

WHO WAS MAHATMA GANDHI ?

By : Ex-President of India - Sarvapalli. Radhakrishnan.

From :OUR HERITAGE (1973).

IT WAS the London Times that remarked: "No country other than India, and no religion other than Hinduism could have produced a Gandhi."

That is why he belongs to us in A very special sense. There are several ways in which he has worked for the country and the world. He was a great nationalist leader. He was a liberator of the enslaved. He taught the doctrine of love that never fails. He was a moral genius who tried to chasten himself first before trying to exert any kind of influence on other people. In all these ways he has helped us.

It was over thirty years ago that I put to Gandhi three questions:

- 1) What is your religion?
- 2) How were you led to it?
- 3) What is its bearing on life?

He gave the answers, the brief answers.

I used to say, "I believe in God", now I say, "I believe in truth". "God is truth", that is what I was saying, and today I say, "Truth is God". There are people who deny God. There are no people who deny Truth. It is something, which even the atheists admit.

Here he was not enunciating any new proposition. He was merely declaring some fundamental truths, which have come down to us from the environment in which he lived, the environment which nourished him.

He took up these two things: *satyam vada dharmam cara*. Speak the truth, do the right—the truth and the right. He used to call them *satya* and *ahimsa*. These were the principles, which he had. Truth is not something, which we can casually get at. It requires considerable travail of human spirit to bring out harmony between the inward and the outward. *Vanmanasyoraikya-rupam satyam*. *Vak* (word) and *manas* (thought) must have identity. If we are able to establish that identity, then it is that we have truth. Such a kind of truth will not allow us to indulge in distortion, in innuendoes, in exaggerations. It will not merely, not allow us to speak lies but it will not allow us to indulge in any statements made with mental reservations. It is, therefore, something, which we have to acquire at considerable cost. We cannot get it for the mere asking of it. So Gandhi said:

I am myself at struggle. There is a strain in between the supreme principle and my factual nature. These two things do not accord with each other. If I have to bring about harmony between these two things, I have to perform penance, ridding myself of all prejudices, trying to make myself one with the supreme spirit which is there.

Gandhi told us next that Truth in action is AHIMSA.

If we want to translate that into practical work, we will have to become followers of the doctrine of non-violence. This doctrine of *ahimsa* one has to be careful about. It does not ask us to abstain from force at all times. It tells us that our spirit must be pure.

The *Yoga Sutra* says: *ahimsa pratisthayam tat sannidhau vaira-tyagah*. In the presence of *ahimsa* there is a renunciation of hatred, *vaira tyaga*. It is abstention from ill-will towards any creature in this world. That is what we are called upon to adopt. We must control our passions, control our appetites, bear no ill-will to any human being, any creature on earth. Such things have been said by other religions, by other thinkers also. Kant has put it thus: "Treat humanity in your own person and in every other person as an end in itself and not a mere means."

For Schweitzer, "reverence for life should be the principle which we should adopt." These are all different ways of expressing the one fundamental truth which we have formulated times without number but which we have not been able to follow in our daily life.

When Gandhi talks about *ahimsa*, he means by it that we must overcome evil. Restrain evil by love. If we cannot do it, restrain it by force. That is what the *Mahabharata* says, *sastrad api sastrad api*, either by means of the traditions of our country or by means of weapons, etc. Gandhi himself said that both these should be regarded as honorable ways.

We should try to do our utmost to adopt the principle of non-violence. But if we are unable to overcome evil, if we are not able to put an end to it, we must not allow the world to be deluged by hatred, by fear, etc. Get rid of the feeling of hatred. Hatred is something which deflects our thinking, which makes our conscience subordinate to an ideology. It does not allow us to look upon the things which are good to us in a straightforward way. So, we must rid our mind of every kind of hatred. Unless we do it, we cannot be regarded as true devotees of *ahimsa*. It is not abstention from force, but it is abstinence from hatred, from ill-will etc.

That is how he put it, more or less, in The traditions of our country. We have it in the Bhagavad Gita. We have it said there that when Arjuna tried to avoid battle, when he tried to get out of it, Krsna was telling him:

ksudram hridaya daurbalyam tyaktvo'ttistha paramtapa

Anyway, Gandhi himself had been slowly moving from toleration of violence, to abstention from hatred; but when he saw that the world was developing these great weapons, the nuclear weapons, which gave us no alternatives and which posed before us these two courses of destruction or survival, he said, "If we want to survive, we have to repudiate violence altogether." He was experimenting all his life with this method and gave to us this idea that we should repudiate war altogether.

If today the great nuclear powers are facing each other, but have not brought about a holocaust this stalemate is due to two things, an instinctive attachment to survival and a healthy reaction against mass suicide. But this cannot go on indefinitely. Unless we are able to create in our own nature, make changes in the spirit, we will not be able to avoid a nuclear catastrophe. This kind of stalemate based on terror, based on fear, cannot go on. So it is that these great powers are thinking of adopting some other methods than the method of a mere balance of terror; and Gandhi's philosophy, his message, is of supreme relevance to us at the present moment and what we should do is, whether it is in our own life or outside, to work for those principles.

Gandhi felt that *ahimsa* meant *sarvodaya*, the awakening of all. There should not be any political domination. When he saw the pain, degradation and want from which this country was suffering, he said, "I must fight this system, I must get rid of it", and so he did it. He said:

"A fallen and prostrate India will not be of any help to herself or to the world. A free and enlightened India can be of help to herself and to the world.

And he added:

"I want my country to be free so that one day, if necessary, she may die for the sake of humanity."

Within the country itself Gandhi felt that we were doing things which were repugnant to one's conscience. We were treating human beings as below any kind of dignity. These things we are paying for and, therefore, he looked upon untouchability as a curse and he said, "So long as it is there in any Hindu's heart, I disdain to be a Hindu." Similarly, he said:

"So long as a few individuals hold in the hollow of their hands the destiny of millions of people it is an artificial, unnatural, uncivilized kind of existence and we must try to get rid of them all."

So, social discrimination should go, economic disparity should disappear, political domination should go. These things he fought for, so far as our country was concerned, and he fought for them from the point of view of pure nonviolence. *Ahimsa* means an awakening of all, welfare of all, *sarvodaya* as he called it. His whole life was dedicated to this because he was fighting with himself all the time. He was very humble. He never laid claims to righteousness or any kind of infallibility. He listened with patience to the views that other people gave him and never did he lose his temper with such people. It is that kind of patience that can win in this world today. We are still not in the high day, not in the noon, of our civilization.

We are in the very early hours of the morning of human history. We have yet a long way to go and if we adopt this principle sincerely, seriously and systematically, we can make this world into a better world.

Patriotism, he said is not final. It has its limits. "I will not hurt Germany or England for the sake of serving my country. That kind of narrowness, that kind of selfish patriotism would be unworthy of a truly civilized human being."

He gave us his vision, his passion and his expression, to awaken us all to a sense of our own dignity, a sense of our honor, to make us feel that we are unworthy to be called human beings if we believe in brute force. Whatever may be the cause—the extreme squalor, abject poverty or national prestige—these things may be there but if they seduce us into paths of violence, we will be doing something which is wrong. Even if, we are unable to follow those principles, we must admit their validity, their supreme relevance.

Gandhiji's message is of a universal quality. He belongs to the race of prophets whose words may not be accepted by their generations but will be accepted by those that follow."

We call Gandhiji "Father of the Nation" and what is it that we have acquired from him? We have been adopting for centuries the retaliatory view of life. *Satham prati sathyam*: to the wicked, be wicked. His amendment was, *Satham pratyapi satyam*. Even to, the wicked be just, be loving. He tried to displace the retaliatory view of life, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", by love even for our enemies. When people asked him to adopt the usual methods of cunning and deceit to gain the freedom of the country, his answer was:

"Let my country go under; I do not want it to survive by means of deceit and cunning."

For him, more than freedom, truth and nonviolence were his breath. He wanted to stand for those: and by adopting those ideals he was sure the country would not go under, but he was prepared to take the risk and say, let the country go under. Another thing he said was:

"I don't wish to live in this world if it does not become united. If there is not the unity of the world on the basis of humanity, I do not wish to live in it."

Well, if he is the Father of the Nation, these are things which we will have to remember. Remember, even to the wicked we have to be truthful and loving. We should not gain even the greatest ends by wrong means and we must work for the building up of a world of humanity.

Gandhi's life has become an idea in the minds of men. It is the hope for humanity, an inspiration for its future. The memory of his life and work is precious to mankind.

In these days of doubt and uncertainty, when young men and women all over the world are losing their faith and turning to new fangled ideas, it is best to remember that Gandhi is the greatest revolutionary we have had in recent times.

Verbal violence in legislatures or physical violence in the streets will only retard the progress of the great social revolution which Gandhi started.

It is necessary for us to remember what Gandhi stood for, individually, nationally and internationally. **He was essentially a religious man**, religion meaning for him an unceasing search for truth and a consistent practice of love.

satyam, jnanam", *anantam brahma*. The Mundaka Upanisad says:

satyam eva jayate nantram

satyena pantha vitato deva-yanah

yenakramanty rsayo hy apta-kama

yatra tat satyasya paramam nidhanam-

-- III-1-6.

"Truth alone conquers, not untruth. By truth is laid out the path leading to the gods, by which the sages who have their desires fulfilled travel to where that supreme abode of truth is.

Jesus says. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John, VIII-32).

The power of thought is essential for the understanding of Reality. Thought which goes deep enough ends in insight. Reason takes us to something deeper than reason, to the power and profundity of the human spirit.

It is not necessary for us to tread the path of decline right to the end, for he who has faith in the power of the human spirit believes in the future of mankind.

We cannot attain truth unless we pass through a spiritual travail. Self-suffering is the Way to it.

The world will be healed if each individual begins the healing within himself. Gandhi said, "I am a mixture of good and evil, weakness and strength, violence and nonviolence; but *ahimsa* has no adulteration."

Truth in action is *ahimsa*, love. Truth and love, *satya* and *ahimsa*, are like the two sides of a coin." All great religions enjoin the practice of love. Gandhi says:

"Nonviolence is complete innocence. Complete nonviolence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. Nonviolence is innocence in its active form, goodwill towards all life. It is pure love."

Hatred deflects our thinking, endangers the very sense of humanity. Love of power takes the place of conscience.

Ahimsa requires us to promote the welfare of all, *sarvodaya*. The socialist implications of freedom were understood by Gandhi. He says:

"There is no freedom for India so long as one man, no matter how-highly placed he may be, holds in the hollow of his hand the life, property and honor of millions of human beings. It is an artificial, unnatural and uncivilized institution. The end of it is an essential preliminary to freedom, *swaraj*."

Gandhi considered untouchability to be a curse and hated communal squabbles. All men are equal before God. If anyone looks down on a human being because he belongs to another faith, he commits a sin before God and man. Gandhi's movement contributed to the emancipation of women. National integration and world solidarity had been his steady objectives. If we are true followers of Gandhi, we should work for social and national integration, emancipation of women, absolute social equality, complete abolition of untouchability and caste discrimination, removal of economic disparities.

Gandhi spelt out the moral principles on which civilizations rest: **truth and love**. If people everywhere respond to them truthfully, the world will be brought closer together and the darkness which we see around us may be dispelled.

It is one of the paradoxes of history that we grow up through trial, error and confusion. We are half animal and half divine. We are straining upwards. We realize that through positive nonviolent action we can effect social and economic changes which once would have meant wars. Gandhi was deeply disturbed by the destructive fury of the years of partition but he was not frightened by it, for he had unshakable faith in the Supreme. Gandhi's words must be broadcast to the whole world:

"Have no fear. He who fears, hates; he who hates, kills. Break your sword and throw it away. So fear shall not touch you. I have been delivered from fear and desire in such a way that I know the power of God."

In the present nuclear age, renunciation of war as a method of settling international disputes is imperative. To the question. "How will you meet the atom bomb?"

Gandhi replied: "I will not go underground. I will not go into shelters. I will come out in the open and let the pilot see that I have not the face of evil against him."

This is a rebuke to the unbelievable levity with which we resort to violence. To reach this nonviolent frame of mind, human conscience has to be enlightened. Till then governments which are charged with the safety of millions have to use force where inevitable, while educating the people to grow better and get rid of the use of force.

Nonviolence is the highest ideal; it cannot be regarded as second to anything else. Gandhi says:

"There are two methods of fighting. The best and the most effective is not to defend at all but to remain at one's post risking every danger. The next best and equally honorable method is to strike truthfully in one's self-defense with weapons and place one's life in the greatest possible danger."

idam brahmam idam ksatram

sapadapi sarad api

Or *sastrad api sastrad api*

The *Kural* says:

A man can be said to forbear only when he has the power to strike and strikes not; where he has not the power, what matters it whether he forbears or does not forbear.

In its positive form, *ahimsa* means "the largest love, the greatest charity."

These ideals should inspire our work for peace, disarmament, racial equality and the economic development of all nations. Let the influence of love break through the dreadful chain of hate.

There have been great nations of the world, with wonderful penetration of intellect and great scientific leadership, which have come to grief. Let us ask the question as to what happened in our own times. We had the first World War. President Wilson of the USA announced that that war was being fought for making the world safe for democracy. What happened? Our little minds took control. We tried to suppress great peoples, we said that we must squeeze the Germans till the pips squeaked. The result was Hitler. Instead of making the world safe for democracy, we made it safe for dictatorships. Throughout the world petty and major dictatorships arose.

During the second World War, what did we say again? Provide the peoples of the world with the four freedoms. Have we provided people with freedom from fear? The nuclear developments have aroused in all of us the fear of a nightmare world. We cannot go to sleep without a sense of fear since the end of the second World War. Till today we have the cold war, though it may not be the hot war.

What is it that is lacking? It is here that Gandhiji comes to our rescue. He tells us that it is not enough to grow in intellect, to grow in body, to amass wealth. Let not people imagine that the one main interest in life is to acquire wealth, protect it, retain it. This is a kind of materialism that has dominated the peoples of the world. Their interest is not in the inward pursuits of life, but in external acquisitions. An acquisitive mind has produced a Slick society, and if we want to get rid of the sickness of our society, we have to supplement our education by a proper emphasis on ethics. Enlightenment and ethics are both essential for a proper system of education. The universities may provide us with scientific equipment, scientific training, they may give us all the knowledge that we have, but that knowledge should become illumined. It must become lustrous. What we learn must not be mere intellectual learning but must become something luminous which transforms our nature and makes us somewhat different from what we happen to be. Therefore, Gandhiji said, "Do not put all your stress on the material interests of life." Men are not satisfied with mere wealth. What shall it profit a man, says Jesus, if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul?

Most of us are interested today in gaining control over the world. We are not developing the other aspect of our nature, the spiritual side of us which is being forgotten in this accumulation of the appurtenances of life. Life does not consist merely in its outer embroidery. It consists in inwardness, freedom. It is, therefore, an essential part of nature.

When we talk of science, what do we mean by science? Science means the remolding of environment. It is wrong to think that the purpose of education is life-adjustment. It is life-enhancement, transforming life to suit our needs, to subject ourselves to the environment which is the opportunity given to this species to improve the environment, to change our nature.

That is the opportunity which is given to man, and it is possible because a human being can sit in judgment on nature; he does not become merely a creature of routine. He is something different from all other animals which are the victims of habit and sheer necessity and which are automata. That is not the way in which life can be improved.

Science itself tells us of the superiority of the human spirit to the whole material world. It is this human spirit that affirms that the world can be remolded, recast. All the changes that have taken place in this world from the beginning of history till today are changes that have taken place on account of the push which the human spirit has given to the forces of the world.

So science, if it affirms anything, does not affirm the omnipotence of matter, or the finality of materialism, but affirms the superiority of the human spirit to the material world. That is the lesson of science.

If we know that, we will be able to discover that there is an element in us which is not a matter of routine or rigidity, which is not a matter of mere automatism or habit, but which is something that transcends the whole past, something that makes us go forward.

We have done ever so many things in this world in the name of habit or tradition of which we are ashamed today. A generation later there will be many things of which we will be ashamed if we think of them—the way in which we are preparing these nuclear armaments for the destruction of one another. It is producing an atmosphere of fear. What we have to be freed from is fear itself, and this fear is there because man is not able to trust his brother man. Man is intended to be trustful, to be loving, to create and not to destroy. Because we have not held to that position, all these other troubles have come upon us. So it is that Gandhiji tells us about freedom from fear, *abhaya*: never to be afraid of what of what things will bring you. But if you think, you will see that these things themselves have been recast and that society has been reshaped. The present challenge is a challenge that we should re-create society, that we should not quarrel about political ideologies or religions but try to understand one another.

All the great scriptures of the world have affirmed one fact: as there are souls in this world, so are there pathways to God. Infinite is God, infinite the soul of man, and infinite the pathways. There is no need for us to stereotype them, to bring them down to any particular principle, rigidity or anything like that. We should beware of every kind of dogmatism, religious, philosophical or political. There is no occasion for the free spirit of man to be consigned to dogmas of any character. Gandhiji asserted in his prayer hymns and in his books that we should all worship one God and that we should not bother very much about the way in which we worship that God. If you go to a place where there is solemnity, where there is the spirit of religion, where people are looking not to

themselves but to something superior to that which is prevailing in this world, you have to bow down, bend your knees and join others in the worship of the One Supreme.

Enlightenment and ethics are the two things essential for the full development of a human being: enlightenment in our libraries, our laboratories, in our class-rooms, our lecture rooms. Ethics and meditation develop our soul, improving the mind and making it something different from what we find it to be. There is nothing so unnatural as human nature: it is something which is perpetually capable of responding to new circumstances. We gave up slavery, we gave up duelling. In Kerala there was the Temple-Entry proclamation. In Tirupati I was told that before the Harijans were admitted, the offerings were Rs. 10 lakhs; today, the offerings are Rs. 150 lakhs because they also go to the temple.

The spirit of God will be satisfied with the worship and adoration which people give. There are ever so many things which we do which are obnoxious, which should not be done by beings who call themselves human. I had occasion to talk to a large audience of over two lakhs of people at Calcutta. I was just telling them that the fundamental spirit of God did not require us to make any blood sacrifice. If God wants blood, He will take my blood; if He wants life, He will take my life. I gave them a pledge. I told them to think of God seriously, not take Him for granted by merely muttering mantras and reciting hymns but understand and try to penetrate into the cosmic mystery. If we are able to do it, we will not hate other people, we will not get angry with them, we will have no cause for resentment, we will feel a sense of brotherhood prevailing over the whole world. That is what we are required to do.

What we require is not the closed societies which are hostile to one another. We do require a society where everybody will feel drawn to everybody else because they are all born of the same substance, come from the same blood. If you are hewn from the same rock, if you spring from the same source, how can there be distinction between *mitra* and *amitra*, between friend and foe? There cannot be any distinction like that. These passing insanity which divide man from man, these hostilities which have sprung up by sinful indoctrination which makes you believe that you are the repositories of all wisdom and that others are groping in the dark, and that you are called upon to bring them out of that darkness into the sphere of light—these are all things which we will outlive. I remember speaking with someone on a Christian platform in New York City. The question, raised there was: What happened to Socrates and Plato, to Ramakrishna and Gandhiji? His answer was that they might not belong to the Church of Christ or to the religion of the Buddha or to the religion of Prophet Mohammed, but they belonged to the one Church of God Universal. That is what a great Catholic theologian said. It is that which Gandhiji said; it is that which has come down to us as a long-standing spiritual tradition. It is that which we have to affirm every day of our lives. When you are angry, when you are intemperate, when you are resentful, when you find fault with others, a more possible explanation may be that you are at fault: a more modest theory is to think that you are yourself at fault and not the other man. That was the principle for which Gandhiji stood, which will remind you that there are other things than science and technology, which will help us to go forward in establishing the true reign of God on earth.

From; OUR HERITAGE, Published in 1973.

By. Hind Pocket Books (P) Ltd., G.T. Road, Delhi 110032.