

The Core of Gandhi

REFLECTIONS OF LIFE
BY
DESIKOTTAMA
DR G. RAMACHANDRAN



The Madhavimandiram Loka Seva Trust
Neyyattinkara

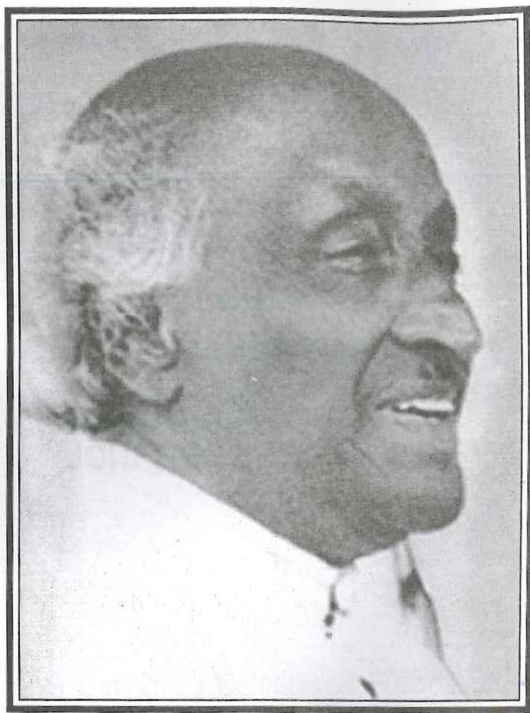
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**DEDICATED TO THE
INNOCENT RURAL CITIZENS
OF
MY MOTHERLAND, INDIA**



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FOREWORD

'*The Core of Gandhi*' is one of the series of the pocket size booklets, '*Reflections of Life*' written by Desikottama Dr G R Ramachandran. Even a casual reader will find inspiration from a study of these reflections. In these reflections he recalls the image of a Triveni or the Confluence of three invisible Saraswathy of Truth, the Ganga of Gandhi and the Yamuna of Tagore. It is well known how he had received his baptism in the purifying fire of the Gandhian revolutions in India and at the same time in the currents of our Cultural Renaissance in which the poetry and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore flowed into like a golden stream. He had the unique privilege of being the disciple of both Gandhi and Tagore. Rarely are we allowed to get such a glimpse of the meditations of such a person as in these reflections. Dr Ramachandran shares with us more of the gleanings of his Sadhana in these booklets.

The Core of Gandhi

BY DR G RAMACHANDRAN

Gandhi's was a many-sided personality. The external simplicity of his life and his constant and concentrated devotion to non-violence often effectively cloaked many profound currents of ideas, disciplines, loyalties and aspirations, which surged with him.

He was at once a saint and revolutionary, a politician and social reformer, an economist and a man of

religion, an educationist and a Satyagrahi, devotee alike of faith and reason, Hindu and Inter-religious, Nationalist and Inter-nationalist and a man of action and a dreamer of dreams.

He was a great reconciler of opposites and he was that without any strain or artificiality. He loved greatly but without sentimentality. He unreservedly accepted the fact that truth can reside in opposites.

We have all come so much under the spell of the astonishing integration and unity of the man within himself that, no one has yet attempted

a clear analysis of his complex and magnificent personality

It was poet Rabindranath Tagore who once wrote that those disciplines are the most complex which ultimately lead to the simplicity of a song. One has only to look at those who learn music to understand something of the daily grind of hard disciplines through which they must pass before they bring out a soulful song.

Gandhi's life was one long and ceaseless saga of endeavour in which he aided, bit-by-bit and piece-by-piece, to his stature ending up in the ever-advancing fullness of his total It is

personality. There was nothing mystic or miraculous about his growth from a common man into the unsurpassed Mahatma of our history.

It is open to each one of us to see how he advanced, step by step, gathering innumerable fragments of truth one by one and mixing them together in the fiery crucible of his life, ready to look at facts, accept their real significance, face any consequence in the pursuit of a cause, suffer any penalty for a mistake, recover lost ground again, but always moving onward, open minded, without fear and dedicated heroically to reach and hold the truth of a matter at any cost.

He was, therefore, not born a Mahatma. He moulded himself into one by the Tapasya of which he became the embodiment. He was a common man who pulled himself up to the uncommon height. He was no God but became a god-man. Gandhi knew this about himself and that was why he named his biography, "The Story of My Experiments with Truth".

Experimentation was one of the deepest passions of his life. He experimented with food, health and cure, clothes and dress, politics and economic, education and reform, ethics and spirituality and organization and revolution. With relentless logic

and courage he broke new ground in every direction and yet had the depth and width of mind to separate the false from the true, the unreal from the real, defeat from success and to integrate all his aims and endeavors into the inner unity of his personality.

When we look into the splendid mosaic of his thoughts and deeds there is one thing, which stands out as unique and puts him in the forefront of world leadership. This was the unique discovery he made in a unique laboratory. The laboratory was South Africa and the discovery was Satyagraha.

It was history, which threw Gandhi into the South African crucible. The situation in South Africa was itself unprecedented in history. It was not merely that a white minority Government brutalized itself and millions of colored people in an attempt to permanently enslave them. Slavery was nothing new in the world, but this one was unique in that it was grounded in a new metaphysics and ethics buttressed by perverted science.

Every thought and action conceivable to diabolic human ingenuity was drawn upon to perpetuate the subjection of the many who were physically weak to the few

who were physically strong. Any rebellion was totally made impossible. The very thought of rebellion was made treason under the law. The white minority Government was armed to the teeth not only with weapons but also with twisted laws, institutions and philosophy.

This slavery itself was held up as part of God's plan for man and the teachings of the New Testament were blackened and poisoned in support of it. The Bible had taught through 20 centuries that God made man in His image, but the cruel tyrants in South Africa taught that this applied only to the Whiteman. The many who were

weak and held in subjection had no arms, no education, no organization and no power of any kind. They could work and just manage to live within the unbreakable frontiers of this slavery.

Once they accepted this slavery, they were fed, clothed and given shelter, but without any human rights whatsoever, not even the right of a husband to live freely with his wife or of a mother with her children. They could live like animals in the cattle shed of this fantastic civilization. Any attempt to break away in any direction was met with torture and death. It was a terrible prison house

reared and maintained with infinite care within the heart of a new civilization

It was into this prison house of slavery that history cast Gandhi. He had lived and studied in London. He was a Barrister-at-law from the Middle Temple. He was also an Indian from an aristocratic family with a great and ancient tradition of culture in his blood. But he was very young and inexperienced. He could have turned tail and run away from this terror in South Africa.

It was at this point that Gandhi revealed the first glimmer of his

at the terror with unflinching eyes. Can we not say, in humility, that God broke into history at this point and gave Gandhi the inner urge to stand firm like a rock?

He had behind him only a mass of unlettered, poor, weak and unorganized Indian coolies and he himself had already been dubbed a coolly-barrister by the arrogant whites who kept the keys of the slave-prison. The historic challenge before Gandhi was whether the weak could fight the strong with any hope of success.

Throughout history in all the battles and conflicts between the

strong and the weak, the weak had always surrendered or perished. Gandhi asked himself the question if this inescapable fact of history, as it appeared to be, could ever represent the law of truth, justice and love i.e., the law of God.

Again, the light of God entered the soul of Gandhi and he knew atonce that what surrounded him was simply the negation of the law of God and therefore of history. Thereafter Gandhi did not hesitate. He plunged into the greatest experiment of our time to discover the weapon with which the weak could fight the strong, not individually but in the mass.

Let us unravel some of the ingredients, which went into this astounding experiment. The first was Gandhi's impregnable faith in God. To Gandhi, God was Truth, love and justice. Truth and justice were concepts, but love or hate furnished the motivation for their interaction.

Hate was acting in South Africa to perpetuate injustice and untruth. Could love be made to act effectively for truth and justice in the same area of collective human life? The answer came from the depth of Gandhi's mind. His inner mind said, yes, it could because it must, if God and man were to co-exist. Otherwise, God would

be annulled and man would be left lonely in the jungle of life. That was impossible? This was the logic of Gandhi. He held on to that logic till the end of his life.

But there remained the question how could love be harnessed and made to act in the collective life of the slaves. The first answer was love must act totally differently from hate. Suppression, torture, violence the prison and the bullet were the instruments of hate in the South African crucible as everywhere. These must be rejected as instruments of love. But what could be the instruments of love? Having rejected

the weapons of hate, Gandhi set about to discover the instruments of love for the battle of the weak against the strong.

Discoveries came to him one after the other. The weak can refuse to obey, the weak must not surrender, the weak must invite suffering instead of inflicting suffering. The weapons of love must make the weapons of hate as useless as possible and above all the slaves must stand together as one united community. It must be remembered that the challenge was to use the weapons of love collectively. It was clear, as crystal to Gandhi that the whole of this battle would,

inevitably be non-violent. And yet large masses of people must act together non-violently.

'Gandhi' was modern enough to understand the dynamics of numbers, which he did not disdain in a mood of super saintliness. He realized at once that the first step was for him to disobey the iniquitous laws himself and then persuade all his people also to disobey them. He saw why the white minority Government used cruel violence to suppress the colored people. It was only under such suppression that the colored millions, including Indians, would give uncomplaining obedience. The whole

aim was to secure obedience through terror. Gandhi's answer was to match fearlessness against terror and disobedience against submission. Gandhi came to the ingredient in his experiment, which made disobedience a duty. It became the only duty. But could there not be violent disobedience, came the subtle question. Gandhi discovered that violence weakened disobedience because it would leave the initiative in the hands of the tyrants who were masters in the art of violence. Disobedience would become more effective when it was non-violent. Instead of increasing the violence of the tyrants it would reduce that

violence to an extent and within that margin non-violence could become more effective. Gandhiji thus arrived at the discovery of strong disobedience through non-violence. But disobedience and surrender must be kept poles apart. How could this be done? If the tyrants failed to secure obedience what would happen? They would punish the slaves, beat them up, throw them into prison and shoot at them with bullets.

So Gandhi said to himself and his people that disobedience should persist in spite of everything the tyrants did. They could and would do everything in their power to extract in

greatness. He stood firm and looked obedience but they could not annihilate a whole community resisting them non-violently. The larger the number the better. But the question was would the weak disobey in sufficiently large numbers and face all the terrible consequences of disobedience. Here Gandhi's mind hesitated for a moment. There came another vital ingredient in his discovery. There was the soul in each human being. Whatever might be the differences between human being due to geographical and historical circumstances and conditions during a few thousand years, man himself who was several hundreds of thousands of years old on the earth

had each one a soul equal to any other soul. God created man in His own image said the Bible. God resided in each human being said the Gita. The Buddha and Mohamed affirmed the same truth. Gandhi was a believer. He decided heroically to act upon the basis of the equality of human souls.

From Gandhi's faith in this equality sprang his conviction that there was no man or woman so small, weak or helpless who could not discover the strength of the soul inside and make use of it when life itself was in peril before tyranny. Gandhi thus put his faith not only in the transcendent God but also equally

the God immanent in every man and woman. Gandhi then put together all these ingredients of his discovery and welded them into the concept and practice of Satyagraha.

Thus, step-by-step again, the experimenter in the laboratory of South Africa arrived at his radiant discovery of the power of collective non-violence, which evolved in time into the revolutionary weapon of Satyagraha.

It is difficult to make a discovery but even more difficult to apply it in a most difficult situation. Where did Gandhi get the reckless

courage to use Satyagraha in South Africa? He was himself undergoing a basic transformation within himself. He found out that fear and non-violent action would be completely contradictory. He therefore shed all fear and resolved that if he did not trust in the power of the soul he could do nothing.

He therefore gave his people the call to awake, arise and act non-violently. The response astonished and justified Gandhi's faith in God and man. His people rose as one man and followed him valiantly in the non-violent struggle the meaning of which came to them instinctively and with

growing conviction. What happened in South Africa in this epic struggle that lasted or 7 years is now a part of our history.

It jerked the whites into wonder and dismay. It also flashed the message of a new revolution across the world. Tolstoy, in far away Russia, saw it and recognized it as a new power for good in the whole world.

The coolies began civil disobedience. The whites became angry and blind. They struck out at Gandhi and his coolies with all their weapons. They threw thousands into prisons, properties were confiscated

and crowds were beaten up brutally. Disobedience continued nevertheless. No Indian surrendered and no Indian obeyed. The whites sought for a remedy and found none. It became a long drawn out struggle that ended in the Smuts-Gandhi Agreement.

The struggle ennobled the coolies and gave them confidence and strength. The whites were ashamed inside themselves and were cleansed a little. The Whites were Christians. The Hindus and the Muslim collies showed them the meaning of the Cross-. Both sides emerged from the struggle with a premonition that something new had happened to them.

both equally. The world had changed a little, not only in South Africa but also in the conscience and mind of man. Tolstoy wrote to Gandhi that the struggle in South Africa was significant for the world. More than anything else Gandhi himself became a transformed man. Deep within him there stirred the first awareness of a great mission.

Gandhi went to South Africa as a young lawyer. He returned to India as the Mahatma. This then was Gandhi's discovery in the laboratory of South Africa. It was the discovery of a weapon with which the physically weak can fight the physically strong.

perhaps the greatest discovery of our century, greater than the discovery of atomic power. Atomic weapons are now in the hands of the mighty and with these weapons the strong will fight the strong and might destroy themselves. But here was the discovery of a weapon, which the weakest could use with effect against the strongest with a sporting chance of success.

Thus the victory of the physically strong and the subjugation of the physically weak became no longer an imperative of history. Gandhian non-violence created a break-through in the history of the and

world. The physically weak need never remain anymore helpless in the face of the physically powerful.

This is the explosion of hope, which Gandhi ignited in our time. There is almost nothing more significant for the future of man than this in the landscape of our century. Luckily Gandhi has not left the power of Satyagraha in doubt.

After the non-violent struggle in South Africa, Gandhi led millions of the Indian people in three massive non-violent revolutions against British rule through which mainly the freedom of India was won.

The new imperative laid upon us now is to place the weapon of Satyagraha in the hands of the suppressed and downtrodden throughout the world. No greater duty rests upon the people of India than this.

Let no one be deceived into thinking that the impact of Gandhi and non-violence on world events are not clear or effective. The world seems to have little to do with Gandhi and Satyagraha.

The U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. dominate the world because of their stockpiles of atomic weapons of incalculable destructive power. Civilization is now in the grip of

escalating violence. But let us remember that since the end of the Second World War we have had several groups in the world, which have successfully practiced Satyagraha against tyranny and terror. More significant still is the worldwide reaction against nuclear weapons and a third world war and for world peace.

Surprisingly, peace movements are strongest in the most advanced countries like the U.S.A. the U.S.S.R. the United Kingdom and Japan. Non-violence is still only a trickle against the tidal waves of violence sweeping the world. But these tidal

waves point to the decay and death of civilization. The trickle however points the way onward to a great renaissance of the human spirit with the possibility of building a new human society based on freedom, justice and peace.

Militarism and nuclear weapons are the blood-soaked signposts of a vanishing era. Gandhi and non-violence are the vibrant symbols of a slowly coming epoch of justice and peace.

This is the core of Gandhi's life and work.

To understand that love can be made more effective than hate, violence

hate are inseparable, equally non-violence and love are inseparable and non-violence can be organized on a commensurate scale to fight tyranny of every kind and above all that these are possible with mankind everywhere is the core of Gandhi.

Effort

with most of us is Sporadic.

Our intention is good

but our effort is not sustained.

Sustained effort alone can give us

Victory worth the name

-GR

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