Quest for Gandhi
A Nonkilling Journey

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Center *for* Global **Nonkilling**

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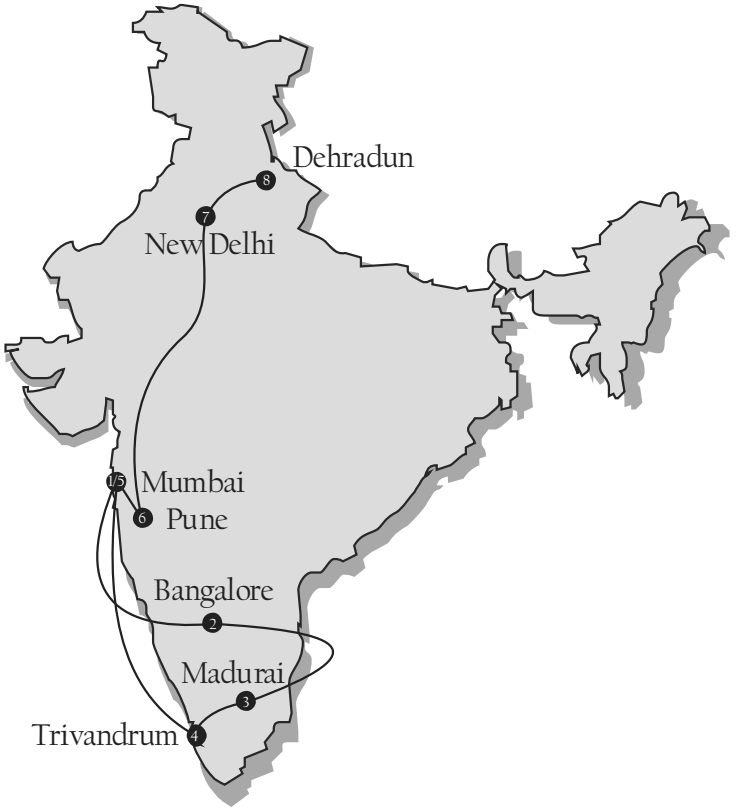
To Professor Glenn D. Paige,
A 21st Century Global Nonkilling Political Science pioneer.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Preface

At the southern tip of India, the small inlet of Kanyakumari brushes with the waters of Indian Ocean while Dehradun, capital of India's new state of Uttranchal in the North juts with the mountainous ranges of Himalayas. The book, a deep desire to understand the meaning and relevance of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's inclusive message of nonviolent political action in early 21st Century, is from my travel journal about meetings in the spring of 2006 with individuals, young and old, across India who in their unique ways have been impacted by Gandhi's life and have chosen to follow the nonviolent path for social justice and a nonkilling peace. While on the way to visit them, the journey also becomes a pilgrimage to some of the places, where Mahatma Gandhi stayed during the struggle for India's Independence from the British Rule.

Introduction

After all these years passing through Mumbai, once Bombay, it was only in February of 2006 I would discover Mani Bhavan, the place from where Mahatma Gandhi launched his *Satyagraha*. It is an elegant two-storied Portuguese style building near Chowpatty and Kemp's corner where Gandhi stayed between 1917 and 1934 whenever he was in Bombay. He planned from here his Civil Disobedience, *Swadeshi*, *Satyagraha*, and *Khilafat* movements to challenge the mighty British Empire.

There is a room on the second floor in this old building kept as it was during Gandhi's time, when he stayed here with his sparse belongings: a small wooden writing desk, a spinning wheel, and a thin mattress covered with a white cotton sheet. I try to imagine Gandhi sitting by the door in the afternoon working on his correspondence on the desk—mellow light of the evening sun drifting into the room, streaming over his bare back casting a long shadow on the desk and the spindly spinning wheel by his side.

Next to that room in Mani Bhavan, there is an exhibition showing vignettes from Gandhi's life through mini figures in a tableaux form. The walls in the room have a gallery of large black and white photographs that provide glimpses of important events depicting India's Independence struggle in which Mahatma Gandhi was involved and led. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869 at Porbandar, Gujarat in India. He studied law in England, then travelled to South Africa for long stays to practice there as a Barrister. His second stay in South Africa from 1902 to 1912 proved a fertile ground for preparing him to put into practice his nonviolent strategy of *Satyagraha*, passive resistance, which he would use later in his nonviolent opposition against the British, first in South Africa and then in

India. At the age of 45, Gandhi returned to India devoting his life to political struggle for India's Independence from British rule, in and out of prisons, using his unique civil disobedience movement of *Satyagraha* grounded in the principles of Truth and Nonviolence. Though India won its Independence on 15th August 1947, Gandhi was not happy at the partition of the subcontinent by the British. He is said to have spent the day fasting and in prayer as he could see the looming human tragedy the massive transfer of population would create from the division of the country into geographically divided Pakistan (East and West) and India. Once the division took place, he worked tirelessly seeking to end violence in order to bring inter-communal harmony in the two newly created nations.

During my childhood visits to Mumbai, I recall being taken for visits to the Raani Baag Zoo, the Prince of Wales Museum, and the distant Aarey Milk Colony; I wondered how the important Mani Bhavan landmark was missed. I had passed through this neighbourhood many times as a child, as a young man, as a married man and as a parent; however there was never a mention of any Gandhi Memorial Museum then. Probably, it was too early for the city or even the country to have a retrospective on Gandhi. Even during my growing up in Delhi, Rajghat where Gandhi (affectionately called Bapu) was cremated in the morning of 31st January 1948, was the only sight where we took our out-of- town visitors to pay homage to Mahatma, the Great Soul.

During this visit to India, the intent was to find origins of my spiritual heritage, around the human value of Nonviolence, *Ahimsa.* Over the past decade I had been trying to comprehend its relevance and meaning in an increasingly violent world. Truth is perhaps revealed when one is ready for it.

On this trip to my homeland I had a lineup of meetings with practitioners and philosophers of peace and nonviolence. Whether they were spiritual swamis, scientific swamis, or political swamis, I wanted them to share with me their understanding of violence and nonviolence, and how Gandhi might have influenced their lives. What drove them to seek nonviolent solutions, and also as some others believed why nonviolence as basic nature of humans was untenable?

This involved travelling across India to meet with a former Indian Ambassador Alan Pa Nazareth in Bangalore; Professors S. Jeyapragasam and William Baskaran, the university teachers of Gandhian Thought and Philosophy in Madurai; Professor N. Radhakrishnan, a practitioner of nonviolent action in Trivandrum; an activist playwright Vijay Tendulkar in Mumbai; the new generation of nonviolent activists for rural and urban poverty, P.V. Rajagopal and Madhu Kishwar in New Delhi; and the science policy philosopher and activist Dr. Dhirendra Sharma in Dehradun. The visit rounded up with a meeting with the former Indian Prime Minister Dr. Inder Kumar Gujral.

1

The Sarvodaya Ambassador

"This is basically Gandhian." Alan pointed out. "All those who adopt the path of truth, justice, love and non-violence become pinpoints of light and emitters of positive energies in the encircling darkness of untruth, injustice, hate and violence. When those in responsible positions adopt the path of truth, justice, love and non-violence they become role models for others to follow. Yatha raja, tatha praja (Like ruler, like subjects)."

The flight from Mumbai reached Bangalore at noon. It was a bright sunny day. As Alan Nazareth, a former Indian Ambassador, was recovering from flu, he asked me to take a taxi to his place. He had given me the directions to his house.

Pascal Alan Nazareth's family house is in Cox Town. It is an elegant bungalow with a porch and a large verandah facing a modest green garden. Following his retirement from the Indian Foreign Service, he had actively engaged himself in setting up a Gandhian organization, the Sarvodaya International Trust (SIT). He had invited me for a conversation over lunch at his house. I was received in his living room. As expected from a former Diplomat's home, the place was adorned with antiques and memorabilia from different parts of the world. His open and warm personality made me at once feel at home. In his early sixties, his receding hairline emphasized the attentive eagerness in his friendly eyes. He had grey sideburns.

I noticed the well-thumbed leather bound Bible on the coffee table, which Alan said he had picked in Philadelphia from an antique dealer. His family had been long established Christians in the region. The sense of civic duty and interest in politics ran in the family. Alan Nazareth's father used to be a well-

known sessions judge in Coimbatore. His sister Margaret Alva was a veteran Congress Party member who was elected as Member of Indian Parliament for many years and had also served as the Union Minister in the Congress government. A well-known community activist, last year she was awarded the prestigious Nelson Mandela Prize for empowerment of minorities.

Unlike his sister, Alan Nazareth had a long distinguished career in the Indian Foreign Service. He started as a Japan specialist and ended as India's ambassador to Egypt (1989-92). In between he was India's ambassador in countries of South America as well as a stint as a Director-General of Indian Council of Cultural Affairs. My meeting was to learn from him about his Sarvodaya Trust, why and how he came to start it. Sarovdaya was Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a compassionate society that was inspired from John Ruskin's book, *Unto the Last*, based on the notion that the good of the individual was contained in the good of all and that everyone had the same right of earning their livelihood from their work irrespective of their class and education.

When Alan returned from his last posting abroad in the early 1990s, he found India was going through a tumultuous period. Communal tensions and religious extremism were on rise. This was the decade when the country had witnessed the destruction of the Babri Masjid (1991), the anti-Sikh and anti-Muslim killings (1984 and 1991), and subsequent attacks on the Akshardam Temple and Christian churches, priests and nuns etc. Political leaders of all stripes were exploiting the situation fermenting trouble to make political gains.

Throughout his career Alan in his work around the globe had spoken about inherent greatness of India's nonviolent tradition and its peace loving people and leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. However the reality of increasing fanaticism around greatly perturbed him. He wanted to see how he could use his skills combined with his experience to retrieve the image of India as a secular democracy where opportunities to a good life were available to everyone regardless of their class, religion or gender. This was what he had propagated as India's distinguished representative abroad. Instead of

consultancy contracts sought often by retired government officials, he chose to create this 'not for profit' Peace NGO.

The Sarvodaya International Trust's three goals, Ambassador Nazareth explained were to promote inter-religious understanding, communal harmony, and humanitarian service. To him, working on these goals, albeit in a small way, was the best he could do to make Gandhi s ideal of *Sarvodaya* relevant in the new Century.

In his new vocation, to him the Gandhian legacy did not mean merely putting on home-spun Khadi clothing or being abstentious, it had to do with developing a coalition of influential people who would stand up in times of communal crisis in promoting inclusive Gandhian values of truth, compassion, and nonviolence.

He described his top-down approach as a model that brought together government, business and political leaders as partners using "truth" as the touchstone of all its action. It was similar to the model the business associations like Rotary Clubs followed all over the world. The Rotarians use Truth as their model of conduct. Their simple four-way test of their project activities was as follows: "Is that the Truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?"

"This is basically Gandhian." Alan pointed out. "All those who adopt the path of truth, justice, love and nonviolence become pinpoints of light and emitters of positive energies in the encircling darkness of untruth, injustice, hate and violence. When those in responsible positions adopt the path of truth, justice, love and nonviolence they become role models for others to follow. *Yatha raja, tatha praja* (Like ruler, like subjects)."

SIT had among its Board of Trustees a former Chief Justice, a former Air-Marshal, a former Army General, and a Senior Scientist. Alan Nazareth found that the desire for Peace and Nonviolence was universal, irrespective of class and religion, it spread across all sectors. It interested rich as well as poor, weak as well as mighty, and those in rural as well as urban areas.

Currently SIT had chapters across India (he invited me to form one in Canada), holding seminars on Gandhi's life. It organized seminars on Gandhian ethics in business and government. He had even taken the message of Gandhi on luxurious

cruise ships to rich passengers. The seminars sought to inspire in its audience a desire for nonviolent leadership creating networks needed for individual and societal transformation. Alan Nazareth as an Indian ambassador must have used considerable oratory and writing in his career; he applied that talent unabashedly to convince others on the senselessness of communal chauvinism and the need for transformative leadership in every individual citizen. The title of his new book, *Gandhi's Outstanding Leadership (2006)* therefore was fitting.

He remarked that there was a general misperception that Gandhi was born a saint, lived like a saint and died a martyr. This was not simply true. Gandhi's thinking was always focused on finding practical solutions to real problems. He was preoccupied with how best to inspire and lead his countrymen, none of whom were as ascetic or nonviolent as he was, to freedom and social reform. Alan pointed out ultimately each of us as Gandhi said, had to be the change we wish to see in the world.

Gandhi's *Autobiography* reveals that it was only after he embarked on his 'Experiments with Truth' at the age of 35 and took the *brahmacharya* celibacy vow that he firmly took the ascetic path and that too in stages. His "half-naked fakir" phase began only in 1921 when he was 53.

The taxi had arrived to take me to my next stop. Ambassador Nazareth reiterated his invitation to set up the first overseas chapter of Sarvodaya International in Ottawa.

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A Glimpse of Gandhi in Madurai

Dr. Ravichandran recalled that during Dr. King's visit in 1959, the Afro-American civil rights leader's eyes brimmed with tears on seeing the blood stained shawl. There was both admiration and mourning in those eyes for his nonviolent mentor. Perhaps Dr. King foresaw the sacrifice that an unarmed soldier of peace had to be prepared for in the struggle for the human rights of oppressed.

I was drawn to Madurai because it was where Mahatma Gandhi in 1921 had discarded his middle class garb in favour of the loincloth *dhoti* worn by the India's 'poorest of poor'. Mahatma Gandhi's immortal image of a bare-chest man wearing a *dhoti* and carrying a bamboo stick in his hand etched in our minds was initiated here. Gandhi visited South India 14 times. Madurai was one of his frequent destinations. Because of such close association with the region, after Gandhi's death, the first of the seven officially designated Gandhi Memorial Museums was opened in Madurai by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1959.

Professor S. Jeyapragasam, Director of the International Gandhian Institute for Nonviolence and Peace (IGINP) was my host in Madurai. In addition to teaching at the Department of Gandhian Thought at the local N. Kamaraj University, Professor Jeyapragasam published a journal *AhimsaNonviolence* with the grassroots Gandhian organization *Ekta Parishad* (The Unity Forum). He was engaged in developing a program of leadership training for landless peasants.

As I was arriving late and the newly opened IGINP residential hostel at Kadavur where I was to stay was 15 kilometers from the airport, Dr. Jeyapragasam had come to pick me up at the air-

port. It did not take us long to spot each other in the small arrival hall. Professor Jeyapragasam had a scrawny build. His dark eyes showed intensity of a person of resolve and courage. He was in the arrival hall along with another gentleman whom he introduced to me, a visiting Australian by the name of John Hogan. John, a tall man in his mid-fifties with a full head of hair, taught Drama and English literature at a high school in Melbourne.

As we drove through the night in the IGINP mini-bus to the hostel, Professor Jeyapragasam informed me on my two-day program in and around Madurai. It included a city-tour with focus on Gandhi related places including a visit to the nearby Gandhigram (The Gandhi Village). Additionally, for a dialogue with local Gandhian group, he had organized a public seminar next evening at the Gandhi Memorial Museum Library. He wanted me to moderate a discussion on the topic of Nonkilling Global Society at the seminar. He thought that this two-day program would give me a flavor of the work that has been going on in the region along the lines of Mahatma Gandhi's thinking on rural reconstruction and youth education. I could see that Professor Jeyapragasam had gone to a great length in ensuring that I was introduced to right people and places related to Gandhian projects.

John Hogan was living at the same IGINP hostel where my stay had been arranged. He had been in Kadavur for a couple of months helping Dr. Jeyapragasam with the editing of the new journal. While he was traveling in Goa early this year, John heard from a fellow Australian tourist about the workshop on "Theatre of Nonviolence" being organized at Kadavur. He came here to experience this unusual workshop. The workshop focused on how poor and marginalized can mobilize and find nonviolent ways to awaken those in power from their apathy towards social injustices; in particular, it was about learning how a deeper understanding of varied scenarios of a structured interaction with authorities could avert violence in a political confrontation. Following the workshop John stayed on at the campus to work as a volunteer at IGINP for a few months.

He said that as his next door neighbor, I would be seeing a lot of him over the next two days and that he wanted to interview me for the Ahimsa journal on the campaign for a establish-

ing a Department of Peace in the Federal Government that I was involved with in Canada. He intended to leave for Australia in a couple of months, and hoped to return next year to gain further insights into how theatre could be used for promoting civil society social action on the ground. He saw many parallels in the social and economic conditions between the landless rural poor in India and Australia's aboriginal population.

When we arrived at the IGINP facility, I was surprised to see a well-lit newly built in-residence compound. Co-located with the Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction (CESCI) and *Ekta Parishad* (The Unity Forum), the facility was a fully-equipped hostel with several rooms, a library, an amphitheatre, and a lecture cum meditation hall. The larger CESCI facility catered to nearly 40 persons with room and board, equipped with a full-fledged kitchen.

Dropping me in my room, Professor Jeyapragasam said that one of his doctoral students would next morning take me around for a city tour, and then we would meet at his downtown office for the evening appointment in the Museum Library. My room was a comfortable one comprising a clean bed protected by a mosquito net and an independent bathroom. I could not have expected anything more. After a long journey, I fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

It was the mild fragrance of jasmine that woke me up next morning. From the large window in my room, I could see in the front compound with a variety of tropical flowers—jasmine, marigold, hydrangea and cannas. John Hogan and the small staff invited me to join them at the breakfast table. They were friendly bunch open to my curiosity about the work of IGINP and its partner organizations, CESCI and The Unity Forum.

Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction

The IGINP and its partner organizations over the past decade were actively engaged in mobilizing at all India level bonded labour and landless peasants to present their grievances effectively to the central government. The facility was used to provide grassroots activists empowerment training so that peasants with potential leadership traits could take on leadership

role to motivate and lead their rural poor constituents in joining them to present their claims for their land and fight for their human rights. Inspiration for such direct action without any intermediaries was drawn from the work in the early 1950s initiated by Gandhi's successor, Sri Vinoba Bhave.

John said that a younger activist named P.V. Rajagopal, an agriculture scientist by training, had taken on the cause of Vinoba Bhave's forgotten *Bhoodan* 'land-donation' mission. Under mentoring of another veteran Gandhian leader Dr. Subba Rao, Rajagopal had found that both government and those who had committed to donate land to Bhave for the poor had reneged on their promises. The most affected among the India's landless were *Adivasi* people from its tribal regions, described as the country's "poorest among poor," who for their survival relied on their indigenous natural resources of land, water, and forest. I would meet Rajagopal later in my travels in New-Delhi.

The CESCI-IGINP facility served as a location where training by experts from India and abroad was provided. Rajagopal and Maja Koene, a Swiss psychiatrist nurse who had raised private funds for the CESCI project internationally had developed the concept of this in-residence training facility. Participants and resource persons involved lived on the compound designed to correspond to village life in India. Living and learning together was a key aspect of its programs.

The facility's terracotta tiled sloped barracks with hostel rooms, lecture hall, amphitheatre and library etc had been developed under Maja Koene's supervision. I found that in the Theatre of Nonviolence project, the workshops were aimed at promoting awareness of the unjust situation in which the rural poor were trapped, being deprived of their livelihood resources by an exploitative power structure—a nexus of upper caste rich landowners, corrupt government officials, police, and politicians. Focus was on learning without books and writing, mainly through enactment of improvised scenes and songs. Potential leaders as part of their training enacted different scenarios of Gandhian *Satyagraha* nonviolent resistance. A major part of training was about how to carry out an effective civil protest bearing pain and difficulty imposed by those in authority. *Sat-*

yagraha belief was that through truthful nonviolent action one could rise in adversary's conscience recognition of unethical and unjust local situation so that the opponent would ultimately have a transformation and mend ways.

Koene succumbed to cancer in 1999 in Zurich, Switzerland. Those around the breakfast table had fond memories of this inspirational young Swiss woman who single-handed helped to create this project and later co-founded with Rajagopal, the all-India *Ekta Parishad* (The Unity Forum) movement.

Gandhi related sight-seeing

Professor Jeyapragasan's doctoral student arrived punctually to take me around Gandhi related sites in Madurai. One was the house on West Masi Street where Mahatma Gandhi had chosen to give up his western dress forever, and the second was the famous Madurai temple where in his many altercations with local Brahimin priests through his sit-in protests and fasts at the entrance door of the temple, Gandhi had won over the orthodoxy to open the edifice to lowest-caste *Achyut* Hindus. In the afternoon, the program included visiting the landmark Gandhi Memorial Museum.

The Half-Naked Fakir

The West Masi Street is a small dusty market road in the old part of Madurai. It was here Gandhi one winter had stayed at the home of Sri Ramji Kalyanji. A modest two storied long stretch of houses has narrow shops on ground floor and homes with small rooms and pokey windows on the top. Gandhi was upset seeing from his host's home the shivering poor dressed in scarce clothes, a towel like white dhoti around their waist. Such sights across India over the years had greatly troubled him. He had already given up wearing his western clothes. In those days he wore the middle class Indian garb of the time - turban, long *kurtha* shirt, and *dhoti*. However in this modest looking house on top of a shop, he decided to take the ultimate step of complete identification with the poor masses. He discarded what he normally wore, wowing to wear from then on

the clothing of India's poorest—the sole loin cloth. The story was covered by the newspapers worldwide, calling him as India's half-naked fakir political leader.

Gandhi's rare courage was inspiring—having journeyed from an England educated well-dressed Barrister in South Africa, shedding step by step his material possessions that he describes in his *Autobiography* as part of his vow to follow the principle of *Aparigraha* (nonpossession) and *Sambhava* (equanimity). It is said that courage is first virtue, as other virtues follow, including that of nonviolence. In this, Gandhi was true to his Hindu origins following literally the four stages of life laid out by Manu's Dharma; at the age 52, ready for the third stage, that of *Vanaprastha* , the phase of renunciation. Instead of putting on an ochre robe, he steadfastly pursued his goal of rendering selfless service to his country's poor masses, wanting to be identified with them in their abject poverty, and aspiring to better their economic situation.

Gandhi Memorial Museum

Dr. T. Ravichandran, dressed in white trousers and white shirt, the Chief Librarian at the Gandhi Memorial Museum met us in his office. He had been one of Professor Jeyapragasam's first doctoral students. The Gandhi Memorial Museum, first of its kind was established to propagate the life and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi through exhibitions, seminars, study circles meetings, group discussions, and summer camps for students. The premises were much bigger than Mani Bhavan museum I had visited in Mumbai a few days ago.

The most significant part of the Museum is "The Hall of Relics" where some of Gandhi's personal belongings such as his sandals, glasses, pen etc. are kept. The most precious object however is the hand-spun piece of cotton shawl preserved in a large glass case. The vivid splatter of blood on the white shawl is evocative of the moment when Gandhi succumbed to the three bullets of his Hindu assassin in 1948. Despite all these years, the blood stains looked fresh and stunned the onlooker. One stood mesmerized imagining the last moments of Gandhi. Dr. Ravichandaran mentioned that all world leaders of nonviolent peace such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dalai Lama, and

Desmond Tutu standing in front of this exhibit were profoundly moved. In his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes about the impact Mahatma Gandhi made on his life:

> It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months. The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social contracts theory of Hobbes, the "back to nature" optimism of Rousseau and the superhuman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

Dr. Ravichandran recalled that during Dr. King's visit in 1959, the Afro-American civil rights leader's eyes brimmed with tears on seeing the blood stained shawl. There was both admiration and mourning in those eyes for his nonviolent mentor. Perhaps Dr. King foresaw the sacrifice that an unarmed soldier of peace had to be prepared for in the struggle for the human rights of oppressed.

In Gandhi's case, it was not merely bringing harmony between Hindu and Muslim communities, but a litany of social reforms that he felt imminent in the caste ridden Hinduism—his lifelong struggle for the poor and lower castes to liberate them from the practice of "nontouchability" where people of the upper-caste did not allow them to share even the common well in villages or went as far to avoid the lowest-castes' shadow in fear of being polluted. Gandhi considered such a system a curse for India. He fought for integration of these outcastes comprising almost one-fifth of Indian population into society as full-fledged citizen. He re-named them as *Harijan* - "People of God" and went against the wishes of his fellow Ashram members in inviting a *Harijan* family to be a resident member, and eventually adopting the daughter of the outcaste family as his own. The caste system was formally abolished in the Indian Constitution after country's Independence in 1947.

Meenakshi Temple and Gandhi's Fast against Caste Discrimination

Mahatma Gandhi had fought all his life prevalent discrimination—racial, religious, gender and the caste discrimination. His protests and fasts unto death to reverse this discrimination are many. During his visits to Madurai, he had fought hard to get the doors of Madurai's famous Meenakshi temple opened to the low-caste *Harijans*.

My student guide and I were at the same temple. It is one of the magnificent temples of the South dedicated to God Shiva and his consort Parvati, known locally as Meenakshi. The Nayak kings who ruled Madurai from the 16th to the 18th Century built the temple. It is sited within a high-walled enclosure, at the core of which there are the two sanctums for Meenakshi and Shiva, surrounded by a number of smaller shrines and grand pillared halls. Its pyramidal gate towers *gopuras* (over 50 meters high) indicate the entrances to the temple complex at the four cardinal points, while there are inside lesser *gopuras* that lead to the sanctums of the main deities.

While strolling through the main temple at one of these *Gopuras*, as I was about to enter into one of the larger temples, a priest in a white *lungi*, his forehead smeared with ash put out his hand out stopping me from entering the premises. This was completely unexpected. On my reluctance to withdraw, the young priest insisted that no foreigners were allowed to enter the sacred spaces of the temple. I wondered if my green knapsack with Air Canada symbol on my shoulders or my grey National geographic baseball cap protecting me from sun made me look foreign in my native land. My student guide not knowing my background did not know how to intervene. He was probably as taken aback as I on this unforeseen barrier at the entrance.

When he heard me explaining about my being a Hindu, he quickly joined in to explain to the priest that it was because of my fairer skin and my attire that the priest had mistaken me for a foreigner, and that I was in fact a Hindu born in Northern India, now living in Canada. Eventually, the priest let me enter the inner sanctum. It was a bizarre experience as all my life in

India or abroad, I had never been stopped from entering a place of worship, be it a temple, mosque, church or a Sikh shrine. For a second, I wondered what would have Mahatma Gandhi thought about this little incident in Madurai temple?

The intense heat, 35 degrees centigrade, was making me queasy. We met Professor Jeyapragasam as planned at the downtown office of International Gandhian Institute for Nonviolence and Peace (IGINP). I chose not to bother Jeyapragasam with the temple incident. A lesson to be learnt was that all civil rights struggles must never be taken for granted. These must be safeguarded by each generation through education and continuous vigilance. Professor Jeyapragasam suggested that I take rest before we head for the evening meeting, the public seminar he had organized at the Museum's Library. A short nap under the ceiling fan refreshed me.

Roundtable on Nonkilling Society: Is such a Society Possible?

The Roundtable on the 'Nonkilling Global Society and Departments/Ministries of Peace that I was asked to facilitate was organized by IGINP together with Gandhi Memorial Museum in the Museum's Library Hall. It was a large hall with high ceiling and a long table in the middle. You could see the spindly ceiling fans dangling from the roof their rotating blades lazily whizzing. The hall was used for public lectures and seminars. Mr. S. Pandian, Secretary of the Museum welcomed me; while Professor Jeyapragasam introduced me as the invited guest. Mr. Pandian was the first Tamil scholar to have a book written in the 1950s on Gandhi's Muslim nonviolent Pathan champion, Dr. Abdul Gaffar Khan.

There was a large gathering on both sides of the long table - teachers, businessmen, journalists, and civil servants. The common interest was to discuss whether Gandhian nonviolent political techniques made any sense in today's violent world. The term "Nonkilling Global Society" as a central focus of the seminar was an unusual one, it related to a book, *Nonkilling Global Political Science* by an American professor, Glenn D. Paige that had been translated into all major languages of the world.

Over the past three years, I had reviewed and written about the book in various journals and discussed it in many forums. A

few months ago, I had made a presentation of the paper, "G.D. Paige's Nonkilling Thesis" at the Conference of the European Consortium of Political Science Research (EPCR) in Budapest which was well received.

As a moderator, I proposed that we use an interactive approach for the meeting with an open-ended question: "Is a Nonkilling Global Society possible? If Yes, why? If No, why not?" The idea was to do a 'tour de table', listening to responses of all to the question. Paige's work shows that humans might have capabilities to kill, but by nature people do not feel compelled to kill. Those who have in line of their duty such as policeman or a soldier had to be trained extensively to act that way, often at the behest of those who themselves don't want to kill.

The "No" responses around the table highlighted the conventional belief that people were born killers, and that human killing of one another was nature's way of controlling ever expanding global population. As the existing societal and economic structures did not permit a Nonkilling society, it would be impossible to sustain such a society for a long time. On the "Yes" side, most participants felt that humans were not born evil, and that a nonkilling society could be a great experiment, worth taking the risk. The governments however would have to create new structures before individuals changed their attitudes towards violence; where there was will, there was a way etc. Paige's thesis was unusual one as it went beyond Nonviolence and Ahimsa in providing a conceptual construct that was open-ended and measurable as well as practical for developing novel approaches to peacebuilding and human security. General conclusion at the end of the evening was that there were already components of a Nonkilling society in India and globally (through the United Nations and its agencies), these needed to be nurtured, actively supported, and expanded.

During our discussion, we found out that as per Paige's book less than two per cent of people had ever killed a person in their life. In fact, most fatalities did not result from war. Among top 10 causes of lethality, it was not war, but suicides ranked higher in number than wars and homicides. It raised the question why do we then as nations spend disproportionate amounts on armies

and military arsenal? However, not all countries were violence focused. There were still some countries, which did not have any armies and allowed objection to military conscription on conscientious grounds etc. There were others which because of moral repugnancy for taking human lives had abolished capital punishment. A major WHO Report on Violence and Health released in 2002 based on similar global data validated Paige's thesis that "violence was preventable."

At the end of seminar we did a recount of "yes" and "no," there were only two nays who couldn't be convinced on the possibility of a Nonkilling society, compared to 28 at the start of the roundtable. We all agreed that the stereotype of the Man being a "born killer" had to disappear in the same way, as we had come to accept the notion of racial and gender equality in the previous Century.

Dr. Jeyapragasam who had co-chaired the meeting, was pleased with the discussion. He wanted to try this approach in his teaching of Paige's thesis at campuses across South India. John Hogan who was sitting next to me nudged to whisper that when we were back at the IGINP facility, he wanted to interview me on this. True to his word, we sat in his room past midnight with his tape recorder having a long free-wheeling conversation on the inevitability of nonkilling and on the possibility of wars becoming obsolete in the 21st Century. Dueling and gladiatorial sports once fashionable disappeared by people's indifference to them as people realized their irrelevance in times they were living in. Slavery too ultimately vanished as a social institution in the 19th Century because of people's abhorrence to such an institution. Perhaps war might one day become obsolete, sooner than we think, because one day we may all realize its futility as a method of resolving conflicts, John and I wondered.

Gandhigram Rural University

In a rapidly changing global society how Gandhi's village as an autonomous republic should dovetail with the government's ambitious plans and policies of market liberalization and globalization? This had been always the problem confronted by India's planners since the Independence. The question of place of the village in the national economic development could not be ignored as six

decades since the Independence more than three-quarters of India's population continued to live in rural areas, and a majority in dire poverty.

Next morning, Dr. Jeyapragasam had plans for me to visit Gandhigram, a village 65 kilometers north of Madurai near Sirumalai hills. Gandhigram has at its core a rural university created along the lines of Gandhi's dream of transforming villages into self-sufficient 'autonomous republics'. All experiments of 'simple living and serving the needy' that Gandhi had undertaken in his Ashrams in South Africa and India were aimed at creating a sustainable economic base through appropriate education and technology. This was to rejuvenate cottage industries at village level through units of hand woven clothing, low-cost housing, and indigenous farming techniques utilizing local skills and resources.

The Gandhian Research Institute (GRI) was established in 1956 by a Gandhian husband-wife team of an educationist and a medical doctor, Dr. G. Ramachandran and Dr. Soundram. These two doctors were long-time associates of Gandhi who had dedicated their lives to develop their mentor's rural reconstruction program. At their marriage, Gandhi is said to have told the young couple to settle down in a place in rural India where they could serve the poor. It was an unusual marriage with all ingredients of social reform that Gandhi had advocated. It involved a widow re-marriage and the couple originated from the highest and lowest Hindu castes as well as hailed from different linguistic regions. Ramachandrans chose the location for their Gandhigram project adjacent to the small village Chinapalti. A local agriculturist, Mr. Lagumiah, was so impressed with their dedication to the rural development that he donated 50 acres of his land for the GRI project.

I was to hear more such stories of this illustrious Gandhian couple from Professor William Baskaran, a faculty member from GRI's Department of Gandhian Philosophy and Thought who had come to Kadavur to take me in GRI jeep to Gandhigram. Arrangement was that after the visit, he would drop me at Madurai Railway Station to catch the afternoon train to Trivandrum.

As we drove on relatively quiet roads passing though the sleepy villages and by the rice fields of Tamilnadu, Professor

Baskaran narrated an incident that took place on nearby railway tracks near the village of Chinapalti in February 1946. The villagers had come to learn that Mahatma Gandhi would be on a train heading for Madurai passing by their village. In order to have glimpse of their famous leader who was fighting the British government for India's Independence, they decided to protest on the railway tracks wanting the colonial government to stop the train at Chinapalti. It is said that in spite of earlier reluctance from the rail authorities the train came to halt, and Gandhi to villagers delight appeared at the door of the rail compartment to speak to them.

Professor Baskaran said that formal and experimental education was always a part of Soundaram and Ramachandran's enthusiasm. In 1956, when the Indian Government was considering the idea of setting up Rural Institutes across the country, plans for 14 such Institutes were under consideration. It was the Gandhigram model that realized its beginning, gaining in importance with time because of its applied orientation and a wide-ranging curriculum focused on solving problems of rural economy. Two decades later, the GRI for its unique curriculum and physical infrastructure was accorded by the University Grants Commission the "Deemed University" status.

Patterned after Gandhi's concept of 'Basic Education,' Gandhigram Rural Institute's (GRI) three key objectives were:

1. Provide for instruction and training in such branches of learning as well promote a classless and casteless society.
2. Provide for research and advancement and dissemination of knowledge.
3. Function as a centre for extension work leading to integrated rural development

My first meeting at GRI was at the Department of Gandhian Thought and Peace Science, with its faculty members and students. Professor Narayanaswamy informed me about the Youth Program *Nehru Yuva Kendras* (Nehru Youth Centres) which was established in the 1980s to provide counseling services and or-

ganize training programs for young people along the lines of Gandhian Constructive Programme.

Professor Baskaran who had specialized in study of conflict resolution, until recently had responsibility for a large program on *Shanti Sena*, Gandhi's nonviolent peace brigade concept that sought youth to be trained to serve the poor in India's villages. In association with another colleague, Professor N. Radhakrishnan (who I was to meet at my next stop in Trivandrum), Professor Baskaran had worked on the development of the nonarms bearing Shanti Sena (Peace Army) program and seen its successful implementation. The programme was aimed at training of an all-round development of a rural development peace worker.

Baskaran explained that the selection of *Shanti Sainiks*, the peace soliders and the organizational set up, content and methodology of training and practical work, everything was prepared from scratch. One could not just straight away dip into a conflict and resolve it. At GRI, a true peace *sainik* (soldier) was to have a deeper understanding of the spiritual and material problems that led to conflicts and various ways of alleviating the tension and enhancing cooperation. Bringing peace was not a simple job of college boys; it required mentoring and apprenticeship in real life situation, working under experienced practitioners of nonviolence.

I noticed that Professor Baskaran spoke of the *Shanti Sena* program in the past tense. When I probed him on this, he shrugged his shoulders. He said that times were changing. His main preoccupation with the program now was more of a historical and academic nature. He was referring to his responsibility at the present limited mainly to the one-room 'peace museum' located at the entrance of the university gates which highlighted the glorious days of Gandhian Research Institute's *Shanti Sena* program from earlier years. With changes brought in by successive GRI management, most programs were altered in content, and original initiatives such as Shanti Sena program from Ramachandran period had been relegated to an optional program with a miniscule budget.

GRI original emphasis was about development of village artisans and craftsman and the ways of improving means for their livelihood. The *Shanti Sainik*, Peace Soldier, was to be able to as-

sist them in providing a conflict free environment to develop local skills and economic infrastructure. However, over the past three decades that objective had been left behind, GRI now producing Ph.D. level Gandhigram graduates, specializing in all disciplines, albeit with some rural sector focus.

There was now a full-fledged Computer Department at GRI. In one of the laboratories of chemistry that I visited, the work on whole production chain on local fruits and vegetables was being carried out. This involved research on extraction of juices from the fruits to their bottling, and then marketing the product in and outside the region. Along the same lines, I was also shown a demonstration site where a pilot project on low cost construction technology was in operation, it involved machine-based building of concrete bricks and other pre-cast concrete components.

While arriving from Bangalore on plane two days ago, I happened to be sitting next to the GRI Vice Chancellor Dr. T. Karunakaran, who on learning the intent of my visit to Madurai had proposed that I visit his Institute. He had explained that a constant review of educational curriculum was essential for any educational institution as it must respond to changing local, national, and global economic realities. To be competitive in the new world, his thinking was that Gandhian Research Institute must produce students who would meet demands of growing industrial infrastructure in and outside the local Tamilnadu State. His concern was that the rural sector if it relied solely on cottage industries as envisaged by Gandhi, would lag behind the urban areas creating a lopsided national economy.

Near where Mahatma Gandhi's train was halted in February 1946, Gandhigram Rural Insitute now a university had a campus grown four times larger in its area than when it started in 1956. The large space was absorbed by its 7 Faculties and 22 Departments. The "Deemed University" offered 54 programmes including Ph.D., M. Phil, diplomas, and certificate programmes. Dr. Karunakaran in the Golden Jubilee Year of the GRI was seeking to redefine GRI's mission as an institution that would be now providing knowledge support to the rural sector to usher in a self-reliant community "with a capability to engage the emerging globalism."

Dr. Ramachandran as an educator had premonitions of such a trend. To him, the Rural University had to attack both ignorance and unemployment. To do this, he felt that research and extension work would need to cross-fertilize all the times. In one of the compilations of his writings, *Thoughts*, Dr. Ramachandran writes that research and application of scientific academic knowledge would be the keystone of his Rural University.

On my way back to Madurai in the afternoon driving across water logged rice fields, I mused on my day at Gandhigram and the challenges faced for post-secondary education in India's rural sector. In a rapidly changing global society how Gandhi's village as an autonomous republic would dovetail with the government's ambitious plans and policies of market liberalization and globalization? This had been always the problem confronted by India's planners since the Independence. The question of place of the village in the national economic development could not be ignored as six decades since the Independence three-quarters of India's population continued to live in dire poverty in rural areas.

Leafing through a booklet given to me by Professor Narayanswamy at GRI, I came across a poem entitled 'Stand Erect' by Dr. G. Ramachandran. It well defined his journey in creating this first village university of India:

> Stand erect, Gandhi's torchbearer!
> Hold your head high before men
> You have walked along on his road
> With nothing but his love to guide you.
>
> Some there were who lay in shadows
> To trap you as you marched on,
> They twisted your words and your deeds
> To betray you with their Judas kisses.
>
> No one knows, no one utterly
> How, awake or asleep all the time
> I hold on to that Grace
> As the only anchor of my life.
>
> I turned my mind to a new purpose
> Which was truly an old one,
> My hope and dream to build
> The first Village University of my land.

No one knew how I toiled again,
Hard at work in the hours of day
Wakeful in thought through many nights,
Solving problems with patience and foresight.

And God gave me a companion
Who understood the entire situation
And gave me comfort and strength
Not to bend before the storm.
(S. Narayanswamy, Golden Quotes on Youth, pp.54-56).

Dr. G. Ramachandaran was born on 7th October 1904, and died on 17th January 1995 in the southernmost city of India, Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum)—the capital of Kerala state, my next destination on the journey.

3

Dr. N. Radhakrishnan
Actualizing Gandhi

Good education should teach ethics of serving society and nation building. He believed that 'peace education' was one sensible way to bring about such change. It could be made an integral part of national education system imparting values, creativity, and training in resolving of conflicts non-violently and serving the poor and needy. A small modest move like that, he felt, could ensure spiritual and intellectual development in the youth. To deliver peace education, a pre-requisite was to develop a new generation of teachers trained and committed to seeking peace through peaceful means.

The journey to Trivandrum by train from Madurai is about eight hours. The Shatabadi Express arrived at the dimly lit station around 10.30 at night. This was the first time I was visiting Trivandrum by rail. I had been there in1991 on another quest. It was to see Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India where the waters of the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal converge. According to Hindu scripture the Ramayana, it was here Lord Rama with his army of *Vaanar* monkeys crossed the Indian Ocean to vanquish the demon king Ravana who had kidnapped his wife Sita. The region witnessed a great battle between the protector of Dharma, Lord Rama and the demon king, the unassailable Ravana who eventually was killed by arrows from Rama's bow.

Kanyakumari is also a point where on a jutting rock of an islet a meditation temple stands commemorating Swami Vivekananada's journey to West in 1893 as India's first spiritual ambassador to West. The tall handsome Swami, a disciple of

Bengal's well-known ascetic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, was on his way to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago where he surprised his western audience with his famous "Dear Brothers and Sisters" speech on the unity of human spirit. Soon after his American tour, Vivekananda, died in his prime at the age of 39. Vivekananda is known for his exhortations to Indian youth to be proud of their universalistic Vedantic *Sanathna Dharma* culture, and to reach out to lift the downtrodden, especially the rural poor from their miserable living conditions. On rural regeneration, he is known best for his proclamation to the young: "Your duty at present is to go from village to village, and make the people understand that mere sitting idly won't do anymore. Make them understand their real condition and say, O ye brothers, arise! Awake."

On this trip, instead of sightseeing, I was focusing on another Vivekananda, someone from the region itself—Dr. Neelakanta Radhakrishnan, a pupil of educator G. Ramachandaran whose creation Gandhigram I had just visited near Madurai. The master and the pupil are known today for their tireless efforts in spreading Gandhi's message of peace and service in the South.

When last evening Dr. Radhakrishnan had come to receive me at the railway station, I was surprised to see a person with a peppery beard standing in front as I stepped down the train compartment. You rarely see faces with beard in the South. He was in white *lungi* attire (in Madurai, Professor Jeyapragasam also wore the same). It must be the hot and humid weather of the region that shaped this local graceful dress men wore that comprised a piece of long cotton wrap on cloth. Unlike Dhoti that is worn usually in north tugged in between the legs, the *lungi* is wrapped around the waist touching one's feet. During my three days in Trivandrum, I saw him wearing handspun *lungi* and the Khadi *Kurtha* shirt taking me around and introducing me to people in Thiruvananthapuram, the ancient name of Trivandrum.

While waiting for Dr. Radhakrishnan in the small hotel lobby, I went over the program that he had emailed me. It included a visit to the G. Ramachandaran's Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeeth School where Dr. Ramachandran on his retirement from Gandhigram spent his last years. Following his mentor's foot-

steps, Dr. Radhakrishnan after completing his formal career had chosen to return to Trivandrum to create the G. Ramachandaran Institute of Nonviolence. This was to promote Gandhi's constructive program of social reforms in partnerships with the likeminded individuals and organizations in Kerala and across South India. One of its first programs was an inter-state Education campaign entitled "*Shanti Yatra*" (A Journey of Peace) with a goal of meeting estimated number of ten million people, traveling a distance of over 1600 kilometers in over 400 villages and 90 towns in the states of Kerala, Pondicherry, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. This was with a view to form units of *Shanti Sena* (Gandhian Peace Brigades) in villages, schools and colleges to prepare children, student and nonstudent youth, and adult men and women to promote communal harmony. The concept was as Dr. Radhakrishnan had in his email written to me to encourage the "study of peace science and Gandhian philosophy to build a broad-based cadre of peace-workers." These workers were to educate the people on the need for building abiding peace in place of violence and killing-ridden conflicts.

As we drove to the Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeeth, Dr. Radhakrishnan recalled his career of over three decades that took him away from Trivandrum to Gandhigram to Delhi and back to Trivandrum. His association with the Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI) began in 1968 where he started as Lecturer, later becoming a full Professor of English literature. It was a great experience for him to have worked closely with the GRI founder Dr. Ramachandan and other Gandhian leaders of that generation. It led to his establishing *Shanti Sena* (nonviolent peace army) program as part of the GRI curriculum at Gandhigram.

When Radhakrishnan joined the Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI) in the late 1950s, he was just 24. He found GRI atmosphere quite different from what he was used to in traditional colleges and universities. One could choose at GRI one's field in many community development experiments being carried out there. The *Shanti Sena* training program, art education, and student welfare were some of the areas that he could associate with besides his teaching assignment. There were many who ridiculed the idea of a *Shanti Sena*, a peace brigade. To them,

Shanti Sena was an extracurricular activity held every Saturday for fun where general assembly of volunteers in their white dress would be trained in village uplift work through neighbourhood cleaning campaigns. Gradually, for him, together with his colleague William Baskaran, this peace brigade became a passion and he was confident that as the chief organizer of *Shanti Sena* he had something useful to contribute. During two decades beginning in 1968 about 20,000 students were trained in this youth program at GRI. 5,000 of these students received intensive training under teachers such as Dr. Radhakrishnan (Venugopalan, p. 26).

After 22 years of teaching at GRI, at the invitation from the Central Government in 1989, Radhakrishnan left his alma mater to move North to New-Delhi to become the Director of an all-India level Gandhian organization, The Gandhi Smiriti and Darsan Samiti. The position gave him opportunity at national and international levels to meet with the like minded and to propagate Gandhian ideals. A decade later, he returned to Trivandrum where he had always kept himself in touch with local communities through involvement in welfare training programs for youth in variety of educational institutions, including Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeeth that he had become closely involved with after Dr. Ramachandaran's death.

At the Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeeth School towards where we were heading, Radhakrishnan was one of its senior Board Members. We were going to meet a close associate of Dr. Ramachandaran, Sister Mythili, a founding member of the school. She presided and managed the school trust, and ran several other social welfare projects from the same premises.

Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeeth

The Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeeth School was set up in 1979. Over the years, while Dr. Ramachandran was in Gandhigram, the modest school had grown from a primary into a high school. It ran on Gandhian principles of respect and tolerance for all faiths.

On arrival at the school, our car stopped in front of the cottage, the family home of Dr. Ramachandran where he lived on return from Gandhigram. The cottage though quaint, was an

impressive residential bungalow with sloped tiled roof. It had a large verandah porch in front, reminding me of similar cottage homes I had seen in other Indian coastal towns that experienced long periods of monsoon. Now Ramachandaran cottage served as the reception and office area for welcoming guests to Gandhi Vidyapeeth School.

Radhakrishnan introduced me to the lady in white Sari with grey streaks of hair who greeted us at the entrance of the cottage. She was our host, Sister Mythili. She exuded warmth and enthusiasm. We followed her to the nearby school building.

A large assembly of students awaited us in the school grounds. In total, there must be over 1,000 students, from Grade 1 to 12. They waited as part of their prayer assembly, sitting on ground dressed in white, their smiling open faces curiously looking at the visitors. I never saw so many students in one place glowing with happiness. Two Indian ladies from Chicago were other guests that morning.

Sister Mythili and Human Values

As Sister Mythili approached the school assembly, there was a pin drop silence. Loudly she greeted her young audience, "Good morning, children!" And a big cheerful response echoed from the assembly, "Goood Morning, Sister!" It was an electrifying applause that was completely new to me. Such greeting was obviously a regular feature that students looked forward in starting their school day. Obviously Sister Mythili seemed to be everyone's favourite.

Looking straight at the gathering, she asked everyone to join in the morning prayers. It was a multi-faith *Sarvadharma* prayer—"*Om Tat Sat*" (God is One). Then a couple of children, one by one came to the front to read passages from the scriptures of major world major religions—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism etc. A remarkable way to start the day for these youngsters, I thought.

Sister Mythili told the children about the visitors that morning. She introduced the two women who had come from Chicago and had brought with them large clocks as presents to be hung in their classrooms. Then the school principal intro-

duced Dr. Radhakrishnan and me. Dr. Radhakrishnan seemed to be known to students as he must have brought other guests to the school in the past. He murmured in my ears that I was expected to say a few words to the assembly. I was surprised, and at the same time touched by the gesture. At the spur of moment the words that came out astonished me, I found myself speaking to the children on the importance of human values of truth, righteousness, love, peace, and nonviolence.

To counter the growing heaviness of humid morning, following the assembly, the guests were treated to a refreshing local cold drink made of milk and coconut water. Dr. Radhakrishnan said that a meeting had been arranged for me later with senior students for a more informal question and answer period.

The school principal took us around the compound. The cottage where Sister Mythili had received us earlier was the place where Mahatma Gandhi on one of his trips to South India in the 1930s had slept. Behind Ramachandaran cottage, there was a large playground and the Ramachandaran Samadhi, where the reverend Gandhi disciple had been cremated. We stood in front of the platform that marked the cremation place, in silence as our homage to this Gandhi disciple.

From there, we were taken into a large class room to meet with the senior boys and girls from grades 11 and 12. Introducing me, Dr. Radhakrishnan told the students that I had agreed to answer any question the students wished to ask me on Canada where I came from. The following is sampling of the questions raised:

> What is the school system in Canada? How is the behavior of students in Canada? What has been your experience traveling in different parts of the world? What is the general standard of living in Canada? Are there enough jobs for students? What kind of governmental system exists in Canada? Who and what inspired me to become what I am? What is the students' attitude towards teachers in Canada? What's the secret to becoming a good person?

These questions though simple, were profound for their breadth and depth. Having lived in Canada for four decades as a parent and having two sons put through Ontario's educational

system, I managed to reply to children's perceptive queries. The question-answer session reminded me of my school days in Delhi. I could see in the children's inquisitive faces myself sitting behind the wooden desk in classroom in my modest school in Delhi. It is strange how these flashes from past come to us so unexpectedly.

Dr. Radhakrishnan playfully asked the children: "If you were to be given a wish for a gift at your birthday, what would be the one present you would most like to have?" Then he went around the class asking each student their wish. The replies ranged from a desire for a nice school dress to a box of chocolate, though one boy did hope for a bicycle. Dr. Radhakrishnan thanked the children, and wished that all of them would get the gifts they hoped on their birthday.

Later as we stepped out of the class room, he asked me if I noted that the children's wishes were so modest. In a similar experiment on value education in the USA, in their replies to a similar question, he said that 60 percent of children wanted an expensive toy, only 10 per cent asked for story books. Poignantly, he looked at me, "And you know what one student asked for? He says: I want a kiss from my mother who is no more." He gently chuckled.

There was something tragic-comic about the bearded professor. His laughter reminded me of the Hollywood actor Robin Williams who has this face with a permanent smile and sad eyes that empathetically draw you to him. Radhakrishnan possessed a similar combination. His sad beady eyes shone through his salt and pepper bearded persona. As a teacher, he seemed to have a special gift of reaching out to the children, always finding ways to engage them in a conversation.

In Ramachandaran cottage, we got served home-made Kerala lunch. I felt privileged to be having my meal where Dr. Ramachandaran had once sat with Mahatma Gandhi for lunch. I took a photograph of that corner where Gandhi slept one night in Trivandrum in the 1930s.

First rain of the Season and Peace Education

As I looked out of the window, it had suddenly gone dark. The ominous grey clouds had covered the sky. Gust of winds coming from the nearby ocean blew vigorously the trees and

plants outside. Next moment, there was a thunderous lightning bolt, followed by a massive downpour. It was beautiful to watch the torrential rain hitting the parched red earth. The fresh wet on the plantain vegetation and trees contrasted against the red soil oozing clouds of steam from the dried up ground. Someone remarked that this was the first rain of the season. It is said that the whole country awaits the rains to start in Kerala. From here, the monsoon first enters the sub-continent moving to other parts of India. The rain had mellowed the heat, bringing down a breath of freshness to the humidity in the air.

Sitting in Ramachandran cottage, Dr. Radhakrishnan and I waited for the shower to stop. I asked him his views on education in India.

Dr. Radhakrishnan looked laconically at me. He felt that there was no serious effort put on laying a solid foundation for school children. India was able to produce world class scientists and technologists, but it had failed to create high caliber thinkers and philosophers in humanities. There had been little encouragement given to children's creativity and imagination. This, he felt, was due to prevalent education model which bereft of human values was mainly interested in providing technical jobs—training young people in computers and IT. Good education needed also to teach ethics of serving humanity. He believed that 'peace education' was one sensible way to bring about such change. It could be made an integral part of national education system imparting values, creativity, and training in resolving of conflicts nonviolently and serving the poor and needy. A small modest move like that, he felt, could ensure spiritual and intellectual development in the youth. To deliver peace education, a pre-requisite was developing a new generation of teachers trained and committed to seeking peace through peaceful means.

Gandhi through Theatre

Dr. Radhakrishnan seemed to be versed in many talents. From his *Kurtha* pocket, he took out a brochure and passed it on. It was an announcement of a play being performed by a local theatre company:

> Rangaprabhat presents *The Melody of Peace*—a Dance Drama in traditional folk style in Malayalam"

I saw his name as the playwright. Smiling he said, "This is what I enjoy the most, trying to find ways to get the younger generation to understand Gandhiji's life and its message."

The story he had scripted for the play had an interesting narrative. It was about a group of children's response to Gandhi's experiments with Truth. The play revolved around a ballad singer and a troupe of gypsies and the two groups of children who clash over a playground. The ballad singer begins his story with the narration of local poet Vallathol's presentation of Gandhi as the embodiment of sacrifice, love, and compassion, whose sharing, caring and adherence to truth was exemplified by such other spiritual luminaries as Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Mohammad, Harishchandra and Rantidev etc. The second group does not appear to be impressed with the ballad singer's telling of story, while the first group welcomes it joyfully.

The ballad singer leads them to the presence of the woman head 'Mother' from a nearby Gandhi Ashram where a prayer is in progress. Children become absorbed and want to know her experiences. She leads them through four-five episodes from nonviolent political action for freedom under Gandhi. Gandhi's giving up of costly dress and taking to loincloth, bringing in to his house an untouchable girl disregarding opposition from his sister, evoke enthusiastic responses from the children.

Many of the children did not know that while the nation was celebrating Independence from British rule on 15th August 1947 Gandhi was away in strife-torn Calcutta observing fast and praying in the house of a Muslim in order to bring in peace in all troubled hearts irrespective of religion. In the midst of this narration by the Mother, a few children of the indifferent group are not able to hold back their tears at their ignorance about Mahatma Gandhi's life and particularly his love of children and down-trodden, and his spirit of sacrifice. They are grateful to the ballad singer and others who took them to the presence of the Mother who had the patience to tell them about the Mahatma.

It was an interesting way of telling the young the Gandhi story. Dr. Radhakrishnan wished that I could have stayed longer to watch one of the performances. He was a founding member of Rangaprabhat established 36 years ago. He now served as a trustee and a consultant to the company.

Employment for Women

As the rain stopped, Sister Mythili appeared on the scene. I was amused to see her outside the cottage dismounting a moped. She had hastily disappeared to ensure that children were not outside on the school grounds and were protected from the storm and rain that had by then stopped. On return, she wondered if Dr. Radhakrishnan had shown me her small-scale NGO project on employment creation for local women. Her intense energy to manage the activities that were going all around seemed infectious. With pride, she told us how she started this women employment creation project a couple of years ago single-handedly. She had succeeded in interesting local medical technology firms and public authorities to help set up two medical technology manufacturing units on the Vidypeeth property. Fifty women with little education were now gainfully employed in semi-skilled jobs in the adjoining building.

Dr. Radhakrishnan took me to the nearby three-storied building. The projects provided employment in high-level clean rooms involving the assembly of medical kits. We saw through the glass windows women in green uniforms, heads covered by caps, their hands in plastic gloves assembling plugs and plastic tubes to small plastic pouches used in local hospitals for storing blood for transfusion. On another project, women were assembling micro parts for valves that are used in heart surgery. It was a meticulous work which required high level of dexterity and hygiene. Profits from both projects were plowed back into the Ramachandaran Foundation Trust. This was to support its wide-ranging children and women welfare activities.

As the rain had stopped, we took leave of Sister Mythili congratulating her on her great school and the innovative women employment enterprise. Dr. Radhakrishnan dropped me at the hotel.

Invitation to speak to Shanti Sainiks

Next morning it was Saturday. Only engagement that I had was in the afternoon to meet with a group of students from a teacher training college. Radhakrishnan described them as his potential recruits for *Shanti Sena* peace activists. In typical Radhakrishnan way, he again sprang a surprise at me, this time asking if I could prepare something appropriate to speak on Gandhi to these young men and women that afternoon. By now I had figured out that to bring out authentic from his guest, he gave them the shortest possible notice when it came to speak before an audience. I had come here to learn about Gandhi, and Dr. Radhakrishnan had been reversing the roles. Last evening, he had put me in front of a large audience to speak to them about the civil society campaign in Canada about the Department/Ministry of Peace that I was part of. This time he asked me if I could speak to the graduating class of young teachers about Mahatma Gandhi. I was bemused at his tactic. He smiled, "anything on Gandhiji you can think of would be right for the occasion."

As I had free morning, I decided to take a walk by the nearby beach. I thought the walk might help to clear my head to select a topic for my keynote. The red sandy Shanghumugham Beach on the west coast of Arabian Sea was quite empty. A few fishing boats moored on the red sand in the late morning sun, their pointed hulls facing out, seemed longingly waiting to join the others who had already left on their fishing expeditions for the day.

The memories from my 1991 trip to Kanyakumari and Trivandrum were still fresh in my mind. In January 1991, facing the same waters I was reminded of Swami Vivekananda's decision to go to the West to spread Vedantic message of Unity of Faiths and his powerful message to the youth of India to serve the poor. Now I was thinking of Dr. Radhakrishnan's young graduating teachers of tomorrow.

Youth Training and Shanti Sena: Another perspective

I had been introduced to the idea of Gandhi's *Shanti Sena*, at Gandhigram University in Madurai. Here in Dr. Radhakrishnan I had met someone who under the tutelage of his mentor at

Gandhigram had been responsible for actualizing the concept. He was putting it successfully into action to develop a disciplined group of youngsters who would be able to serve the rural community as part of their education. An activity that started with Dr. Ramachandran was noticed by other visitors to GRI such as economist E.F. Schumacher and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. They saw in Ramchandaran's effort Gandhi's vision. Freedom fighter Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan in his rare trip when freed from prison in Pakistan to visit India in 1969, at the sight of Gandhigram Rural Institute students being trained as nonviolent peace soldiers was deeply touched. Dr. Radhakrishnan remarked that he would never forget what Gaffar Khan said while taking the salute of *Shanti Sena*: "My *eyes* water when I see you. You are the real children of God." Those powerful words from Abdul Gaffar Khan became Radhakrishnan's inspiration to be actively involved with the work on the nonviolent peace army movement across India and abroad.

When I asked him what he thought of the present day Gandhigram Rural Institute, now a Gandhi Rural University, he was reluctant. At the inception of Shanti Sena in GRI, every student had to join *Shanti Sena*. It was part of the curriculum. This continued till 1977. Then the enrollment to this activity was made optional, giving every one choice to pick the subjects of their choice. Making that training optional was contrary to the basic concept. Radhakrishnan remarked, "Once that happened a sharp decline began in the student enrollment for the program, both staff participation and quality of training given went on deteriorating."

Radhakrishnan's view was that changes that were taking place at GRI were natural as it was no different than what had happened to other entities that were founded by charismatic personalities. On their founders' passing away, the dynamic inspiration got muted. He mentioned the Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Shanti Niketan* and Mahatma Gandhi's Wardha *Sevagram* ashram as two examples, which were suffering the similar fate. These were now much different institutions than the ones created by their appealing founding fathers.

At Shanghumugham Beach, I looked westwards towards the open blue ocean. It was divided at the horizon by a clear sky; the breaking waves of water would splash on to the red sandy beach and withdraw back into the sea. Watching this, the theme for the afternoon speech dawned on me. I had been carrying a draft paper examining the origins of Gandhi's nonviolence philosophy, and while travelling around working on it on my train and plane travels. I decided that paper would form the basis of my speech next day.

Surprise Valedictory Speaker

The Kerala Hindi Prachar Sabha campus where I was to speak in the afternoon is located in the North Thiruvananthapuram. As we were taken into the big auditorium, in front of me sat around two hundred attentive young men and women—men in their white *Lungis* and women in their traditional white *Saris*.

Dr. Radhakrishnan whispered that I would be requested by the organizers at the end of my speech to distribute Diplomas to these graduating students. For the first time, I realized that I was the main guest for the valedictory meeting of the graduating class. The diplomas were for having completed fluency in Hindi for their Bachelors in Education degrees. While we were waiting for other guests to arrive, Dr Radhakrishnan explained that he saw in these young people a great potential as leaders of tomorrow who would be serving in Indian villages. They were the ones who were to create at grassroots level new ways of mediating conflict with a view to prevention of violence and ultimate reconciliation among the disputing parties. It was the rural conflicts arising out of caste and religious animosities which often caused setback to growth in rural areas in cultural and economic terms.

Suddenly, the Principal of the College came up on the stage to put a silk shawl around my shoulders. He said that my presence would greatly encourage the teachers of tomorrow, and the students were looking forward to my speech. Reminding me of the local ways, he requested that I should keep the hand woven shawl on my shoulder while delivering my valedictory address, especially when I am handing out the diplomas to the new graduates.

Dr. Radhakrishnan stood up to introduce me. I was getting used to his effusive introductions. This time he spoke about my being born in India and having lived in Canada for the past four decades, my academic qualifications, work background, publications, and even my present position as a Senior Fellow at the University of Ottawa. For the speech, not knowing that my audience was graduating in Hindi, I had prepared a text in English. Had I known the occasion I would have tried to do that in Hindi as I knew the language quite well.

Understanding Gandhi's *Ahimsa*

I stood up and decided to start with a broad-brush introduction in Hindi about my being from a Sindhi speaking family, that I was born in Lahore, which was now in Pakistan's Province of Punjab, and about my growing up in Delhi. This gave me a lead into speaking on the use of knowing many languages in today's world, in addition to one's mother tongue. It also gave me an opportunity to briefly touch upon the bilingual and multicultural character of Canada. Then making apologies for not having my speech in Hindi on Gandhi's teachings, I proceeded into the English text of my address. It was based largely on my reflections on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's *Autobiography*, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* published in 1926. In my presentation I sought answer to the question: "Was Gandhi a personification of Indian traditions to whom nonviolence came natural and was inevitable?" (Annex A for the text of the speech).

At the end of my address as I returned to my seat, Dr. Radhakrishnan pressed my hand. He had an impish smile. Winking at me with both eyes, he gently remarked: "It was a good speech, and the right one." I was glad of his reassuring comment.

The Trivandrum visit had proven to be gratifying having met Dr. Radhakrishnan and witnessing his peace colleagues' work who carried out the Gandhian message in many different ways: peace education, training of peace brigade, and employment creation for unskilled women. Actualizing Gandhi, Dr. Radhakrishnan was seeking to become one of his mentor's personifications.

4

Vijay Tendulkar
An Activist Playwright

"Gandhi was a man much more difficult to be laid on a dissecting table than many others of his stature. Too many contradictions. But a genuine man. Definitely not a Mahatma. A life size character with confusing characteristics. And of course a charisma which changed the lives of many formidables like the Sardar. You like him and you do not like him - both at the same time."

On my way back from Southern India, I had a meeting in Mumbai with the prominent Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar. I had known Mr. Tendulkar since 1991, having collaborated with him on his work *Safar* that I translated and adapted into English, entitled, *The Cyclist.* It was produced by BBC World Service in 2000, and its North American adaption was staged later by Maya Theatre in Toronto. This led to yet another project where both of us worked on a book of his two plays in English, *The Cyclist and His Fifth Woman*, for the Oxford University Press (India). The book was released a couple of weeks before my arrival in India.

Mr. Tendulkar had written a number of award winning plays, novels, screenplays, and short stories. In the early 1990s, his screenplay for a Ketan Mehta film, *Sardar* was critically acclaimed. It was about the life of veteran Gujarati freedom fighter Sardar Vallabhai Patel who became India's first Home Minister in 1947. Tendulkar had done considerable research on the pre-Independence period for the film script. In his introduction he writes that he was "virtually hypnotized by the multifaceted and most complex relationships between the three greats of that period, Gandhi, Nehru and Sardar".

I dropped one evening at his apartment in East Villeparle for his views on a number of topics, these ranged from Gandhi, India's Partition, and for an insight on violence in his writings. Tendulkar had grown up as a teenage youth during the period of the Independence struggle.

Since we last met four years ago, his hair had turned snow white. At 78, that was to be expected, however there were no wrinkles on his face. In that short period, personal tragedies had struck him, most recently the death of his wife and his two talented adult children. Despite these tragedies, Tendulkar had been always stoic about adversity - an attitude to face and judge life with blunt fearlessness that he described comes to him from being rooted in his reality. His eyes had a sly sparkle, confirming his cynical optimism.

I asked him what he thought about Mahatma Gandhi? His reply was succinct.

> Gandhi was a man much more difficult to be laid on a dissecting table than many others of his stature. Too many contradictions. But a genuine man. Definitely not a Mahatma. A life size character with confusing characteristics. And of course a charisma which changed the lives of many formidables like the Sardar. You like him and you do not like him—both at the same time.

I noted that Tendulkar chose his words carefully. On the question about why Gandhi was adamantly opposed to the partitioning of British India, Tendulkar paused, then emphatically added, "He was the only one among these three (Gandhi, Nehru and Patel), who could foresee the impending tragedy that awaited the Partition of the country. As such, he opposed the offer made by the British in the Paragraph 19 during the negotiations for India's Independence."

I recalled Tendulkar's Sardar script which pointed that as a consequence of acceptance of British compromise formula would lead to the tying down of Hindu majority in Assam to Bengal and the Muslim group in the East; and North West Province to join Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan in the Pakistan group in the West. Reacting to this Paragraph, the character

Gandhi in the script is appalled at the way things have evolved. There is solemnity in his voice: "I think this offer stinks. I cannot advise you to accept it." Frustrated and despondent, he leaves the room humiliated by his own, "I admit defeat. (But) I cannot change my advice." (Vijay Tendulkar p.29-30)

Looking in the distance, Tendulkar reflected: "Dead against the partition of the country, Gandhi eventually bowed before the passion for power and wishes of his disciples Nehru and Sardar and the Congress Party in general (except Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan) and allowed the partition to happen. One of the most unplanned, haphazard and disastrous happenings in the history of Man." It is estimated over half a million people lost their lives in the division of the country.

Tendulkar felt that Gandhi disappointed many who wanted him to take principled action. They found it puzzling that Gandhi who had taken fasts unto death for Hindu-Muslim unity would not do the same rejecting such arbitrary partitioning of the subcontinent. "Blending his idealism with practical realities Gandhi felt compelled to accept compromises, including the terms on which the British offered the Independence of the country", Tendulkar noted. "But then that's what Gandhi is—always aware of realities around him. He pulls away when things are not going as per his principles, often letting the pragmatist do their job while disappointing his true followers."

Tendulkar's sadness at the consequences of Partition was reflected in the issues he had taken up publicly in recent years, mainly the neglect of Muslims and the other minorities by the government. He had stood up for the Muslim community in Godhra with other fellow writers and artists when the police and the state government turned blind eye to the massacre of Muslims during the communal riots in Gandhi's native state Gujarat.

On Violence

In one of his moments wanting to engage public on a deeper understanding of their Mahatma, he had in public made a comment that "Gandhi was a violent person." That as one would imagine brought heckles among certain segment of people, one group even wanting to take him to the court for defa-

mation of the "Father of Nation," seeking a public apology from him. He did no such thing but invited those critical of him to come and talk to him on the subject.

A long time student of violence, Tendulkar's plays reveal deep-rooted structural violence emanating from a class and caste based power relationships of Indian society. Gandhi in his film script of Sardar is antithesis of his often violent characters. His portrait of Gandhi is complex.

In Tendulkar's writings, his conflicted characters have a blend of charm and wit with hubris. It is not always a physical act of violence that shows the dramatic figure's aggressive tendency, it is depicted in their indifference, frustration and contempt in relationships to those around them. It is at that level Tendulkar wanted Gandhi admirers to look at the hallowed figure of "Mahatma." The strong urge for nonviolence, *ahimsa*, in Gandhi throughout his life was to channel his inner violence into *ahimsa* by practicing noninjury in thought, words and actions. Gandhi was most sincere about that, Tendulkar said, but others who were close to him had to pay heavy price for that, especially Gandhi's associates and family. The difficult relationship Gandhi had with his wife Kasturba in the early years of their marriage and the distance between him and his children are well documented. Tendulkar's pronouncement about "Gandhi was a violent man" made good headlines for weeks; eventually no one came forward to take his bait to debate his controversial remark.

I asked Tendulkar whether it was realistic to fulfill the Gandhian vision of a nonviolent society. He responded that "not a complete nonviolent society, but less violent is however possible." For that he felt that one needed to focus on individual, seeking answers to key questions: "What are the ways for taking out the anger within us? How to transform especially the violent anger into something positive? These are the questions that must be addressed. We have to make efforts to find ways to channel violence within us in constructive ways."

Then he smiled wryly, "At individual level, I am concerned when people talk about total suppression of anger. It is like prohibition, you try for complete eradication on drinking of al-

cohol and you will see bootlegging and smuggling becoming a thriving business."

He smiled. "If we did not have violence in us, wouldn't we be all vegetables?"

Tendulkar's take on Gandhi was a clinical one. He had lived through Gandhi's time as a youth and seen first-hand in his native province of Maharashtra consequences of upper caste Hindu nationalism that would eventually cost Gandhi his life. He had witnessed immediate outcome of partitioning of the subcontinent in 1947 resulting in political exploitation of issues pertaining to Hindu-Muslim unity, the Harijans' fight for equality, emancipation of Indian women etc. These themes that Gandhi brought up in his various reform campaigns had been pervasive in Tendulkar's writings.

Downplaying his significant body of work and his literary accomplishments, to my question on how was he able to conceive insightful portraits of power obsessed individuals like Sardar, Sakharam Binder or Ghasi Ram Kotwal from different strata and periods of Indian history, he replied, "Neither a historian, nor a sociologist, I don't know how these characters kept on coming to me, perhaps from being always conscious of the social reality that surrounded me."

"What next?" I cursorily asked.

"The urge to write is now diminishing. I do not find a strong drive to create." He was referring to a lack of new writing on his part, though his plays were hugely successful in attracting crowds to the theatre. "I feel a bit sad about it," He wistfully smiled, "but it's also liberating."

(Vijay Tendulkar passed away on March 19, 2008 in Pune).

5
Gandhi Smriti in Pune

It is an interesting play where men and women tend to react differently to the Gandhi character. Women in general consider that Gandhi was an unusually harsh and irresponsible father when it came to dealing with his own family. Had he shown the same love for his eldest son as he demonstrated for the humanity, Harilal would not have gone wayward. Men on the other hand seem more sympathetic to Mahatma Gandhi, admiring his tenacity and strength to hold on to his principles.

Pune is 170 kilometers northwest of Mumbai in the lap of the Western Ghats. Because of its higher elevation (559 meters above the sea level), it is a preferred destination for people from Mumbai, wanting to escape city's pollution on hot humid days. My reason for travel to Pune was to visit the Aga Khan's Palace where Gandhi and his wife Kasturba along with other leaders of Indian National Congress, were imprisoned during the Quit India movement in 1942.

To travel to Pune, I took the state bus from Dadar TT in Mumbai. This was the first time I had been on a state run Volvo air-conditioned bus on an Indian highway. Further surprise was its reasonable price. It took us just two hours on the newly built Pune-Mumbai expressway to reach Pune. Closer to Pune, the panoramic view of the flat-peak mountains of Ghats from the highway is spectacular.

Aga Khan Palace—a Prison and Gandhi Smiriti

Aga Khan's Palace is now named as Kasturba Gandhi Smriti Mandir, an official memorial dedicated to Gandhi's devoted wife and lifelong companion, Kasturbai (affectionately called by

the public as Kasturba, Mother Kastur). The "palace" is an elegant early twentieth century bungalow built in the villa style Portuguese architecture with extensive green lawns on its all four sides surrounding the edifice. The building has large halls of public reception and rooms of high ceilings and deep verandahs. I first saw this historical building in Richard Attenborough's famous biopic, Gandhi, where an important part of the drama of India's Independence struggle is played out in these premises. Gandhi's dedicated secretary Mahadev Desai who was like a son to him died here; a year later followed by Gandhi's wife who fell ill and succumbed on the premises. Due to the British authorities's fears that funeral ceremonies of the deceased if performed outside would create havoc in public, the two cremations were ordered to be held on the property grounds.

Gandhi acknowledged the crucial role his wife played in his life shaping his nonviolent beliefs of *Ahimsa*. In his *Autobiography*, he writes: "what I did in South Africa was but an extension of the rule of *Satyagraha* she practices in her life." Commenting on their stormy relationship in their early years in South Africa, he goes on: "Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand and her quiet submission to my stupidity on the other hand ultimately made me ashamed of myself." (Gandhi, *Autobiography*) Ultimately, Kasturba's fortitude and devotion led to Gandhi's better understanding of nonviolence.

The tragic deaths of Kasturba and Mahadev Desai in the imprisonment are part of the folklore of sacrifices made by Indian leaders and their families during the Independence struggle. Years ago I adapted Ajit Dalvi's play "*Mahatma virudh Gandhi*" for BBC. The most poignant moment of the play is performed in this compound involving a visit by Gandhi's wayward son Harilal who has come to see his mother Kasturba in this place of imprisonment. Harilal ignores him for he considers Gandhi to have neglected his duty as a father and a husband. Gandhi as father in the play never raises his voice, but also never lets his authority be challenged. Kasturba caught between these two adamant personalities is unable to reconcile their opposing values and attitudes. It is an interesting play where men and women react differently to the Gandhi character. Women in general consider that he was

an unusually harsh to his son, an irresponsible person when it came to dealing with his own family. Had he shown the same love for his eldest son that he demonstrated for the humanity, Harilal would not have gone astray dying as a homeless vagrant in a hospital with no one around him. Men on the other hand seem more sympathetic to Mahatma Gandhi, admiring his tenacity and strength to hold on to his humanist principles.

The 'palace' is also one of the seven designated Gandhi National Memorial Museums with some of its rooms kept the way in which the prisoners had to live. Though these rooms are without chains and shackles, they are austere enough to realize the visitor the intense isolation of those who once lived inside.

It is ironical that in Pune where Gandhi and his followers were in imprisonment, around the same time, the most militant Hindu nationalist movement was being created in this city. Under the leadership of Mr. Savarkar, members of his extreme Hindu right wing group from this sleepy town would produce a few years later Gandhi's assassin in the 38-year old fanatic Nathuram Godse. Savarkar and Godse, both Chitpawan Brahmins, had a vision of an India for Hindus only and regarded Gandhi as the arch enemy for his appeasement of minorities and untouchables. Gandhi's regard of Muslims and Harijans as children of the same God equal to the upper-caste Brahmins infuriated them.

There is an unassuming memorial outside in the lawns where Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai are cremated. Amidst the spring flowers, two short columns stand marking their deaths in the compound.

6

A New Generation of Gandhians (I)
P. V. Rajagopal: Champion for Rural Poor and the Landless

...Rajaji had a knack of reaching out to an ordinary villager and explain to him in simple terms the purpose and strategy of the action to be taken, while at the same time he was also able to face up to Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers explain to them in a reasoned way likely consequences of government's inaction.

I arrived in Delhi around Basant festival when the grass on the open lawns around India Gate is mellow green after the winter. Unlike the humid and hot weather of the South India, the weather here was cool, especially in early mornings and evenings. This was the perfect time to be in the Indian capital. I had plans to meet with old friends and acquaintances. These included two well known activists who were involved in championing the causes of poor and marginalized. P.V. Rajagopal was leading a campaign for retrieving land for landless peasants at all India level. Professor

Jeyapragasam in Madurai had arranged a meeting for me with him. The other was Madhu Kishwar, the fiercely independent activist editor of feminist journal Manushi championing rights of city vendors and bicycle rickshaw pullers, the urban poor. I knew her from previous visits to Delhi. There was also a meeting planned with the former Prime Minister Dr. I.K. Gujral before leaving for my final destination further North to Dehradun.

The appointment was made the evening before on the phone as I found out that the place I was staying in South Delhi was a short walk from the Rajagopals home in Friends Colony. On hearing that I was from Canada and a friend of veteran Ottawa

peace activist Murray Thomson, Jill Carr-Harris invited me next morning for a breakfast to meet with her husband P.V. Rajagopal whom she addressed as Rajaji.

Professor Jeyapragsam in Madurai had described Rajagopals as a couple committed to Gandhian ideals. They would inform me in detail about their unique movement, *Ekta Parishad* (the Unity Forum). The Ekta Parishad worked with the rural poor, focusing upon the plight of India's indigenous *Adivasi* tribals.

Ekta Parishad

Ekta Parishad (the Unity Forum) was created in 1990 with its aim to galvanize activities of civil society groups involved in "reversing the situation to get the rights of the poor in rural India". Described as the people based movement by its founders, the *Parishad* was committed to Gandhian principles of nonviolent action "to help India's most marginalized communities gain control over their livelihood resources such as land, water, and forest". Their civil protests were not only against the Government of India but challenged also international funding organizations. The World Bank in recent years had funded many State Forestry Protection projects across India. These projects were aimed at protection of dwindling natural resources and conservation of wildlife and bio-diversity from exploitation. Due to lack of foresight, these projects however had led to removal of forest dwelling Adivasis from their habitat as well as depriving them of their livelihood. The *Adivasi* relied heavily for food on the same forests.

One *Parishad* member at CESCI facility in Madurai on hearing my intent to meet with their leader, raising her fist in the air had shouted "*Jal, Jungel, aur Jamin Hamara*" (rightful water, forest and land are ours). "This is our *Ekta Parishad* slogan," she had enthusiastically remarked. I was touched by the directness and simplicity of the slogan.

There are not many leaders left with the same zeal for Gandhian ideals like Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, and G. Ramachandaran in the past. Most from that generation, now respected men are now limited to giving lectures and seminars trying to keep Gandhi's memory alive. People like P.V. Rajgopal were

among the very few I met who had chosen to work at grassroots, spending time with the poor, passionately advocating their cause.

I met Rajagopals in their modest living room. Rajagopal would be in his forties. His youthful charismatic face reflected confidence and optimism. He had returned late last night from Kerala where he had been to visit his ailing mother. Jill, born in Canada, had moved to India many years ago. While she worked closely with her husband on Ekta Parishad movement, she also headed a NGO called LEAD involved in environment and development work.

Professor Jeyapragasam in Madurai had said that unlike most other leaders Rajaji had a knack of reaching out to an ordinary villager and explain to him in simple terms the purpose and strategy of the action to be taken, while at the same time he was also able to face up to Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers explain to them in a reasoned way likely consequences of government's inaction.

Poor and Landless of India

Rajagopal pointed out that the problem of the landless poor continued to persist sixty years after Independence because of the half-hearted way in which the successive governments had dealt with these reforms. The Land Ceiling Act had been introduced, but due to a lack of enthusiasm in the government, about million acres of land had not been brought under this Act. Even the distribution of hundreds of thousands of acres of the donated land that was offered to Vinoba Bhave during his peace marches in the 1950s and the 1960s, remained largely undistributed. When any land was given to the poor, it was barren and rocky where no crop could be grown. Wherever the donated land happened to be fertile, children of the former landlords refused to move from the territory threatening the lower castes with violence. According to Rajagopal, in both legislation and its enforcement, the system had failed to consider land reform as a priority. The rising number of suicides of farmers in different parts of India pointed to growing frustration.

Lately, a realization had dawned in government circles that such neglect might be benefitting the violent Naxalite revolutionaries who were beginning to gain support among impover-

ished peasants in many Indian States. It was feared that this disfranchised class might adopt violent means to vent their frustration. Due to the success of militant Maoist rebels in Nepal in recent years, one heard that the government was actively looking at measures aimed at averting the possibility of development of a violent corridor, the so-called arc the poor states formed from Bihar in the North to Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. The *Ekta Parishad* in these developments had seen an opportunity to bring the government and the peasantry face to face to help resolve the human rights issues involved within the existing democratic institutional framework.

Grass-roots Nonviolent Political Action

Explaining the logic of nonviolence as the backbone of *Ekta Parishad*, Rajagopal said that the space for nonviolent championing of human rights must grow in India. He was adamant that a failure on the part of the government to help in creating such political space could be the biggest mistake on its part. He believed that there were presently democratic nonviolent movements and there were violent movements in the country. "It was however mainly due to nonviolent movements like *Ekta Parishad* that violence had remained checked or had at least slowed down. The simple logic of it all," Rajagopal concluded, "when the problems are solved, the violence does not spread."

On Rajagopal's commitment to Gandhian philosophy, an observer Helena Drakakis, author of *Truth Force: The Land Rights Movement in India*, who watched him closely at Parishad's peaceful protests describes him as follows:

> Later that afternoon we left Kawardha. Rajagopal, weak from fasting, contemplated: 'You know in Pandaria there were conflicts. Some people wanted to block the car of the District Collector and I said no. They said I was too much of a Gandhian and they left. They wanted me to act like a Marxist but when people shouted "Down with that guy." I stopped them immediately and said, "No, not down with. You can shout *Zindabad*! No problem, but *down with that guy* is not acceptable. Someone gave a speech the other day and

> said, "If Rajagopal permits us we will use the gun". So I told him, "Go to an organization where guns are used. I'm not stopping you, but if you are part of *Ekta Parishad* then such statements have no place here". What I am trying to explore is how much one can demand from oneself in order to create a different model." (Drakakis p.44)

Over the past decade, using such Gandhian nonviolent approach, *Ekta Parishad* had made inroads into the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, and more recently in Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. These were states with large segments of Adivasis and tenant farmers. There had been rise in violent acts in these districts.

The Wildlife Protection Act and the Forest Conservation Act were meant to safeguard the domicile rights of the indigenous population and where this was not possible compensation and rehabilitation was to be awarded. The Unity Forum found that in many cases, the villagers were still waiting for the promised compensation to be settled or paid. Most families were repeatedly moved from the hill tops to the plains into uncultivable land. Not only this, their tools had been confiscated; huts burnt; and men had been badly beaten; the community felt relentlessly under siege (Drakakis, p. 9).

A Gandhian Strategist

Ekta Parishad's grassroots presence was in 4,000 villages in 60 districts across India, The area covered a population of about 5 million people. Its financial support came from each member paying a modest annual membership fee of ten Rupees. A committee guided the Unity Forum activities in each state where it had presence. I was told that the organization had country wide 300 social activists, men and women, who mainly came from villages and deeply devoted to community development work in their neighborhoods. Unlike other political organizations the *Parishad* had unusual 50% women membership.

It had mapped out a plan of action over the next 22 months, the goal being that in case the Government of India failed to resolve the land issue, the Unity Forum would launch a massive

public campaign on 2nd October 2007, birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. In tradition of Mahatma Gandhi, a peoples' foot march of 25,000 representing millions of poor would start from the city of Gwalior in Central India to the capital demanding the 'land, water and forestry' rights of the rural poor. The Unity Forum's partner organizations were already at work in mobilizing their members and public opinion for the march at national and international level.

Rajaji pointed out that the government's 'trickle down economy' approach was not helping those who depended upon land for their sustenance and lived in villages. "The economic growth models of the government policy makers are America and Europe, where only 2 to 3% are involved in cultivation. This model could never fit a country where 70% of the population still depended on agriculture and lived in rural areas. Trying to promote agriculture as an industry, by transferring farm into industry was a mistake on the part of the government and must be stopped."

Rajagopal wanted government to implement the Land Ceiling Act in a strict manner; only after having done so, if more land was needed, the land ceiling should be brought down. Consistent with traditional farming, these views were seeped in the principles of Gandhian economics seeking India to become a Sarvodaya society, a decentralized autonomous republic of villages. He felt that when everyone in India's villages worked on farm, it would become a base for family employment, generating job and food security for everybody in the unit.

Ekta Parishad had organized national level consultations with the Central government in January in Delhi and an international consultation in February in Bangkok. Rajagopal was hopeful that a resolution would be found before the October 2007 deadline they had given to the government, thereby annulling the need for a citizen's march to Delhi. The Government Planning Commission had agreed in principle to the need for consultations, calling the Unity Forum and other land movements in the country to collaborate so that proposed deliberations might be feasible in the near future.

Rajagopal in many ways reminded me of Radhakrishnan whom I had met in Thrivuananthapuram. The two hailed from

the southern most Kerala State, Though Rajagopal was younger by almost a generation, and due to his training in performing arts he had proven to be an effective communicator using for example theatre as an instrument of role-play in empowerment of *Ekta Parishad*'s grass-roots constituents. Though he was educated as a technologist at agriculture training college, Rajagopal was also a classical Kathakali dancer where in *guru-shishya* tradition he had learnt the value of discipline that is valuable in *Satyagraha* political action. Both Rajaji and Radhakrishnan were children of Gandhian freedom fighter parents. Rajagopal was mentored under Gandhian leaders like Dr. Subba Rao, the latter spent years with Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan in the Bhoodan movement. As young man Rajagopal had been involved as a member of a mediating team led by Subba Rao in the Chambal region seeking dacoits to put their arms peacefully. Rajagopal had an empathetic charisma. An *Ekta Parishad* worker at the CESCI campus in Madurai had remarked about Rajaji with pride: "He is our Gandhi."

Having met Rajagopal, I felt optimistic about the future of Gandhian grassroots activism. He inspired in me a hope about the positive outcome from Ekta Parishad's relentless efforts for landless peasants of India.

7

A New Generation of Gandhians (II)
Journalist Madhu Kishwar: Clean Governance and Urban Poor

Her admiration for Gandhi stems not from any dogmatic following of Gandhian thoughts, but looking at Gandhian paradigm of unending search for absolute truth that Gandhi pursued through nonviolence...Mahatma Gandhi to her was one of the most resourceful reformers who instinctively understood the ingenious potential of many of Indian traditions and values, proving that there was no end to creativity for peaceful solutions.

I had known Madhu Kishwar, the founding editor and publisher of Manushi, for over a decade. This was mainly as a contributing writer for her pioneer bi-monthly magazine. Manushi started in 1979 as a "journal of women and society" aiming to bridge the gap between scholarly academic writing and popular literature. It was the first magazine of its kind in India to become an instrument to inform, mobilize and empower women as well as to serve as a forum for discussion of societal issues facing women.

While traveling through India in 1989, I recall coming across an issue of Manushi in a bookshop on a stall at a railway station. Browsing through the magazine, I was struck by the absence of commercial advertisements in it. The articles dealing with domestic violence, rape, dowry, sexual harassment, inheritance rights, and reservation of seats for women in legislatures etc, showed a journal with courage and an independent spirit. Some of the above themes later got crystallized into Manushi's political campaigns, subsequently co-opted by mainstream political parties into their platforms, eventually leading to the establish-

ment, for example, a Minister for Women Affairs and a pioneer Department/ Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Development within the Central government. Over the years the Women's Ministry resulted in several progressive legislations to help women protect themselves from a wide range of inequities and abuse resulting from moribund tradition.

For easy-reading, the magazine also contained poetry, short stories, photographs, cartoons, and sketches. This was to make Manushi accessible to an ordinary reader. I submitted my first short story, *The Chai Bagaan Express* to Manushi in 1990, I was not sure if it would be accepted coming from a male contributor. I was surprised to see it appear in the magazine a year later. It was a coming of age story of a teenage girl set in the tea estates of North Bengal. Since then, Kishwar published seven short stories of mine. As a short fiction writer I came to realize there were two unwritten rules Kishwar applied to the selection of material. Irrespective of gender of the writer, these were: one, that the submission must be grounded in Indian social reality; and two, the piece had to have a woman perspective either as a subject or as a narrator.

Living abroad, Manushi became a unique window for me on India. Its content pointed out that modernization could not be just imported from Europe or America; it had to be indigenous grounded in local mores and values. In this, the magazine created much needed space through its reports and analytical articles reflecting the issues and trends arising from social and political pressures in India as well as abroad. This was much different from the usual commercial women's magazine that spent most of their glossy paper on glamour, cooking recipes, fashion, and Bollywood etc. The Manushi contributions on the other hand included first hand experiences of women in crisis and cutting-edge perspectives on gender relationships covered from the vantage point of class, caste, language, religion, and politics. These articles were evidence-based and tended to provide thoughtful constructive alternatives and options.

The Manushi office since we last met, seven years ago, had moved to the Civil Lines. Having most of my friends and relatives live in South Delhi, it had been long since I visited North-

ern part of the city. Its new neighbourhood impressed me. Just around the corner, there was new underground Metro station of Civil Lines. It was the first station north of the modern Kashmiri Gate Metro hub, making the office more accessible. The ground floor office was spacious; it was modest but tastefully decorated and organized. It had a staff of three, larger than I had seen in my previous visits.

The link with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi University area had also helped periodical's profile enabling Kishwar to broaden its mandate. An agenda of activity had steadily grown around her in the last few years. In addition to her Manushi Trust, she had created other organizations like Manushi Sangathan to deal on ground with pressing social concerns such as the plight of urban marginalized and poor, e.g. the human and economic rights of cycle rickshaw pullers and street vendors who were being victimized through a systemic corruption emanating from a nexus of corrupt officials, police, and politicians who had let the criminal gangs in the capital made life miserable for the small pavement traders.

From Manushi to Manushi Sangathan

Madhu Kishwar looked harried that afternoon. Her combed back black hair made her forehead looked larger, her small stubborn chin on her round face showed her usual determination.

Kishwar had always the indomitable spirit in her to extend beyond just bringing out a journal. In 1984, following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard, there were anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. A political mob engineered by the members of ruling party together with local goons had gone on a rampage looting, burning and killing innocent Sikh citizens, mainly those living in poor communities. Manushi had just started. Kishwar joined a group of volunteers *Nagrik Ekta Manch* (Citizens United Front) to defend the victims in her neighbourhood. She decided to interview and record statements of the victims. Subsequently, these interviews were published in her journal. When recently the government set up the Nanavati Commission to investigate 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Kishwar did not hesitate to be one of the public witnesses in

recalling the events of burning and rape she had witnessed and were available as in the pages of Manushi.

In our correspondence, Kishwar had mentioned that when I come next to India, she would like to know more about my work on the campaign for a Ministry for Peace in Canada. As we sat in her office, I noticed that she still had that informal approach her eyes fixed forward facing her visitor attentively. There was no office desk distancing herself from the visitor.

Reacting to my description of the political campaign on need for creation of a Department of Peace in Canada, she thought I was fortunate to be living in a country where one could explore the possibility of establishing such an alternative. I explained the need for strategic focus for systematic peace building within Governments in the 21st century all over the world as a counter-weight to Ministries with war-fighting focus. Citizens in over twenty countries were seeking a similar focus to develop culture of peace and nonviolence in the machinery of government. However, the problem of injecting an innovative policy idea into a massive bureaucracy was an uphill task. In a democracy, ultimately it came down to mobilizing the electorate so that politicians and government were unable to ignore their demands.

Goddess Swacha Narayani

By the wall in her office there was an unusual object that I had missed in my previous visits. It was a life size statue of an Indian goddess with multiple arms on the floor, gazing me in my face. The large statue painted in bright earthy colours of red, green, and yellow radiated energy around it. Kishwar said that it was the Goddess she and her group of volunteers had created for inspiration and blessing. The statue was a hybrid of Hindu goddesses such as Durga, Saraswati, and Lakshmi. In this case, the name given to her was *Swacha Narayni*, the Goddess of Cleanliness. *Swacha Narayni Devi's* did not hold in her hands usual ornaments Indian *Devis* (Godesses) such as a trident, spear, or a musical sitar. Instead this *Devi* held a domestic broom. The ornaments in her multiple arms showed multi-tasking traits that most women practice in their day-to-day li-

fe. Those arms held in addition to the broom, a clock, a coin, a weighing balance, a video camera, an earthen lamp, an account book, a pen, a conch shell, a stalk of barley. Each symbolized in this for the Goddess of Cleanliness a role and purpose.

Swacha Narayani's no nonsense gaze made it clear that cleaning one's physical environment should be a duty of every citizen, but the most urgently needed task was cleansing a system of governance from corruption and red-tape. It was clear that the Goddess meant business. Manushi's citizen campaigns are aimed at removal of corruption and abuse of power that required constant vigilance and scrutiny. The Goddess stood in a lotus flower to convey how its followers were attempting to create beauty out of squalor. It was obvious that a great deal of thought had gone into the creation of this colourful statue.

The Goddess, Kishwar said, had evolved out of Manushi's work in recent years to protect street vendors from routine human rights abuses and humiliations. Stories about assaults on their livelihood and extortion rackets involving bureaucrats and police legitimized by archaic laws were commonly known. The broom deity had made her entry on a vendor's cart in March of 2001 in the vendor's unity pilot project in the Seva Nagar neighbourhood. For their project meetings, Kishwar and her supporters would start the project with the practice of worshipping with all the rituals that go with the worship of regular Hindu deities.

In her blog on the subject, Kishwar writes how the Goddess installation provided "tremendous morale boost for the terrorized vendors. Call it coincidence or a miracle; things started improving rapidly after Devi positioned herself in Seva Nagar market on March 12th..." She adds that while "our goddess has Durga like ability to battle tyrants, none of the weapons and symbols associated with her have violent or bloody overtones." While the foremost symbol of *Swachha Narayani* is the broom representing her creative energy to cleanse wrongdoing, "she was to be as much the goddess of self discipline—the power of the individual as a member of a group to create order and withstand chaos."

This creative approach reminded one of the simple traditional symbols and images Mahatma Gandhi used to come up with in his strategies to involve citizenry in political action. He

often said that unlike violent means, nonviolent ingenuity provided one with infinite creative options to resolve any problem. Kishwar said that something that had started as helping the Seva Nagar street vendors from corrupt bureaucrats and police had now become a full-fledged national level 'Swacha Narayani Clean Governance' civil society movement. Persistent efforts of Manushi Sangathan organization had led to a Memorandum of Understanding signed with Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

A major breakthrough happened at the national policy level when due to the widely acknowledged success of the Seva Nagar project, the Government of India's Ministry of Urban Development asked Kishwar to provide a role model for the rest of India. Only persons who were unhappy with the project were those police and Municipal Corporation inspectors who were used to bribes to supplement their income. On a much higher level, the problem pointed to elitist nature of economic liberalization and reforms benefiting mainly the organized and corporate sectors, and not the vast majority of self-employed sections in the informal sector who constitute more than 90 per cent of work force in India.

As a nonpartisan activist, while Manushi focus had been on assisting the urban weak and the underprivileged, Kishwar's analytical and investigative approach which came from her training as a diligent journalist went to the systemic core of the issue that entailed research and a deeper understanding of the problem. In this, she avoided setting adversarial relationships that might divert attention from the problem. She had been successful in bringing to the table key stakeholders and then through Manushi's diligent investigative research and mediation effectively transformed the conflict into a positive discourse where often everyone benefited from new insights gained.

Gandhi and Women

There has been considerable writing by Kishwar and her other contributors on Mahatma Gandhi in Manushi. In 1986, one of the books she authored was entitled, "*Gandhi and Women.*" Her admiration for Gandhi stemed not from any dogmatic following of Gandhian thoughts, but looking at Gandhian paradigm of unending

search for absolute truth that Gandhi pursued through nonviolence. She believed that India inherited a tradition as exemplified by leaders such as Gandhi where one did not have to accept every word and verse as divinely inspired, it had to conform to reason and moral sense. Mahatma Gandhi to her was one of the most resourceful reformers who instinctively understood the ingenious potential of many of our traditions and values, proving that there was no end to creativity for peaceful solutions.

Kishwar did not like to be labelled under any 'ism' or ideology whether a feminist or a Gandhian. Soon after Manushi came into existence, for her it was not words but the deeds that counted. In her Lajpat Nagar office, in those early years there was a lineup of women bringing to the Manushi office their problems that ranged from bride burning, harassment, beating, rape etc. In this, women's welfare legislation by itself was not sufficient for her as she was equally concerned about its abuse through bogus allegations and corrupt police force and inefficient law machinery. In battling for women's rights, she was known for looking at the perspective from her opponent's viewpoint which made her often a credible spokesperson for the victim as well as with those accused of perpetrating violence.

Rising to leave, I had one last look at the statue of Swacha Narayani Devi. I couldn't resist commenting, "You know that *Devi* reminds me of you." Kishwar was taken aback at the remark. "Me?" I said, "The fire in Swacha Narayani's face, that's what reminds me of you." She quickly retorted, "We all have that fire." She was saying that all of us had that fire of social activism within, waiting to be lit. In one of her columns on Gandhi's birthday, Kishwar had challenged those who considered themselves as Gandhians, instead of mere talking about the great man, practice at least one of Mahatma's virtues in their daily life on October 2nd.

For Gandhi, mere thoughts or words were not sufficient, it was the deeds that ultimately counted, and the way in which one performed those actions. Coming out of Manushi office, I felt the same about Madhu Kishwar's work.

8

Dr. I.K. Gujral
A "Refugee" Prime Minister

"Gandhian heritage is now beyond Gandhi's statues, museums and exhibitions. It had now become part of our psyche. The way political conflicts are resolved today in India can be generally described as the Gandhian way —the nonviolent democratic way."

My final meeting in the capital was at the residence of former Prime Minister, Dr. Inder Kumar Gujral. An octogenarian, Dr. Gujral had one of the most interesting backgrounds among Indian politicians. He had lived an extremely active life as a scholar, social activist and a senior civil servant as well as a politician who had served on both sides of the political benches in the Indian Parliament. He had been the leader of world's largest democracy and also as a leader of the opposition. He was born in the Punjab province of Pakistan, in a small town near Lahore. His term as India's Prime Minister from 1997-1998, though brief, was a remarkable one because of the steps taken during that period towards rapprochement with Pakistan.

Gujral's official residence, a large colonial bungalow, was on 5 Janpath, barely 10 minutes distance from Birla House where Mahatma Gandhi spent his last days. We met in his office cum sitting room. A snow white goatee with silvery sideburns and receding hairline marked his long face. It is rather unusual to see an Indian politician with a goatee. He reminded me of a French *savant* of the sixties. Looking distinguished in his steel grey safari suit, he had wiry spectacles with large lens sitting on his thin nose. His relaxed manner put me at ease. Taking a chair by his

desk, he invited me and my cousin who had driven me to the residence to sit on the sofa in front. Two abstract paintings hung on each of the two walls in the office. I recognized one by his brother Satish Gujral, the famous Indian architect and painter.

The meeting was a courtesy call that I was making on behalf of American Professor and colleague, Glenn D. Paige from Hawai'i. Dr. Gujral on reading Paige's book *Nonkilling Global Political Science* (2002) had remarked that it must be taught in every Political Science Department in universities.

I asked Dr. Gujral what he thought about the place and relevance of Mahatma Gandhi on the subcontinent in the 21st Century? He replied that as far as India was concerned, "Gandhian heritage is now beyond Gandhi's statues, museums and exhibitions. It had now become part of our psyche. The way political conflicts are resolved today in India can be generally described as the Gandhian way—the nonviolent democratic way."

He told the story of his beginning as a MP in the Indian Parliament.

> In my first speech as Prime Minister to the House, I began with the words that 'I am a Refugee.' I said I am surprised that a Refugee had been chosen to be a Prime Minister. I had come here without a penny, starting in this country like many refugees empty handed on a railway platform. Eventually, made my life through hard work to where I am.

It seemed his personal story had relevance to our conversation.

> My parents were non-political. They both went to jail during the freedom struggle. My mother as they say went overnight 'from veil to jail'. My lawyer father put on homespun *Khadi* clothes to join Gandhiji. Friends began asking him why he was giving up all for a half-naked fakir, a crank who is wanting to take on the British Empire for a fistful of salt... Gandhi ji's search for Truth in which we all joined him demanded discernment, tolerance, respect for diversity while aspiring for unity. It was not just national unity, but a plea for the unity of spirit that cut across race, religion, and gender.

Looking for an illustration of Gandhian ethos in public psyche, he remembered a recent incident in the Lok Sabha, the Indian Parliament. "Advani ji" (the Opposition Bhartiya Janata Party leader L.K. Advani, who was born in Pakistan) in a parliamentary debate recently was heckled by another MP who called him a "refugee." That created furor in the house, almost all the members of the House were asking the MP to apologize for his inappropriate language. Those MPs who were seeking apology were not from Advani ji's own party, but from other parties. That's Gandhian."

He continued: "Gandhi fought superstition and always looked for a rational solution. His experiments with himself and with others were open-ended, trying to find truth and then to seek nonviolent means to resolve that issue. The Gandhian way teaches us about value of diversity and respect of human beings. Gandhi never wanted a cult to develop around him."

I wanted him to elaborate on his comment about "cult" as I thought he was implying that on the other side of the border in India's neighbouring countries politics had been transformed into dogmatism. He carefully studied me for a moment as if wondering how far he should go with his explanation. "Let's go back to the time of creation of India and Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah on his first visit to Dacca defines Pakistan to be 'One Nation, One Religion, and One Language,' that one language as we all know was Urdu. That was the day seeds for a separate Bangladesh were sown in East Pakistan." The statement was made calmly. Checking whether I was paying attention, he added. "Now look at India around the same time. The most secessionist State in India at that time was Tamil-speaking in the South. Its leaders felt that once Hindi would become the national language, the country would be dominated and absorbed by North. When in the Parliament, a MP from the South raised the idea of Tamil as the national language, Prime Minister Nehru replied 'why Tamil only, it should be English, Hindi and Tamil; ultimately 14 languages became country's officially recognized languages. That sort of flexibility, adjustment, consensus building are part of India's Gandhian tradition of mutual respect and accommodation." Currently, the number of officially recognized languages in India is 22.

He came back with another illustration of pluralism in action in India, that of Hindu-Muslim riots that took place in Godhra a couple of years ago. "The Gujarat riots ashamed Indians. The commission headed by an independent justice looked at the matter to find out the truth. The conclusions identified the culprits and cleared the air. The two communities realized that it was something between brothers in family. Muslims are integral part of India, and equal partners in Indian experiment in all fields of life."

I noticed he used the words "Indian experiment in all fields of life". Gandhi had used the same language. He continued with the theme of communal harmony in India. "This may often take long to see results to correct distrust after a communal riot, but Indian way is to seek political resolution. Gandhi wanted a consensus-based democracy, as that was the nonviolent way to practice politics. He opted for parliamentary democracy as the next best because democracy means essentially finding (non-violent) ways to bring peace in politics."

When Gujral became Prime Minister in 1997, 'people to people' contacts between India and Pakistan were among his first initiatives. That year marked a beginning of exchange of delegations of writers, journalists, and artists between the two countries. The trend over the past decade has continued with similar exchanges led by businessmen, politicians, and even sports personalities, mainly cricket teams playing on Indian and Pakistani grounds.

As Dr. Gujral walked us towards the veranda of his residence to bid goodbye, I thought it was a nice way to end my visit to New-Delhi calling on this most educated "refugee" Prime Minister of India.

9

Dr. Dhirendra Sharma
A maverick philosopher

I felt a conceptual dissonance between Dhirendra's aversion to nuclear weapons and military waste and championing Gandhi on one hand, and his such unflinching admiration for someone who had made his name earlier as the nation's 'missile builder' defense scientist. How did he reconcile the two?

The railway track ends here. Dehradun is the last station for journeying further into the mountains. North of Dehradun, Bhagvantpur is the village where Professor Sharma moved e with his wife Nirmala from Delhi some years ago. He had insisted that next time when I come to India I visit him in his new abode in the foothills of Himalayas. In Delhi, after his retirement from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), he had set up a Center for Science Policy Research. Among other things, the Center continued to publish a journal, *Philosophy and Social Action,* now in its 31st year. He was also a long-established active member of the Indian Science Journalists Association.

I first met Dhirendra in London through a common friend, late Maurice Goldsmith who championed various causes of science policy in the Whitehall, Commonwealth Secretariat, UNESCO, and other such bodies. The need for policies for science education and technological innovation promotion were Goldsmith's passions, his whole life was dedicated to championing these two causes. In his later years, he published from the Whitehall the *Science and Parliament* journal as its editor.

At one of our meetings in London in 1996 when I told him the story from my young days about a futile year as a Research

Fellow at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, Goldsmith was keen that I met an Indian friend of his, Professor Dhirendra Sharma who was visiting London. Professor Sharma taught at the same institution, the Centre for Studies in Science Policy at the JNU that I had left in frustration in 1972. Professor Sharma had run into his own problems, much serious, with the university. The administration wanted him to stop his political activism. His writings and his social protests critical of government's nuclear energy program where he encouraged his students to be in the front lines were seen contrary to the university's policy. Dhirendra asserted that he was exercising his academic right of freedom. Ultimately, the authorities shut down his Science Policy Centre; though they had to retain him as a faculty member until his retirement.

My first meeting with Dhirendra took place in Grosvenor Square in London over a sandwich lunch. In his fifties, Dhirendra Sharma was dressed casually in a white shirt and grey flannel trousers carrying his lunch in a brown bag that he had picked on the way. It was he who had suggested that instead of my office at the Canadian High Commission, we should sit out in the park for an informal chat while enjoying the mild midday sun. I was impressed by his involvement in the "critical science movement" in India, which acted as a citizens' watchdog on matters of science and technology. A copy of that morning's Washington Post that he was carrying had an article that quoted him lambasting Indian government for its inability to protect vulnerable villagers living near Tarapur nuclear power plant from radiation leakages.

Implication was that if the government was unable to prevent leakages from its civilian power plants, how it could manage a nuclear weapons program that it was determined to continue with. There were not many independent Indian intellectuals I was aware of in those days who were willing to stand up and be counted on the nuclear issue because of fear of being castigated as unpatriotic. Most government scientists not wanting their careers destroyed and to lose their pensioned jobs, toed the official line. Dhirendra on the other hand as an

academic, felt that the truth based on diligent policy research, must be presented to public and politicians.

Professor Sharma had quite a checkered career. After doing his Ph.D. in Indic Philosophy from the University of London in 1961, he returned to India to teach at the new University in Kurakshetra near Delhi. Then doing a brief spell of teaching he decided to leave India, this time to the USA. He found academic atmosphere at Kurakshetra University stifling. The visit to USA was to teach philosophy at Wisconsin University at Madison; then over the decade he found opportunities to work at other American universities: Columbia, New York, Harvard, Hawaii, Berkley, and Michigan State. He described this1962 to 1972 period as his "Vietnam years" when American universities were thriving intellectually with dissenting views and debate.

Back to India in 1972, he had this vision of a teacher who ought to engage students in societal issues. As a science policy professor, the issues pertaining to India's nuclear policy became the focus of his attention. During this period, his three books: *India's Nuclear Estate* (1983), *Scientific Knowledge and Social Imperatives* (1987)) and *India's Nuclear Dissent* (1998) were recognized for their conclusions on the need for political accountability and transparency in the management of nuclear power plants in India. The research motivated him to launch his various anti-nuclear campaigns. Drawing on his American and British experiences of activism, he sought to mobilize students against systemic injustices, getting them to express views through civil society protest movements. These controversial campaigns got his name into newspapers and even in the Indian Parliament.

Since our meeting in London, we had continued to be in touch. I looked forward to our long weekend in the Himalayan foothills wanting to see if his political activism had mellowed down with years, especially his views on India's new nuclear posture. I was interested in his insights into Indian philosophy, especially the new areas of research in Vedantic philosophy and importance of *Ahimsa* in it. In particular, I was curious about his views on Gandhian nonviolence and its roots in Indian tradition. I found his well-researched policy perspective to be refreshingly modern, linked to international scientific developments and methodology.

Sharmas have a large house in the hilly surroundings of Bhagvantpur. It was the couple's love of mountain trekking that made them to move to the Himalayan foothills. They had hiked together in both East and Western Himalayan ranges as far as Mount Kailas-Lake Mansarovar and the Everest Base camp. He had not changed much since we met five years ago. There was some thinning of hair that had turned grey. His fervent personality remained the same. I had often seen him becoming indignant on widespread social injustice and at prevalent incompetence of politicians and laggard bureaucrats to resolve local issues, at the same time his deep affection for the land of his birth that remained strong.

Dr. Abdul Kalam—A Missile Builder "Sage Scientist"

As we sat in his living room, I noticed a number of photographs of his wife Nirmala and him taken with India's current President Dr. Abdul Kalam. A great admirer of the scientist President for whom as the founding editor of the *Philosophy and Social Action*, he had lobbied extensively as the ideal candidate for the pinnacle position in the country.

It was first time in Dr. Kalam, according to Dhirendra, India had chosen a nonpartisan President who did not come from any political party. Dr. Kalam was an unusual Muslim who hailed from the southernmost State of Kerala (a majority of Indian Muslim population is based in the Northern part of the country). A scientist by profession, though viewed by many as a 'hawk' for his contribution to the development of missiles in India, Kalam was seen by majority of his countryman as a true patriot. His vision statements for transforming India into a world power and his unconventional face to face meetings with youths across India had generated great enthusiasm that people had not seen in the post-Independence period. In addition to being a rocket scientist, President was unusual in that as a Muslim in addition to his own Islamic faith, he was a scholar with knowledge of Vedic scriptures, a confirmed bachelor, and a vegetarian.

Dhirendra described Kalam, for his simple life style, as India's "sage scientist". Poll after poll had confirmed Kalam's popularity. Notwithstanding his many offbeat ideas and science policies for

the futuristic development of the country, according to Dhirendra, "Kalam had guided the nation with aplomb. He had prompted the government to play the 'Politics of Development', and given the nation even the idea of the Moon Mission, *Chandrayana*."

I felt a conceptual dissonance between Dhirendra's aversion to nuclear weapons and armament and his unflinching admiration for someone who had made his name earlier as the nation's 'missile builder' defense scientist. How did he reconcile the two?

Dhirendra's reply was that he had known Dr. Kalam for more than two decades and had many friendly discussions with him. When he was trying to get Kalam join his anti-nuclear campaign, Kalam declined to do so saying that in today's nuclear world: "Powerful (West) respects powerful." Dhirendra said that Kalam was alluding to the fact that four of the five members of the UN Security Council were the largest producers of the world's military arsenal. His question to me was: how could then one expect peace emanating from that Council responsible for the security of the planet, when a majority of its members were closely tied to their respective military industrial complexes? There was truth in what Dhirendra had spoken. He continued: "Was man a rational being? This is difficult to answer. It is even difficult when you have to play a role as the figurehead President of an emerging industrialized country. In a very complex socio-political-cultural world, one could only try to offer some order to an irrational world order."

Watching Dr. Kalam at close quarters, Dhirendra's view was that Kalam had no political ambition, he had been "informed and reformed." Now in his role as the nation's President, Dr. Kalam thought in terms of how science and technology could be harnessed to benefit the common man, hence his recent drive for renewable resources energy program. To Dhirendra, the President now lived simply, his entire pension as a former civil servant and salary was donated to scholarships for the disadvantaged and disabled children's education.

Most photographs of Kalam in the room were taken a couple of years ago during the President's visit to Bhagwantpur to inaugurate a Montessori school for the village children, started by Dhirendra's wife Nirmala. As founding Director of the pre-

school Chetna Shishu Kendra, Nirmala Sharma possessed right qualifications for the job, (B.Ed. (Mich.USA), Montessori Diploma ((Lond.). Mrs. Sharma was also qualified in child - psychology and Montessori system, and was educated in England and the U.S at Michigan and Hawaii universities.

The village Montessori for preschool children (age-group 2+to 5) was housed in three rooms next to the Sharma house. As first of its kind in this region, the school had begun with five village children in 2001. During last five years the Shishu Kendra had trained twelve village girls in the Montessori system, and had worked with over a hundred children. It also served as a local "crèche" that had taken care of children and mothers from nearby labour camps.

The Bhagwantpur setting with its hilly surroundings was serene and beautiful. I looked forward to spending a couple of days here. I needed some time to reflect on what I had seen over the past three weeks in my travel. The garden facing the hills on the front and back of the house was full of blossoms. In the front lawn, pink yellow and white Dahlias bloomed; and in the back the garden that I could see from my bedroom window papaya, apple and banyan trees.

Impressions of USA and UK

Later that evening, I sat with Dhirendra to find about his days in England and the USA.

He reminisced about his time in England as a student during the cold-war period. As a son of an anti-British agitator, he was surprised at the maturity of British institutions that allowed him to speak freely, criticize the government and even raise anti-British slogans in the Hyde Park. With radical students he marched in anti-government demonstrations in Trafalgar Square. He joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and along with the former Labour Minister Tony Benn took part in the Aldermaston March.

His days in England provided him an opportunity to look more cool-headedly at British Raj and its legacy. In one of his essays, he concludes that British Raj had been responsible for triple revolutions in India: 1) transformation of the ancient stra-

tified and fossilized society to modernity; 2) cultivation of science and technology; and 3) laying basis for the nonviolent civil campaign for political independence. Despite all the shortcomings of a colonial rule of two centuries, he felt these were significant accomplishments and the English Rule need not be scoffed at. Similar views I had read about in the works of many early Indian nationalist leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru. The elite liked the British people and their way of life; their gripe was with the colonial administration who refused to play by the 'rules of the game' laid down by London, not knowing how to respond to increasing local demands for equality, rights, justice and ultimately complete autonomy.

Knowing my interest in Gandhi, our conversation reminded Dhirendra of an experience from his London days. One day during his student days in London, he got a call from the Indian High Commission that a Hindu priest was required to visit an Indian serving long term sentence in an English prison. Being a Hindu (spiritual) Minister (the Sharma family name belongs to the Brahmin caste); he visited the prison to counsel the young man. He presented a copy of Gandhi's *Autobiography*, *My Experiment with Truth* to the convict and made him in charge of the prison library. The English jailor welcomed his suggestion that Gandhi's Birthday should be celebrated in prison. On 2nd October 1956, the young prisoners had produced a journal on Gandhi's life and struggle with details of his trial and imprisonment under the British Raj. It was a very satisfying experience. Dhirendra wanted to take out a copy of the journal, which was not permitted under the Prison Rules. Later, the Jail Superintendant invited him to his home for tea. After being treated with due courtesies, he was presented with a copy of the journal by the Jailor's wife. Talking of his group of activists from those days, he said, that some years later "in a public park near Russell Square, we even installed Mahatma Gandhi's statute."

Later in the evening as I browsed through Dhirendra's library, I came across many other books he had authored, completely unknown to me. One such book in Hindi published in 1982 took me by surprise, *Vietnam Ka Swatantra Sangharsha* (The Freedom Struggle of Vietnam). It is the first and perhaps the only published

work in Hindi on Vietnam War. On the bookshelf, there was another of his work, entitled, *The Negative Dialectics: A Study of the Negative Dialectics in Indian Philosophy*, based on his 1961 Ph.D. thesis from University of London, published by a Dutch publisher.

Dhirendra's preference to be regarded instead of a scholar-philosopher a policy wonk is evident from the logo of his journal: "*The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.*" During our conversations over two days, I noted that he had no problem switching between a policy issue and a pure philosophical matter. I took the book with me for bedtime read, and decided to visit the topic with him in the morning.

Negative Dialectics in Indian Philosophy

As a rare philosopher who had this unique perspective combining Indian Vedic thought and modern science, Dhirendra next morning elaborated that the problems of India could only be best understood when analyzed in its historical context. He had an unorthodox view that dark ages in India started from Shankracharya during 7th and 8th Century AD onwards when this spiritual master introduced into "otherwise an open-ended progressive Upanishadic commentary the concept of *Maya*, the notion that the world is illusion." From then on, "the Indian nation became subject to continual crises, losing gradually its might and zeal to confront foreign invasions whether it be by Moslems, Moghuls, and finally British. All this had a significant impact on the shaping of India in terms of its cultural, social, economic, and political development."

He was convinced that it was only in the last century socio-political changes that followed scientific discoveries and technological progress were able to reverse that immense negativism of the past. He pointed to two significant paradigms arising from the modern scientific revolution that would contribute to shaping of a new evolving Global civilization. These were:

> One, the new knowledge about astronomy and cosmology liberated us from the traditional belief systems in the Divine dispensation. We acquired understanding about the natural

> forces and how the world, the universe, the galaxies and the Suns, and the Moons are being born and destroyed. This scientific knowledge about the universe decisively undermined the authority of the belief-systems. Search for God in the Heavens and Nirvana as the promise of most religions beyond death, was no longer the final end of human endeavour.
>
> Two, the management of affairs on this planet became the business of humankind. No more it was the god's will to govern on Earth as it was in Heavens and there was no divine interference from outside. As the great philosopher of the past century Bertrand Russell wrote that a good world needed knowledge, kindliness, and courage; it did not need a regretful hankering after the past repeating the words uttered long ago by ignorant men.

Dhirendra was an optimist on the question about the future of civilization. To him, modern civilization had no other choice but to be driven by science and its innovations. Secularism and democratic political system, as stated in the Charter of the United Nations, were to be the 20th Century's Testament for the 21st Century global civilization. Terrorism etc. that we now spoke of, he thought, would be seen as a small aberration in this civilizational process.

He challenged the general view that poverty and exploitation turned the oppressed people violent. Fact was that neither the neo-cons in the USA, nor the Bin Laden nor the *jihadis* of the 9/11 were poor and oppressed. *Jihadis* were not uprooted from their ancestral land by the United States. In fact, they were educated and trained in engineering in the USA. They were from rich families and closely connected with powerful multinational corporations. Religious fanaticism, hate and violence though had historical roots, in the present context, was "more of a schizophrenic effect of the contemporary socio-political developments." To him, a key problem was the present leadership (even) in the western countries like the USA and the UK who "were product of political culture of the Middle Ages seeking affirmation of action in supernatural power like Almighty rather than scientific knowledge discoveries."

On Nonviolence

I asked Dhirendra about the significance of the value of nonviolence in all this. As an epistemologist, he had given a lot of thought on the subject. In his thesis on Negative Dialectics in Indian Philosophy, he states that "*Ahimsa* (nonviolence) as a doctrine demanded an active and positive resistance to evil; rejection and opposition to brute force; and the replacement of injustice by justice. Emphasis of *Ahimsa* doctrine was on the right means to achieve right ends, carrying within its own sanction. At macro level, the Indian scriptures say that in cosmos, the battle of good and evil is unstoppable, the Bhagvad Gita for example points out that one has to confront evil through selfless action 'without the desire for its fruits thereof.'"

He deliberated for a moment on my question about the possibility of a nonviolent society, then replied: "*Ahimsa* has been a salient feature of Indian tradition and basis of its socio-ethical reasoning since the time of founding of Buddhism and Jainism. A total elimination of violence in human nature is unreal; it could be however made less. Violence and nonviolence are inter-connected. Intellectually, peace without war as a concept does not make sense. The question is of how to transform violence (the negative energy) into peace (the positive energy)." I had heard this comment elsewhere, it reminded me of meeting with Vijay Tendulkar in Mumbai a couple of weeks earlier.

Sharmas had organized an informal get together in the afternoon for me to meet with their local friends. Most of them like Dhirendra and Nirmala were newcomers, transplanted in Bhagvantpur from other parts of the country. They had come to jump-start the new State, mostly on secondment from the Central Government to set up the administrative machinery of the two-year old Uttaranchal state. Dhirendra and I decided to resume our conversation in the morning on Indian philosophy.

New Frontiers of Indian Philosophy

Next morning, we continued with the subject of new frontiers for research in Indian philosophy. Dhirendra had just turned 74. I was curious if he were to start his journey of exploring

Indian philosophical thought today what would be the most significant question(s) that required urgent attention?

He was amused, "You know in one's mind, one is never old. The mind is working the way it has always, nonstop. As an epistemologist, for example I am currently looking at the possibility of developing a new theory of knowledge that should indicate that knowledge is as infinite as universe. Look, within one Century, we have moved from our earlier notion of universe of one sun, one moon, and one universe to multiple universes and galaxies in the cosmos. We need seriously to look at the impacts of these developments. These scientific findings have created serious gaps in all ancient paradigms that need to be critically examined."

> The Indian philosophy and tradition will have to respond to these newly created challenges. There is need for redefinition and expression of how we cognize ourselves in terms of our ancient heritage. Indian philosophers will have to look at ancient Upanishad texts in the light of new knowledge made available by the developments in astrophysics and the whole new science of cosmology.

Mathematician Professor Jayant Narilkar's work came close to what he had in mind. Narilkar is a pure mathematician, a scientist who has gone that route investigating origins of knowledge and time. Dhirendra thought that philosophy in the 21st Century would have to define in this knowledge-wise richer context, a new definition of Brahman (the Absolute) and revisit the ancient texts to understand their contemporary relevance and interpretation.

Dhirendra had asked a journalist from Hindi newspaper Lok Jagaran to interview me in the afternoon. Departure of my train, Shatabadi Express was at 5 p.m. That meant leaving Bhagvantpur around three for the railway station.

Newspaper Interview and Nuclear Disarmament

Though the business was closed in the city due to the beginning of the Holi Festival when people as part of the festive revelry throw colours at each other, He had persisted with the

newspaper editor to send one of his science journalists to query me. I had overheard him telling the editor on the phone that I was a former Canadian science diplomat and the author of the book on Science and Technology development during Nehru era etc. He thought that this interview could be useful in raising the awareness of Lok Jagran's readers on an outside reaction to the Indian government's growing hawkish armament policy approach. Dhirendra was greatly perturbed by the Indo-US nuclear agreement that had been signed last week during President George W. Bush's visit to India. The government's decision to purchase 20 plus, Mirage fighters, at a cost of some Rs.150 crores each was to him a tremendous waste of scarce resources that India could have easily spent on solving massive issues of poverty. He could not think any use of the weaponry to be procured.

I noticed that Dhirendra had changed from this morning's solemn philosopher into an activist. Exasperatingly, he raised his eyebrows: "when, where and against whom? Besides, now India's all adversaries have heat seeker missiles. Three Mirage fighters have already crashed during training flights." He felt that the new Indo-US Nuclear Cooperation agreement had little to offer for India's security except to tie the nation for next generation into a foreign weapon and nuclear equipment system and its suppliers. "India and Pakistan both have already enough nuclear bombs to create many Nuclear Nights and Nuclear Winter on the Indian sub-continent. Neither state needed to go for any more nuclear weapons as both sides already possessed deterrent capability. Only one to benefit in all this are the arms traders." I could see Dhirendra agitated.

The journalist from the Lok Jagaran arrived with a colleague. He was a polite young man. Dhirendra told him about my background that even though living in Canada, I was born in India and in the past written extensively in Hindi for various periodicals. It made the journalist comfortable to conduct the interview in Hindi. Dhirendra took his companion outside in the garden for a walk, while the journalist took out his pencil and booklet to take down the notes.

From the questions the young journalist was posing, it was apparent that his interest was in getting a NRI's (Non Resident

Indian) views and impressions of current industrial development taking place in this newly created Uttaranchal state. He had expected me to speak highly about the new India, its optimism and confidence shown by its decade long double digit economic growth and great accomplishments in leading edge technology sectors such as IT, Space and Bio-Pharmaceuticals. Like most Indians, he wanted me to affirm India's recognition as an emerging economic superpower and major regional power worthy to be made a UN Security Council member.

My interest however was in seeing India through the visions that pioneering leaders Gandhi and Nehru had for India to see the country self-reliant and without poverty. My concern was whether those ideals were being compromised. With President Bush's visit to India two weeks ago, I wondered how a country with such long tradition of nonviolent ideals was drawing itself away from those lofty nonviolent goals getting sucked into a path of arms buildup and a global military industrial complex. How come there was so little public scrutiny or outcry against such a stance?

The journalist looked at me perplexed. He wanted me to explain what I meant by that. So when I went on to give him my critique of the Indo-US nuclear agreement as an example of such unnecessary dependency, I noticed that he had stopped taking notes. My argument similar to Dhirendra's views (the expensive maintenance costs of nuclear plants proven by such well-known disasters as Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents) did not impress him at all.

I mentioned that Mahatma Gandhi was totally against the use of nuclear energy and atom bomb, and India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's assent to nuclear development was based on the vision of UN's Project Ploughshare that promoted the concept of "Atoms for Peace". Why then this zeal to become a member of the nuclear weapons country club instead of standing up as a champion of nuclear disarmament and nonviolent peace?

The young journalist asked: "Sir, you know about China and Pakistan? How do we deal with them?" There was a look of disbelief in the young man's face as if he was saying, "please get real, sir."

We shook hands. The journalist promised that through Professor Sharma he would send me a copy of the interview when published. I never received the copy.

Reflecting on my two days with Dhirendra, I noted that in spite of all these years, Dhirendra's maverick fervor to jump into a political fray had not waned. His controversial book, India's Nuclear Estate (1983) is dedicated to "350 million citizens of India who live below the poverty line do not know what the Atomic Energy Commission is (not) doing for them." To those who question his patriotism, his retort is: "the measurement of my love for my country is the measurement of my criticism."

It was time to leave Bhagvantpur for train station. I was flying out from Delhi IG Airport next evening back to Canada.

10

Reflections

Mohandas Gandhi in the 21st Century

Travelling across India and meeting these personalities—scholars, politicians, activists, artists, and journalists—everyone whose life had been in one way or the other touched by Mahatma Gandhi, made me realize that Gandhi in his life and after his death remained an exceptional man. Though not perfect, he was one of those rare individuals that we do not generally find in history books—a man persistently searching for unity in his thoughts, words and deeds. Despite his outward calm, there was always an inner turmoil going on to accomplish the monumental goals he had set for himself. As playwright Vijay Tendulkar mentioned Gandhi was a complex man whose personality could not be just put on a dissecting table to be analyzed.

I noted a tremendous upsurge of civil society activism across the country. Unique contributions were being made in different parts of India through nonviolent creativity responding to local issues of peace and social justice. The work in the voluntary sector on education and training, rural reconstruction, emancipation of women, land reform movement, and nuclear disarmament was extension of the causes that Gandhi had initiated and pursued vigorously throughout his life. In the state of Maharashtra alone, to name a few, Vanadana Shiva, Medha Patekar, Shabana Azmi, and Vijay Tendulkar were well-known figures who had gained local and international recognition for their conscientious actions championing issues pertaining to gender discrimination, rising communalism, and environmental degradation. Both Ekta and Manushi movements which served the rural and urban poor showed the nonviolent inventiveness

to mobilize the marginalized. These two organizations were engaged and confronted at the same time the authorities to seek solutions to difficult problems of poverty and exploitation.

Peace Education

There was definitely the need for good education, not merely an education aimed at producing technologists and technocrats, but one that also taught ethics of serving society selflessly. As Dr. Radhakrishnan remarked that peace education by becoming an integral part of national education system was one way to achieve that. Peace education through a well-thought out curricula could impart human values, creativity, and training in resolving of conflicts nonviolently to help the poor and needy in order to ensure spiritual and intellectual development of the youth as well as empowering them about their basic human rights. To deliver such a comprehensive education, it was essential to have trained teachers committed to seeking peace through peaceful means.

Post-Modern Pluralism

Dr. Gujral remarked that six decades after his death, Gandhi was now a part of Indian psyche and even among Gandhi's staunch adversaries, for example, the right wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) when it came to managing a country of over a billion people of cultural, linguistic, and regional diversity, it had readily taken to the Gandhian way of political accommodation to govern, seeking consensus through political compromises to promote national unity. Not only BJP, politicians of all parties had come to accept the usefulness of Gandhian techniques seeking peace and harmony to govern a country of such diversity and magnitude. India, Gandhi had said, could not be run by a single class, single caste, or a single religious group; any move in that direction would bring disaster. In the late 1990s, BJP Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpai during a national crisis, pronounced that he was the Prime Minister of all the people of India, not just majority Hindus. That was the Gandhian way Dr. Gujral spoke about.

After each federal election once the political rancor was down, tendency for political parties while scoring points against

their adversaries was to work towards finding a common path to deal with complexities through directives of racial, religious, and gender equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution, insightfully utilizing the democratic tools of legislature and judiciary at national and local levels. In contemporary parlance, the term "pluralism" used for such an approach seemed by now institutionalized in India. There was a general belief that the countries bordering would also eventually recognize the value of democratic governance, albeit not perfect, of its inclusive nature.

Right to Live and Protection of Human Dignity

Gandhi saw his humanistic approach to politics transcending the notion of a nation-state. Naively or idealistically whatever we may choose to call it, in his South Africa days and in his early days of self-rule campaign in India, he was not much bothered about achieving the Indian Independence. He was more enamored with the thought of India becoming a part of global "commonwealth" of the British Dominion. His stay in England during his student days and knowing British people on one-on-one basis had made him regard English as a people who had a sense of humanizing decency that was universal. Whether it was in the East or in the West, it was human to be ethical. To Gandhi and many early Indian national leaders, the good governance was most important as long as it gave equal opportunity to everyone to earn their livelihood with dignity and respect.

Demographic trends in the globalized world of 21st century are shaping in such a way that it necessitates a rapid flow of skills and talents from one part of the globe to other. Possibility of reversing the trend to a mono-culture, single religion, and mono-chromatic race or nation is unlikely to happen. These had been tried in the past and brought miserable results. Women all over the world while struggling for their basic human rights have now stood up to assert that they will not be taken for granted as mere bearer of children, producers of population who might be used, exploited and sacrificed in the name of patriotism. Thus, there is a connection of what is happening in terms of transmigration of skills at national level being repeated at the global level. Such transfer of manpower has to be different from slavery or serfdom of the colonial

past. It is likely to be a more fully integrated skill base treated with respect and dignity within or outside an individual nation state.

In this, what had begun as the grounding of Gandhian experiment six decades after the country's Independence in India reflected subterranean undercurrents in the phenomena that had been taking place at the global level toward the end of the 20th Century. Such aspirations demanding the Universal Rights of Man were now enshrined in the charters of the UN and the UNESCO. The UN declaration that the first decade of the 21st Century's be devoted to building a "Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for Children of the World" (2000) was a ground breaking initiative in this direction. It exhorted the Gandhian vision that violence and wars were preventable, and 'Right to Live' was a fundamental right of people of the world as proclaimed in the Article 13 of the Nobel Peace Laureates Charter for a World Without Violence (2008).

Violence is Preventable

There was another level where my travel showed a change of thinking, it was in a new way of perceiving political success and victories of war, not through how many wars a nation could win or how much weaponry a nation could amass. It was more focused on how many people—men, women, and children that a nation state was able to save from killing and premature deaths. There was a growing recognition that most conflicts today were result of local cultural issues. Compared to 192 nation-states, there were about 7000 cultures worldwide each coping in their own ways with technological and material onslaught of unevenly distributed wealth and knowledge.

Even some military generals (from NATO countries) seemed to accept that there were no longer clear-cut military victories like achieved through 'industry wars' such as the Second World War in which over 50 million lives were lost. Military solutions to global conflicts were of limited success as conflicts now were occurring at the peoples level, and the foreign occupying forces thousands of miles from their home countries had little knowledge and skills about how to deal with the root causes of issues at the ground level, and no training and skills to resolve local issues. In the first decade of 21st Century, these

unresolved battles and wars as well as stockpiles of armament, both nuclear and conventional had begun to show limits of power through old-fashioned militarism.

For prevention of violence, one needed well-resourced institutions for peacebuilding at local, national and global levels. Beyond United Nations, responsibility for peace work in absence of an infrastructure of peace was presently being dealt with by ill equipped voluntary organizations on ad hoc basis. The problems of conflict required more serious attention from individual governments in provision of peace education, human rights enforcement, prevention of arms build up etc. and most of all a trained cadre of personnel with skills and expertise in prevention, mediation and reconciliation of conflicts at home and abroad. The violence prevention required from national governments structures to recruit, train and deploy specialized peace professional as is done by these governments for its tax-payer funded military sector. A Ministry or a Department of Peacebuilding and Disarmament for example headed by a Cabinet Minister made sense who could balance the advice received by a Head of State from a Minister of Defence and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Similar institutions could be created at local levels to inspire development of peace cities and peace provinces. Gandhi's work showed unending creativity for nonviolent peace structures and actions.

Impact of Ahimsa

My journey to India was to comprehend the meaning of *Ahimsa* and Nonviolence from its source, that understanding came to me with a flash by end of the trip. *Ahimsa* had been philosophized to such an extent by our fascination for philosophical abstractions of western liberal ideas such as justice, freedom, and equality etc. that we had chosen to ignore its entomological root in *Himsa* which translated from Sanskrit means "slaying". The double negative of "A" in front of *Himsa* in the word Ahimsa Dr. Dhirendra Sharma had written in the 1960s, was in historical records since the times of Emperor Asoka and his self-revulsion after the bloody victory in the Kalinga war. A further understanding of nonviolence had come to me in a more current term, Nonkilling in 2002 in the works of Professor Glenn D. Paige. The visit gave me a true sense

of the word. *Ahimsa* was essentially "Nonkilling". How deeply embedded in my DNA the concept of Nonkilling, the nonslaying of the other, prevailed I had not realised.

Origins of *Ahimsa* as a concept as Dr. Sharma pointed were part of ancient Indian Vedantic tradition, however its political applications were rather new, started in an organized way in the twentieth century by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and India, followed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the USA, and then becoming an important tool in the post-war decolonization, and more actively in the late 1980s in Eastern Europe as means for bringing change in the former Soviet Union by civil society groups under various nonviolent leaders. Six decades of democratic experiment in India was a testimony to the Gandhian way. A lot was still to be done to demonstrate that ethos in a more overt way in new institutions of peace and harmony at local, national regional and global levels.

In philosophical terms Sharma had indicated the inadequacy of ancient Indian Vedantic scriptures. That was at a time when the notion of cosmos was limited to one universe, one sun, and one moon. In the 21st century, there was an unparalleled expansion in knowledge of cosmos that included many suns, moons, galaxies, and universes of infinite possibilities. In this setting, the globe was insignificantly tiny, yet at the same time highly precious and unique as we had no other place to habitat except on this globe. The challenge was how to bring an awareness of this new cosmic reality to vast cultural diversity that might compel nation-states and nonstate actors to cooperate instead of a death wish for each other and this rare planet.

Gandhi—No Mahatma: Only a Seeker of Truth

Gandhi throughout his life insisted that he was no Mahatma, the Great Soul, that he was an ordinary mortal like everyone, earnestly searching for the Absolute Truth. Whether it was a large goal such as achieving *Poorna Swaraja*, the full Independence or leading the smaller grassroots issues of education, rural employment, elimination of dowry system, opening of temple doors to the outcaste Harijans, Gandhi's persistence in pursuing selfless public service can not be faulted even when it

brought resentment from his near and dear ones. Gandhi's beauty was that he practiced what he preached.

One controversial remark I heard on Gandhi was about his fasts that he undertook many times as part of his penitence, his nonviolent *Satyagraha* to protest against social injustices and practices. His critics viewed that such fasts were antithesis to nonviolence as those actions violated the basic notion of sanctity of life and an individual's disregard of Dharma to his family. A 'fast unto death' according to these critics tended to reflect one's egoism aiming for glory in a political struggle. Gandhi's action was in fact grounded in spirituality that he had learnt in his childhood from his mother. These fasts were taken as penance for forgiveness of one's sins and of others.

Quite early in his married life in South Africa, Gandhi had chosen to give up his householder phase of life, wanting all his personal income to go to a trust in the service of poor. His decision to become a celibate around the same time, at the age 37 though married to Kasturba was part of the same drive to perfect himself in his goal of Satyagraha (The Soul Force) based on the principles of *Aparigraha* (nonpossession) and *Sambhava* (equability) that he had chosen to practice. His fasts unto death came much later in his "naked-fakir" phase after 1921. These were to prick moral conscience of those who had erred from righteousness. All these were arduous spiritual goals to accomplish but he was unusual to have achieved them to a large extent as could be humanly possible, while at the same time immersed in the worldly affairs.

One of Mahatma Gandhi's favourite devotional hymn that was sung at his prayer meetings was, *Vaishanava jana to tane kahiye* (He is a *Vaishanava* devotee who identifies himself with others' sorrows and so doing has no pride about himself). His was a message that said peace united humanity, while violence divided it. In Ahimsa, as all of us were sparks of the same Divine, there were no enemies or friends; no victories or defeats; and no winners or losers.

As an optimist who sees a half empty glass as half full, my meetings made me realize that there was no ending to the journey of a peace seeker as learning about truth and nonviolence was an unending search. It was about coming to grips with core humanizing values within oneself.

Annex

Valedictory Address at Kerala Hindi Prachar Sabha Convocation, March 4, 2006

"Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Gandhiji in Introduction to his *Autobiography* published writes:

> My experiments in the political field are now known, not only in India, but to a certain extent to the 'civilized ' world. For me, they have not much value...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...

Was Gandhi a personification of Indian traditions to whom nonviolence came natural and was inevitable?

On this, one must rely on Gandhi's own candid evaluations of himself. His *Autobiography* provides one such authentic source.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as Mahatma Gandhi, believed that there was no other God than Truth, and that the only means for realization of Truth was *Ahimsa* (p.453). Truth to Gandhi was synonymous with God. What he strove to achieve through *Ahimsa* was ultimately to seek *Moksha* (spiritual liberation). His *Autobiography* alternately entitled, *The Story of My experiments with Truth*, is about his persistent search about whether such quest steeped in Dharma, right action, is feasible. In Hindu, Buddhist and Jain scriptures, *Ahimsa* refers to noninjury in thoughts, words and deed.

In 1927, when the *Autobiography* was published, Gandhi was 58 years old. There were still many nonviolent struggles to be fought e.g. Hindu-Muslim unity, abolition of caste based un-

touchability, advocacy of home-spun *Swadeshi* clothing, and above all gaining India's independence from the British rule. His *Autobiography* provides insights into shaping of his core beliefs on which his nonviolent instrument of political action, *Satyagraha*, the Truth-force, was later founded.

On his concept of *Ahimsa*, Gandhi writes:

> *Ahimsa* is a comprehensive principle. We are helpless mortals caught in the flagration of *himsa*. The saying that life lives on life has a deep meaning in it. Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward *himsa*. The very fact of his living - eating, drinking and moving about- necessarily involve some *himsa*, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. A votary of *ahimsa* therefore remains true to his faith if the spring of all his actions is compassion, if he shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature, tries to save it, and thus incessantly strives to be free from the deadly coil of *himsa*. (p.319)

Such an individual will then constantly grow in self-restraint and love for others.

Aparigraha and Samabhava

To understand *Ahimsa*, Gandhi relies on the teachings of the Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, his "infallible guide of conduct", especially its two principles of *Aparigraha* (nonpossession) and *Samabhava* (equability) (pp. 244-246).

"Words like *aparigraha* (nonpossession) and *sambhava* (equability) gripped me".

Drawing upon his familiarity as a barrister with the maxims of equity in English jurisprudence, Gandhi's interpretation of *aparigraha* is that of a "trustee" in the service of the poor and the disadvantaged:

> I understood the *Gita* teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude" (p. 245).

It is this 'change of heart' aspect of Ahimsa is central to Gandhi. How to bring in such a change within oneself?

Renouncing his material possessions, Gandhi takes a number of steps. To begin with, he lets his life insurance policy lapse. With regards to his wife and children, he is convinced that God who created them and him, would take care of them (p. 245). Next, he sends his life's savings to his elder brother who had brought him up as a son, informing that henceforth he should not expect anything from him, as all his future savings would be utilized for the benefit of the larger community, who he now regarded as his family. He finds it a terrible responsibility to be a parent, and subjects love for his children also to the test of these two principles.

Purity of Heart

To Gandhi, "change of heart", a life long goal, is of utmost importance. It can be achieved through subduing senses and carrying out selfless service. "To attain perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech, and deed; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion " (p. 453). Without self-purification, he feels that observance of *Ahimsa* will be an empty dream. Purification of mind can lead to the purification of one's surroundings, and eventually extend its impact to broader society.

At the same time, Gandhi is realistic to concede that the path of self-purification is not an easy one. He admits: "I know that I have not in me as yet that triple purity, in spite of constant ceaseless striving for it. That is why the world's praise fails to move me; indeed it very often stings me.

Hate the Sin, not the Sinner

For practicing *Ahimsa*, Gandhi provides another helpful suggestion; distinguish between the actor and his actions. Hate the sin and not the sinner. Gandhi finds that one's inability to make such distinction "leads to the poison of hatred spread in the world" (p. 254). He knows it is a precept easy to understand, but difficult to practice. In Gandhi's words:

> Man and his deed are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth 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 (p. 254).

Gandhi elaborates: "The *ahimsa* is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is in vain unless it is founded on *ahimsa* as the basis. It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author tantamount to resisting and attacking one self. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of the 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 " (p. 254).

The Truth Principle

Gandhi throughout his life remained a seeker of Truth. Since his childhood, he had a strong conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. For him, truth is the sovereign principle for executing his morality. His definition of truth keeps on expanding, bringing in numerous other principles within its fold.

> This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only relative truth in our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God. There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable.

Gandhi's Truth is the search for Universal Absolute. Such definition of God has in it a belief about spiritual unity that Divine permeates everything in this universe. God's names and forms may vary, but same divinity is in all. The oneness towards all creeds in all lands comes natural to Gandhi. His spiritual quest for the Universal Absolute in this sense comes close to the Vedantic notion of *Brahman* which points that everything in the universe originates from *Brahman* (Absolute), exists in *Brahman* and unfolds through it, and ultimately dissolves in *Brahman*. Unity, Purity, and Divinity.

In addition to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Gandhi mentions a long list of books and mentors in his *Autobiography*, starting with Leo Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*; and John Ruskin by his *Unto This Last*, and Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*.

The notion of trusteeship is seeded into Gandhi's mind from Ruskin. The latter's strong revulsion against human exploitation caused by industrialism, brings about in him, an "instantaneous and practical transformation" (p. 274). He is so impressed with Ruskin's book that he translates it later into his mother tongue Gujarati, entitling it *Sarvodaya* (the welfare for all). Sarvodaya will eventually form the basis of Gandhi's vision of his alternative nonkilling society, and will serve as a catalyst for his decision to enter into active politics.

Gandhi is captivated by Ruskin's ethics of dignity of labour and the necessity of bread labour.

Ahimsa and Political Action

Gratitude and nonhatred for his opponents are two hallmarks of Gandhi's *Ahimsa*. He is unable to hate anyone, even his ultimate adversary, the British Empire. He is a strong champion of its judiciary and other institutions. To show his goodwill to the Empire, he goes as far as to involve himself in the recruitment campaigns for the British during the First War. This brings him criticism from others. He persists as he had done the same in South Africa during the Boer War thereby gaining respect of ruling leadership for the social and political reforms for Indian working class émigrés. It is in the ambulance corps he finds a niche where he and his fellow workers could volunteer in the war effort.

The desire for service arises in Gandhi from a deep sense of public duty and a belief that one must be loyal to the State one lives in. Eventually, this notion of loyalty and self-discipline becomes a focal point of training volunteers for his civil disobedience movement of *Satyagraha* (Truth Force). To be considered eligible for his call of civil disobedience, his peace volunteers must render "a willing and respectful obedience" to the State laws. Gandhi clarifies that this is not just an ordinary compliance to a law, but "the willing and spontaneous obedience" that is required of a true *Satyagrah*i.

For *Satyagraha* action Gandhi carefully chooses his causes, initiated often in places by him where the flagrant abuse and exploitation is obvious and known. In addition to truthful moral ground for protest, like a diligent lawyer he goes a step further in examining and analyzing the situation from both the sides. And when convinced that morally the political action is justifiable, he approaches his adversary on the imminent need for change. Only failing those approaches, he takes the recourse of *Satyagraha*.

Satyagraha: The Truth Force

Insisting a high moral character, Gandhi demands of his coworkers that they be civil, nonconspiring, and under no circumstance counter violence with violence. He believes if the cause being fought is just and truthful, the method of truthforce would bring in a change of heart in his opponents. In this, his open and nonsecretive deliberations are always aimed at engaging his adversary in a dialogue.

Forgiveness is an essential component of Gandhi's Truth Force. Without much philosophizing, Gandhi writes about a simple act of sublime forgiveness he learnt from his father. As a lad of fifteen, his innocent confession, written as a letter apologizing for his pilfering money from his ailing father's valet, brings tears to the father's eyes. Both father and son are unable to resist crying at the young Gandhi's act of repentance.

This father-son episode to him is more than just an expression of a father's love, for him it is pure *Ahimsa.*

The gap between ideals and practice of *Ahimsa* at political level came as shock to him when during the civil disobedience movement in the Kheda District in Gujarat, he noticed the lacking discipline among his volunteers. Before any massive deployment of nonviolent civil disobedience workers in a political action, he feels that it would be imperative "to create a band of well-tried, pure hearted volunteers who thoroughly understood the strict conditions of *Satyagraha*" (p.423).

He is disappointed at his co-worker's shallow understanding of *Satyagraha* (Truth Force), and accepts that a long-term serious effort will be necessary to develop a large trained cadre of civil dis-

obedience workers, his *Shanti Sainiks*, the members of his nonviolent peace brigade. A *Satyagrahi* devoid of hatred for his opponent can compel the later in the spirit of love and personal suffering, gaining thereby a higher moral ground over the opponent psychologically. A scrupulous and conscientious observance of this rule is essential for those wanting to join the ranks of *Satyagrahis.*

Whether in private or in public, Gandhi holds that one should consider always the faults of others, however big, to be insignificant and negligible; while one's own, however insignificant and small, to be big and feel repentant. It is then one is able to arrive at the relative estimate of the two. It is only when one sees one's own mistakes in this light, there are possibilities of one's genuine transformation. Once Gandhi realizes that he has made a mistake, he does not rest till he has confessed to it, even though such confession may bring upon him a lot of ridicule and embarrassment. He has a full section in his *Autobiography* on the subject of failure in Kheda campaign under the title "A Himalayan Miscalculation" (pp. 423-424).

Ahimsa and Gandhi

Key ingredients of Gandhi's *Ahimsa* then can be summarized as: a belief in unity of life and brotherhood of Man; noninjury in thought, word, and deed; sense of sacrifice based on the values of equability and detachment; trusteeship in public service; love of one's opponent; compassion and forgiveness, voluntary respect for State laws; and penchant for openness and dialogue.

For Gandhi, *Ahimsa* is a work in progress. It is a fundamental tool for one's continual search of Truth that can bring change at individual and societal levels. Gandhi is able to use it effectively for societal reforms in South Africa and India, and later as an instrument for political change, the Independence movement in colonial India.

Beauty of Gandhi is that he practices what he preaches. A few months before his assassination in 1947, Gandhi remarked that his life has been his message. In his *Autobiography*, he reveals himself with all his warts in hope that his "experiments with Truth" will encourage others in actualization of their self.

Ahimsa to Gandhi is not a refuge for cowardice. He has no place for cowards in his Truth Force. To him, *Ahimsa* is in fact the only way to merge into the Absolute, without fear uttering God's name unto one's last breath.

Gandhi's life shows that practicing nonviolence requires an earnest desire to adhere to such other human values as truth, righteousness, justice, love, and peace. These Gandhian characteristics have been now widely tested over a century, and continue to inspire others interested in a nonviolent social and political action across the globe.

Gandhi's life also raises the question of how much value the contributions of profoundly inspired persons should, either secular or spiritual, be factored into in the training and development of *Ahimsa* practitioners? Gandhi's life in particular points in that direction, that is, in order to employ nonviolent methods such a person must have the highest moral order so as to embody nonviolence within. He has to be morally credible to such a degree that his presence itself should become conducive to transform a climate of violence into that where his presence may generate respect and tolerance among disputing parties, which may subsequently lead to reconciliation and amity.

Let me conclude by saying that in Gandhi ji's unique contribution in discovering "nonviolent political action," his spirituality and character development played primary and politically consequential role. His constant use of religious terminology and theological language in explanation or justification of a social or political act was to enhance his own understanding of ancient scriptures as well as to share his unique socially relevant insights and perspective with the masses of India.

I pray that all of us, you and I, will follow Gandhi's footsteps in having opportunities to examine truthfully our spirituality and character development. Thank you."

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