

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE

REFLECTIONS OF LIFE

BY

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THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—1

We have the tragic words of Pandit Nehru; “We live under the shadow of Nuclear and Thermo Nuclear weapons and the dreadful news of test-explosions of these weapons come to us frequently. We realize that even these explosions are doing terrible injury to mankind. The conscience of man is shocked at this crime against humanity. Yet nothing effective can be done to stop it. And so we drift to the final disaster without a sense of direction or purpose.” These words came from one of the greatest men of our time and one who embodied in him, the vibrations of history.

Pandit Nehru is, alas, no more with us as our sure guide through the labyrinth of present-day portents. We cannot however today stop where he left the matter. We must consciously become part of the rising tide of the will of the common people everywhere to

stop the drift to disaster. Elsewhere in this issue of our Journal will be found an account of how the youth of Germany are opposing the possibility of a nuclear war.

The Germans are a very brave people who have wielded every weapon of war twice in our generation, first under the Kaiser and then under Hitler. The temper of the German youth of today is proving infectious. In country after country the young are emphatically registering their will against being dragged into another orgy of world-slaughter and the destruction of Civilization. The Capitalist Press gives hardly any publicity to this steadily growing movement. A few years ago this writer was waiting at the Air Port in Dusseldorf in West Germany. Finding a small crowd of German youth sitting round a table nearby and arguing heatedly about something, I joined them. They saw my Gandhi cap and gave me a chair. They were by no means "Pacifists". They were

strong-bodied and strong-minded young people from the common ranks of German life. We had an exciting discussion and they listened to my exposition of the power of Gandhian Non-Violence organized on a mass scale. They could hardly believe that India has abolished the British Empire through a Non-Violent Revolution. Before we parted they said in chorus "Twice in our generation our elders betrayed us to death and defeat. We shall never let them do that again." It is this resurgent spirit of German youth that is now arising in Western countries, which will not allow their own Governments to plunge the world into a nuclear war. This reminds us at once of the situation in India.

The Government of India has all along taken the pledge not to make Nuclear Weapons. India is a country dedicated to World Peace and Disarmament. Our Prime Minister is perhaps today the most outstanding World Leader working for disarmament and peace. But this

should not put us to sleep. We have to be wide-awake to the terrific danger facing mankind. Did not Maharshi Vinoba plead with the United Nations to raise a World Peace Army and promise to contribute a hundred thousand Shanti Sainiks from India? After the Maharshi there is none in this country big enough to pursue this offer within the country for the United Nations. Mahatma Gandhi was the originator of the idea of the Shanti Sena. In fact, he made it clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that the whole of his Constructive Programme was intended to create Soldiers of Non-Violence.

The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the Gandhi peace Foundation must take up this most urgent work without any further loss of time. They must prescribe the minimum qualifications and raise contingents of Shanti Sainiks in every district in India. Any Democratic Government worth the name must

learn to look upon the Shanti Sena as a potent instrument of peaceful and creative Social transformation. Equally, every Gandhian worker worth the name must actively take his or her place in this Non-Violent Army. This Journal will be constantly at their service.

We appeal to our fellow men with all the earnestness at our command to listen to this challenge of the Gandhian Imperative in the present world situation.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—2

It was Winston Churchill, who gave the title “The Gathering Storm” to one of his great books. But that was the storm of war gathering over Europe. But there is now a new storm of peace, slowly and steadily gathering over Europe. Elsewhere in this issue of the Journal will be found the story of how masses of the common people are arising in the different countries of Europe protesting against nuclear weapons being brought into their areas? We have more than once claimed that millions of the common people of the world will refuse to allow their Governments to use nuclear weapons. Governments drunk with power and hatred of each other can no longer be trusted to keep mankind away from total destruction

in a Third World War which will ruthlessly employ nuclear weapons. We foresee in the not distant future how the storm of peace will gather mighty momentum. We have called this the Revolution of the people, by the people, and for the people. In the vast demonstrations, which have already taken place the cry has rung out, "We will follow Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King". How startling is this cry. It proves that the roots of non-violence have struck deep, though only here and there, across the world.

After all, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King never wielded any power of State or of Arms. They were long voices of non-violence in the midst of the thunder and lightning of violence raging in the world. But those lonely voices spawned the seeds of life as against the seeds of death spread by those threatening to use brute violence. In the New Revolution appearing on the horizon, the

people will turn against their own Governments and paralyze them before they succeed in devastating the whole world and turning it into a black desert where nothing will exist. We believe that dauntless warriors of peace will arise from among the people who will match the warriors of war in courage and excel them in self-sacrifice. Perhaps the greatest leaders in the struggle for peace against war will be women. Women are more deeply embedded in life than men and their stake in life is far greater than that of men. As mothers, they will fight for peace to the last ditch to save their children from being incinerated. Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba were firm in their conviction that women can and will be the redeemers of the world. That is why they envisioned Sthri-Shakti or Woman Power as the invincible force in human life.

Alas, time is running short. The dreadful tensions among the Super Powers have almost

reached a point of no return. The American and the Russian Governments are competing against each other for the mastery of the world's destruction. There are of course the satellite countries on each side. Except perhaps West Germany and France none of them appears to be capable of asserting itself in the present world context. Most of them are being drawn irresistibly to take one side or the other. But even in these countries the people are awakening to the grim sense of their approaching doom. In the Asian continent, India's firm and unalterable stand for disarmament and peace does strike a note of hope and redemption. Nevertheless the horizon is dark with threat of war. The gentle but inflexible voice of Gandhi comes to us through all the darkness and despair of a world, which does not know how to save itself. Here are his challenging words to the conscience of man "Violence can never save mankind. The only way to peace, justice and happiness is through non-violence. Even the

Western world must wake up at once to realize this truth before it is too late. If the West will produce at least one leader who is faith incarnate in nonviolence, the rest may well follow.” “How heroic but tragic are these words, as though from a Second Cross” commented Romain Rolland. But the Gandhian Imperative stands untouched.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—3

We must take the world as it is. Many of us are inclined to deal with some world of our imagination. We thus tend to become idealists without much solid foundation. That the idealists do serve a purpose is not denied. When we deal with the world, as it is we become per force practical. But even while we are thus practical we are all the time seeking to build something new and this involves imagination. To deal with the world as it is and at the same

time create a new and better society is the challenge, of practical idealism.

Purely religious teachers have given us a vast fund of idealism without practical realism. On the other hand materialist thinkers have generated the power to achieve practical ends ignoring often higher spiritual values. This process has run in parallel streams through history.

They have from time to time assumed the role of different ideologies and consequent programmes. We thus see on the one hand, countless institutions like Temples, Churches, Mosques and Viharas etc. to which multitudes of people come for the worship of God and the observance of rituals and prayers. We also see on the other hand at the same time, materialistic philosophies taking shape in significant secular programmes for human progress. It is astonishing how and why these

parallel forces of history have become competitive and even hostile to each other. Should it not be clear to thinking minds today that these forces should become complementary and co-operative? What is needed is a 'chemical change', which would not be a process of addition but of transformation into a new identity.

At the end of long centuries, we are now made to witness a confrontation of Western Democracy and world Communism. This has produced a situation full of conflicts and problems. Mahatma Gandhi with unerring pragmatism saw the necessity for the two great forces of history coming closer to each other in a new synthesis of spiritual and economic forces. Gandhiji's religion was that of redeeming the dispossessed millions from poverty and hunger. At the same time he sought to instill into his practical and apparently materialistic programmes, spiritual values

creating the synthesis for a new era of justice and peace in India and the world. He had the supreme courage to call himself 'a practical idealist' who wanted God himself to appear before the poor and the hungry only in the form of work and food. One would have thought that the Communist revolution would see in him an ally of the highest magnitude. But what has happened is exactly the contrary. And this for the one over-riding difference in the method of reaching the goal. While many followers have seen nothing but evil in Marxism, Gandhiji while fully aware of the brutal and bloody violence of Communist methods, never failed to acknowledge many of the aims of the Communist revolution as worthwhile and necessary. Acharya Vinoba also did the same.

The final challenge to Gandhian non-violence is of the conversion of Communism to nonviolence for achieving a just and peaceful society. If non-violence cannot convert

violence wherever it is most found, the reverse might happen. Communist violence might well convert non-violence to its own methodology. We are not without instances of both these taking place in our time. Mahatma Gandhi himself had never a doubt that his non-violence had the power to turn communists away from violence ultimately. How many of us share in this tremendous faith of the Master? Gandhian non-violence can defeat Communist violence only through a process of conversion.

There is only one way to defeat the enemy and that is to make him a friend. The conquest of violence by non-violence can be achieved only through love, tolerance, and patience & self-suffering. Let none of us turn away from this Gandhian Imperative.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—4

Western civilization may well be described as an Industrial cum Military Complex within the external structure of Political Democracy. The meaning and content of Democracy have assumed many shapes under the stress of the Industrial-Military Complex. There is nothing that the West is so proud of

as what they call their Democracy. They exhibit profound contempt and hostility to what the Communists call their own brand of People's Republicanism based on the One-Party-System. But the manner in which western Democracy and the Communist States function in terms of world peace appears to be the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee. Even so Democracy is more prone to be affected by the terrible influences of the Industrial-Military Complex, which through its immense power of wealth corrupts and distorts it beyond recognition.

Mahatma Gandhi had a profound distrust of the Industrial-Military Complex behind Western Democracies. The armament industry sells the most sophisticated weapons of mass destruction to different countries that are at war with each other. How this traffic in armaments affects the world situation can be seen in the Middle East where the Arab Nations

and Israel are warring against each other unto death. The same is the case with the war between Iran and Iraq. The rivalries and jealousies between the two super powers are reducing Lebanon to shambles. The Palestinian leader with his little army has escaped annihilation by the skin of his teeth. All the conflicts and wars in the Middle East are really those between the U.S.A. and the USSR in which smaller nations perish like moths in a raging fire. Where this fire will end nobody can yet foresee. American Democracy and Russian Communism are on trial before mankind today. The trial is not as to which of them will kill and destroy more of the world but which will help to create conditions for genuine world peace. We are almost tempted to say the world is watching whether Christ will win or Lenin will win.

In the meantime the great Light of the Divine Spirit embodied in the life, work, teachings and death of Mahatma Gandhi poses

a challenge from which there is no escape for the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R. if both are not to perish together. It is astonishing to remember how Mahatma Gandhi converted spirituality into an irresistible weapon to forge human freedom, justice and peace into an amalgam without parallel in history. We in India are the inheritors of the Gandhian Imperative in this connection. When Gandhi proved in India that the power of love and non-violence could equal any power of violence and hatred in the world, he struck a blow at the very roots of the Military-Industrial Complex, which threatens to drown the world in a flood of violence and destruction.

The technology of the Gandhian Imperative was only partly developed before a mad man assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. But we are witnessing today the moral and spiritual resurrection of Gandhi, even as the world is drifting to the edge of the precipice. It is certain

that the civilized world with its many centuries of moral and spiritual development will not ultimately allow the two Super Powers to destroy the life of man on the earth. Every day peace movements are gathering strength across the world. Millions of women are in these movements. They are the mothers and the wives who hold by the hand the countless innocent children of the world. Their power is the power of love turning into the supreme courage to win the battle for peace. The menace before mankind is that generated by the Industrial-Military Complex.

The hope before mankind is the Christian and Gandhian imperative of love and non-violence.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—5

Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the greatest Democrat of the 20th Century. His concept of Democracy went deeper than majority rule. To him the minority or minorities were as relevant as the majority. He therefore

propounded the latest and the most modern concept of Democracy. This was the Sarvodaya concept of Democracy. Getting hold of a brilliant flash from Ruskin he embodied in his concept of Democracy the idea of “Unto this last”. This meant that the least in society was as important as the greatest. The most intellectual or learned or wealthy or efficient was no more than just a member under Democracy on a par with an ignorant and even illiterate person.

This was a most revolutionary idea, which took the concept of Democracy to a height never attained in history. No majority had the right to dominate over a minority. The interests of the minority were as sacred as those of the majority. In fact the distinction between the majority and the minority almost disappears in the Gandhian concept. Sarvodaya meant equal uplift of all without any distinction between majorities and minorities. In other

words it becomes rule by the consent of all. It may be argued and with reason that this dismisses completely the Western idea of Democracy.

The question may be asked, why then hold general elections with adult franchise; and why should there be a Government responsible to Parliament? The answer is simple. Sarvodaya Democracy means rule by all elected members for all the people without variations of parties and groups. One definition may well be, rule by general consensus. This of course presupposes selfless, non-party approach to the solution of problems. The taking of a vote in parliament is not given up. But as far as possible the Parliament must aim at a general consensus. Only when a difference is fundamental and not negotiable at all, a vote is taken. But in implementing even a law so passed the minority view must be consulted at every step.

Sarvodaya Democracy can only be raised upon greater discipline, clearer understanding and a more lively sense of responsibility of the general public. The word “Opposition”, which is so current in Democracy is not put away but amended and exalted. Opposition even when thorough and unyielding does even so, become responsible. Mahatma Gandhi’s Democracy is thus from beginning to end permeated with the spirit and reality of non-violence. It is thus the climax of non-violence in the field of political action. This is how Mahatma Gandhi, prophet of the spirit as he was, reconciled politics and spirituality. Let none of us forget that Mahatma Gandhi acted pre-eminently in Indian politics seeking nothing less than complete political independence for his people. It has happened that some of those who have studied the life and work of Gandhi remembers only his moral idealism forgetting his highly empirical politics.

There is the old saying that, “Politics is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” Gandhiji proved on the other hand that men and women of the highest character and selflessness could make politics itself into a Tapasya or Penance. He literally spiritualized politics. His Democracy is thus the direct result of this spiritualizing process. The great men and women of India who stood with Gandhi in his non-violent revolutions were of the highest character and purity of purpose. There was Chitranjandas of Bengal who threw away a princely practice at the Bar to go to prison again and again under Gandhi’s leadership. Other similar instances of great Lawyers performing the same sacrificial rite are Motilal Nehru, Rajagopalachariar, Rajendra Prasad, Asaf Ali, K.M.Munshi, Sardar Patel, George Joseph and others. Mahatma Gandhi offered nothing but suffering and sacrifices to those who joined him in his non-violent revolutions. It was therefore inevitable that Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom and

independence for the people should take shape in Sarvodaya Democracy. Alas, we have not in India built up any such Democracy.

The further we have strayed away from Sarvodaya, the more we have deserted Mahatma Gandhi. Unless some great thinker proves that Sarvodaya Democracy is impossible, we shall have to bear the charge that we have forgotten the Master's teaching in this regard. Let us not forget however that the Western concepts of Democracy are under going crucial changes right before our eyes. Socialism in the West has become the corrective to Capitalistic Democracy. When socialism is fully established in the West, Sarvodaya may come a little closer to Modern Western Democracy.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—6

Beyond any doubt the first Gandhian Imperative, as also the last, was and is Non-Violence. No one can or will forget how Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and actions were spread over almost every aspect of National Reconstruction. He touched the life of India at so many points and created so many mighty movements in relation to them, that he gave us the challenging concept of a total revolution. Even as he passed away with the bullets of the assassin taking his life, he was adding more vital touches to the total revolution. But every word he spoke or wrote and every programme of action he undertook had one aim more than any other and that was the creation of the power of non-violence for moulding society. For him, no creative effort at building a new society of

complete justice and peace was possible except on the basis of non-violence. The difference between violence and non-violence was intensely pragmatic. We are often apt to think of non-violence as moral idealism. For Gandhi, however, Non-violence was the only condition of any vital and effective action. Non-violence and action were almost convertible terms in his philosophy of life.

Violence created obstacles and specially counters violence. But Gandhi was not living in a dream world but in the midst of grim realities of life in India. Fear, poverty, casteism leading to untouchability, communal conflicts, religious fanaticism, linguistic intolerance, educational chaos etc. surrounded him like the tentacles of a mighty octopus. His Constructive Programme was his answer. Every item of the Programme sought to solve one or the other of the many problems and when put together he was able to rouse the 'shakti' of the masses.

The Constructive Programme was not completed when the Mahatma passed away. We have of course carried forward some of the items of the Constructive Programme like Khadi, Village Industries, Harijan emancipation etc. in independent India.

That we have not completed the Constructive Programme in all its totality still remains one of the causes why the masses of our people have not advanced, as they should have under freedom and independence. But any talk that India has forgotten Gandhi or given up his Constructive Programme is non-sense. It is one thing to admit that we have not fulfilled or completed that programme and quite another to say we have turned away from it. What great non-official organizations did in pre-independence time, we are now accomplishing with the support alike of the Government and the people. Great Gandhian organizations are

still functioning in the country. Each one of them, with hundreds of dedicated workers, is carrying out one or the other items of the Constructive Programme. We have not however achieved the unity of all such work for the promotion of the Gandhian imperative of Non-violence. There is the great Sarvodaya movement working throughout India without organizational rigidity. But even this movement has failed to bring together effectively all Gandhian organizations and institutions to strengthen adequately the fibre of non-violence among the people.

Violence is erupting in many areas of national life Political parties are abetting in creating and spreading violence in the country. If Gandhians cannot come together today to effectively counter this growing violence among the people, we shall have lost the battle for Non-violence. Let us not lose courage in this crisis. There are enough Gandhian workers in the

country, who if they unite and stand together firmly can change the situation. The Gandhian Imperatives in this connection are crystal clear. We must achieve the functioning unity of all those who believe in Mahatma Gandhi. We must establish once more the link that binds all constructive work together to produce the atmosphere for Non-violence. We must then go on solving the problems of the people, which cry out for solutions. It is not necessary to belittle or contradict the work done by the National Government in a hundred directions. We must co-operate where we can, or carry on our own work silently to the best of our ability. There is no escape for us from these imperatives.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—7

It is not difficult to make a most frightening list of the baffling problems facing mankind today. But the idea that a common religion is proof against cruel wars among those owing allegiance to the same religion has been completely shattered again and again. Today the bitterest wars of hatred are being fought among the Muslim Nations in the Middle East. The terrible tragedies of the war between Iran and Iraq and between Syria and neighbouring Muslim States prove beyond doubt that a

common religion no longer binds people together. Even internally in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan etc, Muslims are persecuting and killing Muslims without mercy. Christianity of course has never prevented terrible wars between Christian Nations as shown in the first and second World Wars. The quarrel between China and Russia proves that even within the Communist circle wars may break out any day.

What then can bind people together everywhere and act as a preventive of war? Religions center round allegiance to God Almighty. Even the loyalty to God has not operated as a force against war. And yet Mahatma Gandhi's faith that love of God will lead to love of man and thus create conditions of peace was never once shaken. This at once clears the idea that religion for Gandhi was never sectarian, but of universal application and validity. Gandhi redefined religion as Truth, Love and Non-violence.

Truth was God and the law of Truth was love and love can and must express itself only through non-violence. There is a false idea that religions are becoming weaker and no longer holding the mind of man. There is certainly some evidence in this direction.

But there is much more evidence that religions continue to exercise influence over the minds of men. This contradiction can be reconciled in only one way and that is the Gandhian way of Sarva-Dharma –Samanathva. To get firm hold of the essential unity of all religions and then to make that unity sub serve the cause of peace and non-violence throughout the world was the chief aim of Gandhiji's religion. And yet strangely many millions of men chanting the different names of God have totally forgotten this universal and inescapable unity. The major question before mankind today is whether the great religions can undergo the vital transformation from competition and

conflict to co-operation and peace. If religions fail to do this in the present crisis of human history they will be swept away in the rising tide of new challenges and demand. How was Mahatma Gandhi able to unite millions of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others to stand together in the battle for India's freedom in which the only reward he could offer his non-violent soldiers was sacrifice and suffering. Himself a profound Hindu, he enabled millions of people of all religions to see the same basic Truth in every religion and the foundation of love upon which such Truth stood. This was possible because his was a war without violence. It was a non-violent war, which brought out the essential good in every religion.

With the magic key of non- violence he opened the door of purification of every religion from within. Muslims and Christians did not quarrel with Gandhi because he was a believing Hindu. For, his Hinduism had passed

through a mighty process of self-purification, throwing out caste and untouchability and all empty formalism and ritualism. The wave of purification within the heart of Hinduism spread to other religions and they too became purified and ready for a process of unified non-violent action against social and political evils and subjection. It will be utterly foolish to imagine we can get rid of the religious impulses holding the mind of mankind in different ways and languages. In fact there is today a resurgence of religious impulses even in countries pledged to socialism and secularism.

The historic Imperative is thus the harnessing of purified religious impulses to the remaking of a just and peaceful social order. This historic imperative is also today the Gandhian Imperative.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—8

We have had down the centuries the battle between the forces of love and the forces of hate. It is not easy at all to decide which of the two has won the battle. After all, our

intimate knowledge of history is only a few thousand years old. May be about three thousand years. Before that, we have largely legend and stories. And only very rarely some patches of genuine history. Civilization became the vast canvas on which the continuing struggle between love and hate and good and evil painted itself. Sometimes the colours on the canvas were black as death and sometimes bright as sunshine. Expressions of hate were in the long catalogue of battles and wars in which countless, millions of human beings have perished in indescribable agonies. Expressions of love were in the equally long catalogue of the birth and growth of great religions, philosophies and arts and literature. The ultimate test of victory or defeat was in the way human life changed. In any study of the broad-sweep of history, the final word may well be that life has persisted and always advanced in spite of death. In the noble words of Mahatma Gandhi, love has persisted in spite of hate, truth has persisted in the face of

untruth and life has persisted in the face of death.

Life and love might have lost many battles but they have not yet lost the war. We have deliberately used the expression 'Not yet.' We have said so because, mankind today stands in an utterly new crisis in which all past experience may be annulled in the explosion of an experience of total annihilation. Even in the last two great world wars mankind emerged from death and darkness into new life and light. The conventional weapons of destruction with which the wars were fought put certain limitations beyond which death and destruction could not be wrought.

But now, there is a new situation altogether. In this new situation we have the nuclear weapons which if used can totally destroy the world, leaving behind no trace of human or any other life. The possibility of any

war escalating into a nuclear war can never be ruled out. There will be no frontiers of any kind in a nuclear war. The only frontier will be that of the total extinction of man and all his civilization. The Super Powers are engaged in a deadly competition to conquer the world. Every step they take is to checkmate each other and to capture the ultimate reins of power and wealth. In this deadly struggle nothing in the past history is valid unless it can be pressed into service to achieve the new aims of conquest.

Look at President Reagan's visit to Beijing. No one had hated and maligned China in the past more than Mr Reagan. He has now swallowed all the past and is in Beijing to make friends with his old enemy to promote trade between his country and China. He is also out to forge their unity against the U.S.R. Evidently Chinese Communism is good but not Russian Communism. There are no moral laws in politics as now understood. Anything is good in politics, which gives a good return.

We are living in an age of politics. Politics dominates everything. Mahatma Gandhi did not turn away from politics. He took the serpent in his hand and extracted its poison. He made politics a programme of sacrifice and suffering without inflicting violent injury on the enemy. In other words he purified politics. No one came into his political movement without undergoing this process of self-purification. This affected millions of men and women in India who came under his supreme leadership. Let us not also in our time turn away from politics and hide our heads in what we call constructive work. Gandhian politics was never dissociated from Gandhian Constructive work. This is not a plea that we should make a mess of both. Unless those who wish to follow Gandhiji come actively into the politics of truth and non-violence it is not possible to bring about the fundamental changes in society, which we are seeking. Other political organizations

are taking the country into their hands and we are helplessly watching how things are done totally contrary to our ideas.

The Gandhian Imperative is not to shirk politics but to tame it. The first condition of this process is the unreserved allegiance to non-violence in politics.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—9

The Gandhian imperatives are reaching more and more countries outside India. That the truth can never be buried nor ever denied too long is being proved again. Looking at the world with the eyes of the modern scientific and technological man it is possible to say that Mahatma Gandhi is seen nowhere on the horizon. The horizon here is the borderline all around us between life and death. And yet the discerning eye can catch the trace of something new on the horizon. This new phenomenon is the indestructible human conscience, which has come along with man in his long evolution from primordial matter down to the present-day man. While all the time the human conscience is betrayed on almost every side and the great and noble values of culture and spirituality are thrown over board without the slightest compunction, and the strident voice of anti-

conscience is heard everywhere, the still small voice of truth has never once died out.

Apart from the numberless demonstrations of the common people in the so called advanced countries, we have now the authentic joint statements of five Heads of States throwing out a moral challenge to the Super Powers to give up their nuclear arms and to come at once to the Disarmament Conference table. These leaders represent the awakened moral sensibility of mankind in regard to the matter of another world war. They take the firm stand that there shall not be another world war for any reason whatever and that all differences among the major powers shall be settled only through peaceful negotiations. Never before has such a statement signed by five Heads of States come before the world with such unambiguity and certainty of conviction. As time passes, more Heads of States will certainly come in to sign the statement. The

snowballing of the human conscience is well on its way and where Governments hesitate, the pressure of the people will compel them to join in the demand that all nuclear weapons be put away.

The five Heads of States come from three Continents and even a casual referendum will show how they have the massive support of the common people in their countries. We have said this before and we repeat it without any fear of contradiction that the common people in different countries do not wish to slaughter each other and to set up any one's supremacy. The time will come when nations and their leaders will join in a race towards disarmament and peace rather than to armaments and war.

Karl Marx taught, "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose except your chains." The imminent new teaching must be, "Peoples of the world unite, you have

nothing to lose except the ropes that bind you to war and death". The people will certainly understand such a cry, which can go ringing round the world. People love life and hate death. People love their children and would wish them to live in a world free from the terror of war and death.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who is the leading signatory to the historic statement mentioned above is today undoubtedly the champion of world peace and disarmament. To her and our country, peace is the first condition of development and growth. Only in a peaceful world can basic problems of hunger, poverty, ignorance and fear be attacked and solved. More than half the world is hungry, disease-ridden and haunted by the fear of war. Indira Gandhi and her fellow signatories wish to take life and happiness to countless millions around the world. The U.S.A. has already rebutted the major call in the statement. The Soviet Union,

on the other hand, has welcomed it. But neither of these Super Powers, who are the guilty ones, has yet taken one step forward to reduce the present terrible international tensions. The whole world is watching their conduct. Ideologies will not matter to the people half as much as relevant action to reduce the perils of a nuclear war. Whichever side takes the first step to disarmament and peace will gain the laurels of the Gandhian imperative.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—10

Elsewhere in the issue of this journal a significant quotation from Mahatma Gandhi will be found. “Socialism begins with the first convert. If there is one such, we can add zero to the one and the first zero will account for ten and every addition will account for ten times the previous number. If, however, the **beginner is a zero**, in other words no one makes the beginning, multiplicity of zeros will also produce zero value. Time and paper occupied in writing zeros will be too much waste.” This is true of Non-violence also. Non-violence has to begin with the convinced individual. Such an individual can and will gather more individuals

dedicated to Non-violence. The collapse of Non-violence in our public life, which we witness on all sides is nothing less than the total lack of individuals at present who are absolutely dedicated to non-violence. If now and then, and here and there, in this vast country there are occasional eruptions of Non-violence, we can always discover behind them a handful of individuals standing by Non-violence at all costs.

Kumari Nirmala Deshpande, disciple equally of Mahatma Gandhi and Maharshi Vinoba who recently undertook a valiant peace march in terribly troubled Punjab has proved Gandhiji's prophetic words right before our eyes. Small groups of genuine Gandhians in other parts of India have also demonstrated the possibility of Non-violent action to put out the fires of hatred and violence raging in the country. While, therefore, it can be rightly said that the over-all influence of Gandhiji through Non-violence has weakened and retreated in our

country, there are enough witnesses to the power of Non-violence still working among the people. The people, who will ultimately matter, are however, caught in a vortex of problems which affect and shatter their daily lives without their being able to control the forces creating such problems.

Let us also admit without hesitation that the gap between the non-violent forces in India and the National Government as also the Governments of the States is very wide and appears to be insurmountable. Gandhian workers, however, can and must draw some comfort from the thought that our Governments will never obstruct truly Non-violent action for the solution of problems. Punjab has shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that neither the police nor the army can bring about peace and harmony among the people. Our leaders are exhorting the people all the time to come into the picture with their

active non-violent forces to quench hatred and violence. The question inevitable arises whether the Government compelled to use the police and the army, and considerable sections of the people ready and willing to employ Non-violence can work together. If it were a matter of choice it will be easy to give an answer. But when neither the Government nor the Non-violent groups are left with no choice at all but compelled by circumstances to act, each in their own way, then, the contradictions become apparent.

If Mahatma Gandhi were alive he would have succeeded in over-coming these contradictions by his political and even more, by his moral authority. Today no such moral authority is available and the result is the increase in contradictions. What the people can do is to oblige the Government to reduce the use of violence to the minimum and encourage non-violent groups to grow and spread. But, let us

come back to Gandhiji's teaching that "Socialism begins with the first convert" and in the present case "Nonviolence begins with the first convert." This is a lesson, which we have to understand and learn much more than we have done yet. Let each one of us resolve that we shall be the first convert to Non-violence and the rest will follow inevitably. But time presses and our country and the rest of the world are drifting steadily towards a final disaster in a nuclear war. We have no time to wait and philosophize. Luckily, in many of the advanced countries of the West people's Peace movements are coming up like tidal waves.

Let us join hands with the millions of the common people who are shaping these movements. This is the Gandhian imperative challenging us toady.

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—11

'Life persists in spite of death' was the expression of Gandhi's optimism. Everything certainly dies but everything grows up again without fail. This view of life is based on the truth that nothing matters so long as life continues. Life creates more life. Life creates bodies and minds. Life creates values and culture. In other words life creates civilization. The sanctity of life is inherent in this view of

life. This sanctity of life is at the core of Gandhiji's philosophy and practice of non-violence. Violence kills and destroys even while it appears to be winning some battle or other. Wherever violence triumphs life is defeated. Wherever non-violence is victorious life is renewed. Undying life is the best friend of non-violence.

Nature sometimes furnishes the highest example. There was a fruit tree in a garden. Suddenly an army of pests covered the tree. It was horrible to look at. "What can be done?" was the question before the gardener. The pests had swarmed right up to the leaves. The gardener thought of setting fire to the tree. He somehow gave up the idea. Then he took the axe in his hand and cut the tree down and dragged it away and then set fire to it. He tried to dig out even the roots and then covered the hole in the earth. Weeks passed and nobody looked at where the tree once stood. But life

was working inside the earth. A shoot of new life sprang up from the soil and before the gardener knew what had happened a new tree was growing where the old one stood.

Weeks passed again and a whole new tree stood in front of the gardener. More branches came out of it than in the old tree. A mighty mass of leaves covered the tree. The gardener wondered at the vitality of the soil and the vitality of life in a few roots of the tree. How could so much new life come out of a corrupt tree, which had been destroyed! **Here was life winning over death.** Here was creative non-violence winning over destructive violence. The tree grew into a great tree and produced big quantities of fruits. Something like this is happening to civilizations and cultures in history. Civilizations come and go. Waves of culture rise and fall. But nothing stops the life of man. Life itself moves forward all the time.

The sanctity of life is the rock bottom of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of life. Only non-violence can guarantee the sanctity of life. Violence is the enemy of the sanctity of life and destroys it. The sanctity of life in Gandhian non-violence goes deeper than that of human life. It embraces the entire creation including all sentient and even non-sentient life. Non-killing in human life is only the first step in the recognition of the sanctity of life. While this is the absolute truth in the abstract, what goes on practically all over the world is the blatant negation of it. Except here and there in India and elsewhere in Buddhist Asia, animal food is the order of the day. The immense slaughter of animals every day in the world is something that can shake any mind. And yet no one bothers about it and even saints and sages accept this reality. We must therefore be satisfied in the practical world of today by the sanctity of life among human beings. But even that is

threatened by wars using weapons of incalculable destructive power.

For men and women all over the world the sanctity of life means only the sanctity of human life. Let us raise no quarrel over this issue. If all of us can join hands together and preserve at least the sanctity of human life, then something could happen which can well save the life of the man on this planet. Even the serious consideration of such a possibility appears Utopian. But without such a possibility what is the future of mankind? We must therefore turn resolutely to the white-clad figure of Gandhi and vow our acceptance of the sanctity of at least human life.

As we look at the world picture, this is the Gandhian Imperative challenging us today. The issue is simply—Will mankind perish or survive?

THE GANDHIAN IMPERATIVE—12

India knows how to generate nuclear power. It has recently been stated at the highest level that India will not however harness nuclear power to destructive weapons. There are

members in Parliament belonging to different parties who constantly raise the question of how India can avoid making nuclear weapons when Pakistan is attempting to do so. China has already manufactured nuclear bombs and is perhaps helping Pakistan to do the same. Nuclear proliferation is abetted by the very powers who oppose proliferation in International Forums. The madness it all baffles the mind. There is now a race among the big powers to produce and brandish nuclear war. Even common sense stands shattered before such blatant hypocrisy. We have said this many times. We have said repeatedly that nothing appears to be more idiotic than to manufacture and stockpile nuclear weapons at unmentionable cost of money, labour and scientific research and at the same time hold numberless conferences to take steps to prevent the use of nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister of India has recently, in more than one firm and unambiguous statement, made it utterly clear that India is not frightened nor unnerved by whatever Pakistan might do in regard to this matter. The Prime Minister pointed out that Pakistan making a few Atom Bombs does not pose a greater danger than the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R. or China, all of which possess mighty arsenals of nuclear weapons. The Prime Minister pointed out that India is all the time pleading with the nuclear powers to put away their weapons and that therefore it was not open to India, politically or morally, to do what she was asking others not to do. Non-Congress parties appear to speak with double voices. They want India to produce nuclear weapons in answer to the so called threat from Pakistan and at the same time they want peace in the world without any war at all. Today India may not be the equal of the Super Powers in armed strength but it has a moral standing, which nobody can

challenge. This comes from Mahatma Gandhi's continuing influence and Pandit Nehru's courageous advocacy for the total abolition of nuclear weapons during all the years he was the Prime Minister.

Both the names of Gandhi and Nehru possess a moral value in this matter, which is unequalled. Indira Gandhi in line with these two masterminds of our history is also uttering the same words and giving the same message of peace and goodwill to a world facing the danger of a total disaster through a nuclear war. She is not only the Prime Minister of India but also the Head of the Non-aligned Movement, which holds together more than a hundred nations.

Much depends on who will be the next President of the United States and who will be the next Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. These are Democracies, which can

register the renewed will of the people from time to time. In the U.S.S.R. there is a rigidity of outlook which is not easily altered by the will of the people. If a referendum were taken by the United Nations in all the countries represented in that World Organization, there will be a solid vote against the manufacture and amassing of nuclear weapons. And this for the simple reason that mankind will not voluntarily accept total annihilation of the race by a few mad men plunging the world into the abyss. Any such referendum will show that the peoples of countries of the Super Powers do not wish to destroy each other for no purposes conducive to the future welfare of the world as a whole. For, if there is one thing more than another which is clearer today than at any time before in human history, it is that the world has become one and indivisible and we all live or perish together.

The Gandhian Imperative therefore is
for the people everywhere to fight with all their
might for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Desikottama Dr G. Ramachandran

Blossomed: 07-10-04

Withered: 17-01-95

Desikottama Dr G Ramachandran, one of the giants of those who were privileged to be moulded by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Rajaji, represented a rare synthesis of the values the great men stood for, all their lives. GR distinguished himself as an authentic interpreter of the first two and set himself up as a practical reformer who sought to harmonize Gandhi and Tagore; in constructive Ventures and act as a bridge between the two.

Sri G. Ramachandran met Gandhi at Dilkush in 1921, during Gandhiji's famous "21 days fast". He was then a student of Mr. CF Andrews at Santiniketan. The discussions GR was privileged to have with Gandhi on the occasion drew him closer to the Mahatma. Ramachandran soon became an inmate of Gandhiji's ashram at Sevagram and under Gandhiji's direct guidance and supervision plunged himself into the national movement and the Gandhian Constructive Programme.

Gandhi chose him as a close disciple and entrusted to him several important missions. He was sent to Jamia Millia Islamia as per the request of Dr Zakhir Hussain where he served a lecturer and taught

spinning. Khadi work brought him closer to the common man and the distinguished Rajaji.

During the Freedom struggle, he courted arrest eleven times and spent seven years in jail.

He began Khadi work selling Khadi yarn and cotton and became the Chairman of All India Khadi And Village Industries Commission of India. During his tenure as Chairman, started the People's Education Programme for poor.

His contribution to education, both Basic Education and higher Education, Khadi and community Development needs special mention. Gandhigram Rural University of which he became the Founder Vice Chancellor is a reflection on GR as an educationist and a constructive thinker. His experiments in Gandhigram showed us how rural children and women could be provided with facilities for growth and all-round development from birth to higher education.

Along with his wife, Dr (Mrs.) Soundram Ramachandran, he founded the "Institute of Rural health and Family planning Center", institute for 'Sanitary Inspectors' Training and Kasturba Hospital which won recognition and awards at the National level (especially for services in Family planning and women & child-welfare).

He was a powerful Orator and a brilliant writer. His Autobiography, “Adventuring with life” is a true reflection of his times and the aspirations of the millions who dedicated their lives for their motherland.

After 60 years of service in various cadres before and after independence, Dr GR came back to his hometown Neyyattinkara in 1980 and started an institution in the name of his beloved mother Smt Madhavi Tankachi. He donated all his landed properties to this charitable society “The Madhavi mandiram Loka Seva Trust”. The Educational wing of this institution is “Mahatma Gandhi Vidya Peedom”. We have Dr GR Public School under this wing with CBSE Affiliation. This is his last venture especially for women and children.

The milestones in the eventful life of this multifaceted personality and man of conviction and humour may be summarized as follows:

- Joined Non Cooperation movement in 1920 and participated in the Tilak Swaraj Fund.
- Become one of the earliest Honours Graduates of the Visva Bharati in 1924 and joined the Sabarmathi Ashram.
- Took part in the Salt-Satyagraha Revolution in 1930 together with Rajaji at Vedaranyam. Sentenced to imprisonment for one year and a fine of Rs.500/-

- Functioned as the Provincial Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh in Tamil nadu and Kerala and member of the Central Executive Committee of Harijan Sevak Sangh.
- Took active part in the Temple Entry movement in Tamilnad and Kerala (Vaikom) Spent six years as one of the general Secretaries of the Hindustani Tamil Sangh in Sevagram and actively promoted Basic Education in Tamilnadu, Mysore and Andra.
- Was appointed the Chairman of the Basic Education Assessment Committee set up by the Government of India.
- Became the General Secretary of the All India Village Industries Association, Maganwadi.
- Appointed Educational advisor of Rajaji Government of Madras State.
- Joined the Pattom Tanu Pillai Cabinet (in Travancore) as a Minister.
- Served the Indian Express as an Editor.
- Along with his wife Dr (Mrs.) Soundram Ramachandran founded Gandhigram in 1947 and was its Director for 15 years.
- Was the member of the Rajya Sabha for 6 years.
- Served on the Balwant Ray G Mehta Committee on Community Development.
- General Secretary of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi for 3 years.

- Founder Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Editor of Gandhi Marg (English Journal)
- Conferred the Degree of D.Litt by the Kashi Vidya Peeth, title of “Desikottama” by Viswabarathi University and Doctorate by Gandhigram Rural University.
- Traveled widely: lectured in the universities in England, Germany, United States, Soviet Union, Poland Yugoslavia, Ceylon etc. spreading the message of Mahatma Gandhi.
- Was a member of the delegation sent to Moscow by the Gandhi Peace foundation along with the Congress President UN Debar to take the message of peace and to prevent the use of Nuclear weapons.
- Authored Several Books: Thought and Talks, Village Reconstruction Step by Step, The Man Gandhi, A Sheaf of Gandhi Anecdotes, Higher Values of life, Adventuring with Life etc.
- Several Poems, drawings and handicraft-items to his credit.
- Received peace awards from Grambling University, USA and the Soka Gakkai International, Tokyo.
- As a last “venture” founded the Madhavimandiram Loka Seva Trust, at the age of 76 bequeathing all his ancestral property (to the Trust) in memory of his mother Smt Madhavi Tankachi. The Trust runs

The founder & the first Managing
Trustee
of this Trust was
Desikottama Dr G.Ramachandran.

Step by step, this small
organization grew into various production
units in Khadi and Village Industries,
winning good name for its products- GR
Sarees and GR Fibre fancy articles.

At present Sister Mythili is our
Managing Trustee. There are 15 members
in the Board of Trust.

The Trust has two wings:
One for Social work and
Another for Education

Soundram Farm; Paramahansa
Yogananda Computer Lab; Sakthi Mandiram
- for Socially handicapped women; Khadi
and Village Industries; Welfare of mothers
& children; are some of the works under
the Social work wing of the Trust.

Crèches 3; Dr GR Play Home for children below 5 years; Dr GR Public School affiliated to CBSE, New Delhi; Continuing Education Centre & People's Education Programme are the works under the Mahatma Gandhi Vidya Peedom.

The Birth Centenary Year of Desikottama Dr G.Ramachandran is to be celebrated as a year long Programme With seminars and workshops Literary and cultural activities

From 7th Oct 2004 to 7th Oct 2005.

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