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MAHATMA GANDHI

Man of the Millennium

HOW INDIA CAN BE GREAT

Now that the struggle for Pakistan and Akhand Hindustan is over, we must settle down to the reality, that in each State Hindus and Mussalmans have to live together as common citizens. If any of them still swears by the past, it would not help but hinder us in our forward march. We have to accept facts, and try to convert every citizen into a worthy member of either State. If we treat the Mussalmans in the Indian Union as aliens who have fought for Pakistan and try to keep them in subjection, we would only succeed in proving our political bankruptcy. Today they are no less citizens of the Union than anyone else.

If a minority in India, minority on the score of its religious profession, is made to feel small on that account, I can only say that this India is not the India of my dreams. In the India for whose fashioning I have worked all my life, every man enjoys equality of status, whatever his religion is. The State is

bound to be wholly secular. I go so far as to say that no denominational educational institution in it should enjoy State patronage.

All subjects would thus be equal in the eye of the law. But every single individual would be free to pursue his own religion without let or hindrance, so long as it does not transgress the common law. The question of the 'protection of minorities' is not good enough for me; it rests upon the recognition of religious grouping between citizens of the same State. What I wish India to do, is to assure liberty of religious profession to every single individual. Then only India can be great, for it is perhaps the one nation in the ancient world, which has recognized cultural democracy, whereby it is held that the roads to God are many, but the goal is one, because God is one and the same. In fact, the roads are as many as there are individuals in the world.

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A Letter from the President



MAHATMA GANDHI: ARCHITECT OF SOCIAL REFORMS AND AUTHOR OF SPIRITUAL REGENERATION OF INDIA

□ R. VENKATARAMAN,
former President of India &
President of the Bhavan

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Gandhiji was the author of Indian Liberation, architect of gigantic social reforms and author of spiritual regeneration of our country. He combined in himself the political insight of Plato, the saintliness of Spinoza and the faith in the masses of Marx. No leader achieved such world-wide attention in his own lifetime as Gandhiji has done. The greatest tribute to him came from Einstein when he said that generations to come "will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood, walked on the earth."

He transformed the mediaeval Indian society seething with abominable practices like untouchability, caste conflicts, exploitation of women and the poor and a host of other inequities into a modern society based on human dignity and equality. The seed of human rights he planted in South

Africa has today blossomed and the abhorrent Apartheid has vanished from the face of the Earth.

Now, could one man have achieved so much? We have great many books on Gandhiji more descriptive of what he did than how he did it. He had a unique charisma but that alone could not have achieved these miracles. He had knowledge and wisdom and commonsense in an uncommon degree. Others have had them too without a particle of Gandhiji's success. In my view, the moral and spiritual approach of Gandhiji to all issues, political, social and economic, distinguished him from the rest of humanity.

Gandhiji spiritualised politics: As early as 1915, he declared that his aim was to spiritualise politics and political institutions. He set an almost impossible standard that the servant of the people must accept the monastic ideal and discard all wealth and possessions.

He wanted the members of the Ashram to take vows of **Satya, Ahimsa, Swadeshi, celibacy, fearlessness, moderation in food and elimination of untouchability.** To him vow was a spiritual resolve, a **Vrata.** Unless one commits oneself to some fundamental principles and upholds them against odds including sacrifice of one's own life, one is not fit to lead the people in any sphere. One has to prescribe for oneself a code of conduct to be observed honestly and faithfully in all



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actions particularly relating to public life. Gandhiji's prescription for men in public life is the practice of Dharma in thought, word and deed. The two pillars of **Dharma** are **Satya** and **Ahimsa** not in the restricted sense of truth and non-violence but according to Gandhiji's conception of them.

According to Gandhiji, Truth does not merely refer to truth in speech, but a number of other virtues such as absence of exaggeration, of secrecy, deception, suppression of facts, prejudice, hypocrisy, dogmatism etc. Truth implies a readiness to accept mistakes and retrace the steps. Gandhiji had himself admitted his "Himalayan blunders". Gandhiji always held that honesty and integrity are the two vital components of Truth and unless one's actions are based on them one was not fit for public life.

Similarly, 'himsa' to Gandhiji is not a negative concept meaning non-killing and non-injury but a positive form of universal love, not merely of human beings but of all beings. It is a crystallised expression of the basic concept of the Bhagavad Gita that all beings are the sparks of divinity. "Non-violence is therefore in its active form goodwill towards all life", wrote Gandhiji in **Young India.** Gandhiji defined himsa to include ill-will, anger, cruelty and torture to men and animals, harsh words intended to hurt, oppression and humiliation of the weak.

In Gandhiji's view, persuasion and not coercion should be the principal instrument of government. In this Gandhiji was not addressing the Indian people only but a world audience. He urged humanity to regulate its life according to the moral law—the Dharma—so that peace and harmony may prevail among peoples and nations, He was the Mahatma not only of India but a great soul of the world

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No wonder, Gandhiji believed in inter-faith harmony and brotherhood and sought to win the goodwill and affection of all other religionists, Muslims, Christians, Parsees etc. Communal harmony and respect for all religions formed the sheet-anchor of his national movement. He undertook a fast unto death to prevent the vivisection of the Hindu society by introduction of separate electorates for the Harijans. He plunged into the strife-torn Bengal to quench the flames of communal frenzy. A frail unarmed individual was able to bring communal peace in Noakhali which brigades of armed men could not do in Delhi.

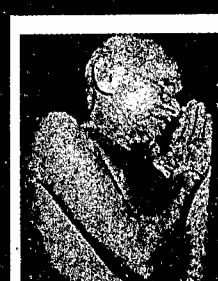
Unfortunately we legatees of the great tradition have forgotten all his teachings and only chant his name in a ritualistic manner during celebrations. We have ceased



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to ask ourselves how faithful we are to the principles that our great leader taught us by precept and practice.

The cardinal principle of ahimsa has been cast to the winds. We are ready to give and take offence at the smallest provocation. The entire atmosphere is surcharged with violence. Violence in the name of religion leading to massacre of innocents and destruction of public and private property is increasingly becoming the rule rather than the exception. Anti-social elements jump into the fray and loot property without being identified. Tolerance which has been the watchword of Indian ethos has become a word in history books. Instead, religious frenzy today has become respectable and even wins sympathy and votes at elections. In a multi-religious society like ours, one has to learn to live in harmony with other religionists.

Crimes like theft, robbery, dacoity are daily occurrences in all cities. Gruesome murders accompany efforts to grab property. The struggle for existence has become so acute that petty things burst into armed fights. Prisons have ceased to be deterrents. Crimes against women, who had an honourable place in the social fabric, have brought disgrace to the nation. Government alone cannot solve these problems. Unless the moral and spiritual foundation is strengthened so that subjective checks are

provided by religion and philosophy there is little hope for the nation.

Rampant corruption in our country has turned our Democracy into a mockery. Democracy which is Government according to the general will of the people, will cease to be so, notwithstanding periodical elections, if the elections are rigged, polling booths captured, voters bribed or intimidated and money power prevails. Nor will the general will of the people be reflected in the legislature if a candidate in a multi-party contest is declared on plurality and not on majority of the votes cast in the constituency. A system of run off between the top two candidates must determine the representation from the constituency.

Another area where Gandhiji strenuously turned all his efforts was alleviation of rural poverty through massive programmes of rural employment, rural self-sufficiency and development. In his expanded definition of ahimsa. Gandhiji said that in a non-violent society, there could be no exploitation nor a wide gap between the rich and the hungry millions. He was so saddened by the poverty of the masses that he gave up his clothes and adopted the loin cloth. He firmly believed that prosperity could come to India only if the 80% of people living in villages were able to have the minimum of subsistence. As a practical genius, he devised schemes



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for decontrolled labour-intensive cottage industries where men and women could work in their homes at their leisure and convenience and earn enough to sustain themselves. The relevance of these thoughts to modern conditions becomes apparent if we realise:

that around 38% of our population is below poverty line and another 30% are at subsistence level.

that employment has not kept pace with the growth in gross national product.

that the expansion of production is more in the elitist consumption products as a result of which per capita availability of essential supplies had remained stagnant and

that the regional disparities still persist.

It is therefore necessary to correct these distortions and have a composite industrial policy consisting of heavy industries, like Steel, Coal, Fertilisers, which obviously cannot be carried on by the small or village sector.

Medium Industries and small scale industries and rural industries.

Villagers should be provided with appropriate help such as infrastructure, technological innovation, marketing of products and adequate and timely finance. The utilisation of local raw materials for local production affords large employment

opportunities for rural people. Harnessing of village energy through Gram Sabhas where the people will have a voice in determining their priorities may go a long way.

India is drifting away from the ideals of Gandhiji whose unorthodox methods were scoffed at by the fashionables of his time. They ridiculed him asking, could spinning charka win you freedom? Will picking a handful of salt dislodge the mighty British Empire? But in truth they did.

How can this generation which has seen the success of his policies and programmes in unifying India as a nation afford to forget his teachings?

R. Venkataraman
(R. Venkataraman)

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New Delhi

The third and concluding part of "C.S. and I : Political Twins" will appear in the next issue.



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Mahatmaji's Martyrdom: HAND OF DESTINY

□ C.SUBRAMANIAM

On the 30th of January 1948, some of us wanted to go to the prayer meeting but it happened to be my birthday also. So a few friends of mine had arranged a party at a restaurant at Connaught Place. As we were proceeding to Connaught Place we heard an uproar of shouts "Gandhiji Mar Gaya" and also that he had been shot dead. A message was broadcast that Gandhiji's assailant was a Hindu. But for that announcement there might have been attacks on the Muslims in various parts of the city and perhaps throughout the country. We all

rushed to Birla House and huge crowd was already there and more people were pouring in. The members of the Constituent Assembly were taken through a different route to the place where Gandhiji's body lay. When we were there most of the leaders were present and they were all in tears. Every one began weeping like a child. It was decided that the funeral would take place the next day. On 31st January Gandhiji's mortal remains were taken in a gun carriage. Sardar Patel was seated by the side of Gandhiji's body. There were soldiers marching

