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Mahatma Gandhi going to evening prayers.

## Architect of Indian Freedom

**"Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi," by D. G. Tendulkar** (*Times of India Press, Bombay. 8 vols. Rupees 180*), is an extensive biography revealing the many facets of Gandhi's thoughts through his own varied writings. It is reviewed by Anand Lall, India's Ambassador to the United Nations and the author of *"The House at Adampur."*

By Anand Lall

**T**HOUGH the most spectacular achievements of Gandhi were his political triumphs it is significant that the title of his monumental work in eight volumes is "Mahatma"—the Great Soul. The Western reader might be inclined to regard the title, as indeed the Mahatmaship to which the people of India spontaneously raised Gandhi, as a manifestation of a tendency to superimpose on things and people a spiritual halo or connotation. Even to many Indians of the generation after the Gandhian era, he will be mainly the architect of India's freedom, and perhaps the three phases of the movement for independence will come to be regarded as a Gandhian pre-thought-out master plan which was bound to succeed: the first phase of which the crest was the 1919-1921 non-cooperation movement; the next phase in which the movement attained truly massive and mass

proportions, and in which the apogee came in 1930-1931, beginning with the salt march to Dandi; and the final phase which led to the very door of freedom and which was marked by the individual civil disobedience campaign opened at Gandhi's behest by Vinoba Bhave and Jawaharlal Nehru in 1940 and the "Quit India" Congress resolution of 1942.

To those, however, who felt the impress of Gandhi's life and read his "Experiments with Truth" and his periodical writings, they were but one ripple of the comprehensive life of that extraordinary personality.

Tendulkar's biography lives with that richness. Had he chosen to be, in the main, an analyst or an interpreter of Gandhi he would have produced eight rather laborious volumes spinning out what has been done already by many writers, including several Americans such as Vincent Sheean and Louis Fischer. But Tendulkar has wisely adopted the technique of stringing together long examples from Gandhi's pen and lips, using his own words and thoughts only as relatively minor links. This technique gives the reader the advantage of listening to the Great Soul himself, an experience to be thankful for not only because of the satisfaction of being engaged by the first person Gandhi but because Gandhi as a writer is undoubtedly a master: his style is clear, concise, and meaningful whether he is dealing with religion or the making

of sandals, politics or snakes, dietetics or handicrafts, sex or civil disobedience.

Tendulkar gives us the Mahatma's own words on what his life was about, "There is no such thing as Gandhism . . ." he said, "I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems . . . The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have reached are not final, I may change them tomorrow . . . Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could do."

But what are truth and non-violence? Non-violence is the English translation for the Sanskrit word *ahimsa* which is essentially love and respect for *all* life. That sounds simple enough, but, as a rule of conduct is it practicable? The greatness of Gandhi who, in our time, has come closer to a full expression of *ahimsa* than any known person, lies in his truthfulness in facing the facts of practical life. There is the enlightening instance of the plague epidemic at Borsad (Bombay State). The local doctor wanted Gandhi's endorsement for his campaign to destroy the infection-carrying rats and fleas. Gandhi consented, "although I believed that even plague-stricken rats and fleas were my kindred and had as much right to live." This is how he explained his decision: "One who hooks his fortune to *ahimsa*, the law of love, daily lessens the circle of destruction and to that extent promotes life and love; he who swears by *himsa*, the law of hate, daily widens the circle of destruction and to that extent promotes death and hate. Though, before the people of Borsad, I endorsed the destruction of rats and fleas, my own kith and kin, I preached to them without adulteration the grand doctrine of the eternal law of love of all life. Though I may fail to carry it out to the full in this life, my faith in it shall abide."

That was in 1935 and the incident is recorded in Volume Four of Tendulkar's work. In Volume Seven there is an absorbing record of Gandhi's thought on the same subject ten years later which must be read in full if the reader wishes to understand Gandhi's concept of non-violence. The essence of his 1945 dissertation is: "In life, it is impossible to eschew violence completely. Now the question arises, where is one to draw the line? The line cannot be the same for everyone. For, although essentially the principle is the same, yet everyone applies it in his or her own way. What is one man's food can be another's poison. Meat-eating is a sin for me. Yet, for another

person, who has always lived on meat and never seen anything wrong in it, to give it up simply in order to copy me will be a sin."

Tendulkar rightly conveys the impression of Gandhi as an experimentalist. The keys to the special quality of his greatness, even as an interpreter of the Hindu religion, were freedom and courage. In this work he comes alive, in his own words—always modest and often whimsical and full of humor—as the free and intrepid soul always pushing his experimentation to the farthest possible fringes of human endeavor. If the field is dietetics, then Gandhi announces quietly that, "for the past five months I have been living entirely on uncooked foods . . . green leaves in place of cooked leaves or other vegetables." If it is sex, and Mrs. Margaret Sanger is incredulous about the possibility of restricting the sex act by husband and wife to occasions when they want children, Gandhi replies, "I had the honor of doing that very thing and I am not the only one." Should any phase of the political movement go underground or conduct its activities in secrecy? Gandhi says, "Nothing should be done secretly . . . In this struggle secrecy is a sin," and of course he invariably announced to the British Government, well in advance, every campaign of civil disobedience that he proposed to launch. And when Jai Prakash Narayan, one of the then Congress leaders and now among the most respected figures in India, tried to smuggle certain documents out of his prison Gandhi, while admitting that according to the accepted canons of war Jai Prakash's action was perfectly legitimate, said, "We must realize that his method is harmful in the extreme, while a non-violent struggle is going on. No underground or underground movement can ever become a mass movement or stir millions to mass action." Almost everything he says is lively, crystal clear, and well worth reading: "Non-violence is of the strongest, not of the weak . . . Good and impotent persons can never do." There is this quality of strength in all he says and does.

These eight volumes are primarily a definitive work of reference, but not just for the Gandhiphile. They will be invaluable to students of India, to those interested in sociology and politics or just in frank biography. And to the general reader looking for first-class reading they will prove stimulating and diverting.

#### LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column Two should read: 4, 17, 2, 18, 5, 16, 3, 12, 6, 11, 10, 19, 14, 9, 13, 8, 15, 7, 1, 20.

## Sad Partition

**"The Transfer of Power in India,"** by V. P. Menon (Princeton University Press. 543 pp. \$8.50), is an account of the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the steps leading up to it. William Clifford, who reviews it, is assistant to the director of the Asia Society.

By William Clifford

**W**HY did the British raj, the first authority either native or foreign to rule the Indian sub-continent from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, execute the vivisection of its proudest child into one India and two Pakistans? Was this but the last of many tactical moves to divide and rule?

There have been those who thought it was, who thought that the British administration was incapable of any alternative. In 1941, six years before independence and partition, Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "Divide and Rule" has been Britain's proud motto. It is the British statesmen who are responsible for the division in India's ranks and the divisions will continue so long as the British sword holds India under bondage."

If V. P. Menon's new book, "The Transfer of Power in India," is valuable in one way above others, it is as well-documented proof that Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, was not an intentional agent of chaos. Rather, he was a brilliant statesman deputed by a thoroughly sincere government to solve a nearly insoluble problem.

Menon, a senior civil servant who was frequently involved in the affairs he writes about, begins his long factual account with a summary of the hesitant steps toward Indian self-rule before the outbreak of World War II. Then he recounts in detail the internal politics of the war years, including the resignation of Congress Party ministries in the important provinces, a serious political blunder, and the consequent growth of the Muslim League. The seed of Pakistan was planted and grew with such surprising vigor that by the time of the Simla Conference, in June 1945, Mohamed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League had made partition inevitable.

Fortunately, the situation was understood by a sympathetic Labour Government in England. In a House of Commons debate on March 15, 1946, Prime Minister Attlee said that the tide of nationalism was running very fast in India and that it was time for clear and definite action. Not

quite able to believe that they were not being tricked, the Congress Party remained suspicious of British intentions, further strengthening their opponents, the League.

After many futile efforts to forge a coalition that would plan the future of independent India, and upon which power would devolve, the British took a bold and momentous decision. In the Commons on February 20, 1947, Attlee said, in a Statement on Indian Policy:

The present state of uncertainty is fraught with danger and cannot be indefinitely prolonged. His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transference of power to responsible Indian hands not later than June 1948.

Only three months later, the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, announced his plan to transfer power not in 1948, but on August 15, 1947, in a matter of weeks! Was this precipitous move not an effort to sabotage the new authorities, or at least an act of irresponsibility in the face of a deteriorating situation? Again Menon proves that the answer is no, that Mountbatten was a scrupulously impartial and even unifying force, and that the intentions of his government were the best. Everyone concerned wanted the political uncertainty to cease, and all leaders agreed that a transfer to Dominion status as soon as possible was the best solution.

The British withdrawal left to India the precious heritage of a democratic form of government. It also left a people woefully divided. What are the chances today of their resolving their differences and forming the federation that many expected in the beginning?

A few months before partition, the Premier of Bengal, H. S. Suhrawardy (now Prime Minister of Pakistan) spoke for "a sovereign, independent, and undivided Bengal." Maulana Azad, now Indian Education Minister, said: "The division is only of the map of the country and not in the hearts of the people, and I am sure it is going to be a short-lived partition." Menon concludes:

It is never too late for men of good will to take stock of realities, for the leaders to sit down calmly and dispassionately, and together evolve some common machinery which would not merely minimize the rigours of partition but, by diminishing all sense of fear and conflict, would bring about for both countries enduring peace and progress.