

Gandhi: An Indian Saint

A Personal Study

We will grow strong by calmness and moderation; we will grow strong by the violence and injustice of our adversaries.—*Abraham Lincoln.*

WHEN a man is described by Rabindranath Tagore as "the greatest of living men," and by the governor of a province of the British empire as "a dangerous and misguided saint" it is worth while studying his personality even if his policy does not interest us. And this is how the Indian leader, M. K. Gandhi has been spoken of. Gandhi is undoubtedly a remarkable man, remarkable in the fact that he differs so greatly in policy and public life from all those who guide the nations. Statesmen and politicians are seldom guided by the motives which compel Gandhi to action. He has said of himself:

"Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise; I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man."

This is the secret of Gandhi's overwhelming influence in India. It is not because he stands for a definite policy in regard to the British Raj, but because he is a saint, a man of austere and ascetic life who follows Truth at whatever cost to himself. Not even his worst enemy has ever doubted Gandhi's sincerity. His friends know him to be so stern in his loyalty to a principle once accepted that even friendship cannot divert him from a course which he regards as right.

I first met him in South Africa early in 1914 just after he had been released from prison for leading the Indian community in his Movement of Passive Resistance against the government. I remember my first glimpse of him as, surrounded by other Indians, he stood on the wharf upon the arrival of the steamer in which I had come from India. He was dressed in simple homespun, had no hat on his head and was barefoot. He is not striking in appearance though on closer acquaintance with him it is impossible not to be struck with the singular sweetness of his expression. As I saw him working for the coolies on the sugar plantations and greeting them often by name, I was forcibly reminded of Saint Francis of Assisi. Whenever he travelled he went by the third class which is usually patronized by the Kaffirs, and he always preferred to walk except when time made it advisable for him to drive.

As an example of his unswerving allegiance to a principle of action I recollect his attitude before the commission which had been appointed by the government of South Africa to inquire into the grievances of the Indian community in that colony. It

was to give Gandhi and other leaders an opportunity of giving evidence before this commission that they had been released from jail. But the Indian community had not been consulted in the matter of the personnel of this commission and Gandhi consequently refused to give evidence and persuaded all Indians who followed him to refuse likewise. He persisted in his refusal, although the Honorable Mr. Gokhale, a man for whom he had the very greatest reverence, was almost daily cabling to him from India urging him to reconsider his decision, as his refusal was being construed as a virtual confession of the weakness of the Indian point of view. But he regarded the appointment of such a commission, without consultation with the Indian community whose interests were at stake, as a direct blow at the self-respect of India. So he turned a deaf ear to the urgent plea of one whom he revered and esteemed. He was right though he may not have been diplomatic. Gandhi never is diplomatic. He always lays all his cards on the table and his opponent is often unable to believe that he has nothing ulterior in his motives. Open diplomacy has always been Gandhi's strength.

Another characteristic is his chivalry to an opponent. Just when he was to start the Passive Resistance campaign again early in 1914 as a protest against the appointment of a commission without adequate Indian representation, a strike broke out among the white workers on the Rand. Gandhi immediately announced that his Passive Resistance would be indefinitely postponed until the government was no longer embarrassed by this strike. This chivalry proved to be a stroke of diplomacy for it won the admiration of General Smuts and of many who would not otherwise have sympathized with his political ideals. But it was not intended as a diplomatic move.

Mr. Gandhi originally had a lucrative legal practice in Johannesburg bringing him in over \$15,000 a year. This he gave up when the call of his country came to him with impelling force. He gave all the money that he had to the founding of a settlement at Phoenix, near Durban, modelled on Tolstoian lines of simplicity and service. He himself felt that a life of poverty would give him the freedom necessary for his work for his countrymen.

I visited him at this settlement where every member of the community does some service for the whole. Gandhi himself was exceptional only in that he did far more when he was there than any other individual member. It was at Phoenix that his characteristic unselfishness of conduct was most evident. Often did I protest against the

way in which Mr. Gandhi in the midst of great public responsibilities spent his valuable hours in menial tasks which could so easily have been carried out by less prominent members of his community.

When the Honorable Mr. Gokhale was a guest at Phoenix he had the same experience and he often told humorously of the heartless tyranny of his host who insisted upon doing the most menial tasks, including that of a sweeper, for his guests. To such protests he would reply that as regards a piece of work which had to be done and got through with, there was no highness or lowness about it—if a piece of work was thought to be too dirty for him (Gandhi), it should be regarded as too dirty and low even for a poor sweeper, who was just as much a human being as he himself.

It is this readiness to make the same sacrifices which he asks of those who follow him which gives him his extraordinary moral authority. As a recent interesting writer on India has said of him:

Mr. Gandhi has always been prepared to accept and has always actually accepted for himself the direct logical outcome of his principles, whatever hardship and breach of social convention it may involve. This, combined with his utter sincerity, the austere simplicity of his life and his readiness to serve the people at all costs and sacrifice, explains his unparalleled hold over his countrymen. No trick or posing can give such influence to any leader.

Mr. Gandhi is a strict vegetarian and when I first met him he was taking only one meal a day which consisted of fruit, nuts, olive oil and whole meal bread often baked with his own hands at the settlement. Even when he went to Pretoria to interview the heads of the government he wore the plain homespun garments which he always wears, believing, as he does, in a revival of hand weaving in protest against the present industrial system. As he sat at his meal in a large store in Durban, he would ask the coolies who had come to see him and to consult with him about their troubles, to sit beside him so that he could give them more time for talk. And in all his dealings with the simple uncultured people he showed the same courtesy and patience. He was always accessible to the poor and unfortunate, and even when affairs of the utmost importance weighed upon him he would give them some of his time.

Mention has been made of his settlement being started on Tolstoian principles and it should be stated that Gandhi has always had the greatest admiration for the teachings of that great western prophet. From him he adopted the term Passive

Resistance, and the spirit of much of his public work shows the influence of Tolstoi. But there is no doubt that the doctrine of non-resistance which he preaches also has its foundation in the teachings of his own religion, a religion which teaches "Ahinsa" or aversion to slaughter and violence. He was born a Jain and the Jains will not destroy any life, even that of the most insignificant animal. Like strict Buddhists they will not eat animal food.

He has, where possible, cooperated with the British government as is shown by the fact that he has been decorated several times with war medals for his services in the Zulu War, the Boer War and the War against Germany in connection with ambulance work. But lately he has lost faith in the promises of British statesmen, and even in the justice of the British people. In an open letter addressed "To Every Englishman in India" occur the following words, which explain his present position:

In my humble opinion, no Indian has cooperated with the British government more than I have for an unbroken period of twenty-nine years of public life in the face of circumstances that might well have turned any other man into a rebel. I ask you to believe me when I tell you that my cooperation was not based on the fear of punishments provided by your laws or any other selfish motives. It was free and voluntary cooperation based on the belief that the sum total of the activity of the British government was for the benefit of India. I put my life in peril four times for the sake of the Empire. I did all this in the full belief that acts such as mine must gain for my country an equal status in the Empire. So late as last December (1919) I pleaded for a trustful cooperation. I fully believed that Mr. Lloyd George would redeem the promise to the Mussulmans and that the revelations of the official atrocities in the Punjab would secure full reparations for the Punjabis. But the treachery of Mr. Lloyd George and its appreciation by you, and the condonation of the Punjab atrocities have completely shattered my faith in the good intentions of the government and the nation which is supporting it.

He goes on to explain the meaning of his Non-cooperation policy:

I am engaged in evoking bravery of soul. Non-cooperation means nothing less than training in self-sacrifice. Why should we cooperate with you when we know that by your administration of this great country we are being daily enslaved in an increasing degree? This response of the people to my appeal is not due to my personality. You are in search of a remedy to suppress the rising ebullition of national feeling. I venture to suggest to you that the only way is to remove the causes. You have yet the power. You can repent of the wrongs done to Indians. You can compel Mr. Lloyd George to redeem his promises. The other solution, namely repression, is open to you. I prophesy that it will fail.

In a recent number of his paper, *Young India*, dated March 30th, 1921, he writes as follows:

The problem before us, therefore, is one of opposing our will to that of the government, in other words to withdraw our cooperation from it. If we are united in purpose, the government must obey our will or retire. It is the disturbing factors of which the government avails itself for the consolidation of its power. When we are violent, it resorts to terrorism; when we are dis-united, it resorts to bribery; when we are united, it resorts to cajolery and conciliation; when we are clamant, it puts temptations in the way of those who cry out the most. All, therefore, we need do is to remain non-violent, united, and unresponsive to bribery and cajolery.

Let us not waste our resources in thinking of too many national problems and their solutions. A patient, who tries many nostrums at a time, dies. A physician, who experiments on his patient with a combination of remedies, loses his reputation and passes for a quack. Chastity in work is as essential as chastity in life. All dissipation is bad. We have hitherto all pulled our own way, and thus wasted away national strength in a most extravagant manner. To boycott foreign cloth within a year is a practical feasibility. To bring into being a working organization for the Congress is an easy thing for honest workers. Drink and untouchability must vanish. The education movement is steadily going forward. The national institutions that have sprung up will, if they are efficiently managed, make headway and attract students who are still hesitating. Boycott of the lawcourts by the public is making fair progress. These things do not now require concentration of universal effort.

My strong advice to every worker is to segregate this evil government by strict non-cooperation, not even to talk or speak about it, but having recognized the evil, to cease to pay homage to it by co-operation.

Gandhi has been able to unite the people of India as they have never been united before, not only because of his unfaltering loyalty to a moral ideal and his austere and ascetic personal life, but because the British government has itself by repeated acts fed fuel to the fires of national aspiration.

Confronting the most powerful empire in existence stands this one man who cares nothing for his own personal safety, who is uncompromising and fearless in the application of principles which he has once accepted, and who scorns any longer to receive or beg for favors from a government which he regards as having "forfeited all title to confidence, respect or support." He believes in conquering hate by love, in the triumph of right over might, and all the effort of his public life is directed towards persuading the masses in India of the truth of this ideal.

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Have Women Names?

I HAVE learned now to recognize the symptoms of a certain question. A man, or a woman, more often a man with whom I've been having a good talk, suddenly stops, leans back, and looks at me benevolently but quizzically. Presently he says, "*Why* do you keep your own name, when you are married?"

It's very hard to make him understand and my answers have to differ. If he or she is nice and kind and white-haired and really distressed at the heresy, I choose the cowardly route and explain gravely that my husband writes and I write and editors are such queer prejudiced people, and if I were trying to sell an article to one of them who didn't like my husband and I used my "married" name then my article wouldn't stand a chance. Usually then he nods sympathetically, and I change the subject before he asks me why I also use my own name in what is sometimes known as private life.

It is much easier to argue with disagreeable people who can simply be informed that there is no law compelling a wife to take her husband's name. Not in America anyway, although in Russia the autocratic Bolsheviki have made a law forcing a couple to live together under the same name, no matter whose. Under the common law in America, however, women are free, as several test cases have proved, to keep their own names though married. The Lucy Stone League has recently been formed in New York to make that point clear to those women who dislike the total immersion in marriage which the loss of one's name implies.

"Oh," the opponent always says then, "but why a league for such a small purpose? Is it so important? Isn't the League of Nations much more vital, or the Class Struggle, for or against?"

I agree, I always agree. What else is there to do? But I haven't yet been able to see the connection between the rise and fall of these noble causes and the few seconds it takes to explain that a difference in names doesn't mean the absence of a marriage certificate. There are much more difficult points to meet than that. There is the quiet-mannered soul who murmurs reproachfully to me that he or she doesn't see why I want to stir up such a fuss over nothing, because what does it really matter what one is called and why create all that unnecessary confusion in simple people's minds? I can only say that I don't stir up any fuss, it's the people who disagree with me who do, and as for the confusion why should there be any when I am always introduced by my husband as my wife Miss