and remain a plaything for men, is still revolutionary and was much before feminism was born in the world.

This contradiction can be attributed to his struggle with his impulses in front of Ba. Gandhi kept most women in his life in a dynamic mode. He would consistently keep them engaged on a flexible leash but not enough to break away, allowed them proximity but never allowed them to dissolve in him blindly. Each one enhanced their potential with him. Few would be hurt but most stayed with him.

Gandhi has been blamed for his celibacy experiments in old age - of sleeping with his granddaughter and other women naked. But his detractors ignore or do not mention it deliberately - this was not happening in some enclosed luxurious bedroom but in a half open hut in a riot-ridden burning village in Noakhali where this 77-year old man was trying to prove to himself that his sinful fall into lust should not be the reason for his inability to control hatred in people.

He was also blamed for showing complete lack of concern for the young girl's feelings in the same way as he did not bother about Ba's when he turned celibate.

We denigrate both by asking this. Manu Gandhi wrote a book named *Gandhi, My Mother* and Ba which did not condemn him for his *experiments* with other women. We have to respect the individual intelligence and decision of the women who lived with him.

The right and wrong from a moral lens can be sacrificed for the intent.

This can only be understood if we allow a concession to Bapu; he had explored and allowed the feminine in him to express more than others.

He was closer to women because he knew them more from his own instincts or else Kasturba would not have told him to be a mother to Manu.

Gandhi was not only a brother and father but also a sister and mother to many.

No one knows it better than Indian politics. When his associates put their minds together looking for tools and weapons to fight the battle, he brought in the feminine tool into politics and its strength too—FASTING. The strong feminine side he had inherited from Putlibai and vicarious impact of Ba gave him immense power to sustain multiple fasts unto death without dying and also the strength to suffer even the Dandi march. He had in him the biblical convention of femininity, the power to pull, suffer and sustain, the active vs passive, the pleasure of pain. His maternal instinct drove him to express his concern for all. No one can deny the stronger female force of nature.

Gandhi probably could never differentiate between sexual love and sexual lust. Lust remained a foe for him throughout his life.

The source of this anxiety (some may say it was irrelevant and unimportant) lies in guilt ridden sexuality of his early years compounded by Christian layering. The concept of sin laced the Indian feel of 'paap', never to leave him. He oscillated between asceticism and eroticism which Nehru referred to as 'the mirror of Don Juan'.

The over emphasis on sin may be wrong and was criticized by his closest followers too but nothing changed his viewpoint.

He always kept women close to him, whether to go beyond or experiment or test his control is debatable. Clearly his humanism prevailed and he rejected the repressive inhuman Indian ascetic's mindset that a woman is the entry to hell. Gandhi respected women and men; his fight was with the assumed weakness of character that lust causes. He chose the way to evolve his mind to a point where the masculine and feminine in him could coexist. The pledges and the battles never freed him from the pull he always felt though he was almost tempted into an 'affair' in England till his inner voice saved him and he confessed to being married.

South Africa saw him in close association with Mrs. Polak and Sonja his secretary. He had to choose his rules especially when he had stringent rules for any natural attraction between young boys and girls in his ashram. He could not have carried on with the gap in action and teaching.

Various experiments with food started in SA to control taste

and passion for food. Food often replaces sexual hunger and other deprivations. Instinctually he may have been right. Start with controlling the tongue and the rest would follow. His commitment to remove the last rage in his mind was total whatever sacrifice it required.

The last time he got physically violent was when he beat his son at 25 yrs of age.

But these vows and simplifications did not preclude his pull towards women; they completed him; they comforted him. He was natural, at ease with them and women felt he was one of them. They could sleep in his presence, few with him and engage in all types of rituals-bathing or massaging. These relationships continued till the end of his life. Few started in Sabarmati, were later abandoned and picked up again in various phases of his life.

Gandhi was a compulsively tactile person and without touch he could not inspire. The ritual of walking with his hand on the shoulder of young people - mostly women, started in 1920 and continued till his death. A few of these were severely objected to by his other associates and even if he gave up he never gave up totally. The idea to stop this habit was to keep people together. Few of these were torrid contacts and he almost distracted himself in one of them in 1920s till he was woken up from the slumber.

Kasturba, till her death, remained a pillar of strength and a silent force but Gandhi oscillated between his female friend followers. He did not leave anyone and no one left him till much later. The world could not dissuade them from Gandhi even if his experiments were indicted to be morally wrong.

For them the only morality was Gandhi's. He impressed upon them to be free, independent and rebellious but never left them to break away.

These women often competed and jealousy may have existed for his proximity.

Gandhi may have been fighting sexuality but a reading of these years and his interaction with women definitely indicates that he was not a man devoid of libido. On the contrary he appears to be a man of immense sensuality and his struggle was to channelize it to love and Ahimsa.

As Ahimsa is not for cowards so fighting with sexuality is not for a man of poor sexual energy. He used food, friends and politics to spread one idea - *change the personal for the benefit of humanity*.

The huge resource of libido can consciously become a sea of universal love and peace. He tried it by systematically decimating lust and enhancing the feeling of one in his contacts with women or men. The masculine agitation became tolerant feminine and was ready to bear the pain and shame of all like Christ. The victories over lust gave him the power to bear his crucifixion. His eagerness to bear the sins of violence made him lonely in his last days and a death wish predominated his mind.

In the last two years of his life he strained physically and mentally, walked barefoot in Noakhali on glass and splinter, fasted multiple times, refused comfort and security of strangers and paid with his life. He was ready to do anything to bring peace and re-establish love.

The torture of partition had again resurfaced; Mohandas experienced guilt and a sense of failure and his mind retrogressed to blame himself for his failures and impurity of thought; he went back to test himself in the experiments of Brahmacharya which created a furor and Gandhi was cursed again. His friends left him in their perplexity, sons criticized him and polity understated his effort. Friends hushed while foes blared but Gandhi was on a solitary path with Manu Gandhi, his grandniece.

He had probably won his lust as he could sleep like a child in open huts with a female but the minds seeing him were closed and missed the moon for the finger.

His effort to bear the sin and lay his life even to the extent of proving his purity to himself was lost in critical blame. He had lost the battle both ways - when he did not want, people made a Mahatma out of him and when he followed his way, he was slandered and quickly forgotten.

The culmination was his assassination. Godse was respectful of his services and sacrifice yet Gandhi's death seemed to be the only way for him.

But was he alone in this?

Post script...

Few analysts have ruefully observed that Gandhi's experiments with Brahmacharya loaded the country's psyche with sin and guilt, harming in process the liberating influence of sexuality. It may be a conclusion in haste.

A deeper look reveals the hidden lesson in sexuality that he mastered.

Gandhi, prior to and after his arrival to India, carried a women's world in and around him. The comfort of innumerable women around him has been recorded and the reasons discussed. But apart from fighting lust and channelizing it to love and Ahimsa, he devised a way to fulfill sensuality. Whether consciously or unconsciously, only he could answer?

His libido was expressed differently with various women; some were daughters, some sisters and one was called 'his spiritual wife'.

These women may have nurtured varied feelings for him, but he had opened up his life to scrutiny, so the common way of expression of love - the physical consummation - was never visible. His verbal expressions - playfulness, tactility and occasional tantrums - were a world of non-physical sexuality.

Even without getting physical, mentally or bodily, the gratification of just being in the field is well known mind dynamics like an artistic expression. His was an art of the feminine.

This part of his psyche reflected in the deep male bonding he had with few. He could easily be more 'widowed' than the widow of Maganlal Gandhi and be in a perplexing 'upper house' to Kallenbach.

As he transgressed Death, he could stretch the limits of sexual taboo creating an alternative to physical expression. He did not break the jigsaw puzzle of life because of the last unfitting piece; instead he solved it by keeping the 'sexual' piece in the centre and weaved life around it.

## GANDHI'S LIFE AND DEATH

Against his feminine force rose another force in this country which wanted to prove its masculinity - people who in his last 15 years advocated a fanatic reactionary nation even at the cost of violence.

Unable to shake the nation from what Bapu had established as a secular, peaceful psyche, they decided to eliminate the very symbol. They misconstrued Ahimsa as weakness and Gandhi was accused of turning the nation to the likeness of a eunuch's non-masculinity. The Sanatani in his own words abhorred his non-violence. Ignoring Gandhi's refrain that Ahimsa was not an escape for cowards and that it was better to be violent in self-defense rather be a fearful Ahimsa follower and permit exploitation.

They got a man whose unconscious pressured him to prove his masculinity. Born a male, he was brought up in his early years as a girl and to ward off an evil eye, a nath (nose ring) was put on his nose. Hence Ramchandra became Nathuram, grew up to be a male with occult powers. He was initiated socially by following Gandhi. Soon he was in the right wing fanatic politics. He never married and was close to another male who was a womanizer.

Gandhi's old foe in thought, Savarkar, was their idol and Godse was influenced by Narayan Apte. They were growing courageous as Gandhi was getting more dejected and preferred to die by a bullet than through illness - his final experiment to prove that he was a son of God. He had escaped a previous assault on his life but refused security even after a bomb attack on 20<sup>th</sup> January at Birla House, as if he knew Godse was coming. Gandhi's feminine Ahimsa versus Godse's masculine brutality was heading for a final confrontation.

Godse recognized Gandhi's sacrifice but almost in a top-down rationalization, all of Gandhi's politics was misinterpreted to feed his hatred. Godse even rejected Savarkar in his admonishments.

Godse had been a Satyagrahi and an opponent of untouchability but his hatred for Muslims and the desire for a Hindu nation grew to a point where Gandhi stood as an antagonistic symbol of appeasement to maintain communal harmony.

It was not only Godse's thought process but events also unfolded in a manner to compound his belief. Congress and Jinnah's ambitions had already caused a bloody partition and the sequel of violence was hovering over Kashmir.

Gandhi may have been impartial in his views on Kashmir but his characteristic immediacy added fuel to the fire in a suspicious atmosphere where refugees and victims of partition were bleeding from the heart. All his life he stressed that Ahimsa was a brave man's possibility and he preferred violence over cowardice in self-protection; in an antithesis, his advice to people attacked by Pakistani infiltrators was that they should not take military help and face aggression non-violently even if it resulted in death. Gandhi added that he was just being true to his nonviolence, but the India of 1947 was far removed from his Dandi days. The stage was set and there were many who wanted their piece of revenge.

Others were angry too for the de-intellectualizing of Hinduism by him. Gandhi had taken control of religion from the self-proclaimed patrons to the masses. His style of connecting with God was within everyone's reach. He had almost decontextualized the Brahman. Ram was personal and no one's prerogative. The temple of life was within. Revival of *Nirgun* and the removal of untouchability almost made the priest irrelevant. God was in the next person.

He had a reason for it. He was rooted and draped in tradition but stretched the boundaries. His belief was that systems cannot be created till limits are broken. He conversed with Christian thought and undermined the organized religion without confronting it. The karma yogi experimented his deep humanism and delusion was threatened. Institutional religion was of no value to him and he openly preferred conscience and morality over scriptures, stating they were incomplete.

Those who lived by these scriptures were furious. Priests and all those who believed Brahmins to be superior, were raging. They blamed him for being a Muslim and Christian and the Muslims blamed him too. Both missed out that there is but one God and He was for all and Gandhi's Ram was no different from Kabir. But even those who were behind him apparently, did not understand him fully. He confounded both friends and foes.

The modern Western educated leader liked his views on women liberation and untouchability but was deeply suspicious of his anti-industrialization and moral stance in politics as were the women supporters who appreciated his progressive views on women without breaking tradition, but his experiments irked them.

Socialists criticized him for his bourgeoisie support and blamed him for being a capitalist but they missed out his secular power in this blindfolding. The entire dichotomy in the mind of India behind Gandhi's back led to a situation where eliminating him had become easy for those who hated him.

But the undercurrent was again feminine vs masculine.

Gandhi's forced conscious conversion to the feminine force and subsequent Ahimsa and attempts for communal harmony even to the extent of helping Pakistan was misconstrued by them as making the country weak and powerless in a female physical mode.

It is a conjecture whether they would have thought about the bloodshed he was trying to avoid and given him some compassion - the child Moniya who never stole or told a lie after promising to his father, even when he could...how could he allow Indian politicians not to keep their promise to nascent Pakistan, especially by the ones who were his own sons? It was a promise made by the leadership of Nehru and Patel. But hate had won temporarily<sup>1/4/4</sup><sup>1/4</sup>.

Godse paradoxically did what Gandhi desired. In his death he had again turned a defeat to a victory.

Those who killed him may have had some logic of a delusion but the ones who claimed to be his own have a lot to answer.

Whether Gandhi himself would have approved of capital punishment for Nathuram is a point to ponder. Only his son mentioned forgiveness.



## THE FATHER AND THE HEIR

Christ had to carry his cross and so did Gandhi. Failure as a father, bad guardian, tyrant husband – these were ascribed to him.

Gandhi has been judged not by his wife and sons but by those who put a filter of—isms.

But no one can blame Gandhi of corruption. From being in a position to demand power, money or benefits for his family, Gandhi did not earn a single material benefit. No scholarships for his sons, no luxury, no wealth.

In a country with a feudal mindset where nameplates and property fill the vain ego, Mahatma Gandhi did not own a single property in his or his family's name.

He may not have been the best father or husband but by law of averages and seeing his sons and grandsons, he was not bad either. He brought up his sons in the frame of his precepts but which father doesn't.

The times were patriarchal, sons were taught and kept in a principled environment and even the worst of human beings teach morality and honesty. No proof exists that Gandhi taught them otherwise.

If the achievements and thoughts of successive generations are any Parameters, the world knows Manilal, Ramdas, Devdas, Manu Gandhi, Kanu, Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Rajmohan Gandhi, Arun Gandhi and Tushar. No father could have a better lineage.

Most families have an alienated member who defies and flaunts his differences. Harilal was one such and we should not forget that he was the heir Satyagrahi in South Africa.

His anger at Bapu was for refusing a scholarship to him. He misdirected it to alcoholism and did whatever he could to hurt Bapu. As their conversation broke down, Bapu had a choice - his son or his principles.

We know multiple stories today in the modern world even in the least value-driven households.

Personality or illness, Harilals' tragedy is sad, but imagine Gandhi compromising his principle of truth, honesty and selflessness. His family was his ring of self; any breach would have been his end.

Had he done it, even then he would have been accused of self-interest.

We can lend an ear to Gandhi...

'You have failed to take even your son with you,' wrote a correspondent.

'May it not, therefore, be well for you to rest content with putting your own house in order.'

Gandhi said, "This may be taken to be a taunt, but I do not take it so. For the question had occurred to me, before it did to anyone else. I am a believer in births and rebirths. All our relationships are the result of the samskaras we carry from our previous births. God's laws are inscrutable and are the subject of endless search. No one will fathom them.

This is how I regard the case of my son. I regard the birth of a bad son to me as the result of my evil past, whether of this life or the previous. My first son was born when I was in a state of infatuation. Besides, he grew up whilst I was myself growing and whilst I knew myself very little. I do not claim to know myself fully even today, but I certainly know myself better than I did then. For years, he remained away from me and his upbringing was not entirely in my hands. That is why he has always been at loose ends. His grievance against me has always been that I sacrificed him and his brothers at the altar of what I wrongly believed to be for the public good. My other sons have laid more or less the same blame at my door, but with a good deal of hesitation, and they have generously forgiven me. My eldest son was the direct victim of my experiments - radical changes in my life - and so he cannot forget what he regards as my blunders. Under the circumstances, I believe

I am myself the cause of the loss of my son, and have therefore, learnt patiently to bear it. And yet, it is not quite correct to say that I have lost him. For it is my constant prayer that God may make him see the error of his ways and forgive me my shortcomings, if any, in serving him. It is my firm faith that man is by nature going higher, and so I have not at all lost hope.

It is true that the non-violence that we practiced was the non-violence of the weak, i.e. no non-violence at all. But I maintain that this was not what I presented to my countrymen.”

## *The Heir*

Mohandas Gandhi journeyed from being a barrister to a politician-saint but he never escaped from life's challenges to the shell of religion or empty spirituality. He trusted his intuition but continuous thinking and effort backed up his execution and reforms. He created such ripples in the vast ocean of the Indian heartland that spread horizontally as well as deep down and no one remained untouched. Gandhi had all sorts of personalities and 'cranks' (in his own words) in his repertory and like a clever mass manager, he had the knack of recognizing and recruiting the right talent. On one hand, he had committed spiritual people like Vinoba Bhave and a hoard of women from the West and India, whom Gandhi guided to spread constructive programs and social reforms and a lot of others who were his political comrades, even in disagreement.

He respected the individual and ultimately worked for human betterment so he had reserved the most emotional and affectionate expressions for opponents and critiques. He could love his enemies because of the reverence and hope of transformation. At the same time, he could adjust his ideology to accommodate people. The great arbiter that he was, he would push his idea but concede or moderate it later to contain people in the orbit if he could not convince them. He failed on few occasions and earned criticism but the complexity of the task is difficult to comprehend.

'Great men make great mistakes and generations suffer' is the most condescending remark about Mahatma Gandhi. The reference is usually to two historical events - partition of India and choosing

Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister. The first is an incorrect and inadequate reading of history and the second is a hypothetical debate whether Sardar Patel would have been a better premiere of Modern India; it often blames Nehru for the present woes of this country and Gandhi for preferring Nehru over Sardar. To avoid the pitfall of the blame game, the new generation should examine this affair as objectively as possible.

Before addressing the deeper dynamics of the triumvirate, the organizational reflection is foremost to be analyzed. The organization named Congress was created in 1885 with the help of the British as a buffer to contain discontentment in the Indian populace grew in two decades to be the spearhead of the freedom struggle. Till the second and third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the communal ideology created Muslim league and Hindu Mahasabha, all political leaders worked under this banner.

Gandhi came in contact with Congress during his visits from South Africa and it did not impress him. The disorganization and the apathy to cleanliness as also the great divide between English educated and rural masses was not to his taste. After his return in 1915, till 1947, the story of India was a dialectics between the Congress party and Mohandas Gandhi. Rest of the leaders moved in this maze of complex thread with the British entangled in between. Most leaders with the exception of Tilak and Gokhale, even socialists formulated their ideology in response to him.

Gandhi became the undisputed leader of the nation and even in disagreement Congress leaders experienced it soon that without Gandhi it could never become a force. He knew the language of the masses and his truthful concern for them endeared him to them. Many suppressed their self-interest in politics to follow Gandhi as that remained the only way to be in the game, rest paved communal or ideological paths but Gandhi was no tame follower of the diktat of a working committee. He not only slowly inspired the Congress with his humanistic philosophy and took them on the path of a nonviolent struggle but also was courageous enough to admit his blunders when the country burned. He left political activity post-Yervada imprisonment and then again after 1935. It left lot of politicians groping in the dark while Gandhi smoothly switched his

attention to constructive programmes. Gandhi returned with a new assault for freedom each time. Though he had left Congress, he remained a friend and guide to the country but the real confrontation with Congress came in during the Second World War, post-1942, when Gandhi exhorted Indians to 'do or die' and force the British to Quit India.

The same Gandhi who had recruited soldiers for the empire in World War 1 opposed any participation in WW2. True to his worldview of Ahimsa, he even wrote a letter to Hitler and India's enemy - the British were exempted initially from a general civil disobedience. He did not want any negotiation even for a benefit with the British. Congress dissented and wanted to support the British on the promise of Independence. Gandhi was ready to sacrifice his role but not Ahimsa.

Congress had to bite the dust and return to Gandhi's fold as the British riding the recent tide of success against Hitler rejected their offer. Ever forgiving, he continued leading but the impatient leadership was ready to grab whatever came their way. Gandhi by the time of Independence was already suggesting separating the leadership of the country from the party leadership to prevent autocracy. He had seen the need for establishing a true democracy even if it meant restructuring Congress to have internal criticism and allowing other parties to shape up.

During these decades, few people were closest to him in politics - Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad and C Rajagopalachari. Sardar Patel knew that Nehru was closest to Gandhi's heart, but Nehru was also the most radical and fierce opponent to Gandhi's ideas.

Twenty years younger to Gandhi, Jawaharlal was the son of the grand Motilal Nehru who was described as more English and Islamic than Hindu; he had been under the influence of the Fabians, Socialists, Marx, and all that was revolutionary. As he tried to absorb Indian culture and politics, he met Gandhi. Initially uninspiring, Gandhi grew on him till Nehru converted totally. He became as simple as he could in personal living. The prince was becoming an ascetic and the aristocratic father followed. Gandhi's biggest catch was the Nehru family.

Gandhi was about fifty, Motilal about sixty, and Nehru about thirty, when they emotionally came together. Gandhi and the Nehru family established not only political but also personal ties.

Nehru said later: "It was perhaps a triangle. Gandhi, my father and myself, each influencing the other to some extent. But principally, I should imagine, it was Gandhi's amazing capacity to tone down opposition by his friendly approach.

Secondly, our closer association...brought out that Gandhi was not only a very big man and a very fine man but also an effective man...Father was forced to think because of my own reaction. I was his only son; he was much interested in me."

Ideologically, Gandhi and Nehru came into conflict very early. Nehru rebelled when Gandhi called off the movement in 1921 after the Chauri Chaura incident. It was a conflict of ideas, not of will. They again had a confrontation in 1927 on the question of total independence -this time the left-leaning Nehru and Subhash Bose vs. Gandhi.

It was a question of tactics, a conflict of temperaments and age. A compromise, by which Britain was to be given a year of grace lead to the Lahore Congress where the Congress, under Nehru's Presidentship, took the Independence pledge.

Their differences persisted and Nehru often lost his temper, but their hearts were one. Nehru was often late to agree with him especially after Gandhi's magic had spread like he felt that Gandhi was distracting and weakening the freedom struggle by focusing on irrelevant issues like unsociability, marveling at the same time his capacity to pay attention to even the most mundane thing in his environment amidst the battle.

After Motilal Nehru's death, they grew nearer as Jawaharlal had a psychological need for a father figure. Nehru accepted Gandhi as a guide. But from the time of the Salt Satyagraha to the time he presided at Lucknow in 1936, then during the bitter crisis created over Subhash Bose's differences with his colleagues over the Tripuri Congress, Gandhi and Nehru had open differences.

Nehru was now a declared socialist round whom most socialists gathered. Gandhi's ideas of both Swaraj and socialism were his own though somewhat different.

Gandhi had great regard for Nehru as a brave soldier with a vision for the nation. Nehru had the greatest regard for Gandhi as the leader of the freedom struggle. He fretted and fumed; Gandhi's fads and experimentation irked him but they never drifted apart. Nehru never concealed his differences with Gandhi.

The war years made the differences more glaring. The two different outlooks had to be spelt out in the context of the international situation and the fast-developing events at home. Two crucial issues tormented them. How far was the Congress to non-co-operate or to co-operate with the government in the war effort?

Nehru and Rajagopalachari lead the dissent. The British Government saved the situation. As mentioned Gandhi spoke for everyone through his 'Quit India' campaign.

It was misunderstood and misinterpreted in various ways. Britain was victorious but the Indian National Army and mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy added to the impact of the "Quit India" movement in shaking the Empire. The British were ready with fresh proposals. Then the Cabinet Mission came.

From the time of the Cripps mission, all British proposals had carried with them implicitly a proposal for partition and Pakistan. Differences between Gandhi, on one side, and Nehru, Azad and Patel, on the other- Gandhi could not think of vivisection; the others too did not like it. But all of them ardently desired freedom and were for "Quit India" in spirit, and they saw in the major proposals of the Cabinet Mission the prospect of freedom. The Congress had during the war years accepted the principle of not forcing unwilling parts of the country to join the Indian Union; for a time, it meant a gesture to the Muslim League, or the bulk of Muslims who thought with it; step by step, it meant that if Jinnah and the Muslim League insisted on partition, it could not be avoided. It was the fulfillment of separate electorates; the presence of a third party ensured it.

But it could not be denied, unless freedom was to be postponed probably forever. Nobody liked it; nobody foresaw the bloody events which followed. Gandhi protested against partition; he was not party to it in any way, but he did not oppose it in the way he could have. Then there were days of agony, and as head of the

interim government, Nehru received constant sympathy and comfort from Gandhi. Events were beyond their control though they had made many events. In the Nehru-Patel differences too, Gandhi was to play a soothing role. Nehru's relations with Gandhi were sublimated by Gandhi's death. The early years were of father, son and Gandhi. Then there were the early differences on Gandhi's mysterious strategy and tactics of non-violence.

On the content of Swaraj, they differed often in spite of frequent communication; there were differences in outlook towards industrialization and the protest methods. Nehru's contradictions were being reduced with each controversy. He was discovering not only Gandhi but also India from time to time. In his autobiography, he is seen questioning but in the later 'Discovery of India', much acceptance appears. By 1942, there was an understanding, but differences of approach still persisted, but in 1948, with Gandhi's crucifixions it seems, Nehru had no doubts. Gandhi was the master. He had become a part of history and Nehru passed into history on his own, as free India's first prime minister for seventeen years with his share of effort, achievement and controversy.

Nehru's part in the fight for freedom, his evolution, even his assertiveness could be traced to Gandhi. Like Gandhi, Nehru was free from fear; both believed in right means and ends. The contributions of both together and separately to human values are great. After Gandhi's death, Nehru referred to Gandhi as his master, but Gandhi did not pretend to be the master and Nehru was not a "disciple". They were independent of each other, two in one, and one in two. They worked on the same moral plane and they both loved the people in different ways, but, while they agreed and disagreed and agreed, they knew each other as others did not know either of them. In his understanding of Gandhi and the expression he gave to it, Nehru was the greatest Gandhian. The way Nehru tried to extend the spirit of Gandhi into moral and other aspects of the structure of the state is a different subject. Like Gandhi, Nehru too never complained about his tools, though he had to work with clumsy tools. He applied Gandhi to the needs of a modern nation state. In that something of Gandhi was knocked out, everything could not be absorbed. But nobody absorbed so much



of Gandhi as Nehru did or incorporated so much of him in the inexorable working of statehood; how much of Gandhi Nehru knocked out consciously in shaping the development of the country is difficult to assess.

It is a controversial subject and belongs to Nehru's biography. Nehru said about Gandhi what could be said of himself:

“Gandhi was something much bigger than all one had imagined him to be. He had that remarkable quality of allowing and even encouraging those who were privileged to follow him to think out their problems for themselves with his guidance to them, of course, but to come to their own decisions and to act more according to their own light, even though that light may be dim. He did not want to impose himself on anyone. He certainly wanted to win the minds and hearts of people in his own way, which was not that of imposition. He did not want people to suppress and restrict themselves and blindly say or do what he said. That was not the kind of following he wanted. So, when problems come, it becomes our duty, I imagine, to come to our own decisions about them, keeping in view, what we have learnt from him and not take shelter in something that he might have said under different circumstances or on a different occasion.”

History will find it difficult to separate them. There was an interesting correspondence between Gandhi and Nehru on Nehru's future. How could Nehru carry on public work without depending on his father? Gandhi would not hesitate to ask friends to pay Nehru for his public services; they would consider it a privilege. Nehru could pay himself from public funds if his wants were not extraordinary owing to the situation in which he was. Gandhi was also convinced that Nehru should contribute to the common purse by doing some business or by letting personal friends find funds for retaining his services. There was no immediate hurry; Nehru could come to a final decision without fretting about it. He would not mind if he did some business, nor would Motilal Nehru. His peace of mind was what mattered. They may have had their intellectual differences, but their hearts were one. With all his youthful impetuositities, Nehru's sense of stern discipline and loyalty made him an inestimable comrade in whom one could have implicit faith.

Would not Nehru's name be a red rag to the English, asked others on Gandhi's support to Nehru's presidential post? 'A president of the Congress was not an autocrat, he worked within the limitations of a constitution. The Congress was an old organization with a status above its most distinguished presidents and the British had to deal with the Congress.'

Gandhi's advice, therefore, was that Nehru should be made the President with the fullest confidence and hope. Some hoped Gandhi would reconsider his decision.

No provincial committee recommended Nehru's name initially, few did later but Nehru was not to accept second lead. The events turned such that Sardar Patel withdrew his name after consulting Gandhi and thus the chance to be the first prime minister.

He wrote that though some saw in the transference of power from the old to the young the doom of the Congress, he did not. He had ascertained from Nehru whether he felt strong enough to bear the weight. Nehru had said, 'If it is thrown upon me, I hope I shall not wince.'

'In bravery, he is not to be surpassed. Who can excel him in the love of the country? He is rash and impetuous, say some. This quality is an additional qualification at the present moment. And if he has the dash and the rashness of a warrior, he has also the prudence of a statesman. A lover of discipline, he has shown himself to be capable of rigidly submitting to it even when it has seemed irksome. He is undoubtedly an extremist, thinking far ahead of his surrounding. But he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point. He is pure as the crystal, he is truthful beyond suspicion. He is a knight sans peur et sans reproche. The nation is safe in his hands.'

Nehru had declared himself a republican and a socialist.

Sardar Patel had said that his withdrawal should not be taken to mean that he endorsed all the views Nehru stood for. For instance, he did not believe that it was impossible to purge capitalism of its hideousness, the acceptance of office was not a live issue then, but he could visualize the occasion when the acceptance of office might be desirable to achieve the common purpose. There might be sharp differences with Nehru but they knew him to be loyal to the

Congress to disregard the decision of the majority. The President had no dictatorial powers, he was the chairman of their well-built organization. Nehru became President of the Congress session at Faizpur.

In a reference to the Bardoli resolution in 1941, Gandhi made his position clear in his speech. Nehru had drafted the resolution and a sub-committee had made changes in it.

Finally, Gandhi said the delegates should not go away with the idea that there was a rift in the Congress. The Working Committee had worked like members of a happy family. Some had suggested that he and Nehru were estranged. They had had differences from the moment they had become co-workers. Gandhi replied ‘...and yet I have said for some years and say now that not Rajaji but Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says that he does not understand my language and that he speaks a language foreign to me. This may or may not be true. But language is no bar to a union of hearts. And I know that when I am gone he will speak my language.’

Gandhi’s suspension of Satyagraha was a reaction to the existing conditions in the country but he wanted every single man to remain outside and do work\*. He would not let them lead an easy life. Nehru would ask for the diaries of one thousand men. He was not going to sleep.

There were many uncertainties and Gandhi was asked the question how he had declared Nehru as his legal heir as he was advocating guerilla warfare against the Japanese. What would happen to his Ahimsa when Nehru openly advocated violence? Gandhi replied that twenty-two years of preaching and practice of non-violence, however imperfect it had been, would not be suddenly wiped out by the mere wish of Nehru and Rajagopalachari, powerful though they were. In his speech, Gandhi said, “In Jawaharlal’s scheme of free India, no privilege or the privileged classes have a place Jawaharlal considers all property to be state-owned. He wants planned economy. He wants to reconstruct India according to plan. He likes to fly, I don’t.” Kripalani wanted to resign as President of the Congress because he had neither been consulted by the government nor had been taken into their full confidence; the government could not ignore the Congress party. He revealed Gandhi

felt that under the circumstances the resignation was justified. To Gandhi, Nehru and Patel were the heads of the government; their hold on the Congress machinery was unquestioned. They identified themselves with the party. Why then should they accept the Congress President's over-riding power? The question was to repeat itself in subsequent years.

But at that time, it seemed very simple especially to Gandhi.

He attended the Working Committee meeting and proposed

Acharya Narendra Deva's name as the new Congress President.

Nehru supported Narendra Deva's nomination but some were opposed to it. Subsequently, at the request of Nehru and Patel,

Rajendra Prasad agreed to become Congress President. He

asked Gandhi for advice. But Gandhi did not like Rajendra Prasad taking over as Congress President. Rajendra Prasad wanted to "withdraw but he subsequently changed his mind.

Early in 1948, Gandhi undertook his last fast. He had to answer many questions on its propriety and timing. Some people had said that Gandhi had undertaken the fast because he had sympathy for the Muslims. Gandhi said they were right; his sympathy had always been with the minorities. The fast was against the Muslims also to enable them to stand up to their Hindu and Sikh brethren. Muslims were in the habit of praising him and Nehru and blaming Patel. Some blamed Patel for his remark that it would be difficult for the Muslim Leaguers to become friends overnight. But most Hindus held this view.

Muslim League friends should live down Patel's remark and by their conduct, not only by their declarations, disprove it. Nehru had not the method nor manner of Patel but Patel was his valued colleague. If Patel was the enemy of the Muslims, Jawaharlal would ask him to retire. Patel sent word that he would do anything that Gandhi might wish. Gandhi suggested that the first priority should be given to the question of Pakistan's share of the cash assets withheld by the Union Government. The Union Cabinet met round Gandhi's bed to consider the question soon after he began his fast. Hindus and Sikhs were angrier with him than ever. Nehru addressed a large meeting at Delhi and said that the loss of Gandhi's life would mean the loss of India's soul. He appealed to the people to maintain communal harmony and

save his life. Besides other relief measures, the government would arrange accommodation for every refugee in Delhi within a week. In a dictated message, Gandhi insisted that critics were wrong in separating Patel from Nehru. Patel was not anti-Muslim.

It was some time later that Nehru told Gandhi that he had been fasting along with him from the day before. Gandhi was deeply moved. As soon as Nehru left, he wrote a note to him:

‘Now break your fast. May you live for many long years and continue to be the Jawahar of India. Bapu’s blessings.’ Gandhi repeatedly referred to the suffering of the refugees and said that Nehru was doing all that was possible. His heart bled for them. He had asked refugees to stand with him. All civilized people appreciated the value of such acts of leaders. Nehru had set an example before the whole country. More refugees were now attracted to Delhi. It proved the popularity of Nehru’s example.

On January 30, Gandhi was busy again with the problem of differences between Patel and Nehru - they worried him. He wanted them to hold together. At 4pm, Patel went to see him. Nehru and Azad were to see him after the evening prayer. At 5pm he took out his watch and told Patel that it was time for his prayer. As he was going to the prayer meeting, he was shot dead by Nathuram Godse. It was one of the major crucifixions in the history of man.

So much for the events...

Several factors may have propelled Gandhi to choose Nehru over Patel as the first leader of the country and one has to examine his relationship with Sardar Patel as also the personality differences which the master recruiter Gandhi could not have ignored.

Patel was like a younger brother to Gandhi. Though he was slow to warm up to him but his conversion unlike Nehru was total. He, with his frank, bold approach stood like a solid rock behind Gandhi. He had made supreme sacrifices and matched Gandhi in his ascetic lifestyle and simplicity. His ‘index mind’ was perfectly suitable for organization and his ruthless, cold approach effective in controlling emotions. Gandhi had tested him in Kheda and Bardoli and seen his efficacy as an administrator in the Ahmadabad Municipal Corporation and Gujarat Congress.

Nehru and Patel were the left and the right wing respectively,

in its more liberal sense within the Gandhi thought frame. For Gandhi, Nehru was the secular, liberal, international face of India and Patel the iron hand to unite the 550 states to one country. He preferred Nehru even accepting his socialist ideas and had asked Patel to side-step from Presidentship even when PCC had supported him probably to prevent Nehru drifting to the extreme left.

Gandhi knew that Nehru was vastly popular and his charismatic leadership bound him to liberals, socialists and youth whereas Patel was more traditionalist, capitalist-oriented and linked to the workers in the party. He had envisaged that both together could fulfill their duties much better than alone. He had seen their unity in the Bardoli resolution, partition and in controlling violence. Though Patel called 'Nehru the only nationalist Muslim in India', he, along with Gandhi and Nehru, was the one to control the madness around partition and secure Muslim life.

Nehru and Patel both drew their energy from Gandhi and he remained the ultimate judge between their conflicts. Both had worked together for 28 years and Gandhi's death reunited them again. No doubt they had differences and both were eager to resign to make each other's work easier but Gandhi stopped them. It was the last task he had planned on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1948.

The source of controversy and blame is the blind or selfish motives of followers who have exaggerated the differences even to the extent of causing reactionary denigration for both.

They had serious conflicts but they were both large hearted comrades capable of rising above it. And in their hearts, they were the same—Indian. Gandhi had seen that Nehru's public popularity, complemented by Patel's clear incisive capacities to control, kept them at the helm of the affairs over and above all others. All of them wanted to rebuild the nation and Nehru's age would have given him a longer innings as also his international exposure and contacts gave him an advantage in foreign policy. The 'Harrow boy' and the 'Cambridge graduate' could deal with the English mindset.

The fact they never disintegrated is the biggest proof against the accusations flung at Gandhi. Perhaps Nehru and Patel trusted each other's intentions and commitment and loved Gandhi more than petty analysis shows it to be.

## NOBEL TO GANDHI

*“Karmanye Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana,  
Ma Karma Phala Hetur Bhurmatey Sangostva Akarmani”*

(Performing the action is your only right, not the attachment to its results. Never perform the act for the result yet never be found inactive).

Gandhi knew only one YOGA, that of action - the karma and that too the way Krishna had taught in Bhagvad Gita. He strove to achieve the spirit of this shloka all his life and succeeded too, even if partially.

Post-colonial Indian minds covet the Western-conferred awards as the highest reward and these remain the highest proof of worth.

Nobel prize, literary awards, medals, scholarships and in the modern day Academy (Oscar) and Grammy. The next on the list are government sponsored National awards.

Most of us act for results and the process betrays the lust for popularity and illusory superiority. The end justifies the means.

Gandhi was not only different himself, the world too reacted differently to him.

Though Gandhi was nominated five times for the Nobel peace prize between 1937 and 1948, whatever politics kept the prize away from him, even posthumously, he himself would have liked the way it turned out.

Inadvertently the Nobel committee has honored him. The man himself never coveted any position or prize. He shines out of the list and reminds us of our fallacies.

It is a lesson in the worthlessness of material...

Though he never bothered, the country still broods over his exclusion from the elite list of winners. Nobel committees have been under constant criticism for this but Gandhi himself would have exonerated them.

While rest of the Nobel awards are decided by Swedish academies, the ‘nobelprisen’, the peace prize, is given by a committee constituted by Norwegian Storting (Parliament).

Whatever transpired in the closed room during the discussions on the five occasions when Gandhi was on the list flares up every time the peace award is given to an international figure.

To add to it was Dalai Lama’s award which was mentioned ‘as a tribute to Gandhi partially.’

And Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961 was awarded posthumously while 14 years prior in 1948 Gandhi was not. In fact, ‘no living person’ was found worthy of the Nobel peace prize in that year.

Great activists who modeled themselves around Gandhi like Martin Luther King and many others remind the world repeatedly about the chasm in world politics.

Politics for sure...anything arising out of any political body cannot be but political, so it is with the peace prize.

It is not just about the peaceful life or non-violence or religious tolerance. Peace for individual salvation would qualify many ascetics for the award, but the impact of one’s peace initiatives, the social activism, the effort to bridge the gap and prepare a ground for a humane life to flourish.

This is where the RASHOMON begins, distortions and politics intervene.

Cursorily no one else will fit the bill so aptly as Gandhi has in the last century. Immediate reaction would be a Eurocentric view or a flawed approach of the committee, but the cause was Gandhi himself.

Gandhi in his lifetime and afterlife has evoked severely contradictory ideas.

That the Nobel committee could not resolve them is evident.

He was nominated once by sympathizers from the West - those who were liberal but marginalized and opposed to colonialism.

Gandhi was rejected because of “sharp turns in his policies,



which can hardly be satisfactorily explained by his followers. (...) He is a freedom fighter and a dictator, an idealist and a nationalist. He is frequently a Christ, but then, suddenly, an ordinary politician.” This sums up the confusion.

Later he was nominated by Indians often by letters and telegraphic messages, even in his year of his death.

Whether he was seriously considered in later nominations is not known but probably by then politics had confounded even the clear mind. This is a case study highlighting the fallacy of analyzing from a cultural and philosophical context.

The western mind, given to linear reductionist thinking style, must have been puzzled by Gandhi and his actions, which had perplexed even Indian pundits.

Peace activists blamed him for ‘ignoring the black population’ in South Africa, being selfishly Indian and nationalist and not being universal in approach.

Later in India, the moderate protests against the British were almost infused with agitational spirit by 1920. In spite of being a nonviolent movement, incidents like Chauri Chaura kept recurring. Gandhi himself was severely critical. Not realizing that in all this he was the focused Satyagrahi with Ahimsa and truth, he was deprecated for inciting a movement without being able to control leading to violence.

Gandhi’s expression of frustration on violence often sounded as if he was about to leave the path of Ahimsa which he expressed in a speech on India-Pakistan relations post 1947.

He once even implored both the countries to go to war if they could not improve relations.

These statements were often taken on face value in the atmosphere of mistrust. Whether the Nobel committee did not want to irk the British, their European cousins, is debatable.

The Nobel committee cannot be blamed for ignoring Gandhi but surely must be charged for not awarding Ahimsa and Truth as tools for social change, for their concrete thinking and missing the confluence of east and west.

## AN INDIAN REMINISCES

“A little bit of me will remain in all of you”—MK Gandhi

A middle age man decides to give books to his young son on his birthday.

While buying, he decides to pass on a defective atthani (50 paisa) to the seller. While returning, guilt strikes and he thinks that ‘I tell my son to be like Gandhi but I have cheated.’ He goes back and confesses to the seller about his deliberate act. He was unable to eat for 2 days realizing the potential of wrongdoing and Gandhi’s inspiration.

Many years later he told his son about this. The young man passed his life as a doctor and is well past eighty...But his eyes travel far when asked about Babu...

The year was late 1948. Babu was gone. The light was out and the leaders including Pt Nehru had met in May to discuss how to run the country and wondered who will guide them. Babu who had convened a meeting in February 1948 to discuss the same was now only alive in the heart and minds of millions who were trying to follow him in their own ways.

This doctor had served Babu as a volunteer during his stay at Bhangi colony in his twenties.

He says, “That all his life he has not seen another man as good or gentle as him. Gandhi’s word was their command - no questions, no debate, no idol bashing. His smile was assurance itself. Gandhi was caring like a mother. He knew all the needs and troubles of people around him. Maulana Azad’s tea would be ordered before he arrived and Gandhi would enquire regularly about the health of the poor kid in the next hut.

He remembers that when some youngsters asked him about their rights he said, *no rights only duties* something which hadn't changed from SA. He was dejected in last days but never passed on his sadness.

He wanted people to forget the blemish of violence and stop the blame game, to move on to peace and love but his compassionate nurturing continued. Once a blind woman wanted to see him. Gandhi walked to her and held her hand; she cried and offered him few copper coins as donation. Gandhi said that all he collected was for the poor only but seeing the woman sad, he took the coins and gave ten rupees to a volunteer to arrange for her conveyance.

He retained his sense of humor and when few British journalists ridiculed a French journalist for taking off his shoes in front of Gandhi's room, he saved the him the embarrassment and lightheartedly interjected, *everyone is free to take off their shoes provided the socks are clean.*

People were and are unfair to him when they denigrate his love to physical lust. His love was far beyond the physical and almost cosmic.

Indians were his children and he never discriminated. Few blamed him of being sly and cunning but if he had not been sincere, he would not have been able to sustain and persist. In daily life, he was simple and had no pretense; it was only his concern for other human beings that kept him busy whether it was replying to all letters personally, serving the poor, attempting to bridge gaps or simply keeping the goodness alive.

Gandhi can never die and will remain relevant for all that is good but we should understand his compassion and not deify him lest he isolates himself.

...and as I left this old man with his memories of Bapu, he said "Bapu showed how one can evolve with effort and become GOOD from any moment."

(Thanks to Dr AC PRADHAN)

## THE CORE

The discourses and discovery of the myriad facets of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, if distilled, can be summarized in three words - cornerstones of his life and thought - GOD, TRUTH, AHIMSA.

Gandhi's God—

God may be an invention of an insecure Human mind or a reality manifest through all sentient living beings, depending on the position one takes. But undoubtedly the unique position which man enjoys in nature gives him a liberty to choose that.

A lump of grey cells united and controlled by electrical signals creates a cloud of all that is peculiar to us.

Religion, arts, science and the whole grey world of love, values, morality - all emanate from an abstraction called thought. As kids, it is all or none- love or no love. As thought grows decision-making gets murkier and confused. Each one of us still retains the choice, few are lucky to receive training in mind, fewer still are directed to train their inner instincts.

Gandhi as we know had an upbringing in a ritualistic orthodox Vaishnava tradition but at the same time liberal and tolerant influences touched him in abundance. He grew up amidst the winds of change brought about by revolutionary revivalists - Ram Krishna Paramhans (1836-86) Dayanand Saraswati (founder of Arya Samaj, 1824-83), but no proof exists that he was directly influenced by it. There were also the Christian and Islamic influences, the result of a missionary education system and contact with Muslim friends. The only direct effect which might have taken deep roots in his psyche was Jain thought (many of his vows later are mentioned in Jain canons).

Hinduism was being reconstructed after few centuries of reactionary orthodoxy and Gandhi did it in his own way. He almost revolted against the bigotry, idol worship and ritualistic behavior.

Almost enmeshed with his mother's pious self, he had the discrimination even in early years to question. The only alternative to traditional Hindu behavior was atheism. For few years, the teenage in him bordered at experimenting - meat eating, smoking, visiting a brothel – all had an undercurrent of being antireligious. While in England, he was saved by a surge of shame for not knowing the GITA and Sanskrit when a few British knew it by heart. Thus began a study, an exploration of religion, an eclectic process in Gandhi's mind of taking the best of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

He did not follow any blindly though his conversion was attempted many times as if he were a prize catch.

He rather invented his own GOD in the tradition of a true and original revolutionary.

Gandhi was six years younger to Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and both were rebels. Swami Vivekananda would never accept any thought unless he applied it to a razor's edge. He never delved in politics but he was no orthodox Hindu ascetic. His was a modern outlook that never rejected life and exhorted youth to plunge into life and be the masters over matter. Vivekananda roared and brought about a semi-revolution. His guru Ramakrishna knew his restlessness and tried to channelize it.

Gandhi had no guru, except Raichandbhai who was more a teacher quelling his thirst for religious knowledge. Gandhi tried meeting Swami Vivekananda in 1901 and went all the way to Belur Math and back to Calcutta when told that Swami was not well. He was refused audience by Vivekananda's disciples. This 'missed meeting' is an irony in history, one which could have brought a new humane religion to the forefront.

But Gandhi continued his quest all through his 46 years after Vivekananda.

His GOD could be called anything - Ram, Krishna, Allah, Jesus, but He was never locked in the shrine. He freed God from the clutches of those who stood between the masses and the Supreme. Often accused of bringing religion to politics, the critics fail to see

that his was an act to unite and not divide. The prayer meetings had prayers from all religions, he kept insisting on God being one only because he had rationalized and felt the unity. On one occasion amidst the tense days of partition, he cancelled a prayer meeting as few objected to recitations from Quran. Even when most agreed Gandhi did not budge. His argument was simple - till a single man is objecting to a prayer from a different religion the purpose is defeated.

Who was this God who was beyond religion for him?

He practiced the tenets of the Gita all his life, the yoga of non-attachment - anasakti, amidst the battles and strings of attachments in life, like Krishna did, but his ideal was the straight path of Rama - the balance of principles and morality.

Gandhi never sat in meditation in isolation and never visited temples or performed rituals, yet he was the most religious man. Probably for him GOD was man himself. Each one who lives is united by the same thread and is pervaded by the same truth (even when the action and manifest belief is different), such was Gandhi's belief. Else there is no other way to treat all with same love and dignity which he did all his life. His capacity to love often shamed much rhetoric. And to serve was his truth - the truth to annihilate ego.

## *Truth*

It was Truth that saved Gandhi during his rebel days from atheism. He could not tolerate speaking a lie for his gratification, but the truth was balanced enough not to break the heart of his Gods- his parents, hence the experiments with meat were hidden.

The absolute and relative truth existed for him even then. Those who knew Gandhi had realized that truth was his backbone and Ahimsa came second to it. 'God is truth' was transformed to 'Truth is God'.

The truth may have been absolute for himself but he accepted people with their relative truths. Was he talking about the temperament or the weakness or the self-centered ego.

Gandhi from his South Africa days went on sublimating his

self-centered, self-gratifying needs of ego to a diffused self, comfortable with all. His class both in spirit and mind was available to him all the time but he successfully turned it to love for humanity. Never did his elite mind come in between him and others. His insistence on unity and not differences helped him develop an insight where he could see the larger unity beyond the obvious fragmentation. We all get a glimpse of it in our moments of occasional detachment from the trivia of life.

Gandhi applied this epiphany to all his living moments.

A deeper look at his daily routine, his political decisions, a ruthless sacrifice and the tools that he used verify this. The thread out of the Charkha, the salt grains and the broom, all intended to crush the ego to the minimum because what worked for him will work for all. His constant exhortations to people, often out of place and context, were triggers he kept putting his fingers at. The gaps in an average mind that keep life disjointed could be bridged. This confounded friends and foes alike till few realized the intent. The opposites and the conflicts, the losses and the victories, me vs you, us vs they, seems a reality to most people. Gandhi spoke in this lingo for political purposes but it was never filled with the agitation of hatred and violence, which often is our fate.

He could extend unconditional love to the so-called enemy in the fervors of pitched battle, the British Empires' history can testify it. A seemingly impossible feat to achieve was possible for him because he merged his God with his truth of unity and surrendered the self and his utility in life to him. There is no reason to disbelieve him, because his life proved his belief.

His belief translated directly to 'serving the needy and poor', a revolution he brought into his pantheon of Hinduism from Christianity, Islam, the Quran, the sermon on the Mount and the Gita along with Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy.

But what he is known for the world over is AHIMSA.

## *Ahimsa*

He is the modern God of non-violence for motley groups claiming self rights and political dignity. Gandhi himself advocated Ahimsa

all his life but made concessions especially for self-defense. The prophet of Ahimsa served in a war with his ambulance corps, went on a mission to recruit soldiers for the British Empire and negotiated with Lord Irwin for allowing arms to Indians for self-protection. He went on to insist that it is better to die fighting physically than be non-violent and a coward. His praise for violent and non-violent acts differed at times and earned criticism from analysts. Violence is momentary and disruptive nonviolence is eternal and continuous.

For Gandhi, it was a creed but he was no religious romantic with Ahimsa as a fantasy. Gandhi during his early struggle in South Africa had realized the lack of self-respect amongst Indians, the capacity of violence by the State and the non-sustainability of a violent struggle with the government. Besides, he had a genuine belief in the goodness of men. He acted as an innovator and perfected the art of nonviolent resistance - the Satyagraha.

Back in India he saw a divided India, the factions prevailing in this vast land must have propelled him to choose Ahimsa as an apt weapon. The potential of reactionary violence, the class conflict, the oppressive empire presented a picture of a simmering volcano to him. Visionary reformer that he was, he set on a dual goal with Ahimsa as a process and tool.

Firstly, he realized that the poor masses will not be able to sustain violence for long, so in a fight for freedom if they were to be involved, nonviolence was the way as against the elite revolutionaries who never had a mass following.

Secondly, he addressed the fundamental questions in his desire to unite people, his ultimate reason of being. This was his mission - to transform India into a new modern country with her dignity and large heartedness restored, not by some archaic teaching but through an inner revolution.

AHIMSA was the only way. He honed Satyagraha, withdrew it many times till the country was ready for it. His innovation was in identifying fundamental issues, moral principles, human rights and justice where compromise was undignified. Often it appeared to sideline the issue of conflict. But the empowerment of oppressed people by applying Satyagraha or nonviolent struggle, to bring in change worked mostly for larger and sustained benefit.



His Satyagraha and Ahimsa still pose a difficult understanding because it is neither pacifism nor surrender. What did he mean?

Gandhi had experimented on his self to develop a fearless force within himself and was working to infuse it in the nation too.

He knew even a Satyagraha is a war...A few of his thoughts will make it clear Gandhi wrote in 1930

“The British people must realize that the Empire is to come to an end. This they will not realize unless we in India have generated power within to enforce our will.”

“The English Nation responds only to force...” Gandhi wrote at the beginning of the 1930-1931 civil disobedience campaign.

To Lord Irwin, he wrote:

“It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interest by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death.”

Gandhi knew the political powers too well and that it rested with people.

He wrote that “...No government—much less the Indian Government—can subsist if the people cease to serve it.”

“Even the most despotic government cannot stand but for the consent of the governed which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone.”

The science of conflict resolution still has few lessons to learn from him.

## DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW?

Prophets often are considered divine voices of GOD but in the world of humanity even they have to struggle to make themselves heard. Their battles are both internal and external.

The will of their times and their own inspiration often create a third vision. It is always expedient to study them as a part of humanity and not in their ivory towers. Once we treat them as one of us it provides a rare chance not only to get a glimpse of their divinity but also attempt to follow them.

Following Buddha, Mahavir, Jesus is difficult even though their lives are linear, but even attempting to follow the life of Prophet Mohammed brings in huge social complexities. Understanding philosophers and writers is easy, their lives can be separated from their utterings. Mystics cannot be dealt with in a similar vein; their being is their work. Gandhi poses special problems, the aspiring mystic kept returning to a lesser orbit of politics and confounding those who wanted to be like him.

Mohandas Gandhi remains a Prophet of the future. His impact is still to be fully realized but his life provides a unique opportunity to explore the dynamics.

The level of complexity is not singular but multidimensional. He sounds straight and simple but the process he uses is difficult even to comprehend. Gandhi had the habit of thinking aloud and expressing his thoughts through his writing.

His 100 volumes of writing and about 2500 books on him, not counting the innumerable articles, make it a herculean task to draw an image. He compounded it with his inconsistent statements though he always said that the later statement on any issue is to be believed

as he had learned and corrected his errors. Probably he was aware and he insisted his actions be studied more than his words. Also, leaving a systematic philosophy would have created a cult – one he could not escape.

Gandhians and Gandhism could have become another non-liberating ritualistic semi-religion had it not been for Gandhi's multitudinous aspects.

From his first biography by Rev JJ Doke in 1909 people from all walks of life have written about him in an attempt to discover themselves but Gandhi remains elusive. Each one helps the next and takes one step forward. Let us do our share.

The reality of being nothing in the vast scheme and the temporariness of life is all pervasive. It is the source of gloom and insecurity. The ego as the manager creates the myth of being somebody and creates the drama of life. It is two-pronged. On one hand the ambition to be different and secondly clinging to life and objects around. Both are like straws and illusory. But in the process false pride swells up and satisfies the need to be different.

The answer is simple-either follow this and be anxious and lonely all your life or accept and flow with life by taming the ego. Gandhi probably in the episodes of humiliation realized this - in the seething anger with the British agent at Rajkot, at Peter Maritzberg and on multiple occasions in South Africa. He turned it upside down and decided to dissolve himself in the truth that became a God for him.

The route he chose was service and he knew that it is a narrow lane so ego had to be tamed. The fuel of the ego had to be moderated. As the ego cannot be avoided, the sensation and need to cling to material objects had to be reigned. He snipped away the threads of attachment that bound him and were fleeting but addictive. Taste, sex, possessions were all sacrificed for a higher goal.

He sublimated his ego in service of others and later the circle widened to encompass the Nation and Humanity. The focus on here and now was a strategy to stay grounded. He struggled to check his ego in his interactions with near ones but after years of perseverance, he succeeded in conquering the ego. Gandhi came to realize that respect for the other flows from within if one sees the

nonexistent being within. Gandhi's personal and political life reflected his deeper struggle and convictions. Amidst all his experimentation and premise, his prime motive and concern was the *Individual*. He was first and foremost a rebel who was out to establish individual freedom and liberty. The dignity of human life was his obsession. He objected to dogmas and simultaneously expanded the discourse he attended to include the previously excluded.

Without uprooting tradition, he expounded modernity but never lost the awareness for individual responsibility.

He may have talked of Ram-Rajya and a utopian world, a harmonious world, full of love and respect but only after he had created a smaller community laid on the same foundation. He was ruthless with himself in harmonizing the various precepts. His inner voice guided him while he consciously strove to attain the Truth. If this sounds abstract let us look at the practical action of Gandhi and it will prove his artistry in dialectics.

He maintained his sense of humour amidst a storm and subjected even his inner voice to conditions like dignity of the other to be preserved, self-discipline, moral standards and a willingness to suffer.

He moved in the world full of faith without a map. He could come to India with his team and family without financial planning for daily bread and butter. The habit of packing up and risking it all must have shaken people around him but his faith never betrayed him.

His habit of shocking confessions revealed a fearless mind with nothing at stake.

At times, it was like a theatre where the shock and awe drove followers to him. He chose poverty to assimilate himself with the poorest and ejected himself from the so-called 1<sup>st</sup> class way of life even when he was in mind a superior class always.

Gandhi used what was apparently a very simple process but one that was complex to enact - impersonal yet involved, annihilation of the ego through service, his eleven vows and submission of pride within the human premise. Most people who try this become ascetics and withdraw from the world yet Gandhi persisted in protesting against wrong.

He could differentiate between what he had to fight against and

where he had to submit and yield but the tougher part was to train the mind to channelize ego, hurt, insult, anger and other negative emotions.

All his precepts and vows were directed to control passion, rage and annihilate the illusory self.

We in daily life do acts entirely the opposite performing acts which further inflate our egos. Even those who adapt to a spiritual way of life have a covert inflated self. Once Gandhi was able to detach himself and annihilate the ego, he extended it to public life.

His *I* submergered with the *We*.

Gandhi intuitively surrendered to God but in a superhuman effort to consciously surrender each moment and still function in the trivia of the world, he kept reminding himself and others.

Gandhi knew that he had to be more equal than others so he just focused on the job at hand. His concentration was on unity rather than fragmentation. He accepted conflict and focused on the neglected.

Gandhi could empathize with human weakness of limited tolerance for pain and fear.

He knew the complexity of human need and vulnerability, their resistance to complete honesty because they lacked courage. He never blamed or rejected the people. People who want to be honest should live in an environment conducive to nurturance of Truth. He was attempting a double conversion. His was an attempt to make people realize what they are and what they had the potential to become. His message to the people was as simple; his finger stood for: village/ women/ Hindu- Muslim unity/khaddar/abolish alcohol and his wrist was Ahimsa.

A few may think that all this is a creation of a shrewd political mind but to persist for four decades and stay open to scrutiny and make sacrifices calls for great courage. He saw beyond the external at that common thread that tied together all of creation. He called it Truth or God. His basic need was to unite all beings; everything else was next to this. All his life he tried to balance the contradictory within himself and outside. He was engaged in a duel throughout and never sacrificed people for principle which is why he never had to raise his voice and loved his enemies too.

An honest assessment of oneself in the socio-cultural matrix shows us our fights within. Struggle with anger, ambition, fear, lust, greed, truth and lies demoralize and pushes humans to compromise daily. Ordinary people drift through life when compared to the dialectics Gandhi faced. George Orwell rightfully said, “His character was an extraordinarily mixed one, but there was almost nothing in it that you can put your finger on and call bad and I believe that even Gandhi’s worst enemies would admit that he was an interesting and unusual man who enriched the world simply by being alive.”

As Doke said, ‘Many felt ashamed in his presence.’ Gandhi consciously applied himself to attain this status to balance between- The personal and the public, the hero and the ordinary, courage and fear, greed and asceticism, impersonal love and attachment, tradition and evolution, autonomy and dependence, fragmentation of consciousness and oneness...and many more in public life.

He was no saint born with a temperamental piety; he went through his share of sins and consciously chose to tread on the razor’s edge especially when he had a life open to scrutiny supplemented by frank admissions. Only a person who does not attach much importance to his skin can have such courage and fearlessness.

What Gandhi found difficult to balance was the politician in him which kept meddling in his spiritual journey but the saint kept trying to purify politics.

One needs to resolve and balance the conflicts within and search for the individual truth. Probably that is what he wanted.

## DOES POLITICS REQUIRE GANDHI ONCE MORE?

An individual may keep returning to him for the inward search but what about Gandhi, the politician? Do we need to review Gandhi for our policy and planning public behavior and posterity or is talking about him akin to living in the past?

Society and politics act on each other to determine the collective psyche. The direction of Indian polity and the outcome of democracy after six and a half decades was evident at the Ramlila grounds in New Delhi, in August 2011 where a semi 'Gandhian' led a group of civil society members (whatever it means!) followed by a huge number of youth, in an agitation to force the Government to adapt an anticorruption bill. Without questioning the process and validity, India supported him in person and through media and social networking sites. Was it frustration piled up in 65 years where the common man has had few chances to vent out his angst against the powerful?

The protest was against the parliamentarians but the frontal attack was on the Congress party in power.

Although this Congress is not even a shadow of the Nationalistic party which struggled for the Indian independence, the continuity cannot be denied.

The issues of corruption and communalism had already arisen before Gandhi's death. He was and still is accused of not doing enough to prevent the partition and for choosing Nehru as the leader of the country.

A few attribute the country's economic and political troubles

to Nehru and by default to Gandhi; some acquiesce that great people make great mistakes. To be fair, Gandhi had sensed the seeds of the rot. He had commented on the spreading corruption amongst congressmen, their lust for power and money and had demanded that those who are in power should not hold party positions. He hinted at dissolution of the Congress party and a reorganization in which different parties could emerge for a true democracy to begin. An equal chance in the constitution of the socialist sovereign republic became a reality several years later and those at the fringe of society could share political power but as Gandhi thought that the Congress had outlived, they made him redundant. His economic ideas were considered retrogressive and ethical-moral insistence utopian.

Congressmen wanted to reap the benefits of their sacrifice 'apparent' or 'real'. It suddenly seemed that Gandhi had no value except as a peace-keeper in communal riots; a front where he himself felt defeated. The partition and the violence had dejected him often to the point of a death wish.

He knew Nehru was of a socialist bend of mind and would ignore his policy of minimal interference of the State and would go for centralized control and industrialization.

Despite the financial corruption and red tape, India developed and the economy improved living conditions. Partly the attitude of Indians was due to a resource crunch, tight governmental control in initial decades and a temperament of the nation to find an easy way out. We were neither socialist nor capitalistic. Free enterprise remained cumbersome till 2 decades ago and the government machinery failed to extend benefits to the last man. Exploitation continued, direct and indirectly, leaving huge chasms between different sections of society. While nepotism, bribery, insecure hoarding and inhuman attitude to the needy marked the initial 45 years, the new wealth and the wave of liberalization - globalization and free entrepreneurship triggered by Dr. Manmohan Singh, brought a comfortable material life to India, but Dr. Singh miscalculated human nature. If initially it was, 'if you allow people to cheat, they will' it became, 'greed knows no end.'

As people grew richer over the last 2 decades, the gap between



the rich and poor widened and the gradient which maintained the continuity in the pre-capitalistic era ruptured. The scope of trade and industry changed the pace of richness and minds became lost in the cloud of material kicks. The rich middle class became self-centered as never before.

And herein steps Mahatma Gandhi. We cannot go back to a Marxian model of society because the new worker is the sales executive or a software engineer in a multinational. Wealth generation is a reality for any nation to avoid being usurped by Imperialism and maintain its identity. What remains is a midway between Gandhian socialism and blind Capitalism. Capitalists were never an anathema to Gandhi and neither were princes but he knew in order for them to survive, they must learn to share. The process of money generation should not be stopped but the alternative is not to snatch wealth in an enforced, violent, communist revolution but a voluntary, soulful sharing of wealth to improve the living standards and sustainable development of the poor.

No one should be poor is the new aim and class conflict is not the answer. Gandhi's life long idea of all beings as one and acceptance of all is the answer. Trusteeship may have been ahead of times and even though he could not convince anyone but 4 decades later India saw the emergence of Narayan Murthy and many others who share their wealth. His idea of autonomy to village units may be extended to rebuild the dying cottage industry at a different level to promote self industrious units as in the near future cities will not be unable to provide jobs to all.

The innovative Gandhi should be re-consulted for sustainable development but above all we as a country should have more pride in our own heritage and national character. We are at the crossroads in history where reinforcing our truth both in personal and public life can restore us to our deserved position.

## DO WE NEED TO REINVENT GANDHI?

No epilogue or postscript can be attached to Gandhi as Jawaharlal Nehru said ‘this hour will be remembered even ten thousand years later.’

Gandhi’s murder was akin to ‘crucifixion of Christ’ as the revolutionary poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz wrote on Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1948. Christ is resurrected, Gandhi is waiting his.

E Stanley Jones, a Christian missionary friend of Mahatma Gandhi reminisced that he discussed with Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan on the possibility of Pakistan existing as a federal state within the Union of India. Jinnah in a moment of generosity agreed but reverted back later and claimed misinterpretation. Liaqat Ali Khan said Pakistan was a child who has crossed ‘*dependence*’, but has to be ‘*independent*’ before becoming ‘*interdependent*’.

Gandhi not only awaits this but a lot more.

100 years back he had dreamt of a secular India with self respect, tolerance, modern yet traditional in its own civilization, with utmost value to every human being.

He had risen above the petty differences of the mind and had seen the unity of all, the *One in All*.

The India of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may surprise him. The gaps between India and Bharat was not his dream. The pseudo-confidence and the glitter which is blinded to the chasms and casts away the marginalized.

The delirious India no more talks of values and morality, unity and Ahimsa.

Only history will judge the route we have taken.

Renunciation is far removed; controlling gluttony remains the biggest challenge.

Sharing wealth, dignity of labor and women emancipation (with their own role in their freedom) are ideas which Gandhi had repeatedly talked about in 4 decades but as if India kept him and his teachings on a shelf. Only few are dusting the books now.

Gandhi surely would have traversed India - person to person, village to village, city to city and without taking any umbrage, reiterated the same old lessons of love and care, of truth and tolerance, of sacrifice and Ahimsa. He would have patiently drawn another constructive program.

Gandhi, like Buddha and Einstein, was like the juncture in human evolution from where the human spirit moves up a few notches. They act and live to show a better way and in their death, they persist like a thought, more valuable than ever.

Talking about Gandhi and the attempts to rediscover will just remain rhetoric if we are unable to reinvent the thought and more so if we fail to reapply.

This question keeps rebounding, 'Is Gandhi relevant today?'

It may appear as a fantasy today but if we want a better tomorrow, Gandhi holds the secrets. To coexist harmoniously, limit wants, share wealth and show concern for human life – these are the only alternatives.

Is there a practical Gandhi for us?

This page can be left blank and each one can fill it from his/her own thought and spirit. But it can create tremendous existential questions as historical Gandhi has not left a guideline and rulebook and moreover relegated to academics detached from reality.

In face of the lack of 'Gandhism' the thought is available for each individual who wishes to explore. 'Civilizational Gandhi' as Rajni Bakshi puts in her brilliant exposition of the idea in her book 'BapuKuti'

Two dimensions that are universal and linked are ? 'Transformative skills to alter within? Gandhi the social innovator

The latter is demonstrated by his highly creative yet simple techniques of environmental care. He always insisted on using both ends of a 'daatun' (twig used as a tooth brush). He advised people

to cut, dry and preserve the chewed part as fuel. He instructed Ashram mates to cut the wet, chewed part and use the other end of the twig rather than throwing it away. The chewed portions were collected, dried and used as fuel to cook food. People were reprimanded on plucking leaves or twigs unnecessarily to save trees, he insisted on reusing discarded envelopes and the empty white sheet of paper at the end of a calendar, to teach geometry or for writing short notes.

On one occasion Gandhi returned a copybook presented by a jailor to his granddaughter as he refused the money extracted from poor Indians.

He instead advised the sad child to get old calendars from behind the jail doctor's cupboard and convert them to a geometry copy.

While making sure that kids use their pencils to the last bit, he once took time to explain the whole process of making a pencil to make children aware of the hardships and pain endured by a worker toiling in some dingy mine in Africa.

The innovations Gandhi used for cleanliness and sanitation still are pragmatic by any standards.

Such was his concern for the excluded and ignored and his vision always focused on 'more' for 'everyone' and not for the 'most'.

Charkha, autonomous village industry and trusteeship were innovative ideas for sustainable 'economy of permanence' as Kumarappa defined.

Possibly all this appears archaic but when the world is hit by a resource crunch, we shall need him again because his message of sharing love and life and concern for all will remain the only answer.

Whatever our chosen field of action, we can always be creative and innovative in preserving the environment through minimal exploitation of man and nature. Bringing Gandhi to the present does not necessarily mean going back to villages; it is about including the man on the fringe, inclusion not exclusion, decentralization and participatory power.

The basic premise and tools originate from Mahatma Gandhi's being and beliefs that all are equal and Ahimsa is the way to feel

one with all because to feel separate is the root of all evil and violence.

As for the transformative skills, a simple personal experiment can glimpse the tight edge on which Gandhi walked. His way was of true empathy. He could accept and forgive even the strongest opponent.

Try accepting criticism, stop self explanation and counter attacks at detractors even when the worst accusations are flung at you and try to forgive the person even if he is totally wrong while simultaneously analyzing within for a possible fault. Make a conscious effort for few days and Gandhi and his God will appear.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The idea of Gandhi came very early in life listening to my maternal family's association with him from my mother. Thanks to her and my late father who allowed my mind to explore life in it's fullest. My large family of siblings and cousins have sure contributed in enhancing this experience.

Arun Bajpai, my cousin, remains the backbone of 'AN HOUR WITH THE MAHATMA'. Every school, every meeting he was beside me, relieving my mind free of logistical issues.

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But from word to pen was a long dream, had my best friend who happens to be my wife too, Anjali, and my God daughter Ishita not pressed me to write my experience of this programme. They happily bore my absence during this.

The list of young people who give me a chance to share whatever little I know is long, but Aayush, my God son, Achintya, Divyam, Meghna, Parth and Dev all poke me to think.

But at the end to Mahatma Gandhi himself who has taught me the greatest lessons about love and empathy and has exhorted me to experiment and apply them in my work as a Psychiatrist.

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