

The Co-operative Movement in our National Reconstruction

A Confession of Faith

Dr G Ramachandran

This is a confession of faith. It is not a recent confession. It is as old as nearly 50 years of my public work. When the late Sri Pattom Thanu Pillai asked me what subjects I would like to hold as a Minister in his cabinet. I included in my small list, "Co-operation". I spoke at many Co-operative conferences then and gave this confession of faith which I am making now.

Economic development, specially in under-developed Countries, naturally covers many important areas. But of them all, the Co-operative method of economic reconstruction is item No.1. Democratic countries and Dictatorial countries have both alike utilized the Co-operative method in economic development from below. Most of the Democratic countries have the Capitalistic system with honourable exceptions. The Dictatorial countries have a Socialist system. In the first, Co-operation is voluntary and thus real co-operation. In the Dictatorial countries co-operation is compulsory and thus in some ways only a parody of co-operation. It is claimed that co-operation as practiced in Communist countries is more effective. This is a questionable preposition. In the Democracies, co-operation is often dominated by big money and big politics. In India also our co-operative who have political influence and economic power with all these movement is sometimes riddled by those/deficiencies Co-operation has played a magnificent part in our economic development from below among the people. My own impression is, even if co-operation in our country is not as extensive as in some of the great Democracies, what we have is a little cleaner and more wholesome than elsewhere. I am not saying this in any spirit of complacency.

There are powerful political and economic ideologies clashing with each other in our wide world. But if our aim is to build a human society of justice, equality and peace, then there is no other way except the Co-operative method of development. I once asked Mahatma Gandhi why he had not included co-operation in his great Constructive Programme. His answer was at that time the Co-operative movement was dominated by British officials and we would not be able to change this easily. India had first to obtain political independence before our co-operative

movement could be free, unfettered and a movement of the Sovereign Independent Republic of India. It is for us now to make the Co-operative movement the biggest and the most effective instrument of peaceful Social change. I am sorry to say we have not yet done this effectively or on nation-wide scale. Perhaps Kerala and Gujarat and one or two other states are forging ahead in the right direction. I envy our able and devoted Minister for Co-operation Smt M.Kamalam for the job she is doing so well. There is hardly an economic activity at the peoples level which cannot be run on Co-operative life. When I was once in Moscow I discovered that even Barber's Saloons are run as Co-operative societies. Mahatma Gandhi's aim was a just, peaceful and prosperous Indian society in which there will be no ultra rich or ultra poor. If we mean truthfully to build up such a society we can do so only through an endless chain of Co-operative Societies in which the common man has his full share of authority and importance. "Co-operate or Perish" may well be our slogan.

“ON HUMAN EXCELLENCE”

(Dr G.Ramachandran)

Human Excellence inescapably covers a major segment of life. It is not possible to define it adequately or even to indicate how its ramifications touch human life at so many points. The history of civilization is largely the history of the evolution of human excellence through the ages. But luckily the subject I have on hand is circumscribed enough not to scare me away. Let us remember it is, “Human Excellence through Art, Literature and Religion”. These sub-headings are however prolific enough to challenge our understanding and interpretation of History and the growth of Culture. Culture is thus the word for us in the present context. Because, Culture comprises Art, Literature and Religion. These are the three great streams which pour into the Ganga of Culture. Human Excellence thus become Human Culture as we study it. Art is the expression of beauty in every form. Literature is the embodiment of imagination and Religion, the aspiration of man to rise above his self and to reach out to divine perfection. Human excellence is both the cause and the consummation of Culture. There can be no Human Excellence apart from Culture and no Culture apart from Human Excellence.

Let us now see what these ideas and words really mean. The ultimate meaning points to the man of high character, courage, truth and compassion. Our minds go to those verses in the Gita which Gandhiji repeated everyday, verses portraying the “Sthita Pragna” or the perfected person. Such Human Excellence is not of a starved and frustrated Sanyasin turning away from life full of joys and beauties but of a Karmayogin standing erect and accepting every challenge of life full of happiness and fulfillment. Human excellence is positive and dynamic, joyous and life-giving. There is a joy in the heart of Karmayoga which nothing else can give. Freedom from slavish attachment and commitment to great ends and aims are in harmony in Karmayoga. To be brave, unyielding but not retaliating and conquering hate with love and cruelty with compassion make the sum total of Karmayoga. Human excellence can never be negative. It is always positive and full of light, joy and the splendor of thought and action. The philosophy of Human Excellence calls us to the high adventures of life in every field of thought and action. Any other concept and vision of human excellence will be self-contradictory. We realize that nothing can be more excellent than such Human Excellence for mankind.

Mahatma Gandhi was the highest and fullest embodiment of such human excellence as we have described it. He was not a long-faced or sour minded saint turning away from the sunshine and joys of life. If he was an ascetic there never was a more glad hearted one, so full of laughter and love and self-realization. He was a mighty man of action and at the same time a profound thinker and a great artist of the spoken and written word. He loved every expression of beauty so long as beauty purified the mind. A man of heroic deeds, he could play with children like a child. He could rebuke kings and nurse lepers. He would not hurt an ant and yet called millions of people to intense self-suffering for the freedom of India. He never had a dull moment because he touched living-life on every side all the time. Life was one great, inspiring and redeeming adventure for him. He was the master of the art of jokes without hurting. He went into the Buckingham Palace in London and met the King Emperor, himself dressed only in his loin-cloth and His Majesty in royal robes and then when coming out of the Palace, Journalists asked him how he had been admitted into the Palace in his loin-cloth, he answered with a twinkle in his eye, “Yes, I did meet the King Emperor but he had on him clothes enough for both of us” and the British public roared with laughter at the joke. To another journalist he quipped, “You wear in your country Plus-Fours” but I wear “Minus-Fours”. No one could remain long with Gandhiji without himself and others enjoying up-roarious laughter. And yet this man of laughter had wept more than any other man of our time over the sorrows of the widows, the orphans and the untouchables. It was Pandit Nehru who once said that he had never known a man whose whole life was one piece of art as Gandhiji’s.

Human excellence posits the idea that human life is full of beauty and joy and meaning to those who understand life. Human Excellence is the Art of living effectively, beautifully and purposefully. Let us be grateful to Tirumali for keeping constantly before our eyes this vision of Human excellence at a time when we are groping in the dark having put out the candles of vision.

My Tribute of Admiration and Affection to Dr S.R.K.

We both met long ago when life was young and full of battle and faith. We met from different starting points. S.R.K. was a Marxist and I a Gandhian, as one might have said. Then what could have brought us together? The time was an important factor. We met sometime in the early nineteen forties. We loved our country and longed to push out the British from India. He believed in violent revolution and I in non-violent Satyagraha. Mahatma Gandhi then dominated Indian Politics and the millions followed him. S.R.K. like a realist stepped into line whatever might be his political creed. I was in the thick of the non-violent revolution sweeping India from end to end. We thus met in battle and in faith. He and I addressed many meetings in and around Madurai. He was the brilliant translator into Tamil of my English speeches. As we thus worked together we became genuine friends and co-workers inspite of our different ideologies. A strange thing happened however. I grew to appreciate the challenges of Marxism and he grew to appreciate the inevitability of the Gandhian method of revolution in our country.

We then separated for many years from each other. I went away to New Delhi as the Secretary of both the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the Gandhi peace Foundation. Later still I went away to Bombay as the Chairman of the Khadi and Village Industries Commissions of India. During these ten or fifteen years we met only rarely. But the warmth of our friendship continued unbroken. From Bombay I returned to Gandhigram and became the Vice-Chancellor of the Gandhigram Rural University. During this period, I invited him to deliver a few lectures to my students at the University. Need I say, they were brilliant lectures. In one of them he gave a wonderful comparison between the Tamil Poet Kambar and the English Poet Milton. The talk he gave to the students on Tagore day would be long remembered by those who heard him. In the mean time there came on the scene someone who became an intimate link between us both. This was Kumari Mythili, the granddaughter of Sri A.Vaidyanatha Iyer of fame in the history of Madurai of our time as the chief person responsible for opening the Meenakshi Temple to the Harijans. Kumari Mythili became a student of Dr S.R.K. for her M.A. in English. I also gave her lessons in English. So, S.R.K. and I became fellow teachers and we met often in this connection. Kumari Mythili became an ardent admirer and student of S.R.K. and she and I visited him often. We have now thus this triangular friendship.

Dr S.R.K. has a vivid and attractive personality. He is full of good humour and can crack remarkable jokes about men and affairs. He is the embodiment of the composite culture of India. He is both a Tamilian and an Indian at high level. I must add he is indisputably also a citizen of the world. He has now become the teacher of hundreds of post-graduate students, who look upto him with reverence. He is therefore the Guru par-excellence in the educational world in and around Madurai. Recently I had the privilege of inviting him, as the Chairman of the Madurai Gandhi Memorial Museum to be the Secretary of the Museum. I have no doubt that with him as the Hony. Secretary the Gandhi Museum will play even a more important role than till now among all those who come to see the Museum.

In the sum we have in Dr S.R.K. a valiant freedom fighter, a scholar of high distinction, a champion of the poor and the lowly and a symbol of India's high and broad culture. What I specially value in him is his genius in making and keeping friends. May God bless him and give him many more years of active, intellectual and progressive life. I must not omit to pay my tribute also to Dr (Mrs) Kamala Ramakrishnan, his devoted partner in life. It can be said without any doubt that this noble lady has considerably helped in making Dr S.R.K. the eminent person he is today. May both live long and happily.

Dr G.Ramachandran

PANDIT NEHRU AND HIS PARADISE OF CHILDREN

(Dr G.Ramachandran)

It was Agatha Harrison, the well-known British Quaker, who knew the Nehru family intimately, who coined the phrase which is the title of my talk today i.e. “Pandit Nehru and his Paradise of Children” Nehru’s face was the intensity sensitive mirror of all his passing emotions and sentiments as few other faces we have known. Suddenly there would be a frown on his face and you and I will be puzzled seeing it. We would wonder what has brought the frown on the handsome face. Did any of us say a wrong word or indulge in a false phrase? But the frown will disappear as quickly as it came and an enchanting smile will take its place. Then again some shadow of sadness will fall on the face. Some dear one has passed away, something shameful has taken place in the Congress party, some tragedy has over taken India or the world and so, that sadness. Or a flash of anger will light up the face. Agatha Harrison meant that Nehru, when among children, was like a man walking in Paradise. He loved children and they loved him. He would play with them and even sing and dance with them. He would show them pictures and tell them stories. He became carefree and relaxed among children. Agatha Harrison loved this picture of Nehru among children.

Just as he loved children, children loved him equally. Wherever he went in India or in Russia or England or America nothing pleased him than to see thousands of children together. He would throw away all rules of protocol or security arrangements and run into the midst of the children till his daughter Indiraji or some Secretary rescued him and brought him back to his programme. Throughout India he became “Chacha Nehru”. He valued this title which came spontaneously from children more than any other given to him at any time. I remember one particular scene in Gandhigram near Madurai. Some ten thousand children from a hundred villages had gathered in an open school playground. The children gave a wonderful demonstration of collective drill, marches and games. Pandit Nehru saw the children from the top of a platform specially constructed for the occasion. They were so overjoyed that several times there came the gentle thunder of their voices, chanting “Chacha Nehru, Chacha Nehru”. Suddenly Pandit Nehru ran down from the platform rushed into the midst of the children and holding hands with them started what was nothing less than a wild and laughter- filled dance. All arrangements broke

down and the Prime Minister was literally drowned in that seething sea of happy children. One can multiply hundreds of pictures like this from his life.

Pandit Nehru was always acutely conscious that from among these children will someday emerge the citizens of New India. Every time he looked at the children he knew he was looking at the future of India. He longed that the future of India should be great, full of the light of knowledge, of sustained productive work and of loyalty to truth and human welfare. If such greatness was to be achieved, the millions of children of the current generation should grow up into qualified and functioning citizens of our great Democracy. The first step towards such a future was to love the children and help them to grow up properly. When Pandit Nehru therefore hugged the children of India he was literally hugging the future of India. But I do not want to give the impression that Pandit Nehru's love of children was only historically motivated. Apart from everything else he loved children for their own sake just as he loved red roses. Children were the blossoms in the vast garden of life.

Many years ago Pandit Nehru came to Gandhigram near Madurai and there was a meeting of children at which he patiently and happily spent nearly an hour. He asked a little girl to tell him the name of our Motherland. She happily blurted out, "our motherland is Tamilnadu" Pandit Nehru looked a little puzzled. So he asked the child again, what is your teacher's name and she gave the correct name. Then Panditji asked for the name of the Headmistress. The girl answered at once "Mother Sarala" "Ah" said Pandit Nehru "you see you have a teacher and there is also a Headmistress. Your teacher is Tamilnadu and your Headmistress is India! Tamilnadu is part of India". The girl agreed at once and so the little lesson at a higher level and asked the teachers to take the lesson to every child in the school.

Pandit Nehru had the gift of the story teller. Infact much of his writing is in the form of stories for the boys and girls of India. We have thus the phenomenon of our great Prime Minister being a great lover of children. Mahatma Gandhi wanted that his birthday should be celebrated as "Charka Jayanthi". Dr Radhakrishnan wanted his birthday to be celebrated as "Teacher's day". But Pandit Nehru wanted his birthday to be celebrated as "Children's day". And so throughout India millions of children, year after year, celebrate Chacha Nehru's birthday as their own day.

On this day there will be colourful rallies of children, games and feasts for them and other entertainments. But above all the children will remember Pandit Nehru on this day and will write essays on him and participate in lecture competitions on his life and work.

It is remarkable how three of the greatest men of 20th century were all lovers of children in different circumstances and conditions of history. These three immortals of our time were Lenin, Gandhi and Nehru. Lenin was a ruthless Marxist Revolutionary and in his revolution millions of people lost their lives in rivers of blood. Lenin wanted to achieve certain great aims of economic justice and freedom for the common man. It mattered nothing to him how many people perished in his violent revolution. But it has been testified to that Lenin's heart softened at the sight of little children. He loved children and played and laughed with them like a tender father. Perhaps in no other country in the world are children so well cared for as in the Soviet Union. Pandit Nehru, Dr Radhakrishnan and others have written how the Soviet Union gives infinite care to make their children healthy and happy. Mahatma Gandhi also was a great lover of children. In the Sabarmathi Ashram and later in Sevagram I personally witnessed how Gandhiji took care of the health and happiness of children. He would play games with them and entertain them with stories and take them along with him in his walks and run races with them. In the schools which he established any physical punishment of a child was ruled out. He wanted children to learn and acquire knowledge in freedom and through love. Pandit Nehru was some kind of a synthesis of Lenin and Gandhi. And so he loved and served children in the same way as Lenin and Gandhi did. In a sense he added something more and that was his artist's appreciation of flowering childhood. More than once he had adopted children whom he met in different parts of India.

We have known Pandit Nehru as a great patriot, fearless freedom fighter, Statesman and World Leader. He will be long remembered in all these areas of greatness. But perhaps he will be remembered most as Chacha Nehru. Let all our schools take care of this part of Nehru's greatness and teach succeeding generations of our children how he loved them and wanted his birthday to be celebrated as Children's Day. And so, year after year, the 14th of November will remain as a day of remembrance of him and even more of our dedication to the happiness and proper growth of the millions of India's children. We require in this country better schools, better books and pictures and songs for our elementary schools throughout the country. There are some

bright patches of good schools of children in the bigger cities and towns. But in the vast rural areas primary and elementary schools furnish a different picture. They are badly housed, badly furnished and badly run without adequate inspection or care. The best pledge therefore we can take on Nehru's birthday is to firmly resolve that the schools into which our children come are bright and happy places where the foundations of our national life will be truly laid with all our enlightened care and devotion. May the memory of Chacha Nehru live forever in the minds of succeeding generations of the children of India.

INTRODUCTION

This Thesis of Dr K.J.Charles is an astonishing and daring documents. Most often it is taken for granted that the Marxian and Gandhian perspectives in relation to “Total development” are utterly irreconcilable. Even so, there has been considerable current thought on some of the inevitabilities of both Marxian and Gandhian perspective which cannot be completely put away from any philosophy or programme of “Total development”. These inevitabilities continue to challenge the minds of political and social thinkers. One such inevitability is that of economic justice to everyone in society in the widest and deepest sense as the main objective of total development. Both Marx and Gandhi accept this inevitability. That Marx accepts it is well known. But, Gandhi’s acceptance of it without reservation is neither known or accepted adequately. Relevant quotations from Marx can be produced in plenty because this is in consonance with the main thrust of Marxism. The philosophy and perspective of Gandhi covering not only the realities of materialism but the equally imperative moral and spiritual forces require much closer study to arrive at the same basis of Gandhian Revolution. Such a study will also yield an array of quotations which can stimulate and inspire radical social scientists of the present time. Dr Charles has valiantly attempted this formidable task. Both Marxian and Gandhian thinkers have been guilty of stressing that their Prophets are so unique and distinct that they can never be reconciled. This is the tragedy of all orthodoxy which leads to fanatical through this granite wall of prejudice and mutual disdain. Dr Charles is undoubtedly one of them.

Curiously, among those who are called Gandhian in India, I was one of the very few who through the years was of the view that the Marxian and Gandhian perspectives will have to accomplish some reconciliation for “Total development”. Marx and Gandhi are perhaps the two original social revolutionaries of the 20th century. Both embodied in themselves and their work an inflexible and total philosophy of life. Both looked at life as a whole. Nothing in life was too small to be left out. Both wanted to change life radically for mankind. Their ways of doing this certainly differed. Marx believed that violence and terror are among the methods of accomplishing total revolution. Gandhi proved that organized collective non-violent power could

equally accomplished total revolution. Marx became undoubtedly real in the history of our time. Gandhi too became real in changing the life of India. Both gripped the minds of the millions. Even so, they were adamant in their different personal and ideological appraisal of life and its challenges. At the same time both wanted to bring a new life to the common man. Though they derived inspiration and strength from different sources of history they had something vitally common in their ultimate objectives.

Lenin drew his deepest inspiration from a study and understanding of material forces shaping human destiny. Moral or Spiritual values came out only as a consequence of his historic concept of materialism. For Gandhi, spiritual and moral forces constituted the rock-bottom of changes affecting human destiny and thus his own realistic materialism was the outcome of spiritual and moral forces operating in life within began with materialism, and moved forward broadly on its current and sought to effect changes in the life of man which ultimately produced a new crop of moral and cultural values. Mahatma Gandhi beginning with a profound insight into spiritual and moral forces, and then at the same time accepting the challenges of material life fearlessly sought to shape his solutions and remedies based on those imponderable forces. It will thus be seen at once that for persons conversant with Marxism and Gandhism, an ultimate reconciliation of some of the vital elements in both was possible and necessary for total development. The whole thesis of Dr Charles in the present volume is a scholarly concurrence with this world view. But Dr Charles has brought to bear on his thesis a grand array of facts, figures and quotations which makes it a high intellectual exercise. The first two quotations he has produced from Marx and Gandhi, next to the title page, sets the tone and scope of his whole thesis. The first quotation from Karl Marx is one, which hardly any other writer has pinpointed as Dr Charles has done. "The Production of too many useful things results in too many useless people". Here is Marx's ringing blow on modern capitalist economics caught in the whirlpool of unending production of more and more gadgets and other articles for the profit. How true it is, that too many people are daily becoming useless people in this terrific process. As against this is this quotation from Gandhi, "I see coming the day of the rule of the poor, whether that rule be through force of arms or non-violence". Here is Gandhi's prophesy that the poor masses will inherit the earth. We have here the preliminary key to the great reconciliation. Marx aimed at the dictatorship of the proletariat and Gandhi warned us against the endless multiplication of material goods, without

any consideration of moral values in the methods of production and distribution, as the aim of total development.

A casual look at the contents of the book will show what a wide ground of history and realities Dr Charles has covered. His chapter 13 entitled “Gandhi and Marx” is a fascinating study. There are very revolutionary quotations from Gandhi and many realistic and sober reflections from Marx which Dr Charles has very properly used in support of his thesis calling for a possible reconciliation of Marxian and Gandhian perspectives. It was inevitable that Dr Charles made it clear that Marxism and Gandhism are not and cannot be identical. They are very different and are the products of the history of peoples very differently situated. The Russian people and the vicissitudes in which they found themselves when Lenin appeared on the scene were wholly different from those of the Indian people and when Gandhi liberated them and lead them on ward to a new life. History is a tremendous force in life. But it functions differently in response to varying situations in which peoples find themselves. Dr Charles is not attempting the impossible, but pointing the way to what is possible and needed in our time. The next century will witness the confrontation of Marx-Gandhi. What Lenin and Stalin were to Marx, Nehru and Vinoba were to Gandhi. Nehru and Vinoba have together represented Gandhi in India more than anyone else and they always understood and respected each other.

Every day we see the accentuation on the hand of the forces of materialism and on the other of spirituality and morality. The nuclear age will be the age of the destiny of mankind. And that destiny will be determined by the final success or failure of the Marxian materialistic approach or the Gandhian spiritual approach. A careful study of Dr Charles’s Thesis may well convince us that some of the vital objectives of Marxism and the essential nonviolent method of action of Gandhi can jointly furnish the answer to the future of man. The nuclear age is the imperative factor forcing mankind towards such a broad and inevitable synthesis. The significance of Dr Charles’s Thesis is just that it points this out forcibly. And that is challenging by important to us in our time.

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## **My First Meeting With Gandhiji**

(G.Ramachandran, Director, Gandhigram)

The year was 1924 and I was then a student in the Viswa Bharati University at Santiniketan. The late C.F.Andrews was my favorite Professor and I lived very close to him in mind and in spirit. I could not have been more than 20 years of age. Something suddenly happened in my life which gave it a turn from which I never could come away in all the rest of my life.

In those days in the Visva Bharati I set myself up as an intellectual and I loved nothing better than to challenge every kind of ideology and concept. I found endless delight in posing as an agnostic and held that the very idea of God was anti-reason. God was not needed at all to make men and women good. In fact, God had never succeeded in doing that yet! Moral and spiritual life was largely the artistic life of poise, dignified behaviour and intellectual clarity. I was always debating and arguing with vehemence. It was into this life of mine that something came like a flash of lightning illuminating my inner world and changing it forever.

C.F. Andrews suddenly received a hundred-worded telegram from Maulana Mohammed Ali who was then the President of the Indian National Congress. The telegram conveyed the news that Mahatma Gandhi had gone on a fast of 21 days in Delhi to bring about unity between the Hindus and the Muslims and that a great conference of the leaders of all the communities was being summoned in the same city. Maulana Mohammed Ali asked C.F. Andrews to come to Delhi immediately and to take care of Gandhiji's during the fiery ordeal. The whole of Santiniketan was plunged into gloom. Never before had Gandhiji's undertaken such a long fast. He was also reported to be in indifferent health. Could he survive such a long fast? Even if the mind was strong, would the frail body stand the test? There was a crowded meeting of students and teachers in the

library hall in Santinikethan at which Andrews spoke with deep feeling. He caught the night train and left for Delhi. I lost my sleep. I was thrilled and shattered at the same time. Two days later, Andrews summoned me to Delhi to come and help him. There was an excited meeting of the students who gave me a touching send-off. Within the next 48 hours I reached Delhi. The Delhi Railway Station was full of Khadi-clad and white-capped Congress volunteers. From every part of India Congress leaders and workers were pouring into Delhi. The mighty pull of the moral conscience associated with the Gandhian fast was stirring in the souls of vast numbers of men and women in India. Within a few days, Delhi had become the centre of many cross-currents of pilgrimage from every part of India. One of the Congress volunteers identified me, drew me out of the station, put me into a Tonga and we went straight to 'Dil-kush', a beautiful, quiet house on the edge of the city in which Gandhiji lay fasting. As our Tonga neared 'Dil-kush', we passed through growing crowds of men and women and as we turned in at the gate, I saw some five to six thousand people sitting in solemn on the road sides and on the lawns and in the shade of the trees. A deep anxiety hung in the air like some heavy rain-cloud of July.

Many wonderful things happened during the next few days. Andrews occupied a small room on the ground floor opposite to the staircase which led up to the first floor and it was in a room on the first floor that Gandhiji lay fasting. I was kept busy day and night helping Andrews wash his clothes, bring his food, sweep and tidy his room and last, but not least, deal with his correspondence and the unending stream of visitors who filled the small room all the time. So far as Gandhiji was concerned, Dr. Ansari had strictly forbidden all visitors except a few of his closest co-workers. It was in that small room of Andrews that I saw for the first time the Roman figure of Motilal Nehru, prince-like Jawaharlal, sharp and ascetic Rajaji, dynamic Chittaranjan Das, the immense Ali brothers, tall and valiant

Swami Shraddhanandha and a host of others. For more than a week, I did not get even a glimpse of Gandhiji. I was a prisoner in that room on the ground floor. And then, one evening, Andrews asked me to accompany him to attend Gandhiji's evening prayers and I felt the thrill of the thought that at last and for the first time I was going to see Gandhiji at close quarters.

The sun had just set as I climbed the stairs behind my venerable Professor. By the time we reached Gandhiji's room, it was full of silent figures sitting on the carpet on the floor. The electric lights had been switched off. In the dim light of evening I could only see a thin and indistinct figure on the cot wrapped in folds of snow-white Khadi. I knew that was Gandhiji. He looked a frail figure etched in delicate, peaceful lines against the indistinct evening light which came in through the open window. I could also distinguish the faces of the leaders of the Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Hindu communities sitting around the cot with bowed heads. Then someone suddenly struck up the cadences of the prayer, the pattern of which became classical in later years in the history of India. Again and again the voices of prayer rose and fell inside that room. There was complete silence after the prayers; no one spoke a word.

I watched the scene and heard the prayers with the entire critical and intellectual attitude I could summon. I said to myself that I must not be swept away. I tried to keep a hold on myself. But, even as the prayers were going on something began to pound inside me. It was not a physical experience, but a mental one absolutely. I saw the frail figure on the bed and looked at the many mighty men of India's destiny sitting with heads bowed in reverence around the central figure on the cot. The question came to me, how did this little man succeed in becoming the unquestioned leader of a political revolution and how on earth did he perform the magic of linking that revolution with non-violence. How a man of prayer could at all become the leader of a revolution? All distinctions of caste,



religion and creed melted in the power of devotion to the unseen God. My mind caught fire. The truth came to me in a flash that God existed and ruled the conscience of humanity. The intellect might not touch God and reason might also fail to reveal God. But, God did exist. No myth could hold and rule the hearts of men and women. God was truth and love in one and he who lay on the bed fasting, so that Hindus and Muslims might come together in good will and in understanding was the symbol of that truth and love. The spirit of God appeared to hover close within that room. A man had brought God into the room. I felt it unmistakably with the touch of my mind. I said to myself, I may never see God nor know God fully, but this human symbol proved the truth of Godhood. I would follow the man who had brought God into that room. I took a silent vow.

This was thirty and more years ago. I have tried to keep the pledge I gave to myself inside that room in 'Dil-kush'. I know I have often failed and slipped and even fallen. But, I have never once stopped trying to hold on to that pledge with all the strength in me. I met Gandhiji again and again after the above event. I lived close to him and worked under him for nearly a quarter of a century. More than once during these last many years I have sometimes shocked or amused my friends by telling them that if I had not known Gandhiji, I would have been a lifelong atheist and that perhaps the only party of which I could have become a member was the Communist Party! But, the moment I understood that a man of God could at the same time become the unhesitant and valiant leader of a great political and social revolution, I ceased to be an atheist and had no more need for the membership of the Communist Party. I have met innumerable other men and women who have said the same thing to me in different words. The world will realize in the coming years that Mahatma Gandhi has furnished the only alternative to the challenges of Communism in the modern world. The world must ultimately go the way of Lenin or Gandhi. All other ways will only be modifications and

amendments of these two paths which have already been cut on the earth of history.

**Speech delivered by Sri.G.Ramachandran, Secretary, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, at the Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1958, the Birthday celebrations of Lord Buddha**

(Let me begin with a confession. I am not going to confess my sins to you. This woman here has begun to inspire me a great deal. I have long struggled to cross the frontier of my own religion and hold out my hands to people who are outside my frontiers and receive their hands in turn without any reservation anywhere in my heart. For thirty years now I have come across with people of various religions. I have not met many people who can do this. There are many people willing to step outside their religion but they too have some reservations. I have been seeking comrades in the march. Probably in all my life I have not met more than three or four people may be five people, who have come out of their own frontiers be with me in my pursuits. This woman sitting by my side was reciting wonderful hymns. The way she resided gave us the depth of the hymns. In India we seldom recognize greatness at the right time. We are wonderful fellows to accept greatness in the wrong time. This centre where she presides today has for its ideal, Sarva Dharmee Samanathva, It., I will give reverence to all the great religious traditions of the world. The word respect is very cheap and can keep inside it great many things. But reverence is either reverence or no reverence at all. Respect has a limit, but reverence has to be wholehearted. I want to strength her in

the manner in which she is thinking to build up. That is the unreserved companionship of the fellow pilgrim in the march to the white throne of mercy.

The subject today is Lord Buddha. Imagine a time in this country when this man was living in this country 2500 years ago. What was India like then? This man, a born prince, became a pilgrim. All his teachings were done during his Pad Yatras. He said I would walk from place to place. These all 2500 years ago, the very thought if it will give us the thrill. I say he is a man, because he never claimed divinity. Right through till the end of his life he said I am only a man like you. You take the history of the culture of India. It is the history of India from Buddha to Gandhi. If somebody understands the history of this country from Buddha to Gandhi, he understands India. He said something which no one has surpassed in all the human history. He said, 'Don't believe because it is written in the Vedas. In the time in which Buddha lived, Vedas dominated the life of India. He emerged out of the Vedic traditions. He said, 'don't believe because it is written in the Vedas, don't believe because a neighbor is saying to you, and don't believe because, I the Buddha is am telling as you. Put them to the test of reasoning and if it does not suit your understanding reject what I say. Is there any greater challenge to rationalism in human thinking than this? There is one rationalism which strengthens all these things. Reason about it, meditate about it and if what I say does not appear to you to be the truth, reject it. That was the Buddha.

He walked from place to place. He walked through the Indo-Gangetic Valley. He laid down something 2500 years ago which Gandhiji laid down 2500 years afterwards when he went to Bombay. Gandhiji said don't take anything with you more than necessary while on tour. Buddhas said the same thing. No monk should receive for himself alone. Whatever you receive it should be for all people. Wash your own clothes yourself. In fact Buddha was very much concerned with rule making and he did not make any rule which he did not follow. In this he was

much closer to Gandhiji. What happened two thousand five hundred years ago is being continued today. Buddha performed Pad Yatras and sat under the groves. Vinobaji is doing the same. People used to come to him and talk to him in these groves.

There is a story in one of these groves. One day after his Pad Yatra he came into one of the groves and sat down. There was a woman who lost her only child. Suddenly she said to herself, 'Master has come and he will give me back the child'. She went to him and wept and told him how his child, the only child was lost. She said that the Master should give her the child. Buddha told her: "Go and get a handful of mustard seeds from a house where there had been no death and I shall give back you child." The mother was happy and she went into the village, went from one house to another, knocked at every door and she could not find a house without death. In one house a father was dead, in another a son was dead and in yet another someone else was dead and so in the whole of the village there was not a single house which death has not visited. She came back to Buddha and told him what happened. Then Buddha explained to her how everyone should die today or tomorrow and that why one should not lament over the death of a child. She understood the reasoning and became one of his disciples. That was the story.

2500 years ago there was the understanding of Buddhist psychology, momentariness of phenomenon and all that is a wonderful heritage for us. The personality of the Master as he moved up and down in this country for 40 years, has delivered us the message of love, the message of passion, that evil can be conquered only by good. Hinduism before Buddha is not wholly vegetarianism. But it is the Buddha who brought this compassion for all sensual beings to us. He made a nation into vegetarianism. Hinduism after the Buddha has never been the Hinduism before the Buddha. Even today Buddhism lives more in this country without the name, than in the countries where Buddhism is reigning. Adi

Sankaracharya was a Buddha. We observe a great deal of Buddhism and Hinduism of today has received more from him. There has come from Gandhi which has transformed the whole of Hindu religion.

Then there is a great story about his death. One false story.

This is the birthday of Buddha, the day of the enlightenment and the day of the Nirvanan of the Buddha. I don't see there is any magic in it. But the coincidence is amazing. At the time when Buddha attained Nirvana Ananda, one of his disciples and Chief among them who had a sense of humor in him, said that for some time now there would be no one making laws and rules for the disciple.

A question, very interesting question came before the Buddha. Sangham is the first Church in human history. Sangham is the first order of monks. The question was whether women could be admitted into the Sangham. He said we must admit women in absolute terms of equality. Then he also said, I have admitted women. But if I do not admit women, My Sangham will live up to 5000 years, but because I have admitted women, my Sangham will stand only for perhaps one thousand years.

If there is a society which is non-violent in itself, there women will lead men. Women made more contribution to the freedom struggle.

We should keep the essence of the teaching of Buddha in our mind. Often a charge is made that Buddha had not preached God. Now there is a story about it. When somebody went and discussed the matter of divinity with him, he said, let us understand human nature first and then it will be time for us to understand the divine nature. Don't come and drag me into the nature of divinity. He has nowhere said that there is no God. He has said when mankind understands itself and human life, we understand divinity. Buddha 2500 years ago told that we must live a life that will purify. Serving each other we come nearer to God. This is not atheism, but that is religion at its height. He said that right thinking, right meditation, right

speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollectedness, and right concentration are the eight fold path of living. His teachings are enshrined in dharma panda.

When Sanskrit was at its height, he taught in the language of the people, prakrudra.

In those days animal sacrifice was in every religion. All the ancient religions had animal sacrifice. He wandered from place to place when there was sacrifice of animals; he went to the place of sacrifice and rescued the sheep. In Bible also Jesus is called the shepherd.

We now see the renaissance of Buddhism in Ceylon, in Burma in the countries of the south west Asia and you will remember recently the Prime Minister of Burma wanted to retire from his political career and join the sangem. In southern east Asia what we are now witnessing is the rebirth of Buddhism. We celebrated the 2500 anniversary of Buddha. During one of my recent tours I had an occasion to visit a monastery dug out from the earth. The whole monastery has been very well designed. There are rooms where four people can live. When monks advance in the training and sadanaess, they are put in rooms where there can live. And as each one step in advance goes, two are put in one room marches towards God. Finally there is a place where only one man can sit. That is the highest order of attainment of a monk when he is given this small single cell room. Then the story in the monastery is that only a very few people were qualified to sit in the single cell. Of all the monks in the monastery more people were in four-member room, the number becomes less and less as the rooms become smaller and smaller. Then you go to Malatya. It is a magnificent picture and ten thousand live there. I wonder at the engineers who built those building. There is on well and every student from any floor can draw water easily and the sanitary arrangement

there was perfect. The ratio of student teacher in Nalantha was 10 to 1. For every 10 students there was one teacher and every book was meant for such a union.

In the wake of Buddhism there again was an outpouring of arty and beauty. There has been this all through the history in the wake of any religion, be it Islam or Christianity or Hinduism. The greatest beauty of stone and color come in the wake of Buddhism.

The first church in the world is the Buddhist Sangha. First monastery in the history is Buddhist monastery. First monks in the world are Buddhist monks. First hospitals for animals were built by Asoka.

Finally ending up with Gandhi is an unbroken continuity of our history throughout these 2500 years.

The challenge of today is whether we will be true to ourselves. Buddhism was born here and Gandhiji was born here. Even though Gandhi did not want any 'ism' there is his philosophy and method of work. Whether we will be true Buddha and Gandhi and their teachings is the question today.

